



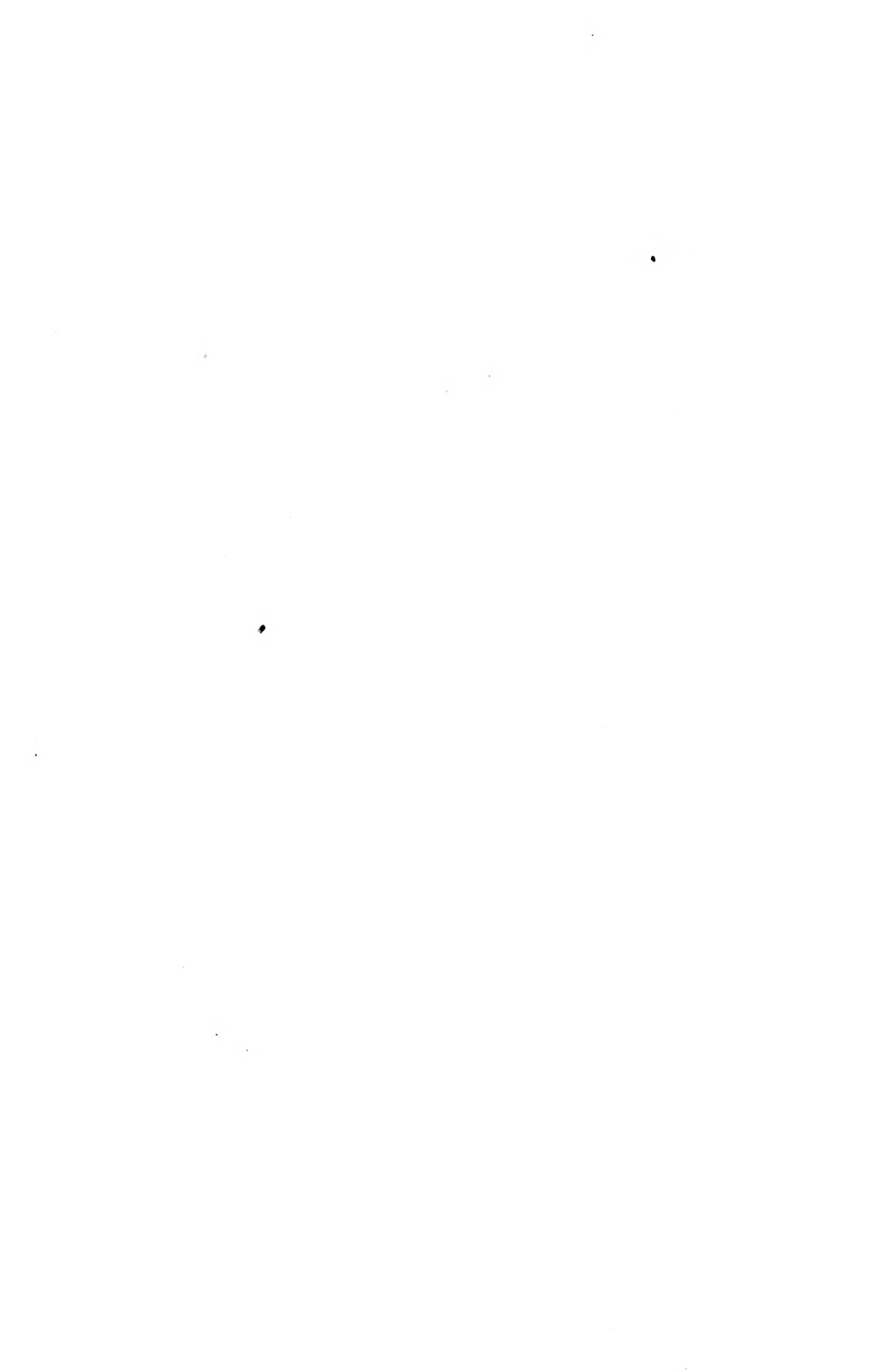
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Thirty thousand thoughts

THIRTY THOUSAND THOUGHTS.



SECTIONS XVI., XVII.

WITH A GENERAL INDEX TO ALL SIX VOLUMES.



THIRTY THOUSAND THOUGHTS,

BEING

EXTRACTS COVERING A COMPREHENSIVE CIRCLE OF
RELIGIOUS AND ALLIED TOPICS,

GATHERED FROM THE BEST AVAILABLE SOURCES, OF ALL AGES AND ALL SCHOOLS OF THOUGHT:
WITH SUGGESTIVE AND SEMINAL HEADINGS, AND HOMILETICAL
AND ILLUMINATIVE FRAMEWORK:
THE WHOLE ARRANGED UPON A SCIENTIFIC BASIS.

WITH

CLASSIFIED AND THOUGHT-MULTIPLYING LISTS, COMPARATIVE TABLES, AND ELABORATE
INDICES, ALPHABETICAL, TOPICAL, TEXTUAL, AND SCRIPTURAL.

EDITED BY THE

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XVI. OLD TESTAMENT SCRIPTURE CHARACTERS (MALE).
XVII. NEW TESTAMENT SCRIPTURE CHARACTERS (MALE).

INDEX TO THE SIX VOLUMES.

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OLD TESTAMENT SCRIPTURE CHARACTERS.

(MALE.)

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OLD TESTAMENT SCRIPTURE CHARACTERS.

(MALE.)

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SECTION XVI.

OLD TESTAMENT SCRIPTURE CHARACTERS.

(MALE.)

INTRODUCTION.

SCRIPTURE BIOGRAPHY.

I. THE STUDY OF SCRIPTURE BIOGRAPHY.

1 Its importance.

[16702] Biography is a species of history peculiarly interesting and useful; and in this the Bible excels. The sacred writers describe to the very life—they fear no displeasure—they conceal no imperfection—they spare no censure. And while they discover their impartiality, they equally prove their wisdom and prudence. This appears from the characters they delineate. What are philosophers, politicians, or heroes, to the generality of mankind? They may excite wonder, but they cannot produce imitation. They may indulge curiosity, but they cannot furnish motives, encouragements, or cautions. But here we are led into private life—we contemplate ordinary scenes—we see goodness in our new relations and circumstances—we behold blemishes which we are to shun, excellences which we are to pursue, advantages which we are to acquire. Thus the Scripture becomes not a glaring comet, but “a lamp unto our feet, and a light unto our path.”—*Anon.*

[16703] It is very interesting and instructive to look at these sacred persons, not merely in their official character, but as men believing what they taught, and exhibiting in their history phases of religious experience and conflict bearing upon ourselves; to unfold their inner spiritual life; to bring out their conflicts and their trials—their weakness as well as their virtue; to allow them to pass before us neither as dim abstractions, nor as cold officials—neither as unfallen angels, nor as perfect men—but as brethren of our own, who, along with their amazing gifts, had human infirmities; who, while inspired truth sat in regal splendour on the throne of their minds, had manifold battles going on between good and evil in their hearts.—*Anon.*

2 Its proper method.

It must be conducted with the mind and the soul.

[16704] Such narratives must be turned to a moral and religious application, or they will be useless, or at any rate of no greater utility than ordinary every-day history. The mere bare facts of history, whether of Jewish history or of English history, have no spiritual effect upon the soul. If I say that Samson was a strong man, the mental effect would be just the same as if I said Hercules was a strong man. If I say that Joshua commanded at the battle of Beth-horon, no other powers are called into play than if I said that Wellington commanded at the battle of Waterloo. If I am told that Solomon reigned forty years, I believe it just as I believe that Elizabeth reigned rather more than forty years. Unless we get something more out of the Bible than these bare facts of history, we get no religious gain whatever. It is simply secular knowledge we are getting. A man may read the Bible, and it may be nothing but a worldly pleasure or study; and as for a man's thinking that he is very religious when he is reading the Bible, it quite depends upon the spirit and understanding with which he reads it. He may read it, and find that God is teaching him, that his mind is opened, that his soul is stirred, sustained, or rebuked; or he may read it, and simply know that Goliath was a big man and Zaccheus was a little one. Therefore we must bring our minds to the Bible, for it is not an amulet or a charm, which acts as it were by magic. A verse of the Koran, when pounded up and swallowed, is said by devout Mussulmans to cure certain diseases! We are not to treat our Bibles in this way; we must bring our mind to the Bible—nay, more, we must bring our soul, and that is our mind, suffused by the Spirit of God; and around the hard text the crystals of Divine revelation will form, reflecting the light of heaven, and the “word of the Lord will be precious in these days.”—*Rev. W. Page Roberts.*

3 Its largely-resulting effect when rightly pursued.

[16705] If we study Old Testament history for religious education, and not for secular instruction, what sort of influence will it be likely to have upon us? To a very large extent the influence of warning. It is true there are many fine and noble characters whose lives are presented to us in the Old Testament, but many of them are stained with darkest faults and crimes. If some of the things which were done in those old days by men who stand high amongst the servants of God were done now, we should shrink away from the doers rather than attach ourselves to them, and never dream of taking them for our religious guides.—*Ibid.*

II. THE SUPERIORITY OF SACRED TO PROFANE BIOGRAPHY.

[16706] The Holy Scriptures possess an acknowledged superiority over all other writings in all the various kinds of literary composition; and in no one respect more than in that species of historical composition which is called Biography, or a delineation of the fortunes, character, and conduct of individuals: and that, whether the historians be themselves the men whom they describe and record; or whether, from proper sources of information, they record the lives and actions of other men.—*Rev. H. Hunter.*

[16707] A great part of profane history is altogether uninteresting to the bulk of mankind. The events therein recorded are removed to a vast distance, and they have now entirely spent their force. The actors exhibited are either too lofty to admit of our approach, with any interest or satisfaction to ourselves; or too brutal to be considered without disgust, or too low to be worthy of our regard. The very scenes of action are become inaccessible or unknown; they are altered, obliterated, or disregarded. Where Alexander conquered, and how Cæsar fell, are to us mere nothings. But on opening the sacred volume, all these obstructions in the way of knowledge, of truth, of pleasure, and of improvement, instantly disappear. Length of duration can oppose no cloud to that intelligence with which "a thousand years are as one day, and one day as a thousand years." The human heart is there unfolded to our view by Him "who knows what is in man," and "whose eyes are in every place, beholding the evil and the good." The men, and the events therein represented, are universally and perpetually interesting, for they are blended with "the things which accompany salvation," and they affect our everlasting peace. There, the writers, whether they speak of themselves or of other men, are continually under the direction of the Spirit of all truth and wisdom. Those venerable men, though subject to like passions with others, there, speak not of themselves, but from God; "for the prophecy came not in old time by the will

of man; but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost."—*Ibid.*

III. THE CRIMES AND SINS OF SCRIPTURE SAINTS.

I They cannot but have been recorded for important ends.

[16708] Every one must have been perplexed, in reading the Scriptures, by the awful crimes of those who are called saints, and spoken of as approved of God. The unbeliever has taken occasion from thence to blaspheme, and the humble Christian has often found difficulty in satisfying the minds of others, and perhaps his own, upon this point. Certainly we must believe that a God of wisdom has not left these defiling stains on Scripture characters to be recorded in His Word, without intending thereby to answer some important end.—*Rev. W. Lewis, D.D.*

(1) *They afford a striking proof of the veracity of the Scriptures.*

[16709] The greatest saints have their weaknesses and imperfections, and they often appear when least expected. Who would have imagined that Abram could yield to criminal distrust, and, to avoid imagined danger, resort to dissimulation, or at least equivocation most unworthy of his character? Yet such was the case. A common historian would have drawn a veil over these blemishes, but the sacred writers never either blazon the virtues or palliate the faults of the characters they portray, but simply relate things as they really were. This affords a strong and striking proof of the truth of Scripture. It is written on principles the very opposite to those which have dictated the most admired works of men, and yet, with all its impartiality and simplicity, an innate majesty runs through all its delineations, to which their most laboured efforts have never attained. The facts are in themselves exceedingly instructive, as they tend to exemplify human nature as it really is; to teach us that the most exemplary saints were not perfect, but stood in the same need of Divine mercy as ourselves: to remind us that the most eminent should distrust themselves, and not imagine that they are beyond the reach of danger, while they are still in the flesh, and surrounded by temptations; and to encourage us to hope in the mercy of God, notwithstanding the unallowed and lamented imperfections of which we often find ourselves the subjects.—*Anon.*

(2) *They are consistent with, and serve to emphasize, the fact that man everywhere and under all conditions is a sinner.*

[16710] Some men regard the Bible as a kind of picture gallery, in which they expect to find splendid specimens of perfected humanity. Entering, they observe strongly-marked defects in the faithfully-drawn portraits of such men as Abraham, Jacob, David, Peter, John, and many others. "What!" they ask, "are these men

after God's own heart? Then away with them, and away with your Bible which speaks of them as such. If these defective characters represent Christianity, we do not need it; it is high time it gave place to something better." How common is this kind of reasoning, how exactly it tells the thoughts of many minds; and yet a little consideration is amply sufficient to show its fallacy. The Bible could never have been designed to portray the excellency of human character, for the obvious reason that man everywhere and under all conditions is a sinner. "There is none righteous, no, not one." Such is the emphatic testimony of the living God. An excellent sinner—who ever heard of such a being? The object of the testimony of Scripture in regard to the actions and lives of the men whose names I have quoted is to show that, tested by the Divine standard of righteousness, every man at his best estate comes short of the glory of God, and needs to be redeemed from sin and death. These men were not justified before God on the ground of their personal character, but because they as sinners having confessed their iniquity, obtained His forgiveness who "set forth His Son a propitiation for their sins," and for whose sake they were pardoned and in whom they were accepted.—*Rev. A. Edersheim, D.D.*

[16711] We go to extremes in this matter. We begin by thinking that all the men who are commended in the Bible are almost perfect, quite beyond anything which we see in our day. The sentiments of our childhood linger about us, and Noah and Jacob and Samson and David and Solomon are shadowy and grand in the distance; their great faults are passed over, until we scarcely think of them at all, and they take their places unquestioned in the saintly calendar. And then comes another period, and we fly too often to the opposite extreme. We think only of the drunkenness of Noah, of the deceitfulness of Jacob, of the fierce immoralities of Samson, of the murder and adultery of David, and of the licentiousness of Solomon and his court; and as we had before half deified them, now we wrathfully degrade them. In both cases we are wrong. They neither deserve our adoration, nor yet our contempt.—*Rev. W. Page Roberts.*

2 Palliation of them is not to be attempted.

[16712] Some have laboured in their defence, as if our religion depended on their vindication, and, under their pleadings, that which is recorded as the grossest crime has been made to appear as a very venial transgression. But against such ingenuity common sense will revolt, and though carried away for a while, as the judgment may be, by an eloquent plea for a criminal at the bar, the verdict will still be one of condemnation. No argument can cover the falsehood of Abraham, nor excuse the murder and adultery of David. The feeling of every heart is, that so far from being excusable, their crimes were rendered more heinous by

their professions of religion. Indeed, the more we labour to justify one who is evidently guilty, the more shall we increase indignation against him. Ingenuous confession is the best plea for a gross offender. And this is precisely the course which the Scriptures pursue. They name certain individuals as guilty of great crimes, though servants of the Lord; they do not say a word in their justification; they do not even mention those extenuating circumstances which might be mentioned; they do not say that Peter was overcome by fear, or Jacob by his mother's persuasions; but only bring the offender before us with a plain account of his crime, and leave us to form our own judgment.—*Rev. W. Lewis, D.D.*

[16713] We may admit most fully that Abraham and Sarah and Isaac were guilty of falsehood; that Jacob was a supplanter deceiving his blind father by fraud; that Aaron was so stupid as to make a golden calf for the people to worship, even at the foot of Sinai, when God was giving the law above; that David, the man after God's own heart, was guilty of such complicated crimes, as seem almost incredible. We may allow that James and John showed a most revengeful spirit when they would have called fire from heaven to consume a whole village for want of hospitality; that Peter denied the best of masters with aggravated guilt; and that it was a sad spectacle when two apostles contended so sharply as to be ever after separated in preaching the gospel. We may confess that there is scarcely a Scripture character without a blot, and need be at no pains to excuse the fact. We should indeed give the same justice to them that we do to others in dwelling upon their faults, but there is nothing in the Bible requiring us to regard sin any differently, whether seen in a prophet, minister, Christian, or infidel.—*Ibid.*

3 Their guilt furnishes no argument against religion.

[16714] It has often been used for this end, but without reason. Will it be said that a religion which holds up such transgressors as the saints of the Lord cannot be from a holy God? But that religion does not commend their sins; if it did, we might well reject it. . . . The record of their faults, so far from weighing against the truth of Scripture, is, indeed, one strong evidence in its support. . . . Uninspired biography, and often even that which is called Christian, has none of this candour; . . . so that many a religious character of modern times appears fairer on the pages of his biographer than the fairest of those whose lives are written by the pen of inspiration. . . . Why is the Bible so different from all other books in this respect? Because it is the truth of God, and the God who gave it knew that it had nothing to fear from telling the truth.—*Ibid.*

[16715] If we deal with the most striking case in point, the mixed character of David, I think

we may see how great he was, even in the midst of his faults. We must measure a man by the standard of his own age, by his circumstances, by his education, and by the recognized obligations which lay upon him. There are things which most of us know, and even our children know, about the structure of the globe and many other things, which were altogether unknown by such mental giants as Bacon and Newton. Can we therefore say that we and our children are mightier in mind than those intellectual monarchs, because we make fewer mistakes in some things than they made? Certainly not. And just so is it in the realms of morals and religion. How many men, of all of us, live up to what we admit to be our duty—the claims of God, of our Church, and of our fellow-men? How many of us are as good as we know we ought to be? and I would further ask, how many are there who rise above the ordinary requirements of their age in matters of morality and religion? How many men are there who would not do what nearly everybody does? and how many men are bold enough to be alone, and take up an earnest line in religion and in religious service, when no one else does it, and they would be observed upon? It must be admitted that the great majority of good sort of people fall much below what they see to be the best, and what public opinion itself admits to be best; and scarcely one in ten thousand rises above the level of ordinary requirements.—*Rev. W. Page Roberts.*

- 4 Had all the characters of Scripture Biography been represented as faultless, the Bible would not have been more, but less credible than it is.

[16716] The question would have been asked, Why is it that no such perfect characters are formed under the power of the gospel in the present day? Men would have looked around upon its professors, and seen that they were but imperfect, and they would have said either that religion had lost its power, or that it never had any. But now the representations of Scripture and the actual state of things in the Christian world are in perfect harmony. There we see good men sometimes overcoming their sins, and sometimes overcome by them, and if we turn to the Bible, we find just such mingled characters drawn in its histories. Every one must feel that the Scriptures are much more credible, describing believers as but imperfectly sanctified, than they would have been had they represented them as perfect.—*Rev. W. Lewis, D.D.*

- 5 In their case all the secret guilt of their sins is brought to light.

[16717] We may pride ourselves in our superiority over them, but suppose that the worst action of our life was held up to view, with all the secret circumstances and corrupt motives that attended it, should we have much to boast of? Would one be found so sinless that he could venture to cast the first stone at them?

It would silence the scoffs of many a person who now holds up the sins of Scripture saints to derision could some one of his sins be drawn to light by a God who knew all its secret guilt.—*Ibid.*

- 6 God's dealings with these His guilty servants were eminently severe.

[16718] In the ordinary course of things their crimes would have been in a great measure concealed. David might have sinned and the world never known his guilt, had not a special providence revealed it. No one heard the plottings of Rebecca and Jacob against the aged Isaac, and had not God unfolded them by inspiration, they would have passed down to judgment among ten thousand other unknown sins. There were only a few around Peter who heard him curse and swear, and deny his Master. In the ordinary course of things they would have made a few scoffing remarks upon his conduct, his fellow-disciples would have been grieved, but the recollection of his sin would soon have died away. Had not God taken special pains to record it in the Gospels, we should never have heard of Peter's denial, tradition would not have brought it to us, and we should have known him only as the ardent and bold disciple of his Lord. But God would not suffer these offenders so to escape. What would have been forgotten, He has engraved on an enduring monument to their shame. What would have been unknown, He has dragged to light, and the greater part of those very crimes which so awaken cavil might have never come to our view in this world, had not God unfolded them. Does not this look like the confidence of truth? Common judgment would have told any one that such crimes as those set down against good men would awaken cavils, and that it would be better in human prudence to keep them back; when therefore we see them studiously brought to view, as a perpetual punishment for those offenders, certainly we must feel that this is the boldness of truth.—*Ibid.*

- 7 They have encouraged many a believer, overtaken in a fault, to seek forgiveness.

[16719] No doubt many have drawn encouragement from hence to sin, and because such crimes as those of David and Peter have been forgiven, some have been led to presume that they too should find forgiveness, however they might live. From the same plant poison and honey are extracted. But many a time also has the Christian been led by the deceitfulness of sin into some gross transgression, yet after long indulgence he awakens from his dream of pleasure, and finds the stings of conscience can still reach him. In an agony of remorse he desires forgiveness; and had he never heard of one that had sinned as vilely, who had been pardoned, he would despair. But he sees that others as wicked have found remission, and he is encouraged to come and seek the same mercy. Ten thousand times has the despair of a real penitent been chased away by the story of

Peter's sin and repentance. Instead of caviling, then, at the scriptural record of the offences of believers, we ought to bless God that they have been left on the pages of His Word, to inspire with hope the desponding mourner.—*Ibid.*

[16720] Would any one say that a contrite sinner ought not to be forgiven, whatever his guilt may have been? Then why object because David was forgiven? He was not called "the man after God's own heart" during that black year of his apostasy; and had he died in that season, God's own assurance is, that "all his righteousness that he had done should be no more remembered, but in his sin that he sinned he would have died." Because, however he lived to repent, he was forgiven; because he became eminent in holiness he was loved; and who would wish it had been otherwise, or say that the door of mercy should be shut against any penitent offender? No; we bless God that his sins were forgiven, that Abraham and Noah, Peter and Paul, were forgiven, and that they have become examples of the long-suffering of our God, for the encouragement of true penitents to the end of time. Those very pages stained with the sad failings of believers may have inspired hope, and saved the souls of many who would otherwise have sunk to everlasting despair. He who would cavil at such things in Scripture might plunge the drowning wretch from the rock on which he was clambering, or persuade the trembling penitent that God had no mercy in store for him.—*Ibid.*

8 They have made believers of succeeding ages more circumspect.

[16721] Many a one disposed to say, "I never will deny Thee, Lord," has had presumptuous confidence checked by the recollection how vain the boast was in the mouth of an apostle. Probably every Christian can declare that he never reads these melancholy accounts without being made more humble and distrustful of self;

and thus they have their use. In a great naval contest of England we are told that one ship ran aground, so as to be entirely out of reach of the enemy, but contributed very much to the victory by serving as a beacon to the other ships bearing down into action. It was not a way of contributing to victory which any brave captain would choose, but it would be a matter of rejoicing even in this way to serve one's country. And so, though we would not choose that holy men of old should have fallen into sins, we rejoice that the great Captain of our salvation is making use of their failures to swell the triumphs of His people, and to bring glory to His own great name.—*Ibid.*

9 They teach that salvation is not of works, but of grace.

[16722] What a view of human depravity does it give us to see such eminent servants of God falling into such transgressions! To find the foul worm in a mass of pollution does not surprise us; but to see it in the fairest flower, to discover it in the most delicate fruit or upon the most perfect form of earthly beauty, shocks and disgusts. We look for sin in the lawless transgressor, but does it not defile the character of a Paul or an Abraham? Did this worm of the abyss leave its pollution on the soul that at other times breathed the inspiration of heavenly psalms? Then surely we must feel that "there is none that doeth good, no, not one." Are we better than David? Have we a greater perfection by nature or grace than Paul? It would be arrogance to pretend to this. And we see that they were sinners. We feel that they could not have entered heaven by their own good works. Then let us fall with them at the foot of the cross and say, "Not by works of righteousness which we have done" do we hope, O Lord, to be saved, but only of Thine infinite mercy in the Redeemer. Their sins brought them to this conclusion. May their sins, as well as our own, teach us that to this we must come!—*Ibid.*

PART A.

PRIMITIVE ERA.

(Adam to Abraham, B.C. 4004-1996: 2008 years.)

SYLLABUS.

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PART A.

PRIMITIVE ERA.

ADAM.

I. THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF OUR FIRST FATHER'S FORMATION.

The peculiarly poetic interest attaching thereto.

[16723] First among Scripture characters abundantly entitled to the epithet poetical stands Adam himself. How interesting the circumstances of his formation! Mark with what dignity God accompanied the making of man. Behold the whole Trinity consulting together ere they proceeded to this last and greatest work of the Demiurgic days. God had only said, "Let there be light, let there be a firmament, let the waters be gathered together, let the earth bring forth the living creature after his kind;" but, when man was to be taken out of the clay, the style of Deity rises, if we may so speak, up to itself, and He says, "Let us make man after our own likeness." We may imagine ourselves present at this thrilling moment. A mist is watering the face of the ground, and partially bedimming the sun. Slowly, yet mysteriously, is the red clay drawn out of the ground, fashioned, and compacted into the shape of man, till the future master of the world is, as to his bodily part, complete, and lies, statue-like and still, upon the dewy ground. But speedily, like a gentle breeze, the breath of the Lord passes over his face, and he becomes a living soul, and his eyes open upon the green, glad earth, and the orb of day shining through a golden mist, and his ears open to the melodies, which seem to salute him as Lord of all, and he starts to his feet, and stretches out his hands to the sun as if to embrace it, and the mists disperse, and the beams of noon show him Eden shining in all its beauty—the abode of man, and the garden of God.—*G. Gilfillan.*

[16724] Adam's emotions on awaking to life can no more be conceived than described. The infant is introduced step by step into the sight of the great temple of the creation. But it must have burst in all but an instant upon the view of the man-boy, Adam. His happiness, however, was not complete: he was alone. And he could not be long in the world till he desired a companion. The sun he could *not*

grasp; the moon, walking in her brightness, he could not detain; the trees cooled his brow, but yielded no sympathy to his heart. His own shadow was but a cold and coy companion. And probably, while full of cravings after society, which mingled with and damped his new-born raptures of joy, he felt creeping over him the soft influences of slumber. He slept. Man was scarcely created till he slept; and, while asleep, "God took one of his ribs, and made of it woman," not of rude clay, but of the finished portion of a finished man, forming her from a finer material, and clothing her with a more fascinating loveliness. "He brought her to the man," as a companion to his joys—for sorrows as yet he had none—to talk with him in Eden, in the large sweet utterance of a tongue tuned and taught by God Himself, to wander with him by the rivers of Paradise, to be united to him by a tie of tender and indissoluble affection. With joy he welcomed her as the breathing essence—the glorious marrow of his own being—"bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh;" and surely we may believe that the harps of angels, as well as the glad sounds of nature, celebrated the happy union.—*Ibid.*

II. WHEREIN THE IMAGE OF GOD CONSISTED IN MAN.

Man resembled his Creator with regard to his spiritual, intellectual, and moral qualities, being a noble human reflection of the Deity itself.

[16725] In *spirituality*, and consequently immateriality, this image of God in man, in the first instance, consists, . . . and the sentiment expressed in Wisdom ii. 23 is an evidence that, in the opinion of the ancient Jews, the image of God in man comprised *immortality* also. "For God created man to be immortal, and made him to be an image of his own eternity." . . . To these we are to add the *intellectual powers*, and we have what divines, in perfect accordance with the Scriptures, have called "the *natural* image of God in His creatures," which is essential and ineffaceable. Man was made capable of *knowledge*, and he was endowed with liberty of *will*. This natural image of God was the foundation of that *moral* image by which also man was distinguished. Unless he had been a spiritual,

knowing, and willing being, he would have been wholly incapable of moral qualities.—*Encyclopædia (Edwards)*.

III. THE INNOCENCE AND PURITY OF THE PRIMALVAL AGE.

Adam, before the Fall, had no consciousness of guilt, and consequently no reason for shame concerning his natural state.

[16726] The words of Genesis which immediately precede the history of the fall describe to us better than anything else the perfect innocence and purity of primitive man: "And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and they were not ashamed." Like truth, which has been represented naked, to give us an idea of the purity of its attractions, our first parents, until sin had poured over them its poison, saw in the majestic beauty of person, with which God had endowed them, no motive for shame. And this is the feature of the Divine image, which we trace most faithfully in the young child, which has not yet had the misfortune to feel the seeds of that corruption which is natural to us, develop themselves within him, and whose purity and innocence sin has not yet withered by its impure breath. What a charm does this ignorance of evil, which keeps aloof shame, the offspring of sin, shed over infancy! Why should the tender infant, whom you love to press to your heart, be ashamed of its nudity? It has not yet sinned! Oh! who has not regretted those days of childhood, the remembrance of which still sometimes returns to soothe the miseries inseparable from a world which lieth in wickedness! Who has not shed bitter tears over the loss of that ignorance of evil, which allowed us to indulge, without distrust and with happy feelings, in enjoyments in which, at a later period, we find at every step the poison of sin!—*L. Bonnet*.

[16727] Man, as he came forth from the hands of his God, possessed an innocence, a purity of heart, which nothing had as yet sullied. Perhaps also the body, with which God had clothed him, partook of the glory and beauty of the Divine image which adorned his soul; the Father of lights had perhaps invested with a halo of celestial brightness the creature of His love. "He had crowned him," the Scripture tells us, "with glory and honour." The "glorious body," with which the elect of God shall be clothed by the power of Him who hath repaired the disorders of the fall and of sin, shall probably be but the restoration of that body which the immortal being, created by God, the Sovereign of the Universe, possessed. He was not naked, he was crowned with glory and honour.—*Ibid.*

[16728] That Adam's corporeal and intellectual elevation was accompanied with entire moral purity appears not only from the capacity shown for free intercourse with God, and the disposition to fall in with all His arrangements,

but also from the express statements respecting both, that "they were naked, and were not ashamed." Sin as yet wrought not in their bosoms. . . . Truth alone was in their inward parts—the truth of pure and holy love; and nothing but this could be mirrored in the features or the movements of their external frames.—*Fairbairn*.

IV. THE GRAND BEAUTY AND HARMONY OF ADAM'S HUMAN NATURE AS ORIGINALLY CREATED.

1 As regards his physical being.

It may be reasonably inferred that the first man was characterized by perfect personal beauty of form and mien, from the very fact of his being framed by the fingers of God, without the intervention of a second cause.

[16729] The Divine record says nothing of the personal appearance of Adam when he came from the hands of his Creator; but, fashioned as he was, by the immediate agency of God, and standing chief among the productions which were all pronounced "very good," we cannot doubt that in form and aspect he belonged to the highest type of humanity.—*Ibid.*

[16730] The region where, according to all the indications of modern research as well as of ancient tradition, the human family had its first local habitation, favours the supposition. The exact site of Paradise has, by subsequent changes on the earth's surface, been hopelessly placed beyond the reach of our investigations, but there can be no doubt that it lay somewhere within that district of Western Asia in which the Caucasian territory is situated; and from the earliest periods to the present times the Caucasian type of man has always been placed by naturalists in the highest rank. The sculptured figures in the ancient Assyrian, Grecian, and even Egyptian remains bear much of this cast; and in proportion as the offshoots of the original race receded from the Caucasian centre, and planted themselves in the more distant extremities of the globe, they became deteriorated in appearance. It is therefore in perfect accordance with all that we know, and have reason to believe, that the first pair were, even in a physical respect, cast in the finest mould of humanity.—*Ibid.*

2 As regards his mental and moral being.

The grace and symmetry of his character viewed as a whole.

[16731] This fair and noble product was made in "God's image"—understanding not by this, as some suppose, his erect bodily form—a form possessed by apes as well as by men—but a similitude of mental and moral character, mingled together in large and equal proportions. We deny not, indeed, that this may have expressed itself in the outward lineaments of our first parents, nor will call those mere enthusiasts who may tell us that Adam was fairer

far than any of his sons, and Eve than any of her daughters; nay, that the sun is not more glorious than the face of the first man, nor the rising moon of evening more beautiful than that of the first woman. But the glory was chiefly mental and moral. Adam bore a mental resemblance to his Maker. He had an ample intellect, a rich imagination, united together by a link of burning soul, as superior to that of Milton, who sang him in strains which shall never die, as that to the trodden worm. But he had not only a high but a holy spirit—a conscience the most undefiled—a sense of duty electrically quick—affections sunning themselves in God—and a love pure, and bright, and constant as the lamps which, while shining in the Divine presence, owe their radiance to the Divine eye.—*G. Gilfillan.*

V. THE TEST OF HIS FIDELITY AND LOVE TO THE CREATOR.

Man placed under a sense of dependance and responsibility.

[16732] Glorious and perfect as he is, Adam, upon his first reflection, feels himself a dependent and a limited being. No sooner had his eye ascended to the God who made him, than it returns to the earth from whence he was taken; and the very first excursion of his reason informs him that he is at the disposal of another, and that he is restrained by a law. He receives a whole globe, over which he is permitted to exercise an unlimited sovereignty; but one tree is reserved, as a token of his subjection. Every plant in Paradise offers itself to gratify his sense, every animal does homage at his feet; but the sight of one kind of fruit in the midst of the garden continually reminds him that he himself is dependent upon God, and accountable to Him; and while six parts of time are allowed for his own employments and delights, the seventh is set apart as sacred to his Maker.—*Rev. H. Hunter, D.D.*

VI. THE MORAL WEAKNESS DISPLAYED IN HIS FAILURE UNDER THE TEST.

"She took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband, and he did eat" (Gen. iii. 6).

[16733] Adam appears to have sinned with his eyes open, and to have done it from love to his wife; he hearkened to her voice, and plunged headlong into her sin. The dearest and most lawful attachments may prove a snare; and though father or mother, husband or wife, son or daughter, should tempt us to forsake God, we must not hearken.—*E. Copley.*

[16734] I know not if the ingenious and beautiful idea of the poet of Eden be true, that Adam gave himself up to crime and misery, to share the lot of his beloved companion, whatever it might be; but, however that may be, his sin was not the less great. Evil is not less cursed, nor does temptation less inevitably lead to ruin,

because it is presented to us by a hand that is dear.—*L. Bonnet.*

[16735] By what arguments Adam was prevailed upon to become a partner in her guilt, we are not informed. From the apology he made for his conduct, it is to be inferred that female insinuation and address misled him from the law of his God. And thus were both ruined by the operation of principles in themselves good and useful; but carried to excess, because unchecked by reason, and unawed by religion. Eve perished by a curious and ambitious desire after a condition, for which God and Nature had not designed her, a desire to be "as God, to know good and evil;" Adam fell by complaisance to his wife, carried to unmanly weakness and compliance, yielding to his subject, bidding defiance to his Sovereign.—*Rev. H. Hunter, D.D.*

VII. THE LOSS OF INNOCENCE CONSEQUENT ON THE FALL.

[16736] "They saw that they were naked;" stripped of the virgin robe of conscious innocence which shielded the soul's sensitive and shrinking delicacy from the rude contact of sin, and enwrapped them from its bold and familiar gaze in the modest veil of sin-repelling purity. Till now they had felt themselves protected, enveloped, sanctified by the presence of God. "To the pure all things are pure; to the defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure." And now, guilty in conscience, and defiled in mind, the light of heaven shamed them: they blushed, as the eye of Essential Purity looked upon them; and they commenced the drudgery of sin, by labouring to conceal, with a patch-work of futile devices, the shame which sin had tempted them to incur. "They sewed fig-leaves together, and made themselves aprons"—a just and lively emblem of the deceitfulness of sin, and of the folly and unfruitfulness of its vain devices.—*Rev. J. Hiffeman.*

[16737] Innocence refuses any longer to introduce and support them in the awful presence of the Divine Majesty: penitence has not yet taught them to prostrate themselves before the heart-seeing God, in full confession and entire self-abandonment. Guilty fear betrays all their resources, and gives them an experimental acquaintance with those deeps of spiritual darkness to which Satan's promised knowledge was to lead them, while it induces them vainly to fly from the all-pervading presence, and foolishly attempt to hide themselves from the All-seeing eye of the Lord God, among the trees of the garden.—*Ibid.*

VIII. FORCE OF THE DIVINE INQUIRY, "WHERE ART THOU?"

The bringing of Adam face to face with his real position now as compared with what his position previously had been.

[16738] There is something more in this in-

quity than an expression of a desire on the part of God to discover the local position which Adam occupied. God could have done that without asking any question; but it always seems to me as though God would say not only—"Where art thou in the material world?" but "Where art thou as compared with the moral position which thou didst previously occupy? Only a few moments ago thou wast the favoured creature of the God who made thee, exalted to a high and glorious position, permitted to hold fellowship with thy Creator. A little while ago it was thy joy to hear My voice: a little while ago it was thy highest honour to be admitted into My presence, and to participate in the blessedness which My presence always carries along with it; a little while ago thou wast able to think the thoughts of heaven, and to breathe its very atmosphere; and now how changed, how fallen! The very voice which caused a thrill of joy within thy heart now only creates terror; the thought of meeting Me fills thee with confusion and dismay; thou wast My companion, and now thou fliest away to hide thyself. There was something within thy nature which found that which corresponded to and harmonized with itself in My nature, and now thou discoverest that thou and I are at variance with each other. Hitherto, unbroken love has bound thy heart to Mine, and My heart to thine; but now there has stepped in something between thyself and Me; the chain of love is broken, and instead of this there has arisen a fearful sense of separation"—for wherever sin goes it brings with it separation of the sinner from his God—"Where art thou, but a few moments before exalted so high, that thou seemedst but little inferior to those bright spirits that stand around My throne? And it had been thy glorious destiny to rise to an even more exalted height, and to know a deeper and a more wondrous blessedness than even they can attain to. But where art thou? Hurlled down from this height of moral purity; hurlled down to degradation and to sin: how art thou fallen, thou son of the morning! fallen to the very gates of hell! Thy hope dashed and blighted; a dark cloud between thee and the meridian splendour of Divine glory; an awful sense of condemnation brooding upon thy soul; already a paralysis of the will has induced within thee a certain sense of moral helplessness, of incapacity to become what thou desirest to be. Where art thou? Fallen, fallen, fallen: oh how deeply fallen! fallen from the very threshold of the world of glory down to the very portal of the world of doom!"—*Rev. Hay Aitken.*

[16739] Where art thou? saith the Lord to Adam, covered with confusion, and not yet repentant, where art thou? O My creature, O sovereign of this universe, into what a gulf of misery thou hast precipitated thyself! Thou, whom I loved, thou wast so happy in communion with Me, where art thou? Thou who wast clothed with majesty and innocence, thou on whose brow I planted a ray of Mine own glory,

where art thou? How great is thy disgrace! How great the bitterness of thy remorse! What a voice of mercy! How calculated to make the two guilty inmates of Eden look within themselves, to show them the depth of their fall, and to lead them, humbled and repenting, to the feet of their Creator, to see if they might find grace and pardon with Him!—*L. Bonnet.*

IX. THE GRADUAL STEPS OF ADAM'S DE- CLENSION TRACED IN HIS SELF- DEFENCE.

i Unholy fear, shame, and folly.

"I heard Thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself."

a. Adam's haste to make excuse proved that he had eaten of the forbidden tree.

[16740] The consciousness of evil leads to self-vindication: the consciousness of innocence is slow to suspect a charge. If you ask a man how he is, and he answers, "I am sober," you are tempted to suppose that he may have indulged too freely: and, if inquiring what he is carrying, he replies that it is his own, you fancy it possible that he has made too free with his neighbour's goods. Why should a man deem it needful to defend himself, unless he is attacked? and if there is no attack from without, is it not likely that there is one from within, and conscience does the office of accuser?—*Rev. A. Morris.*

b. The nature of the excuse urged was in itself an involuntary admission of guilt.

[16741] The excuse which Adam made proved that he had eaten of the tree. He was afraid, and hid himself. Now whatever he knew not, he should have known that he had no right to be afraid of God. Fear was no feeling for "man new made." If a child dreads its parent, the child or parent must be wrong. He had not been afraid before. What had made the change? Only eating of the tree. Ah, that was it. He had committed "the offence." With abundance of all kinds, he had coveted the one reserved good: with almost unlimited freedom, he had trespassed on the one forbidden spot. He had broken a law, not which withheld all things but one, but which allowed all things but one; and for the gratification of a single sense in a single mode, he had despised the riches of God's goodness, and defied the terrors of His curse. And when he heard the voice of God (even though he had been insensible till then) it echoed through his guilty soul and aroused his slumbering conscience, like a voice of doom, and he sought a vain shelter in what might have been a grateful shade. He was afraid of God, because he had sinned against God. It was not his unclad body, but his naked soul, that frightened him. Whatever occasion of shame might have been furnished by his natural nudity, there was no shame until he made shame. He had not been ashamed until now, and would never have been so but

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for sin. If he connected any thoughts or feelings, except of honour and purity, with what God had created honourable and pure, he must have undergone a sad deterioration, must have admitted a perverting and polluting influence into his nature. God's work was perfect, and if man saw in it aught of dread or of disgrace, he must have lost his own perfection. Adam's plea was thus his condemnation. He had no natural right with the feelings he acknowledged and urged as the excuse of his conduct. A child afraid of a perfectly good father, one who had made him in his own image, and prepared for him a garden of delights! A creature afraid of God for being in the state in which that God had made him! No better proof were needed of the "broken covenant" and commandment trampled under foot!—*Ibid.*

2 Cowardice, selfishness, meanness.

The whole shuffling excuse culminating in hardihood, implied blasphemy and impenitence.

"The woman whom Thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat."

[16742] Have I heard aright? What! his beloved companion, her whom he lately loved so dearly, her whom God had given him, who, by participating in, had enhanced his happiness, had added double charms to his abode in Eden, and multiplied the joy of his blissful existence; her whom he ought to have protected, at the risk of his own life, against all dangers; upon her he throws all the blame, all the fault of his sin! Yes, and if the sentence pronounced against sin must be executed, let it strike Eve, Adam accuses her! If the maledictions and thunders of Divine Justice must reach the author of sin, let them fall upon Eve, Adam accuses her! If endless misery must be the deplorable consequence of the fall, let Eve drink, even to the dregs, the bitter cup, Adam accuses her! Behold sin, corrupting the most intimate and the purest affections. See that monstrous selfishness, which withers in the root the most generous feelings of the heart, brought into existence, and become the moving principle of human life! Let all around me be humbled and confounded so that my pride be satisfied! Let even that which I most love be stricken before my eyes, so that I escape! Let all perish so that I live!—*L. Bonnet.*

[16743] Confidence has fled, and gloomy suspicion scowls amid the ruins of despair. In the treacherous purpose of their own bosoms they mutually read, each, the separate interest, the exclusive hope, the selfish defence which animates the other. Confidence, and with it affection, vanishes, and distrust and enmity succeed. Once, indeed, they were of one heart and one mind, and each would have felt happy to relieve, by enduring them, the sorrows of the other. Life hitherto had been a bridal-day. Each lived but in the affections of the other; and they twain, by a commerce of sympathies, had

become one flesh. Once, rather than be severed from his second self, his beloved Eve, Adam was content to plunge into the abyss of ruin, which, undeceived as some suppose, he saw yawning to engulf him if he cleaved to her; but now, guilt has obliterated those fascinating charms which innocence alone can perpetuate—"the beauty of holiness" has fled—and now he repels from his selfish bosom the degraded partner of his crime, and interposes her between him and ruin. Now he immolates this once sinfully-adored idol at the shrine of selfishness; and sets up upon the vacant throne of the heart that new god, to which, since then, man has ever prostrated his heaven-born nature, self.—*Rev. J. Hiffernan.*

X. THE TERRIBLE RETRIBUTION INVOLVED IN THE PENALTY INCURRED BY ADAM AND HIS POSTERITY THROUGH THE VIOLATION OF DIVINE LAW.

It is impossible to measure the far-reaching consequences of even one single sin.

[16744] O Adam! O sovereign of the creation! Methinks I see thee tasting the bitterness of thy sin, shedding tears of blood over the loss of that crown of innocence and glory which adorned thy now polluted and confounded brow! For the first time thou bedewest with thy tears that beautiful soil of Eden, from which thou art about to part for ever, with the favour of thy God. But what would have been thy grief and thy despair if thou couldst have seen all future generations engulfed in the abyss of sin and death, which thou hadst created; if thou couldst have seen, beforehand, that pestilential cloud of iniquity which each successive age sends up to heaven, as a testimony of condemnation; if thou couldst have heard the sighs, and seen the sufferings and woes of each generation of men; if thou couldst have heard the groaning of creation "made subject to vanity;" if thou couldst have seen the ravages and disorders of sin, which finds no remedy save in the death of the eternal Son of God; if thou couldst have seen the merciful Redeemer, expiring under the strokes of Divine justice, and in the agonies of the second death; if thou couldst have heard the echo of the fearful trumpet of judgment, which shall put an end to all things present; if thou couldst have witnessed the endless, boundless torments of the damned!—*L. Bonnet.*

[16745] The corruption of the soil henceforth to be prolific in noxious weeds, the pain and peril of childbirth, the ravages of sickness, the throes of disease, the horrors of the pestilence, the desolations of war, the failings and deformities of age, the agonies of the last mortal struggle, the dark prison-house of the grave, the foul companionship of corruption and the worm—all were the unmitigated consequences of a single sin.—*Ep. Woodford.*

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[16746] By the fall of Adam it came to pass that as before he was blessed, so now he was accursed; as before he was loved, so now he was abhorred; as before he was most beautiful and precious, so now he was most vile and wretched in the sight of his Lord and Maker: instead of the image of God, he was now become the image of the devil; instead of the citizen of heaven, he was become the bond-slave of hell, having in himself no one part of his former purity and cleanness, but being altogether spotted and defiled; inasmuch that now he seemed to be nothing else but a lump of sin, and therefore, by the just judgment of God, was condemned to everlasting death.—*Rev. T. Gregg.*

XI. THE PECULIAR GUILT OF ADAM'S TRANSGRESSION.

Argued from the very perfection of his natural character and the circumstances in which he was placed.

[16747] What was it which gave Adam's fault so deep a dye as to provoke from God such a tremendous penalty? We are conscious that we all offend oft. Numbers among us do, not only as Adam did, give way to a solitary temptation, but again and again fall into sin; and yet God spares us, yet God forgetteth not to be gracious. There is a penalty denounced for wickedness; but, nevertheless, we are informed how we may win pardon or acceptance. There seems here an unaccountable contrast between our position and that of Adam. To us it is said, "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." To Adam there was extended no hope of forgiveness. "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt die." He was not allowed a second trial; one offence marred the whole of the new creation. . . . In treating of this topic, it is necessary to call to mind the perfection of Adam's nature; that, unlike us, he had no innate evil to contend with, no unrighteousness within to second the voice of temptation from without. Now this freedom from natural defilement, whilst it gave him the capacity of attaining a height of virtue, beyond aught that we may reach, did at the same time immeasurably increase his guilt if he fell. When we offend, we are the victims of a double assault. Satan attacks, and our apostate nature helps his assault. In our case there are foes in the citadel to back the efforts of the external adversary. Not so with Adam; he was tempted, like as we are, by the serpent; but he had no natural infirmity; he sinned, therefore, without any of that palliation which our inherited defilement affords to our unrighteousness.—*Bp. Woodford.*

[16748] God had condescended to explain His will respecting the conduct of Adam in a manner which he could not mistake. He imposed no rigid rule upon him to impress that will upon his recollection; but He left him to

the enjoyment of the beauties amidst which He had placed him, of the society of the fair partner He had given him, and to the unbridled gratification of his own free-will. Adam, having received the command of God, had all he required to guide and direct him. He was threatened by the terrors of no fiery law, or the thunderings and lightnings of the Mount; but he had received the clear warning of His Maker—"In the day thou eatest thou shalt surely die."—*Rev. A. Mursell, D.D.*

XII. REFLECTIONS ON THE BANISHMENT FROM EDEN.

"The Lord . . . drove out the man; and He placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubim, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life."

(1) *The defilement of sin wholly unfits man for inhabiting an Eden of purity.*

[16749] Man must bid an eternal adieu to the delightful fields of Eden, those hallowed spots where the Lord conversed with him as a man converseth with his friend. "The Lord sent him forth from the garden; he drove out the man." Such is the last act of the Mosaic account. Behold man exiled from Eden! Behold the most heart-rending banishment that was ever denounced against any of the human race! We understand your grief and your tears, oh unhappy beings, whom an inexorable arrest of the law snatches from all the endearments of a beloved land, where the hours of childhood have been spent, from all the joys of a family and friends tenderly beloved, from all the indescribable charms of the place where you learned to feel and to love, and removes you to some inhospitable clime, where the severest privations are the least of your evils, and where you languish, rather than love. But what are your afflictions, compared with those of our first father, when he went out of Eden at the voice of his Judge, to wander with his unhappy companion in the desert countries of an accursed earth! Oh delights of Eden, life of innocence and love, blissful retreats where the Lord revealed Himself to the soul, where everything was ravishing beauty without, and harmony and peace within, favours of God, happiness of His love and of His presence; you are lost for ever! Bitter regret! profound misery! Oh, could Adam find again the way to Eden! Oh that the flaming sword of eternal justice no longer glittered!—*L. Bonnet.*

(2) *To the sinner tainted with guilt Eden would have been not only unsuitable but also ungenial.*

[16750] Adam can no longer even desire the abode in Eden; and this is the completion of his misery! To fallen man Eden has no more attractions, no more glory, no more happiness. What avail the beauties of man's first abode? his heart, deprived of innocence and peace, could no longer enjoy them. What does it

avails that the glorious majesty of the Lord still shines forth in all His works? man is despoiled and ashamed. What does it avail that he still beholds over his head the azure firmament of heaven, and the brightness with which it sparkles, while darkness reigns in his soul, and gloomy clouds hide from him the glory of the Most High? What does it avail that all created beings unite to send up on high one melodious hymn of praise? there is nothing now in the heart of man but discord, anguish, and grief. What does it avail what riches and abundance replenish Eden? man is poor, miserable, and naked. What avails the tree of knowledge? man sees in it an accusing witness of his crime. What avails the tree of life? man reads in it the sentence of death against himself. What avails even the presence of God? man now only sees in Him a Judge; he feels in His presence only the fear of a slave, the shame of a criminal, the terror of a condemned malefactor.—*Ibid.*

(3) *Adam, in aspiring to be a law unto himself, contradicts his own existence, and by voluntary exile from God exchanges life for death.*

[16751] Adam has separated himself from the source of life, and broken the bonds which united him to his Creator by trampling under foot the supreme law of God: now then let him go and try his new mode of existence beyond the precincts of Eden, cultivating with toil an accursed earth; let him go and live without God, without communion with Him, without His grace! Live without God! without Him who fills the heavens and the earth, and in whom alone, whether as it regards the soul or the body, we can “live, move, and have our being”—such an existence is a mere contradiction, such a life is death itself! Hence, let the expulsion of Adam explain to us the existing state of man. Let it teach us why the natural man “lives without God in the world,” without spiritual life, without the love of God; why, far from “seeking after God,” he desires not the knowledge of Him, and does not receive the Divine law as the rule of his existence; why, on the contrary, he learns to take pleasure in offending Him, from whom he has received everything, and in living in sin, in pollution, and in forgetfulness of God, as his natural element; why (whilst God in His infinite mercy condescends to seek him, to call him to Himself, to prevent him, by an incomprehensible love), he too often refuses to hear His voice, despises His word and the invitations of His grace, hardens his heart, and persists in his rebellion. Let the expulsion of Adam explain to us the grief which has invaded the whole human race and the numberless sufferings which result from *man's want of harmony with himself and with his God!* Let this fact explain to us disease and death—death, that mystery inscrutable to human wisdom, that abyss which has yawned beneath the feet of man ever since he was banished from Eden!—*Ibid.*

XIII. COMPARISON BETWEEN ADAM, THE FEDERAL HEAD AND REPRESENTATIVE OF THE HUMAN RACE, AND CHRIST, THE COVENANT HEAD AND REPRESENTATIVE OF THE CHURCH.

I The resemblance.

(1) *Adam typified Christ, as being in a peculiar sense the Son of God.*

[16752] The Evangelist Luke, in tracing the natural pedigree of our Saviour, ascends step by step from Son to Father, till he comes to the first progenitor of all, “who was,” says he, “the Son of God:” that is, His immediate offspring, deriving his existence without any interposition from the great Source of being. And what saith the Scripture concerning the Messiah? “I will declare the decree: the Lord hath said unto me, Thou art My Son, this day have I begotten thee” (Psa. ii. 7). And when He bringeth in the first-begotten into the world, He saith, “And let all the angels of God worship Him” (Heb. i. 6). As the manner in which Adam was produced was new and unexampled, so the conception and birth of Christ were “a new thing in the earth;” the former was created of dust from the ground, the latter formed by the power of the Holy Ghost in the womb of a virgin.—*Rev. H. Hunter, D.D.*

(2) *The constitution of Adam's nature pre-figured the person of Christ.*

[16753] The same stamp of Deity was put upon them both. Both were formed in the same glorious likeness, designed as the mirrors to reflect the life and image of the Author of all life. It was a pure pattern by which the Creator first designed His noblest creature; for His own declaration of His design was, “Let us make man in our own image.” He who had looked upon unfallen Adam would have beheld the likeness and the form of God; the erect nobility of the Maker would have been visible in the crowning work of His creative hand. Sinless, and pure in heart, he entered on his Eden life, and in the scope of his soul, as well as in the semblance of his body, he was the reflex of his Creator's mind and form. Even so when we turn to the Antitype, Jesus Christ, do we not discover a similar perfection? We find, indeed, with reference to His bodily proportions, but little of the grace and comeliness which marked the human type. Physically, he is not the Adonis which it would appear the first Adam was made. There is no courtly symmetry in His stature, nor smooth elegance in His countenance: for those who saw Him found “no beauty that they should desire Him,” and “His face was marred more than any man's.” Yet the eyes—those windows of the soul—bespoke a character which was verily of God; upon His brow there shone Divinity; and in His life the Godhead showed in meekness, and in power, and in love. Holy, harmless, undefiled, He was verily the likeness of the Father, “the express image of His person.” And as in Adam, ere he fell, the unblushing cheek, where

shame had been "ashamed to sit," formed the mirror which reflected the likeness of the Father, so was that same likeness printed on the form and feature of the spiritual life of Jesus Christ, in so far that He could claim with righteous honesty His heavenly pedigree, and declare, "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father."—*Rev. A. Mursell, D.D.*

(3) *The paternal relation which Adam bears to all the human race represents to us Jesus the Son of God as the spiritual Father of all them that believe.*

[16754] The first man, Adam, was made "a living soul," that is, the source of a natural life, to them who had it not before; the last Adam was made "a quickening spirit," that is, the giver and restorer of a spiritual and Divine life, to those who, having lost it, were "dead in trespasses and sins." As every man, upon coming into the world of nature, the instant he draws the breath of life, bears the image of the first man whom God created, so from Jesus Christ, the progenitor of them who believe, all who are regenerated or born into the world of grace derive their spiritual existence and bear the image of Him from whom the whole family of heaven and earth is named.—*Rev. H. Hunter, D.D.*

(4) *The institution of marriage in Eden symbolized the sacred espousals of Christ with the Church, His Bride.*

[16755] Adam's soul was enlarged to a higher and more peaceful apprehension of his bliss; his eye saw fairer beauty in the bloom of flower and the blush of sky; his ear heard richer music in the matin of the lark and vesper of the nightingale, and paradise became more like itself than it had ever been before, when the union of husband and of wife was formed. Now this conjugal relationship is one of the most striking types of Christ's union with His Church. He is the Bridegroom, and that Church is "the Bride, the Lamb's wife." Now the sleep of Adam seems to show, by a vivid emblem, the means whereby Christ obtained the Church as His Bride. When the first Adam slept, his side was opened and the woman fashioned from the rib which was removed. It behoved the nobler Bridegroom, Christ, to sleep the sleep of death, and in the article of that heavy sleep His side was pierced; His inmost heart was wounded by the shaft, and the very stab which human hate infixed into that heart, opened a wound of love, whereby the union with the desired Bride was made; for "Christ loved the Church, and gave Himself for it." That is a mysterious cleaving with which—for better or for worse—in storm and shine—an honest man protects and loves his wife; that is a deeper mystery of love which links the Saviour with the saint, and purchases the comely garment which can decorate our dust for the embrace of such a Bridegroom. Yet Adam and Eve were not more intimately and emphatically one flesh, than Christ and

the Christian are one spirit. "This is a great mystery; but I speak concerning Christ and the Church."—*Rev. A. Mursell, D.D.*

(5) *Adam and Christ bear a striking resemblance in respect of dominion and sovereignty.*

[16756] When God had created man "He blessed him, and said unto him, Have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth." David also descants upon this thought in Psa. viii. 5-8.

2 The contrast.

[16757] Adam was assaulted of the wicked one by a slight temptation, yielded, and fell. Christ was tempted of the devil, by repeated, vigorous, and well-conducted attacks, resisted to the last, and overcame. Adam in Paradise became guilty and miserable and liable to death; Christ passed through a corrupted world, lived in the midst of a sinful and adulterous generation, but preserved unspotted innocence; He "did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth." Adam, by one offence, became guilty of the whole law, poured contempt upon it, and transmitted his crime, together with the punishment of it, to all mankind; Christ, by a complete obedience, "magnified the law, and made it honourable," approved Himself unto God, and conveys the merit or His obedience and sufferings to all them that believe, for their justification and acceptance with God. Adam, aspiring to a condition superior to that in which his Maker placed him, not only failed to obtain what he aimed at, but also lost that which he had; desiring to be as God, to know good and evil, he acquired the fatal knowledge of evil, but lost the knowledge of good which he already possessed; and, sinking himself, drags down a devoted world with him; whereas Christ, for the voluntary abasement of Himself, is exalted to "the right hand of the Majesty on high," "for the suffering of death, is crowned with glory and honour," and, "lifted up on the cross, draws all men unto Him."—*Rev. H. Hunter, D.D.*

XIV. HOMILETICAL APPLICATIONS.

1 The history of Adam furnishes a lesson respecting the duty of gratitude, adoration, and service.

[16758] Let us endeavour to improve ourselves by learning habitually to acknowledge, to adore, and to serve the great Author and Preserver of our being, who has lavished so much goodness upon us; who adorned our nature with His own glorious image, who pitied us in our low and lost estate, and has laid help for us on one who is mighty to save: and who, by the exceeding great and precious promises of the gospel, is aiming at making us partakers of a Divine nature, and delivering us from that bondage of corruption into which we are sunk by reason of sin.—*Ibid.*

- 2 It censures the spirit and practice alike of selfish misanthropy and of morbid asceticism.

[16759] Let me take occasion from that institution which God designed for the completion of human happiness, in a state of innocence, and for the mutual assistance and comfort of the sexes in their fallen condition, to censure and condemn that spirit and practice of celibacy which is one of the crying vices of our own age and country, and which is equally inimical to religion, to good morals, to public spirit, and to human comfort. He who says, or lives as if he thought that it is "good for man to be alone," gives the lie to his Maker; sins against the constitution of his nature; dishonours his parents; defrauds another of one of the justest rights of humanity, and in a case, too, where it is impossible so much as to complain; and exposes himself to commit offences against society, which are not to be mentioned. In truth, celibacy is a vile compound of avarice and selfishness, which would fain pass upon the world for prudence and self-denial; and the state of our own country at present, in this respect, looks as if a single state, as in Roman Catholic countries, were established by law, but that the laity, not the clergy, were bound by it. But, alas! I am only furnishing matter for a little conversation. There must be more virtue, religion, and good sense among the young men of the age before this crying evil be remedied.—*Ibid.*

- 3 It inculcates the necessity of contentment and steadfastness.

[16760] Let us learn, from the sad example of the first transgression, to rest contented with that state and condition which Providence has assigned to us in life; let us learn to use only lawful means for bettering it; to make the known will of God the only rule of our conduct; never to reason and tamper with temptation; but to repel or flee from it at once; and let us shun those as our worst enemies, who, on any occasion or pretence, would attempt to make us think lightly of the law of God.—*Ibid.*

- 4 It teaches the advisability of searching self-examination, that in condemning we be not ourselves condemned, and should force the question upon each individual conscience, "Who art thou that judgest another?"

[16761] In depicting the depravity of the first Adam, let us bear in mind that we are depicting our own. We are the posterity of the first sinner, and his sin is our heavy heritage. Let us not, therefore, gloatingly lecture our first father, as though we were above his yielding and superior to his sin, but remember that when we probe his wound we probe our own; that the ulcer of his leprosy inheres in us, and chokes us like a pestilence. We are the heirs to all the miseries his fall produced.—*Rev. A. Mursell, D.D.*

[16762] Not only have we inherited the guilt
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of Adam, but we have disproved our right to blame him by showing that we are as guilty as he, and should have done the same thing in the same circumstances. We have imitated his sin. He proudly clambered after that which lay beyond his reach. Elated with the joy which grace had given him; drunk with the nectar love had distilled for him, he grew wanton for the knowledge wisdom had denied; he tried to run the blockade of God's decrees; he sought to break loose from the Divine spell, and broke the embargo of Jehovah's word. And which of us has not proudly climbed, and disgracefully fallen, on the ladder of a like ambition?—*Ibid.*

ENOCII.

I. THE PECULIAR POINTS OBSERVABLE IN HIS HISTORY.

- 1 The extreme brevity of the Biblical record.

Those lives which deserve most to be had in remembrance are most easily recorded, and consist of fewest articles.

[16763] The history of an Enoch is comprised in three words, while the exploits of an Alexander, a Caesar, or any other of the scourges and destroyers of mankind swell to many volumes. But what comparison is there between the bubble reputation bestowed by historians, poets, or orators, on the worthless and the wicked, and the solid, sterling praise conferred on the wise and good, by the spirit of God, by whom actions are weighed?—*Rev. H. Hunter, D.D.*

- 2 The comparative shortness of his stay upon earth.

[16764] He was here three hundred and sixty-five years, a period which, although comprehending a space equal to ten of our generations, was not so much as half of the age of many of his contemporaries. He left the world in the zenith of his manhood. One might have thought that if his contemporaries, who had sunk into depths of wickedness, lived to nine hundred years, that he who was serving his generation by the will of God would have continued as long, if not longer. Nothing in the procedure of Heaven is more inscrutable to us than the removal of the best men from society in the fulness of their energy and the midst of their usefulness.—*Anon.*

- 3 The manifest singularity of the life he lived.

[16765] It would seem that his contemporaries, with the exception of Noah, had descended to the lowest stage of moral corruption. "And 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 con-

tinually." The imagination of every man was evil; the imagination of every man's thought was evil; the imagination of every man's thought was evil continually. Such were his contemporaries. But he "walked with God." He held principles practically repudiated by all; pursued a course in direct opposition to the whole current of social sentiment, feeling, and practice.—*Ibid.*

II. THE LESSONS OF HIS LIFE.

1 The life of Enoch is a grand example to all ages of the possibility of being in the world, yet not of it.

(1) "He walked with God."

a. There was a perpetual consciousness of the Divine presence.

[16766] Noah walked with God. The word is strong and peculiar, denoting the repetition and energy of the act. He walked and walked; yea, walked with fervent and untiring energy. Through centuries he lived on, walking with God, as Enoch had done before him; nay, during part of the time, with Enoch at his side; for only of these two is the expression used. It is as if God had come down to earth and walked through it, with Enoch on one side, and Noah on the other. Of Abraham it is said, "Walk before me, and be thou perfect;" but it would almost seem as if this walk of Enoch and Noah were something nearer and more blessed than this.—*H. Bonar.*

b. There was constant and cordial fellowship with God.

[16767] "How can two walk together except they be agreed?" The question coming down from most ancient times shows how such language as is used of Enoch was then understood. Enoch was at one with God, in profound and intense sympathy of heart. He loved God, and God him. They were in every sense friends to each other. Enoch labouring in his sphere to promote the interests and work of God on earth, and God on His part ever wakeful over the interests of His friend. What a friendship was this! Very few at that time may have had the least hint of its existence. Probably most of Enoch's neighbours thought him an unsocial recluse who had no friends. Oh! they did not know his heart. They did not see those outgoings of trust, affection, and prayer, which were the very life of his soul. They could not see how he lived on God.—*Christian Treasury.*

c. There was manifest spiritual progress.

[16768] He walks—every step bearing him onward into higher truths and richer experiences. A more truthful and elevating description of godliness know I not than this. What is true religion? It is not a mere belief in dogmas, observance of ceremonies, and membership with churches. It is the spirit walking with God, holding fellowship with Him who is the Creator of the universe and the fountain of love.—*Anon.*

[16769] The example of a man like Enoch is like the mystic pillar of the Hebrews, whose movements indicate the will of Heaven and guide men to a better land.

(2) "He had this testimony, that he pleased God."

[16770] How this testimony came to him we are not told. It is not necessary to suppose that it came in any miraculous way, that he heard God's approving voice sounding in the atmosphere, or that an accredited messenger came from heaven to tell him that the Almighty was pleased with his conduct. He had, as we all have, a conscience, and that conscience, God's own minister, gave the testimony. How blessed such consciousness! He who feels that God is pleased with him may well be magnanimous in trial, brave in danger, calm and sunny through all the storms of life, and exultant in the prospect of dissolution.—*Anon.*

2 The history of Enoch also teaches that it is not the religion of God which withdraws or excludes men from society, and infers disrespect to the secular destinations of Providence, or the relative obligations and connections of life.

[16771] Enoch, however illustrious and distinguished in his latter end, as well as by the superior sanctity of his life, came into the world in the usual manner, and fulfilled the duties of the ordinary relations of human life, while he continued in it. One great branch of holy walking with God is useful walking among men. Having, to the proper period, lived in the obedience and subjection of a son, he in due time becomes the master of a family and a father; for Methuselah was born to him in the sixty-fifth year of his age, a period earlier than that at which any of the patriarchs, according to the record, became a parent, except his grandfather Mahalaleel.—*Rev. H. Hunter, D.D.*

III. IMPORT OF HIS PROPHETIC UTTERANCES AS RECORDED BY ST. JUDE.

1 The remarkable significance of the subject matter of this prophecy.

[16772] It is strange that, though the first of the prophets, he yet prophesied of the last event in the history of the world—the coming of the Lord. It is as if no event betwixt were majestic enough for him to touch—as if this coming of Christ from heaven best suited the tongue of him who, even on earth, was breathing the air of the upper paradise, and was, in a little while, to be caught up among the visions of God.—*Gilfillan.*

2 The three great features of the Second Coming of Christ, foretold by Enoch.

(1) *The advent of the Judge.*

"The Lord cometh."

[16773] It is a solemn truth, that the Great Judge is always coming to the sinner. "Be ye

ready, for in such an hour as ye think not, the Son of man cometh." But there is a grand final coming still awaiting this old earth. Whether Jude referred to this or not, it is clearly and frequently held out in the Book of God. John saw it in vision. "I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life, was cast into the lake of fire." The scene overawes us with silence. Our poor descriptive words would be impertinence, if not impiety.—*Anon.*

(2) *The gathering of the saints.*

"With ten thousands of His saints."

[16774] This is a definite number for an indefinite multitude. He will not come alone. The Great Sun will draw the planets after Him. When the Lord appeared to the Jews in the wilderness, He came "from Sinai, and rose up from Seir unto them; He shined forth from Mount Paran, and He came with ten thousands of saints." And Christ Himself tells us "He will come with all His holy angels."—*Ibid.*

(3) *The conviction of sinners.*

"To execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him."

[16775] The wickedness of men consists in "deeds" and "speeches." On the day of judgment every sinner will be convinced, Enoch teaches, of every ungodly deed and every ungodly speech. This moral conviction is the most terrible feature of that final day. It is not the manifestation of the Judge *outside* the sinner, grand and awful as that will be, that will be the most distressing. It is His coming *into* the soul, carrying His court into the conscience, that will be the terror of that terrible event. Conviction will be carried into every sinner's inmost nature; the wrong of every ungodly deed and speech will be poignantly felt. This conviction implies two things. (1) A wonderful action of the human memory. For a sinner to be convinced of all the wrong things he has done, those wrong things must be recalled. Memory must

open their graves and bring the ghastly monsters up to life. The circumstances of that period will be such as to act so mightily on the laws of association, that the whole of a man's past history shall give up its dead. This conviction implies (2) A consciousness of freedom through the whole of the past life. If the sinner felt that he had not been *free* in his conduct, that he was necessitated to act as he did by the internal tendencies of his organization, or the external circumstances which surrounded him, he would not experience the conviction. It is the consciousness of his freedom now that will give the scorpion sting to the memory of forgotten crimes.—*Ibid.*

IV. ENOCH AND ELIJAH CONTRASTED WITH CHRIST.

[16776] Enoch, Elijah, and Christ, in certain views, can be compared only with each other; but in all things He must have the pre-eminence. They prophesied through the power and virtue of the spirit given unto them; He is the giver of that spirit to them and to all the prophets. As mere men, they must have had their infirmities, and the infirmities of one of them are upon record; but He knew infirmity only by a fellow feeling with the miserable, and He is the atonement for their sins. By the power and mercy of God they were taken up into heaven; by His own power He ascended on high; they as servants, He as the eternal Son of God. In them we have a repeated instance of bodies glorified without suffering death; He "was dead, and is alive again," and carried to heaven a body which had been laid in the tomb. In them we have an object of admiration and astonishment; in Him a pattern for imitation, a Saviour in whom we trust, a ground of hope whereon to rest. Faith exempted them from death; and faith shall at length redeem all the followers of the Lamb from the power of the grave. Enoch and Elijah ascended as solitary individuals, Christ as the first-fruits of them that sleep; and, "lifted up," is drawing an elect world unto Him. They were admitted to regions unknown, and among society untried; He only returned to the place from whence he came.—*Rev. H. Hunter, D.D.*

V. THE TRANSLATIONS OF ENOCH, ELIJAH, AND CHRIST VIEWED AS BELONGING SEVERALLY TO THREE GREAT EPOCHS IN THE CHURCH'S HISTORY.

[16777] In each of the three great periods of the Church was exhibited an instance of a man taken up into heaven, body and spirit, as a support and encouragement to the hope of believers, of attaining the same felicity. Enoch, before the law was given; Elijah, under the legal economy; and Jesus Christ, the Saviour of men, under the evangelical dispensation.—*Ibid.*

NOAH.

I. THE UNPARALLELED WICKEDNESS OF THE ANTEDILUVIAN WORLD.

Never did there exist such a combination of deeply imbedded, various, and vigorous iniquity.

[16778] Different ages of the world have been distinguished for different degrees of wickedness. . . . But of no age of the world's history do we read of such aggravated wickedness as that which pervaded the earth immediately before the Deluge. We have no record of it except in the Book of Genesis, and in some incidental allusions to it in a few other parts of the sacred volume. . . . The language by which it is described is plain and simple; it has none of the figures of rhetoric; but it is exceedingly emphatic and strong. The wickedness of man was great—it was unmingled wickedness, uninterrupted wickedness. It was a community conspicuous in crime, and that stopped not short of every sort of crime; a community where there was no religion, and therefore no morality; a community where there was no moral restraint, and therefore where wickedness was rank and exuberant.—*G. Spring, LL.D.*

[16779] Charles Simeon on Gen. vi. 5, remarks that the dispositions of the hearts of the Antediluvians were—1. Evil without exception—*every* imagination was evil. 2. Without mixture—*only* evil. 3. Without intermission—*continually*.

[16780] It is a revealed fact concerning this generation of men that there was but one individual who did not partake of this intense degeneracy. This earth had been in existence almost sixteen hundred years, and contained millions of inhabitants; yet of all this multitude, one man only was found who was righteous before God. Pious men there had been; but the last generation of the worshippers of God had died out; their names and example, if remembered at all, were remembered only to reproach their descendants. This perfectly universal degeneracy of this dark age is a fact not to be lost sight of in its subsequent and melancholy history. Sodom was corrupt; yet, if there had been "ten righteous" found in her, she would have escaped her terrible overthrow. Yet the "cities of the plain" formed but a small portion of the entire earth, and Lot himself but a small fraction of its pious men. The city of Paris, during the French Revolution, was almost as destitute of pious men as of Bibles; yet were there godly men and women within its walls not a few; while in other lands they could be numbered by millions. At no period since the creation of the world to the present hour, except that of which we are speaking, has it ever been known that there was but *one* righteous man.—*G. Spring, LL.D.*

II. THE GRAND CONTRAST PRESENTED IN THE CHARACTER OF NOAH TO THIS UNIVERSAL CORRUPTION.

"Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord. . . . Noah was a just man and perfect in his generations" (Gen. vi. 8, 9).

[16781] Public opinion and example control the world, both for good and for evil. Interest, pride, and social bonds allure men to moral virtue; none dispute their power to harden them in sin. There is little apparent evil in wickedness, and no reproach where wickedness is fashionable and universal. Noah was a righteous man in opposition to the strong and overwhelming current of the whole antediluvian world. His incipient purposes of godliness were protected by no sacred alliances and influences; he had no retreat from the snares and scoffs of the ungodly, even in the more retired circles of domestic love. He stood alone, the only example of piety in the earth. "*There* have I found righteous before me in *this generation*." He was God's witness, chosen, called, faithful. He was a consistent witness, wondered at for his boldness amid powerful and inveterate foes, for his perseverance in the midst of hardships and perils, and for his all-conquering faith and zeal amid stupid carelessness, sottish ignorance, and degrading profligacy.—*Ibid.*

[16782] It was a noble example of Christian heroism when the youthful Stephen, assailed by the flower of five Jewish synagogues and an exasperated mob, stood firm, at every hazard, for God and righteousness, and remained undismayed amid the terrors of martyrdom. It was a noble spirit in Luther, when Rome gnashed upon him with her teeth, and, like Hercules, he boldly attacked this Nemean lion in his lair. It was a splendid testimony when Patrick Hamilton, a youth of royal lineage, renounced his hereditary honours for the sake of rekindling in Scotland the smouldering beacon of God's truth, though he himself was the first victim to the flames. But it was a still nobler spectacle to see that venerable patriarch standing for centuries, unpatronized and unprotected where "all flesh had corrupted its way on the earth." These wondrous men, and others like them, were bright stars in the moral firmament; but they were not, like him, the only light amid the pervading darkness. It was a proof of piety that was never, before or since, put to so severe a test. All men and all visible things were against him; yet had he hope against hope, and tranquil endurance amid "great swelling words of vanity."—*Ibid.*

[16783] Solitary piety—what is it? where is it? We learn what it was, when we think of Noah; we know where it was, when we think of that giant race of wicked men. Beautiful was it, inexpressibly beautiful; a single flower blooming in the scathed forest, and breathing its fragrance amid desert sands; a single temple rescued from the ravages of time, where the Shekinah dwelt; a solitary heart filled with his

love, where "every imagination of the thoughts of man's heart was only evil continually."—*Ibid.*

III. THE GENERAL RIGHTEOUSNESS OF NOAH BEFORE GOD.

His piety was of no doubtful kind, but was distinguished for its genuineness and sincerity.

[16784] In speaking of the character of Noah, we are left in darkness so far as it regards his early history. We read nothing of his *conversion*; nor, indeed, of the conversion of any of the saints of the patriarchal period. He was the great adornment of the most degenerate age; yet human example and influences accomplished little in the attainment of that spirit, and in the cultivation of those virtues for which he was distinguished. How *early* he became a pious man we are not informed, although it is quite obvious that it was long before the antediluvian world had attained its excess of wickedness. It was under the most unfavourable auspices, and probably in early life, that strong religious impressions were made upon his mind that proved permanent, and that evinced his indebtedness to renewing and sanctifying grace. It is recorded of him that he was righteous before God. He who draws aside the curtains of the heart, and "weigheth the actions of men," bears witness to his religious integrity. There was no more doubt of it than there was of the impiety of those whose "wickedness was great on the earth," and whose character was distinguished by their enmity to God, and their scandalous vices.—*Ibid.*

[16785] Not a few are righteous *before men* who before God are not righteous. They are righteous in their own eyes; righteous by profession and in all the form of godliness; but there their righteousness stops. Their piety consists, on the one hand, in the variations of animal excitement, and, on the other, in the monotony of a prescribed ritual. With some it is emotion without thought; with others it is a mere religious mechanism without emotion. . . . Right conduct is the fruit of right principles and affections. The external rectitude which God requires and approves, flows from a rectitude that is internal; a godly heart and a godly life constitute a godly man. The external is nothing except as it is the expression of the internal; while the internal is nothing if it have not sufficient impulse to produce the external. "Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or else make the tree corrupt and its fruit corrupt; the tree is known by its fruit." It is a beautiful character where the internal and the external are thus combined, and present a true and visible conformity to the law of God. Such was the character of Noah. He was righteous, not in form merely; not in his own eyes; not merely in the eyes of men; he was "righteous before God."—*Ibid.*

IV. HIS HABITUAL AND INTIMATE INTER-COURSE WITH HIS MAKER.

"Noah walked with God" (Gen. vi. 9).

[16786] Wickedness hates God, and shuns His presence. Such was the wickedness of the antediluvian world; it was practical atheism. Piety loves God, and seeks His presence and love; such was the piety of Noah. Centuries after he was gathered to his fathers his biographer was divinely directed to write his epitaph in those few and emphatic words, "And Noah walked with God." To render the contrast between himself and the world around him the more striking and impressive, his piety was of the sweetest kind; it was the steady and delightful habit of his soul. He was acquainted with God, familiar with God. He realized the Divine presence. God was his companion, his friend, his guide, his refuge, his portion. There was no being in the universe with whom he had so much to do as with God; none whom he thought of so much; on whom he so constantly felt his dependence; with whom he had such unembarrassed intercourse; to whom he looked with such expectations, and on whom he so implicitly relied; from whom he received all that relieved the burden and gladdened the sadness of his pilgrimage; and whose favour and love were his "shelter and shade," his "glory and the lifter up of his head."—*Ibid.*

[16787] His piety must have been pre-eminent to have existed at all. In that world of wickedness he must have lived near to heaven, or near to hell. He did live near to heaven; and this was his security. There was wondrous condescension in God in His personal interviews with this holy man. He who held that shoreless deluge in the hollow of His hand, laid aside His glorious, His awful majesty, and held intercourse with a worm. Noah was admitted to "the secret of His tabernacle." Worm as he was, he was God's consecrated servant and much-loved child. "He walked with God;" and they were paths of righteousness; pleasant and peaceful paths, where truth flourishes and exceeding great and precious promises grow; joyous paths, where are smiles, and blessings, and fullness of joy; bright paths, cheered with heavenly light and love, overhung with unearthly glories, and ever opening new vistas of increased beauty and loveliness.—*Ibid.*

V. HIS MARVELLOUS FAITH UNDER MOST SINGULAR CIRCUMSTANCES, AND THE MIGHTY INFLUENCE IT EXERCISED UPON HIS LIFE.

1 Noah's implicit faith in God formed the most prominent feature of his character.

[16788] The building of the ark commenced when Noah was four hundred and eighty years old; that is, before any of his three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth, had been born—in fact, just twenty years before the birth of Shem. Thus

the great faith of Noah appeared not only in building an ark in the midst of a scoffing and unbelieving generation, and that against all human probability of its ever being needed, and one hundred and twenty years before it was actually required, but in providing room for "his sons" and his "sons' wives," while as yet he himself was childless! Indeed, the more we try to realize the circumstances, the more grand appears the unshaken confidence of the patriarch.—*Ederstein*.

[16789] It is faith in the unseen that makes men strong "to labour and to wait." "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." The heroic achievements emblazoned in Noah's history are all attributable to this faith. Let me believe in those things "not seen as yet," which God has revealed, and I shall be magnanimous in suffering, invincible in duty, brave in danger, discharging evermore my mission heroically, regardless alike of the smiles or frowns of men.—*Anon.*

2 Noah's sublime faith influenced his life in various ways.

(1) *It impelled him to the most trying work.*

a. Trying to his *patience*.

[16790] "Being moved with fear," which Ebrard renders, "*with wise foresight*," he set himself to the construction of an ark according to the directions which the Almighty had given him. And his work was truly trying. There is a tendency in most men to get tired of the same work; change of labour we feel to be rest. But here is a man who labours on day after day, month after month, year after year, for *one hundred and twenty years*.—*Ibid.*

b. Trying to his *social nature*.

[16791] All men in labour desire the sympathy and co-operation of their fellow-men. To work alone, single-handedly, without sympathy, is never pleasant. But Noah had to detach himself from the men of his age, and not only sacrifice their sympathy, but incur their scorn and opposition. He exposed himself to their bitter insults, their withering lampoons, and malignant contempt.—*Ibid.*

[16792] Scoffing unbelief and cutting irony did not move him. Such was the loneliness amid which he lived, that it seems to us a visionary and unearthly existence. There was no kindred spirit on earth to cheer him; his consolation and his courage were all from worlds unseen. Wonderful man! Not naval or military hero, amid the stormy scenes of battle, ever gave proof of greater heroism than the ardent and steady mind of this man of God.—*G. Spring, LL.D.*

c. Trying to his *reason*.

[16793] His own experience, and that of his ancestors, assured him of the *stability* of nature. Year after year, up to the last of the one hundred and twenty, as nature proceeded in her wonted course, moving on in the majesty of un-

broken order, she would seem to him at times to denounce him as one of the most deluded of visionaries. The sceptics of his age would no doubt avail themselves of the indisputable regularity of nature, and point him out to society as one of the most brainless of fanatics.—*Anon.*

[16794] Coming events were told to him, not at first told to others—events which, to the eye of sense, were the most improbable in the world, which indeed seemed impossible. It did not seem likely that God would destroy the earth He had so recently made; nor were there any outward and visible indications of this overwhelming calamity. . . . It was a fearful, unheard-of thing which God had threatened, and the world around him did not believe it. But it drew his attention more and more, till it became the absorbing theme, and his faith anticipated it with an assurance which the reality itself could not make more sure.—*G. Spring, LL.D.*

(2) *It impelled him to the most serviceable work.*

[16795] The ark he made proved the "saving of his house" as well as the saving of the germs of a new world. Had he not done his work would not the human race have become extinct? A truly serviceable work was this work of Noah. He became the second father of mankind; and, under God, we owe him our existence and our earthly all. What made him such a benefactor? Faith in "the things not seen as yet" which God revealed. In making that ark he worked out God's idea: "According to all that God commanded him, so did he." And in thus working out God's idea he saved the world. Thus it ever is. No man can truly help his race unless he believes in God's Word, and works his faith out on the little and, it may be, very humble and dusty platform of his earthly life. Wouldst thou be a true benefactor? Then, like Noah, take into thy being ideas from God about "things not seen as yet;" let these fill and fire thee, work thy faculties, and shape thy character. Man's mission is to get ideas from heaven into him, and plant them as living seeds in the earth.—*Anon.*

[16796] Believing, simply believing, is the basis of vital faith; but if this be all, it comes to nothing. It avails and suffices no more than if Noah had contented himself with drawing a plan, or shaping a model of the prescribed ark, and perhaps marking the trees that would serve for the timber. To each belief, relative to important concerns, there is some appropriate affection or passion; and the belief must bring that into exercise. Noah's belief excited his "fear." And, in concerns involving practice, there is an action appropriate to each belief and corresponding emotion, he "prepared an ark."—*Rev. J. Foster, D.D.*

(3) *It impelled him to self-rectifying work.*

[16797] "He became heir of the righteousness which is by faith." The meaning is, he became a possessor of righteousness. His faith in the

"things not seen as yet," which included the intervention of Christ, made him right with God, right in the very spirit of his life. Men are ever "justified"—made right by faith.—*Anon.*

(4) *It impelled him to sin-condemning work.*

[16798] "He condemned the world" by practically trusting the Divine word, obeying the Divine command, working out in every-day life the ideas of God. He condemned the unbelief, corruption, and impieties of the wicked millions about him that revelled in these crimes. Thus he was, as Peter calls him, a "preacher of righteousness." He preached righteousness not merely with the lip, but with the whole life. Every stroke of the hammer that echoed in the valley was a homily against sin. He was a light "shining in a dark place." "This is the condemnation, that light has come into the world." The excellence of one individual exposes the faults of another, as I have sometimes seen a light beaming out from one region of the sky giving a blacker and more threatening aspect to a dark thunder-cloud hanging in the opposite heavens.—*Ibid.*

[16799] Noah was not contented to keep himself from sin. He was a preacher as well as an example of righteousness. By how much the more fixed and undoubting his own faith was, by how much the more certainly he knew that God loveth righteousness and hateth iniquity, by so much the more did his heart sink within him, when he looked on his right hand and on his left, and saw all his brethren walking in the ways of death. He did his best to turn them from their sin and danger; he set them a good example, gave them good advice, and prayed, we may be sure, to Almighty God that He would yet show forth His mercy in renewing a right spirit within them. Behold here a true mirror of the duty of every good man toward his bad neighbours.—*Rev. J. Keble.*

VI. THE STRENGTH OF HIS PROMPT AND UNQUESTIONING OBEDIENCE.

[16800] He might have reasoned as ancient and modern infidels have reasoned on the subject of the deluge; but instead of doing this, or employing his time in refuting the cavils of unbelief, no sooner did God command him to build the ark than he set himself in earnest to obey His will. He justified and vindicated the reality and strength of his faith by his obedience. It was an arduous enterprise; but God had commanded it; He had indeed originated and minutely dictated the plan of it. Noah was but the under-builder, the humble workman, and felt that he had nothing to do but implicitly obey the Divine directions. He needed no other prompting, no other rule of conduct. Nothing was omitted or overlooked, and nothing was delayed. "Thus did Noah: according to all that God commanded him, so did he." His religion was a practical religion, and his obedience the crown of his piety. Mighty interests were de-

pendent on this watchful and diligent observance; it would have cost him shame, agony, and death if he had not been true to his trust, and if he had been governed by any other rule of action than God's will.—*G. Spring, LL.D.*

VII. HIS UNSHAKEN FIRMNESS OF SOUL.

[16801] Behold the venerable sage, at the admonition of heaven, undertaking his great work. The foundation is laid; the fabric advances; and every stroke of the axe or hammer summons a thoughtless and a guilty world to repentance; but "they will not hear, they will not lay it to heart." I see the good man maligned, derided, insulted. In their gaiety of heart, they scornfully style the ark *Noah's folly*. The work is finished, but they continue to sing, dance, and play; and many, it is probable, have an active hand in the construction of that machine to which they scorn to resort for shelter from the impending danger. Noah is not to be diverted from his purpose. Neither the immensity of the undertaking, nor the length of time which it required, nor the opposition which he meets with from an unbelieving generation, discourage him in the prosecution of a design, planned by infinite wisdom, and recommended by Divine mercy.—*Rev. H. Hunter, D.D.*

[16802] We may suppose Noah's ungodly neighbours gazing and scoffing at his persevering labour, pointing to the cloudless sky and the solid earth, and asking, "Where are the indications of approaching calamity? Whence shall come this flood of water you speak of? From the heavens above, or from the earth beneath?" Without hazarding a reply to their captious and cavilling questions, the holy man proceeded with his work.—*E. Copley.*

VIII. THE WAY IN WHICH GOD EXPRESSED HIS APPROBATION OF HUMAN WORTH IN THE CASE OF NOAH.

1 Generally considered.

[16803] Noah's character was *honoured of God*. Such a character is praiseworthy. It is God's image reflected upon the soul of His creature and child. "The righteous Lord loveth righteousness." He could not do otherwise than approve of such a character. The mediatorial interposition of the Son of God was known before the time of Noah, and justice and mercy had already harmonized their claims in the promised seed of the woman who was to bruise the serpent's head. Noah had availed himself of this great sacrifice, and his person was accepted of the Most High. His high-born character was not veiled from the all-seeing eye; nor were its glories obscured by any law of justice, or any acts of all-controlling sovereignty. Men scoffed at it, but God smiled. Humble as this godly man was, and disdaining, as he did, everything in the form of meritorious righteousness, he had not only an approving conscience, but an approving God.—*G. Spring, LL.D.*

2 Specially considered.

(1) *God honoured Noah in the fact that He preserved him from the universal overthrow.*

[16804] "God shut him in!" His faithful love shut him in. He was housed from the tempest. The billows might surge, and the earth reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man; but there was *that* within the ark which Almighty Love protected as the apple of His eye. The church was safe. All was turbulence without; within all was perfect and sweet repose. There was no solicitude, and there were no bewildered thoughts; never was man more composed, and never were hopes in brighter bloom. There were no lights in the heaven to shine upon the mingling elements. Nothing could be seen upon that dark and solitary waste but the single light glimmering from the window of the ark as it floated upon the universal flood. There this honoured man of God dwelt for three hundred and seventy days, fearing no evil. There he rose morning after morning; there he slept, lulled by the murmurs and awakened by the rushing of the troubled deep, realizing the promise, "Because he hath set his love upon Me, therefore will I deliver him: I will set him on high, because he hath known My name."—*Ibid.*

(2) *God not only extended His preserving care toward Noah himself, but also preserved others for his sake.*

[16805] Even when God first gave the command to Noah to build the ark, He did not leave him in suspense and agitation in relation to those he loved; the threatening to destroy the earth was scarcely uttered, when God said to him, "But with thee will I establish *My covenant*." His children were not infants; they had reached maturity; and though they were not then righteous before God, there were blessings in prospect for them, because it is the method of His grace thus to sanctify and reward the natural affections, and because He would not wither the heart of the parent by blasting the hopes of his children. And when the hour of trial came, and the ark was finished, it was made the depository of the righteous and his seed. This was the reward of the patriarch's faithfulness; but for their father's piety they would have perished in the flood; for his sake they were safe from the desolations where the dove could not find a green leaf, nor a rest for the soles of her feet.—*Ibid.*

IX. THE SPIRIT OF THANKFULNESS AND GRATITUDE EVINCED BY NOAH UPON QUITTING THE ARK.

[16806] After somewhat more than a year's residence in this divinely appointed sanctuary, the rescued family came forth in safety and in health—the proprietors of the world—the progenitors of a new race. Their first act was to build an altar, and offer thereon a sacrifice of adoration and gratitude for their preservation,

as well as an expression of their faith in the great atoning Saviour promised, through whom this mercy had been extended.—*E. Copley.*

[16807] No sooner is Noah come out of the ark, but he builds an altar: not an house for himself, but an altar to the Lord. Our faith will ever teach us to prefer God to ourselves: delayed thankfulness is not worthy of acceptance. Of those few creatures that are left, God must have some; they are all His: yet His goodness will have man know that it was he, for whose sake they were preserved. It was a privilege to those very brute creatures, that they were saved from the waters, to be offered up in fire unto God. What a favour is it to men to be reserved from common destructions, to be sacrificed to their Maker and Redeemer!—*Lp. Hall.*

[16808] "And Noah builded an altar unto the Lord, and took of every clean beast, and of every clean fowl, and offered burnt-offerings on the altar." We know of no extravagant delight with which he contemplated the new world before him, rising in beauty from the waters, and offering himself a kingdom of boundless magnificence. We know of no exulting that he had escaped the malice of his enemies, henceforth to be the father of a countless race. But like the Christian, for Christian he was by anticipation, the first act was to build an altar to the Lord; and upon that he laid, according to the custom of his fathers, the sacrifice of every clean beast, and every clean fowl, and offered burnt-offerings upon the altar.—*Rev. G. Croy, LL.D.*

X. THE ONE DEGRADING SIN RECORDED OF THIS PATRIARCH, AND THE WARNING IT CONVEYS.

"... Noah . . . planted a vineyard: and he drank of the wine and was drunken" (Gen. ix. 20, 21).

[16809] When Noah—with his three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth—left the ark to become a husbandman, he planted a vineyard, as Jewish legend has it, from a slip of the vine that had strayed out of Paradise. But it may boldly be asserted that, except the forbidden fruit itself, none has brought more sin, ruin, and desolation upon our earth. Whether Noah was unacquainted with the intoxicating property of the vine, or neglected proper moderation, the sad spectacle is presented of the aged patriarch, so lately rescued from the flood, not only falling a victim to drunkenness, but exposing himself in that state to the impious and vile conduct of his son Ham.—*Edersheim.*

[16810] Who would look to have found righteous Noah, the father of the new world, lying drunken in his tent! Who could think that wine should overthrow him that was preserved from the waters! that he, who could not be tainted with the sinful examples of the former

world, should begin the example of a new sin of his own ! What are we men if we be but ourselves ! While God upholds us, no temptation can move us : when He leaves us, no temptation is too weak to overthrow us. What living man had ever so noble proofs of the mercy, of the justice of God : mercy upon himself, justice upon others ? What man had so gracious approbation from his Maker ? Behold, he of whom in an unclean world, God said, These only have I found righteous, proves now unclean when the world was purged. The preacher of righteousness unto the former age, the king, priest, and prophet of the world renewed, is the first that renews the sins of that world which he had reproved, and which he saw condemned for sin. God's best children have no tence for sins of infirmity.—*Bp. Hall.*

[16811] Which of the saints have not once done that whereof they are ashamed ? God, that lets us fall, knows how to make as good use of the sins of His holy ones as of their obedience. If we had not such patterns, who could choose but despair at the sight of his sins ? Yet we find Noah drunken but once. One act can no more make a good heart unrighteous, than a trade of sin can stand with regeneration. But when I look to the effect of this sin, I cannot but blush and wonder. Lo ! this sin is worse than sin ; other sins move shame, but hide it ; this displays it to the world.—*Ibid.*

XI. NOAH CONSIDERED AS A TYPE OF CHRIST.

1 As regards his name.

[16812] Noah signifies comfort or rest, and of him it was prophetically said, " This same shall comfort us concerning our work and toil of our hands," &c. (Gen. v. 29). Now Jesus is emphatically the " consolation of Israel," and the rest of a heavy laden and guilty world. He imparts spiritual rest to the weary soul. The believer rests on Him as the only foundation of hope ; and He has provided, and it is His prerogative to admit to, that heavenly rest which remains for the people of God.—*Rev. J. Burns, D.D.*

2 As regards his holy life.

[16813] " Noah was a just man and perfect in his generation, and Noah walked with God " (Gen. vi. 9). What a testimony does God give in this verse of the excellency of Noah—" just, perfect, and walking with God." Yet how much more fully were these features observable in Jesus. He was the " Just One." His nature was immaculate—without spot, or sinful infirmity. He lived in closest fellowship with God, and ever walked before Him in all well-pleasing. His whole life reflected the purity of the Father, and, in all things and every moment, God approved, and loved, and delighted in Him.—*Ibid.*

3 As regards his public ministrations.

[16814] Noah was a " preacher of righteousness." No doubt it was by the truth which Noah delivered that the Spirit strove with the wicked and infatuated antediluvian world. We have every reason to believe that, in discharging this office, he was faithful, self-denying, earnest, and persevering. How fully did this office point out the ministrations of the Son of God ! Jesus was appointed to preach the gospel of righteousness to the poor. To this He devotedly attended, and faithfully did He persevere in publishing the righteous doctrines and precepts of His heavenly kingdom. His preaching was eminently spiritual, yet clear, plain, and often clothed in the language of figure and parable, so that the common people heard Him gladly. It is remarkable, too, that, as preachers, both prophesied of the just vengeance of God. Noah with respect to the old world, Jesus with respect to Jerusalem and Judæa.—*Ibid.*

4 As regards his deliverance of his family.

[16815] God directed him to prepare an ark for the saving of himself and house ; and he obeyed God, built the ark, and thus saved himself and family from the destructive flood. Jesus expressly came to save His people from their sins, and thus to deliver them from the wrath to come. The ark, in this sense, seems strikingly to represent the Church of Christ. 1. Thus, as in the ark the family of Noah were together, and separated from an ungodly world, so believers are redeemed out of the world, and are united together under their one head, Jesus Christ. 2. As the ark was of Divine construction, so the church is the workmanship of Christ, fashioned in all things after His own infinite wisdom and skill. 3. As the ark was the instrument of safety, so we are brought into the church, out of the condemnation under which the whole world lieth. 4. As those in the ark escaped the vengeance of God, and became the inhabitants of the new world ; so all believers, united together in the church of Christ, are heirs of God and of the kingdom of eternal life.—*Ibid.*

5 As regards his priesthood of the world.

[16816] Noah evidently acted as priest, and his offerings were clearly typical of that which Christ has presented for the guilt of the world. (See Gen. viii. 20, 21.) The sacrifice which Noah presented consisted of clean beasts, and also of every clean fowl, a sacrifice which was peculiarly acceptable to God, and through which He expressed His gracious regards to the future generations of mankind. Jesus offered the perfect sacrifice of Himself for all the nations and families of the earth, a sacrifice which made atonement for the transgressions of man, and through which God has expressed His favour and mercy to all who sincerely repent and believe the gospel of His Son.—*Ibid.*

16817—16823]

CAIN.

I. THE TWO SACRIFICES (GEN. IV. 3, 4).

The intellectual pride and deistic self-sufficiency characterizing the offering of Cain.

Human reason over-reaching Divine revelation.

[16817] As it was evidently a feeling of wounded pride which at last precipitated in Cain the commission of the fatal act, we can scarcely doubt that the growth, however it may have come about, of a proud rebellious spirit of opposition to the will of heaven in the matter of religious worship, was the form which the evil in him more especially assumed, and the direct cause of the direful consequences that followed.—*Rev. D. Macdonald.*

[16818] Cain, disregarding the gracious assurances that had been vouchsafed, or at least disdaining to adopt the prescribed mode of manifesting his belief, possibly as not appearing to his reason to possess any efficacy or natural fitness, thought he had sufficiently acquitted himself of his duty in acknowledging the general superintendence of God, and expressing his gratitude to the Supreme Benefactor, by presenting some of those good things which he thereby confessed to have been derived from His bounty. In short, Cain, the first-born of the Fall, exhibits the first prints of his parents' disobedience, in the arrogance and self-sufficiency of reason rejecting the aids of revelation, because they fell not within its apprehension of right. He takes the first place in the annals of Deism, and displays, in his proud rejection of the ordinance of sacrifice, the same spirit which, in later days, has actuated his enlightened followers in rejecting the sacrifice of Christ.—*Bp. Magee.*

[See Art. "Reason and Faith," Vol. I., Sec. I., pp. 254-263.]

II. THE JEALOUS WRATH AND MALIGNANT ENVY OF THE REJECTED OFFERER.

"Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell" (Gen. iv. 5).

[16819] Abel's sacrifice is accepted: what was this to Cain? Cain's is rejected: how could Abel remedy this? O envy! the corrosive of all ill minds, and the root of all desperate actions. The same cause that moved Satan to tempt the first man to destroy himself and his posterity, the same moves the second man to destroy the third. It should have been Cain's joy to see his brother accepted: it should have been his sorrow to see that himself had deserved a rejection; his brother's example should have excited and directed him. Could Abel have stayed God's fire from descending? or should he (if he could) reject God's acceptance, and displease his Maker to content a brother? Was Cain ever the farther from a blessing, because his

brother obtained mercy? How proud and foolish is malice, which grows thus mad for no other cause but because God or Abel is not less good! It hath been an old and happy danger to be holy; indifferent actions must be careful to avoid offence; but I care not what devil or what Cain be angry that I do good, or receive good.—*Bp. Hall.*

[16820] Cain brought the first-fruits of the ground, and his offering was rejected; while at the same time the victim from his brother's flock, offered in humble faith, evidently met the Divine acceptance and regard. This so enraged Cain, that his countenance assumed a sullen and a gloomy aspect, too correct an index of his unhumiliated, self-righteous, and malignant spirit.—*E. Copley.*

III. THE CONDESCENDING REMONSTRANCE FROM ON HIGH.

"Why art thou wroth, and why is thy countenance fallen?" &c. (Gen. iv. 6, 7).

[16821] Sin is personified; he crouches like a wild beast at the door of his heart. Jehovah is remonstrating with angry, jealous Cain. "Why art thou wroth, and why is thy countenance fallen?" Then Cain is warned that while he is giving way to his jealous thoughts, sin is waiting outside the door of his heart, ready to spring in, when once passion has assumed its sovereignty. He has not long to wait: the warning is now to be proved too necessary. The evil eye has set its mark.—*Rev. H. Cust Numm.*

IV. THE DELIBERATE MURDER.

Premeditated revenge sated in ruthless cruelty.

[16822] By God's expostulation Cain was silenced, but not humbled. His envy and hatred against his unoffending brother became more and more inflamed, and his dark soul meditated deeds of revenge. Surely evil passions must long have been fostered in his bosom; for vice never reaches such a frightful maturity at once. Shortly afterwards, as Cain talked with his brother Abel in the field, probably in a familiar manner, as though all unpleasant impressions had worn off from his mind, he rose up and slew him!—the first-born of human race became a murderer! the murderer of his innocent, his only brother!—and wherefore? because his own works were evil, and his brother's were righteous. When a person has made such progress in wickedness, as to hate another for the sake of his goodness, there is no calculating to what consummation of guilt and horror he may rise.—*E. Copley.*

V. THE ACCUSING INQUIRY.

"Where is Abel thy brother?" (Gen. iv. 9.)

[16823] No sooner doth Abel's blood speak unto God, than God speaks to Cain. There is no wicked man to whom God speaks not, if not

to his ear, yet to his heart. What speech was this? Not an accusation, but an inquiry; yet such an inquiry as would infer an accusation. God loves to have a sinner accuse himself; and therefore hath He set His deputy in the breast of man; neither doth God love this more than nature abhors it.—*Bp. Hall.*

VI. THE DARING RETORT.

“I know not: Am I my brother’s keeper?”
(Gen. iv. 9.)

[16824] Cain professed ignorance; but he could not deceive that eye which is a flame of fire, and which had witnessed the whole transaction: beside, a voice was heard proclaiming his guilt—a voice from the ground—the voice of his brother’s blood, calling for Divine vengeance—

Blood has a voice to pierce the skies;
Revenge, the blood of Abel cries—

and the plea was not disallowed.—*E. Copley.*

[16825] Cain answers stubbornly: the very name of Abel wounds him no less than his hand had wounded Abel: consciences that are without remorse are not without horror: wickedness makes men desperate. The murderer is angry with God, as of late, for accepting his brother’s oblation; so now, for listening to his blood.—*Bp. Hall.*

VII. THE RETRIBUTIVE CURSE (GEN. IV 10-12).

Its aspect as regards the mental suffering inflicted.

“Cain went out from the presence of the Lord.”

[16826] He that cares not for the act of his sin shall care for the smart of his punishment. The damned are weary of their torments, but in vain. How great a madness is it to complain too late! He that would not keep his brother, is cast out from the protection of God; he that feared not to kill his brother, fears now that whosoever meets him will kill him. The troubled conscience projecteth fearful things, and sin makes even cruel men cowardly. God saw it was too much favour for him to die; He therefore wills that which Cain wills. Cain would live; it is yielded him, but for a curse. How often doth God hear sinners in anger! He shall live, banished from God, carrying his hell in his bosom, and the brand of God’s vengeance in his forehead. God rejects him, the earth repines at him, men abhor him; himself now wishes that death which he feared, and no man dare pleasure him with a murder. How bitter is the end of sin, yea, without end! Still Cain finds that he killed himself more than his brother. We should never sin if our foresight were but as good as our sense; the issue of sin would appear a thousand times more horrible than the act is pleasant.—*Ibid.*

[16827] The pride of Cain, still unsubdued, writhed under the stroke; and he exclaimed, “My punishment is greater than I can bear.” What led him to speak thus appears to have been not so much the physical as the social evils of his position—the alienation alike from God and man into which he was now thrown, and the savage horrors of the state of isolation and outlawry to which he was consigned.—*Rev. D. Macdonald.*

[16828] Not an expression of regret escapes from Cain; the sense of injury inflicted, or likely to be inflicted upon himself, is all that he is concerned about; and he seems utterly unconscious of any moral necessity for his appointment to such a lot, as the consequence of the unbrotherly and inhuman spirit he had displayed. There was just one indication of a softened mood in what he said—in his feeling it to be an intolerable burden to be treated as an exile from human society, and exposed to the calamities of an outlaw from heaven. And as a token of mercy still mingling with judgment, the Lord was graciously pleased to set bounds to the evil by assuring him of protection to his life.—*Ibid.*

[16829] The story of Cain is the story of all ages. Sin, suffering; the one following the other by a law fixed and imperative like that by which pain agonizes a burning hand. A living poet speaks of—

“The coils
Of those twin serpents—Sin and Suffering.”

So far as the narrative informs us, the suffering of the first murderer was mental suffering. Disease did not blast him; chains did not bind him; the mysterious mark on his forehead was not a burning brand. He went his way like other men. He had sons and daughters: he built the first city known in history. Tradition says that he founded many cities, and became the head of a great empire. Yet Cain “went out from the presence of the Lord.” He lived a life of conscious curse. The serpents coiled within. Cursed in thought, cursed in feeling, cursed in fears, cursed in blasted hopes, cursed in one long despair: such was life to the first man who bore the fruit of the first matured and ripened sin. And such will be the life of the last man who shall go out from the presence of the Lord, bearing the burden of a finished crime unrepented of and unforgiven.—*Rev. A. Phelps, D.D.*

VIII. REASONS WHY CAIN’S LIFE WAS PRESERVED.

[16830] Why is God so anxious to preserve Cain from death, and to give him the assurance of this security? Some reasons are obvious, besides those which run us up directly to the sovereignty of God.—*Horatio Bonar.*

[16831] God’s desire is to manifest the riches of His grace, and the extent of His forbearance,

and that He has no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but wishes by His long-suffering to lead him to repentance.—*Ibid.*

[16832] Death would not have answered God's end at all. It was needful that Cain should be preserved alive as an awful monument of sin, a warning against the shedding of man's blood. We find that this proved ineffectual; for in after ages we read that the earth was filled with violence, which compelled God to interfere with the deluge; and we find also that, after the deluge, God enacted the definite statute for the repression of murder, putting into man's hands the very power before that He had kept wholly in His own.—*Ibid.*

[16833] Cain was spared too, because of this partial repentance, God accepted Ahab's repentance (1 Kings xxi. 29), poor and hollow as it was; so does He Cain's; for He is gracious and merciful, looking for the first and faintest signs of a sinner's turning to Himself, willing to meet at once without upbraiding, and putting the best possible construction on all he says and does. To what length is not the grace of our God able to go! Sin abounds, but grace superabounds. How desirous is Jehovah not to curse, but to bless; not to smite, but to heal; not to destroy, but to save.—*Ibid.*

IX. THE CAUSES OF CAIN'S DESPAIR.

[16834] Cain enumerates the causes of his despair. These are three—the three articles of the sentence pronounced; and when he sums up with a conclusion of his own: "It shall come to pass that every one that findeth me shall slay me."—*Ibid.*

1 Behold Thou hast cast me out this day from (or upon) the face of the ground.

[16835] He sees it to be Jehovah's own doing; He who drove Adam out of Paradise, now drives Cain out of Eden. Adam's sin brought expulsion from the inner circle, Cain's from the outer. He is to cast out from the land where he had been born, where was his home; from the ground which he had tilled. He was now doubly banished; compelled to go forth into an unknown region, without a guide, or a promise, or a hope.—*Ibid.*

2 From Thy face I shall be hid.

[16836] God's face means, doubtless, the Shekinah or manifested glory of Jehovah at the gate of Eden, where Adam and Eve, and their children, had worshipped; where God was seen by them, where He met them and spake to them as from His mercy-seat. From this place of Jehovah's presence Cain was to go out, and this depresses him. Not that he really cared for the favour of God, as one in whose favour was life; but still, he could not afford to lose it, especially when others were left behind to enjoy it. And all his religious feelings, such as they were, were associated with that spot.—*Ibid.*

3 "I shall be a fugitive and a vagabond in the earth."

[16837] Unchained from his primeval home, he was now to drift to and fro, he knew not whither. He was to be a leaf driven to and fro, a man without a settlement, and without a home. Poor desolate sinner! And all this is thine own doing! Thy sin has found thee out. Thine own iniquities have taken thee, and thou art holden with the cords of thy sins (Prov. v. 22). Cain now sums up all by drawing his own sad inference. He is liable to be slain by the first who meets him. There was nothing of this in the sentence; but a guilty conscience suggested it. He sees himself a marked man. Death surrounds him. What else can a murderer's conscience forbode?—*Ibid.*

X. "THE WAY OF CAIN."

[16838] The way of Cain—what is it? (Jude 11.) The apostle speaks of it as something terrible, and something which will be specially exhibited in the last days. "Woe unto them, for they have gone in the way of Cain." That way began in unbelief, in the rejection of God's ways of "salvation through the shedding of the blood." It ended in utter worldliness and infidelity; in the unrestrained indulgence of the lust of the flesh, the eye, and the pride of life. It was a way very much marked by the Apostle Paul's characteristics of the perilous times of the last days (2 Tim. iii. 1).—*Ibid.*

[16839] In it we find selfishness, envy, hatred, murder, hypocrisy, lying, pride, independence, rebelliousness, ambition, all coupled or covered over with the "form of godliness." Rejection of the woman's seed, and of God's way of acceptance through that seed—this is the main feature, that which influences all the rest. No Christ for him! No bruised heel for him! No shedding of blood for the remission of sins! No righteousness of a substitute in which he may stand before God! "The way of Cain"! It still exists. It has not been ploughed up so as to become imperceptible. It is still visible, and it is coming more and more into admiration as man's conscience gets blunted, and as his proud self-sufficiency exhibits itself. No sacrifice, no substitute, no imputed righteousness, no blood-shedding, no "religion of the shambles" for us! And is such a way the way of holiness? Will such a religion lead men to love and gentleness and brotherly kindness? Will such a faith make a happy kingdom and a blessed earth, introducing the reign of peace and gladness? So say its exulting votaries, emancipated, as they suppose, from the trammels of old creeds, and from the brutalizing influence of altars besmeared with blood. So says the philosophic theology of the day. So says the poetry of the age.—*Ibid.*

[16840] Look at Cain. That was his way. He rejected the expiatory blood, turning away from "religion of the shambles" to the mild

gentleness of a worship in which no life was taken, and no blood was spilt, and no suffering inflicted. Did this mild and genial religion of his lead to a loving, gentle life? No. He who had so many scruples about shedding the blood of an innocent lamb, has none about taking the life of a holy and unoffending brother. He who is too pure and refined in his ideas of religion to profane his altar by turning it into "shambles," is all the while busied in preparing "shambles" of his own, where, for the gratification of malice, hatred, envy, and revenge, and every hellish passion, he may, with his own hand, butcher a brother for being more righteous than he.—*Ibid.*

ABEL.

I. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE NAME BESTOWED UPON THE SECOND CHILD OF MAN.

[16841] Abel (signifying emptiness, vanity) was the second son of Adam and Eve. Why such a name should have been conferred upon him we are not told. Possibly something in his personal appearance might have suggested the derogatory appellation; or, what is fully more probable, this name, by which he is known to history, was occasioned by his unhappy fate, and expressed the feelings of vexation and disappointment which that affecting tragedy awakened in the bosoms of his parents. The rather may this explanation be entertained, as the name in Abel's case is not, as it was in Cain's, connected with the birth. It is not said, Eve brought forth a son and called him Abel; but after recording the birth of Cain, and the reason of his being so designated, the sacred narrative simply relates of Eve, "And she again bare his brother Abel" (Gen. iv. 2). It was quite natural that the vanity which was so impressively stamped upon his earthly history should have been converted into his personal designation.—*Rev. P. Gosse, D.D.*

[16842] The word Abel denotes vanity, or a breath of air. Was this name given him through the unreasonable prejudice and unjust preference of a partial mother? Or was it an unintentional prediction of the brevity of his life, and of the lamentable manner of his death? But the materials of which life is composed are not so much its days and months and years, as works of piety, and mercy, and justice, or their opposites.—*Rev. H. Hunter, D.D.*

II. THE DIFFERING CHARACTERISTICS OF THE TWO BROTHERS OBSERVABLE IN THEIR RELATIVE CALLINGS.

- I. Abel chose the pilgrim life, Cain that of settled possession and enjoyment of earth.

[16843] The promise which God freely gave to man was that of a deliverer, who would bruise the head of the serpent, and destroy his works.

Now, it was possible either to embrace this promise by faith, and in that case to cling to it and set his heart thereon, or else to refuse this hope and turn away from it. Here, then, at the very opening of the history of the kingdom, we have the two different ways which, as the world and the kingdom of God, have ever since divided men. If we further ask ourselves what those would do who rejected the hope of faith, how they would show it in their outward conduct, we answer, that they would naturally choose the world as it then was; and, satisfied therewith, try to establish themselves in the earth, claim it as their own, enjoy its pleasures and lusts, and cultivate its arts. On the other hand, one who embraced the promises would consider himself a pilgrim and a stranger in this earth, and both in heart and outward conduct show that he believed in, and waited for, the fulfilment of the promise. We need scarcely say that the one describes the history of Cain and of his race; the other that of Abel, and afterwards of Seth and of his descendants. For around these two—Cain and Seth—as their representatives, all the children of Adam would group themselves according to their spiritual tendencies. Viewed in this light the indications of Scripture, however brief, are quite clear. When we read that "Cain was a tiller of the ground," and "Abel was a keeper of sheep," we can understand that the choice of their occupations depended not on accidental circumstances, but quite accorded with their views and character. The nearer their history lay to the terrible event which had led to the loss of Paradise, and to the first giving of the promise, the more significant would this their choice of life appear. Quite in accordance with this, we afterwards find Cain not only building a city, but calling it after the name of his own son, to indicate settled proprietorship and enjoyment of the world as it was.—*Edersheim.*

[16844] Behold this pair of brothers growing in wisdom and in stature, gladdening their parents' hearts. They arrive at the age of reason, of vigour, of activity; they feel the law of God and nature upon them. Though the heirs of empire, they must labour for their subsistence: "Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground." The earth will no longer spontaneously yield her increase. The clods must be turned up, and the seed must be cast into the furrow, through the care, foresight, and industry of man, else in vain will the heavens shed their influence; and in vain will the blessing of the Most High be expected. That cattle may furnish either the fleece for clothing, or milk for food, they must be protected from inclement seasons and ravenous beasts; they must be conducted to proper pasture, and provided with water from the brook. And this is the humble origin of the first employments which occupied our elder brethren in a state of nature. And here it is observable that the different dispositions of the brothers may be traced in the occupations which they followed. Pious and contemplative, Abel tends his flock: his profession

affords more retirement and more leisure for meditation ; and the very nature of his charge forms him to vigilance, to providence, and to sympathy. His prosperity and success seem to flow immediately, and only, from the hands of God. Cain, more worldly and selfish, betakes himself to husbandry—a work of greater industry and art, the necessary implements of which suppose the prior invention of sundry branches of manufacture ; and in whose operations, and their effects, art blending with nature, would claim at least her full proportion of merit and importance.—*Rev. H. Hunter, D.D.*

[16845] Abel appears to have early discovered a mild, contemplative, and pious disposition. This discovered itself in the choice of his worldly pursuits. “He was a keeper of sheep.” Not that goodness is necessarily connected with, or excluded from *any* lawful occupation ; but it is well to choose those most favourable to devout contemplation, and to the cultivation and exercise of the best dispositions. The keeping of sheep has always been regarded one of the most innocent and delightful employments ; and no small honour was put upon agriculture and husbandry, that, when the first parents of the human race had but two sons, one of them became a tiller of the ground, and the other a keeper of sheep.—*E. Copley.*

III. THE FAITH DISPLAYED IN ABEL'S SACRIFICE, AND ITS IMPORT.

His sacrifice was a visible embodiment of the doctrinal principles which his faith respected.

[16846] It is impossible to allow the sacrifice of Abel in this instance to have been an act of faith, without supposing that it had respect to a previous revelation which agreed with all the parts of that sacrificial action by which he expressed his faith in it. Had Abel's sacrifice been eucharistic merely, it would have expressed gratitude but not faith : or if faith in the general sense of confidence in God that he would receive an act of grateful worship and reward the worshippers, it did not more express faith than the offering of Cain, who surely believed these two points, or he would not have brought an offering of any kind. The offering of Abel was not an eucharistic sacrifice, it was an expiatory one ; and in fact it is only in a sacrifice of this kind that it is possible to see that faith exhibited which Abel had and Cain had not.—*Encyclopædia (Edwards).*

[16847] If we refer to the subsequent sacrifices of expiation appointed by Divine authority, and their explanation in the New Testament, it will be obvious to what doctrines and principles of an antecedent revelation the faith of Abel had respect, and which his sacrifice, the exhibition of his faith, proclaimed : confession of the fact of being a sinner, acknowledgment that the demerit and penalty of sin is death, submission to an appointed mode of expiation,

animal sacrifice offered *vicariously*, but, in itself, a mere type of a better sacrifice, “the seed of the woman,” appointed to be offered at some future period, and the efficacy of this appointed method of expiation to obtain forgiveness, and to admit the guilty into the Divine favour.—*Ibid.*

[16848] In the tenth chapter of Romans we are informed that faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God ; and in the twelfth chapter of Hebrews we are presented with a considerable list of Old Testament worthies, such as Abel and Noah and Abraham, whose faith is there held up for example and for imitation. Now, it is worthy of remark, that in reference to the several individuals alluded to in that chapter, their faith is uniformly illustrated by their trust in the Divine promise, and by their obedience to the Divine command. If, then, the faith of Noah and of Abraham was commended, on account of their having acted according to the Divine command, and trusted in the Divine promise, how is it possible but to conclude that the faith of Abel also, which is commended in the same chapter as well as theirs, was exemplified in precisely the same way, and approved of, too, upon the very same principle ; and since it is said that “he obtained witness that he was righteous” by virtue of his having offered a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, what can we infer from this, but that his offering, like the conduct of Noah and Abraham, was approved of, because it was presented in a believing spirit of *obedience to a Divine command* ? And what other conclusion can we come to than that God at that time had already prescribed the sacrifice of animals in religious worship ; that in compliance with His revealed will upon the subject, Abel presented to Him the firstlings and the choice of his flock ; and that, as the living creatures which he sacrificed were accepted as a proof of his faith, so, on the other hand, Cain's vegetable offering was rejected, just because it was an evidence alike of his unbelief, his presumption, and his impiety?—*Dr. J. Brown.*

[16849] Abel looked with faith's keen eye to the world beyond the clouds. Perhaps he little thought of the great necessity of a Saviour for mankind, when, as yet, the world was in its infancy ; although he may have heard his mother talk of the curse and its cause. Of this we are quite certain, that Jehovah discerned in Abel's heart much love, much zeal, and faith.—*Rev. H. Cust Nunn.*

[16850] “By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain.” Cain came before God as a righteous man ; Abel as a sinner. Cain brought an offering of acknowledgment ; Abel a propitiatory sacrifice. Cain's gift bespeaks a grateful heart ; Abel's a contrite spirit. Cain eyes the goodness of God ; Abel acknowledges His mercy and long-suffering. Cain says, “Lord, I thank Thee for all Thy

benefits towards me ;" Abel confesses, "Lord, I am unworthy the least of Thy favours." Cain rejoices in the world as a goodly portion ; Abel, by faith, discerns and expects a better inheritance. Cain approaches, trusting in an imperfect righteousness of his own, and departs unjustified ; Abel draws nigh, depending on the perfect righteousness of a Mediator, and goes away righteous in the sight of God.—*Rev. H. Hunter, D.D.*

IV. THE EXAMPLE AND LESSONS OF HIS MARTYRDOM.

Abel presents the first example of enduring persecution for righteousness' sake.

[16851] It was a fact pregnant with awful meaning for the future, that the first righteous man in Adam's family should also have become the first martyr to righteousness ; yet it was not without hope, since heaven distinctly identified itself with his testimony, and espoused the cause of injured rectitude and worth. In such a case the ascendancy of evil could not be more than temporary.—*Rev. P. Gosse, D.D.*

[16852] How early did martyrdom come into the world ! The first man that died, died for religion : who dare measure God's love by outward events, when he sees wicked Cain standing over bleeding Abel, whose sacrifice was first accepted, and now himself is sacrificed ? Death was denounced to man as a curse ; yet, behold ! it first lights upon a saint : how soon was it altered by the mercy of that just hand which inflicted it ! If death had been evil, and life good, Cain had been slain, and Abel had survived. Now that it begins with him that God loves, "O death, where is thy sting?"—*Bp. Hall.*

[16853] The spirit returns to God to see His unclouded face, formerly seen through the medium of natural objects, and of religious services ; to understand and to enjoy the great mystery of the atonement, hitherto known only in a figure. Happy Abel ! thus early delivered from the sins and sorrows of a vain world. And thus death, at whatever season, in whatever form, and from whatever quarter it comes, is always unspeakably great gain to a good man.—*Rev. H. Hunter, D.D.*

V. ABEL CONSIDERED AS A TYPE OF CHRIST.

[16854] Was Abel a type of Christ, as well as a believer in Him? The Scripture indeed saith it not expressly ; but surely, without straining, we may discern some striking marks of resemblance. What saith Moses ? "Abel was a keeper of sheep." What saith Christ ? "I am the good shepherd : the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep." What did Abel ? "He through faith brought of the firstlings of his flock, and of the fat thereof, an offering unto

the Lord." What did Christ ? "Through the eternal Spirit He offered Himself without spot to God." Were Abel's days cut short by the hand of violence ? So "Messiah, the Prince, was cut off, but not for Himself." Was Abel hated of, and slain by his brother ? Christ "was despised and rejected" of His own, and died by the treachery of a familiar friend in whom He trusted, and by the cruelty of those who were His brethren according to the flesh. Did the blood of Abel cry to God from the ground for vengeance on the head of him who shed it ? Ah ! with what oppressive weight has the blood of Jesus fallen, and how heavily does it still lie on the heads of them, and of their children, who with wicked hands crucified and slew Him ! Could the blood of Abel atone for his sin ? No : but the blood of Christ cleanseth him, and every believer, from all sin. Yet Abel died as a righteous man, Christ as a sinner. Abel, a guilty creature, was justified and accepted through an imputed righteousness ; Christ, who was "holy, harmless, undefiled, and separated from sinners," was condemned and suffered because "the Lord laid on Him the iniquity of us all."—*Ibid.*

VI. TRADITIONAL VIEWS.

[16855] Ancient writers abound in observations on the mystical character of Abel ; and he is spoken of as the representative of the pastoral tribes, while Cain is regarded as the author of the nomadic life and character. St. Chrysostom calls him the *Lamb of Christ*, since he suffered the most grievous injuries solely on account of his innocency ; and he directs particular attention to the mode in which Scripture speaks of his offerings, consisting of the best of his flock, "and of the fat thereof," while it seems to intimate that Cain presented the fruit which might be most easily procured. St. Augustine, speaking of regeneration, alludes to Abel as representing the new or spiritual man in contradistinction to the natural or corrupt man, and says, "Cain founded a city on earth ; but Abel, as a stranger and pilgrim, looked forward to the city of the saints which is in heaven." Abel, he says in another place, was the first-fruits of the Church, and was sacrificed in testimony of the future Mediator. And in Psa. cxviii. (Serm. xxx.), he says, "This city (that is, "the city of God") has its beginning from Abel, as the wicked city from Cain. Irenæus says that God, in the case of Abel, subjected the just to the unjust, that the righteousness of the former might be manifested by what he suffered."—*Encyclopædia (McClintock and Strong)*.

[16856] Heretics existed in ancient times who represented Cain and Abel as embodying two spiritual powers, of which the mightier was that of Cain, and to which they accordingly rendered Divine homage. In the early Church Abel was considered the first of the martyrs, and many persons were accustomed to pronounce his name with a particular reverence. An ob-

scure sect arose under the title of Abelites, the professed object of which was to inculcate certain fanatical notions respecting marriage; but it was speedily lost amidst a host of more popular parties.—*Ibid.*

VII. HOMILETICAL REMARKS.

1 Abel's character presents both an object of esteem and a pattern for imitation.

[16857] Faith in God and in a Saviour to come, and the righteousness which is of God by faith, are the leading and striking features of this portrait; and by these, "being dead, he yet speaketh," or if you choose to adopt the marginal reading, "is yet spoken of." It is a desirable thing to enjoy a good name while we live, and to be remembered with kindness after we are dead. But reputation is the gift of others; it is often gained without merit, and lost without a crime. Whereas true goodness is a real, unalienable possession; it cleaves to us in death; it accompanies us into the world of spirits; it instructs the world while we live; it speaks from the grave; it shines in the presence of God in heaven. Here it is lawful and honourable to aspire. Permit others to get before you in wealth or in fame; grudge not to your neighbour the superiority in wit, or strength, or beauty; but yield to none in piety, in purity, in faith, in charity; aim at the highest honours of the Christian name; be humble, and be everything. Salvation has, from the beginning, flowed in one and the same channel. There was not one gospel to the antediluvian, and another to the postdiluvian world; one method of redemption to the Jews, and another to the Gentiles; but "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever."—*Rev. H. Hunter, D.D.*

[16858] "He being dead, yet speaketh." Thus writes the sacred penman, and true indeed it is. Abel speaks to you and me. He seems to say: "Don't fear the world, never hesitate to do your duty, worship your Father, exhort your brother. Never weary in well-doing; act the part of a true Christian. Let not trouble daunt you. Let not fear thwart you; only trust in Christ: never lack confidence in His glorious promises, His almighty and never-failing word. For He, most blessed, spake of me in His earthly temple at Jerusalem, when leaving it for the last time, as 'righteous Abel.' He knew, centuries back, my trusting faith, my daily struggles to become a child of His, and He urged the world then, in the days of His humanity, to follow in the steps of the 'righteous.' Yet now does He speak, by the voice of His ministers, of the 'righteous' Abel. He asks you to follow me."—*Rev. H. Cust Nunn.*

[16859] "When He cometh shall He find faith on the earth?" The very particle used expects the answer: No. Cyril makes longer answer "No: the love of many will wax cold

in the latter days, and many will depart from the faith." "The faith" of God's Church is even now shaken: nay, in some cases it seems almost riven with the tempest. We see how it was in the earliest days. There was a father easily led into temptation, and most clearly weak concerning the faith. The mother had proved herself to be the pliant instrument of an artful schemer. The first-born was a mixture of malice and worldliness. The "faithful" Abel was soon despatched: for of him "the world most truly was not worthy." And is this but a picture of the world's end? Is this to be the proportion of the "just made perfect"? Let us strive one and all to prove ourselves as true "sons of heaven." Let us endeavour to throw off the world's vain costume. Let us hasten to equip ourselves with the robes of Christ's righteousness. Let us imitate, as best we may, the "faithful" Abel.—*Ibid.*

2 No life which has been fully consecrated to God is ever really shortened by death.

[16860] He dies in full maturity who has lived to God and eternity, at whatever period, and in whatever manner he may be cut off. That life is short, though extended to a thousand years, which is disfigured with vice, which is devoted to the pursuits of time merely, and at the close of which the unhappy man is found unreconciled to God,—*Rev. H. Hunter, D.D.*

LAMECH.

I. ASPECTS OF HIS CHARACTER.

1 As the first violator of God's primeval law of marriage.

[16861] That law most strictly enjoined one wife, and doubtless had been observed till Lamech's time. He sets it at defiance. That law was the very foundation of society. It was the foundation of family peace, of true religion, of social order, of right government in the state. Take away this foundation, or place two instead of one, and the whole fabric shakes, the nation crumbles to pieces. It is not merely the family hearth that is destroyed, but the throne of the King is undermined. Bonds the most sacred and needful Lamech breaks. The most ancient and venerable law of earth he tramples on. Lust has got the mastery in him. He is the true type of those "filthy dreamers" who "defile the flesh" (Jude 8); of those who in the last days are to "walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness, having eyes full of adultery" (2 Peter ii.). And as Lamech's sin threw open the flood-gates of lasciviousness, so may the sins of those who in our day are walking in his steps be throwing open these same flood-gates, and ripening the world for the judgment of the great day.

2 As a murderer.

[16862] Lust had led to adultery, and adultery had led to violence and murder. We are not told the name of him whom he slew. It matters not. He is a murderer—true follower of Cain—true offspring of the serpent, of him who was “a murderer from the beginning” (John viii. 44). Abhor Lamech’s spirit as we would that of Satan. The anger, passion, revenge—of all that would lead, however remotely, to bloodshedding. In Cain, it was envy; in Lamech, lust. Flee both.

3 As a boaster of his evil deeds.

[16863] He does the deed of blood, and he is not ashamed of it; nay, he glories in it—nay, glories in it to his own wives. There is no confession of sin here, no repentance, not even Cain’s partial humbling. This iniquity lifts up its head, and waxes bold in countenance, defying God and vaunting before men as if the deed had been one of honour and not of shame. Boasters are to rise up in the last days (2 Tim. iii. 2), specially boasters of evil, like Lamech. Men are to “boast themselves in mischief” (Psa. lii. 7). The wicked is to “boast of his heart’s desire” (Psa. x. 3).

4 As one taking refuge in the crimes of others.

[16864] He makes Cain not a warning, but an example. He perverts God’s purpose in sparing Cain, and takes courage in evil from Cain’s example. He “goes in the way of Cain” (Jude 11), and makes no account of God’s awful monuments of indignation against sin. He sins because Cain sinned! He thinks he has a right to sin, because Cain sinned! Oh, desperate perversity of man’s heart! What will it not make an excuse for sinning? And yet it always tries to find an excuse or an example, and ashamed to sin unless for some reason, or with some example before it!

5 As one perverting God’s forbearance.

[16865] He trifles with sin, because God showed mercy to another. He tramples on righteousness, because it is tempered with grace. He sets vengeance at nought, because God is long-suffering. Instead of saying, “God is so loving that I dare not sin,” he says, “God is so loving that I will go on in sin without limit.” Divine compassion has no effect in softening his obstinacy; but “after his hardness and impenitent heart, he treasures up to himself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God” (Rom. ii. 5). Thus men still turn God’s grace into lasciviousness, and make Christ the minister of sin!

6 As a scoffer.

[16866] He believes in no judgment, and makes light of sin’s recompense. His words are evidently the words of a scoffer, and of one

who believed in no wrath of God against the workers of iniquity. He speaks like the scoffers of the last days, “Where is the promise of His coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation” (2 Peter iii. 1–3). Is not this the mocking that we hear on every side? No day of judgment, no righteous vengeance against sin, no condemnation of the transgressor. God has borne long with the world, He will bear longer with it still. He may do something to dry up the running sore of its miseries; but as for its guilt, He will make no account of that, for “God is love.” But what then becomes of law, or of righteousness, or of the difference between good and evil? And what becomes of God’s past proclamation of law, His manifestations of righteousness, His declarations of abhorrence of all sin? Was Adam’s ejection from Paradise the mere attempt to cure a disease, and not the condemnation of his guilt? Was the deluge the mere drying up of the world’s running sore of wretchedness, that it might start healthy and vigorous on a new course, instead of being the expression of God’s estimate of human guilt, and His determination to prevent men from imagining that He was indifferent to the evil of sin, and, as the God of love, that He could only treat it as a sad misfortune, but not as an infinite and unalterable crime against love and majesty, and truth and government and holiness?

II. COMPARISON OF THE CHARACTERS OF CAIN AND LAMECH.

[16867] The brief story told of Lamech the polygamist is one of lust, bloodshed, and defiant hardihood. He is the first to violate God’s primeval law of marriage; and the violation of this leads to other sins. In Cain we have seen the man of *violence*. In Lamech we see the man of *lust*. From those two fountain-heads of evil, what wickedness has flowed out upon the earth!

III. THE PREDICTED REPRODUCTION OF THE CHARACTERS OF CAIN AND LAMECH IN THE LATTER DAY.

[16868] As in the last days we find men returning to the way of Cain, so do we find them returning to the way of Lamech—walking after the flesh, in the lust of uncleanness, and despising government, presumptuous, self-willed (2 Pet. ii. 10). All the old world’s sins repeated and intensified in the last generation, just before the arrival of Him of whom Enoch prophesied (Jude 14).—*H. Bonar.*

JOB.

I. INTRODUCTORY.

1 Historic truth, era, and authorship of the Book of Job.

[16869] On the historic character of the Book of Job, various opinions have been entertained. Some, such as Spanheim, have held that the whole poem, both poetry and prose, is strictly historical, the events detailed occurred precisely as they are described, the speeches attributed to the different speakers were delivered precisely as they now appear. That this is possible, perhaps not many will deny; that it is credible, few indeed will admit. The book bears the impress of a single intellect upon it; and skillful as the Oriental extemporisers are, we shall hardly attribute the sublimest poetry the world possesses to the efforts of a few Idumean improvisatori.—*Rev. A. Davidson.*

[16870] Several Jewish doctors, and among modern critics Hengstenberg, deny the Book of Job to have any historic basis. It is purely allegorical, all its elements and characters being due to the imagination of its author. It would thus stand on a parallel with the parables of our Lord. . . . But such elaborate allegories, so unlike the Divine simplicity of the Master's parables, seem not only something foreign to the character of Scripture, but something quite beyond the reach of the Semitic genius. And the allusions to Job by Ezekiel and James (Ezek. xiv. 14; James v. 11) as a historic personage equally with other well-known historic personages, such as Noah and Daniel, seem to imply that the reality of the circumstances of his history was never questioned by the national mind.—*Ibid.*

[16871] The opinion held by all moderate critics now is no doubt correct, that there is both a historic and an ideal element in the Book of Job, and that both elements are fused together as well in the prose as in the poetic portions. The history is not all fact, much of it is poetry; the poetry is not all allegory, much of it is fact.—*Ibid.*

[16872] As to the authorship of the book nothing is known with certainty. Some have attributed it to Job himself; some to Elihu; others to some unknown Arabic author, under the impression that the book has been translated into Hebrew. But no competent Hebrew scholar can doubt that the poem is an original Hebrew work. Others, following the Jewish tradition, have attributed the book to Moses, while some have discovered in the philosophic cast of the poem the hand of Solomon. Both the authorship and the era must ever remain involved in doubt. There is no reason to suppose the book very ancient, except that its scene is laid in patriarchal times. And there is no reason to consider it very modern, except the

occurrence of many dark pictures of misery, which it is supposed must have been drawn from the dissolving scenes of the Jewish commonwealth. . . . We cannot greatly err if we place the composition of the Book of Job at a period not long after the death of David.—*Ibid.*

2 Its general character.

[16873] This book is one of the grandest portions of inspired Scripture, and a heaven-replenished storehouse of comfort and instruction. It is the patriarchal Bible, a precious monument of primitive theology, and is to the Old Testament what the Epistle to the Romans is to the New. Job's history was well known to early Christians as an example of patience (James v. 11), and understood by them typically and allegorically of Christ. From the second century the book has been read in the churches in Passion Week. It stands unique and independent among the books of the Bible. In its prose parts it is so simple and easy that a child may understand it; in its poetic portion, the deepest and obscurest book in the Old Testament. It contains milk for babes and strong meat for those of full age. It is studded with passages of grandeur and beauty, tenderness and pathos, sublimity and terror, and acknowledged to surpass in sublimity and majesty every other book in the world. In recent times it has been studied as a masterpiece of poetry, and is the fountain from which some of the greatest poets have drawn their inspirations. To suffering believers it is the sound of Faithful's voice to Christian in the Valley of the Shadow of Death.—*Rev. T. Robinson, D.D.*

[16874] The Book of Job is an Arab poem, antecedent to the Mosaic dispensation. It represents the mind of a good man not enlightened by an actual revelation, but seeking about for one. In no other book is the desire and necessity for a Mediator so intensely expressed. The personality of God, the I AM of the Hebrews, is most vividly impressed on the book, in opposition to pantheism.—*S. T. Coleridge.*

3 Its special design and purposed lessons.

[16875] There is a peculiar interest attaching to the Book of Job, even among Divine poems, because it alone, of all the books of the Bible, grapples with those mysteries of God's providential government which have more or less perplexed every intelligent inhabitant of the universe. It gives the answer to life's great enigma. It teaches that life is not, as most young people seem to regard it, a *fête* or carnival; much less, as some old people seem to think it, a temporary lodging in the dungeon of the castle of Giant Despair—that it is something between the two—a struggle, a strife, a mortal conflict between good and evil; that it is not therefore to be entered upon with unthinking levity, much less with unhoping

gloom—but bravely, strongly, manfully, expecting the calmness, the inevitable shocks of the combat, and looking up hopefully, and always, to Him in whose strength we are more than conquerors. The object of the book is precisely that which Milton announced in the “Paradise Lost:”

“That to the height of this great argument
I may assert eternal providence
And justify the ways of God to men.”

—*Rev. F. Greeves.*

4 Its inculcated truths.

[16876] (1) The creation of the world by one Supreme Being. This is the first great principle of natural religion; it is laid down throughout the whole book as an incontestable truth, but is particularly illustrated in the speech of Jehovah Himself (Job xxxviii., xli.). (2) The government of the world by the providence of God (i. 21, ii. 10, v. 8–27, ix. 4–13). (3) The corruption of man by nature (xiv. 4, xv. 14–16, xxv. 4). (4) The necessity of an atonement, prefigured in sacrifices, to turn away the Divine anger, and to render the Almighty favourable; also, the intercession and mediation of a righteous person on behalf of the guilty (i. 5, ix. 33, xxxiii. 23, 24, xlii. 8, 9). (5) The certainty of a future resurrection and retribution (xiv. 7–15, xix. 25–27, xxvii. 8, xxxi. 13, 14).—*E. Copley.*

5 Its remarkable references and implications confirmatory of other Scriptures.

[16877] 1. To the former destruction of the world by water, and its final dissolution by fire, xxii. 15–20; compare with Gen. vi., vii., and Jude 14, 15. 2. To the existence and agency of angels, both good and evil, i. 6–12, ii. 1–6, iv. 18, 19, v. 1; compare with Psa. civ. 4, ciii. 20, xxxiv. 7, xci. 11; Heb. i. 14; Zech. iii. 1, 2; 1 Pet. v. 8, 9.—*Ibid.*

II. THE PERSONALITY OF JOB.

I His actual existence.

[16878] Kennicott, in a table of descent given by him, represents Job to have been contemporary with Amram, the father-in-law of Moses; Eliphaz the Temanite, who was the fourth from Abraham, being contemporary with both. Calmet asserts that he was Jobab the son of Zerah, who reigned in Edom (Gen. xxxvi. 33); and both the Septuagint and Syriac Version represent Job as fifth descendant from Abraham, by the line of Esau.—*J. Ellice.*

[16879] Job is a historic, not a fictitious character, and is mentioned with Noah and Daniel (Ezek. xiv. 14). He lived in the time of the patriarchs, and died about 200 years old. There is no apparent allusion in the book to the exodus or the giving of the law. Worship, manners, and customs were those of patriarchal times. His existence is a proof God never left Himself without a witness.—*Rev. T. Robinson, D.D.*

[16880] It is highly probable that Job lived about the same period as Abraham. There is no allusion to be found in the book which bears his name to any of those remarkable events which distinguished the exodus of Israel; and we may therefore conclude that his era was not coeval with that of Moses, but preceded it. But there are plain allusions in that book to the Sabian worship, to the adoration of the heavenly bodies; and this makes it highly probable that Job lived about Abraham's time, and among those whose religion corresponded with that of his compatriots.—*Rev. T. Guthrie, D.D.*

2 His residence.

[16881] Uz, east or south-east of Palestine, was adjacent to the Edomites, who appear at one time to have occupied it (Lam. iv. 21). Probably in Arabia Deserta, between Palestine and the Euphrates. Uz was also the name of a son of Aram the son of Shem (Gen. x. 23); of the firstborn of Nahor, Abraham's brother (Gen. xxii. 21); and of the grandson of Scir the Horite (Gen. xxxvi. 28). The country was named from one of these. Job's country, like Abraham's, at that time was tending to idolatry (chap. xxxi. 26–28). Grace is found flourishing in the most unfavourable situations. Job, like Abraham and Daniel, is found “faithful among the faithless.” To be godly among the ungodly is a high excellence and honour. Compare the cases of Obadiah in Ahab's court and the saints in Cæsar's palace (1 Kings xviii. 12; Phil. iv. 22).—*Rev. T. Robinson, D.D.*

3 His name.

[16882] The derivation of the word “Job” is still undetermined. Some, deriving it from an Arabic root, contend that it means “the penitent one”—a conjecture confirmed, if not suggested, by the fact that, in the Corân, Job is designated, “he that turns or repents.” But, with more reason, commentators assume it to be derived from a Hebrew verb which signifies to fight against, to persecute: in which case the word being here (chap. i. ver. 1) used in its passive sense, it would mean “the persecuted one,” the man who has known afflictions; in short, “the man of sorrows,” of the antique world. All we certainly know of it is, that the name was borne by a son of Issachar (Gen. xlvi. 13), and by the hero of this great poem.—*S. Cox.*

III. HIS WORLDLY PROSPERITY.

[16883] It pleased God to bless Job with eminent prosperity. His wealth was abundant, his station in life exalted, his influence extensive; and he used them all as not abusing, but as the steward of God, and the guardian of his fellow-creatures. The abundance by which he was surrounded, the family connections with which he was blessed, the respect and gratitude with which he was honoured, the security of his possessions, the success of his enterprises—all crowned by the enjoyment of a good conscience,

and the favour of God—left him, as it were, nothing to desire.—*E. Copley.*

[16884] All the stores of earthly happiness were poured at his feet. He was a king and father to his countrymen. The hills were covered with his countless flocks, and the valleys were white with his waving harvests. Gold and silver were his in abundance; and he was the greatest of all the men of the East. His domestic felicity was perfect. His wife and children were about him. His mind and his body were in the prime of manly vigour and dignity.—*Rev. F. Greaves.*

IV. HIS UPRIGHT CHARACTER.

“That man was perfect.”

Qualities implied in this description.

a. Completeness.

[16885] Job was complete in all the parts of his moral character (James i. 4). He was like a human body with no member or organ wanting or imperfect. A man's morality and religion should be characterized by symmetry and thoroughness. Attention is not to be given to one class of duties to the neglect of another. Job was conscientious in the discharge of all the duties of life (Psa. cxix. 6). He kept, like Paul, a conscience void of offence both towards God and man (Acts xxiv. 16). Believers should be sanctified wholly, throughout body, soul, and spirit (1 Thess. v. 23). They are actually sanctified in every part, though every part is not wholly sanctified. Job was a perfect man, in the New Testament sense, an advanced, mature, and fully instructed Christian (Phil. iii. 15; 1 Cor. ii. 6; Eph. iv. 13; James iii. 2).—*Rev. T. Robinson, D.D.*

b. Sincerity.

[16886] Job's perfection was rather that of purpose than performance. He aimed constantly at perfection. He was not sinless but sincere, without guile (John i. 47), without hypocrisy towards God or double-dealing towards man. Sincerity is the foundation of a gracious character. It gives religion all its worth and beauty. Godly sincerity is gospel perfection. Sincere and sound-hearted believers in God's sight are “perfect.”—*ibid.*

c. Blamelessness.

[16887] This was the character of Zechariah and Elisabeth (Luke i. 6). No fault was found in Daniel, even by his enemies (Dan. vi. 4). Moral integrity is Bible perfection. Paul lived in all good conscience (Acts xxiii. 1). Job was blameless though not sinless.—*ibid.*

V. HIS FIRST TRIAL, AND HIS STEADFASTNESS THEREIN MANIFESTED.

I Its cause and occasion.

[16888] The cause of Job's trial was his character; the occasion of it was Satan. If a

dispute arises between the masters of two men, as to the relative physical strength of their servants, the only way to end the dispute is to test each man by ordering him to lift a certain load. God declared of His servant Job, that there was none like him in all the earth. Satan disputed this. Said God, “Put him to the test;” and all have declared for 3,000 years that God was right.—*W. Harris.*

2 Its incidents.

(1) *The challenge of Jehovah.*

“Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth?”

[16889] What high commendation is here expressed, and how pronounced the audacity of Satan to call in question the sincerity of a character thus grandly attested by God Himself! Observe the terms in which Jehovah speaks of this object of the devil's malice.

(1) “*My servant* :”—one who obeys My word, and walks in all My ways—the willing slave of his Master—the loyal subject of his King.

(2) “*Job* :”—I call *My own* sheep by name.

(3) “*A perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God* :”—one that will not do that thing which I abhor—one that will not sin in My sight—one that writes upon his heart, “holiness to the Lord.”

(4) “*And escheweth evil* :”—one that not only denies sin, but assails it—not only loathes it from within, but openly defies it from without.—*A. M. A. W.*

(2) *The counter-challenge of Satan.*

“Doth Job fear God for nought? . . . touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face.”

[16890] Satan professes to have no confidence in human virtue; he believes that every man has his price; he suggests that Job serves God from motives of self-interest, and that if the wages, so to speak, of his service are withdrawn he will renounce his allegiance. “Hast Thou not made an hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side? Thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land; but put forth Thy hand and touch all that he hath, and he will curse Thee.” Such is the problem proposed. The solution is sought by inflicting upon one in whom Satanic malice can detect no evil calamities which were believed to be due, and due only, to a life of wickedness. Job, the upright servant of God, is subjected to a series of the most severe trials, which Satan maintains will destroy his belief, and prove him to be at heart a hypocrite.—*Rev. Sir E. Bayley.*

[16891] Satan, the adversary, the accuser of the brethren, hating the holiness and envying the happiness of Job, stood before the Lord, and endeavoured to impugn his motives. “Doth Job fear God for nought? Is he not mercenary and self-interested? Does he not find it answer his purpose, and promote his worldly interests? Has not God set a hedge of defence round about

him, and his house, and all that he has? Surely, then, Job may be religious without any good principle. But let him be stripped of his worldly enjoyments, and he will no longer retain his integrity; he will curse God to His face." Not to gratify this false and malignant accuser, but to confound and defeat him, Jehovah permitted the trial of His servant's integrity; and Satan went forth with a license to touch him in every enjoyment, restricted only as to laying his hand on his person.—*E. Copley.*

(3) *The work of malice.*

[16892] The first trial deals with the outward circumstances of the patriarch's life. Four messengers of woe successively arrive, and announce to him the loss of all his substance, the destruction of his flocks, the slaughter of his servants, the sudden death of his children—calamities without parallel in the history of human sorrow, for no book of Job had yet been written; calamities which, as befalling a righteous man, were, with the lights men then possessed, incapable of explanation.—*Rev. Sir E. Bayley.*

(4) *The triumph of faith.*

a. *Job's submissive grief.*

[16893] He is aroused from his wonted calmness, and his nature is now stirred to its depths. Deeply moved, but not prostrated by his calamities, he "rent his mantle" in token of sorrow and humiliation. . . . Job was neither too insensible to feel grief, nor too proud to acknowledge it. Not to feel is either to be more or less than a man. . . . Grace teaches us not to be without sorrow, but to moderate it, and to connect with it penitence and submission, faith and hope. Job fell "down upon the ground" in (1) grief, (2) humiliation, (3) adoration; . . . while Satan expected to see him standing on his feet and cursing the author of his troubles.—*Rev. T. Robinson, D.D.*

[16894] How does Job bear the shock? Does his faith in God and in goodness stand firm, or does he, as Satan had predicted, renounce God to His face? Nothing can be more beautiful than the behaviour of the patriarch. There are indeed all the signs of deep sorrow, but there is at the same time a perfect resignation, an unquestioning submission, to the Divine will. Under the overwhelming pressure of his grief he betakes himself to God. "He fell down upon the ground, and worshipped." Reviewing his losses, he acknowledges that all is of God; what has been freely given may be withdrawn at will; and God had only exercised His sovereign rights in stripping him of all.—*Rev. Sir E. Bayley.*

[16895] Job bowed submissively to God's will and dispensations. Instead of cursing Him, he adores His justice, goodness, and holiness. Afflictions draw a godly man nearer to God, instead of driving him away. It is a sign of a gracious state to be worshipping when God is chastising, and that trouble cannot but be blest

which brings us to our knees. . . . Job opens his mouth, but not as Satan expected. "Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away."—*Rev. T. Robinson, D.D.*

[16896] The joyful parent is bereft of his offspring, and his children are buried in death. The man of affluence is stripped of his abundance, and he who was clothed in scarlet embraces the dunghill. But in the midst of all these vicissitudes, what was the conduct of Job? What the spirit and temper he displayed? What the language which he uttered? Listen to him, and, while you admire, imitate his conduct—"When I am tried, I shall come forth like gold. The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away." This was the perfection of patience.—*R. Bond.*

b. *Job's victory over sin and Satan in its positive aspect.*

[16897] *Job blesses God instead of cursing Him.* "Blessed be the name of the Lord." The word is chosen with reference to Satan's charge. The same word is used, but in its opposite and proper sense, and Satan is thus entirely defeated. Every word of Job gives the lie to his slander. . . . There is no ground even in the worst times to murmur against God, much ground to bless Him, and our greatest trials and losses are often our richest mercies. True Christian piety is the purest heroism, and widely different from stoical insensibility and pride. Believers weep, but bless God through their tears. Job's blessing God must have sent an echo through the heaven of heavens. Unprecedented trials, heightened by the contrast of unprecedented prosperity, meet not merely with submission, but with blessing on the Author of both. To bless God in prosperity is only natural; to bless Him in adversity and trouble is music that fills heaven and earth with gladness. Job's calamities appeared to argue that God against him. Mighty is the faith that blesses God while smiting our comforts to the ground. The grace enjoined on New Testament believers is exemplified in this Old Testament saint (1 Thess. v. 18). To bless God in our comforts is the way to have them increased; to bless Him in our afflictions the way to have them removed [*Augustine*]. A thankful and pious spirit the true philosopher's stone—turns all things into gold. Faith gilds our crosses and sees a silver lining in the darkest cloud.—*Rev. T. Robinson, D.D.*

c. *Job's victory over sin and Satan in its negative aspect.*

[16898] *In all these trials Job kept from sinning.* "Sinned not," as Satan desired and declared he would. Glorious triumph of grace to keep from sinning in such circumstances. Sinned not, either by impatience or passion. Grace is given to keep us from sin, not absolutely, but relatively and comparatively. There is sin more or less, in all a believer's

16898—16904]

actions, though all his actions are not sinful. "Nor charged God foolishly." (1) Imputed no folly, injustice, or impropriety to God. (2) Vented no foolish and impious murmurs against Him. Ascribed nothing to God unworthy of His justice, goodness, and wisdom. Entertained no dishonourable thought, uttered no murmuring word against Him. Impiety is the greatest folly. To murmur against God's dealings is as foolish as it is wicked. To misconstrue God's character and conduct is the great sin to be guarded against under heavy trials.—*Ibid.*

[16899] It is impossible too much to admire this beautiful model. Might it not be admirable if one had thus sustained a ruinous loss if he could thus cheerfully resign luxuries or comforts to which he had been all his life accustomed? But these are the words of one who has lost *all*. Would it not have been a wonderful proof of resignation in a parent thus meekly to have resigned to his Maker *one* beloved child? But he who so speaks had in one moment been bereft of all. "Joseph was not, and Simeon was not," and Benjamin also was taken away! With every circumstance that could stagger faith, quench love, and destroy hope; under every aggravation of malice; in face of a destruction so detailed in its parts, so detailed in its effects, calculated and executed with such a power and precision as almost to suggest the idea of a providence of overruling evil—"in all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly."—*Rev. F. Greeves.*

VI. HIS SECOND TRIAL, EVIDENCING HIS CONTINUED PIETY TOWARDS GOD.

1 The trial permitted.

[16900] "All that he has is in thy power; only upon himself put not forth thy hand," said God, in His first permission to Satan. But when Job had proved himself equal to this test, a higher trial was permitted. "Behold he is in thine hand; but save his life." God's children are sometimes treated like a lad who is being trained for a seaman's life. When he is taking his first lessons in climbing out upon the bowsprit or jib-boom a large net is placed beneath him. This gives him courage to venture out; but after a few days a greater proof of his fearlessness is demanded, he must go out now without the net.—*W. Harris.*

[16901] Thus far Satan had failed in his contention. But he refuses to acknowledge his defeat, and, when opportunity offers, renews the accusation. The trial, he argues, had not been sufficiently severe, it had reached but the outskirts of the man's life; but let it touch the centre of his being, let it affect his very self, and the result will be different. "Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life." Let a man's own person be exempt from suffering, and he will bear all else with composure; he will give up "skin" or life of others, yea, "all

that he hath," if only his own remain intact; man is essentially selfish; he cares little for others if his own life be safe. Let another, a personal test be applied, "Put forth thine hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse thee to thy face." Permission is granted.—*Rev. Sir E. Bayley.*

2 The trial inflicted.

Its terrible physical suffering.

[16902] Job's disease was the worst kind of leprosy, . . . prevalent both in Arabia and Egypt, making the sufferer loathsome to himself and his nearest relations (chap. xix. 13, 19). It appeared to mark him out as an object of the Divine displeasure, as Miriam, Gehazi, and King Uzziah. In an advanced stage, fingers, toes, and hands gradually fall off (chap. xxx. 17, 30). It was attended with great attenuation and debility of body (xvi. 8, xix. 20, xxx. 18), restless nights, and terrifying dreams (xxx. 17, vii. 13, 14), anxiety of mind, and loathing of life (vii. 15), foul breath, and difficult respiration (vii. 4, xiii. 15, xxx. 17), the skin itchy, of great tenseness, full of cracks and rents, and covered with hard or festering ulcers, and black scales (ii. 8, xix. 20, xxx. 18, vii. 5, xxx. 30), the feet and legs swollen to an enormous extent; hence the disease was also called *Elephantiasis*. The mouth was swollen, and the countenance distorted, giving the patient a lion-like appearance; hence another name to the disease, *Leontiasis*. Contagious through the mere breath, often hereditary, it was as a rule incurable. In any case it was one of the most protracted as well as dreadful diseases.—*Rev. T. Robinson, D.D.*

[16903] "From the crown," &c. So in Deut. xviii. 35. The body was one continued sore. Job escaped with the skin of his teeth—sores everywhere else (xix. 20). The *tongue* was left free for an obvious reason. Satan's mercies are cruel. Rare spectacle for angels; the holiest man on earth the most afflicted. Astounding sight for men; the richest and greatest man in the land made at once the most loathsome and miserable.—*Ibid.*

3 The trial intensified.

In the unnatural desertion and blasphemous despair of his wife.

[16904] "All my inward friends abhorred me; and they whom I loved are turned against me." To form the climax of this cruel desertion: "My breath is strange to my own wife; though I entreated for the children's sake of my own body." Not content with denying him sympathy and solace, this woman even took part with the adversary, and persuaded him to abjure his religion, and deny his God; insinuating that religion was a thing of nought, since it availed not to preserve him from these calamities. In this deep extremity, the reply of Job was most magnanimous, and served only to evince the firmness of those religious principles which Satan had belied, and his own ungodly wife had

derided : "Thou speakest as one of the foolish women speaketh : what ! shall we receive good at the hand of the Lord, and shall we not receive evil ?"—*E. Copley.*

[16905] His wife, broken down, it may be, by the loss of her children, gives way at the sight of her husband's misery, and urges upon him the very counsel which Satan would have given, "Dost thou still retain thine integrity? curse God, and die." But to no purpose. Job recognizes the affliction as coming from God. He cannot understand it, he cannot explain it ; but he will not rebel against it.—*Rev. Sir E. Bayley.*

[16906] Far above all others in duty and affection was his wife ; to her he turned confidently for consolation, and lo ! she bids him curse ! "Curse God, and die." The words might indeed be translated, "Bless God, and die," but even that miserable consolation from the wife of his bosom we do not believe the unhappy sufferer received. . . . She basely deserted woman's holy ministry of love and comfort ; nay, we fear she forsook him, and her God also !—*Rev. F. Greeves.*

[16907] The mildest reading that we could adopt, without destroying the full force of the controversy between Job and his wife, would be "Ignore God, and die." But the rendering in the English version is perhaps to be preferred to any other. Clearly she had come to look upon the Almighty as unworthy of her husband's confidence, and quiet submission to such a Being as unreasonable, and she desired, therefore, that the patriarch should throw off all allegiance, express his resentment in maledictions of a fearful character, and send forth his soul in a desperate and blasphemous curse against his Maker. Nothing was left for him on earth ; let him, therefore, banish trust, hope, and love together, hurl his petty vengeance against the tyrant by whose will he had to suffer, and cursing, die. The language of this woman is that of utter despair, and she endeavours to bring her husband into the same unhappy frame of mind as that in which she finds herself. She does not deny God, but hates Him. All trust and confidence has fled—if she ever had any—and she has taken one desperate plunge, into what Shakespeare calls—

"The swallowing gulf
Of dark oblivion and deep despair."

—*G. Sexton, LL.D.*

4 The tempter foiled.

"In all this did not Job sin with his lips."
[16908] A second victory has thus been gained over Satan. He has dealt his last direct blow against God's servant, and an answer has been found to his question, "Doth Job fear God for nought ?" It has been proved that Job's religion has some deeper foundation than self-interest ; that he serves God, not from mercenary motives, but because he acknowledges God's right to his allegiance. Amidst the wreck of his fortunes

his integrity survives, and, bereft of all earthly good, his faith in God and in goodness stands firm.—*Rev. Sir E. Bayley.*

[16909] Job here is greater than his miseries, more than a conqueror. One of heaven's as well as earth's heroes, "in all this," his increased calamities as well as his wife's taunts and temptations. Job is now seen lying under a quaternion of troubles—adversity, bereavement, disease, and reproach. "He sinned not with his lips." The thing Satan desired, endeavoured after, and waited for. The temptation to murmur was *present*, but was *resisted and repressed*. Job is still by grace a conqueror over corrupt nature.—*Rev. T. Robinson, D.D.*

VII. SATAN'S THIRD AND INDIRECT ATTACK.

Through the accusations of Job's three friends.

[16910] When a general fails in direct attack, he often has recourse to an indirect one ; when he cannot *force* an enemy's position, he will endeavour to *turn* it ; and an army which has bravely stood its ground against repeated attacks in front, will often be seized with panic, when the enemy's troops appear upon its flank or rear. Still more fatal is the result when its own allies turn suddenly against it, and become the attacking column : as did the Saxon troops, when in 1813 they turned against Napoleon at Leipsic, or the Bavarians, when immediately afterwards they barred the French retreat to the Rhine. Satan had failed in direct attack ; the most overwhelming afflictions had proved insufficient to shake the constancy of Job ; but the battle was not yet won. It is the peculiarity of Job's last trial that it came to him from an altogether unexpected quarter. It was *indirect*, not a direct, attack—an assault not in front, but in flank ; an assault not from his avowed enemies, but from those who professed—and professed truly—to be his friends. Just as Balaam, when unable to inflict injury upon Israel by the utterance of a direct curse, sought by guile and evil counsel to lure them into sin ; so Satan, finding it impossible by direct means to shake the faith of God's servant, approached him under the guise of friendship, and sought thus to gain the advantage over him.—*Rev. Sir E. Bayley.*

[16911] The third and last trial of Job was brought about by the harsh suspicions, the cruel reproaches, and the unjust charges of his friends. Their contention was, that under the righteous government of God there is always in this life an exact agreement between sin and punishment, and that the calamities of Job could only be accounted for on the assumption of great criminality on his part. A parallel has been drawn between the sufferings of Job and those of our blessed Lord. Both were righteous, witnesses for truth and holiness ; both were assaulted by Satan ; both were upheld by God ; both in the end triumphed over their accusers.

But there is another point of agreement between them : they were *attacked* by their enemies, they were *betrayed* by their friends ; and of both, therefore, might it be said, in the words of the Psalmist, " Mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me " (Psa. xli. 9). In this, I conceive, lay the peculiar bitterness of Job's last trial. Deprived of all earthly good, he might have hoped for sympathy from his friends ; but this even was denied him. Not only did his friends fail him, they became in turn his accusers, and strove to shake his faith in his own integrity, by again and again affirming that they had lost all faith in it themselves.—*Ibid.*

VIII. THE PECULIAR POIGNANCY OF JOB'S MENTAL SUFFERINGS AND CONFLICTS.

1 The moral pain to his conscious integrity in the apparent desertion of him by God.

[16912] During the discussion with his friends, there is exhibited to us the conflict in Job's mind ; how it sometimes veered in the direction of infidelity, but ever again recovered itself and came back to steadfastness and trust. What raises such tides of agony in Job's soul is not that he has been stripped barer than the tree in winter ; not that his friends misunderstood him ; not even that his life and hopes were extinguished ; it is that God has forsaken him ; that he is cast out from His presence : and that he is so, all these calamities are proofs too surely conclusive.—*Rev. A. Davidson.*

[16913] If I am to lie down in misery that makes me cry for death ; if I am to go in unrelieved misery downward to the land of darkness, it is for no act of injustice that soils my hands. " My prayer," he cries, " is pure."—*Dean Bradley.*

2 His torturing doubts and perplexities concerning the awful mysteries of eternal Providence.

[16914] The rebukes of his unwise friends had given birth to something not from without, but from within, that made the head reel, reel beneath his weary frame. Their hard and ready dogmatism had forced upon him a question for which his soul travailed in vain for an answer. This mighty, this Almighty Being, on whose greatness, and whose justice, and whose omniscience they discourse so fully, was He, after all, a righteous Being ? Was the Ruler of the world a just Ruler ? Did the Judge of all mankind judge rightly ? Powerful He is, no doubt ; Nature, he feels, tells His power. " In His hand," he says himself, " is the life of every living being, the health of all mankind." History, such as he knows it, tells His power. Nations, he says, rise and fall, and kings exchange the royal girdle for the cord that encircles the loins of the captive horde, but what if all this power is wielded by one who looks with indifference on right and wrong ; who

smiles alike on the good cause and the bad ; who leaves the world to be misgoverned, pain and pleasure to fly through creation at random, or worse still, to be distributed in the interests of wrong-doing ? And all the wise saws of his friends intensify the agony of this doubt. They tell him that from of old, from the day when man was first placed upon the earth, the triumphing of the wicked hath been short ; that God had been invariably and at all hours the good man's friend ; that he himself is paying the penalty due to his hypocrisy and ill-living, and he knows that this is false, and dark thoughts stir within him, and bitter doubts—doubts that have tried many a heart that has never tasted of his exceptional and tragic cup of misery—cloud his brain, and shake the faith that Satan's malice had vainly assailed. " Mark me," he says, in the twenty-first chapter, " and be astonished, and lay your hands upon your mouth." The thought that stirs within that pious patriarch he hardly dares to utter. " Even when I remember," he says, " I am afraid, and a trembling takes hold of my flesh." Yet speak he must. He looks out with changed eyes on the spectacle of life.—*Ibid.*

[16915] It is deeply interesting to observe, not merely that the difficulties concerning Providence felt by Job refer to the very subjects which painfully perplex the modern mind, but also that the friends of Job exhibit the instinctive tendency which is observed in modern times to denounce his doubt as sin, not less than to attribute his trials to evil as their direct cause.—*Archdeacon Farrar.*

[16916] Beneath the dress of the patriarch of the Old Testament, honoured in all the churches, the friend of God, we see the form of the questioner of the most fundamental of all religions, of all moral truth. " Wherefore," he says, " do the wicked live, become old, yea, are mighty in power ? Their seed is established " — their " families," as we should say, are founded under their eyes ; all goes well with them, their wealth increases, and all prospers ; they send forth their little ones like a flock, and their children dance to the timbrel and the harp. We see beneath the Eastern imagery the prosperous family in all ages founded on violence or wrong-doing. " They spend their days," he adds, " in wealth, and in a moment, in due time, they go down impoverished to their graves. Where is the God that rules the world in righteousness ? " and he tries to find satisfaction for his doubts in retribution falling one day on their posterity. But no, he comes back uncomforted to the same question, the inequalities, the injustices of life. One dieth in his full strength, being wholly at ease and quiet ; another dieth in the bitterness of his soul, and never toucheth bread with pleasure ; they lie down alike in the dust, and the worms cover them. It is the opening scene of Dives and Lazarus, without its sequels—the rich man died, the beggar died also ; and we need not go through Job's preliminary tortures

to feel the problem that vexed him. An hour's walk may stir the same question. — *Dean Bradley.*

[16917] How much darker and more cruel the world must have seemed, when thus regarded, to one who lived in the religious atmosphere which Job breathed! Not one word his friends whispered to him of a world beyond the grave. Amidst all the voices that surrounded him, there is none of One who tasted the shame and desolation of death, and was in all points tempted like as we are, yet was infinitely dear to God His Father, and lives at God's right hand. — *Ibid.*

[16918] "What is man that Thou shouldest magnify him? and that Thou shouldest set thine heart upon him? and that Thou shouldest visit him every morning, and try him every moment?" That question must have been asked by Job in the profoundest earnestness. Deprived in one day of all the hopes of life, and believing as he did that every loss came, not by chance, but from the hand of God, the sudden shocks of sorrow had been bringing him face to face with the mysteries of God, and making him feel their power as he had never felt it before. And the question expresses one of the first of those great mysteries which the stern reality of trouble had forced on his thoughts. It was no curious inquiry on his part; it was not a question which he could be content to leave unanswered; it was one which the agony of his life had compelled him to meet. He had reached that desire for death which sometimes rises from the strong pressure of deep and sorrowful thought. Every earthly hope had been wrecked, all the charm of life had faded, his very friends had proved unkind in the hours when he most needed their sympathy. And, still more, he had no peace in his own soul, for by day dark doubts respecting God perplexed him, and at night those doubts haunted him in dreams. It was not strange that he should choose death rather than life, and pray for the time when he should enter that region where the "wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest." And then arose the mysterious question, Why did God prolong his life? To live amid the desolation of his great sorrow, and struggling with awful doubts, was a constant trial, and why did God thus "try him every moment" by keeping him alive? — *Rev. E. Hull.*

[16919] We must remember, too, that Job had remained for days and nights in silence under the open sky. We know that this book abounds in references to God's action in the natural world, and hence I cannot but imagine that, as Job remained looking at nature in his sorrow, the mighty march of the stars in the far-off wilderness of space, and the solemn glory of the day as it rose and faded, and the voices of the winds as they came and went through the land, would all make him feel the majesty of God and the insignificance of man.

There was the great world, so still, and calm, and wonderful, so joyous and so strong, and yet the God who was behind all its forces was "trying him every moment." He rolled the splendours of the morning up the sky; He had "woven the bands of Orion," and bound the Pleiades by His law; and yet He was sending the feeble child of earth sorrow upon sorrow; and preserving his life only to add the bitterness of memory to his past misery! Can you not imagine when a man had come thus to long for death, and yet day after day had watched in silent sorrow the mighty movements of nature — until he felt himself nothing in the midst of the awful universe — that from his perplexed soul the question would rise with overwhelming force? — *Ibid.*

[16920] This Book of Job is the most ancient statement we have of the perplexities and miseries of life, so graphic, so true to nature, that it proclaims at once that what we are reading is drawn not from romance, but life. It has been said, that religious experience is but the fictitious creation of a polished age, when fanciful feelings are called into existence by hearts bent back in reflex and morbid action on themselves. We have an answer to that in this book. Religion is no morbid fancy. In the rough, rude ages when Job lived, when men did not dwell on their feelings, as in later centuries, the heart-work of religion was manifestly the same earnest, passionate thing that it is now. The heart's misgivings were the same beneath the tent of an Arabian Emir which they are beneath the roof of a modern Christian. Blow after blow fell on the Oriental chieftain: one day he was a father—a prince—the lord of many vassals and many flocks, and buoyant in one of the best of blessings, health; the next, he was a childless, blighted, ruined man. And then it was that there came from Job's lips those yearnings for the quiet of the grave, which are so touching, so real; and, considering that some of the strongest of the elect of God have yielded to them for a moment, we might almost say so pardonable: "I should have been at rest—where the wicked cease from troubling and the weary are at rest. There the prisoners rest together: they hear not the voice of the oppressor. Wherefore is light given unto him that is in misery, and life unto the bitter of soul." — *Rev. F. Robertson.*

3 His yearning struggles after Divine truth.

[16921] He has to face the spectres of his mind. His foes are, indeed, those of his own household, his wife, his friends, the teaching of his age, the traditions of the past, his own sorrows, his own experience, his own tumultuous thoughts. And what is left him? What severs him from the mere cynical denier of God's providence, or God's goodness, or from Him who smiles at all distinctions between right and wrong? What is it that gives him his place in the roll of God's servants? Much is left him

still, much that, in all times, it is well to remember, is dear to God. There is the eager, the passionate, desire for truth—"Give me light, and let me die." And there is the firm persistence in calling on his God to reveal the truth to him. Through all the darkness that surrounds him, he is on the search for God. His soul, in the Psalmist's words, is "athirst for the living God"—for God and for His truth. "Behold, I go forward," he says, "but He is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive Him; on the left hand, but I cannot behold Him; He hideth Himself on the right hand that I cannot see Him." And so, "Oh, that I knew where I might find Him: that I might come, even to His throne!" He tries to comfort himself by drawing pictures, even as his friends had done, magnificent pictures, of the greatness of Him at whose reproof the pillars of heaven tremble and are astonished; and he lays his finger for a moment on the immortal truth that all "these are but parts of His ways;" that we hear but a small portion; that we see, in modern language, but the "skirts of creation," and he speaks of truth and wisdom as sorely hard to find, as hidden from the sight, as veins of metal that can only be reached by the dark miner's path, a hidden track like that beneath the earth which the "vultures," as he says, "have not seen, lions' whelps have not touched it, nor fierce lions passed by it." Yet for all that, a human wisdom, as consisting in the fear of God and in the avoidance of evil. And he cannot believe that to do justice, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with God, can alienate a man from God; and just before his last words died away, he breaks forth into one last piteous appeal, obscured though it be in the rendering of his imagery, that the God who seemed his adversary would reveal to him His will, would only hear him and answer him.—*Dean Bradley.*

IX. THE OBJECT AND DESIGN OF HIS REPEATED TRIALS.

1 Direct.

To vindicate the existence of genuine religion.

[16922] Satan directs an attack against the honour of God; and he knows perfectly that the most deadly blow he can aim at it is to deny that God can be served with disinterestedness, and sincerely loved by any being whatever. The trial of Job is precisely destined to demonstrate the contrary. This is the key of the enigma. This solution is clearly given in the prologue, and no other need be sought for. The rest of the book can neither add anything to, nor take away anything from, its clearness, and can only serve one use—to dispel false ideas, dangerous misunderstandings, rash judgments upon the Divine government which may be formed in the minds of men, when they are witnesses of facts of this nature, without having penetrated into their

mystery. The author of the Book of Job does not pretend in any way to deny the portion of truth contained in the thesis of Job's friends. Assuredly there is a close connection between sin and suffering, and the latter is very often the wages of the former. Much less does he think of rejecting the explanation advanced by Elihu in the first part of his discourse—namely, that suffering is a salutary trial, even for the righteous—a trial which serves to purify him from his secret faults, known to God alone, and, above all, to preserve him from pride. But he establishes that there are cases to which these two solutions do not apply. . . . There are cases where God inflicts suffering upon man, not because of sins committed which demand expiation, nor even with the view of ameliorating his moral disposition, and preventing faults which he might commit, but in view of Himself, of God and His own honour. It is then given to man to sustain a noble part in the universe—that of vindicating the outraged honour of his Creator, and of showing forth His glory, even into spheres higher than that of humanity.—*Godet.*

2 Indirect.

To more completely establish the work of God in his soul.

[16923] The indirect result of Job's trial was to bring to light the latent evil of his nature: in charging him with open transgressions, which did not exist, his friends called into action the secret sin, which did exist: in attacking faults which were not found in him, they laid bare those which were found, and thus prepared the way for the growth of that self-abasement and humiliation with which the book closes.—*Rev. Sir E. Bayley.*

X. THE VALUE AND BLESSEDNESS OF HIS AFFLICTIONS.

1 As a test.

[16924] The controversy between the Almighty and the great apostate angel was narrowed to a single point—did genuine faith and love exist upon the earth? If found anywhere, they would be found in the person of Job. Upon this question issue is joined, and the trial takes place. We know the result. But let us well remember wherein lay the strength of Job's position. Satan was right in his contention, that fallen man does not fear God for nought. Self is the spring of action with the unregenerate; self is the centre around which the life of the natural man turns. Let the temptation, therefore, be sufficiently strong, and man will consult his own interest rather than the will of God. Wherein, then, did the error of Satan consist? It consisted in his applying this rule to Job. He did not take into account the influence of Divine grace; he either did not understand this principle, or he refused to believe in it.—*Ibid.*

2 As a discipline.

[16925] "We count them happy which endure," and the endurance of Job is held up by the Apostle James as the great lesson of the patriarch's life. But trial is essential to endurance; it is "tribulation" that "worketh patience" (Rom. v. 3); and they only who have passed through the discipline of sorrow have learned its blessedness as a channel of grace. Job sorrowed, we might almost say, without hope, for he lived in the twilight of the world's infancy, a stranger to the full-orbed revelation which we possess. No Divine Teacher had yet appeared to "comfort all that mourn;" no suffering Saviour had humbled Himself even to the death of the cross; no Christ had burst the bonds of death, and "brought life and immortality to light through the gospel."—*Ibid.*

XI. HIS GRAND REALIZATION OF THE SECOND ADVENT.

"I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth" (Job xix. 25).

[16926] Job *knew* that God was the vindicator of wrongs—that he said. But why did he go on repeating in every possible form the same thing:—"I shall see God—see Him for myself—mine eyes shall behold Him—yes, mine and not another's"? It would seem as if he were doing what a man does when he repeats over and over to himself a thing which he cannot picture out in its reality. It was true: but it was strange, and shadowy, and unfamiliar. It is no matter of uncertainty to any one of us whether he himself shall die. He knows it. Every time the funeral bell tolls, the thought in some shape suggests itself—I am a mortal, dying man. That is knowing it. Which of us has realized it? Who can shut his eyes, and bring it before him as a reality, that the day will come when the hearse will stand at the door for him, and that all this bright world will be going on without him; and that the very flesh which now walks about so complacently, will have the coffin-lid shut down upon it, and be left to darkness, and loneliness, and silence, and the worm? Or take a case still more closely suggested—out of the grave we must rise again—long after all that is young, and strong, and beautiful before me, shall have mouldered into forgetfulness. Earth shall hear her Master's voice breaking the long silence of the centuries, and our dust shall hear it, and stand up among the myriads that are moving on to judgment. Each man in his own proper identity, his very self, must see God, and be seen by Him—looking out on the strange new scene, and doomed to be an actor in it for all eternity. We all *know* that—on which of our hearts is it stamped, not as a doctrine to be proved by texts, but as one of those things which must be hereafter, and in sight of which we are to live now?—*Rev. F. Robertson.*

XII. HIS VINDICATION OF HIS INTEGRITY AGAINST THE FALSE CHARGES OF HIS ACCUSERS.

Both as a private individual and a magistrate.

[16927] Job's reputation was not without just grounds—the fruit not of his riches and powers but of his benevolent and upright character. He asserted, and justly asserted, his benevolence and compassion, honesty, uprightness, freedom from covetousness, chastity, justice, and humanity to his servants or slaves, kindness to the poor, freedom from idolatry (both in its spiritual and external form, both secret and open, in heart and in life), as also from vindictiveness in reference to enemies. He likewise declared his humanity as a householder, faithfulness and justice as a magistrate, and boldness in opposing the wicked and oppressive, while he maintained himself clear as regarded secret and concealed transgressions, and unconscious of injustice in all business transactions with his fellow men.—*Rev. T. Robinson, D.D. (adapted).*

XIII. POINTS OF CHARACTER NOTICEABLE DURING HIS VARIOUS SORROWS AND CONTROVERSIAL TRIALS.

I Inherent or normal excellencies and graces.

(1) *Secret tenderness.*

[16928] How wonderfully does the character and history of Job lay bare, with matchless power, the depths of strength and tenderness that lie hidden in the human heart! He is introduced to us at first with nothing remarkable about him—rich and prosperous, just to his neighbours, benevolent to the poor, loving to his children, faithful to his God. But in all this there is nothing remarkable; it was the case of hundreds in his day, it is the case of thousands in our own, and had all this continued he would have gone down to a nameless grave, and a few generations after his very memory would have been erased. Suddenly sorrow comes and touches him. In a moment he is transfigured. No new power is imparted to him, but those already in him are brought into activity. Immediately he rises into a hero; his grandeur becomes colossal; he projects the shadow of his trial and the light of his triumph over forty centuries. He acquires a name that will endure as long as earth endures. And so true is all this to the most secret principles of our nature that even now, after a hundred generations have successively trodden on his dust and laid down to sleep beside him, our own hearts, and the hearts of all who read the story, beat in perfect sympathy with the stricken, but most human, heart of the Patriarch of Uz!—*Rev. F. Greeves.*

[16929] Look at Job's tenderness! We see this more in his silence than in all his speech. One of the tenderest and most touching things in all literature is this most eloquent and

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pathetic silence of Job about his children. Ten of them are gone, and through the whole of his complaints he never mentions them. "What," you say, "do you call that tenderness not to speak of his children? One would have expected him to name them first of all." Glad we are to hear you say so (though it is a great mistake), because it shows this is a kind of sorrow you have never known. . . . It is the shallow stream that murmurs; deep waters are silent: when real sorrow comes it falls upon the heart as heavy as an avalanche, and as cold; no tears then, no complainings; the heart smitten and withered like that of Job is as the stricken deer, whose only remaining wish is to penetrate the depths of the tangled forest, hide the pang from every human eye, and die in peace.—*Ibid.*

[16930] In the silence of Job, no less than in all his utterances, we see the tenderness of the man's heart. And this tenderness is a part of heroism. Stoicism is not heroism. A great heart is always a tender one. And such was the heart of Job!—*Ibid.*

(2) *Tenacious strength.*

[16931] Look at this man's strength. . . . His friends try to shake him out of confidence in his own integrity. Everything is on their side—the temptations of the devil, the suggestions of his own fears, his wish to be rid of their tormenting insinuations. Why does he not yield a little? Why not say, "It may be so! Perhaps you are right"? That would satisfy them; he might reckon at once on their sympathy and prayers. How many of us would have yielded all rather than be troubled to argue with them! Not so Job. No "reed shaken with the wind" is he, but a tree—a strong, grand tree—scathed by the lightnings, it is true, and quivering, like the aspen, to the uttermost leaf of the furthest spray, but still as deeply rooted as ever, and as determined in his resistance to all human, all spiritual attacks.—*Ibid.*

[16932] Job tells his comforters openly that he recognizes in them the malice of Satan, by whom he is "wounded in the house of his friends;" that he knows his infernal adversary is let loose upon him, and that all they say is but further proof of it. And still, amidst the din of controversy, in which he contends alone, as he believes, against earth and hell—amid the onslaught of pain, doubt, and frenzy, fell enemies urged on by the devil himself—under the canopy of a darkened heaven, and a sky that is as brass to his complainings—forsaken, confused, and wounded; still he stands at bay—like the standard bearer of a defeated host, beset alone by his enemies, mangled by their thrusts and blows,

"Sore toiled, his riven arms to havoc hewn"—

but unable as ever to yield—and, amid the closing darkness, still upholding above the polluting breath of that hostile array the white ensign of his innocence upon which, dying, he

will fall—that he may be buried still grasping it on the lonely field.—*Ibid.*

(3) *Patient endurance.*

Consideration of St. James's reference to the "patience" of Job (James vi. 11, 13).

[16933] Job . . . is held forth to our notice by the apostle as a man remarkable for his patience, inasmuch that the patience of Job has passed into a common proverb. What, then, are we to understand by this patience? If we take the word in its ordinary sense, it implies great meekness and resignation, while suffering under the chastisement of God's uplifted hand. That certainly was the spirit which he exhibited at the time when his great and aggravated trial was first announced to him. Neither the loss of his property nor the sudden destruction of all his family could unsettle his principles or drive him from his steadfastness. It would appear, however, that the spirit of patience and of un-murmuring resignation was not of long continuance. Nor was it the ruling and predominating habit of his life. When leisure was given him for reflection, and he began to reason on the mystery and severity of the Divine dealings, it is scarce possible to resist the conviction, that he spake very rashly and unadvisedly with his lips. On almost every occasion when he spoke at all there were the symptoms of fretfulness and irritation almost bordering on rebellion, and therefore we cannot help thinking that it was not in the ordinary sense of the term that he is here held forth as an example of suffering patience. But there is another meaning of which the word is susceptible. It does not always imply great resignation. It is sometimes used to indicate great endurance and long-continued waiting for some ultimate result—some appointed end. And I presume that is the sense in which it is used in this passage.—*Rev. J. Wallace.*

[16934] The apostle is exhorting men to be patient in waiting for the coming of the Lord. And this lesson he well enforces, first, by the case of the husbandman, and second, by the example of the prophets. By the case of the husbandman, "Behold the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receives the early and latter rain." But it does not follow that the husbandman is always remarkable for his patience; that on his part there is no fretfulness, no irritation, no complaining. On the contrary, the complaints of the husbandman are often as bitter and as openly expressed as were Job's in the time of his trouble and distress. But there is one thing which the most impatient husbandman never abandons altogether, and that is the hope of a harvest. He may often fear that it may be a scanty one, and his fears after all may not be realized. But he continues waiting and working and using the means under the deep conviction that the seed will bring forth fruit, and that the days of the harvest will come. . . . And so I believe it was with Job. I

do not think that he was pre-eminently patient in the ordinary sense of the term. On the contrary, there was much in the language which he used, and in the spirit which he displayed, and in the attitude he assumed, which it were well for us not to imitate, but carefully to avoid. But as it is with the husbandman in tilling the earth, and as it was with the prophets who have spoken in the name of the Lord, there was on his part great patience in waiting for the appointed end. He may have spoken rashly with his lips. From such a charge we make no attempt to clear him. And that eventually was the conviction of his own heart. He himself did not hesitate to acknowledge his guilt. And this was his confession. "I uttered what I understood not, things too wonderful for me which I knew not." But though he spoke strongly, and argued keenly, and suffered greatly, he never let go his confidence, but kept waiting on.—*Ibid.*

[16935] What do we discover in the personal experience of Job? Not quiet and un murmuring resignation which the heaviest strokes of God's hand can neither ruffle nor disturb. That may be a high and rare attainment, but even Job did not come to it all at once, or until he was emptied of all self-righteous thoughts, and through the stern siftings of God's providence brought into the depths of the lowest distress. When the golden ore is cast into the heated furnace, and the scorching fire is laying fast hold of it on every side, it is not wonderful that it cannot be altogether motionless, perfectly still. It is not wonderful if there be something like tumult and rebellion when it is quivering in the hot crucible, and its inward parts are vomiting out the dust and ashes with which hitherto it has been alloyed. No man who knows anything of what human nature is need wonder at the outcries of Job when subjected to the stern processes of so fierce an ordeal. The wonder is, not that there was commotion when the fire of the furnace was doing its work; the wonder is that he ever came out of it uncorrupted. But he did come out of it. Aye, he came out of it, leaving the dross of his corruption behind him, purified and refined for the Master's use.—*Ibid.*

[16936] There may be a higher patience even than that of full submissiveness, a holding out a corner of the fortress against desperate odds, the resistance or the charge of a handful that may determine the issue of a campaign. "He that endureth to the end," said a greater than the Apostle James, "the same shall be saved." If ye have faith as a grain of mustard, ye shall remove mountains; remove and raise and elevate what is more precious than the mountain—the human soul.—*Dean Bradley.*

(4) *Trust in God.*

[16937] Everything is against his trust in God. He has been stricken, terribly stricken, when he had no consciousness that he deserved it. And He who permitted this—instead of

appearing to explain the mystery—has hidden Himself from His servant. All around in the darkness does the patriarch grope after Him, but it is in vain. . . . The next blow may cleave him to the ground; but he fears it not. He sits upon a dunghill indeed; but, with him upon it, that dunghill is a throne. He looks calmly to the threatening cloud. His bald, bare head is ready. Let it come. It will make no difference in his confidence—"Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him: but I will maintain mine own ways before Him."—*Rev. F. Greeves.*

[16938] Job exemplifies in real life just what the poet Campbell has put into the lips of an imaginary character, whom he calls "the last man." He supposes the one survivor of the human race, following the sun, in the hour of his last setting, with words like these:—

"Go, Sun, while mercy holds me up
On Nature's awful waste
To drink this last and bitter cup
Of wrath that man shall taste.
Go, tell the night that hides thy face
Thou heardst the last of Adam's race
On earth's sepulchral cloy
The darkening universe defy,
To quench his immortality,
Or shake his trust in God!"

Such a declaration, under such circumstances, would be heroic; but not one whit more so than the conduct of Job. For him the universe *was* darkened. Not a gleam of light remained. But his trust in God was as strong as ever. Was he not a hero? Did imagination ever picture a character so tender, yet so strong?—*Ibid.*

[16939] It is clear that the trial of Job was a severe one; the patriarch breaks out into language of passionate remonstrance; he even charges God with wrong, and the issue of the contest is at times in doubt. Still in the centre of his being, Job remains true to his allegiance. "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him"; and whilst shrinking from the cup which he is called upon to drink, he could yet say, "Not my will, but Thine be done." A final answer is thus given to the charge of Satan, "Doth Job fear God for nought?"—*Rev. Sir E. Bayley.*

2 *Spiritual errors.*

(1) *Limited self-knowledge.*

[16940] Wherein lay Job's error? His error lay in the too daring assertion of his innocence, and in his giving way to a spirit of impatience and angry pride. With Job, as with his friends, there was an absence of any deep sense of sin. Had he known himself as God knew him, he would have denied, indeed, the charge of open transgression, but he would have been less vehement in his protestations; he would have been ready to acknowledge that, although he knew nothing against himself, "yet he was not thereby justified" (1 Cor. iv. 4). In self-knowledge Job was deficient; there was nothing, therefore, in him to check the indignation which

he felt against his accusers ; and, stung by their reproaches, he assumed an attitude of defiance, of which he afterwards sincerely repented.—*Ibid.*

[16941] Job is apparently still too confident in his own righteousness. Though upright in his external dealings, and blameless in the eyes of men, yet, weighed “in the balances of righteousness,” even Job is found wanting (Rom. iii. 9, 10, 19, 23). Much self-knowledge is yet to be gained by him. Job has yet to take the place of the publican, “God be merciful to me a sinner” (chap. xl. 4 ; xlii. 5, 6).—*Rev. T. Robinson, D.D.*

(2) *Irreverent presumption.*

[16942] “God is greater than man” in wisdom, power, and justice. Greater than man as his Maker, Ruler, and Judge. The natural inference from this is, man, even the greatest and best, is not to strive with God. “Why dost thou strive against Him?”—quarrelling with and disputing against His procedure (Isa. xlv. 9). God’s greatness above man is sufficient to exclude all murmurs and complaints, as—(1) *God is not to be required to give an account of His procedure to any of His creatures.* “For (or because) He giveth not account of any of His matters” (or dealings). This is the reason why Job should have refrained from the sentiments he had uttered in regard to God, and why neither he nor any one ought to “strive against Him.” God is a sovereign who acts according to His own will, though never but in infinite wisdom, rectitude, and holiness. It is monstrous presumption to think that the Creator is to be called to His creature’s bar to answer for what He does (Psa. cxv. 3 ; Dan. iv. 35). God is far too great to stoop to defend His procedure against the cavils of rebellious worms. This is the scope of Jehovah’s own answer to Job afterwards.

(2) *God is not to be comprehended by His short-sighted creatures.* It is folly and presumption for man to think he is able to comprehend God’s dealings, except as He is pleased to reveal and explain them. Hence the weakness and wickedness of censuring them.—*Ibid.*

[16943] As if upon a full-proportioned dome, On swelling columns heaved, the pride of art !
A critic fly, whose feeble ray scarce spreads
An inch around, with blind presumption bold
Should dare to tax the structure of the whole.

—*Anon.*

(3) *Omitted access to God by prayer in the spirit of humility.*

[16944] Job was not remarkable for his devotions. In almost every chapter we have long and elaborate arguments, the deep reasoning of a subtle and intellectual spirit, seeking to vindicate his own cause and almost asserting his own innocence both in the sight of God and man. And these trains of thought are interspersed with the language of murmuring and rebellion. But in looking over the whole book we cannot

fix upon a single instance which represents him as lying prostrate before the throne of the Divine Majesty, and pouring out his soul in supplication and prayer. There may be distant approaches to this, but there is nothing so explicit or so clearly revealed as to warrant us to say of him, “Behold he prayeth.”—*Rev. J. Wallace.*

[16945] On one occasion there was a noble confession of faith, perhaps the noblest which the Bible contains. . . . And this confession was preceded by the expression of an earnest desire, “Oh that my words were now written ! oh that they were printed in a book ! that they were graven with an iron pen and lead in the rock for ever !” But that was not the language of prayer. It was a desire merely for his own vindication. And it was not presented unto God. It was addressed merely to his fellow-men : “Have pity upon me, have pity upon me, oh ye my friends, for the hand of God hath touched me.” At another time he gave utterance to these words : “Oh that my grief were thoroughly weighed, and my calamity laid in the balances together.” Oh that I might have my request, and that God would grant me the thing that I long for, even that it would please God to destroy me.” But that can scarcely be regarded as the language of prayer. For he was asking what he was not warranted to expect—a thing which, not being promised, could not be agreeable to the Divine will. On another occasion, when he was almost goaded to madness by the stern reproaches of false-hearted friends, he gave demonstration of the most heroic fortitude, for he declared, “Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him.” But even then there was no trace either of humbleness of mind or of earnest supplication ; for it is added, “I will maintain my own ways before Him. Behold now I have ordered my cause, I know that I shall be justified.” On another occasion still he uses these remarkable words. He does not say, I have called upon Thee, and Thou didst answer me ; but, “If I had called and He had answered me, yet would I not believe that He had hearkened unto my voice. For He breaketh me with a tempest, and multiplieth my wounds without cause. He will not suffer me to take my breath, but filleth me with bitterness.” “Let Him take His rod away from me, and let not His fear terrify me ; then would I speak and not fear Him ; but it is not so with me.”—*Ibid.*

[16946] We are very far from concluding that Job never prayed at all. But prayer was not the element in which he lived, and moved, and breathed. And when he did pray, it was not in the spirit in which a favourable answer could be expected to his petitions, nor an outlet obtained from the sore trouble to which it seemed meet unto God to subject him. There were deep processes of reasoning and elaborate arguments on the mysteries of God’s providence, but there was nothing through the whole course of his experience to warrant the conclu-

sion that he was acting upon the principle, "Is any among you afflicted, let him pray." And that, perhaps, was the reason why his afflictions were so long continued, and that during their continuance there was so little to calm his fretfulness and to minister to his comfort.—*Ibid.*

3 Circumstantial defects.

(1) *Pronounced despondency and vehement complaint.*

[16947] Though we may by no means justify the murmurings of Job, nor yet the doubting despondency which he occasionally manifests, we cannot wonder at their existence, but rather stand amazed before the massive fortitude which formed the chief characteristic of his conduct. Nevertheless, he *did* murmur against God, he *did* miscalculate Divine providence. Let us take warning and remember that he who complains of his lot in life, questions the love and wisdom of his Maker, and he who dares to despair—even though passing through the fiercest fire of affliction—indirectly blasphemes.—*A. M. A. W.*

(2) *Passionate resentment.*

[16948] One there was who "in the house of His friends" submitted to every conceivable insult and indignity, misconstruction and abuse—One who could have shattered with a word His unjust accusers, and have gloriously "maintained His ways" and asserted His "integrity." He, nevertheless, "held His peace," and, without any sign of intemperate anger, patiently "endured the contradiction of sinners." Job passionately flings back the taunts of his "miserable comforters," and though fully justified in clearing the honour of his name from false imputations, displays not the Christ-like spirit in his justification. "For what glory is it, if when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if when you do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God" (1 Peter ii. 20).—*Ibid.*

(3) *Contemptuous sarcasm.*

[16949] Job is, perhaps, more sarcastic and ironical than any other Scripture character, but we can scarcely read his magnificent utterances without perceiving to what a marked extent severe contempt is mingled with the caustic reproaches of his sarcasms. It is noticeable, also, that this weapon is used from purely personal considerations. Elijah's ironical admonition to the worshippers of Baal, "Cry aloud, for he is a god"; and Paul to the Corinthians, "Ye are rich; ye have reigned as kings without us," were not uttered on their own behalf, or for purposes of self-vindication, but in the interests of religion. Job's use of this means is principally in defending his own character against unjust charges of ignorance, &c. Witness his contemptuous reply to Zophar, "No doubt but ye are the people, and wisdom shall die with you. But I have understanding as well as you, . . . yea! who knoweth not such things as these?" (Job xii. 2, 3).—*Ibid.*

XIV. THE PERSONALITIES AND CHARACTERISTICS OF JOB'S FRIENDS ANALYZED AND DISCRIMINATED.

I Collectively.

[16950] The characters introduced, though not numerous, are nicely discriminated and well supported. It has been justly observed, that the milder and more modest temper of Eliphaz is well contrasted with the froward and unrestrained violence of Bildad (compare iv. 2-4 with viii.); and the terseness and brevity of Zophar (xi.) with the pent-up and overflowing fulness of Elihu (xxxii.).—*E. Copley.*

[16951] Eliphaz represents the true patriarchal chieftain, grave and dignified, and erring only from an exclusive adherence to tenets hitherto unquestioned, and influenced in the first place by genuine regard for Job and sympathy with his affliction. Bildad, without much originality or independence of character, reposes partly on the wise saws of antiquity, partly on the authority of his older friend. Zophar differs from both; he seems to be a young man; his language is violent, and at times even coarse and offensive (see especially his second speech, chap. xx.). He represents the prejudiced and narrow-minded bigots of his age.—*Encyclopædia (McClintock and Strong).*

[16952] The great want in Job's friends is a genuine sympathy. After the first oriental outburst of grief at their friend's calamity, all was cold, heartless, and even cruel. Selfishness is the common sin of our fallen nature—

"The proud, the cold, untroubled heart of stone,

That never mused on sorrow but its own."

In Job's friends this coldness is aggravated, if not generated, by false religious views and misinterpretations of Divine Providence. True religion softens the heart, and inclines it to kindness and compassion. A false religion is generally the parent of cruelty.—*Rev. T. Robinson, D.D.*

2 Individually.

(1) *Eliphaz.*

[16953] "Eliphaz" was an old Edomite name. A district was also so called (Gen. xxxvi. 11, 15). It denotes "My God is strength." This indicates his parent's piety. "Temanite." From the stock he sprung from, or the place (Teman) where he lived. Temanites were celebrated for their wisdom (Jer. xlix. 7; Obad. 8, 9).—*Ibid.*

[16954] The aim of Eliphaz is Job's repentance and consequent restoration to Divine favour. His motive was good, but was founded on a mistaken and uncharitable view of Job's character and the cause of his sufferings. Eliphaz may be viewed as an example to preachers in that he (1) Is sincere, (2) Is earnest, (3) Is courteous, (4) Employs variety of arguments and illustrations, (5) Adduces authorities, (6) Appeals to Divine revelation. Fails—(1) In sympathy

and warmth of feeling, (2) In comprehensiveness of view, (3) In adaptation of his authorities to the case in hand, (4) In charitable judgment, (5) In appreciation of the case of his hearer.—*Ibid.*

(2) *Bildad.*

[16955] The name signifies "Old Friendship." Bildad the Shuhite was one of Job's friends, probably descended from Shuah, the son of Abraham by Keturah. From want of just views of the dealings of Providence in correcting the righteous for the trial and improvement of their character, Bildad, like the other friends of Job, was led to very rash and hasty conclusions concerning his character. He addressed him as a deliberately wicked man, whose hypocrisy was manifested by the afflictions with which he was exercised; but Bildad was afterwards convinced of his mistake, and glad to solicit the intercessions of the man he had so disparaged. It becomes us to be very candid and charitable in judging of others, and especially to avoid anything like unkind reflections on the afflicted (Job ii. 11, viii., xviii., xxv., xlii. 7, 8; Gen. xxv. 2).—*E. Copley.*

(3) *Zophar.*

[16956] It is better to be silent in the presence of the afflicted than (like Zophar) to dispute and censure. Consolation is due to sufferers from their friends. A brother is born for adversity. Professed comforters may become real tormentors.—*Rev. T. Robinson, D.D.*

[16957] The exhortation of Zophar as addressed to Job in chap. xi., especially with reference to ver. 12, was (1) *Inapplicable.* Job was neither a fool nor, except perhaps in his trouble, especially when worried by his friends, a wild ass's colt. (2) *Uncharitable,* because inappropriate. "Charity thinketh no evil; hopeth all things." (3) *Rude.* It is no part of wisdom in a preacher or monitor to apply harsh terms and ill names, even indirectly. "Be courteous." Hearers are neither to be flattered on the one hand nor libelled on the other. (4) *Unfeeling.* No consideration is made of Job's intense sufferings and accumulated trials. Zophar pours vinegar instead of oil on Job's wounded spirit. Sympathy in a preacher is necessary to success. Want of sympathy argues want of sense.—*Ibid.*

(4) *Elihu.*

[16958] The name signifies "He is my God Himself." Elihu, a native of Buz, was one of Job's friends, who came to condole with him in his distress. The other three friends of Job took a very mistaken view of his calamities, and bitterly reproached their unhappy friend, as though he must be conscious of some heinous and concealed wickedness, which had provoked the immediate judgments of God against him. Elihu, being a much younger man than the rest, patiently listened till all had done speaking, then modestly begged to be heard. In summing up the argument, he discovered far more wisdom and proper feeling than the others, whom he severely reprehended for their rash and cruel

insinuations against Job; at the same time, censuring Job for some rash and pertinacious expressions he had uttered. He then asserted the sovereignty of God, proved that He often afflicts men for the best of purposes, and that, in every instance, it is both our duty and our wisdom to exercise submission, and to wait the Lord's time for deliverance from our trials. He concluded his speech with a grand description of the omnipotence of the Creator.—*E. Copley.*

[16959] Elihu is a fine example for young persons of superior abilities, who too often find great difficulty in restraining the expression of their opinions, when the presence of their superiors, and the modesty becoming their years, would urge upon them to be silent, or at least to hear attentively, and wait patiently a suitable opportunity to propose their difficulties, or to venture their suggestions. Nothing is more disgusting than a pert, flippant youth, impertinently obtruding his crude opinions, positive assertions, and rude contradictions. On the other hand, nothing is more lovely than a meek, intelligent youth, listening with respectful deference to the sentiments of his seniors, and, with equal modesty and fidelity, suggesting and pointing out the incorrectness of any sentiment advanced; then, when the force of his reasoning is admitted, quietly retreating again to the shade, without proclaiming his victory or seeking applause. It is observable, that when Jehovah Himself appeared in awful majesty, and wound up this remarkable controversy, though His anger was kindled against Job's other three friends, and they were pardoned only at the intercession of him they had injured and misrepresented, no censure whatever is expressed of Elihu's interference or arguments: hence we are left to conclude, that they were according to truth and righteousness (Job xxxii.—xxxvii.).—*Ibid.*

[16960] The place of Elihu is that of an umpire stepping forward of his own accord, under the promptings of zeal and conscious knowledge, to decide the controversy between Job and his three friends on the one hand, and between Job and the Almighty on the other. His speeches contribute to the solution, as showing reasons why Job might be afflicted as he was, without being what his friends suspected him to be—a secretly bad man, and also as pointing out wherein he erred—namely, in his too strongly justifying himself, and almost censuring the Almighty. His speeches are preparatory to the appearance and address of Jehovah, who follows up what Elihu had begun. Elihu in relation to the Almighty was like John the Baptist in relation to Christ.—*Rev. T. Robinson, D.D.*

XV. THE COMBINATION OF TRUTH AND ERROR OBSERVABLE IN THEIR UTTERANCES.

[16961] In the lengthened controversy which was carried on between Job and his friends,

there was certainly an element of truth on either side. The three friends were right in affirming that there is a close connection between sin and suffering. Our present life is passed under the moral government of God, and he must be blind who cannot trace *in it* the judicial dealing of God with men. Nay, it is only when we see in the course of history a continuous judgment of the world, that our faith in a *final judgment* can be rational and strong. The future life is not the beginning, but the completion of our existence. There is no break in the continuity of our being. If sin does not even here work ruin, then there exists no hell; if salvation and happiness do not even here wait upon righteousness, then there exists no heaven. Scripture knows nothing of a God who only rises to power when this life is ended. Its God is from beginning to end a living God; and both in His retributive judgments and in His bestowing of present blessing He is ever enforcing His own great principle, that "whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." There was truth, therefore, in the contention of the friends: their error consisted in applying this principle, without any qualification, to Job. Sin in their view was an outward act; they knew little of its inner nature; they treated it rather as a crime, and could only account for the calamities of Job by assuming the existence of undiscovered wickedness. It never occurred to them that suffering might be inflicted as a test of virtue; or that, apart from any actual transgression, it might be sent in order to lay bare the hidden defects of a godly life.—*Rev. Sir E. Bayley.*

[16962] Many of the remarks of Job's friends, although made upon mistaken conceptions respecting him, nevertheless form excellent aphorisms on general principles. At the same time, care should be taken not to confound the sentiments of erring, imperfect, and perhaps unholy persons, with the divinely inspired principles, injunctions, and promises of the word of God. This error is not unfrequently fallen into, by taking detached sentiments and passages, without due regard to their connection.—*E. Copley.*

XVI. JEHOVAH'S ANSWER TO THE PATRIARCH'S DOUBTS.

1 Its apparent insufficiency as regards the solving of Job's difficulties, and the lesson thereby conveyed.

This disappointing fact should teach us that the path of logic is not the path to faith.

[16963] When we read that "Jehovah answered Job out of the tempest," we forthwith ask, "And what did He say?" expecting to hear some conclusive argument that will pour the light of eternal wisdom on the difficulties and perplexities of human life: we overlook the immense pathos and force of the fact, that *Jehovah spake to Job at all.* And yet, so soon as we think of it, it is easy to believe that, if Job had not understood a single word Jehovah uttered, the

mere fact that Jehovah spoke to him would excite a rush of emotion before which all memory of his doubts and miseries would be carried away as with a flood. *This*, indeed, was that which Job had craved throughout. In how many forms does he cry, "O that God would meet me! O that He would speak to me! O that He would fix a day, however distant, in which to visit me and hear my plea! O that He would even come to question and judge me!" The pain at the very heart of his pain was not that he had to suffer, but that in his sufferings God had forgotten and abandoned him. He could bear that God should "take" the children He had given. He could bear to receive "evil" at the hand from which he had received so much good. He could even bear that his "friends" should forsake him in his calamity, that they should sit in judgment on him and condemn him for crimes which he knew he had not committed. What he could not bear was that *God* should abandon him, *abandon* as well as afflict him, that when he cried for pity or redress Heaven should not respond.—*S. Cox, D.D.*

[16964] If, now, through the tempest and the darkness, there should sound a voice from heaven; if, however it came, the conviction should come to Job that the God he could not find had found him, and was speaking to him, would it matter very much what God said? Would it not be enough that it was God who was speaking, that the Divine Friend had come back to him, that He had never forgotten him, nor forsaken him; that He was in the tempest which had swept over him; that He had listened to him, even when He did not answer him, and had loved him even when He afflicted him? It was *this*—oh, it was *this*—which dropped like balm into the torn and wounded heart of the sufferer: it was the resurrection of faith and hope and love in the rekindled sense of the Divine Presence and favour that raised him to a life in which doubt and fear had no place, a joy on which even repentance was no stain. Not what God said, but that God spoke to him and had come to him—it was this which cast him in the dust, which quickened in him that humility which is man's true exaltation.—*Ibid.*

[16965] There have been numbers of books written that have professed to give the history of an inquisitive human spirit sounding its dim and perilous way across dark seas of doubt to the clear rest and haven of faith. . . . Written, as such books commonly are, by wise and good men, men of the most genuine sincerity and earnestness; written, too, for the express purpose of leading the sceptical inquirer from doubt to faith, there is no one of them which does not disappoint us just as the Book of Job disappoints us. They may command our admiration; they may touch our hearts; but they do not satisfy our reason nor answer our doubts: they fail just at the one only point at which we are concerned for their success. What should the fact teach

us? It should lead us to ask whether it may not be impossible to solve, in human words, and to the human intellect, the mystery of God's dealings with men, whether, if possible, it would not be undesirable. Logic can do much, but not all. It may convince the reason, but it cannot bend the will or cleanse the heart. Prove to me, if proof be possible, that God is good in permitting pain and sorrow and loss to come upon me; but if I do not *feel*, or want to feel, that He is good, and do not love Him for His goodness, mere proof will not do much for me. "With the heart man believeth unto righteousness;" and logic does not address itself to the heart. It is doubtful, even, whether the human intellect, at least while it is prisoned in the flesh, could so comprehend the infinite providence of God as to prove its equity and kindness, or even understand the proof, if proof were to be had; but it is very certain that, were such a proof within our reach, we might still distrust His goodness, and even hate it when it thwarted and pained us.—*Ibid.*

2 Its suggested argument.

(1) *That while the mysteries of life pain and perplex, they may have a nobler motive and happier end than we conceive.*

[16966] It is only an argument of hints and suggestions, it does not touch the profounder questions which Job had raised, nor would it be difficult to pick holes in it, if we took it simply as an argument addressed to the inquisitive and sceptical intellect. It does not go very deep. It is addressed to the heart rather than to the brain, to faith rather than to doubt. It would not convince a sceptic, however reasonable and sincere he might be. Nothing would, or can, convince him save the sense of a Divine Presence and Love, and *that* no argument can give.—*Ibid.*

[16967] Let us mark what the Divine answer was, viewed simply as an argument. Viewed thus, it met that painful sense of mystery which oppressed Job as he sat solitary and alone among his friends, and all the more alone because they were with him. One element in his pain was that he could not tell what God was aiming at, that the Divine Providence was all dark to him, that he could see no reason why a good man should be vexed with loss and misery and a bad man live out all his days in mirth and affluence. And this is a pain we have all felt, of which we should all be gladly rid. The injustice, the inequalities, the pains and degradations which enter into the human lot perplex and afflict us; we can see no good reason for them: we cannot approve and vindicate them. Does Jehovah, then, when He answers Job out of the tempest, answer the questions which this spectacle of human misery suggests? Does He assign a good reason, a sufficient motive, for the inequalities of the human lot? He does nothing of the kind. He does not lift an iota of that painful mystery. The argument of the poem is Butler's argument—the argument from ana-

logy. To the perplexed patriarch, who sits brooding painfully over the dark problems of life, Jehovah points out that equally insoluble mysteries are over his head and under his feet; that he lives and moves and has his being amid them; that look where he will he cannot escape them; and that as he finds them everywhere else he should expect to find them in human life.—*Ibid.*

[16968] Briefly put, taking only the argument which underlies its sublime poetry, the Divine answer runs thus: "You fret and despair over the one mystery which has been brought home to you by the pangs of sorrow and loss, . . . yet you live content amid a thousand other problems you cannot solve, and turn them to account. Should you not look, then, to find mysteries in the creature whom I have set over all other works of my hand—in man, and in his lot? Will it not be wise of you to use your life rather than to brood over it; to turn your lot, with all its changes, to good account, rather than to fret over the problems it suggests?"—*Ibid.*

(2) *That all things work together in Providence for man's good.*

[16969] In His sublime description of the heavens and the earth and all that in them is, Jehovah may have meant to suggest to Job: "Consider these mysteries and parables of Nature, and what they reveal of the end and purpose of Him by whom they were created. You cannot adequately interpret any one of them, but you see that they all work together for good. You cannot tell how the world was made, how the firm earth and flowing seas were formed; but the earth yields you her fruits, and the sea carries your ships and brings you the wealth of distant lands. You cannot command the wind, or the clouds that bring rain; but you can see that the winds carry health and the rains fertility wherever they go. You cannot explain the migration of the birds that travel all the year, but you can see that God feeds and fosters them by the instinct which drives them from shore to shore. The world around you is full of mysteries which you cannot solve; but, so far as you can judge, is not their end a beneficent end? And if the world within you also has mysteries which you cannot fathom, cannot you trust that, somehow, here or hereafter, these too will reach a final goal of good? The mystery of life, the mystery of pain—may not these be as beneficent as you admit the marvels and mysteries of Nature to be?"—*Ibid.*

XVII. JOB'S DEEP HUMILITY AND PENITENCE, AND HIS JUSTIFICATION BY GOD.

"I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth Thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (Job xlii. 5, 6).

[16970] Hitherto Job had lived in the outer

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court, the traditions of former days had been handed down to him, he had taken religion upon trust; but now his inward eye is opened, he sees God as he had never seen Him before. Bathed in this flood of light, a new revelation dawns upon him; it is as a *sinner* that he stands before God: "Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (xlii. 6).—*Rev. Sir E. Bayley.*

[16971] In Job's repentance all the marks of evangelical repentance are found—submission and abasement (ver. 2); confession of sin (ver. 3); humble and believing prayer (ver. 4); the revelation of God to the soul (ver. 5); and then the blessed result—self-knowledge, self-abhorrence, true, deep, lasting repentance: "Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (ver. 6).—*Ibid.*

[16972] Job, though he expressed so much courage and patience, yet (betraying some infirmities after he was baited long by so many fresh dogs, men, and devils) he must cry *peccavi*, and abhor himself in dust and ashes before God will take him into His arms (Job xlii. 6); and the same way God takes with all His children.—*Anon.*

[16973] Job's vindication is complete, as is also his humiliation. From the beginning he has been God's true and righteous servant; but now with a deeper acquaintance with his own heart, and a deeper knowledge of God, he walks more surely because more humbly; and, in the chastened holiness of his life, supplies a conclusive answer to the scoffing question of Satan, "Doth Job fear God for nought?"—*Rev. Sir E. Bayley.*

[16974] It is not the first time in the history of the world that the majority of religious professors have been wrong. The solitary thinker, the philosopher, the heretic, the forlorn monk, the rejected of his day, has been sometimes, even in spite of many errors, in the right. That little group in that unknown land of Uz, who tried to silence the one among them who was in his wild cries and low wails the herald and the apostle of a truth that was one day to be embodied in the symbol of Christ's religion—they warn us against thinking that truth is always to be found on the side of numbers, that the God of truth marches always with the largest battalions. How startling to those who heard them, how instructive to us who read them, are the words which we shall find when next we meet: "Ye who have been so earnest, so rigid in justifying My ways, and asserting My righteousness; ye have not spoken the thing that is right, as My servant Job hath."—*Dean Bradley.*

XVIII. THE DIVINE REWARD OF SUFFERING PATIENCE.

[16975] It was an honour put on Job, and likewise a testimony of his meek and loving

spirit, that he prayed for his friends. Nor can we have stronger proof that our prayers and intercessions for others, especially for our offending brethren, are acceptable to God, than what is here related. For *then* "the Lord turned the captivity of Job," when his resentment against his accusers was extinguished, and he put up to heaven charitable petitions for them. The poor sufferer was restored to health, abundance, and prosperity. He received twice as much property as he had before possessed, so that his latter end was better than his beginning. The Lord gave him favour amongst an extensive acquaintance, a very large property, a numerous issue, and an honourable old age. Thus the Lord casteth down, and raiseth up; and, "Oh that men would praise the Lord for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men!" It is delightful to trace the dealings of God towards His people, and their faith in Him, which are the same in all ages. The very truths that supported Job under his sorrows remain to the present day, firm as the pillars of heaven, an unshaken basis of confidence for the people of God.—*E. Copley.*

XIX. HOMILETICAL HINTS.

I Special lessons.

(1) *The revelation of man to himself is an essential condition of religious progress.*

[16976] A man may be a good man, a thoroughly religious man, and yet may know but little of his own true nature. It was so with Job. It was well that Job should be what he was, an upright, God-fearing man; but it was not well that he should remain *where* he was; and if we read the Book of Job as a true story of the Divine training of a soul, we see in it how wonderfully God overruled the malice of Satan and the false judgments of men to the advancement of the religious life of His servant. Job began as a "perfect man"; he was so by common repute; he was so in a true sense, as a sincere, whole-hearted servant of God; he was so, perhaps, in his own estimation. His religion was genuine, but it was too superficial; his faith was true, but he had not dug deep to the firm rock beneath. Thus when trial came it shook him to the very centre of his being; but it taught him much that he did not know before; it taught him that unsuspected evil lay concealed within; it taught him that there was a "law of sin in his members," from which he needed deliverance.—*Rev. Sir E. Bayley.*

[16977] It is an essential condition of religious progress that we know in what such progress consists, and that we know well the true point of departure. A deep conviction of sin lies at the foundation of all real spiritual growth; our first great lesson is the lesson of humility; self-knowledge teaches us what we are; and, thus instructed, we know what we ought to become.—*Ibid.*

(2) *The revelation of God to man is the crowning blessedness of the religious life.*

[16978] Job could not anticipate the revelation of the gospel, "This is life eternal, that they might know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent;" he could not antedate the Saviour's words, "I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes;" but he could bring to his Father in heaven the teachableness of a little child, and he could approach Him in the spirit of believing prayer. He did this, and God revealed Himself to him, as he was able to bear it.—*Ibid.*

[16979] We must not expect to find in Job the advanced knowledge of a later age; we may have to give up the famous passage, "I know that my Redeemer liveth," as a prophecy of the incarnation of the Son of God, and of the resurrection from the dead. But Job evidently knew God as the bountiful Giver, the wise Administrator, the righteous Judge; and, although he felt himself unable to interpret the Divine action, his faith assured him that all was well ordered, and that God would assuredly avenge His own elect. All this Job had known for years; and if he now knew it as he had not known it before, it was not so much that God had taught him new truth, as that He had given him increased powers of vision with which to apprehend the old. I know not that we need hope for more than this. It is not new truths that we want, but rather new power to grasp the old ones. The revelation of God in Christ is made to all, and what we require is that God should "shine in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."—*Ibid.*

(3) *The discipline of trial is both needful and salutary in the Divine education.*

[16980] You know how the Christian Scriptures abound with sayings about the necessity of disappointments, the uses of adversity, and the glory of suffering.—How full they are of exhortations to be patient, to endure, to be steadfast—all implying our need of discipline. How sublimely, too, they teach us the true secret of endurance, in the life of Him "who, though a Son, learned obedience in the things that He suffered." In this light we can understand why God makes life a trial. Our characters must be tested. There are evil tendencies in us which remain concealed and unknown, until we are tried—tendencies to a low, grovelling selfishness, which almost rejoices in another's pain—capacities for the darkest sins, which may burst into action in moments of passion. We fancy we hold the reins of our natures. We think we are strong, and rejoice in our fancied strength. And then God sends us trials, disappointments, bitter lessons of sorrow, and under their startling light we discover our weakness and evil. We grow earth-bound, become wrapped in life's transient interests;

God sends us suffering, and in the long, lonely watchings of pain, we catch glimpses of eternal realities.—*Rev. E. Hull.*

[16981] Job was no more than a man; a man of like passions with us; a man as weak and full of infirmity as we; a man who, before he was tried, had no more of the hero apparent about him than ourselves; who, when tried, had no other support than is promised to us, and promised to us in a higher degree than to him. All the strength and tenderness that formed the original character of Job are slumbering in the calm depths of your own untroubled heart. Whether circumstances will ever occur to you that will exhibit these sublime qualities, we cannot tell. But heroism consists not in showing these qualities, but in having them; not in seeming great, but in being so. Act well your part. Do each day's duties well. Bear each day's trials patiently. Encounter each day's conflicts bravely. And, above all, live in prayer and faith, and love toward God; that will strengthen the weakest character, and give depth to the shallowest; and then, without ever rising above, or sinking beneath, your present station, you may be "a hero in life's strife." But changes may come. Joy may pass away; for her hand is ever on her lips, bidding adieu! Friends may be taken; for God hath sold the forest unto death, and His axe even now is at the root of the trees. What is sweet may become bitter; what is bright may become dark; life may be a weariness, and, like Job, you may "long for death, and dig for it as for hid treasure." But, even then, trust in God such as his will support you.

"Oh, fear not, in a world like this,
And thou shalt know ere long—
Know how sublime a thing it is
To suffer, and be strong!"

—*Rev. F. Greeves.*

[16982] "Troubled on every side, yet not distressed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed;" ours may be a life of tribulation, passed in the deepest depths of personal affliction; but the end is sure. We fight upon the winning side. Sorrow shall soon give place to joy, darkness to light, and the cry of distress be exchanged for the shout of victory.—*Rev. Sir E. Bayley.*

(4) *Affliction should bring us nearer to the mercy-seat in prayer and supplication.*

[16983] "Is any among you afflicted? let him pray." Don't argue about your afflictions; for in that case it is likely to fasten and perpetuate the impression on your hearts that God is dealing hardly with you, and driving you beyond the reach of all consolation and all hope. Don't rise up like Jonah, nor attempt to fix your undivided attention on the blasted gourd lying all withered around you. For in that case you may be ready to exclaim, as he did, "I do well to be angry." Take your heaviest trials to

the mercy-seat. Spread them out before God. Deal with Him, not as with a task-master, but a loving Father. Ask Him to solve your doubts, to cast light upon your darkness, to aid you amid your helplessness, and to reveal to you why it is that He has been afflicting you, what defective grace He is seeking to supply, what wayward tendency He is seeking to correct, what besetting sin He is seeking to subdue. Remember that there is a need-be for every affliction that He sends; and neither speak unadvisedly with your lips, nor charge God foolishly. It may be a bitter medicine that He pours into your cup; but He does not do it recklessly, nor without some good reason, or with the design of harming you.—*Rev. E. Hull.*

2 Important inferences.

[16984] Innocence and piety are no defence against Satanic influence, personal afflictions, and the misconceptions and reproaches of both enemies and friends. To do well and suffer reproach is characteristic of the Christian.—*E. Copley.*

[16985] Outward prosperity or adversity affords no criterion of character, nor of the Divine approbation or displeasure. Job was equally the servant, the friend, the child of God, when he sat bemoaning himself on the dunghill, despised and persecuted, as when he was exalted in prosperity, and surrounded by affectionate relatives and obsequious attendants.—*Ibid.*

[16986] Integrity of heart and purity of conscience form the best basis upon which the afflicted mind can rest in adversity. Under all the complicated trials of human life, all the unkindness of friends, and all the reproach of enemies, what delightful support and consolation are derived from the consciousness, "My witness is in heaven, and my record is on high!" (Job xvi. 19.) "He knoweth the way that I take; when He hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold" (Jobxxiii. 10).—*Ibid.*

[16987] We have no right to arraign the sovereignty of the Divine Being. When the wicked prosper, and unaccountable calamities attend the righteous, we are too apt to reply against our Maker, and say, "What doest thou? Is this equitable and right?" But humble submission ever becomes creatures like ourselves, so blind, so ignorant, so guilty. Jehovah has reasons for His conduct, though we cannot perceive them. He orders all things according to the counsel of His own will. Nothing is left to the decision of chance; nor anything decreed but what equally consists with rectitude, wisdom, and love. If we trust in God with an unshaken confidence, like that of Job, when he said, "Though He slay me: yet will I trust in Him;" in the furnace of adversity we shall not only be preserved from destruction, but shall emerge with a brighter lustre and with a higher degree of purity.—*Ibid.*

[16988] In the conferences of Job and his friends we see the ill effects of bitter religious contention; these four pious men, it has been well observed, argued together till, becoming angry, they censured and condemned each other, and uttered many irreverent things about the Divine character and government; and, having lost their temper, would have lost their labour, and been more than ever at variance, if another method had not been taken to decide the controversy.—*Ibid.*

[16989] However upright and excellent the character and actions before men, and though, under certain circumstances, persons may justly and properly plead their innocence and rectitude; yet, before God, the best have nothing, are nothing, but meanness, vileness, and guilt. Self-abasement is ever attendant on a perception of the Divine glory, and is the precursor of advancement, and of the signal favours of heaven (Job xlii.).—*Ibid.*

PART B.

JEWISH ERA.

DIVISION I.
EARLY PERIOD.

(Abraham to Moses, B.C. 1996-1571 : 425 years.)

SYLLABUS.

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PART B.

JEWISH ERA.

ABRAHAM.

I. THE SPECIAL EMINENCE AND RENOWN OF THIS PATRIARCH.

- 1 No other character in history, sacred or profane, has left such a broad mark on the world.

[16990] When one looks closely into the course of revelation in Holy Scripture the name of Abraham appears to tower over the centuries. In point of fact it meets none to excel or rival it till the Divine name of Jesus Christ Himself is reached. The words of Jesus, "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it," implied this much, whatever more they might import, that the call and covenant of Abraham formed the first step in a long series, of which the last was the advent of Messiah. Across the intervening ages, during which the promises made to Abraham were slowly ripening, the chosen father and his far greater seed look at one another. What lay between them was mainly covered by the temporary episode of the Mosaic Law. That interval of the law is explained by St. Paul to have been an interpolation. It could neither annul nor invalidate the covenant made with Abraham.—*Rev. O. Dykes, D.D.*

- 2 Abraham opens the second great chapter of the Bible.

[16991] There are four great chapters of the Bible. The first, Adamic, having to do with men in homes. The second, Abrahamic, having to do with men in tribes, nascent nations. The third, Mosaic, having to do with men in nations, in all the exigencies and experiences of national life. The fourth, Christian, having to do with men as members of a universal community, subjects of a universal kingdom, through which the human opens out into a wider world. Here then is order—a grand and beautiful order, which has an evidence of its own which no special criticism of parts will find it easy to destroy. Abraham opens the second chapter, the tribal, and is perhaps the grandest figure in the Old Testament history. By an act of sublime obedience and trust he made himself the father of the spiritual servants of the Most High God in all ages of the world. Moses was, no doubt,

a larger and abler man; one of the greatest of the rulers of mankind. But there was a depth of loyal obedience and trust in Abraham which make him spiritually the head even of Moses. Without Abraham the mission of Moses had been impossible; and it was on Abraham's faith that Moses really rested his own. It was the God of Abraham whom Moses knew and served, and because he was the God of Abraham (Exod. iii. 1-10). Moses went on full and rich traditions. Abraham had but dim and feeble traditions to go upon. He had to establish, by making his will a living sacrifice to God, that vital relation between God and His people on which Moses built up his legislation, and God claimed and won their trust. Abraham was the great leader. Even Moses was but a disciple.—*Baldwin Brown.*

- 3 With him continuous history may be said to begin.

[16992] When one looks back to the dim beginning of history, the very first figure which stands forth in full outline is that of "Abram the Hebrew." It is true that in those chapters of our oldest record—the Book of Genesis—which refer to a still earlier period, two events at least are related with some minuteness—the fall and the flood. But these are only single events. Before Abram, no individual life has been preserved with any completeness. No man in all these misty millenniums, before or after the deluge, stands before us in such historical fulness of portraiture that we can be said to know him as the great men of later story are known. Adam is little more than a name for a common progenitor, who fell. Noah is the just man who escaped the flood. Names still more shadowy, like Cain or Abel, Enoch or Nimrod, are scarcely anything else than names. A far larger space in Scripture has been devoted to the single life of Abram than to all previous generations put together. His personal character, the details of his domestic affairs, his migrations, revelations, and trials, are all known with unusual minuteness. In the long series not only of Biblical biographies, but of the world's great lives, his is really the first. With him may almost be said to commence the revelation of Divine grace to mankind.—*Rev. O. Dykes, D.D.*

II. HIS PARENTAGE AND EARLY HISTORY.

[16993] Descending from Shem, Abraham stands tenth among "the fathers" after the flood. He was a son—apparently the third and youngest—of Terah, the others being Haran and Nahor. The family, or perhaps more correctly the tribe or clan of Terah, resided in Chaldea, which is the southern part of Babylonia. "Ur of the Chaldees," as recently again discovered, was one of the oldest, if not the most ancient, among the cities of Chaldea. It lies about six miles away from the river Euphrates, and, curious to relate, is at present somewhere near one hundred and twenty-five miles from the Persian Gulf, though it is supposed that at one time it was actually washed by its waters, the difference being accounted for by the rapid deposit of what becomes soil, or of *alluvium*, as it is called. Thus Abram must in his youth have stood by the seashore, and seen the sand innumerable, to which his posterity in after ages was likened. Another figure, under which his posterity is described, must have been equally familiar to his mind. It is well known that the brilliancy of a starlit sky in the East, and especially where Abram dwelt, far exceeds anything which we witness in our latitudes. Possibly this may have first led in those regions to the worship of the heavenly bodies. And Abram must have been the more attracted to their contemplation, as the city in which he dwelt was "wholly given" to that idolatry; for the real site of Ur has been ascertained from the circumstance that the bricks still found there bear the very name of *Hur* on them. Now this word points to *Hurki*, the ancient moon-god, and Ur of the Chaldees was the great "Moon-city," the very centre of the Chaldean moon-worship! The most remarkable ruins of that city are those of the old moon-temple of Ur, which from the name on the bricks are computed to date from the year 2000 before Christ. Thus bricks that are thirty-eight centuries old have now been brought forward to bear witness to the old city of Abraham, and to the tremendous change that must have passed over him when, in faith upon the Divine Word, he obeyed its command.—*Rev. A. Edersheim, D.D.*

III. THE GENERAL SPIRITUALITY, UPRIGHTNESS, AND DIGNITY OF HIS LIFE.

1 In its religious aspects.

[16994] Such daily, intimate, and loving communion did this grand saint maintain with heaven, that God calls him His "friend;" and honouring his faith with a higher than any earthly title, the Church has crowned him "Father of the Faithful." He lived on terms of fellowship with God such as had not been seen since the days of Eden. Voices addressed him from the skies; angels paid visits to his tent; and visions of celestial glory hallowed his lowly couch and mingled with his nightly

dreams. He was a man of prayer, and therefore he was a man of power. Setting us an example that we should follow his steps—thus, to revert to language borrowed from the stateliest of Lebanon's cedar, thus was he "fair in his greatness and in the length of his branches, for his root was by the great waters."—*Rev. T. Guthrie, D.D.*

[16995] Each important transaction of life was entered on by Abraham in a pious spirit, and hallowed by religious exercises. His tent was a moving temple. His household was a pilgrim church. Wherever he rested, whether by the venerable oak of Mamre, or on the olive slopes of Hebron, or on the lofty, forest-crowned ridge of Bethel, an altar rose; and his prayers went up with its smoke to heaven.—*Anon.*

[16996] Abraham was in one sense a model man of the world; a keen and able chieftain: rich, prosperous; with flocks, herds, and retainers; mixing with lofty courtesy with the men of the world around him, and able to make the weight of his arm felt when he was called to strike. And yet he was not of the world. That is, he had always a higher end in view. His prosperity came by the way; his supreme concern, with which nothing came in comparison, was to do the will of God, and walk in His way. He cared deeply for nothing else. God *was* in all his thoughts, the world was not. Wherever he had a tent and an altar, he was well. What came to him by the active use of faculty he accepted thankfully; but his life was to commune with, to serve, to walk with, God, his everlasting Friend.—*Baldwin Brown.*

2 In its domestic aspects.

(1) *Conjugal.*

[16997] Like other patriarchs he was a polygamist; nor was there at that period of the world any revealed law either against polygamy or against marriage within the nearer degrees of consanguinity. Sarah, the wife of his youth, was distinguished for her personal beauty, and well deserved to be the mother of one of the most distinguished races. And who does not see that his attachment to her was strong and ardent, and that nothing quenched the flame? In youth, in middle age, in advanced life she was never separated from him; wherever he wandered, and whatever his trials, he had her affection, her respect, and even reverence; while his love for her was exalted by his piety.—*Rev. G. Spring, D.D.*

[16998] That beautiful scene between Abraham and the sons of Heth, when, on the death of Sarah, he was in treaty with them for the field of Ephron, the Hittite, for a burying place for her and her family, presents one of the finest pictures recorded in history. An old man, a stranger in a strange land; yet he could not forget what was due to himself and to the memory of her he loved. Though he well knew that God had destined his posterity to be the

sovereigns of that land, he had not as yet a spot upon it large enough for a sepulchre. The singular address and dignity which marked his conduct, when, in the day of his mourning, "he stood up before his dead, and bowed himself to the people of the land," honouring, yet declining their courtesy, was in every view characteristic of this noble man. It is not every incident that would have thus brought out his character, and showed the dignity of his grief. Nor is it every good man that would have demeaned himself thus. It is *Abraham* throughout. The striking feature throughout the whole is the delicacy and wisdom of a great mind, bowed under the weight of sorrow. The marks are strong of an accomplished and venerable man. Those who are most acquainted with the workings of a mind like his will best perceive its beauty. Next to the scene where he offers up the child of promise, it is perhaps the finest moral lesson of the patriarchal age, neither overacting, nor, at an hour when much was likely to be forgotten, leaving anything undone.—*Ibid.*

(2) *Paternal.*

[16999] Excellence of character appears in Abraham's conduct toward his children and slaves. His family was large; he was the great Prince of the Oriental country. In addition to his children, he had three hundred slaves born in his house, beside others that were bought with his money. There is no more important duty than the religious education and government of such a household, nor is there any more difficult, especially if it be, as Abraham's immediate family was, a *family of sons*. Yet we may be allowed to say, that no parent, and no master, ever performed this duty more faithfully than Abraham. God himself declares, "For I know Abraham, that he will command his children, and his household after him, that they shall keep the way of the Lord to do justice and judgment." That large household were all dedicated to God, stamped with the seal of His covenant, and carefully instructed in the truths and duties of piety. Nor was his care in consulting the temporal prosperity of his children less remarkable. For the children of Hagar and Keturah he made bountiful provision during his lifetime, and sent them away into the East country; while, in relation to Isaac, his great solicitude was to see him commence the world as a godly young man, and in such alliances as were befitting the child of promise. Fearful lest he should be ensnared by some of the wealthy and accomplished daughters of Chaldæa, or by some princely daughter of the idolatrous Canaanites, he does not rest until he sees him the affianced husband of the daughter of his brother Nahor, still in Mesopotamia, and the companion of his pilgrimage when they left Chaldæa. It is not easy to find, either in sacred or profane history, a more instructive and beautiful example of a Christian father than in the character of Abraham.—*Ibid.*

3 In its social aspects.

[17000] Good men there are who are great only in great actions and splendid scenes and enterprises. Abraham's character was formed upon a different model. He knew how to adjust the apparently conflicting claims of heaven and earth, without doing injustice to either. He felt his obligation to his fellow-creatures, and was, indeed, the greater saint for being so accomplished and dignified a man. It was not the coarseness of savage life to which he was accustomed, but to a state of society whose refined intercourse often brought out the generosity and delicacy of his character.—*Ibid.*

[17001] With the single exception of his want of ingenuousness toward the king of Egypt and Gerah, we do not find in Abraham an instance either of faulty or negligent deportment. There was nothing ill-judged or ill-timed, nothing offensive, nothing out of place, and nothing that might have been better done. There was no arrogance or ostentation; no unbecoming elation of mind, and no air of haughtiness; no embarrassment, and no expression of gratified or mortified pride. In his conduct towards others he was the pattern of propriety and decorum, and to an extent which minds of less generous and delicate texture do not always appreciate.—*Ibid.*

IV. THE THREE INSTANCES IN ABRAHAM'S HISTORY WHICH MOST PROMINENTLY DISPLAY THE GRANDEUR OF HIS FAITH IN ITS SUCCESSIVE GRADATIONS.

1 His faith was manifested in a great degree by the promptitude with which he obeyed the Divine call to emigrate.

"The Lord had said unto Abraham, Get thee out of the country . . . unto a land that I will shew thee. . . . So Abraham departed" (Gen. xii. 1, 4).

[17002] This is one of the sublimest acts of faith recorded in the spiritual history of mankind. "He went out, not knowing whither he went." Our acts of faith rest on the recorded experience of 4000 years. Age by age the evidence has accumulated. For a soul in these days to distrust the God whose leading of humanity is here recorded, is as though the eye should distrust the sun. But Abraham began to make the experience for us. What had he to rest upon but pure faith—the clear sense that a Divine voice was speaking, and that there was one thing to be done, at all hazards, at all costs—to obey. The greatest fact in the past which his soul could rest upon was an awful one—the deluge. He would have to stand by and see a fiery deluge burst upon and overwhelm his world. But he had one thing to guide him, one only—the Divine hand; and by faith "he obeyed, and went out, not knowing whither he went."—*Ibid.*

[17003] When Abram turned his face to the dreaded desert, which stretched, wide and in-

hospitable, between him and the nearest seats of men, he gave his first evidence of that trust in the unseen Eternal One, leading to unquestioning, heroic obedience, which must even then have formed the basis of his character, and of which his later life was to furnish so many illustrious examples. It was thus one of the great moments of history when that primitive caravan of shepherds set out from Haran. A single man and his childless wife set out together upon a strange quest. They sought a land, they knew not where; they sought a seed, they knew not how; they sought a blessing, they knew not what. One only of their kindred, an orphan nephew, clave to their fortunes. With them they carried all they had—household gear piled on the camels' backs, and household bondsmen tending the droves of cattle. Who does not feel that the grandeur of that moment centres in the loyalty of one human soul to one word of God?—*Rev. O. Dykes, D.D.*

[17004] With his religious principles and emotions, and believing as he believed, he could not act otherwise than as he acted. The world was an idolatrous and disobedient world. God's object in calling him out from it was to raise up a different and an obedient community, "a peculiar people above all people." It could have been for no useful purpose to Himself that God had thus made these revelations, unless He designed to mould his character and control his conduct. They were not lessons in moral science which his Great Teacher was reading to him; they were not merely abstract and theological truths; they were commands and promises, words to be verified by facts, and directions to be complied with. They were self-denying precepts, and such as brought his own heart and will and conduct to the test. They were to "get out of his country and kindred," and go he knew not where; they were to subject himself to an outward and bloody rite, the import of which he could not understand; they were to cast out of his house those whom he was bound to love and care for. Yet Abraham did not hesitate to obey.—*Rev. G. Spring, D.D.*

[17005] The command was quite definite in its terms: "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee;" leaving it, however, as yet undecided which was to be the place of his final settlement. This uncertainty must have been an additional and, in the circumstances, a very serious difficulty in the way of Abram's obedience. But the word of promise reassured him. It should be distinctly marked, that on this, as on every other occasion in Abram's life, his faith determined his obedience.—*Rev. A. Edersheim.*

[17006] He is called to leave his country and his kindred—called to go he knew not where; called to be he knew not what. Nor does he hesitate. He instantly responds; repairs

to Canaan; and lives and dies in the confident belief that it shall belong to him and his. Yet he found no place there to rest the sole of his foot—his weary foot—but was tossed about during a long lifetime here and there, like a seaweed which is floated hither and thither on the wandering billows, cast on the shore by this tide and swept away by that. Of Abraham and his whole life in the land of Canaan, of every journey he undertook, every march he made, and every footprint he left on its soil or on its sands, it might be literally as well as figuratively said, it was true of him in respect of this world as well as of the next, as it never was of any other man, "He walked by faith and not by sight."—*Rev. T. Guthrie, D.D.*

2 His faith was manifested in a still greater degree by his acceptance of the truth concerning the seed of promise.

[17007] The son of promise had to be the gift of superhuman grace. Not only free-born and a lawful heir, he must be also a child of faith, and a child of miracle. Now, when Abram entered Canaan he was seventy-five years of age, and his wife was sixty-five. As we reckon human age, neither was any longer young; yet they retained vitality enough, according to the slower decay of that long-lived period, to cherish a hope of offspring. Such a hope must have expired as the slow years went past. Five-and-twenty years had now elapsed since then. During the last thirteen of these, Sarai had so far surrendered her expectation of becoming a mother, that she had been content to see her husband settle his affections and his hopes on the son of the Egyptian. By this time, a child of their marriage was become, according to the usual laws of life, a physical impossibility. Nothing short of His power, who plants in human bodies their vital force at the beginning, could re-create youthful vigour in the exhausted frames of this pair. It is when all this is remembered that the strength of Abraham's faith appears so extraordinary.—*Rev. O. Dykes, D.D.*

[17008] It is easier for men to believe in the unlikely when they have a strong reason for desiring it. Abraham was told to expect, not the unlikely, but the unnatural, and that when he had not only ceased to desire it, but had long settled his desires elsewhere. To let Ishmael go in order to look for another, when it seemed flat against nature and reason that any other should be born, was the severest strain to which even this athlete of the religious life, this hero of faith, had yet been subjected. In that plaintive, clinging cry of fatherhood, "Oh that Ishmael might live before Thee!" one hears with what a painful rending of heart the man tore himself loose from the knotted loves and anticipations of a dozen years, to school himself into the expectation of a gift, new, strange, and unheard of—the gift of a miraculous child.—*Ibid.*

3 His faith reached its culminating point of unequalled trust in the virtual sacrifice of Isaac.

Abraham stands before us in this stupendous trial as the noblest example on record of earnest faith tested by suffering obedience.

[17009] We here contemplate the venerable patriarch under the most trying circumstance of his life. It might seem, when his obedience, faith, and patience had been so long tried, and at length rewarded in the fulfilment of the promise, that he would enjoy a quiet old age; but this was not the case; neither past afflictions nor present enjoyments are any security against new trials. God now tried Abraham, not to inform Himself, for He knew what was in His servant, and had Himself imparted that exalted faith, by which Abraham was enabled to stand the fiery trial; but that his faith and obedience being tried, might be found to praise and honour and glory, and handed down as an illustrious example to all succeeding generations. The nature of the trial was most peculiar, as applied to the tenderest feelings of the parent, and the graces of the saint.—*E. Copley.*

[17010] In what manner the command of heaven was communicated to Abraham, we are not informed. It was unquestionably conveyed with so much clearness and certainty, as left him no possibility of doubting from whom it came. It appears to have been in the night season—probably when, as on a former occasion, God had “caused a deep sleep, and a horror of great darkness to fall upon him.” What a stroke to the fond paternal heart! Every word in the oracle seems calculated to awaken some painful feeling, and to increase the difficulty of compliance.—*Rev. H. Hunter, D.D.*

[17011] The same indefiniteness which had added such difficulty to Abraham’s first call to leave his father’s house marked this last trial of the obedience of his faith. He was only told to get him “into the land of Moriah,” where God would further tell him upon which of the mountains around he was to bring his strange “burnt-offering.” Luther has pointed out, in his own terse language, how to human reason it must have seemed as if either God’s promise would fail, or else this command be of the devil, and not of God. From this perplexity there was only one issue—to bring “every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.” And Abraham “staggered not” at the word of God; doubted it not; but was “strong in faith,” “accounting”—yet not knowing it—“that God was able to raise up Isaac even from the dead; from whence he also received him in a figure.” For we must not detract from the trial by importing into the circumstances our knowledge of the issue. Abraham had absolutely no assurance and no knowledge beyond that of his present duty. All he had to lay hold upon was the previous promise, and the character and faith-

fulness of the covenant God, who now bade him offer this sacrifice.—*Rev. A. Edersheim.*

[17012] A little excursion by the pious chief and his son for purposes of devotion may have been too ordinary an incident to do more than gently stir the monotony of their pastoral life. Yet few passages in literature carry a deeper pathos than the words which tell how, in the fresh dawn, the aged lord of that camp crept away on foot out of the midst of his retainers’ tents, while the cattle, marshalled with merry call and tinkling bell, were going forth in long strings to their several grazing-grounds, and all the landscape grew busy with cheerful stir. How willingly would he have purchased, by the lives of all these lowing herds and bleating flocks, that one dear life which was going forth at his side to return no more! Not to a single soul that we know of did the old man dare to confide his purpose. The entreaties of a mother less resolute than himself might have overborne his firmness. The quieter anguish of a young and gentle heart, shrinking from too early death, might have proved more than he could endure. Like one who carries within him a guilty secret, must he steal, as it were, from his home—the only wretched heart in all that pleasant camp; more wretched for this, that he must dissemble his wretchedness. . . . Two slow days of footsore walking along rugged paths, up hill and down dale; two still slower nights spent in sleepless thought, while beside him on the ground slumbered his unsuspecting boy; . . . these must have brought such tortures of delay as principle alone, and not impulse, could sustain.—*Rev. O. Dykes, D.D.*

V. THE COMPARATIVELY MINOR EXCELLENCIES OF HIS CHARACTER ANALYZED AND PERSONALLY APPLIED.

1 Peaceableness and generosity of disposition.

As displayed in his conduct towards Lot.

[17013] As the older man and leader of the expedition, Abram might not unfairly have selected for his own use the richest pasture-ground. But this would have ill become his nobler temper. Still less would it have served those ends for which he had come to Canaan, to leave the free air of these lonely hills for a stifling, exuberant valley, or to exchange his tent and altar among the simple highlanders for the lot of a citizen in Sodom. So Lot made his choice and went his way. One more effort of self-denial had completed the rupture which his uncle had made in leaving Haran. One more victory over temptation had purified the confidence of Abram in his God.—*Ibid.*

2 Energy, courage, and disinterestedness.

As displayed in his expedition against the five kings.

[17014] Abram was a man of peace, yet he was no coward. When a just occasion called it forth, it was found that Abram, the generous,

the peaceful, the contemplative, the pious, possessed a spirit of true valour and promptitude. On hearing of Lot's capture by the five kings Abram immediately armed his own trained servants, three hundred and eighteen men, born in his house, and went forth to assist a just cause; not only to rescue his relative, but to resist the power of a cruel, foreign oppressor. Thus in Abram, as a patriot or lover of his country, the promise began to be fulfilled, that he should be blessed and made a blessing. The prosperity with which Providence had favoured his household was made subservient to the general good. His friends, Mamre, Eshcol, and Aner also brought together all the forces they could muster, and joined in pursuit of the haughty conquerors and attacked them in the dead of the night. Thus unexpectedly assailed, the enemy fled in confusion, and was pursued from Dan to Hobah in Syria, a distance of about eighty miles. Chedorlaomer, and all the kings that were with him, were slain in battle; and Lot and his family and substance, as well as all the other spoil of Sodom, rescued and brought back uninjured.—*E. Copley.*

[17015] Abram was far from indulging any ambitious views, or, it appears he might easily have followed up his victory over the five kings, and made himself master of the whole country; but in rescuing his kinsman, and serving his country, he had achieved his object, and with his victorious band he peaceably returned homewards. As he went he was met and congratulated by the king of Sodom, who pressed on his acceptance the whole of the booty he had recovered; but with a dignified disinterestedness, worthy of the servant of "the Most High God, possessor of heaven and earth," Abram refused to accept of the smallest share. He obeyed the commands of his heavenly Master, and relied on Him for protection and maintenance; and he would give to no man occasion to say, "I have made Abram rich."—*Ibid.*

[17016] Abraham was peaceful because of his conscious relation to God; in other respects he takes fire, like an Arab sheikh, at the injuries suffered by Lot, and goes to war with the combined kinglings accordingly.—*S. T. Coleridge.*

3 Courteousness and hospitality.

As displayed in his reception of the angel visitants.

[17017] Where shall we find such a pattern of courteousness as Abraham offers for our imitation? He descries three men approaching, making for his tent, toiling along under the broiling heat. Strangers, neither clansmen, nor neighbours, nor friends, they have no claim on him. He may wait their approach, leaving them to solicit his hospitality. Not he. Abraham rises, nay, he runs to meet them; and mingling respect with kindness, courtly manners with the most benevolent intentions, he bows himself to the ground. Not one who says, *The*

favour which is worth the giving is worth the asking, he anticipates their request, and makes offer of his hospitality. But they may fear being burdensome to him. So, to remove any reluctance on their part to accept his kindness, he makes light of it—speaking of what he was about to offer as no tax on his generosity, as but "a morsel of bread." Nor is this all. With that delicate regard to others' feelings which true kindness prompts, he would make it appear that they will oblige him more by accepting, than he does them by offering, his hospitality. "My lord," he says, addressing him who appeared the chief man of the three, "my lord, if now I have found favour in thy sight, pass not away, I pray thee, from thy servant; let a little water be fetched and wash your feet; and rest yourselves under the tree; and I will fetch a morsel of bread, and comfort ye your hearts—after that ye shall pass on." And in a short while the three are seated at an ample board, Abraham giving the finishing touch to his courtesy by respectfully standing beside his guests while they eat.—*Rev. T. Guthrie, D.D.*

[17018] Courteousness is a Christian duty, and nowhere can a better example of it be found than in Abraham's reception of the three strangers—the eight verses of Genesis which relate the story containing a better lesson on true politeness than the whole volume of "Lord Chesterfield's Letters to his Son."—*Ibid.*

[17019] Abraham's courteous demeanour to the three angels who appeared to him on the plains of Mamre is even referred to in the New Testament as the great example and incentive to Christian hospitality.—*Rev. G. Spring, D.D.*

4 Tenderness of heart.

As displayed in his intercession for Sodom.

The holy boldness allied to profound humility characterizing this appeal, and its peculiarly touching pathos.

[17020] The tenderness of Abraham's heart is as remarkable as the loftiness, purity, and sternness of his virtue. Sodom awakens all his pity. Considerations of its enormous guilt are swallowed up in the contemplation of its impending doom. Truest, tenderest type of his own illustrious son, with the spirit that dropped in the tears and flowed in the blood of Jesus, he casts himself between God's anger and the guilty city. He asks, he pleads, he prays for mercy—not that the righteous only be saved, but that the wicked be spared for the sake of the righteous. In his anxiety to save their lives he imperils his own; stands in the way; braves and encounters the danger of turning the Avenger's sword on himself. Once, and again, and again, he puts God's long-suffering patience to the trial. He detains Him; keeps Him listening to new pleas and requests. Like the gallant crew who, moved by the sight of drowning wretches that hang in the shrouds and stretch out their hands for help, after repeated failures to reach the

wreck, venture lifeboat and lives once more amid the roaring breakers, Abraham cries, "Oh, let not my Lord be angry, and I will speak yet but this once; peradventure ten shall be found there?"—*Rev. T. Guthrie, D.D.*

[17021] Throughout the interview the humility of Abraham is quite as remarkable as his courage. He is but "dust and ashes." Once and again, as he presses his plea a step farther after each concession gained, does he deprecate the Divine displeasure against such perseverance. With all this humility, however, there is no hesitation whatever about the terms in which the argument itself is stated. It may be presumptuous in a man to remonstrate with his Judge at all; but there can be no presumption in counting upon the rectitude of the Judge. Without misgiving, therefore, does this simple-hearted man address God in these terms: "That be far from Thee to act after this manner—to slay the righteous with the wicked; and that the righteous should be as the wicked—that be far from Thee. Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?"—*Rev. O. Dykes, D.D.*

[17022] Such shadows from the inequalities of earthly providence, as at a later age fell deep upon the speculative intellect of Job, had not yet fallen on the childlike soul of Abraham. Out of the clear depths of his own conscience he looked up, and in the clear depth of heaven saw a moral nature enthroned over men, at least as upright, fair, and true as his own. Nor did he err in this. It is a wonderful confirmation of man's right to reason from the most certain intuitions of his own moral being to the character and ways of Him who made man, that Jehovah neither resented nor disappointed the appeal of His servant. To each successive question He returned a calm assent: "I will not do it for the sake of so many." As far as the courage or the justice of the man made bold to go, God's higher and more merciful justice went along with him.—*Ibid.*

VI. HIS RECORDED INCONSISTENCIES AS DISPLAYED ON TWO OCCASIONS.

Dissimulation and falsehood.

[17023] Strong as the faith of Abraham always proved in what concerned the kingdom of God, it failed again and again in matters personal to himself. A famine was desolating the land, and, as is still the case with the Bedouin tribes under similar circumstances, Abram and his family "went down into Egypt," which has at all times been the granary of other nations. It does not become us to speculate whether this removal was lawful, without previous special directions from God; but we know that it exposed him to the greatest danger. As we must not underrate the difficulties of the patriarchs, so neither must we overrate their faith and their strength. Abram "was a man of like passions with us," and of like weaknesses. When God spoke to him he believed, and when he believed

then he obeyed. But God had said nothing as yet to him, directly, about Sarai; and, in the absence of any special direction, he seems to have taken the matter into his own hands, after the manner of those times and countries. From Gen. xx. 13 we learn that when he first set out from his father's house, an agreement had been made between the two, that Sarai was to pass as his sister, because, as he said, "the fear of God" was not among the nations with whom they would be brought in contact; and they might slay Abram for his wife's sake. The deceit—for such it really was—seemed scarcely such in their eyes, since Sarai was so closely related to her husband that she might almost be called his sister. In short, as we all too oft-times do, it was deception, commencing with self-deception; and though what he said might be true in the letter, it was false in the spirit of it. But we must not imagine that Abram was so heartless as to endanger his wife for the sake of his own safety. On the contrary, it seemed the readiest means of guarding her honour also; since, if she were looked upon as the sister of a mighty chief, her hand would be sought, and certain formalities have to be gone through, which would give Abram time to escape with his wife. This is not said in apology, but in explanation of the matter.—*Rev. A. Edersheim, D.D.*

[17024] There is no occasion to deny, as certain apologists have unwisely done, the guilt of the patriarch's cowardice and falsehood. To call his wife his sister was a falsehood, although in the letter it was half a truth, for it was a suppression of the essential fact with a design to deceive. . . . Not even the excuse can be offered of a sudden impulse, for the scheme was pre-arranged between husband and wife before they entered Egypt. Even after this lesson it was repeated under analogous circumstances some twenty years afterwards. It was too faithfully imitated by his feebler son. When all this is considered, it will perhaps be judged that the moral strength of this great man lay in his power of yielding an implicit obedience to direct instructions from heaven; whereas when these failed him, so that he was left to his unguided impulses, he showed himself by no means uniformly strong or true. Such occasions, indeed, were of rare occurrence; but on these occasions he did betray a certain cowardly craftiness, which runs, like a discreditable strain, through the blood of his posterity.—*Rev. O. Dykes, D.D.*

VII. SUMMARY OF HIS CHARACTER VIEWED AS A WHOLE.

- 1 The unexampled honour attaching to the name of Abraham is due to the lofty order of his religious life.

[17025] Perhaps the impression which lingers longest on the mind after close contact with the personality of this saint, is that no man ever won for himself an equally honourable place

among men by qualities which are so imitable and within the reach of all. Wherever his foot trod or his fame spread, the homage of numberless generations has elevated the Hebrew exile of Ur almost into a divinity. In the bosom of "Father Abraham" it was the aspiration of the pious Jew to repose after his decease (Luke xvi. 23); and the mere circumstance of inheriting his blood appeared sufficient in the eyes of multitudes to secure them a passport into heaven (Luke iii. 8; John viii. 23). Apostles of such opposite type as St. Paul and St. James united in commending his example to the imitation of primitive Christians, even in an age which had seen the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. The mediæval Church, far as it departed from the lessons which his faith taught and from the simple worship which he practised, yet canonized Abraham and him only among Old Testament worthies, by no decree, but by popular consent. To devout Mussulmans, all over the lands of Islam, the name of Abraham ranks in the long calendar of accepted prophets, as second only to the name of Mohammed himself. Whence has such widespread fame been gained? The reply is a remarkable one. All this unexampled honour has been won in a way equally without example, through the elevation of his religious character. Not as a leader of emigration; not as a prosperous emir; not as a captain of fighting men; not even as an ancestor of nations; neither as a witness to new truths; nor as the confessor of an ancient faith. All these capacities he sustained, and in some of them he has scarcely a rival. Yet it was through none of these that he achieved his far-spread and lasting reputation. It was simply the purity and nobility of his personal piety which made him what he is. He was chosen to become, and he was fit to be, the friend of God. In spiritual attainment as well as in order of priority he deserved his title of the Father of the Faithful.—*Ibid.*

- 2 Such was the religious discipline of his thoughts that God's Word exerted more influence over him than all his previous conceptions, all the habits of an ungodly world, all sight or sense.

[17026] Abraham "was called the *friend of God*," than which no higher distinction can be conferred on mortal man. Beyond all the men of his age, his mind was linked by indissoluble bonds to the Great Author of his being; moved in a sphere where it held habitual intercourse with his Maker, and received its strongest impressions and most vivid and permanent impulses from this hallowed correspondence. If "he that walketh with wise men shall be wise," does not that man become wise who walks with God? Abraham's character obviously bore this colouring and these hues of heaven. He had acquainted himself with God, and well knew how worthy he was of His entire confidence. Though educated in an idolatrous land, and where the sottish and infatuated mind of man

sought its decisions from the oracles of the heathen, he sought and became imbued with the teachings of unerring wisdom. It is recorded concerning him, *Abraham believed God*. This is a compendious but a true description of his character, and no doubtful index of the man. Such, indeed, was his faith in God, that even under the Christian dispensation, the Apostle Paul awards him the honour of being "the father of believers." From the hour when God first called him from Chaldaea, to the day of his death, . . . no opposing testimony, no delusion, no reasoning, no personal inclinations or interest, and no persuasion nor influence of others, could countervail the word of God.—*Rev. G. Spring, D.D.*

- 3 The great charm of this noble character lies in its union of simplicity with grandeur.

[17027] The patriarch rises like one of those great stones which are found standing alone in the wilderness, so quiet in their age, so unique in their structure, and yet on which, if tradition be believed, angels have rested, where sacrifices have been offered up, and round which, in other days, throngs of worshippers have assembled. His prayers pierce the heavens with the reverent daring of one of the mountain altars of nature. He is at once a shepherd and a soldier. He is true to the living, and jealous of the honour of the ashes of the dead. He is a plain man, dwelling in tents, and yet a prince with men and God. Peace to his large and noble dust, as it reclines near that of his beloved Sarah, in the still cave of Machpelah. He was one of the simple, harmless, elephantine products of an age when man was a giant, and when all the "giants in those days" were not robbers and oppressors.—*Giffilan.*

VIII. ABRAHAM CONSIDERED AS A TYPE OF GOD THE FATHER.

[17028] In reaching the summit of service possible to a creature, Abraham grew of necessity into the nearest likeness to the Divine character which creatures can attain. The path of obedience was a difficult one to tread; but it conducted him, as it must conduct every one who follows it, into close fellowship and similarity with God. The will of God demands nothing from His servant but a parallel service to that which His own love is prepared to render, nor can God's love seek for His friend anything higher than moral likeness to Himself and the power to walk in Divine footsteps. The surrender which Abraham had made at the bidding of Divine love was not only the highest possible for love to make, it was such a surrender as no one but a father has it in his power to offer. Through this particular form of sacrifice, therefore, Abraham rose into the honour of foreshadowing upon earth the sacrifice of the Eternal Father Himself, who is in heaven. What man was ever so like the Father of Jesus as the father of Isaac?—*Rev. O. Dykes, D.D.*

IX. ABRAHAM CONSIDERED AS A TYPE OF GOD THE SON.

1 Points of resemblance.

[17029] Abraham, at God's command, leaving his country and his father's house, points to us obviously Jesus, at the fulness of time, leaving heaven's glory, and the bosom of the Father, and coming into our world, and living a pilgrim and a stranger in it. Abraham, in a land which was his own by the gift and promise of God, nevertheless obtained no fixed residence in it, but wandered about from place to place; Jesus, in a world which He made and upholds, which is His by the most undeniable title, was without a place where to lay His head. Abraham was called the friend of God, and to him God communicated His purposes of mercy and of judgment: Jesus the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, and knows intimately the mind of the Lord, he hath declared Him. With Abraham, God established the political covenants which secured to him and his family the possession of Canaan, and all the temporal and spiritual blessings of a transitory and preparatory economy. Jesus is the Mediator of a better covenant, established upon better promises; even the covenant of redemption, whereby the kingdom of heaven, and eternal life, are made sure to all His spiritual seed.—*Rev. H. Hunter, D.D.*

2 Points of contrast.

[17030] "Who shall declare *his* generation," who saith of Himself, "Before Abraham was, I am?" Abraham was a man of like passions with us, and even the Father of the Faithful stumbled and fell; Jesus was "holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners," and the prince of this world himself, when he came, found nothing in Him. Abraham was ready to offer up Isaac, Christ actually offered Himself, a sacrifice of "a sweet smelling savour unto God." The faith of Abraham could not redeem him from death; the power of Christ triumphed over the grave. The first covenants, being of a temporary nature, having fulfilled their design, are passed away. The New Testament in the blood of Christ, being for everlasting, continues in full force, and shall last while sun and moon endure, nay, when "all these things shall be dissolved."—*Ibid.*

X. HOMILETICAL HINTS.

1 The holy life of Abraham presents a grand example to modern Christians.

[17031] It is certainly remarkable, and it shows how wonderfully independent God's ways with us are all of our "progress" and "civilization," of which we boast so much, that over the vast tract of four thousand years, through periods so immense and so obscure that history hardly finds here and there a thread of light running through them, we yet travel back all that way to find this example of simple-hearted,

practical, and courageous trust in God, overtopping and outshining most of the specimens of Christian faithfulness that we meet in the best modern society. The plain patriarch's experience illustrates, sixty generations beforehand, the Lord's Prayer and the Beatitudes better than thousands among our self-confident, calculating, and over-anxious nominal Christians. We can see how even an apostle of Christ, preaching nothing but justification by the faith of the cross, should point back to Chaldæa, before the law was given by Moses, and say to Christendom, "Why can you not learn the secret of holy living and its blessedness at least from that venerable saint standing there with the light and freshness of the world's morning on his forehead?" Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness.—*Rev. F. Huntington, D.D.*

2 It inculcates the importance and necessity of absolute, unconditional, voluntary self-surrender, and consecration to the will of God.

[17032] True piety, in its more masculine and self-conscious stages, always involves renunciation of natural supports. It does not always require a literal separation from home or friends, but it does require the withdrawal of the heart's deepest dependence from earthly props or ministers, in order to rest in a self-contained and unaided trust upon the Unseen Arm. Abram's emigration teaches by example precisely the same profound and universal lesson of spiritual life which Jesus taught in words: "Whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be My disciple." St. Francis of Assisi, and many like him, have read this evangelical call to renounce the world too literally. Nevertheless, if we would choose and pursue the heavenly country to which God is calling us, there must be in the heart of each of us a virtual leaving of father and mother, a forsaking of all that we have, in order to be Christ's followers. Of this we have the first great type in the emigration of Abram.—*Rev. O. Dykes, D.D.*

[17033] The only way to find comfort in an earthly thing is to surrender it (in a faithful carelessness) into the hands of God. Even in small things there is a great providence. What mysteries there are in every act of God! . . . Abraham, while he exercises his faith, confirms it, and rejoices more to foresee the true Isaac in that place offered to death for his sins, than to see the carnal Isaac preserved from death for the reward of his faith. Whatsoever is dearest to us upon earth is our Isaac; happy are we if we can sacrifice it to God. Those shall never rest with Abraham that cannot sacrifice with Abraham.—*Ep. Hall.*

[17034] To such an absolute sacrifice of everything to the Supreme must sound both unreasonable and unnatural. Even religious men are apt to find the air upon this height of

sacrifice too rare for them to breathe with comfort. It is only at moments of somewhat similar trial, when the Christian is lifted above his usual self-indulgent level, that he can taste a similar blessedness, or feel his heart at one with that ancient saint upon Moriah. None the less does this act of Abraham express the kind of self-surrender which must be natural to any one who perfectly knows God, and is in close friendship with Him, and therefore can repose in Him an unflinching trust that He will act like God. To souls made perfect and set free from the shadows of earth into that vision of the Eternal Face for which it is our present blessedness to long, such a temper of sacrifice as Abraham attained may prove to be not natural only, but easy, and even rapturous. To live for ever on an equal altitude of self-consecration may possibly make part of the felicity as well as of the worship of the saints in God's celestial city.—*Rev. O. Dykes, D.D.*

- 3 The spirit of submissive, cheerful obedience displayed by Abraham in the yielding up of his best beloved, conveys a sublime lesson to bereaved parents.

[17035] When thou hast lost a beloved and only son, whom thou wert bringing up in much wealth, displaying good hopes, himself being the only one to succeed to thine inheritance, do not complain, but give thanks to God, and glorify Him who has taken him; and in this respect thou wilt not be worse than Abraham. For as he gave him to God, when He commanded it, so thou hast not complained when He has taken him.—*Chrysostom.*

- 4 The unswerving character of his faith under the severest tests strikingly enforces the comforting truth that God is able to succour them that are tempted, and to provide "a way of escape."

[17036] With safety may it always be presumed, not only that the wise Lord who guides earthly discipline tries men's virtue for their own profit, but also that He graduates such trials to the strength of virtue which is to be found in each. It concerns His faithfulness to "tempt," indeed, in this beneficent sense of the word, yet at the same time to provide that no servant of His be tempted "above that he is able." With a task so delicate, who could trust any hand less firm or skilful or tender than His own?—*Rev. O. Dykes, D.D.*

ISAAC.

I. INTRODUCTORY.

- 1 The value of Isaac's history.

[17037] Those scenes in human life which make the greatest figure in history are far from being the most beneficial to mankind; neither were the persons, whose names have been transmitted to us with the most renown, and

whose actions have dazzled posterity with their lustre, either the happiest in themselves, or the greatest blessings to the age in which they lived. To constitute one man a hero, how many garments must have been dyed in blood? And what are the acclamations of a triumph but the miserable echo of the cries of the wounded, and the groans of the dying? We trace here the history of a man of peace; of one who was not indeed exempted from his share of the ills which flesh is heir to, but whose afflictions, being private and domestic, were patiently borne by himself, and disturbed not the repose of others; of one who, by the example of his piety and virtues, did more to instruct and to bless mankind than all the conquerors that ever existed, from Nimrod of Assyria down to Frederick of Prussia.—*Rev. H. Hunter, D.D.*

- 2 His connection with the covenants.

(1) *He forms the second link in the Abrahamic covenant.*

[17038] "I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob," is the Lord's own declaration of that threefold cord of the patriarchal dispensation which assigns to each of those holy men an equality of rank and position in the Lord's purposes of mercy to a fallen world. In point of time, there was priority; Abraham was antecedent to Isaac, and Isaac to Jacob; and so, too, as regarded the moral fitness of things, there were both distinction and precedency; the father was before the son, and the son below the father. Yet still, in God's spiritual and eternal covenant, there was neither priority nor precedence. If Abraham be called the father of the faithful, so is Isaac, and so is Jacob; and in this respect "none is afore or after other, none is greater or less than another."—*Rev. B. Bouchier.*

(2) *He forms the second link in the universal covenant.*

[17039] In what does the superiority of this patriarch consist? Evidently, that his predicted birth related to no local, no partial, no solitary purpose—that in that birth was involved the everlasting purpose of Jehovah, the counsel of the Blessed Trinity, before the foundations of the earth were laid, that generations antecedent to Isaac, from the first father of the human race, and every generation that has been born since, or shall be born hereafter, are alike interested in the event. "In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed," was the Lord's promise; and what is the apostle's comment on the words, "Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made, He saith not, 'And to seeds as of many, but as of one, and to thy seed,' which is Christ." It is because Isaac is the second link in that chain of mercy which has been from everlasting to everlasting, which reaches from the throne of the Almighty in heaven to the humblest chamber of the poorest penitent, or the deepest dungeon of a martyr on earth, and which will never be lost throughout the countless ages of eternity.—*Ibid.*

II. POINTS OF CHARACTER TRACED IN THE SEQUENCE OF HIS HISTORY.

1 Excellences and graces.

(1) *Gentleness and placidity.*

[17040] He was naturally of a gentle, placid disposition, which was increased by his mother's influence and society, who no doubt had him much in her company, and to whom he fondly clung till her death. . . . From his youth he was imbued with heavenly wisdom, and saved from many of the dangers and miseries of self-will.—*Rev. A. Gregory.*

(2) *Self-surrender and submission.*

"And Abraham bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar upon the wood" (Gen. xxii. 9).

[17041] As the obedience of the father was prompt and cheerful, so was that of the son. If the resignation of Abraham merits praise, the submission of Isaac claims no less, for his consent must have undoubtedly been attained. In both, it was "a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God; and a reasonable service;" and the blessing which was pronounced from heaven on that occasion applied to both equally, and in the same manner.—*Rev. H. Hunter, D.D.*

[17042] There could be no doubt that Abraham had found a true heir when Isaac laid himself on the altar and steadied his heart to receive the knife. Dearer to God, and of immeasurably greater value than any service, was this surrender of himself into the hand of his Father and his God. In this was promise of all service and all loving fellowship.—*Rev. M. Dods, D.D.*

[17043] So incomparable with the most distinguished service did the sacrifice of Isaac's self appear, that the record of his active life seems to have had no interest to his contemporaries or successors. There was but this one thing to say of him. No more seemed needful. The sacrifice was indeed great, and worthy of commemoration. No act could so conclusively have shown that Isaac was thoroughly at one with God. He had much to live for; from his birth there hovered around him interests and hopes of the most exciting and flattering nature; a new kind of glory such as had not yet been attained on earth was to be attained, or, at any rate, approached in him. This glory was certain to be realized, being guaranteed by God's promise, so that his hopes might launch out in the boldest confidence and give him the aspect and bearing of a king; while it was uncertain in the time and manner of its realization, so that the most attractive mystery hung around his future.—*Ibid.*

[17044] Plainly Isaac's was a life worth entering on and living through; a life fit to engage and absorb a man's whole desire, interest, and effort; a life such as might well make a man gird himself and resolve to play the man throughout, that so each part of it might reveal

its secret to him, and that none of its wonder might be lost. It was a life which, above all others, seemed worth protecting from all injury and risk, and for which, no doubt, not a few of the home-born servants in the patriarchal encampment would have gladly ventured their own. There have, indeed, been few, if any, lives of which it could so truly be said, The world cannot do without this—at all hazards and costs this must be cherished. And all this must have been even more obvious to its owner than to any one else, and must have begotten in him an unquestioning assurance, that he at least had a charmed life, and would live and see good days. Yet with whatever shock the command of God came upon him, there is no word of doubt or remonstrance or rebellion. He gave his life to Him who had first given it to him. And thus yielding himself to God, he entered into the inheritance, and became worthy to stand to all time the representative heir of God, as Abraham, by his faith, had become the father of the faithful.—*Ibid.*

(3) *Self-repression and patience.*

[17045] He leaves all concern about his future fortunes and his establishment in the world to the care and wisdom of his father, and thereby reproves the forwardness and self-sufficiency of many of our young men who presume to act for themselves in everything before they have learned to think at all; who attempt the works of men with the understanding and the strength of children.—*Rev. H. Hunter, D.D.*

[17046] The patience of Isaac was quite as remarkable as the faith of Abraham. At forty years old he was still unmarried, and if, as he had been told, the great aim of his life, the great service he was to render to the world, was bound up with the rearing of a family, he might with some reason be wondering why circumstances were so adverse to the fulfilment of this vocation. Must he not have been tempted, as his father had been, to take matters into his own hand? Fathers are perhaps too scrupulous about telling their sons instructive passages from their own experience; but when Abraham saw Isaac exercised and discomposed about this matter, he can scarcely have failed to strengthen his spirit by telling him something of his own mistakes in life.—*Rev. M. Dods, D.D.*

(4) *Spirituality of mind.*

"And Isaac went out to meditate in the field at the eventide" (Gen. xxiv. 63).

[17047] His figure, going forth into the fields to meditate, is painted for ever on the eye of the world. An action common now becomes glorified in the light of the past. It is the same with David's going to his chamber to weep, and with Christ's walking out "mid ripe corn on the Sabbath day." And it seems no wonder that the same person who had meditated in his early days should, in his old age, "tremble very exceedingly" at the discovery of the fraud practised on him by his son Jacob. It is the genuine

history of his peculiar temperament.—*Rev. G. Gilfillan.*

[17048] Twilight, "nature's vesper-bell," or the light shaded at evening by the hills of Palestine, seems to have called Isaac to a familiar occupation. The long-continued mourning for his mother, and his lonely meditation in the fields, are both in harmony with what we know of his character, and of his experience on Mount Moriah. Retiring and contemplative, willing to conciliate by concession rather than to assert and maintain his rights against opposition, glad to yield his own affairs to the strong guidance of some other hand, tender and deep in his affections, to him this lonely meditation seems singularly appropriate. His dwelling, too, was remote, on the edge of the wilderness, by the well which Hagar had named Lahai-roi. Here he dwelt as one consecrated to God, feeling little desire to enter deeper into the world, and preferring the place where the presence of God was least disturbed by the society of men.—*Rev. M. Dods, D.D.*

[17049] No doubt Isaac's meditations, however they might deviate here and there, on this hope and on that, would ever recur to that blessed promise, which was handed down to him as the precious heirloom of his inheritance, that in him—in Isaac—"should all the families of the earth be blessed," and in the sweet certainty of the fulfilment of that covenant promise of the Almighty, would he no doubt recall that foreshadowing of the Redeemer's death, in his own sacrifice on the mount of Moriah.—*Rev. B. Bouchier.*

(5) *Filial love.*

"And Isaac was comforted after his mother's death" (Gen. xxiv. 67).

[17050] Some years had elapsed since Isaac's last scene on the mount of Moriah, probably five or six. During that interval he had lost his mother, no doubt with Abraham closing her eyes, and like him, too, mourning and weeping for her. It is a touching expression which is used at the close of this chapter, that in his marriage with Rebekah "Isaac was comforted after his mother's death," as if up to that period he had felt the void in his heart unfilled; and the unoccupied tent in which his mother dwelt had kept up the remembrance of her he loved so well. That she was affectionate and endeared to Isaac by the closest ties that ever linked the hearts of mother and son together, we may well infer from the lengthened period during which Isaac held that mother in such loving remembrance, and suffered not her place in that heart to be filled, till one came of whom God's word had said, in the beginning, that "therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife, and they twain shall be one flesh."—*Ibid.*

[17051] At the partiality of Sarah to such a son as Isaac we need not be at all surprised. It is pleasant to observe, however, that it cor-

rupted neither his understanding nor his heart. Neither the indulgence with which he was treated, nor the prospects to which he was born and brought up, seem to have rendered him, upon any occasion, insolent or assuming: and maternal fondness met with its dearest, best reward in filial duty and tenderness. Sarah lived respected, and died lamented, by her only and beloved son.—*Rev. H. Hunter, D.D.*

(6) *Peccableness.*

"And the Philistines envied him. . . . And Abimelech said unto Isaac, Go from us, for thou art much mightier than we. And Isaac departed thence" (Gen. xxvi. 14, 16, 17).

[17052] Isaac was essentially a man of peace. The beginning of his life was, indeed, marked by a scene of bitterness and wrong; but Isaac was an unconscious agent, and had neither part nor lot in the matter; and, indeed, his whole life seems to have been a life of quietude and avoidance of turmoil. It is very possible that his being an only child, and the child, too, of his parents' old age, may have unconsciously tended to nurture this disposition and love of ease. And even in after years, when the herdmen of Isaac and the herdmen of Gerar strove together about that which was the usual source of disputation in those early days, when pasturage and wells of water were the chief ingredients of wealth, Isaac, with his characteristic love of peace, gave way to the encroachments and wrong of his opponents, till he had at length reached a neutral spot, where he could live without disturbance.—*Rev. B. Bouchier.*

[17053] The Philistines were anxious to get rid of their too-powerful neighbour, and no more effectual means of annoyance could be devised, than stopping and filling up with earth the wells, on which Isaac must have depended for the watering of his numerous flocks and herds. Such a step was no doubt most galling to Isaac's herdsmen, and had their master, as his father had once done, under great aggression, armed his trained servants, born in his own house, and taken the matter into his own hands, there could have been little doubt as to the result, for as Abimelech acknowledges to Isaac, "Thou art much mightier than we." And Isaac had right as well as might on his side, for the wells were his own; wells which his father's servants had digged, and which Abimelech had covenanted he should possess, when he said to him, "Behold my land is before thee, dwell where it pleaseth thee;" and special mention was afterwards made of the very wells which were now the subject of dispute. It is, however, a noble testimony to the peaceableness of the patriarch's disposition, as well as his loving and self-denying spirit, that without retaliation, or even remonstrance, he immediately departed and took up his abode in a district beyond, though adjoining, the territories of Abimelech. "If they persecute you in one city," said our Lord, "flee ye to another." And one rejoices to think, how in those earlier days

of the patriarchs, Isaac, as well as Abraham, had drunk of that spirit which was in Christ. "Go from us," was the uncourteous demand of Abimelech—"he departed," the answer which Isaac made.—*Ibid.*

[17054] His meek and placid deportment, together with his increasing power and wealth, and the favour of heaven so unequivocally declared, rendered the patriarch so dignified and respectable in the eyes of the world, that the prince, who from an unworthy motive had been induced to treat him with unkindness, and to dismiss him from his capital, felt himself impelled to court his friendship, and to secure it by a solemn compact. Abimelech considers it as no diminution of his dignity to leave home, attended with the most honourable of his council, and the supreme in command over his armies, in order to visit the shepherd in his tent.—*Rev. H. Hunter, D.D.*

(7) *Resignation.*

"I have blessed him, yea, and he shall be blessed" (Gen. xxvii. 33).

[17055] The shock which Isaac felt when Esau came in and the fraud of Jacob was discovered is easily understood. The mortification of the old man must have been extreme when he found that he had so completely taken himself in. He was reclining in the satisfied reflection that for once he had overreached his astute Rebekah and her astute son, and in the comfortable feeling that, at last, he had accomplished his one remaining desire, when he learns from the exceeding bitter cry of Esau that he has himself been duped. It was enough to rouse the anger of the mildest and godliest of men, but Isaac does not storm and protest—"he trembles exceedingly." He recognizes, by a spiritual insight quite unknown to Esau, that this is God's hand, and deliberately confirms, with his eyes open, what he had done in blindness: "I have blessed him: yea, and he shall be blessed." Had he wished to deny the validity of the blessing, he had ground enough for doing so. *He* had not really given it: it had been stolen from him. An act must be judged by its intention, and he had been far from intending to bless Jacob. Was he to consider himself bound by what he had done under a misapprehension? He had given a blessing to one person under the impression that he was a different person; must not the blessing go to him for whom it was designed? But Isaac unhesitatingly yielded.—*Rev. M. Dods, D.D.*

(8) *Faith.*

"By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come" (Heb. xi. 20).

[17056] In the Epistle to the Hebrews Isaac is commended for his faith in blessing his sons. It was commendable in him that, in great bodily weakness, he still believed himself to be the guardian of God's blessing, and recognized that he had a great inheritance to bequeath to his sons.—*Ibid.*

(9) *Hope in death.*

"Behold now, I am old, I know not the day of my death" (Gen. xxvii. 2).

[17057] Though he knows not the day of his death, yet he feels that it may be nigh. There is something very affecting in an old man's unquailing glance at his dying day; his course is run; he has fought the fight; the day of his departure is at hand, and the aged warrior looks hopefully upwards to that crown which the Saviour's arm has won for him. And though Isaac's words are immeasurably inferior in interest or expression to those of the dying Paul, few, I think, even of the young, and far fewer of any of the old, have ever read them without feeling their hearts touched by the simple but solemn truth they utter.—*Rev. B. Bouchier.*

2 Defects, more or less constitutional.

(1) *Excessive timidity and pliability.*

[17058] Isaac, although son of one of the bravest and greatest of men, was himself of a quiet, meditative, and even timid temperament. For the first forty years of his life he seems to have remained in his mother's tent, ruled by the proud and resolute will of Sarah, "the Princess," if also cherished and protected by her love. And when in after years he had to choose his own course, and was free to follow his own will, he seems to have had little will left. He drifts with circumstances. He is timid and yielding, so timid that again and again he gives up his most precious possessions—the deep, costly wells which he had dug and built by the labour of years—rather than strive for them with any neighbouring herdsman who coveted them. Pensive and timorous, he had a keen eye for the dark and haunted shadows of life; and while Abraham walked with God as with a friend, Isaac prostrated himself before "the Fear" that sat on the throne of the universe with an awe, if not with a terror, too deep for words.—*Atmoni Peloni.*

(2) *Inertness.*

[17059] The character and career of Isaac would seem to tell us that it is possible to have too great a father. Isaac was dwarfed and weakened by growing up under the shadow of Abraham. Of his life there was little to record, and what was recorded was very much a reproduction of some of the least glorious passages of his father's career. The digging of wells for his flocks was among the most notable events in his commonplace life, and even in this he only re-opened the wells his father had dug.—*Rev. M. Dods, D.D.*

(3) *Apathy.*

[17060] Isaac has been called "the Wordsworth of the Old Testament," but his meditative disposition seems to have degenerated into mere dreamy apathy, which, at last, made him the tool of the more active-minded members of his family, and was also attended by its common accompaniment of sensuality. It seems also to have brought him to a condition of almost entire

bodily prostration, for a comparison of dates shows that he must have spent forty or fifty years in blindness and incapacity for all active duty. Neither can this greatly surprise us, for it is abundantly open to our own observation that men of the finest spiritual discernment, and of whose godliness in the main one cannot doubt, are also frequently the prey of the most childish tastes, and most useless even to the extent of doing harm in practical matters. They do not see the evil that is growing in their own family; or, if they see it, they cannot rouse themselves to check it.—*Ibid.*

3 Defects, moral and spiritual.

(1) *A tendency to falsehood.*

“And the men of the place asked him of his wife: and he said, She is my sister” (Gen. xxvi. 7).

[17061] It is curious to observe his timid and almost childish imitation of Abraham's stratagem about his wife. Isaac does it beforehand, and without any apparent necessity.—*S. T. Coleridge.*

[17062] Isaac knew nothing personally of his father's guilty fears and falsehoods. But one can hardly doubt that he was acquainted with them, and the very readiness with which he too adopts the same falsehood, under exactly similar circumstances, implies at least his knowledge. It has been said that the good that men do is too often buried with them, but that the evil lives after them, both in the remembrance of it and in its results. And if the name of the place and its inhabitants, and the very title and name of the king as well, recalled Abraham's sojourn there and his sin, it recalled, also, the recollection of the means by which he escaped a supposed peril. And yet, in some respects, Isaac's sin was greater than Abraham's. In the first place, he had that father's conduct, and the rebuke that God had given him, as a landmark to guide his own steps from a similar snare. Besides, Isaac had the direct promise of God's protection over him in that Philistine land. And more than that, the Lord minutely, and with most condescending tenderness, recapitulated word for word the various assurances of the promised blessing which He had vouchsafed to Abraham, and had bade him continue where he was till he should receive intimation to depart. I do not add that Isaac's assertion, that Rebekah was his sister, was a more direct falsehood than his father's, who had some plea of such relationship to urge; for in reality it was no palliation of the sin of Abraham. He meant the assertion to deceive, and it did deceive; and all we can say of Abraham's excuse is, that though it apparently suggested the falsehood, it in no degree diminished the guilt; and in that respect the father and the son are both alike guilty before God.—*Rev. B. Bouchier.*

[17063] Virtue is not hereditary in families, it descends but in rarer instances; whereas frailty, alas! descends from every father to every son.

Virtue is the water in the particular pool; vice the torrent in the river, which sweeps everything before it. The moderation, honour, and good sense of Abimelech, are the severest imaginable reproof of the disingenuousness of the prophet, and happily prevented the mischief, which Isaac, seeking by improper means to shun, had well-nigh occasioned.—*Rev. H. Hunter, D.D.*

(2) *Injudicious laxity as regards domestic rule.*

[17064] Isaac's conduct in the rule of his household was far from that standard of high attainment which was so conspicuous in his own father, when God gave that memorable testimony to his holy and consistent management of his household. A little judicious counsel, a word here and there spoken in season, some holy lesson of brotherly love from a father's lips, some gentle admonition, such as a mother's heart alone can give, would have fostered and nourished all that was lovely and loving in the spirits of his sons, one towards the other, and have repressed and crushed all that was unamiable and selfish. But, unhappily, we read that it was not so.—*Rev. B. Bouchier.*

[17065] Most of the evils of a man's lot may be easily traced up to some weakness in which he has indulged himself, some error into which he has fallen, some opportunity which he has let slip, or some crime which he has committed. Of all the infirmities to which our nature is subject, no one is more common; no one is more unreasonable, unwise, and unjust; no one more easily guarded against; no one more fatal in its consequences to ourselves and others, than that of making a distinction between one child and another. It destroys the favourite, and discourages those who are postponed and slighted; it sows the seeds of jealousy and malice, which frequently produce strife, and violence, and blood. It sets the father against the mother, and the mother against the father; and the sister against the brother, and the brother against the sister. It disturbed the repose of Isaac's family, and had well-nigh brought down Jacob's hoary head with sorrow to the grave.—*Rev. H. Hunter, D.D.*

(3) *Culpable shortsightedness, if not self-will.*

[17066] In unaccountable and inconsistent contempt of God's expressed purpose, he proposes to hand over the blessing to Esau. Many things had occurred to fix his attention upon the fact that Esau was not to be his heir. Esau had sold his birthright, and had married Hittite women, and his whole conduct was, no doubt, of a piece with this, and showed that, in his hands, any spiritual inheritance would be both unsafe and unappreciated. That Isaac had some notion he was doing wrong in giving to Esau what belonged to God, and what God meant to give to Jacob, is shown from his precipitation in bestowing the blessing. He has no feeling that he is authorized by God, and therefore he cannot wait calmly till God should intimate, by un-

mistakable signs, that he is near his end ; but, seized with a panic, lest his favourite should somehow be left unblessed, he feels, in his nervous alarm, as if he were at the point of death, and, though destined to live for forty-three years longer, he calls Esau that he may hand over to him his dying testament. How different is the nerve of a man when he knows he is doing God's will, and when he is but fulfilling his own device ! For the same reason, he has to stimulate his spirit by artificial means. The prophetic ecstasy is not felt by him ; he must be exhilarated by venison and wine, that, strengthened and revived in body, and having his gratitude aroused afresh towards Esau, he may bless him with all the greater vigour.—*Rev. M. Dods, D.D.*

(4) *Love of ease and self-indulgence.*

"Isaac loved Esau because he did eat of his son's venison" (Gen. xxv. 28).

[17067] It was no sin that Isaac loved Esau ; it would have been sin had he not ; but oh, what a reason is here assigned for that love ! What a poor, wretched, degraded estimate of a father's love, of a father's affection for his firstborn ! "Isaac loved Esau because he did eat of his son's venison." The expression seems purposely and significantly used, to throw light on much that is perplexing and painful in this patriarch's character. I think we have been accustomed to look on Isaac's life, not merely as devoid of incident, and as peculiarly peaceful and undisturbed, gliding on in its calm and equable current, unruffled by those winds and waves which so often mar the tranquillity of other men's existence, but as free also from all those blemishes and sins which mark the infirmity and pollution of our common nature, and from which no child of Adam is exempt.—*Rev. B. Bouchier.*

[17068] One is ashamed to think of the reason which is assigned for Isaac's preference of his elder to his younger son. "Isaac loved Esau because he did eat of his venison." The original language expresses it more forcibly, "because his venison was in his mouth." By what grovelling and unworthy motives are wise and good men frequently actuated ? And what a mortifying view of human nature is it to see the laws of prudence, and justice, and piety, vilely controlled and counteracted by the lowest, the grossest of our appetites ?—*Rev. H. Hunter, D.D.*

[17069] One wishes that Isaac had simply intimated his purpose to make that arrangement of his affairs which his conviction of approaching death warned him to make. One mourns to find the infirmity of former years still lingering even in old age ; and if, in comparative early days, his son's venison was recorded as the cause of the father's love, it is not without significant meaning, that now, in his old age, we find Isaac still dwelling on and mentioning with eager complacency "the savoury meat such as he loved," which Esau's hands had so often made. It seems, indeed, an odd prelude to a father's

blessing on his son, that he should send forth that son to bring in venison that he might eat of it before he blessed him, but there most probably was some religious solemnity or offering intended to accompany it, and Isaac might not altogether mean a mere common meal.—*Rev. B. Bouchier.*

[17070] Esau's intermarriage and double connection with an idolatrous race had caused great grief to his parents, but the father seems soon to have forgotten the sorrow, and to have suffered things to go on in their usual quiet course, unwilling to be disturbed in the enjoyment of his ease, and not sorry, it would seem, to make his wonted use of Esau's skill and success in the chase. Esau's sale of his birthright, if indeed ever known to him, must have passed away from his memory ; and what was far more sad, the Lord's appointment, with reference to the younger and the elder, had been forgotten also.—*Ibid.*

[17071] Whatever allowance may justly be made for infirmity of nature, it is impossible to disguise from our view the fundamental element of a simply natural or predominating carnal tendency in Isaac's procedure on the occasion such as no child of faith could have fallen into of a sudden. Not only does he hold, in opposition to all signs and intimations to the contrary, that Esau is by reason of his slight priority of birth to be the heir of covenant blessings ; but the moment he selects for pouring out his soul in the formal bestowal of this blessing, is one of fleshly gratification—when refreshed with the enjoyment of his son's savoury meat—as if it were flesh rather than spirit that was to bear sway in the transaction ; and a genial reciprocation of human sympathies that was intended, rather than the solemn utterance of an oracle of God.—*Rev. D. MacDonald.*

[17072] Scripture records no such other scene in connection with the announcement of heaven's more peculiar purposes—none in which the spirit of the man of God sought, as the condition of its speaking, the stimulus of fleshly appetite. The dying utterances of Jacob over his offspring were otherwise pronounced ; otherwise too, at a later period, the last words of David ; and generally the soul of spiritually gifted men strove to work itself free from the disturbing influence of earthly passion, and from the very consciousness of fleshly environments, when addressing itself to the work of learning or communicating the mind of God.—*Ibid.*

[17073] We claim for Isaac no exemption from the infirmities and errors and sins that have beset every child of Adam ; there were no doubt many spots in Isaac's character "which were not the spots of God's children ;" and while one admires and reveres the fidelity of the narrative that records them, one can only mourn over that corruption of our fallen nature which, amid so much that was bright and holy, and

pure and lovely, and of good report, still needed to be washed and made clean in that fountain of precious blood which flowed on Calvary, and by that sacrifice there offered, of which His own was the glorious type.—*Rev. B. Bouchier.*

III. THE SIMPLICITY AND BEAUTY OF HIS CHARACTER VIEWED AS A WHOLE.

[17074] "Isaac was in truth what his name—the Laughing," that is, the kind and gentle—implies. . . . He, among the three patriarchs, passed pre-eminently for the type of that kindly and quiet nature which guards the possession of its allotted share of worldly goods through unpretending goodness and unwavering fidelity. . . . As rightful son and heir, he had no need by great deeds or great qualities to win for himself what was already his. His greatness and his duty consisted only in the faithful maintenance of these spiritual and material possessions, and to this a firm, unruffled, and virtuous nature, even if unaccompanied by extraordinary powers of mind, was quite equal. Isaac thus typifies the true child of the community, who by faithful obedience and self-sacrifice even unto death, rewards his parents' hopes and longings; and thus earns by merit a new title to what is already his by birth. In like manner, his union with Rebekah is the prototype of every happy marriage, approved by parents, and blessed by God, as appears in the beautiful story in Gen. xxiv. . . . He appears to us always under the same simple character—a good, true-hearted father; a contented, inoffensive, pious man.—*H. Ewald.*

[17075] Isaac was a gentle and dutiful son, a faithful and constant husband. If there were any very prominent points in his character they were not brought out by the circumstances in which he was placed. He appears less as a man of action than as a man of suffering, from which he is generally delivered without any direct effort of his own. Thus he suffers as the object of Ishmael's mocking, of the intended sacrifice on Moriah, of the rapacity of the Philistines, and of Jacob's stratagem. But the thought of his sufferings is effaced by the ever-present tokens of God's favour, and he suffers with the calmness and dignity of a conscious heir of heavenly promises, without uttering any complaint, and generally without committing any action by which he would forfeit respect. Free from violent passions, he was a man of constant, deep, and tender affections. Thus he mourned for his mother, until her place was filled by his wife. His sons were nurtured at home till a late period of their lives; and neither his grief for Esau's marriage, nor the anxiety in which he was involved in consequence of Jacob's deceit, estranged either of them from his affectionate care.—*Rev. W. Bullock.*

[17076] Isaac's life of solitary blamelessness must have been sustained by strong habitual piety such as showed itself at the time of

Rebekah's barrenness (Gen. xxv. 21), in his special intercourse with God at Gerar and Beer-sheba (xxvi. 2, 23), in the solemnity with which he bestows his blessing, and refuses to change it. His life, judged by a worldly standard, might seem inactive, ignoble, and unfruitful, but the "guileless years, prayers, gracious acts, and daily thank-offerings of pastoral life" are not to be so esteemed, although they make no show in history.—*Ibid.*

[17077] Isaac's character may not have exercised any commanding influence upon either his own or succeeding generations, but it was sufficiently marked and consistent to win respect and envy from his contemporaries. By his posterity, his name is always joined in equal honour with those of Abraham and Jacob, and so it was even used as part of the formula which Egyptian magicians in the time of Origen ("Contra Celsum," i. 22) employed as efficacious to bind the demons whom they adjured (compare Gen. xxxi. 42, 53).—*Ibid.*

IV. ABRAHAM AND ISAAC CONTRASTED.

[17078] The life of Isaac has nothing about it of the marked individuality of his father. As the record of it is more brief, so the life itself is much more quiet, even, and uniform, having little of action or movement, of exposure to danger or trial, little of vicissitude or adventure. One reason of this may be that God did not intend him for a great pattern of faith, for a living picture of the life of faith, with its trials and its triumphs. Isaac is a father of the Church and an ancestor of Messiah, but Abraham alone is the "father of the faithful." God is no respecter of persons; but there are distinctions in His house, orders and ranks, degrees of dignity, among His children and servants; in the spiritual firmament one star differeth from another star in brilliancy of gifts, of graces, and of service.—*Rev. A. Gregory.*

[17079] In strong contrast to the first patriarch, who is familiar to our minds as an exiled wanderer, leading a life of stirring adventure, now leaving his father's house for a strange country, now attacking kings for the rescue of a kinsman, and now going on a painful journey to Mount Moriah, Isaac presents us with the sweet picture of a retired and tranquil life; we think of his calm and peaceful form walking in the fields and meditating.—*Ibid.*

[17080] Abraham, in leaving Isaac behind him, left rather a shadow than a son. He has less body and bulk, less grandeur, less boldness, but shadow-like, he kneels, and looks up to God in imitation of his original. He has all Abraham's piety and more than his peace. His cast of mind is given in one sentence—"And Isaac digged again the wells which they had digged in the days of Abraham his father." And when these wells become the subject of contest, he meekly retires in search of others.

He is one among other proofs, that the children of very great men are sometimes inferior to their parents. The rationale of this may either be, that the mothers are inferior to their mates, or that the education of the children of men, much engrossed in public affairs, is often neglected; or that there is what we may call either an exhaustion or an economy in nature, which makes the sight of two men of eminence in the same family, or of two men of eminence in the relation of father and son to each other, much rarer than the reverse.—*Rev. G. Gilfillan.*

V. ISAAC VIEWED AS THE MOST ILLUSTRIOUS TYPE OF CHRIST.

1 As regards his prophetic and miraculous birth.

[17081] Even before he was born Isaac's birth was the theme of prophecy and expectation, as well as the result of miracle; and, as such, a fitting type of Him to whom all the prophets gave witness, and in whose birth "the Lord created a new thing in the earth," unprecedented and unheard of before or after, that as from "one as good as dead, there sprang as many as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as the sand which is by the sea-shore innumerable," so, "behold a virgin should conceive and bear a son, and should call his name Immanuel."—*Rev. B. Bouchier.*

[17082] I do not say that God never foretold the birth of any save of Isaac and of Jesus. Even in the case of Isaac's own sons it was said to their mother: "Two nations are in thy womb, and the elder shall serve the younger;" and to the wife of Manoah was a promise given of a Deliverer for Israel: "Thou shalt conceive and bear a son, and he shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines." Still more remarkable was the declaration of the Lord, by the mouth of His prophet Isaiah, of the raising up of Cyrus, whose very name, as well as the purpose for which he was raised up, were distinctly declared more than a century before his birth, and nearly two centuries before the accomplishment of the work given him to do. It was the same, too, with "that" child born unto the house of David, Josiah by name, only that the far longer interval of 340 years elapsed between the prediction and its fulfilment. And still more remarkable than all, was the birth of the forerunner of the Saviour, announced 700 years before by Isaiah, and about 400 by the prophet Malachi, as well as by an angel sent from God to announce the approaching birth to the aged parents. So that I do not mean that, in the single fact of Isaac's birth being beforehand declared of God, nor even that his own conception in the womb of one as good as dead, was a solitary instance of the Lord's dealings and dispensations among the children of men; but I think that in the declarations and promises of God Himself to Abraham, we find abundant evidence that in

his birth, as well as in his prefigured death, Isaac was indeed an illustrious type of Him whose progenitor, according to the flesh, he was.—*Ibid.*

2 As regards his "obedience unto death."

[17083] When he resisted not his father, and allowed himself to be bound and laid on the altar, he entered into the spirit of Abraham, he took upon himself his faith, and thus showed himself truly the heir to the promises. Nor can we forget how this surrender of the first-born was the first of that dedication of all the first-born unto God, which afterwards the law demanded, and which meant that in the first-born we should consecrate all and everything unto the Lord. Perhaps the lesson which the Canaanites might learn from the event will seem to some quite secondary, as compared with these great truths. Yet we must bear in mind, that all around cruel human sacrifices were offered on every hill, when God gave His sanction to a far different offering, by for ever substituting animal sacrifices for that surrender of the best beloved which human despair had prompted for an atonement for sin. And yet God Himself gave up His beloved, His own only begotten Son for us—and of this the sacrifice of Isaac was intended to be a glorious type; and as Abraham received this typical sacrifice again from the dead "in a figure," so we in reality, when God raised up His own Son, Jesus Christ, from the dead, and has made us sit together with Him in heavenly places.—*Rev. A. Eidersheim, D.D.*

[17084] He was to be in all things a type of Him who in the fulness of time was to come. He, too, was to be the willing, unresisting sacrifice and victim. He, too, was to go as a lamb to the slaughter; and, as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so was he not to open his mouth in murmuring or complaint. Nay, the language of his heart was to be—"I delight to do Thy will, O my God; yea, Thy law is within mine heart. My heart is ready, my heart is ready." We know that, in the ancient sacrifices of heathen rites, if the victim struggled, or seemed even to shrink with instinctive apprehension of its doom, it was looked upon as an ill omen. But *our* victim never struggled, never drew back; nay, He declared of that baptism of blood wherewith He was to be baptized, "How am I straitened till it be accomplished!" And surely in this type which so strikingly foreshadowed, not so much the Saviour's sufferings as the Saviour's willingness, we might truly expect to find, not simply the obedience of a child to a father's will—however nature and instinct might shrink—but the perfect, entire, and ready acquiescence to the will of God, however mysterious and inscrutable its purpose, however painful and abhorrent to every feeling He Himself had implanted in the human heart. "I am content to do it," was as true of Isaac, as it was undoubtedly true of Jesus.—*Rev. B. Bouchier.*

VI. TRADITIONS RESPECTING THIS PATRIARCH.

[17085] Jewish legends represent Isaac as an angel made before the world, and descending to earth in human form; as one of the three men in whom human sinfulness has no place, as one of the six over whom the angel of death has no power. He is said to have been instructed in Divine knowledge by Shem. The ordinance of evening prayer is ascribed to him (Gen. xxiv. 63), as that of morning prayer to Abraham (xix. 27), and night prayer to Jacob (xxviii. 11).—*Rev. W. Bullock.*

[17086] The Arabian traditions included in the Koran represent Isaac as a model of religion, a righteous person inspired with grace to do good works, observe prayer, and give alms, endowed with the Divine gifts of prophecy, children, and wealth. The promise of Isaac and the offering of Isaac are also mentioned. Faith in a future resurrection is ascribed to Abraham, but it is connected, not, as in Heb. xi. 19, with the offering of Isaac, but with a fictitious miracle. Stanley mentions a curious tradition of the reputed jealousy of Isaac's character that prevails among the inhabitants of Hebron respecting the grave of Rebekah.—*Ibid.*

VII. HOMILETICAL HINTS.

1 The meek and gentle nature, though it will have its own trials, escapes many of those pertaining to stronger and froward wills.

[17087] The low head is saved many of the knocks which are encountered by lofty carriage, as they are often provoked by it. Much is owing to natural temper; but where this is defective, what powerful helps we have, for the culture of humility, in the lessons of other men's experience, above all in the teachings of the Divine Word—a priceless wisdom, which most men choose to buy dear, though all may have it cheap. But the sovereign remedy is the grace of God, which alone, and not nature, can produce genuine meekness and humility, not what is a mere variety of natural disposition, but the Christ-like grace, the fruit of the Spirit, which is quite consistent with the most heroic character; and this it does by taking us to Mount Moriah and to Calvary, if indeed they are not the same, and laying us on the altar, yea, nailing self to the cross. "If any man will come after Me," says Jesus, "let him deny (renounce) himself, and take up his cross (as a death-devoted man) and follow Me." How much is anticipated, done once for all in that first thorough learning of Christ, that one decisive act of self-surrender for life, which makes His yoke easy and His burden light!—*Rev. A. Gregory.*

2 "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. v. 3).

[17088] It is no unfitting close of this patri-

arch's history that the last time the word of God names him is in that enumeration of guests who are seated at the marriage supper of the Lamb.—*Rev. B. Bouchier.*

JACOB.

I. INTRODUCTORY.

1 The life of Jacob is an interesting study as illustrating the faults and failings of a very composite character.

He presents an average type of frail humanity.

[17089] In the case of such "Great Hearts of the olden time" as Abraham and Moses, we have lofty ideals of "patriarchal saintliness,"—lives which contain passages of rare and exceptional excellence. They resemble Alpine peaks with their virgin snow, towering far above their compeers, inaccessible and discouraging from their very loftiness. In Jacob, on the other hand, we have one of the lowlier eminences of a commonplace world—one, also, with its scars and fissures only too faithfully revealed to the eye of the spectator—one of Nature's least lovable products—a man who originally had comparatively few elements of worth to recommend or redeem him; who, had he been left to himself, uncontrolled by any higher impulses, might have become a confirmed dissembler, if not a wrecked and abandoned castaway.—*Rev. J. Macduff, D.D.*

[17090] He entrap his brother, he deceives his father, he makes a bargain even in his prayer; in his dealings with Laban, in his meeting with Esau, he still calculates and contrives; he distrusts his neighbours; he regards with prudential indifference the insult to his daughter, and the cruelty of his sons; he hesitates to receive the assurance of Joseph's goodwill; he repels, even in his lesser traits, the free confidence that we cannot withhold from the patriarchs of the elder generation.—*Dean Stanley.*

[17091] If the sacrifice of Isaac be one standing difficulty of the Book of Genesis, surely the character of Jacob is another, and more especially, I think, to the young. All the generous sympathies of young hearts are drawn forth by the frank, bold, athletic, impetuous, generous Esau, while all their instinctive antipathies are roused by the cool, crafty, far-reaching schemer, whose early life seems to be one long web of subtlety and treachery, and who carried some strong threads of it through to the close. There are few darker sayings in the Old Testament Scripture than "Jacob have I loved, Esau have I hated," which, in this instance, is repeated and confirmed in the New. We have seen how Esau despised his birthright, became base and sensual, and cut himself off from the vocation and the hope of God. But what about Jacob's life? Was that lovely in the sight of

heaven? Was that cruel, lying, and treacherous trick, by which he cheated his brother of his blessing, the thing which God selected to seal with His benediction? Or is the true account of it that God, while hating and punishing that particular act of treachery, yet found something which was worthy of a high culture in the man's whole heart and life?—*Rev. J. Brown.*

2 The life of Jacob is an interesting study as foreshadowing the character and fortunes of his descendants.

[17092] We cannot mistake the type of the Israelites in him whom, beyond even Abraham and Isaac, they recognized as their father Israel. His doubtful qualities exactly recall to us the meanness of character, which, even to a proverb, we call in scorn, "Jewish." By his peculiar discipline of exile and suffering, a true counterpart is produced of the special faults and special gifts, known to us chiefly through his persecuted descendants in the middle ages. In Jacob we see the same timid, cautious watchfulness that we know so well, though under darker colours, through our great masters of fiction, in Shylock of Venice and Isaac of York. But no less, in the nobler side of his career, do we trace the germs of the unbroken endurance, the undying resolution, which keeps the nation alive still, even in its present outcast condition, and which was the basis, in its brightest days, of the heroic zeal, long-suffering, and hope of Moses, of David, of Jeremiah, of the Maccabees, of the twelve Jewish apostles, and the first martyr, Stephen.—*Dean Stanley.*

[17093] Jacob is the true patriarch. He is the epitome of the character of the chosen people, who, again, are an epitome of the great human world. Jacob is the typical Jew. All the vices, all the virtues, all the strength and all the weakness, all the nobleness and all the baseness of the people whom Jehovah loved and took to be His own, meet in their patriarch's character and life.—*Rev. J. Brown.*

[17094] We have learned, during long years of tumultuous history, to attach a distinctive and peculiar meaning to the name of *Jew*. There are great and honourable exceptions; but the application is wide, and the general significance (it must be confessed) is not lofty or ennobling. The characteristics may be easily enumerated. On the one side, we find indomitable resolution; the patient fortitude; the industrious thrift; the fidelity to friends; the steadfast adherence to what is believed to be doctrinal truth; the burning zeal of energy; the unretaliating endurance of violent wrong; the unwavering faith; the beautiful hope, which shines unquenched through the years of humiliation, exclusion, and defeat; and the grand reverence for the past, of which (it is freely admitted) they have no reason to be ever ashamed. This it is which has made them worthy of the glowing panegyric: "A nation that living, shall die, and dying, shall live; trampled by all, shall

trample on all; bleeding from a thousand wounds, shall be unhurt; beggared, shall wield the wealth of kingdoms; without a name, shall sway the councils of kings; without a city, shall inhabit in all lands; scattered like the dust, shall be bound together like the rock; perishing by the chain, by fire, by famine, shall be imperishable, unnumbered, glorious, as the stars of heaven!" On the other side, we find the wonderful and unscrupulous shrewdness, the sharp cunning, the relentless avarice, the low craft, the penurious parsimony, the alertness to over-reach, the Shylock severity to the bond, the amazing resources in concealing duplicity and covering tracks behind it. Jacob becomes the pattern *Jew*. All that is good or bad in his descendants has its natural beginning in him. He had not yet received the name of Israel, but he was an Israelite nevertheless. As you look at him lying there on his stone pillow, however, it would be palpably out of place for any one to quote our Lord's remark made long years after this, concerning Nathanael: "Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!"—*Rev. C. Robinson, D.D.*

[17095] Jacob is a thorough Jew. In him, subtlety, love of this world's goods, and timidity co-exist with profound attachment to the God of his fathers and ardent devotion. His patience, too, in so waiting and working for his bride, reminds you of that of his people, who have, for ages, been looking up to a heaven which, whether it be black or bright, never opens nor ever shall, to let forth *their* beloved Messiah.—*Rev. G. Gilfillan.*

3 The life of Jacob is an interesting study if only on account of its poetical incidents.

[17096] The poetical incidents in Jacob's history are exquisitely peculiar and interesting. Indeed, his whole life is as entertaining and varied as a romance. There is his journey to Padan-aram, and the dream which, says one, "cast a light upon the lonely place which shall never pass away." No picture has hitherto done this complete justice. Even Rubens has but dimly expressed the ideal of the smiling face of the young patriarch, itself a dream of beauty—the vast silent desert stretching around—the stone pillow, shining like a lump of gold in the radiance—and the undefined blaze of splendour (like a ladder, mountain, or stair; the original word is uncertain) rising up in brightening gradations, till lost in one abyss of glory, and with angelic shapes swimming up and down, like motes of light, in the liquid lustre. And who shall paint the bewildered and amazed aspect of the awakened patriarch, when, looking around and above, he finds the warm light of the vision gone, the dread yet tender voice past, and nothing around him but the dark desert, nothing beside him but the stone pillow, and the cold light of the stars of morning above, and when he says, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not?"—*Ibid.*

[17097] The scenes around the well-side, where Jacob met the daughters of Laban, are in the sweetest pastoral vein. His meeting with Esau has made many a heart overflow in tears. But a deeper and stranger interest surrounds him, as he wrestles at Peniel, until the dawning of the day, with that mysterious figure of a "man," who seems to drop at once from heaven, shapes into dubious form during the shadows of the night, and melts away in the morning sunshine. The passage is one of those strange pits of darkness which occur amid the narrative plains of the Pentateuch, taking you down in an instant, like Joseph, out of the clear shining of the sun, into a place of impenetrable mystery. Yet it is full of deep significance. It is one of many proofs that the Word, ere identifying Himself with flesh, *tried on*, once and again, if we may so speak, the robe of human nature, which He was everlastingly to wear. "Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: for I have seen *God face to face*, and my life is preserved."—*Ibid.*

II. INHERITED QUALITIES OF CHARACTER.

1 He inherited the same tendency to falsehood displayed in the Abrahamic family.

[17098] Abraham himself lied twice in relation to his wife—once in Egypt and once in Gerar, telling both Pharaoh and Abimelech that Sarah was his sister, and implicitly denying that she was his wife. This same falsehood Abraham's son Isaac repeats at the same court of Gerar, with the double aggravation of having his father's disgrace for a warning, and, in his remoter relationship to his wife, a less excuse for his prevarication. So Jacob lied unto his father Isaac in the matter of the birthright. And Jacob's sons lied unto Jacob in the matter of their brother Joseph.—*Rev. W. Roberts.*

2 He inherited the same predisposition to religion displayed by his ancestors.

[17099] Jacob exhibits the strong religious nature—if we may not say the faith—of Abraham, along with his powers of endurance; while his mother's character appears conspicuously, her depth, energy, and tenacity of purpose—a character more complex than that of Esau, whom you would have known thoroughly on your first acquaintance with him.—*Rev. A. Gregory, M.A.*

[17100] The quality which chiefly distinguished Jacob from his hunting and marauding brother was his desire for the friendship of God and sensibility to spiritual influences.—*Rev. M. Dods, D.D.*

III. MORAL SIDE OF CHARACTER, GENERALLY CONSIDERED.

1 Vices.

(1) *Craft.*

[17101] The first display of character in act and deed recorded of him is recorded of his

manhood. And it is precisely what we might expect, the record of an error and a blot. Imperfect natures will not yield, at first, at least, a perfect fruit of life. Jacob was the heir, as all men are, to an entail of evil, and in the development of his character evil soon displayed itself. And the second act recorded of this patriarch is just the repetition and the counterpart of his first act of sin and evil. It is that which gives occasion to the words, "Is not he rightly named Jacob? for he hath supplanted me these two times." Is it not remarkable that the first two acts of Jacob's life, recorded in this book of him, are acts of sin, and acts of sin almost identical in kind? He robs his brother of his birthright; and this is his first act in life so far as his biography informs us. His name then disappears from view for years, and when he reappears again upon the stage his first performance is a repetition of his former crime. He first of all robbed Esau of his birthright. He now defrauds him of his blessing. The name "Supplanter" is therefore fairly earned by Jacob; and the character of a "supplanter" is to be regarded as representing, at this stage of his life at least, his character and disposition.—*Rev. W. Roberts.*

[17102] Esau came in hungry from hunting; from dawn to dusk he had been taxing his strength to the utmost, too eagerly absorbed to notice either his distance from home or his hunger; it is only when he begins to return, depressed by the ill-luck of the day, and with nothing now to stimulate him, that he feels faint; and when at last he reaches his father's tents, and the savoury smell of Jacob's lentils greets him, his ravenous appetite becomes an intolerable craving, and he begs Jacob to give him some of his food. Had Jacob done so with brotherly feeling, there would have been nothing to record. But Jacob had long been watching for an opportunity to win his brother's birthright, and though no one could have supposed that an heir to even a little property would sell it in order to get a meal five minutes sooner than he could otherwise get it, Jacob had taken his brother's measure to a nicety, and was confident that present appetite would in Esau completely extinguish every other thought.—*Rev. M. Dods, D.D.*

(2) *Unscrupulous selfishness.*

[17103] How repulsive the cold-blooded, calculating spirit that can hold every appetite in check, that can cleave to one purpose for a lifetime, and, without scruple, take advantage of a twin brother's weakness! Jacob knows his brother thoroughly, and all his knowledge he uses to betray him. He knows he will speedily repent of his bargain, so he makes him swear he will abide by it. It is a relentless purpose he carries out—he deliberately and unhesitatingly sacrifices his brother to himself.—*Ibid.*

[17104] What! because a brother is regardless of his birthright, shall I take advantage of

his hunger to defraud him of the same? Or is a mess of pottage a proper price to offer for it, even if it may be purchased? A most usurious proceeding, to say the very least of it; the bargain of a highwayman rather than a brother. For does not Jacob plainly see that Esau is "at the point to die," and what was Jacob's answer to his brother *in effect* but the alternative of his birthright or his life?—*Rev. W. Roberts.*

[17105] Jacob looks his brother calmly in the face, and *calculates his opportunity*, . . . and in his depth and shrewdness makes him "swear" that he would stand by it.—*Ibid.*

(3) *Duplicity.*

[17106] Rebekah proposed to Jacob to take advantage of his father's dim sight, and to personate Esau. He was to put on his brother's dress, which bore the smell of the aromatic herbs and bushes among which he was wont to hunt, and to cover his smooth skin with a kind of fur; while Rebekah would prepare a dish which his father would not be able to distinguish from the venison which Esau was to make ready for him. It is remarkable, that although Jacob at first objected, his scruples were caused rather by *fear of detection than from a sense of the wrong proposed*. But Rebekah quieted his misgivings—possibly trusting, that since she was doing, as she thought, the will of God, she could not but succeed. In point of fact, Jacob found his part more difficult than he could have expected. Deceit, equivocation, and lying, repeated again and again, were required to allay the growing suspicions of the old man. At last Jacob succeeded—with what shame and remorse we can readily imagine—in diverting his father's doubts; and Isaac bestowed upon him "the blessing," and with it the birthright. But it deserves special notice, that while this blessing assigned to him both the land of Canaan and lordship over his brethren, there is in it but the faintest allusion to *the great promise to Abraham*. The only words which can be supposed to refer to it are these: "Cursed be every one that curseth thee, and blessed be he that blesseth thee." But this is manifestly very different from the blessing of Abraham, "In thee and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed." It is clear that Isaac imagined he had blessed Esau, and that he did not dare confer upon him the spiritual privileges attached to the birthright. So, after all, Jacob and Rebekah did *not* attain that which they had sought!—*Rev. A. Edersheim, D.D.*

(4) *Falsehood and dissimulation.*

[17107] Jacob found that he had to speak when he went in to his father. Various circumstances roused the old man's suspicions: the quickness with which the pretended Esau presented himself with the food, and still more the tones of the voice. To allay these suspicions, Jacob resorted to falsehood after falsehood. "Lying is soon learned." What a moment of agony to him must it have been when he heard

his father say, "The voice is Jacob's voice," and ask the question, "Art thou my very son Esau?" No small punishment to him was the probably unforeseen dilemma in which that placed him. "I would have flung down the dish and run," says the honest Luther. But Jacob was now fairly committed; and the fear of God and a regard to truth being lost sight of, and his conscience, already twisted, not deterring him from the crowning falsehood, he determined to put a stop to all troublesome questions, and replied, "I am." And God did not step in to prevent even this. No; since the sin, the deceit, is there in Jacob's heart, it is to come out, the whole of it, in all its blackness, to horrify Jacob on reflection by its hideousness, and to be punished and corrected with lengthened and repeated agonies of heart, as that falsehood reappeared and repeated itself, as that imposition inflicted itself on him in after life.—*Rev. A. Gregory, D.D.*

2 Virtues and excellences.

(1) *Thoughtfulness.*

The teaching of his father doubtless implanted in him a meditative spirit.

[17108] Jacob was trained for long years under the eye of a father, who, if we may transfer modern phraseology to an age innocent of theological erudition and book-love, had himself been a devout student alike in natural and revealed religion. He who delighted to "meditate in the field at eventide" (Gen. xxiv. 63) would not be likely to suffer his child to grow up to youth or manhood with that outer oracle of God unread and unreverenced. No minstrel had yet arisen to sing of "the green pastures, or the still waters" where the Divine Shepherd led His flock; of "the valleys covered with corn, the little hills rejoicing on every side." But the meadows around, fringing the desert, and the oasis where we may imagine the tents were pitched, would then, as now, form a floral lesson-book for the young and inquiring mind; while the bright heavens above, whether vaulted in their canopy of blue, or arched with the rainbow, or gleaming with oriental stars, would serve as a mighty diagram to illustrate the power and love and glory of the Almighty Framer.—*Rev. J. Macduff, D.D.*

[17109] Isaac could unfold to his son more sacred revelations of Jehovah than those seen in the hieroglyphics of external nature, the pencilling of desert flower, or the lighting of the vestal fires in the temple of night. By that desert tent there was an altar on which, morning and evening, sacrifices were slain, and from which the incense cloud ascended. More than this, it is evident from an expression Jacob afterwards employs, that the Divine Being was so constantly realized by him (although as yet by no outward palpable manifestations), that the "no creed," so common in apostate Christendom, never threw its malignant shadow across his early mental vision. There were other wilds on which he might roam, but not

the bleak wilds of sceptic doubt. He speaks of God with the familiarity of a recognized, ever-present friend: "The Lord before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac did walk, the God that fed me all my life long" (Gen. xlviii. 15, 16).—*Ibid.*

[17110] These religious principles in which Jacob had been nurtured from his earliest years were illustrated and countersigned by his parent's holy and consistent life. For although Isaac is the least prominent and conspicuous of the founders of the nation, reticent, retiring, unambitious, he never seems to have lost the impress and reward of his early faith, on that memorable occasion when he so meekly bowed his young head in unexampled self-sacrifice at the bidding of his father and his father's God. That patient, uncomplaining act of filial obedience appears to have given a tone of peacefulness to his after character. The well of Lahai-roi, the well of Hagar and her outcast boy, where the patriarch occasionally pitched his tent, was well calculated, from its name and associations, to give Jacob his earliest impressions of the "all-seeing God."—*Ibid.*

(2) *Tenacity of purpose.*

[17111] The substance, the strength of the chosen family, the true inheritance of the promise of Abraham, was interwoven with the very essence of the character of "the plain man dwelling in tents," steady, persevering, moving onward with deliberate, settled purpose, through years of suffering and prosperity, of exile and return, of bereavement and recovery. The birthright is always before him. Rachel is won from Laban by hard service, "and the seven years seemed unto him but a few days for the love he had to her."—*Dean Stanley.*

[17112] While one recoils from his craftiness and management, one cannot but admire his quiet force of character, his indomitable tenacity.—*Rev. M. Dods, D.D.*

(3) *Patience.*

[17113] When the twins stood before His penetrating knowledge, the all-wise God saw that Jacob was the better man—not the better saint, for neither of them was much of a saint in those days—but the better instrument. One was calm, secret, quiet, self-possessed, ingenious—obsequious, pliant, timid, agricultural—tenacious, patient, hopeful. The other was hasty, passionate, impulsive, irregular, adventurous, restless—a hunter by taste, and a rover by disposition. Plainly, Jacob would make the best patriarch of the two. The long run in those days was a more desirable thing than the short cut. *Patient steadiness* was more serviceable for the Divine ends than mere executive rush. James would have been better than Peter to go on Old Testament errands.—*Rev. C. Robinson, D.D.*

(4) *Prudence.*

[17114] I need not either rehearse the details of that handsome present which Jacob (allowed,

perhaps, a somewhat longer time than he expected, before Esau's arrival) prepared for his brother. But I may remark on the skill with which his dispositions were made, and the delicate consideration shown in the constitution of the present offered. The present was composed of several kinds of animals. It was a handsome present, in point of value, on account of their character and numbers; and well chosen on account of the suitable proportion in which one part of each class stood to the other. And these several flocks Jacob divided into distinct droves, setting a space between each drove, so as to magnify the impression of the greatness of the gift, it may be, by making each item of it distinct in itself; but more especially, perchance, to give the servants in attendance the opportunity of repeating again and again the propitiatory answer to Esau's repeated inquiry concerning the things he saw: "These be thy servant Jacob's; it is a present sent unto my lord Esau; and, behold, also he is behind us."—*Rev. W. Roberts.*

[17115] In the tactics of Jacob, if I may so call them, in sending the present to Esau, there was none of that crooked policy which he had displayed in Beersheba and at Haran. There was only so much legitimate *skill* employed in propitiating an angry brother as testified to Jacob's earnest desire to be at peace with him, and as was consistent with integrity.—*Ibid.*

[17116] His wise and politic nature was suited to the position of a leader. He was to develop a nation. He was to found a religious economy. He was fitted to be a statesman. He had an eventful life and a long one. Yet so adroitly did he manage circumstances, so discreet was he in dealing with human nature, that we see, even in the simple and rude affairs of a shepherd's life, a statesman, and one able to control himself (an ability which constitutes the first element of statesmanship), and then able to control other men, and, last of all, able to seek human ends by the use of principles rather than by expedients. Such was Jacob's gift.—*Ward Beecher.*

(5) *Domestic affection.*

a. *Conjugal.*

[17117] To have had such a vision of God, and such a love for Rachel, was to connect him with all that is highest and noblest in the experience of the human race. As the memory of a sun that has gone down apparently into darkness, such to Jacob was the death of Rachel. His very love was swallowed up in his grief. His whole life, seen in retrospect, was this: "I lost her. As I was in the way she left me." This man, that stood so high amongst his own people—this man, that was admitted to the presence of the king, and that was full of years, and honours, and wealth, in looking back upon his life, said, "I remember God, and I remember Rachel that died." These were all he had left to remember. The wail measures the fore-

going joy. . . . When Rachel died, the whole world had but one man in it, and he was solitary, and his name was Jacob.—*Ibid.*

[17118] There is something in the helplessness of former days to express affection that touches every generous soul. Modern loves have had their literature. Dante has lifted up his Beatrice and made her the world's admiration. Petrarch's Laura will not be forgotten while letters last. Poets build temples in verse wherein they enshrine love and give it immortality. The letters of Abelard and Heloise will make their names famous to the end of time, which show that they spent their life in repenting of that which was the noblest thing that belonged to that life—the fact that they loved each other. In the days in which they lived, love, under the touch of superstition, had withered. But in those far-away days in which Jacob lived, men were without literature, without the instruments of expression, and the great heart carried its love unspoken. Yet this simple scene on the boundary of the other life is a testimony to Rachel more touching and exquisite, by its very helplessness, than any man has ever laid at the feet of his beloved. The simple mention of her name by the side of that of God, in this last tremulous moment of his life, is itself a monument to her, to her goodness, to her loveliness, to the ascendancy which she gained over the patriarch's heart. I would rather be Rachel than Laura.—*Ibid.*

[17119] Is it not among the things of note and of grandeur to see a soul walking along life upheld by a full and perfect love? Others had been dear to Jacob, but Rachel alone filled his capacity of love. She left no part of his life unfertilized. The outward life had been full of cares, dangers, business, and change. This inward life had been silent, and had had little expression. Persons approaching this chief would not have dreamed of its depth and power. They would have seen his state, his authority, his wealth, but not that spring which, though hidden, fed his joy and made it green. But in his last hours the flocks were forgotten. The gold and silver, the raiment and the riches—these external elements sank out of sight, and left disclosed that deep and hidden source of his life, a soul-satisfying love.—*Ibid.*

b. Paternal.

[17120] Joseph and Benjamin are long and passionately loved by their father with a more than parental affection—bringing down his grey hairs for their sakes “in sorrow to the grave.” This is no character to be contemned or scoffed at.—*Dean Stanley.*

[17121] “If I be bereaved of my children, I am bereaved!” It may be truly said of Jacob, as a father, that “even his failings leaned to virtue's side.” We can account for them from causes that are in themselves good. There are good principles, right affections—but operating irregularly, under the sway of certain misguiding

influences,—erring in their direction and their degree, more than in their kind. The words before us express the power of natural affection. To be bereaved of his children was to him a pang of peculiar acuteness and tenderness. And yet still, the partiality of fondness is manifestly for Benjamin. Simeon is far from sharing equally with him the anxieties of the father's heart: “That he may send away *your other brother and Benjamin.*” The former appellation has not in it the affectionate tenderness that there is in the familiar and beloved name. We approve his affection, while we condemn its partiality; and yet, as we have before seen, even its partiality has its natural alleviations in the considerations from which it arose.—*Rev. R. Wardlaw, D.D.*

IV. SPIRITUAL SIDE OF CHARACTER AS VIEWED BEFORE THE VISION.

His inner life presents to view a heavy heart and a guilty conscience.

Faith slumbers.

[17122] The sun had set, and its last glow faded out from the grey hills of Ephraim, when he reached “an uneven valley, covered, as with gravestones, by large sheets of bare rock, some few here and there standing up like the cromlechs of Druidical monuments.” Here, close by a wild ridge, the broad summit of which was covered by an olive grove, was the place where Abraham had first rested for some time on entering the land, and whence he and Lot had, before their separation, taken a survey of the country. There, just before him, lay the Canaanitish Luz; and beyond it, many days' journey, stretched his weary course to Haran. It was a lonely, weird place, this valley of stones, in which to make his first night's quarters. But perhaps it agreed all the better with Jacob's mood, which had made him go on and on, from early morning, forgetful of time and way, till he could no longer pursue his journey. Yet, accidental as it seemed—for we read that “he lighted upon a certain place”—the selection of the spot was assuredly designed of God. Presently Jacob prepared for rest. Piling some of the stones, with which the valley was strewed, he made them a pillow, and laid him down to sleep. On that first night, when an outcast from his home, and a fugitive, *heavy thoughts, doubts, and fears* would crowd around Jacob; when, in every sense, his head was pillowed on stones in the rocky valley of Luz.—*Rev. A. Edersheim, D.D.*

[17123] Jacob had wilyly deprived Esau of his birthright. It needed lying and fraud to accomplish this; but he had scrupled at nothing. He had committed a mean deceit to outwit his brother; he had falsified the truth openly, in order to prevail over his old blind father; and then, in smooth-faced villany, he had knelt at the feet of the same outraged parent, and received the invoked blessing with a hardihood which, under the circumstances, appears almost like

blasphemy against God. It is likely his meditations must have been *far from pleasant*. From the actual summit of hope he was now precipitated into an abyss of uncertainty and alarm. His *heart was sad*; his mood was pensive. His step was not elastic; his eye was not full of light. *Guilt was heavier* than his wallet; sin pierced his hand more than his staff did.—*Rev. C. Robinson, D.D.*

[17124] His thoughts probably centred in one deep feeling that he was an outcast, a fugitive from justice. He was glad he was in so solitary a place, he was glad he was so far from Esau and from every human eye; and yet—what desolation of spirit accompanied this feeling: there was no one he could bid good-night to, no one he could spend the evening hour with in quiet talk; he was a banished man whatever fine gloss Rebekah might put upon it, and deep down in his conscience there was that which told him he was not banished without cause. Might not God also forsake him—might not God banish him, and might he not find a curse pursuing him, preventing man or woman from ever again looking in his face with pleasure?—*Rev. M. Dods, D.D.*

V. SPIRITUAL SIDE OF CHARACTER AS VIEWED AFTER THE VISION.

His inner life presents to view a sin convicted heart and an accusing conscience.

Faith awakes but prevails not.

[17125] "And Jacob awaked out of his sleep, and he said, Surely Jehovah is in this place, and I knew it not." Quite another fear now came upon him from that of loneliness or of doubt. It was *awe at the conscious presence* of the ever-watchful, ever-mindful covenant-God which made him feel, as many a wanderer since at such discovery: "How dreadful is this place! This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven." The next effect seems to have been some sort of sense of guilt. He immediately bethought himself of his old sins. He vaguely feels the need of propitiation. He seems to be fumbling around for something. He erects a pillar, which does not turn out to be an altar. He pours oil on it, which is no sacrifice. He vows a vow, which is only an offer of a bargain. He promises to give the Lord one sheep out of ten if the Lord would furnish the ten. He says he will begin to behave himself when he gets back; and live a better life, provided the Lord will bring him back unhurt. So we see that this vision has awaked him into a half-spasm of repentance, which renders him scared and uneasy.—*Rev. C. Robinson, D.D.*

[17126] The goodness of God leadeth men to repentance. And Jacob's was precisely a nature apt to be led—gentle, quiet, timid. And God dealt with him, in goodness, for his good. He would *shame him* out of subtlety by kindness. And oh! how bitterly ashamed of his sin against

Esau must Jacob have felt, in the light of what was now revealed to him! How must he have humbled himself in the dust before God, as he now perceived that the same God who had just blessed him had also witnessed all his treachery to Esau, and his duplicity towards Isaac! And how superfluous, as well as shameful, must all his artifices have appeared!—*Rev. W. Roberts.*

[17127] He seemed reverent, and yet he did not give his heart to God. He was *afraid*, but not submissive. He was convicted, but not converted. He was moved, but not melted. He lifted a monument, and then went on his way without lifting a prayer.—*Ibid.*

[17128] What this fugitive man can feel he feels. He seems absolutely arrested. He moves around as if he had been fairly impressed by the spirit of the spectacle. He is thoroughly awe-struck. He talks to himself. He acts like one swayed by a purpose outside of him. That dream gave his mind a shock. It broke up his apathy. One of the kings of France is said to have offered a reward for a *new sensation*. This was what Jacob now had. It had entered his very soul. He rose to meet it with as much gravity as he could command. The first thing it did was to frighten him. "And he was afraid." Singular to notice, he does not *pray* a word.—*Rev. C. Robinson, D.D.*

VI. SPIRITUAL SIDE OF CHARACTER AS VIEWED AFTER THE WRESTLE.

His inner life presents to view a God-converted heart and a quieted conscience.

Faith triumphs.

[17129] There are two decisive and determining moments in the life of Jacob. This wrestling with the angel of the Lord was the second of these, even as that marvellous vision in the field of Luz had been the first. The work which that began, this completed. That Lord who was the author then, was now the finisher, of the patriarch's faith. And this with which we now have to do, was the crisis not of his inward and spiritual life only, but of his outward life as well; even as the decisive, all-determining moments of the one and of the other do, in the providence of God, fall oftentimes together. What an epoch in his spiritual life this was, we shall best understand if we consider the name of Israel, which in this conflict he won, and which hereafter as a memorial of his victory he bore.—*Abp. Trench.*

[17130] That night Jacob the supplanter disappears, and Israel the prince of God stands up in his room. The man who could wrestle thus with the angel for the blessing had learnt what stolen blessings are worth. He had wrested the birthright by superior intellect and will from Esau, and it had become a bitter curse to him; he knew now that he must win it afresh by wrestling prayer to God. He wrestled, he agonized; lame and fainting he still held on; and

he came out of that agony of prayer a prince, having power with man and with God.—*Rev. J. Brown.*

[17131] God had finally conquered Jacob's nature by persistent grace. And the man was for evermore happier for the subjection. His figure rises in beautiful majesty on our recollection hereafter. He is God's own child now—an Old Testament Christian. He lived a discordant life for these years, but his powers were reduced to harmony by the convulsions of experience at Penuel. They had been, for all this lonely time, like so many bells in a mediæval belfry, where saint and monk had failed—tuneless and tongueless with neglect—which some mighty tempest rocking the turrets and towers, had unloosed from the rust, so that even the gentlest touch of the chorister could now set them ringing into chords—not sweet nor mellow at first, but growing more and more musical with each day's use, and by and by falling easily into their old wonted chimes calling to prayer.—*Rev. C. Robinson, D.D.*

[17132] It is easy to imagine the relief of this wrestling patriarch when the dawn caught him just crossing the stream. That light was only the sweet emblem of the dearer, brighter illumination he had in his soul. Every old cloud of apprehension was gone, every shadow of fear was banished. No more doubts, no more hesitancy; he could go forward on his journey unalarmed. Weeping endured for the night; joy came in the morning. He felt himself now under the sunshine of reconciliation and peace with God. He had gained the blessing he went across the brook to wrestle for. He was once more on praying terms with his Maker. And the greater included the less also. If he could only surely know that the Almighty was within reach of his voice, he knew that he need no longer dread an encounter with his wild brother Esau. In the very wording of his benediction the hint was given: "thou hast power with God, and with men;" that last expression meant he should prevail over Esau as he had prevailed over God. Nor was even that all which was given for his encouragement. The omniscient God reminded him that from his birth he had been chosen; it had been predicted "the elder shall serve the younger." This supplanting of Esau, however iniquitously accomplished by trickery, was now forgiven—overruled—and even accepted into the eternal purpose of Jehovah as a historic fact. So that all he had to do in the future was to go on, obedient, godly, resting upon the grace and goodness of his Almighty Friend.—*Ibid.*

VII. JACOB AND ESAU CONTRASTED.

1 Esau's feelings controlled his judgment, Jacob's judgment controlled his feelings.

[17133] They could not have been better contrasted had their characters been merely dramatic. Esau was bold, abrupt, heedless, yet

with much in his nature that was generous and lovable. He united a kind of rashness which produces the effect of wickedness, with qualities which still draw the heart to him. He had no settled plan of life, no governing principle. He acted resolutely, but thoughtlessly. Esau's feelings were first, his thoughtfulness was second.—*Ward Beecher.*

[17134] He indulged or repressed his feelings as seemed best. . . . Reason was always dominant. Nothing in him acted that he did not permit. He looked before him. He foresaw advantages, anticipated evils; secured the one, and avoided the other.—*Ibid.*

2 Esau was the man of generous impulse, Jacob of selfish calculation.

[17135] The sacred history, whilst exposing the carnal indifference of Esau, does not extenuate the selfishness of Jacob. Throughout their history, Esau is the bold, reckless, but generous and open-hearted man of this world; Jacob, on the contrary, is a thoughtful, religious man, but with many infirmities, and especially with that absence of simplicity and uprightness which often characterizes those who have made their choice of heaven, and yet let their hearts linger too much on earth.—*Commentary (Canon Cook).*

[17136] Unlike the sharp contrast of the earlier pairs of sacred history, in these two the good and evil are so mingled, that at first we might be at a loss which to follow, which to condemn. The distinctness with which they seem to stand and move before us against the clear distance is a new phase in the history. Esau, the shaggy, red-haired huntsman, the man of the field, with his arrows, his quiver, and his bow, coming in weary from the chase, caught as with the levity and eagerness of a child, by the sight of the lentil soup—"Feed me, I pray thee, with the red, red pottage,"—yet so full of generous impulse, so affectionate towards his aged father, so forgiving towards his brother, so open-hearted, so chivalrous; who has not at times felt his heart warm toward the poor rejected Esau, and been tempted to join with him as he cries with "a great and exceeding bitter cry, Hast thou but one blessing, my father? bless me, even me also, O my father!" And who does not in like manner feel at times his indignation swell against the younger brother? "Is he not rightly named Jacob? for he hath supplanted me these two times."—*Dean Stanley.*

[17137] Did we seek indeed from Old Testament history, in the era in which Jacob lived, a more winning portraiture, we do not require to travel beyond the tent-home of Isaac. In the person of Esau, even if we take him, as he is often regarded, as the representative man of the world, we have more engaging native excellencies. Our sympathies are all with the bold, brave hunter—his noble mien and manly ways

and filial devotion, rather than with the artful equivocating brother, who has tricked him out of his patrimonial rights, and drawn down thereby a very righteous vengeance. Add to this, there is nothing either brilliant or heroic about Jacob. Absent are those mental gifts and those valorous exploits which throw a halo of interest over the lives of some even subordinate characters in Bible story. Though we may admire a tenacity of purpose and unflinching determination, which go far to redeem baser and less amiable qualities—a certain worldly adroitness, energy of will, fertility of resource, and perhaps, more than all, patient endurance; yet he is neither philosopher, nor minstrel, nor warrior. His name is the keynote to his inner nature, “the crafty”—having a shrewd eye to business, and to self. His prosaic calling and ways are brought out in the sacred narrative, when he is briefly described as “a plain man dwelling in tents” (Gen. xxv. 27).—*Rev. J. Macduff, D.D.*

[17138] Esau might be a pleasant companion, far brighter and more vivacious than Jacob on a day's hunting; free and open-handed, and not implacable; and yet such people are not satisfactory friends. Often the most attractive people have similar inconstancy; they have a superficial vivacity, and brilliance, and charm, and good-nature, which invites a friendship they do not deserve.—*Rev. M. Dods, D.D.*

[17139] The weakness in Esau's character which makes him so striking a contrast to his brother is his inconstancy.

“That one error
Fills him with faults; makes him run through
all the sins.”

He is led by impulse, betrayed by appetite, everything by turns and nothing long. To-day despising his birthright, to-morrow breaking his heart for its loss; to-day vowing he will murder his brother, to-morrow falling on his neck and kissing him; a man you cannot reckon upon, and of too shallow a nature for anything to root itself deeply in.—*Ibid.*

[17140] Esau had his father's easy and generous nature, with his mother's energy fully developed in a masculine form. Jacob with his father's retiring disposition inherits his mother's artful ways. Esau, rough and robust in body, and of a bold and intrepid disposition, does not like the restraints of an “indoor” life; simple pastoral employments are dreary to him, and he devotes himself to the chase, living the life of an Ishmael or a Nimrod. Jacob, apparently a smaller and feebler man (as is sometimes the case with one in a twin birth), was also “a plain man,” quiet, timid, and retiring, fond of a simple life, and content to “dwell in the tents,” and attend to shepherd's duties. And so “the boys grew,” their diverse natures growing with them: Esau, manly and generous, a strong, bold, and cunning (*i.e.*, skillful) huntsman of the field, the favourite of his father; Jacob, a quiet, tender,

gentle youth, sitting in the tents, living a homely domestic life, the favourite of his mother. Courage, frankness, impulsiveness, and lordliness are encouraged by Esau's habits; thoughtfulness, timidity, and scheming craftiness by those of Jacob.—*Rev. J. Macduff, D.D.*

3 The fundamental superiority of Jacob's character to that of Esau is proved in the fact of the Divine preference.

[17141] God, who reads the heart, inclines to Jacob rather than to Esau. How, then, is this? Most certainly it is not on account of those things in his character which we so strongly reprobate that God prefers him. These things God also reprobates, and with far more intensity of indignation and abhorrence than any one of us experiences. But God inclines to Jacob for that in him which He more plainly sees than we are able to detect. Esau is a brave, honourable, and manly spirit; but he is godless and profane. Jacob is a mean, cowardly, and crooked nature to begin with; but there are germs and latent possibilities of goodness in him, which more than counterbalance his present inferiority to Esau. We see this when we look more closely into the conduct of these brothers, both in the matter of the birthright and also of the blessing. Jacob bought and Esau sold the birthright—a nefarious transaction whichever way we look at it. A birthright is a thing too sacred to be bought or bartered. But at least Jacob showed his appreciation of the birthright in his purchase of it; while Esau just as plainly showed how he despised it in his sale of it. So, also, in the matter of the blessing. How much Esau valued it for its own sake we do not know. But that he so readily forwent his birthright raises the suspicion that he did not greatly prize his father's blessing till he lost it. But Jacob manifestly did attach importance to his father's blessing, and a very high importance too, though he used such crooked means to gain it. Indeed, the very depth of his devices shows the earnestness with which he coveted the thing he sought. And God appreciates these indications of superior susceptibility in men, and fosters them, and bears with much infirmity in order to develop them. And the result justifies the preference God shows to such men.—*Rev. W. Roberts.*

[17142] It is natural, I know, to pity poor Esau; but one has no right to do more. One has no right to fancy for a moment that God was arbitrary or hard upon him. Esau is not the sort of man to be the father of a great nation, or of anything else great. Greedy, passionate, reckless people like him, without due feeling of religion or of the unseen world, are not the men to govern the world, or help it forward, or be of use to mankind, or train up their families in justice, and wisdom, and piety. If there had been no people in the world but people like Esau, we should be savages at this day, without religion or civilization of any kind. They are of the earth, earthy; dust they are,

and unto dust they will return. It is men like Jacob whom God chooses—men who have a feeling of religion and the unseen world; men who can look forward, and live by faith, and form plans for the future—and carry them out, too, against disappointment and difficulty, till they succeed.—*Canon Kingsley.*

[17143] The character of Jacob, with all his moral imperfections at the first, is, on account of its religious aptitudes, a nobler and truer character than Esau's, in spite of all his natural excellences at the first. *Such is the judgment of the Most High God* on character, and such is the criterion by which our judgments must be regulated. We are very apt to worship the manly and the bold: let us try, with better reason, to reverence the simple and devout.—*Rev. W. Roberts.*

[17144] Esau was bold, off-hand, generous; unthinking, impulsive, impetuous; taken up with the present, regardless of the future. Jacob was thoughtful and strong-minded; retiring, cautious, and calculating, and disposed to be even selfish and wily, not nearly so attractive as a natural character; and yet he is preferred by Him who is sovereign in His choice of the objects of His favour and the instruments of His purposes, and not without reason and wisdom in His choice. And what a vessel unto honour is grace to make out of the inferior materials supplied by the natural qualities of Jacob!—*Rev. M. Dods, D.D.*

4 The fundamental superiority of Jacob's character to that of Esau is proved in the result of their respective lives.

[17145] The free, easy, frank good-nature of the profane Esau is not overlooked; the craft, duplicity, timidity of the religious Jacob is duly recorded. Yet, on the one hand, fickleness, unsteadiness, weakness, want of faith, and want of principle, ruin and render useless the noble qualities of the first; and, on the other hand, steadfast purpose, resolute sacrifice of present to future, and fixed principle, purify, elevate, turn to lasting good even the baser qualities of the second. And, yet again, whether in the two brothers or their descendants, we see how in each the good and evil strove together and worked their results almost to the end. Esau and his race cling still to the outskirts of the chosen people. "Meddle not," it was said in after times, "with your brethren the children of Esau, for I will not give you of their land, because I have given Mount Seir to Esau for a possession." Israel, on the other hand, is out-cast, thwarted, deceived, disappointed, bereaved—"all these things are against me;" in him, and in his progeny also, the curse of Ebal is always blended with the blessings of Gerizim. How hardly Esau was condemned, how hardly Jacob was saved!—*Dean Stanley.*

[17146] By toil and struggle, Jacob, the supplanter, is gradually transformed into Israel,
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the prince of God. He looks back over his long career with the fulness of experience and humility. "I am not worthy of the least of all Thy mercies and of all the truth which Thou hast shown unto Thy servant." Alone of the patriarchal family, his end is recorded as invested with the solemnity of warning and of prophetic song. "Gather yourselves together, ye sons of Jacob, and hearken unto Israel your father." We need not fear to acknowledge that the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac was also the God of Jacob.—*Ibid.*

[17147] Esau in his youth is a far more attractive character than Jacob. But who ever dwells on his later years, as we fashion them forth to ourselves in his strongholds on Mount Seir, the rich, successful, mighty Arab chief, as we rest on those of Jacob? It is the true, ever self-repeating history of the world's banquet; the best wine is that which is first, and afterwards that which is worse. The very lands of the two brothers' inheritance seem to catch up and repeat the mighty truth. The red ranges of the mountains of Edom shine forth gloriously under the blaze of the morning sunshine; but the calm shadows of evening sleep peacefully on the grassy uplands of Judah. There is a difference deep as eternity between natural attractiveness and the true character of redeemed humanity wrought by however slow degrees in the servant of God, by the regenerating, renewing influences of the Holy Ghost. Brightly as the morning of the man of the world may glow with all the glorious colours of the molten light, it must end in darkness. Showy and attractive as are youthful frankness, joyousness, and daring, there is a poison which pervades and at last destroys all worldly things which are not sanctified by the presence of God; whilst the path of those who walk with God is like the "shining light which shineth more and more unto the perfect day."—*Bp. Wilberforce.*

[17148] At the outset of their lives, no doubt, Esau utterly eclipses Jacob; but in the outcome of their lives Jacob as thoroughly eclipses Esau. Jacob's is an upward, and Esau's, comparatively at least, a downward course. Day by day we see new excellences springing up in Jacob's life and Jacob's heart, until at last he wins the name of Israel, a prince with God.—*Rev. W. Roberts.*

VIII. HOMILETICAL HINTS.

1 The sympathy of our own lives with that of Jacob.

[17149] There is the Jacob whom the Lord saw under all the craft and cleverness of the lad who could cheat both father and brother of a blessing. And this is the radical strength of every man who would leave his baser nature beneath him, and pass up, as Jacob passed, to claim his birthright in the eternal world. If you have never wrestled the long night through for the blessing, if you have never, faint and

worn, flung yourself down before the cross and cried, "If I perish, I perish here; I will not let Thee go, Thou dying Christ, except Thou bless me," be silent about Jacob's falsehoods and sins. That, too, is your world. Israel can never be your name if you cannot win your principedom as he won it in Peniel. And if, like him, you go halting on your way, if through this Divine infirmity you feel crippled in your race for the prizes and crowns of this life, then "Gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end, for the grace that shall be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ."—*Rev. J. Brown.*

2 The lessons to be derived from his history.

(1) *It teaches us to realize our need and the source whence that need may be supplied.*

[17150] The history of Jacob teaches us this: Let a man know himself. Let him understand, first and last, and once for all, that what he wants is God. Not fame—not wealth—not friends—not country—not home—yes, in a sense all of these, but over and above any one of them, he is soul-hungry and soul-thirsty after God. And he will never be at peace till he rests in God, the centre of all hope and joy.

[17151] We must recollect that real, genuine religion consists in a very essential experience of sin and grace, of our own misery and God's glory, of our own weakness and God's strength, of our own blindness and God's wisdom; and remember, at the same time, that in reality we understand nothing more of it than what we experience. We must learn to know that God has interwoven the cross into all His providential dealings, and that the old man gradually bleeds to death upon it under them. The Scriptures speak of a salutary crucifixion and a dying with Christ, as well as a rising and being made alive again with Him. Even as the latter is something very sacred and glorious, so the former, on the contrary, like every other mode of being put to death, cannot take place without anxiety and distress, as little as Jacob's conflict could be carried on without pain and tears. Before Israel was delivered out of Egypt, their distress had reached its height; and Paul always bore about with him the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Christ might also be manifested in him.—*Krummacher.*

[17152] The life of Jacob is an illustration of the way in which the Divine Being, by wondrous but effective discipline, turns a sinful life into that which is comparatively pure and prayerful. Here we see the possibilities of which the lowest manhood is capable under the touch of heaven; and in its study welcome light is thrown upon many problems which perplex the soul.—*C. N.*

(2) *It suggests the duty of improving life's opportunities.*

[17153] Look at Jacob in the opportunities of his boyhood. A contemplative father like Isaac was not the best sort of father for him. There was

between them just that want of sympathy which led to parental neglect on the one hand, and to filial disregard on the other. Jacob was quiet without being thoughtful, and his habits were homely without being devout. It was a certainty that he would be his mother's boy, for his nature was the complement of hers. She had the greater will, he had the greater affection. Under her he learned how to submit to another's strong mind rather than how to guide his own warm heart; and, when suddenly wrenched from her, we see how little he was prepared to traverse the world alone. He might have had a different brother. The youth who early took to the life of a beast of prey was not likely to have much regard for a brother who did not dare to sleep abroad, and who lived on potherbs and goat's milk. But, with the powers which Jacob had, the opportunities of such a home were great, and, by wise behaviour, he might have endeared himself to Isaac his father, and to Esau his brother, no less than to Rebekah his mother, and, as he did afterwards, to Rachel his wife, and Joseph his favourite child.—*Rev. G. Woolnough.*

[17154] If we come up to this man in mid life we shall find his position one of difficulty. He must break away from Laban, and whilst there may be a right way and a wrong to do that, the difficulty is all the same. Leaving a situation of great trust is an awkward thing at any time, and he must have felt it desperate to call in both his wives to advise him. Getting clear of Laban was running foul of Esau, and that was the most trying moment of his life. At last all the energy, tact, and courage of the man are brought out. There is now something like an effort to do the right thing in the right way. His last precaution is rightly last, for it must be either first or last. When a man should work he ought not to pray, and when he should pray it is waste time to work. If a man wants guidance, let him pray; Jacob did not want that, and therefore at once laid all his plans. If a man wants God's prospering blessing, let him pray; Jacob did want that, and he sought for it last of all, sought by soul-stirring prayer.—*Ibid.*

[17155] If we follow Jacob into old age and into Egypt his surroundings are, if possible, still more critical. He was the head of a clan in a country ruled by an absolute monarchy. Their vocation as shepherds made them not very welcome just at that time, and they are welcomed as a set-off for the great service which Joseph has rendered to the nation. Jacob must bear himself with submission, yet with dignity. He must be a good citizen, and yet rule well his own people; and the gratitude of Pharaoh must not be greater than that of his distinguished guest. Yes, here was a man of rare powers and of rare opportunities for writing his character on the lives and destiny of his children, and few perhaps have succeeded better. Few men have had the like possi-

bilities for moulding large communities with means that were primitive, but with prospects the most enduring. But let us be warned against wasting time in unavailing regrets that Providence has not been more generous with us; let us embrace the opportunities given, however small, nor wait for great ones; for great occasions do not make great men. The sum of our small efforts may at last be great indeed, and it may be that of those who have so done it will be found, "he who has gathered much has nothing over, and he who has gathered little has no lack." I would, therefore, affectionately warn the young especially against waiting for something to turn up, and against seeking for a place in life where they will have as little as possible to do, and where they will contribute as little as possible to the common stock of public good.—*Ibid.*

JOSEPH.

I. INTRODUCTORY.

x The history of Joseph is one of the most touching and instructive narratives ever recorded for the benefit of mankind.

(1) *As to its inimitable pathos.*

[17156] The story of Joseph is in many respects unique. A universal favourite, one over which gentle childhood bends with interest and venerable age with tears, it is in some respects as unrivalled in the Bible as the Bible is unrivalled among books. There are touches of nature which the greatest uninspired genius never approached—so fine, so true, so tender, that no man of ordinary sensibility could read the story aloud, but his tongue would falter and his eyes be dim with tears.—*Rev. T. Guthrie, D.D.*

[17157] There is a beauty and pathos in the story of Joseph which invest it with a peculiar charm. Indeed, if we consider the marvellous changes of fortune, the deliverance from the pit and the prison, and the sudden elevation to princely power, it may be safely said that there is nothing in the highly-seasoned tales of romance so passing strange.—*Rev. J. Norton, D.D.*

[17158] In whatever point of view we consider it, the history of Joseph, as it is laid before us in the first book of the Bible, is wonderfully adapted, not only to arrest our attention, but to affect our hearts, and influence our lives. Many things unite to give a special and peculiar charm to this story. The tender age of Joseph, when he is first introduced to our notice, his grievous afflictions, his virtuous behaviour, his marvellous advancement, and all the steps and circumstances which led to his promotion, are most striking and most instructive. These things also are related with all the eloquence of that

unaffected simplicity which never fails both to interest and delight us.—*Ibid.*

(2) *As to its picturesque simplicity.*

[17159] The life of Joseph is eminently picturesque. It resembles the scenes that lend their charms to the Alps or Apennines, where the thundering cataract and foaming torrent alternate with lakes that lie asleep in the arms of beauty, where frowning crags look down on flowery meadows, and deep dark valleys are parted by mountains whose peaks pierce the azure sky, and, glistening with eternal snows, seem to bear up the vault of heaven.—*Rev. T. Guthrie, D.D.*

[17160] No tale of Eastern fiction could be more full of picturesque detail or striking adventure, no hero of romance could move our sympathy more powerfully.—*The Bible Educator.*

(3) *As to its dramatic interest.*

[17161] The history of Joseph is a succession of scenes, constituting the finest prose drama in the world. If ever drama possessed all the constituents of the species of composition—unity of plot, a beginning, middle, and end, vicissitude of interest, variety of character, pathos of feeling, elegance of costume—it is this. Its commencement is so simple, its denouement so ingenious, its close so satisfactory and triumphant! And yet we never lose the feeling for a moment—"This is truth, although truth stranger far than fiction."—*Rev. G. Gillilan.*

(4) *As to its historical interest.*

[17162] The historical interest is greater than in the case of the earlier patriarchs, for in Joseph sacred and profane history for the first time mingle; he has left his mark on the Egyptian annals as deeply as on the Hebrew.—*The Bible Educator.*

[Some Egyptologists question this.—*C. N.*]

(5) *As to its intense and finely diversified moral interest.*

[17163] The history of Joseph recommends itself, by its lofty morality, the spirit of piety which it breathes, and the lessons of wisdom which it teaches. Seek stories that rouse and sustain our interest by remarkable vicissitudes of fortune, the play of lights and shadows, sudden alternations of sunshine and of storm, scenes both of the wildest grief and of ecstatic joy, hair-breadth escapes from horrid crimes, from pit, and prison, and deadly perils, where shall we find one to compare with Joseph's? No man, I ever read of, had such experience of the vicissitudes of life, passed unscathed through so many strange and fiery trials, met with deliverances so signal, or had more apparent cause to doubt, and in the end more real cause to acknowledge, a presiding providence and the goodness of God.—*Rev. T. Guthrie, D.D.*

(6) *As to its theological interest.*

[17164] The theological interest of Joseph's life can hardly be over-rated; in him the

Messianic promise made to Abraham first begins to unfold itself, while in his own career the foreshadowing of the Messiah Himself is unmistakable.—*The Bible Educator*.

[Some Egyptologists question this.—C. N.]

- 2 The history of Joseph presents a type of character pre-eminent in its combination of grace and power.

Its comprehensive beauty is unsurpassed, though occasionally reproduced in Jewish record.

[17165] In David we find a similar flexibility and grace of character, and a similar personal superiority. We find the same bright and humorous disposition helping him to play the man in adverse circumstances; but we miss in David Joseph's self-control and incorruptible purity, as we also miss something of his capacity for difficult affairs of state. In Daniel this latter capacity is abundantly present, and a facility equal to Joseph's in dealing with foreigners, and there is also a certain grace or nobility in the Jewish Vizier, but Joseph had a surplus of power which enabled him to be cheerful and alert in doleful circumstances, which Daniel would certainly have borne manfully but probably in a sterner and more passive mood.—*Rev. A. Dods, D.D.*

II. SPECIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE CHILD AND YOUTH.

- 1 Joseph inherited and happily combined the highest qualities of his ancestors.

[17166] He had Abraham's dignity and capacity, Isaac's purity and power of self-devotion, Jacob's cleverness and buoyancy and tenacity.—*Ibid.*

[17167] Like Abraham, he was strong, decided, and prudent; like Isaac, patient and gentle; like Jacob, warm-hearted and affectionate.—*Rev. A. Edersheim, D.D.*

[17168] A remarkable combination of gifts and graces met in the character of Joseph. He had the calmness, the shrewdness, the large-heartedness, the faith of Abraham, with the holy reverence and much of the gentleness of Isaac. He had the gushing tenderness of Jacob, without his ruggedness and impetuosity.—*Blackie.*

[17169] A more attractive character can hardly be conceived, containing as it does so wonderfully the robust virtues of a heroic age with the tender graces of a devotional life.—*The Bible Educator.*

- 2 He displayed unspoiled humility and gentleness, notwithstanding the injudicious partiality of his father.

[17170] It does not appear that Joseph had been at all spoiled by indulgence. It may be said, indeed, and said truly—no thanks to Jacob for that—how many hundreds have been spoiled by such partiality, for one that has escaped its injurious influence! In the present case we

have an exception to the general result, but no proof against the tendency. For the exception before us, we have to thank, along with the naturally gentle dispositions of the youth, the early influence of the grace of God upon his heart—the power of piety. We discover none of the perverseness and selfishness of one who had been spoiled by a petted childhood.—*Rev. R. Wardlaw, D.D.*

[17171] It is not difficult to perceive how even the promising qualities of his natural disposition might become sources of moral danger. Of this the history of Joseph's ancestors had afforded only too painful evidence. How much greater would be the peril to a youth exposed to such twofold temptation as rooted dislike on the part of brothers whom he could not respect, and marked favouritism on that of his father!—*Rev. A. Edersheim, D.D.*

[17172] The speciality of affection for Joseph relates to him in comparison with his senior brothers rather than with Benjamin; Joseph having been one for whom the father had waited and longed during a succession of many years, and who was at length born to him, when he was advanced in life, by the wife of whose love he had ever been most anxiously desirous to possess such a pledge. This peculiarity of feeling centred most strongly therefore in him, although it was afterwards renewed in Benjamin. He was the first-born of his beloved Rachel, of whom Benjamin was the only brother. Rachel had been the wife of his own choice—his first love; and the tenderness with which he cherished her memory naturally and strongly attached itself to her offspring. But, independently of these and other natural "cords of love" by which Joseph was bound to his heart, he appears to have been a youth of amiable character and of early piety; which, to a godly father, could not fail to be another and a powerful bond of attachment. He was in this distinguished from his elder brothers at least—who, both here and throughout the narrative, appear before us as very far indeed from what they ought to have been—very unworthy sons of such a sire.—*Rev. R. Wardlaw, D.D.*

- 3 He stands out prominently as one who, from early childhood, manifested all the virtues of youth.

(1) Piety.

[17173] The record does not inform us of the means by which, in Providence, his early impressions of piety were produced. The fact unfolds itself in his subsequent history. And that this early piety was one of the grounds of his father's partial fondness, we have no reason for a moment to doubt. What we know of his own character, more than warrants our belief of it. And, considered in itself, the ground was a worthy one. He looked not to corporeal or even mental powers and accomplishments merely, but to the qualities of the heart; and of all those qualities, first and specially to the

symptoms of religious principle and spiritual sensibility—the indications of Divine grace taking hold of the affections—of that “fear of the Lord which is the beginning of wisdom.”—*Ibid.*

(2) *Moral sensitiveness.*

[17174] The dress and the dreams were insufferably exasperating to the brothers, because they proclaimed and marked in a definite way the feeling of Joseph's *superiority*, which had already been vaguely rankling in their consciousness. And it is creditable to Joseph that this superiority should first have emerged in connection with a point of conduct. It was in *moral* stature that the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah felt that they were outgrown by the stripling whom they carried with them as their drudge. Neither are we obliged to suppose that Joseph was a gratuitous rule-bearer, or that when he carried their evil report to his father he was actuated by a prudish, censorious, or in any way unworthy spirit. That he very well knew how to hold his tongue no man ever gave more adequate proof; but he that understands that there is a time to keep silence, necessarily sees also that there is a time to speak. And no one can tell what torture that pure young soul may have endured in the remote pastures, when left alone to withstand day after day the outrage of these coarse and unscrupulous men.—*Rev. M. Dods, D.D.*

(3) *Artlessness and candour.*

[17175] In relating his dreams to his brethren, Joseph displayed the simplicity of his mind. Had he been artful and deceptive, he would, we imagine, have kept them to himself. But there was a noble frankness in his character, and far from supposing that by communicating his dreams, he would increase the animosity of his brethren, he probably thought that he would thereby win their confidence, and disarm their hate. That his dreams were calculated to do this, we do not say, but Joseph had no vain or ostentatious views, and why then should he not tell his brethren everything? Had he been less candid, he might perhaps have escaped their wrath; but, on the other hand, the relating of his dreams was one of the links in the chain of events, which, in the end, led to their accomplishment.—*Rev. T. Smith.*

[17176] Had he not been a very *simple-minded* lad, he would have kept his dreams to himself; but he not only related them to his father, but to his jealous brothers. They nursed their bitter hatred, and bided their time for punishing the unsuspecting object of it.—*Rev. J. Norton, D.D.*

(4) *Thoughtfulness.*

[17177] He saw, obscurely indeed, but with sufficient clearness to make him thoughtful, that the man whom God chooses and makes a blessing to others is so far advanced above his fellows that they lean upon him and pay him homage as if he were in the place of God to them. He saw that his higher powers were to be used for

his brethren, and that the high destiny he somehow felt to be his was to be won by doing service so essential that his family would bow before him and give themselves into his hand. He saw this, as every man whose love keeps pace with his talent sees it, and he so far anticipated the dignity of Ilim who, in the deepest self-sacrifice, assumed a position and asserted claims which enraged his brethren and made even his believing mother marvel. Joseph knew that the welfare of his family rested not with the Esau-like good-nature of Reuben, still less with the fanatical ferocity of Simeon and Levi, nor with the servile pationce of Issachar, nor with the natural force and dignity of Judah, but with some deeper qualities which, if he himself did not yet possess, he at least valued and aspired to.—*Rev. M. Dods, D.D.*

(5) *Patience.*

[17178] Fastened to a pole, as the custom was, and dragged behind the camels of the Ishmaelites; or, it may be (to prevent his being in a way injured, and thus rendered less saleable on the market), placed upon a camel; he was carried away from his country and his home, and brought down into Egypt. The youth was now seventeen years of age, and fully capable, therefore, of understanding the distressing circumstances of his condition. How he bore up above his trials it is somewhat difficult to conceive; but he was, we imagine, one of those spirits who can endure the rough blasts of adversity with extraordinary fortitude and patience. He was cast in such a mould as that he could pass through afflictions under which many would have pined away; and then, we cannot doubt that he was sustained and strengthened by an unseen hand.—*Rev. T. Smith.*

(6) *Filial duty.*

[17179] Unsuspecting of the evils before him, Joseph set out on his errand to visit his brethren. It was an errand of filial duty and of fraternal kindness. To the claims of both the pious and amiable youth was feelingly alive. How fond soever of his father's society, he was still fonder of his father's gratification, and prompt to do his will.—*Rev. R. Wardlaw, D.D.*

[17180] He could not expect much pleasure from the errand upon which his father proposed to send him. He does not appear to have been acquainted with the way. After he had set out, a certain man found him wandering in the field. After what had occurred at home, he might look for raillery and unkind treatment from his brethren abroad. But it is his father's will that he should go and visit his brethren, and that is his law. Hence he urges no objection, nor mentions a single obstacle; but with all the readiness of cheerful alacrity and dutiful submission, his only language to the summons of his father is this: “Here am I.” As if he had said, Here am I, my father, ready to go wherever you may send me, ready to do whatever you may command me.—*Rev. C. Overton.*

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[17181] His thus "*seeking* his brethren" showed that he was in earnest, both to fulfil his father's wishes and to satisfy himself and relieve his own anxiety. Had he not been thus in earnest, he might, on coming to Shechem and not finding them, have turned carelessly homeward, and told Jacob he had executed his message—had gone to the place, but they were not there. But this would not have been Joseph. He could not be thus indifferent, either as a son or as a brother. He is overjoyed at the intelligence thus received, and hastens on to Dothan. He at length descries his brethren at a distance; and, weary as we cannot but conceive him to have been, he quickens his steps to reach them.—*Rev. R. Wardlaw, D.D.*

III. SPECIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE STATESMAN.

1 Sound judgment.

[17182] The power he wielded was just the power which a nation gives to a statesman of real talent—to the man, who, in extraordinary times, steps forward, and by some large and comprehensive measure proposes to meet the circumstances of the country. Such a man is hailed by the popular voice as just the man for the day, and almost with one consent will the people, as well as the monarch, submit to his arrangements, and lend him their assistance in carrying them to perfection. That Joseph was such a man is evident from his history. He possessed an extraordinary capacity for government. In the house of Potiphar, in the prison, and now no less in the court, he managed the affairs with which he was entrusted with superior skill, and if genius be rightly defined as inventive, then must we admit that he was richly endowed with it. God was with him, it is true, and to God he owed his superior abilities, but these abilities were to a great extent natural, for he evinced from the very first a mind of a very superior order. The wisdom of his policy it is impossible to call in question. Viewed in whatever light it may be it was indicative of sound judgment and discretion. Joseph occupied the place of Pharaoh; and what is more becoming in a monarch than a desire to promote the welfare of his people? He is properly their shepherd, whose duty it is to provide for the necessities of his flock. Joseph probably thought of this, and ruling for Pharaoh and in Pharaoh's name, wished to promote the best interests of the people; and to gather up the surplus produce of the land during the seven years of plenty, and thus to prepare for the famine which he foresaw would come, was undoubtedly an act of kindness to the Egyptians, and one which, as the narrative intimates, they ultimately appreciated.—*Ibid.*

[17183] When the Egyptians had parted with all their money, cattle, and lands, and still wanted sustenance, they offered to become Pharaoh's servants. But Joseph refused to accept this

offer. He seems to have had a great and true insight into things, and could not think that he should really advance his master's interest by keeping his subjects in poverty and slavery. He was desirous of establishing a sufficient revenue for the occasions of the crown, and, at the same time, of giving the subjects a property of their own—as well to excite their industry to improve it, as to raise in them a sense of duty and affection to the government that protected them in the secure enjoyment of it. For this reason, Joseph returned back possessions to all the people, upon condition of paying yearly the fifth part of the product of their lands to the king for ever. When he returned the lands back again to the people, however, he did not put them in possession each man of what was his own before, but he removed them from one end of Egypt to the other, wisely foreseeing that few men would have so easy a sense of their condition in the enjoyment of what had formerly been their own, without tax or burden, but which they now received upon terms of disadvantage, as they would have in the possession of what was never their own, though they held it upon the same conditions.—*Shuckford.*

[17184] The permanent alterations made by Joseph on their tenure of land, and on their places of abode, may have convinced the most sagacious of the Egyptians that it was well for them that their money had failed, and that they had been compelled to yield themselves unconditionally into the hands of this remarkable ruler. It is the mark of a competent statesman that he makes temporary distress the occasion for permanent benefit; and from the confidence Joseph won with the people, there seems every reason to believe that the permanent alterations he introduced were considered as competent as certainly they were bold.—*Rev. M. Dods, D.D.*

2 Keen foresight.

[17185] An enemy was at hand—an enemy more terrible than the warriors' proudest hosts; but Egypt was prepared to meet him, and to bid defiance to his power. But for Joseph's forethought, famine would have found the country like a dismantled city, and would have entered in among the people, and smitten its thousands to the ground; but the land was fortified against it, and when it came it could scarcely find admission, for its demands were met, and the necessities of the inhabitants relieved.—*Anon.*

3 Self-reliance.

[17186] There was that in Joseph's bearing which would have commended him to any sagacious monarch. Not only did the court accept him as a messenger from God, but they could not fail to recognize substantial and serviceable human qualities alongside of what was mysterious in him. The ready apprehension with which he appreciated the magnitude of the danger, the clear-sighted promptitude with which he met it, the resource and quiet capacity

with which he handled a matter involving the entire property of Egypt, showed them that they were in the presence of a true statesman. No doubt the confidence with which he described the best method of dealing with the emergency was the confidence of one who was convinced he was speaking for God.—*Rev. M. Dods, D.D.*

4 Personal determination.

[17187] Joseph was not the man to be satisfied with *playing* the prime minister; but he began, forthwith, to carry out the duties of his high office with diligence and conscientiousness. The indications were soon made apparent to every one, that his interpretation of Pharaoh's dream was correct. The year in which Joseph was called to assume the management of public affairs proved to be a year of plenty, and it was followed by six years of like abundance; and "in the seven plenteous years, the earth brought forth by handfuls" (Gen. xli. 47).—*Rev. J. Norton, D.D.*

[17188] There is no doubt that Joseph had learned to recognize the providence of God as a most important factor in his life. And the man who does so, gains for his character all the strength and resolution that come with a capacity for waiting. He saw, most legibly written on his own life, that God is never in a hurry. And for the resolute adherence to his seven years' policy such a belief was most necessary. Nothing, indeed, is said of opposition or incredulity on the part of the Egyptians. But was there ever a policy of such magnitude carried out in any country without opposition or without evilly-disposed persons using it as a weapon against its promoter? No doubt during these years he had need of all the personal determination as well as of all the official authority he possessed. And if, on the whole, remarkable success attended his efforts, we must ascribe this partly to the unchallengeable justice of his arrangements, and partly to the impression of commanding genius Joseph seems everywhere to have made.—*Rev. M. Dods, D.D.*

5 Honourable policy and upright action.

He appears before us an unimpeachable pattern of disinterestedness.

[17189] Suppose it assumed that everything he did was for his prince, and that he exerted himself, to the uttermost of his power and his policy, to serve him and to forward his interests, there is not the slightest symptom of his having availed himself of so tempting an opportunity to benefit himself and his family—as so many, in the same circumstances, would have reckoned themselves almost entitled, or even more than entitled, to do. Of no such selfish principle is there the remotest indication in the whole of Joseph's political administration. He stands clear of this too common vice of public eminence and trust.—*Rev. R. Wardlaw, D.D.*

[17190] "Joseph," says Dr. Lawson, "did not enrich himself with that money which came so

abundantly into his hands. He brought it into Pharaoh's house, reserving nothing to himself but the lawful reward of his labour." He certainly had good opportunities to heap up riches without end to himself. He could not have been easily detected if he had secreted a part to his own use; and, if his mind had been tainted with covetousness, it might have found out many pretences to excuse him to himself; but he knew that an all-seeing eye was upon him, and abhorred the thought of sinning against God.—*Ibid.*

IV. SPECIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE MAN.

1 Conscientiousness and integrity.

[17191] When one has learned how little he can depend upon finding good faith and common justice in the world, his character will show itself in the attitude he assumes towards men and towards life generally. The supreme healthiness of Joseph's nature resists all the infectious influences that emanate from the world around him, and preserves him from every kind of morbid attitude towards the world and life. So easily did he throw off all vain regrets and stifle all vindictive and morbid feelings, so readily did he adjust himself to and so heartily enter into life as it presented itself to him, that he speedily rose to be overseer in the house of Potiphar. His capacity for business, his genial power of devoting himself to other men's interests, his clear integrity, were such, that this officer of Pharaoh's could find no more trustworthy servant in all Egypt.—*Rev. M. Dods, D.D.*

[17192] Joseph wisely accommodated himself to his situation. He did not give way to stubbornness and sullenness in his new capacity. He did not arrogantly say, This is no situation for me, nor one which I have been accustomed to fulfil. He did not say, I will do nothing but what I am obliged to do; and even that I will not take the least care how I do. Far, very far, was Joseph either from speaking or acting thus. He made it a matter of conscience to discharge, faithfully, the services and the duties which he had to do. He did everything as well as he could.—*Anon.*

[17193] The integrity of his character was put to the severest trial. Removed from the watchful eye of his doting father, and surrounded by every form of temptation which can be imagined, the foundations of moral responsibility must have been firmly laid, to have remained undisturbed.—*Rev. J. Norton, D.D.*

2 Trustworthiness.

[17194] In the house of Potiphar it went with Joseph as formerly in his own home. For it is not in the power of circumstances, prosperous or adverse, to alter our characters. He that is faithful in little shall also be faithful in much; and from him who knoweth not how to employ

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what is committed to his charge, shall be taken even that he hath. Joseph was faithful, honest, upright, and conscientious, because in his earthly, he served a heavenly Master, whose presence he always realized. Accordingly "Jehovah was with him," and "Jehovah made all that he did to prosper in his hand." His master was not long in observing this. From an ordinary domestic slave he promoted him to be "overseer over his house, and all that he had he put into his hand." The confidence was not misplaced. Jehovah's blessing henceforth rested upon Potiphar's substance, and he "left all that he had in Joseph's hand; and he knew not aught that he had, save the bread which he did eat."—*Rev. A. Eidersheim, D.D.*

[17195] The sculptures and paintings of the ancient Egyptian tombs bring vividly before us the daily life and duties of Joseph. "The property of great men is shown to have been managed by scribes, who exercised a most methodical and minute supervision over all the operations of agriculture, gardening, the keeping of live stock, and fishing. Every product was carefully registered, to check the dishonesty of the labourers, who in Egypt have always been famous in this respect. Probably in no country was farming ever more systematic. Joseph's previous knowledge of tending flocks, and perhaps of husbandry, and his truthful character, exactly fitted him for the post of overseer. How long he filled it we are not told."—*Ibid.*

3 Purity.

[17196] There are characters, even godly characters, who resemble different classes of household gods. Some are so frail that the faintest breath of trial seems to shiver them to fragments and the weakest temptation to mar their beauty, while others pass through the roughest experience of providential dealing without sustaining any injury. It is written, "God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able." Joseph is a striking example of the latter class. The nurture of a godly home had not exerted its influences in vain, he had so profited by them that he was strong enough to bear unharmed the temptations that grew out of the painful transitions of his early manhood; yea, to be more than conqueror.—*Rev. W. Harris.*

[17197] He preserves his purity and uprightness. How grand, like some lustrous diamond gleaming inwardly on his lonely spirit, the talisman of the one thought, "How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God!" (Gen. xxxix. 9).—*Rev. J. Norton, D.D.*

4 Charity and forbearance.

[17198] When Joseph, in prison for no crime, was asked the cause of his misery and disgrace he merely says that he was innocent and stolen away from the land of the Hebrews. He is silent about Potiphar's wife, about the murderous

conspiracy of his brothers, about their envy, their calumny, their cruelty, their deceit, because his love for his enemies forbids him to dwell on their sins or to make mention of them to others. He speaks of *things*, not of *persons*, and here we have a lofty lesson of the most exalted charity.—*Chrysostom.*

[17199] For his purity you will find his equal, one among a thousand; for his mercy scarcely one. For there is nothing more intensely trying than to live under false and painful accusations, which totally misrepresent and damage your character, which effectually bar your advancement, and which yet you have it in your power to disprove. Joseph, feeling his indebtedness to Potiphar, contents himself with the simple avowal that he himself is innocent. The word is on his tongue that can put a very different face on the matter, but rather than utter that word, Joseph will suffer the stroke that otherwise must fall on his master's honour; will pass from his high place and office of trust, through the jeering or possibly compassionating slaves, branded as one who has betrayed the frankest confidence, and is fitter for the dungeon than the stewardship of Potiphar. He is content to lie under the cruel suspicion that he had in the foulest way wronged the man whom most he should have regarded, and whom in point of fact he did enthusiastically serve. There was one man in Egypt whose good-will he prized, and this man now scorned and condemned him, and this for the very act by which Joseph had proved most faithful and deserving.—*Rev. M. Dods, D.D.*

5 Sympathy.

[17200] On coming, one morning, into the apartment of the two officers of the king, Joseph perceived in both their countenances an unwonted gravity, and an expression of care and sadness, evidently indicative of something lying heavily upon their spirits. By manners above his station, as well as by the amiableness of his dispositions, and the kindly activity of his attentions, he had ingratiated himself into their favour. With the affection of one who was interested in their condition, and who was never sullenly and selfishly regardless of the circumstances of others about him, he inquired the cause. And they told him. Not that from him they could look for any solution of their difficulties, for any relief to their perplexed and troubled minds; but he was one whom they could not treat with disdain; and, by giving him their confidence, they would have at least his sympathy.—*Rev. R. Wardlaw, D.D.*

[17201] "Wherefore look ye so sadly to-day?" How little was there here of that unfeeling indifference to the anxieties of others, which is so common in the world, and which, alas, is natural to us all! How little of the pride of office, or of the self-importance which is constantly shown by one in authority, to those that are under him! If Joseph had been a selfish man, what would he have cared for the looks of

the prisoners that were under his charge! It would have been a matter of perfect indifference to him whether they were looking sad or joyful. Such a man would never have noticed their looks at all. Or, if he observed them, he would not have troubled himself to inquire into the cause of their anxiety. But Joseph is a man of another spirit. He has more of the mind of Him who is very pitiful and of great kindness. He knows the heart of a prisoner. He has learnt compassion for others by things which he has suffered himself. He remembers them that are in bonds, as bound with them. He can weep with them that weep, as well as rejoice with them that rejoice. Thus, he notices at once the cloud that sits on the brow of his fellow-prisoners, and immediately, in the tenderest accents of kind consideration, he inquires, "Wherefore look ye so sadly to-day?"—*Rev. M. Dods, D.D.*

6 Gentleness and heroism.

[17202] When he found how completely he was forgotten, and how friendless and lone a creature he was in that strange land where things had gone so mysteriously against him; when he saw before him no other fate than that which he had seen befall so many a slave thrown into a dungeon at his master's pleasure and never more heard of, he must have been sorely tempted to hate the whole world, and especially those brethren who had been the beginning of all his misfortunes. Had there been any selfishness in solution in Joseph's character, this is the point at which it would have quickly crystallized into permanent forms. For nothing more certainly elicits and confirms selfishness than bad treatment. But from his conduct on his release, we see clearly enough that through all this trying time his heroism was not only that of the strong man who vows that though the whole world is against him the day will come when the world shall have need of him, but of the saint of God in whom suffering and injustice leave no bitterness against his fellows, nor even provoke one slightest morbid utterance.—*Ibid.*

7 Self-possession and tranquillity.

[17203] The self-possessed dignity and ease of command which appear in him from the moment when he is ushered into Pharaoh's presence have their roots in the two previous years of silence. As the bones of a strong man are slowly, imperceptibly knit, and gradually take the shape and texture they retain throughout; so during these years there was silently and secretly consolidating a character of almost unparalleled calmness and power. One has no words to express how tantalizing it must have been to Joseph to see the Egyptian officer have his dreams so gladly and speedily fulfilled, while he himself, who had so long waited on the true God, was left waiting still, and now so utterly unbefriended that there seemed no possible way of ever again connecting himself with the world outside the prison walls.—*Ibid.*

8 Conscious rectitude.

[17204] As in Potiphar's house, so in the king's house of detention Joseph's fidelity and serviceableness made him seem indispensable, and by sheer force of character he occupied the place rather of governor than of prisoner. The discerning men he had to do with, accustomed to deal with criminals and suspects of all shades, very quickly perceived that in Joseph's case justice was at fault, and that he was a mere scape-goat. Such was the vitality of Joseph's confidence in God, and such was the light-heartedness that sprang from his integrity of conscience, that he was free from all absorbing anxiety about himself, and had leisure to amuse and help his fellow-prisoners, so that such promotion as a gaol could afford he won, from a dungeon to a chain, from a chain to his word of honour. Thus even in the unlatticed dungeon the sun and moon look in upon him and bow to him; and while his sheaf seems at its poorest, all rust and mildew, the sheaves of his masters do homage.—*Ibid.*

9 Self-renunciation and fidelity to God.

[17205] It is the existence at the court of Pharaoh of this highly respected class of dream-interpreters and wise men, which lends significance to the conduct of Joseph when summoned into the royal presence. Such wisdom as he displayed in reading Pharaoh's visions was looked upon as attainable by means within the reach of any man who had sufficient faculty for the science. And the first idea in the minds of the courtiers would probably have been, had Joseph not solemnly protested against it, that he was an adept where they were apprentices and bunglers, and that his success was due purely to professional skill. This was of course perfectly well known to Joseph, who, for a number of years, had been familiar with the ideas prevalent at the court of Pharaoh; and he might have argued that there could be no great harm in at least effecting his deliverance from an unjust imprisonment by allowing Pharaoh to suppose that it was to him he was indebted for the interpretation of his dreams. But his first word to Pharaoh is a self-renouncing exclamation: "Not in me; God shall give Pharaoh an answer of peace."—*Ibid.*

[17206] Two years had elapsed since anything had occurred which looked the least like the fulfilment of his own dreams, or gave him any hope of release from prison; and now, when measuring himself with these courtiers and feeling able to take his place with the best of them, getting again a breath of free air and feeling once more the charm of life, and having an opening set before his young ambition, being so suddenly transferred from a place where his very existence seemed to be forgotten to a place where Pharaoh himself and all his court eyed him with the intensest interest and anxiety, it is significant that he should appear regardless of his own fate, but jealously careful of the glory of God.—*Ibid.*

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JEWISH ERA.

[17207] Considering how jealous men commonly are of their own reputation, and how impatiently eager to receive all the credit that is due to them for their own share in any good that is doing, and considering of what essential importance it seemed that Joseph should seize this opportunity of providing for his own safety and advancement, and should use this as the tide in his affairs that led to fortune, his words and bearing before Pharaoh undoubtedly disclose a deeply inwrought fidelity to God, and a magnanimous patience regarding his own personal interests.—*Ibid.*

[17208] When Pharaoh—whose curiosity, so strongly excited, and hitherto so miserably disappointed, brooked no delay—instantly and briefly intimates his purpose in sending for him: “I have dreamed a dream, and there is none that can interpret it: and I have heard say of thee, that thou canst understand a dream to interpret it;”—mark Joseph’s answer. “It is not in me: God shall give Pharaoh an answer of peace.” He had formerly acted the same part, with becoming lowliness of mind, putting self in abeyance, and giving God the glory. But it is more remarkable in this manifestation of it than in the former. The temptation to self-recommendation and self-aggrandizement was now much more powerful than when in prison with the chief butler and chief baker. But if the inducement was stronger to selfishness on the one side, it was stronger also to piety on the other. And the latter prevailed. A regard to the glory of God triumphed over all considerations of self-love. It was an opportunity which he felt it would be inexcusable in him to lose, for recommending the God and the religion of his fathers. He embraces it. He disowns self in the matter, and magnifies Jehovah.—*Rev. R. Wardlaw, D.D.*

[17209] What genuine humility and true piety shine forth together in Joseph’s answer to Pharaoh! “It is not in me. God shall give Pharaoh an answer of peace.” He disclaimed all merit and credit to himself, and gave it all to the living and true God, who was pleased to employ him as the instrument of revealing His providential intentions to Pharaoh.—*Rev. M. Dods, D.D.*

10 Fear of God.

[17210] We find Joseph in temptation, exposed to imminent danger of ruin; not only enticed under circumstances which promised concealment, but aware that if he declined, he might be ruined in his master’s esteem by a false accusation. How true it is that snares and dangers thicken in the path of promotion and prosperity! They appear in new and unexpected forms, and under fair disguises. They lull suspicion to sleep, they elude all guards but One; and that One stood revealed to Joseph’s mind in the hour of his greatest danger, and threw around him that shield of heavenly chastity which averted the shafts of vicious

pleasure, and inspired a deep abhorrence of the sin; it was the Holy One, whose voice had called Abraham from his native land; whose blessing was renewed on Isaac; who stood by Jacob’s pillow of stones at Bethel, and who now defended Jacob’s favourite son from ruin, though he left him to be tried by new suffering in the dungeon of the king’s prison.—*Rev. C. Mason.*

[17211] If Abraham was the “friend of God,” Joseph may be termed the “fearer of God,” for regard to the holiness and majesty of Jehovah was the ruling motive of Joseph’s life. In temptation he asks, “How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?” With his cruel brothers in his power, he takes no revenge, but says, “This do and live, for I fear God.”—*M. J.*

11 Prudential sagacity.

[17212] The counsel of Joseph to Pharaoh was obviously wise and excellent. Like many similar counsels, it commends itself, when suggested, to instant approbation, while yet to many minds it might not at once occur. As there is nothing in it, however, beyond sound human policy, there is no need for supposing any direct Divine suggestion of the plan; while, at the same time, it would be wrong, and very unlike the spirit of Joseph himself, were we to overlook that God from whom all wisdom, as well as all else that is good, proceeds. He who gave his wisdom to Solomon, gave it also to Joseph.—*Rev. R. Wardlaw, D.D.*

12 Sensibility.

(1) *He displays the fine and rare combination in human character of exquisite feelings allied to the most perfect self-control.*

a. He assumed a sternness which he did not feel.

[17213] “And the sons of Israel came to buy corn among those that came: for the famine was in the land of Canaan. And Joseph’s brethren came, and bowed down themselves before him, with their faces to the earth.” Here are the sheaves and the stars of his prophetic dreams! What a sight for the eyes of Joseph! The last time he had seen these ten brothers—more than twenty-one years before—was by the brink of the pit, into which they had cast him in the wilderness of Dothan, and out of which they had drawn him forth to sell him into slavery, regardless of his entreaties and tears, and the anguish of his soul! And now, here they are, prostrate at his feet, performing, with profound respect, their lowly Eastern *salams* before him, and dependent upon his will for the sustenance of life! To look upon them with indifference was impossible; he instantly felt the necessity of his not immediately discovering himself. He was inwardly conscious that the ordinary and natural expression of his countenance was not that of forbidding austerity, and anxious that his brothers, continuing to look upon him, might not recognize him, put on the expression which

was most likely, as the furthest from that to which of old they had been accustomed, to prevent such recognition. We cannot, of course, suppose his plan matured at once. He wanted time. And we cannot but admire, in his conduct, on so sudden an apparition, and in circumstances so startling and so trying, at once his readiness and his self-command: he makes an effort—commanding his emotions—assuming a look and tone and manner the very opposite of the real state of his mind, and of what it powerfully dictated.—*Ibid.*

[17214] Joseph here acted like a humane and skilful surgeon, who probes the wound, or cuts the limb of his patient with unflinching firmness and apparent unconcern, while at the same time his heart is inwardly bleeding for the pain he inflicts, and nothing but the necessity of the case and the happiness of the expected result would have reconciled him, either to endure himself or to inflict upon another so much mental anguish and so much bodily pain.—*Rev. M. Dods, D.D.*

b. He put a strong restraint upon his genuine emotion.

[17215] By the remarks which Joseph heard from the lips of his brethren he was deeply affected, and, for awhile, retired to weep. It must have cost him a struggle to retain his composure and to withhold from them the fact that he was Joseph; but he was evidently a man of firm purpose and resolution, and, rising above the emotions of his nature, he returned and conversed with them again.—*Rev. T. Smith.*

[17216] “And he said unto them, Nay, but to see the nakedness of the land ye are come. And they said, Thy servants are twelve brethren, the sons of one man in the land of Canaan; and, behold, the youngest is this day with our father, and one is not.” This reply was very valuable. It assured Joseph of the life of his father, and of his uterine brother: and it informed him, in terms touchingly simple, of the view entertained at home of his own fate: “one is not!” What an affecting close to Joseph’s ear—“one is not!” This was the only account they dared to give of him. But it was more a great deal than they could with certainty affirm. They were now in the very country into which they themselves had sold him. He might be still alive there: how could they assert the contrary? It was long since, however. They had heard nothing of him; nor is it at all likely that the idea of falling in with him was in their minds, even in the form of a possibility, when they left their father’s house to come down to Egypt. “One is not!” What a temptation to betray himself! how superlatively difficult for him, when these simple words were dropped, to command his feelings! All the past was, in one instant, before him: their jealousy; their cruelty; his father; his brother Benjamin; and all the strange vicissitudes through which he himself had since been

led: how could he stand it?—*Rev. R. Wardlaw, D.D.*

[17217] In conformity, no doubt, with Joseph’s instructions, the steward treats his brothers with all the attention and kindness of Eastern hospitality, making every suitable provision both for their own comfort and for the accommodation of their beasts: and they prepare to offer their father’s present to the steward’s master, in the most appropriate and respectful style, on his coming home at noon. When he does come, the scene is touched with admirable simplicity and tenderness. In spite of all Joseph’s previous resolution and bracing up of his mind for the firm and consistent acting of his part, it must have cost him no small effort of self-command, when he thus came into more immediate contact than ever with his brothers, and especially when to the ten there was now added his own only full brother, the son of the same mother, the fond and lively playmate of his childish and boyish days, and the intimate bosom companion of his maturer years. Filial and fraternal love, inwardly felt in all their mighty and melting power, could not but expose him to the imminent hazard of betraying himself.—*Ibid.*

[17218] The sight of Benjamin, the son of his own mother—Benjamin, who had never entertained towards him the envious feelings which were expressed by the others—Benjamin, who had never devised the cruel devices which the others had devised against him—the sight of Benjamin with the rest completely upset him. He abruptly inquires, in a voice, we may conceive, almost choked with emotion, “Is this your brother of whom ye spake?” Then, without pausing for an answer (for he could answer himself the question which he proposed), he gives utterance to the short and pathetic prayer for his youngest brother, “God be gracious unto thee, my son!” He cannot any longer trust to his feelings. His secret will be out if he remains with his brother a moment longer. He is obliged to retire, and that immediately, to conceal his emotion and to master his feelings. The strong feeling of natural affection was ready to throw off the mask of indifference which it had put on, and to burst from the fetter of expediency by which it was confined; to act in its true character, and to give utterance to its genuine language. Oh, how Joseph longs to spring forth, and to embrace his brother with all the warmth of unrestrained affection! But he puts a restraint upon his feelings. He withdraws for a while; and, having found relief by giving vent to his feelings in private, again he conceals his emotion, and returns with apparent composure to his brethren.—*Rev. M. Dods, D.D.*

[17219] What a crowd of overpowering recollections must have rushed upon Joseph’s mind! In this one moment he lived all his early life over again. It is true there could not be between Joseph and Benjamin the softly but

strongly uniting remembrance of a common mother's love; for Benjamin had never known a mother; but they both knew and felt that for that mother's sake they were the joint objects of a doting father's affection; and they appear too to have been mutually attached by kindred dispositions, by a congeniality of character. Strong as his emotions were, he succeeded, by this sudden withdrawal, under whatever pretext, to conceal them from his brethren. The gush of tears, which he could allow freely to flow in his chamber, relieved him, and made him, for the time, "himself again"—restoring his composure and self-command. The suspicions of his brothers remained unawakened. They do not seem ever to have had the remotest surmise of the truth.—*Rev. R. Wardlaw, D.D.*

(2) *He united to his keen sensibilities the deepest tenderness.*

[17220] Joseph, thoroughly unmanned by the pathetic pleading of Judah, and unable any longer to impose the painful restraint upon his feelings, which even thus far he had with no little difficulty maintained, gives way to the overpowering violence of his emotions, weeps aloud, pouring forth a flood of tenderness, to the relief of his aching yet overjoyed heart; to the surprise of the Egyptians who overheard him without, and to the still greater surprise of the brothers within. Joseph's was not a heart of stone; and a heart of stone it would have required not to be melted now. Our only astonishment is how he stood it so long; how Judah got his address finished. The pleading of Judah, even apart from the special interest which Joseph himself had in it, was one which admitted of the indulgence of feeling. Even to a neutral stranger it was tenderly affecting. It would have been unnatural not to feel, and not to appear to feel. This, therefore, would so far lessen the necessity of restraint and self-control. Nobody could wonder at his feeling. He had not to shut up all his sensibilities, to seal at every opening the fountain of tenderness. The constraint so long laid upon himself had been painfully difficult. He had often been in danger of giving way. His heart had yearned towards the objects of its love—had longed intensely to go forth toward his brethren, and to give its struggling emotions full freedom of expression. And in proportion to the difficulty with which the current had been dammed up, and the length of time during which its force had been gathering, was the impetuosity with which, at length, it burst forth (Gen. xlv. 1-3).—*Ibid.*

[17221] "And he fell upon his brother Benjamin's neck, and wept; and Benjamin wept upon his neck." Benjamin shared not in those feelings by which the rest (he knew not why) were kept at a distance. His heart and his conscience were alike free. Both brothers are overcome. Both weep. They are tears, not of grief, unless for so long a separation, but rather of affection and gladness. Tender sensibilities are no indications of a feeble mind;

and, when found in association—as they may be, and not unfrequently are—with the amplest and most vigorous intellect, the two form a delightful union. And when mind and heart—strength of understanding and softness of affection thus in union—are sanctified by piety, this completes the character. In Joseph they were all combined. The other brothers could easily account for his first and strongest emotions being towards Benjamin. But while they looked on the tender scene they could not but recollect that Benjamin, besides being Joseph's maternal brother, was, at the same time, guiltless of the wrong which their consciences reminded them that they had done him. So that Joseph's feelings towards him were no certain test of his feelings towards them.—*Ibid.*

(3) *He united to his strong affection the most considerate delicacy.*

a. He banishes every lingering remnant of distress and distrust by the looks and the language of kindness.

[17222] "He kissed all his brethren, and wept upon them." It required all this to set their minds fully at rest. And then, having somewhat recovered from the stunning and stupefying effect of the first discovery, and being tranquillized by the manifest indications of deep sincerity in his assurances of forgiveness; of his retaining no grudge; of his being desirous to forget as well as to forgive—they got so far at their ease as to enter into conversation with him. "After that his brethren talked with him." This follows his embrace and his tears. They felt at once, from the manner of that embrace, that it was none of your cold, constrained, formal embraces, which, instead of grappling heart to heart, give you the instant and mortifying assurance that there is no heart at all in the matter, and so repel instead of conciliating, freeze instead of melting. And the tears which accompanied his embrace they saw and felt to come warm from the fountain of love—to be anything but the crocodile tears of feigned endearment covering a secret purpose of revenge. They felt in a moment that they were more than safe in his hands; that they were in the power of one who, instead of "rendering evil for evil," would "overcome evil with good."—*Ibid.*

[17223] We perceive the anxiety of Joseph to take off all painful hesitation and doubt from the minds of his brothers. Now that he had told them who he was, he appeals to themselves for the truth of his declaration. Not now covering his face, or using any arts of concealment, but exposing his countenance to their gaze in all its own expression, and, resuming all his natural manner, he in effect asks them whether they did not recognize in him the injured, the long-lost Joseph. "Look at me, my brothers; look at me, Benjamin. Twenty years have passed since last we parted; yet cannot you recognize me? Is it not indeed Joseph that is before you? Is it not his mouth that speaks to you? Are they not his eyes that look, and

his lips that smile upon you? Is it not so, Benjamin—son of my own mother, comrade of my early days? Look again. Be assured it is indeed he, and no stranger.”—*Ibid.*

b. “He is not ashamed to call them brethren,” and is anxious they should feel their equality.

[17224] “And Joseph said unto his brethren, Come near to me, I pray you. And they came near. And he said, I am Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt.” They were overawed and held back. With the melting eye and winning smile of benignity he invites their free approach.—*Ibid.*

[17225] There is a species of forgiveness which assumes the throne of offended superiority; which dictates terms; which stands upon punctilio; which exacts submission, and, with the offenders prostrate at its feet, deigns to grant a reluctant pardon, on a certain stipulated ratio of humble acknowledgment. This is not the spirit of Joseph. He is open, affable, kind, condescending. He is no longer the viceroy of Pharaoh and lord of Egypt, but their own brother inviting them to his arms and making them feel their equality. He has forgiven them in his heart. He has no grudge there. And he is anxious to assure them that it is so, and that they have nothing to fear.—*Ibid.*

[17226] He was the governor of Egypt, entrusted with its richest treasures and distinguished by its highest honours. He was arrayed in silken robes, he wore on his hand the royal signet, and around his neck hung a golden chain. He rode in the king’s second chariot, and heard the heralds proclaim, “Bow the knee before him.” He ruled all the people with such undisputed authority that without him no man lifted up his hand or his foot in the land. But this governor was still himself. He remembered that he was Joseph, a Hebrew—the son of an old pilgrim, who now sojourned in Canaan, and the brother of these plain and vulgar strangers who depended on his goodness and solicited his clemency.—*Rev. J. Lathrop, D.D.*

[17227] Perhaps in instantly following the words “I am Joseph” with the inquiry after his father, he might have the kind intention, when he saw his announcement stunning and troubling them, of turning their thoughts from himself to a centre of union—to the one common object of his own and their affection. The supposition is in good keeping at least with the amiable delicacy and considerate kindness of his character.—*Rev. R. Wardlaw, D.D.*

c. He leads their minds away from the evil cause to the good result.

[17228] The lofty ruler of Egypt might have reproached them for their treacherous cruelty, but he studied only how he might remove their embarrassment and dread. “Come near to me, I pray you,” he said in gentlest words; “I am

Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt. Now, therefore, be not grieved nor angry with yourselves that ye sold me hither, for God did send me before you to preserve life.” In listening to these words, we know not which to admire most: the magnanimity of Joseph, in not only pardoning, but even making excuses for his cruel brothers; or for his sublime devotion to God, which enabled him to discover in each event of life, whether prosperous or adverse, the ordering of His gracious providence. It was God who had brought him into Egypt, and made him, the poor bond-slave, a father unto Pharaoh; and, not only so, but had enabled him to become the preserver of his own race. Joseph must have often heard of the gracious promises which had been made to Abraham and Isaac, and he now saw clearly that his being sent into Egypt had formed one part of the plan by which these promises were to be fulfilled.—*Rev. J. Norton, D.D.*

13 Filial love.

While giving vent to the generous feelings of a brother he does not forget that he is a son.

[17229] Joseph’s love for his father is very forcibly brought before us at the time when he made himself known to his brethren. “And Joseph wept aloud: and the Egyptians and the house of Pharaoh heard. And Joseph said, I am Joseph. Doth my father yet live?” To be sure, he had heard them speak of his father as *being yet alive* long before this. But now that he has told them who he is, and the relation in which he stands to them, nothing can be more natural, or more proper, than for a pious and dutiful son to make this, at such a time, his very first inquiry.—*Rev. M. Dods, D.D.*

[17230] The aged father is first in his thoughts, first in his cares. How tender, how affectionate, how dutiful his question! He was elevated high in power; but not elevated above his relation to, and solicitude for the old patriarch from whom he descended. What is his first instruction to his brethren? “Haste ye, go up to my father, and say to him, Thus saith thy son Joseph, God hath made me lord of all Egypt. Come down unto me; tarry not. Thou shalt dwell near to me, and I will nourish thee.” While all Egypt bowed the knee before him, he could feel the affection and duty of a son to an aged parent, whom he had not seen for more than twenty years.—*Rev. J. Lathrop, D.D.*

[17231] Joseph remembers the “good old father,” left alone in Canaan, suffering many a pang of anxiety—looking out, with longing solicitude, for the return of his family—with his beloved Benjamin; marvelling at the protracted time; often trembling for the issue; his fond heart misgiving him under the self-created suggestions of a timid and too faithless fancy. Joseph discovers the full power of *filial* as well as fraternal love.—*Rev. R. Wardlaw, D.D.*

17232-17238]

JEWISH ERA.

14 Simplicity.

He bore a simple, unsophisticated heart amidst the pomp of an Egyptian court.

[17232] In Joseph we find simplicity of character: partly in the willingness to acknowledge his shepherd father in Egypt, where the pastoral life was an abomination; partly in that incidental notice which we have of the feast at which he entertained his brethren, where the Egyptians sat at a table by themselves, and Joseph by himself. So that, elevated as he was, his heart remained Hebrew still. He had contracted a splendid alliance by marrying into one of the noblest families in Egypt, that of Potipherah the priest of On. And yet he had not forgotten his country, nor sought to be naturalized there. His heart was in that far land where he had fed his father's flocks in his simple, genial boyhood. The divining cup of Egyptian silver was on his table; but he remembered the days when the only splendour he knew was that coat of many colours which was made for him by his father.—*Rev. F. Robertson.*

[17233] Whatever nerve and self-command and humble dependence on God Joseph's varied experience had wrought in him were all needed when Pharaoh took his hand and placed his own ring on it, thus transferring all his authority to him, and when turning from the king he received the acclamations of the court and the people, bowed to by his old masters, and acknowledged the superior of all the dignitaries and potentates of Egypt. Only once besides, so far as the Egyptian inscriptions have yet been deciphered, does it appear that any subject was raised to be regent or viceroy with similar powers.—*Rev. M. Dods, D.D.*

[17234] After a life in the service of the state, he retains the simplicity of the Hebrew lad. With the magnanimity of a great and pure soul, he passed uncontaminated through the flatteries and temptations of court life; and, like Moses, "esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt." He has not indulged in any affectation of simplicity, nor has he, in the pride that apes humility, declined the ordinary honours due to a man in his position. He wears the badges of office, the robe and the gold necklace, but these things do not reach his spirit. He has lived in a region in which such honours make no deep impression; and in his death he shows where his heart has been. The small voice of God, spoken centuries ago to his forefathers, deafens him to the loud acclaim with which the people do him homage.—*Ibid.*

15 Benevolence.

[17235] Benevolence was manifested in the generosity with which he entertained his brethren, and in the discriminating tenderness with which he provided his best beloved brother's feast with extraordinary delicacies. These were traits of thoughtfulness. But further still. The prophetic insight of Joseph enabled him to foresee the approach of famine. He took measures

accordingly; and when the famine came, the royal storehouses were opened, and every man in Egypt owed his life to the benevolent providence of the Hebrew stranger.—*Rev. F. Robertson.*

16 Forgiveness.

His life was one long pardon of human perfidy.

[17236] Conversant as his experience was with human treachery, no expressions of bitterness escape from him. No sentimental wailing over the cruelty of relations, the falseness of friendship, or the ingratitude of the world. No rancorous outburst of misanthropy: no sarcastic scepticism of man's integrity or woman's honour. He meets all bravely, with calm, meek, and dignified forbearance. If ever man had cause for such doubts, he had; yet his heart was never soured. At last, after his father's death, his brothers, apprehending his resentful recollections of their early cruelty, come to deprecate his revenge. Very touching is his reply. "Fear not: for am I in the place of God? 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. Now, therefore, fear ye not: I will nourish you and your little ones."—*Ibid.*

[17237] Distrust seemed to pursue Joseph from first to last. First his own family misunderstood and persecuted him. Then his Egyptian master had returned his devoted service with suspicion and imprisonment. And again, after sufficient time for testing his character might seem to have elapsed, he was still looked upon with distrust by those who of all others had best reason to believe in him. But though Joseph had through all his life been thus conversant with suspicion, cruelty, falsehood, ingratitude, and blindness, though he seemed doomed to be always misread, and to have his best deeds made the ground of accusation against him, he remained not merely unsoured, but equally ready as ever to be of service to all. The finest natures may be disconcerted and deadened by universal distrust; characters not naturally unamiable are sometimes embittered by suspicion; and persons who are in the main high-minded, do stoop, when stung by such treatment, to rail at the world, or to question all generous emotion, steadfast friendship, or unimpeachable integrity. In Joseph there is nothing of this. If ever man had a right to complain of being unappreciated it was he; if ever man was tempted to give up making sacrifices for his relatives, it was he. But through all this he bore himself with manly generosity, with simple and persistent faith, with a dignified respect for himself and for other men. In the ingratitude and injustice he had to endure he only found opportunity for a deeper unselfishness, a more Godlike forbearance.—*Rev. M. Dods, D.D.*

[17238] The brethren had sold Joseph into

this foreign land, meaning to bury him for ever ; he retaliated by requiring that the tribes should restore him to the land from which he had been expelled. Few men have opportunity of showing so noble a revenge ; fewer still, having the opportunity, would so have used it. Jacob had been carried up to Canaan as soon as he was dead : Joseph declines this exceptional treatment, and prefers to share the fortunes of his brethren, and will then only enter on the promised land when all his people can go with him. As in life, so in death, he took a large view of things, and had no feeling that the world ended in him. His career had taught him to consider national interests ; and on his death-bed, it is from the point of view of his people that he looks at the future.—*Ibid.*

17 Faith.

[17239] “Joseph took an oath of the children of Israel, saying, God will surely visit you, and ye shall carry up my bones from hence.” This is the one act of Joseph’s life which the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews selects as the sign that he too lived by faith. “By faith Joseph, when he died, made mention of the departing of the children of Israel ; and gave commandment concerning his bones.” It was at once a proof of how entirely he believed God’s promise, and of how earnestly he longed for its fulfilment. It was a sign too of how little he felt himself at home in Egypt, though to outward appearance he had become completely one of its people. The ancestral spirit was in him true and strong, though he was “separate from his brethren.” He bore an Egyptian name, a swelling title, he married an Egyptian woman, he had an Egyptian priest for father-in-law, but he was an Israelite in heart ; and in the midst of official cares and a surfeit of honours, his desires turned away from them all towards the land promised by God to his fathers.—*Rev. A. Maclaren, D.D.*

[17240] All his life long, from the day of his captivity, Joseph was an Egyptian in outward seeming. He filled his place at Pharaoh’s court, but his dying words open a window into his soul, and betray how little he had felt that he belonged to the order of things in the midst of which he had been content to live. This man, too, surrounded by an ancient civilization, and dwelling among granite temples and solid pyramids, and firm based sphinxes, the very emblems of eternity, confessed that here he had no continuing city, but sought one to come. As truly as his ancestors who dwelt in tabernacles ; like Abraham journeying with his camels and herds, and pitching his tent outside the walls of Hebron ; like Isaac in the grassy plains of the South country ; like Jacob keeping himself apart from the families of the land, their descendant, an heir with them of the same promise, showed that he too regarded himself as a “stranger and a sojourner.” Dying, he said, “Carry my bones up from hence.” Therefore we may be sure that, living, the hope of the inheritance must

have burned in his heart as a hidden light, and made him an alien everywhere but on its blessed soil.—*Ibid.*

[17241] Faith imparted to Joseph’s spirit the same composure and peace as it had imparted to that of his father ; and it was very strikingly evinced. Not only does he look at death with firm tranquillity, saying, without fear or shrinking, “I die ;” but he assures them, as Jacob had done before him, of Jehovah’s faithfulness to His promises, and of the certainty of His visiting them, and delivering them, and bringing them to the promised land. And what pledge does he give them of the reality of his faith? A very remarkable one. He does not, as his father had done, enjoin the removal of his body now ; but so confident is his assurance that the time would come, that he gives his bones to them in charge, to be kept and carried with them, that he might take possession of the land in death at the same time with the generation which should be then alive.—*Rev. R. Wardlaw, D.D.*

V. THE INFLUENCE OF HIS CHARACTER AS SEEN IN THE POSTHUMOUS TESTIMONY TO HIS WORTH.

The honours of this world were given to the graces of the next.

[17242] It is highly probable that Janes and Asses were the monarchs of Egypt during the latter period of the life of Joseph ; and so valuable a servant had he proved to Aphophis, that they retained him in the office which he held, perhaps to the very close of his life. The benefits he had conferred on Egypt were of the greatest value and importance, and they were not forgotten when he became infirm. He had been faithful to his king, and not less faithful to his God, and he went down into the valley of the shadow of death laden with the honours of the world, but at the same time cheered with the smile and approbation of Heaven.—*Anon.*

[17243] We cannot suppose that Joseph’s own obsequies were on a scale less grand than his father’s. This was not the homage paid to talent, nor to wealth, nor to birth. He was a foreign slave, raised to eminence by the simple power of *goodness*. Every man in Egypt felt, at his death, that he had lost a friend. There were thousands whose tears would flow when they recounted the preservation of lives dear to them in the years of famine, and felt that they owed those lives to Joseph. Egypt mourned the good foreigner.—*Rev. F. Robertson, M.A.*

VI. THE MARKED SUCCESS OF HIS LIFE TRACED TO ITS SOURCES.

i It was due to God.

His history furnishes manifest examples of a special Providence.

[17244] “Who knoweth,” said Mordecai to

Esther, when urging that noble woman to risk life and all for the sake of her people, "who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" The special providence which seemed, though probable, still problematical to Mordecai in Esther's fortunes, no man can doubt, held the helm of Joseph's. Though somewhat like the course of a boat, now riding upon the top of the waves and now lost in the trough of the sea, or like that of a traveller crossing a mountain region, who now stands on sunny heights and anon descends into the sombre depths of valleys, Joseph's course, with many ups and downs, goes right to its mark—from the point where he starts to the goal he reaches. How manifest is it in his case, that a Divine eye—none else could—saw the end from the beginning! By what a special providence did all the vicissitudes of his chequered life—those things men call accidents—like successive waves, bear him on and up to the position where he accomplished his singular destiny; saving his family, and through them the hope of the Messiah? What hand but one Divine could have forged the chain which linked long years together; the sheepfolds of Hebron with the proud palaces of Egypt; the dreams of the boy with the deeds of the man? No hand but God's could have steered his bark through the storms, shoals, reefs, and quicksands of his romantic and eventful life; and well therefore might he acknowledge God in his remarkable success, saying to his brothers, "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."—*Rev. T. Guthrie, D.D.*

2 Under God, it was due to his own decision and uniformity of character.

[17245] He owed nothing to fortune, but, under God, everything to himself—to his piety, his pure and high morality, his extraordinary self-control, the patience with which he bore, the faith with which he waited, the perseverance with which he pursued his objects, an iron will and an indomitable energy.—*Rev. M. Dods, D.D.*

[17246] Joseph stands clear throughout a series of singular transactions; wanting neither in tenderness nor kind-heartedness, nor in the piety of a God-fearing man—the behaviour of the patriarch was throughout consistent and considerate.—*Rev. H. McNeill, B.D.*

VII. THE SYMMETRY AND HARMONY OF HIS CHARACTER VIEWED AS A WHOLE.

There is a clear and steady ascending scale in his growth in moral worth.

[17247] In whatever aspect we behold him, whether as son, brother, slave, statesman, father; or in whatever stage of life, be it dawning youth or closing age, the grand symmetry of his moral physique is always strikingly apparent. No spurious element mingled with the

sterling qualities of this all but perfect character. His absolute power as a ruler never degenerated into despotism; his moral superiority as a man was untinted by the slightest trace of self-sufficiency or conceit; and the almost feminine susceptibilities of his nature, so far from weakening the sterner virtues, only served to heighten their beauty. The "positive" qualities of an artless childhood were augmented by the "comparative" graces of a God-like youth, and every ripened virtue culminating, as it were, in the "superlative" manhood, he stood erect to the close of his earthly life—a grand specimen of the "noblest work of God."—*A. M. A. W.*

VIII. ANALOGY BETWEEN THE LIFE OF JOSEPH AND THAT OF OUR LORD.

The leading events of his history are typical of the great facts connected with the life and work of Christ.

[17248] Although Joseph is not personally mentioned in the New Testament as a type of Christ, his history was eminently typical of that of our blessed Saviour, alike in his betrayal, his elevation to highest dignity, his preserving the life of his people, and in their ultimate recognition of him and repentance of their sin.—*Rev. A. Edersheim, D.D.*

[17249] In Joseph, sold into the hands of the Ishmaelites, many have seen a type of Christ, despised and rejected by His people, and ultimately betrayed by Judas the chief priests and scribes. We do not meet with any warrant for this opinion in the pages of the New Testament, but there are several other persons and things of the older economy, having a typical relation, which are not mentioned there, whence we infer that those which are mentioned are mentioned only as specimens. And so striking is the similarity between Joseph and Christ in this, and in several other particulars, that it is scarcely possible to conceive that the events in the life of the former were not ordered by God with reference to certain events in the history of the latter.—*Rev. T. Smith.*

TWELVE TRIBES, BLESSINGS OF THE.

INTRODUCTORY.

1 The light in which to regard Jacob's blessing of the twelve tribes.

[17250] It is not to the sayings (in Gen. xlix.) of the dying saint so much as of the inspired prophet that attention is called. Jacob is prepared, like Isaac in similar circumstances (chap. xxvii.), to pronounce, before the collected group of his numerous family, that solemn benediction which, in the case of the first patriarchs,

carried with it the force of a testamentary deed in conveying the Divine promises committed to them. These communications, however, though commonly called blessings (ver. 28), contained, in the present instance, words of severe censure upon some of his sons; while in their prospective import they were made to indicate the future fortunes of his posterity.—*Rev. R. Jamieson, D.D.*

[17251] These "blessings" were founded on a long and close observation of the character, dispositions, and habits of each of his sons; for such a knowledge undoubtedly lay at the foundation of his judgments. But his words were more than the dictates of mere natural sagacity; and although he was now arrived at this extreme age—

"When sage experience does attain
To something like prophetic strain,"

the utterances of Jacob concerned the destiny not so much of his sons individually, as of tribes which should respectively descend from them, and they were so pregnant with a meaning which a remote future alone could evolve, that he must be considered as having spoken them under the immediate inspiration of the Holy Spirit.—*Ibid.*

2 Jacob's providential preparation for the office of blessing his sons.

[17252] Jacob has studied these sons of his for fifty years, and has had his acute perception of character painfully enough called to exercise itself on them. He has all his life long had a liking for analyzing men's inner life, knowing that when he understands that, he can better use them for his own ends; and these sons of his own have cost him thought enough over and above that sometimes penetrating interest which a father will take in the growth of a son's character; and now he knows them thoroughly, understands their temptations, their weaknesses, their capabilities, and as a wise head of a house, can, with delicate and un-noticed skill, balance the one against the other, ward off awkward collisions, and prevent the evil from destroying the good. This knowledge of Jacob prepares him for being the intelligent agent by whom God predicts in outline the future of His Church.—*Rev. M. Dods, D.D.*

3 Jacob's dignified faith in the performance of his office.

[17253] Note the faith of Jacob, by which he assumes the right to bless Pharaoh—though he is himself a mere sojourner by sufferance in Pharaoh's land, and living on his bounty—and by which he gathers his children round him and portions out to them a land which seemed to have been most barren to himself, and which now seemed quite beyond his reach. The enjoyments of it, which he himself had not very deeply tasted, he yet knew were real; and if there were a look of scepticism, or of scorn, on the face of any one of his sons; if the unbelief

of any received the prophetic utterances as the ravings of delirium, or the fancies of an imbecile and worn-out mind going back to the scenes of its youth, in Jacob himself there was so simple and unsuspecting a faith in God's promise, that he dealt with the land as if it were the only portion worth bequeathing to his sons, as if every Canaanite were already cast out of it, and as if he knew his sons could never be tempted by the wealth of Egypt to turn with contempt from the land of promise.—*Ibid.*

4 The dispensational aspects of the blessings themselves.

(1) *It marks the close of the patriarchal dispensation.*

[17254] Henceforth the channel of God's blessing to man does not consist of one person only, but of a people or nation. It is still *one seed*, as Paul reminds us, a unit that God will bless, but this unit is now no longer a single person—as Abraham, Isaac, or Jacob—but one people, composed of several parts, and yet one whole; equally representative of Christ, as the patriarchs were, and of equal effect every way in receiving God's blessing and handing it down until Christ came. The Old Testament Church, quite as truly as the New, formed one whole with Christ. Apart from Him it had no meaning, and would have had no existence. It was the promised seed, always growing more and more to its perfect development in Christ.—*Ibid.*

(2) *It is the first multiplication of Christ's representatives.*

[17255] At this point—where Israel distributes among his sons the blessing which heretofore had all lodged in himself—we see the first multiplication of Christ's representatives; the mediation going on no longer through individuals, but through a nation; and where individuals are still chosen by God, as commonly they are, for the conveyance of God's communications to earth, these individuals, whether priests or prophets, are themselves but the official representatives of the nation.—*Ibid.*

5 The typical aspect in which the history of the twelve tribes should be viewed.

[17256] Upon the gates of the New Jerusalem are written the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel. This fact proves their eternity. As long as the twelve apostles are remembered, so long will endure the memory of the twelve tribes. All are now lost in the undistinguished mass of the dispersed Jews. Until the destruction of Jerusalem all were known to retain their individuality. The captivity of the kingdom of Israel by the Assyrians did not destroy it: the kings of Judah gathered the remnant together into one nation. When Judah also went into captivity, the tribes of Israel still kept their identity. Children of Ephraim and Manasseh, as well as of Judah, Benjamin, and Levi, are stated to have returned (1 Chron. ix.

3, &c. Observe that this is parallel to Nehemiah xi. 4, &c.). The sacrifices were offered in the restored temple for twelve tribes. Those who did not return were not absorbed into the Gentiles in the time of Queen Esther, in any of the hundred and twenty and seven provinces reached by Haman's and Mordecai's decrees. Twelve tribes were remembered by our Lord in His promises to His apostles; twelve were acknowledged by St. Paul in his profession of the common faith; twelve were addressed in an epistle by St. James; twelve tribes contributed their thousands to the number of those who were sealed with the seal of God in their foreheads and seen in the visions of the Apocalypse; twelve are immortalized on the gateways of the golden city. Each gate is alike in everything except its position and the name of the tribe to which it belongs. Every several gateway is of *one pearl*, for all find entrance into the city through the "one pearl of great price;" but whosoever enters the New Jerusalem must pass in under the name of one or other of the twelve tribes. It follows from this that the twelve tribes must be representative of spiritual characters in God's Israel, and the method of their entrance into the city representative of ours. All the tribes alike were made partakers of redemption, but their experience of sin and love is diverse. They come from the East, and from the West, and from the North, and from the South. A right study of their history would include the tracing out the separate career of each tribe in this aspect, to mark its individuality in sin, redemption, grace, and work of God, as depicted in Holy Scripture. The saints of God have an experience no less diverse and manifold than that of the twelve tribes.—*Rev. C. Waller.*

I. REUBEN.

"Reuben, thou art my firstborn, my might, and the beginning of my strength, the excellency of dignity, and the excellency of power: unstable as water, thou shalt not excel; because thou wentest up to thy father's bed; then defiledst thou it: he went up to my couch."—GEN. xlix. 3, 4.

"Let Reuben live, and not die; and let not his men be few."—DEUT. xxxiii. 6.

1 His traits of character.

Instability and impulsiveness.

[17257] Reuben is presented to us as a *creature of passion*, following the impulses of the moment, whether corrupt and degrading, or generous and noble. *Feeling* is fickle as the wind, "unstable as water," and the character determined by it must present a constant alternation of bright and dark shades—apparent energy and real feebleness; high resolve, withering at the touch of temptation; no great plans steadfastly pursued till their end be gained. The man of mere feeling cannot excel. Such was Reuben. How different from Joseph, the man of *principle*—of stern, unbending integrity! He had not less tenderness of susceptibility than his older brother; but with him, feeling was sub-

jected severely to conscience and duty, and therefore he excelled always and everywhere.—*Christian Treasury.*

[17258] This excellency that does not excel, the weight that is weighed in the balances and found wanting, is the one fatal flaw. There are resources enough and to spare; natural ability, and the best of it; the best portion of all that makes a man acceptable, gives him dignity and influence with others, and a good deal of the force that might bring it to bear; all this in abundance, yet for want of moral steadiness this excellency is not to excel. This man, who is qualified to take the first place, shall never have it for want of application to the matter in hand. Who has not seen this character and seen it fail? "Unstable as water" is a terribly accurate illustration. The force of water is one of the most powerful in nature, but it is utterly useless until it is confined and kept in bounds. The force must be concentrated, or else nothing can be done with it. The character of Reuben is one which has no power of continuous concentration, and has not learned self-control. Reuben develops this character in his father's lifetime, and the place of his tribe is determined for ever. That place may be second, it will never be first.—*Rev. C. Waller.*

[17259] Lightness of character is a leading element in Reuben's instability. Such characters express themselves in many acts of weakness and wickedness; the particular act is of less importance than the root of evil from which it springs. The want of weight appears in the character of Reuben when he had Joseph cast into the pit, and then left his brethren, thinking by absence to separate himself from their evil deeds, though he was the eldest, and responsible above the rest (cf. Pilate's washing his hands of the Saviour's blood). There was no want of conscience, no absence of feeling or ignorance of responsibility in Reuben. When Simeon was put in prison by Joseph, Reuben was the first to apply the lesson to the rest: "Spake I not unto you, saying, Do not sin against the child; and ye would not hear? therefore, behold, also his blood is required."—*Ibid.*

2 Instances in which he exhibited instability.

[17260] Jacob's dying prophecy concerning his eldest son embodied a most important practical truth—"Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel." The sacred history exhibits to us just enough of Reuben to illustrate this trait of his character. The criminal indulgence of passion (Gen. xxxv. 22), which sent down its withering curse to generations after him (Gen. xlix. 4; 1 Chron. v. 1), presents the most painful aspect of it. Next we see him attempting to save his brother Joseph, whom his brethren were determined to put to death, and overwhelmed with grief on learning that his efforts had failed. His compassion was excited by his brother's cries for help, and he seems also to have had sincere affection for his brother and for Jacob his father.

Again, on the return of the sons of Jacob from their first visit to Egypt to buy corn, when they wished to take Benjamin immediately and go back again, and their father, overwhelmed with grief, reproached them as the cause of his sorrow, Reuben promptly offered to suffer for the security of that child of his father's old age. "Slay my two sons if I bring him not unto thee." This was the language of sudden emotion rather than calm judgment and the stern call of duty.—*Christian Treasury*.

3 The rationale of his failure to excel.

[17261] Unstable as water, how could Reuben excel? Excellence involves elements of constancy, conditions of stability. But what stability is there in water? The house built on the shifting sea-sands—we know what came of it. But the sands are more stable than the sea—than the waves of the sea, at least; and he that wavereth is like the waves of the sea. Unstable as that troubled water, he shall not excel. Says Philip van Artevelde—

"All my life long
I have beheld with most respect the man
Who knew himself, and knew the ways before
him,

And from among them chose considerably,
And, having chosen, with a steadfast mind
Pursued his purpose."

A commentator upon which passage has remarked how true it is that, attractive though versatility be, concentration of energies upon some one good work is the master-key to the honour and respect of our fellows.—*F. Jacox*.

4 Descriptions of the Reuben-like character.

(1) *In the downward course.*

[17262] The future of Reuben is a negative, blank kind—"Thou shalt *not* excel." His unstable character must empty it of all great success. And to many a heart since have these words struck a chill, for to many they are as a mirror suddenly held up before them. They see themselves, when they look on the tossing sea, rising and pointing to the heavens with much noise, but only to sink back again to the same everlasting level. Men of brilliant parts and great capacity are continually seen to be lost to society by instability of purpose. Would they only pursue one direction, and concentrate their energies on one subject, they might become true heirs of promise, blessed and blessing; but they seem to lose relish for every pursuit on the first taste of success—all their energy seems to have boiled over and evaporated in the first glow, and sinks as the water that has just been noisily boiling when the fire is withdrawn from under it. No impression made upon them is permanent—like water, they are plastic, easily impressible, but utterly incapable of retaining an impression: and therefore, like water, they have a downward tendency, or, at the best, are but retained in their place by pressure from

without, and have no internal power of growth.—*Rev. M. Dods, D.D.*

[17263] The misery of an unstable character is often increased by the desire to excel which commonly accompanies instability. It is generally this very desire which prompts a man to hurry from one aim to another, to give up one path to excellence when he sees that other men are making way upon another; having no internal convictions of his own, he is guided mostly by the successes of other men, the most dangerous of all guides. So that such a man has all the bitterness of an eager desire doomed never to be satisfied. Conscious to himself of capacity for something, feeling in him the excellency of power, and having that "excellency of dignity," or graceful and princely refinement, which the knowledge of many things, and intercourse with many kinds of people, have imparted to him, he feels all the more that pervading weakness, that greedy, lustful craving for all kinds of priority, and for enjoying all the various advantages which other men severally enjoy, which will not let him finally choose and adhere to his own line of things, but distracts him by a thousand purposes, which ever defeat one another.—*Ibid.*

(2) *In the upward course.*

[17264] Is not this the history of the second birth of many a Reuben, who at first is no true child of Israel at all? In the days of his great ability and instability he is morally worthless, but he is made to feel his weakness. He loses the place that his birthright had entitled him to hold by his unsteadiness of character, and falls from the first place to the second, though his talents were unsurpassed. Thus he is afflicted, and it is good for him. He is brought down to feel his need of a Saviour, and the Lord looks upon his affliction, and he is born of God. Such characters as Reuben have sometimes gone a long way with the prodigal; they lose great opportunities and advantages, if they do not actually waste their substance with riotous living, and experience some of the pressure of the mighty famine which the parable describes. Then they come to themselves; and, if Christ has prayed for them, "Let him live, and not die," they arise and go to the Father against whom they have sinned. They are received into the arms of His mercy with joy unspeakable, and, behold, a son is born to God. "This my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found." This is the true interpretation of Reuben; but, if it had not been for the affliction, the child of God would never have been seen.—*Rev. C. Waller*.

5 The significance of Moses' prayer for Reuben.

[17265] We find the natural end of instability marked in the blessing of Moses (Deut. xxxiii. 6), which takes the form of a prayer. This prayer is the salvation of the tribe. Mark the natural end of instability, if it were suffered to run its

course—"The end of those things is death." This is plainly intimated in the prayer of Moses—"Let Reuben live, and not die; and let not his men be few." Why should he pray that Reuben might not die, unless he were on the way to death, in danger of perishing from among the congregation, like those Reubenites of vain and light character, who died in the rebellion not long before? This prayer of Moses is most significant in the salvation of the Reubenites, for Moses is the "mediator" and "ruler and redeemer" of Israel under the old covenant. It represents the prayer and intercession of the Saviour, which is the only salvation of those who fall, and yet do not die. The character of Reuben, the first of the twelve patriarchs, is hardly the same with that of Peter, the first of the twelve apostles, though in both there is a certain amount of failure and recovery. But there is a resemblance in this—that both of them are saved by the intercession of another, who stands between them and death. "Simon, Simon, behold Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat; but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith die not; and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren." So in the Old Testament, "Let Reuben live, and not die; and let not his men be few." Accordingly we find in history that from this time forward Reuben has a place and a work. He strengthened his brethren in the conquest of Canaan, fighting under the banner of Joshua till the land was won.—*Ibid.*

II. SIMEON.

"Simeon and Levi are brethren; instruments of cruelty are in their habitations. O my soul, come not thou into their secret; unto their assembly, mine honour, be not thou united: for in their anger they slew a man, and in their self-will they digged down a wall. Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce; and their wrath, for it was cruel: I will divide them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel."—GEN. xlix. 5, 6, 7.

1 Description of the Simeon-like character.

[17266] The natural character represented by Simeon is hard and cruel. Men who think to advance the kingdom of heaven by the sword are here. "Lord, shall we smite with the sword?" says Simeon, or Simon Peter of the New Testament; and, before he has heard the answer, he has smitten his Master's enemy, and cut off his ear. "If the kingdom of Christ were of this world, then must His servants fight, that He should not be delivered to the Jews. But now is His kingdom not from hence;" and thus, though the Master is insulted, and the daughter of Israel outraged, the Simeons and Levis that stand by and see it must not take the sword, or they shall perish with the sword.—*Ibid.*

[17267] "Here is the patience and the faith of the saints." "The wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God." But this is a truth that the Simeonites in Israel find it hard to earn. They cannot see why they should not

do justice, even to severity, upon others. They are austere in their religion, and yet the same character sometimes breaks out into acts of licentiousness, as with "Zimri, the son of Salu, the prince of a chief house among the Simeonites," who was slain with a Midianitish woman by a man of the brother tribe of Levi for his sin. Of this tribe in Israel are many persecutors of the saints, who think that they do God service—men who take up arms, not to defend their religion, but to propagate it, with many monks and children of the desert, and those who will put down false doctrine by open violence, forsaking the simple remedies which the Master had prescribed.—*Ibid.*

[17268] It is always difficult to draw the lines between intolerance and discipline, and between tolerance and neglect. But cruelty and violence, especially when accompanied with treachery, are not the weapons for a disciple of Christ. No one ever yet accomplished by the sword what has been accomplished by "the meekness and gentleness of Christ." The way in which God deals with this disposition has been clearly taught in the case of Simeon. Separation, imprisonment, and isolation are the results of this conduct. God's cruel servants find themselves deserted and alone. They are parted again and again from their associates in Jacob, and are at last left almost alone in Israel; their strength is diminished, they are so surrounded by others of a different temper to themselves that they can work their will no more; and then they are brought into contact with the gospel. There is a defect in their apprehension of it. They know not what manner of spirit they are of. Theirs is the spirit of fear, not of love; and the remedy for them is this—they are first brought low in their affliction, and then overwhelmed with the revelation of the love of God.—*Ibid.*

2 The design of Simeon and Levi being scattered in Israel.

[17269] "Simeon and Levi are brethren"—showing a close affinity, and seeking one another's society and aid, but it is for bad purposes; and therefore they must be divided in Jacob and scattered in Israel. This was accomplished by the tribe of Levi being distributed over all the other tribes as the ministers of religion. The fiery zeal, the bold independence, and the pride of being a distinct people, which had been displayed in the slaughter of the Shechemites, might be toned down and turned to good account when the sword was taken out of their hand. Qualities such as these, which produce the most disastrous results when fit instruments can be found, and when men of like disposition are suffered to band themselves together, may, when found in the individual and kept in check by circumstances and dissimilar dispositions, be highly beneficial.—*Rev. M. Dods, D.D.*

III. LEVI.

"And of Levi he said, Let thy Thummim and thy Urim be with thy holy one, whom thou didst prove at Massah, and with whom thou didst strive at the waters of Meribah; who said unto his father and to his mother, I have not seen him; neither did he acknowledge his brethren, nor knew his own children: for they have observed Thy word, and kept Thy covenant. They shall teach Jacob Thy judgments, and Israel Thy law: they shall put incense before Thee, and whole burnt sacrifice upon Thine altar. Bless, Lord, his substance, and accept the work of his hands: smite through the loins of them that rise against him, and of them that hate him, that they rise not again."—DEUT. xxxiii. 8-11.

Instances in the history of the tribe of its capacity to stand alone.

[17270] Isolation is a feature in the history of Levi, quite as much as in that of Simeon. The capacity to stand alone, which made Simeon and Levi so conspicuous among their brethren in their attack upon the Shechemites, proved a valuable instrument for the work of the Lord. Look at Moses when he was come to years, refusing "to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter," and finally forsaking Egypt, "not fearing the wrath of the king." When compelled to flee into Midian by inevitable danger, we find him standing forth as the fearless champion of the daughters of Jethro against the shepherds at the well. Moses, in these things, acted not only from natural impulse, but in the fear of God. At first Simeon and Levi acted from natural character alone; but it is the same character throughout—a fearless unconsciousness of self, and disregard of danger, in the cause of right. The man Moses for his own part was "very meek, above all men on the face of the earth." It was for others he was bold, and in the cause of justice, not in self-assertion, or for selfish gain. When the fear of God is the ruling principle, this character is one of the mightiest in the world. This is the material that makes men of God. These men are outwardly and visibly successful in His cause. They are most perplexing to an enemy, because they are proof against fear or favour. It is said that "every man has his price," but what is the price of a man who will give his life for a cause which he is not supporting for the sake of gain? That kind of man was Moses, and that kind of tribe was Levi. Of course there were exceptions—all Levites were not as Moses.—*Rev. C. Waller.*

IV. JUDAH.

"Behold the LION of the tribe of JUDAH."—REV. v. 5.
 "Judah, thou art he whom thy brethren shall praise: thy hand shall be in the neck of thine enemies; thy father's children shall bow down before thee. Judah is a lion's whelp: from the prey, my son, thou art gone up: he stooped down, he couched as a lion, and as an old lion; who shall rouse him up? The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be. Binding his foal unto the vine, and his ass's colt unto the choice vine; he washed his garments in wine, and his clothes in the blood of

grapes: his eyes shall be red with wine, and his teeth white with milk."—GEN. xlix. 8-12.

"And this is the blessing of Judah: and he said, Hear, Lord, the voice of Judah, and bring him unto his people: let his hands be sufficient for him; and be Thou an help to him from his enemies."—DEUT. xxxiii. 7.

1 His traits of character.

His lion-like qualities.

[17271] There is enough in the subsequent history of the tribe to justify the ascription to Judah of all lion-like qualities—a kingly fearlessness, confidence, power, and success; in action a rapidity of movement and might that make him irresistible, and in repose a majestic dignity of bearing. As the serpent is the cognizance of Dan, the wolf of Benjamin, the hind of Naphtali, so is the lion of the tribe of Judah. He scorns to gain his end by a serpentine craft, and is himself easily taken in; he does not ravin like a wolf, merely plundering for the sake of booty, but gives freely and generously, even to the sacrifice of his own person; nor has he the mere graceful and ineffective swiftness of the hind, but the rushing onset of the lion—a character which, more than any other, men reverence and admire—"Judah, thou art he whom thy brethren shall praise"—and a character which, more than any other, fits a man to take the lead and rule.—*Rev. M. Dods, D.D.*

2 The typical nature of his character.

[17272] Do we not find in the story of Judah the most complete manhood in the world? Every human capability, every human propensity, every human motive—the heights and depths of our nature—every capacity that man possesses—may be found here. And the strongest must win, if he has skill and energy to use his strength. Judah had the firmness to do so, and therefore "Judah prevailed above his brethren, and of him came the chief ruler." Where else could he be found? This was true to the end. Who came to the first place among the apostles at Jerusalem but James, the Lord's brother?—a man of Judah, without doubt. We see what follows when this is applied to the character of our Lord. Here is man in full perfection, and "yet without sin." What can be more certain than that He was "in all points tempted like as we are" if He was a man of this tribe? No man on earth need doubt that he will find sympathy in the Lord Jesus Christ, whatever the peculiar bent of his nature may be. "We have not an High Priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities;" but one of whom we may be absolutely certain that "in all things He was made like unto His brethren"—one who fully understands man, knows what is in man, and one also who, even humanly speaking, has no equal in the knowledge of God.—*Rev. C. Waller.*

V. ZEBULUN.

"Zebulun shall dwell at the haven of the sea; and he shall be for an haven of ships; and his border shall be unto Zidon."—GEN. xlix. 13.

"And of Zebulun he said, Rejoice, Zebulun, in thy going out; and, Issachar, in thy tents. They shall call the people unto the mountain; there they shall offer sacrifices of righteousness: for they shall suck of the abundance of the seas, and of treasures hid in the sand."—DEUT. xxxiii. 18, 19.

1 The Zebulun-like condition of life.

Poverty and obscurity.

[17273] It may be called the poor man's tribe. The fact that our Lord dwelt there betokens this. When He for our sakes became poor, it was at Nazareth in Zebulun that He chose to dwell. His first miracle at Cana was called forth by want. The wine had run short even at the wedding—an occasion when every one who can will provide abundance. The obscurity of Zebulun's boundaries, of his history, of the very prophecy that concerns him, all point in the same direction. Whose lives and histories and abodes are so hard to trace as those of the poor?—*Ibid.*

2 The Zebulun-like turn of mind.

Inquiry and speculation.

[17274] Zebulun, then, was to represent the commerce of Israel, its outgoing tendency; was to supply a means of communication and bond of connection with the world outside, so that through it might be conveyed to the nations what was saving in Israel, and that what Israel needed from other lands might also find entrance. In the Church, also, this is a needful quality: for our well-being there must ever exist among us those who are not afraid to launch on the wide and pathless sea of opinion; those in whose ears its waves have from their childhood sounded with a fascinating invitation, and who at last, as if possessed by some spirit of unrest, loose from the firm earth, and go in quest of lands not yet discovered, or are impelled to see for themselves what till now they have believed on the testimony of others.—*Rev. M. Dods, D.D.*

[17275] It is not for all men to quit the shore, and risk themselves in the miseries and disasters of so comfortless and hazardous a life; but happy the people which possesses from one generation to another, men who must see with their own eyes, and to whose restless nature the discomforts and dangers of an unsettled life have a charm. It is not the instability of Reuben that we have in these men, but the irrepressible longing of the born seaman, who *must* lift the misty veil of the horizon and penetrate its mystery. And we are not to condemn, even when we know we should not imitate, men who cannot rest satisfied with the ground on which *we* stand, but venture into regions of speculation, of religious thought which we have never trodden, and may deem hazardous. The nourishment we receive is not all native-grown; there are views of truth which may very profitably be imported from strange and distant lands.—*Ibid.*

3 The Zebulun-like character.

(1) *Stubborn pride combined with stubborn fidelity.*

[17276] The men were faithful and brave and warlike; but, like many who are thoroughly faithful, they are too apt to despise their brethren, and think there is no one like themselves. We may see this in the question of Nathanael, "Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?" The people of Nazareth themselves showed the same kind of spirit afterwards to our Lord. They were astonished at His being anything more than one of them: "Whence hath this man this wisdom?" They were offended at Him. And when His reference to Elijah and Elisha among the Gentiles touched their pride, they were ready to cast their Saviour down headlong from the brow of the hill on which the town stood. So, in time past, some of them had mocked the messengers of Hezekiah who called them to repentance, and laughed them to scorn: a few humbled themselves, but the greater part were wise in their own conceit. I think the same characteristic may be traced in another man of Zebulun, the prophet Jonah, the son of Amittai of Gath-hepher, in that tribe. How indignant he was when God spared Nineveh, because it might make his reputation as a prophet somewhat less!—*Rev. C. Waller.*

(2) *Lowliness and fidelity induced by the "single eye."*

[17277] We see in the tribe of Zebulun the sort of people with whom the Saviour will abide. They are lowly and yet faithful; not of double heart. They are such as will go forth at His bidding to the conflict, and bring others to Him. Their dwelling-place may be hard for man to discover, but it is the dwelling-place of Christ; and they are saved because He is among them. It is not of themselves, for they have pride enough to ruin them. Their natural impulse would be to bid Christ depart. They are too proud to acknowledge Him by nature until they are brought low. Then they become His most diligent servants, and He condescends to manifest Himself to them as He does not to the world. To them He appears in the midst of trouble, saying, "It is I, be not afraid." They will see Him standing on the shore, in the dawn of the resurrection morning, when He will call them to Himself.—*Ibid.*

VI. ISSACHAR.

"Issachar is a strong ass couching down between two burdens: and he saw that rest was good, and the land that it was pleasant; and bowed his shoulder to bear, and became a servant unto tribute."—GEN. xlix. 14, 15.

"And of Zebulun he said, Rejoice, Zebulun, in thy going out; and, Issachar, in thy tents. They shall call the people unto the mountain; there they shall offer sacrifices of righteousness: for they shall suck of the abundance of the seas, and of treasures hid in the sand."—DEUT. xxxiii. 18, 19.

1 The censurable nature of an Issachar-like want of ambition.

[17278] There is a pleasantness still in the land that appeals to us all ; a luxury in observing the risks and struggles of others while ourselves are secure and at rest ; a desire to make life easy, and to shirk the responsibility and toil that public-spiritedness entails. Yet of what tribe has the Church more cause to complain than of those persons who seem to imagine that they have done enough when they have joined the Church and received their own inheritance to enjoy ; who are alive to no emergency, nor awake to the need of others ; who have no idea at all of their being a part of the community for which, as well as for themselves, there are duties to discharge ; who couch, like the ass of Issachar, in their comfort without one generous impulse to make common cause against the common evils and foes of the Church, and are unvisited by a single compunction that while they lie there, submitting to whatever fate sends, there are kindred tribes of their own being oppressed and spoiled?—*Rev. M. Dods, D.D.*

[17279] Issachar is portrayed as the big-boned, patient, strong, plodding ass, willingly submitting to no burden of tribute, if only he may have the present enjoyment of his good things—a type surviving still among us in the persons of those citizens who are too busy minding their own affairs to be disturbed with public matters, and who will rather endure injustice than put themselves to trouble in removing the wrong-doers.—*W. M. Taylor, D.D.*

2 The occasional practical wisdom of such a character.

[17280] In the days of David apparently new character is given to them—"the children of Issachar, which were men that had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do." This quite accords, however, with the kind of practical philosophy which we have seen to be imbedded in Issachar's character. Men, they were, not distracted by high thoughts and ambitions, but who judged things according to their substantial value to themselves ; and who were, therefore, in a position to give much good advice on practical matters—advice which would always have a tendency to trend too much towards mere utilitarianism and worldliness, and to partake rather of crafty politic diplomacy than of far-seeing statesmanship, yet trustworthy for a certain class of subjects. And here, too, they represent the same class in the Church ; for one often finds that men who will not interrupt their own comfort, and who have a kind of stolid indifference as to what comes of the good of the Church, have yet also much shrewd practical wisdom ; and were these men, instead of spending their sagacity in cynical denunciation of what the Church does, to throw themselves into the cause of the Church, and heartily advise her what she *ought* to do, and help in the doing of it, their observation of human affairs, and poli-

tical understanding of the times, would be turned to good account, instead of being a reproach.—*Ibid.*

3 Issachar's compromise and tact.

[17281] The character of Issachar has been made remarkable by the words used of the tribe in the time of David (1 Chron. xii. 32), "Of the children of Issachar, who were men that had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do ; the heads of them were two hundred ; and all their brethren were at their commandment." This description agrees with Jacob's blessing. The tribe consisted of men who were ready to sacrifice a great deal for the sake of a good position—for ease and wealth and rest. Compromise and tact were absolutely necessary to them. They must be ready to give and take, and to bear much if they would hold their ground. The difficulties of their own position made them excellent advisers to all Israel, owing to the great experience of conflict and perplexity which they had. In their position they were a kind of lesser Israel themselves. As Canaan, upon the whole, was a pleasant land and a great highway between other nations, so the lot of Issachar was a pleasant inheritance, lying between the northern and southern tribes—a battle-ground for all who were pushing their conquests either way.—*Rev. C. Waller.*

VII. DAN.

"Dan shall judge his people, as one of the tribes of Israel. Dan shall be a serpent by the way, an adder in the path, that biteth the horse heels, so that his rider shall fall backward. I have waited for Thy salvation, O Lord."—GEN. xlix. 16-18.

"And of Dan he said, Dan is a lion's whelp ; he shall leap from Bashan."—DEUT. xxxiii. 22.

Dan's grim humour.

[17282] The whole tribe of Dan seems to have partaken of that "grim humour" with which Samson saw his foes walk time after time into the traps he set for them, and give themselves an easy prey to him—a humour which comes out with singular piquancy in the narrative given in the Book of Judges of one of the forays of this tribe, in which they carried off Micah's priest and even his gods.—*Rev. M. Dods, D.D.*

VIII. GAD.

"Gad, a troop shall overcome him : but he shall overcome at the last."—GEN. xlix. 19.

"And of Gad he said, Blessed be he that enlargeth Gad : he dwelleth as a lion, and teareth the arm with the crown of the head. And he provided the first part for himself, because there, in a portion of the lawgiver, was he seated ; and he came with the heads of the people, he executed the justice of the Lord, and his judgments with Israel."—DEUT. xxxiii. 20, 21.

Gad's dogged pertinacity.

[17283] "Gad, a troop shall overcome him, but he shall overcome at the last." Many a good soldier of Jesus Christ has proved the truth of

this. He was going to make such havoc among the hosts of God's enemies—to do such great things for Him, and gain such glory—and lo! before he had done anything he was himself invaded and trampled to the ground, and almost crushed by the enemies of his own soul. The disciple who drew the sword and struck for his Master, when the band of men came with Judas, denied his Master for fear of a woman before the night was gone. And yet he did overcome at the last, and was crucified, going without his Master, and yet with Him, to prison and to death. This is the history of many soldiers of Jesus Christ. The command given to them is to "endure hardness." What is it to endure hardness? To suffer ill-treatment from the enemy, to endure afflictions, temptations, persecutions, just as in battle the soldier must sometimes be still under the fire of the enemy and receive many attacks before he can be suffered to make the attack himself.—*Rev. C. Waller.*

[17284] There is something particularly inspiring to the individual Christian in finding this pronounced as part of the blessing of God's people—"a troop shall overcome him, *but he shall overcome at the last.*" It is this that enables us to persevere—that we have God's assurance that present discomfiture does not doom us to final defeat. If you be among the children of promise, among those that gather round God to catch His blessing, you shall overcome at the last. You may now feel as if assaulted by treacherous, murderous foes, irregular troops, that betake themselves to every cruel deceit, and are ruthless in spoiling you; you may be assailed by so many and strange temptations that you are bewildered and cannot lift a hand to resist, scarce seeing where your danger comes from; you may be buffeted by messengers of Satan, distracted by a sudden and tumultuous incursion of a crowd of cares so that you are moved away from the old habits of your life amid which you seem to stand safely; your heart may seem to be the rendezvous of all ungodly and wicked thoughts, you may feel trodden under foot and overrun by sin, but, with the blessing of God, you shall overcome at the last. Only cultivate that dogged pertinacity of Gad, which has no thought of ultimate defeat, but rallies cheerfully and resolutely after every discomfiture.—*Rev. M. Dods, D.D.*

IX. ASHER.

"Out of Asher his bread shall be fat, and he shall yield royal dainties."—*GEN. xlix. 20.*

"And of Asher he said, Let Asher be blessed with children; let him be acceptable to his brethren, and let him dip his foot in oil. Thy shoes shall be iron and brass, and as thy days, so shall thy strength be."—*DEUT. xxxiii. 24, 25.*

The luxurious ease of Asher, and its natural issues.

[17285] It is not surprising that Asher was contented to partake the luxuries of the Phœnician settlements which were even at that early

period in full vigour, and to "dwell among them," without attempting the conquest and extermination enjoined in regard to all the Canaanites (*Judg. i. 31, 32*). Accordingly he did not drive out the inhabitants of Aecho, nor Dor, nor Zidon, nor Ahlab, nor Achzib, nor Helbah, nor Aphik, nor Rehob (*Judg. i. 31*), and the natural consequence of this inert acquiescence is immediately visible. While Zebulon and Naphtali "jeopardied their lives unto the death" against Sisera, Asher was content to forget the peril of his fellows in the creeks and harbours of his new allies (*Judg. v. 17, 18*). At the numbering of Israel at Sinai, Asher was more numerous than either Ephraim, Manasseh, or Benjamin, but in the reign of David so insignificant had the tribe become that its name is altogether omitted from the list of the chief rulers (1 *Chron. xxvii. 16-22*), and it is with a kind of astonishment that it is related that "divers of Asher and Manasseh and Zebulon" came to Jerusalem to the passover of Hezekiah. With the exception of Simeon, Asher is the only tribe west of the Jordan which furnished no hero or judge to the nation.—*G. Grove.*

X. NAPHTALI.

"Naphtali is a hind let loose: he giveth goodly words."—*GEN. xlix. 21.*

"And of Naphtali he said, O Naphtali, satisfied with favour, and full with the blessing of the Lord: possess thou the west and the south."—*DEUT. xxxiii. 23.*

Naphtali's heroism.

[17286] How gigantic were the efforts by which these heroic mountaineers saved their darling highlands from the swarms of Canaanites who followed Jabin and Sisera, and how grand the position which they achieved in the eyes of the whole nation, may be gathered from the narrative of the war in *Judg. iv.*, and still more from the expressions of the triumphal song in which Deborah the prophetess of Ephraim immortalized the victors and branded their reluctant countrymen with everlasting infamy. Gilead and Reuben lingered beyond the Jordan amongst their flocks. Dan and Asher preferred the luxurious calm of their hot lowlands to the free air and fierce strife of the mountains. Issachar, with characteristic sluggishness, seems to have moved slowly, if he moved at all; but Zebulon and Naphtali, on the summits of their native highlands, devoted themselves to death, even to an extravagant pitch of heroism and self-devotion (*Judg. v. 18*), "Zebulon are a people that threw away their lives even unto death; and Naphtali on the high places of the field."—*Ibid.*

XI. JOSEPH (EPHRAIM AND MANASSEH).

"And unto Joseph were born two sons before the years of famine came, which Asenath the daughter of Poti-pherah priest of On bare unto him. And Joseph called the name of the firstborn Manasseh: For God, said he, hath made me forget all my toil, and all my father's house. And the name of the second called he

Ephraim : For God hath caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction."—GEN. xli. 50, 51, 52.

"And his father refused, and said, I know it, my son, I know it: he also shall become a people, and he also shall be great: but truly his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his seed shall become a multitude of nations."—GEN. xlviii. 19.

"His glory is like the firstling of his bullock, and his horns are like the horns of unicorns: with them he shall push the people together to the ends of the earth: and they are the ten thousands of Ephraim, and they are the thousands of Manasseh."—DEUT. xxxiii. 17.

1 Ephraim's pride and its rebuke.

[17287] The prophecies addressed to Israel as distinct from Judah would point first to Ephraim, the acknowledged head of the ten tribes. Pride of our own privileges is our danger as well as Ephraim's, according to the caution addressed to us by St. Paul in the famous passage where he shows the position of Jew and Gentile in the good olive-tree of God. "Boast not thyself against the branches. Be not high-minded; but fear." The God who punished Israel for the sin of Ephraim will punish us also for our pride. But the pride of Ephraim in the days of his power in Israel receives a most significant rebuke in the list of the sealed tribes. His name is simply omitted. He gives place to his father Joseph, whose children were to be called after the name of Ephraim and Manasseh in their inheritance. The name of the humble Joshua has risen above every name; the name of the proud Ephraim is lost; for "every one that exalteth himself shall be abased, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted."

2 Manasseh and Ephraim, as Jacob's Gentile descendants, were typical of the Gentiles who should be admitted into the Church of Christ.

[17288] "Manasseh shall be a people, and he shall be great," is the portion given by Jacob to this tribe. Moses speaks of the thousands of Manasseh side by side with the ten thousands of his brother Ephraim; but there is more character about the name of Manasseh than appears in either of those two fragments of prophecy which can be limited to him. Ephraim and Manasseh may fairly be called Jacob's Gentile descendants. They were children of an Egyptian mother, born while their father Joseph occupied the position of a Gentile prince. Accordingly, when we remember the words respecting Ephraim, that his seed should be "the fulness of the Gentiles," we can only regard Joseph as representing Christ, the Saviour of the Gentile world. The tribe of Judah is sacred to our Lord as head of the chosen people. The character of Joseph belongs to Him in prophecy as the Saviour of all mankind; and as in the twelve tribes we find the house of Judah and the house of Joseph united, so in the Church of Christ—the Bride, the Lamb's Wife—we find the twelve tribes of the children of Israel, and the gate of Joseph open for the Gentiles in multitudes that no man can number.—*Rev. C. Waller.*

XII. BENJAMIN.

"Benjamin shall ravin as a wolf: in the morning he shall devour the prey, and at night he shall divide the spoil."—GEN. xlix. 27.

"And of Benjamin he said, The beloved of the Lord shall dwell in safety by him; and the Lord shall cover him all the day long, and he shall dwell between his shoulders."—DEUT. xxxiii. 12.

The passionate impulsiveness of the Benjamin-like character.

[17289] There may be some difficulty in showing how the virtues and vices of Benjamin can be the expression of the same character, even under opposite influences. But the ruling principle seems to be impulsiveness. The object of Benjamin's desire is pursued without the least regard to consequences. The cruelties and vices of the Benjamites were the indulgence of unbridled passion. Their virtues were the expression of undaunted love. Saul casting javelins at David; saving the men of Jabesh-Gilead by a sudden appeal to all Israel; sentencing the priests to death, and even his son Jonathan too, in a moment of passion; yet bursting into tears at the sound of the voice of David; utterly overcome by the terrible apparition at Endor; and yet fighting bravely to the last. Who does not see that he is the creature of impulse throughout? The effect of Divine grace is to control the outward expression of these impulses, but not to chill the loving heart from which they spring. We see this exhibited in Jonathan and St. Paul. The result is a kind of deliberate passion in God's service, which produces an almost unconquerable force. The conversion of St. Paul by a sudden onset of Divine love and glory exhibits God's way of dealing with this character for good. Probably the behaviour of the persecuted disciples had given many a prick already to the warm but misguided heart. The behaviour of Christians under persecution would have an influence that a man of Benjamin would find it hard to withstand.—*Ibid.*

LOT.

I. HIS WORLDLY AND SELF-SEEKING CHOICE.

1 Probable temporal advantages blinded him to all other considerations.

(1) *He thought neither of the possibility of local changes nor of the anger of God.*

[17290] "He lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of Jordan, even as the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt." The volcanic fires, slumbering beneath, made that vale so fertile that its riches have become proverbial, and the Jordan, which has now so short a course to the Dead Sea, then wandered through the plain, like the rivers of Eden. Lot's eye regarded neither the dangers sleeping beneath,

nor the light of God above, but only the corn and wine and verdant pastures.—*Rev. J. Ker.*

(2) *He displayed an utter disregard of religious privileges.*

[17291] "The men of Sodom were wicked, and sinners before the Lord exceedingly." This is said in connection with Lot's choice, as if to intimate to us that it was full in his view when he came to a decision. Their sins were of a peculiarly gross and inhuman kind, and were the growth of that very luxuriance of soil which made Lot choose it for his home. The prophet Ezekiel (xvi. 49) enumerates these three causes of the sins of Sodom, "pride, fulness of bread, and abundance of idleness." And how they are still the parents of vice in prosperous communities we know full well. It shows how widespread and inveterate the wickedness of the community was, that when the fiery deluge came down, not one beyond Lot's family was counted worthy to escape. Can there be conceived a more unpromising place for a man who had a spark of religion in him to enter, if he wished to keep it still burning? Had it been very warm and bright he would not have ventured there; for this is observable, that in general those who have least religion to lose are most ready to thrust it into danger.—*Ibid.*

[17292] It is very likely that if Lot thought at all of the question of religious privilege, and the hazard of evil association to himself and his children, he had a number of ways of smoothing his choice to his conscience. One of these, common enough still, might be that he was going there to do a great deal of good. Their wickedness made it the very spot for him to work in, and set a different example. If this were genuine, it might be very well; but when it is merely a pretext, the man cannot cover it comfortably from himself, and it is somehow found out still sooner by the sinners who are to be converted. Nothing prejudices religion more than to use its interest as a mask for covetousness.—*Ibid.*

[17293] Among the indications of a very low state of religion in Lot's own soul may be mentioned his *negligence of the spiritual good of his household*. In this particular he was strongly contrasted with Abraham. His large household of children and slaves, whom he was bound to train up for the kingdom of heaven, were educated—*where?* Amid the luxury and pollutions of Sodom, and at best by the very doubtful example and influence of such a master and such a father. This is one of the darkest features in his character. Well is it said by the prophet, "And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse." Lot had sons, and he had daughters too, whom he brought up in Sodom! Was it possible for a good man thus to trifle with the highest and most sacred of earthly responsibilities, and thus

educate and prepare for everlasting perdition those who were committed to his trust for the purpose of becoming the heirs of heaven?—*Rev. G. Spring, D.D.*

[17294] It was a perilous hour in the history of Lot when he consented to part with his religious privileges, to leave the Holy Land for a land of Paganism, and to separate himself from his spiritual friend and guardian to dwell with wicked men. There was no necessity for his doing this, even though the unseemly strife between the herdsmen rendered a separation expedient; there was room enough in the broad land of Canaan without his removal to a land of notorious wickedness. It was not poverty that drove him, for he was rich. It was not a due regard to his worldly interests; these might have been promoted without such a fearful exposure. Nor was it for the purpose of disseminating the true religion among the ignorant and unevangelized population with whom he selected his inheritance; his subsequent life shows no such benevolent motive. It was for no such good ends as these, but rather for purposes that were purely mercenary and selfish. His piety was obscured by his love of wealth. His whole history shows that the love of money was a passion which early influenced him, nor was it eradicated at last but by violence.—*Ibid.*

(3) *He was entirely untouched by Abraham's magnanimity.*

[17295] Abraham, to preserve good feeling, proposed that their encampments should be kept apart, and he gave Lot the selection of place. It was in accordance with the noble nature of Abraham; and had Lot shared, or been capable of appreciating it, he would have declined to avail himself of the offer. But he grasped at it eagerly, and took the richest side. It may be he had the slightest possible feeling of contempt for Abraham's unworldliness and simplicity, and congratulated himself on his own shrewdness. This is one of the mean things in life, to gloat over a gain that may have dropped from the generosity, or may have been stolen from the simplicity, of a friend who scorns to be always standing on the extreme edge of his rights. It is a "blessing of himself by the covetous which the Lord abhors."—*Rev. J. Ker.*

2 The consequences which the choice he made brought upon him.

(1) *The profit and loss of a selfish policy is therein plainly displayed.*

[17296] Lot by his choice gained a more comfortable and luxurious abode than Abram, probably also a more rapid increase of his worldly wealth. But this was all. Now what are we to place upon the "loss" side of the account? He soon lost, for a time at least, his peace of mind, his liberty and his goods, in the captivity which he experienced at the hands of the four kings, and it was only by the resolute

action of his noble-minded kinsman that Lot and his family were rescued and returned to Sodom. Lot certainly lost by his residence in Sodom a large portion of his tranquillity of mind, for as regards the inhabitants of that city "just Lot vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds." He also lost his married daughters, who remained in Sodom and were destroyed with it. He lost his wife, he lost his home, and he lost altogether the moral tone which had once pervaded his family. The very name of that family was lost, disappearing for ever from the sacred narrative. Here is a deficit in the account indeed!—*M. J.*

(2) *The issues of his choice well illustrate the law of "retaliation" in the spiritual life.*

a. As he made worldly advantage his chief aim, he failed in gaining it.

[17297] See how Lot's choice came back on him. He grasped recklessly at worldly advantage, and twice he lost his entire possessions—the second time, as it would seem, beyond recovery. In the first instance, the kings of the East plundered Sodom, and carried off Lot and all he had. "They took Lot and his goods"—an emphatic conjunction. There was much property, and it was much to him, for his heart was in it. No doubt it was a sore blow to Lot, and was meant as a warning to quit the place. But he refused to take it, and the stroke came next time direct from God, and with more crushing weight. He who would not leave Sodom of his own free will must be driven from it by the sword of the avenging angel. He went out poorer than he entered, and all his wealth perished with the men of Sodom. So when God punishes open sinners, He can judge the sins of His own people by the way. He can mingle judgment with mercy, but also mercy with judgment, and Lot was made to feel it when he fled from the fiery rain, stripped of the labours of years, and did not dare to look behind on the ruin of his hopes.—*Rev. J. Ker.*

[17298] He that chose the plains of Jordan in his youth was glad of a cave in the mountain in his old age. Wife, home, property, with the prospect of a home for his daughters—all were gone. Who would go near the survivors of such a place as Sodom? They were outcasts from the whole earth.—*Rev. C. Waller.*

[17299] This is not unfrequently the case with good men when they have become excessively worldly, and more especially where their wealth has been accumulated at the sacrifice of religious principle, and by doubtful means. The history of this strange man furnishes an affecting view of God's faithfulness in visiting the iniquity of His people. He lived to see the wealth of Sodom, and the treasure he had there secured, smouldering in ashes; the finger of God touched his possessions, and they vanished into smoke. Those luxuriant plains, for which he left the land of promise and forsook the God of Abraham, were overrun by fire from the Lord

out of heaven. He was probably never richer, and never gloried more in his wealth, than at the time when his expectations were so fearfully defeated, and the large possessions for which he had sacrificed so much, either perished in the flames or sunk in the Dead Sea. Just look at this guilty and miserable man in the extremity of his poverty and want. He who once could scarcely find space enough in the land of Canaan for himself and servants, and augmented flocks and herds; he who had been heaping up silver as dust, and fine gold as the mire of the streets, now retires to a cave in the side of a mountain, and probably with not enough rescued from the flames to keep him from actual suffering.—*Rev. G. Spring, D.D.*

b. As he failed in generosity to Abraham, he was repeatedly brought under the weightiest obligations to him.

[17300] If this did not make him blush, it should have done so. Lot took what may be called an unfair advantage, and trusted perhaps that he was in a clear way to outstrip Abraham in wealth, but, ere many years had passed, he owed all he had—family, property, liberty—to Abraham's timely and courageous interposition. Abraham never reproached him, but let us hope Lot's own heart did. Time came round, and when Sodom was ripe for destruction Abraham's voice was raised for it. That Lot was there, was no doubt one reason why he pleaded so urgently. Sodom could not be spared, but Lot was rescued, and Abraham's intercession, no less than Lot's own character, had to do with that result (Gen. xix. 29). The friend with whom he had dealt so ungenerously fought with men and wrestled with God for him, and, in both conflicts, like a prince he prevailed. In his old days, when reduced to poverty, it is every way likely that Lot was again indebted to Abraham for succour. Certainly, if it was needed, it was given, and given without upbraiding.—*Rev. J. Ker.*

c. As he disregarded religious privileges, he brought upon himself a bitter entail of sin and shame.

[17301] There can be little doubt that Lot's own religious character suffered from the long sojourn in Sodom. A man cannot voluntarily expose himself to the worst of influences from the mere love of gain without his religious sensibilities being deadened; and this only can account for the grievous termination to the history of Lot, which is among the most melancholy records in the Word of God. It is one of those cases which we must contemplate because it is there—very terrible and very necessary to be thought of; but we would wish to look at it as Abraham did at the ruin of Sodom (Gen. xix. 27), standing in the place where we have met God, and looking at it "a great way off." There is a general consistency in the lives of men; and such a deplorable spiritual catastrophe could not well have happened to one who strove to maintain warm religious feeling, and

to keep himself unspotted from the world. To Lot's family the disregard of all religious associations was even worse.—*Ibid.*

[17302] His own mind must have been involved in darkness and doubt, his spiritual views and prospects obscured, and his peace and comfort disturbed. God said to His ancient people, "Know therefore and see that it is an evil thing and bitter that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God." Lot had none of the enjoyment of a consistent and exemplary piety. Many was the bitter reproach of conscience he had to struggle with, and many a painful remembrance of the past. Violated obligations embarrassed his intercourse with God. He was often, if not habitually and always, shut out from all that delightful influence, and reminded that in "forsaking the fountain of living waters," he had "hewed out to himself cisterns, broken cisterns that could hold no water." His religious policy, if it may so be called, could not have been more unwise and inexpedient. The man who has just religion enough to spoil the world and not enough to draw comfort from God, always "procures to himself" this comfortless state of mind. The threatening is sure, "Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backslidings shall reprove thee." The defects of Lot's character, if they did not exclude him from hope and heaven, produced great spiritual desertion. He had been a thousand-fold the happier man if he had been a better. Contrast his hopes, his friendship, and fellowship with God, with those of Abraham, and it is not difficult to perceive on whose side the advantage lies.—*Rev. G. Spring, D.D.*

[17303] Lot was disgraced in the character and ruin of his household. Not one of his numerous servants escaped the overthrow of the city; they were all nurtured, and partook in its crimes, and were therefore partakers of its doom. Nor were his own flesh and blood reserved for a much better fate. He probably married one of the wealthy daughters of Sodom; there his children were born and brought up; and there they also contracted those matrimonial alliances which insnared them to their undoing. His sons-in-law, who married his daughters, do not appear to have been reclaimed from their wickedness by their alliance with his family; when he gave them the warning that the city was about to be destroyed, they mocked the message. His daughters listened to the warning, and escaped with their parents; while their scoffing husbands were overtaken by the horrors of that fearful morning when the licentious, and abandoned, and scoffing, sunk to hell. Sad hour to this fatherless father! and most bitterly must he have felt the consequences of his own folly when he saw his children thus die without hope, and the pit close upon them for ever! And his daughters—we blush to recite their history; we may not recite it. They had been familiar with the rumour and spectacle of crime, and

they had learned enough of the ways of Sodom to destroy all sense of it.—*Ibid.*

II. HIS LAGGARD FLIGHT FROM SODOM.

1 It displayed how completely the fascinations of the city had subjugated even Lot.

[17304] The angels hastened him in the morning; "they laid hold of his hand while he yet lingered, and the hand of his wife, and the hand of his two daughters"—four souls, only half the number saved with Noah—and "they brought him forth, and set him without the city." They bade him escape to the mountain, but the idle life of Sodom had so unnerved him that he was afraid. He still clung to the city. He that had begun life a wanderer with Abram, now feared to live outside the city wall. At his own earnest entreaty he was permitted to be safe in Zoar. But the horrors of that day overcame him. He dared not stay any longer in the place where he had seen four prosperous cities overwhelmed.—*Rev. C. Waller.*

[17305] The powerful attraction which Sodom exercised over even Lot himself (no doubt in his case in connection with the increase of worldly wealth) is markedly shown (1) in his return to the city after his rescue by Abraham from the hands of the four kings; and (2) from the actual force which it was found necessary to exercise to drag him from the devoted place, immediately before its doom fell upon it.—*M. J.*

2 It furnished a notable instance of God's condescending mercy.

[17306] Even "while he lingered," angelic messengers "hastened him, and laid hold upon his hand, and upon the hand of his wife, and upon the hand of his two daughters, and they brought them forth and set them without the city." What a scene for some delicate and moral painter is furnished by this little incident in sacred history! We know not with what so fitly to compare it, as to those sweet and heavenly influences which so often come down upon the hesitating, lingering sinner, and constrain him to flee to the stronghold while he is yet the "prisoner of hope." Sweet messengers of mercy! angel forms, thus condescending, in their robes of light, to force this group of delaying, hesitating refugees from the flames of Sodom! Memorable words! "Haste thee; escape to Zoar; for I cannot do anything till thou be come thither!"—*Rev. G. Spring, D.D.*

[17307] "The Lord being merciful to him." Yes, indeed. Omnipotence deigns to bind its own hands whilst degenerate Lot shall flee to a place of safety. "Escape to Zoar, for I cannot do anything till thou be come thither."—*M. J.*

III. HIS CHARACTER ESTIMATED.

1 It was highly ambiguous, presenting a more than ordinary intermingling of good and evil.

[17308] He was far from possessing either the

intellectual or moral qualities of Abraham ; on the other hand, he was in some respects a weak man. We must acknowledge even more than his infirmities ; and while we may not call in question his piety, must consent to portray melancholy features of his wickedness. There were times when his religion was very obscure and doubtful, and many a beholder might have been pardoned the suspicion that it was anything more than a name. But there were times also when it broke through the cloud, and he appeared and conducted himself like a good man. There are several incidents in his history which evince his moral sensitiveness, and his high regard for rectitude and goodness. His undisguised and frank-hearted hospitality to the angels who, under the garb of travellers, were sent to execute God's wrath upon the cities of the plain, was not a little in his favour. His expostulation with the men of Sodom when they would have done those strangers a foul wrong, and his ready exposure of his own person to danger in their defence, were creditable to him as a man of moral principle. His appeal to his sons-in-law, on the approaching destruction of Sodom, was marked with an earnestness which honoured his heart ; and showed that in that age of contemptuous unbelief he was not among those who had no faith in God's threatenings.—*Rev. G. Spring, D.D.*

[17309] That his religious and moral principles were not of the most firm and established kind is obvious from his voluntary exposure to corrupting associations from no good end. Good men will not thus expose themselves but from considerations that justify and demand the exposure. They instinctively recoil from them, as ill-suited to the state of their own minds. Duty may call them to this exposure, and when it does so, they may pass through the furnace without even the smell of fire upon their garments.—*Ibid.*

[17310] He appears from history to have been a weak and selfish character. . . . He had good feelings and perceptions ; but was a feeble-spirited man, lacking the strength to act on his own convictions. He was content to mourn over the guilt he saw ; and would rather passively sit down amid the certainties of danger and the probabilities of judgment, than rouse himself to one great and energetic effort to be free, and, at whatever sacrifice, to depart from the tainted and abominable place.—*Rev. J. Kittle, D.D.*

[17311] The root of the matter, we believe, was in him ; but he was one of those good men who teach us more by their faults than their attainments—standing as beacons on the edge of terrible breakers, rather than moving like lights to lead us to places of refuge, and the chief purpose of whose life seems to be to show how far a good man may go astray and yet leave ground for believing that he was saved, as by fire, through the grace of God.—*Rev. J. Ker.*

IV. LOT AND ABRAHAM CONTRASTED.

[17312] Abraham was generous, Lot was selfish ; Abraham was full of faith, Lot was feeble of faith ; Abraham was a strong man, Lot was a weak man ; Abraham was a spiritual giant, Lot was a spiritual dwarf.—*M. J.*

[17313] Few, if any, examples of the two extremes of religious character are more forcibly exhibited than in Lot and Abraham ; this distinguished for his constancy and circumspection, that for his declension ; the latter for his cultivation of every grace and virtue, the former for blemishes which tarnish his excellence ; Abraham for a piety that was comely and fruitful, Lot for a piety that was barren and doubtful, and that failed to carry conviction to the minds of men of its genuineness and purity.—*Rev. G. Spring, D.D.*

V. HOMILETICAL REFLECTIONS.

1 The history of Lot is a standing warning against worldly-mindedness and the spiritual loss which accompanies it.

[17314] If there be a life in the Bible which warns against the spirit of worldliness, it is that of Lot. There is no sin so insinuating, none that can hide itself under so many fair excuses to the self-deception of the possessor, and that ends with more destructive results. If it is the sin of God's people, it must be burned out of them in some way ; but it frequently needs a funeral pile of all they have to effect it.—*Rev. J. Ker.*

[17315] Such a state of mind involves fearful loss. Many a bright and cheering view of God's truth is lost by it, which a quickened intellect and an awakened heart enjoys. Fervid love and elevated faith are lost by it, and in their place come apathy and distrust. The tenderness and sweetness of godly sorrow are lost by it, and instead thereof is hard-hearted obduracy. Steady hopes, precious comforts, and inciting joys are lost by it, and are superseded by gloom and despondency. Activity and usefulness are lost by it, and, instead of mounting upward, the soul, in ignoble sloth and lassitude, cleaves to the dust. Communion with God is lost by it ; and when such a Christian kneels at the mercy-seat, it is with a languor and deadness, and vacancy of thought and emotion, that seem to forbid his access. His retrospect is pensive, and the grateful reminiscences of what God has done for his soul are few.—*Rev. G. Spring, D.D.*

2 The history of Lot illustrates the truth that "all things are lawful, but all things are not expedient."

[17316] Had God forbidden Lot to enter the plain of Jordan? No ! There is no direct law in the Bible that forbids any of us to go into this or that city, this or that family, this or that

scene of temptation. Of course it was *lawful* for Lot to forsake his country, and his kindred, and his father's house, on the other side of the river, where they served other gods, and to come away with faithful Abram to be a pilgrim and a stranger looking for the better country, the city that hath foundations. It was lawful for Lot in the morning of life to start on a pilgrimage to the heavenly city, and then before noonday to betake himself to the wickedest city that he could find on the earth! There is nothing that *forbids* a would-be citizen of the golden city to dwell in Sodom, if it pleases him so to do. "Just Lot" set the example. It has often been followed since. God will not bind His servants by more rules than are absolutely necessary. But see the result! Little by little Lot's way of living underwent an entire change. Hitherto Abram and Lot had both lived "as strangers and pilgrims," "dwelling in tents." Lot did not at once give up the tent when he parted from Abram (Gen. xiii. 12). But not long afterwards we find him dwelling *in* Sodom—a citizen, not a stranger, upon earth (Gen. xiv. 12).—*Rev. C. Waller.*

ISHMAEL.

I. THE ANTE-NATAL PROPHECY REGARDING HIM.

"And he will be a wild man; his hand will be against every man, and every man's hand against him, and he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren" (Gen. xvi. 12).

His wild and unruly character was herein graphically described.

[17317] The prophecy given to his mother before his birth describes his character most vividly: "He will be a wild man (or, literally, a wild ass of a man); his hand shall be against every man, and every man's hand against him; and he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren" (Gen. xvi. 12). If this were indeed the personal character of Ishmael while he was a child in his father's house, and not merely a description of what he would become when he was cast out to dwell in the wilderness, it is clear enough. The wild ass is one of those creatures whom the Creator has Himself condescended to describe. "Who hath sent out the wild ass free? or who hath loosed the bands of the wild ass? whose house I have made the wilderness, and the barren land his dwellings. He scorneth the multitude of the city, neither regardeth he the crying of the driver" (Job xxxix. 5-7). You may try to tame him and keep him in the house, like Ishmael, for a season; but God made his home in the wilderness, and, sooner or later, you will have to send him home.—*Ibid.*

II. THE SINGLE INCIDENT UPON WHICH HIS LIFE TURNED.

"And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, which she had born unto Abraham, mocking" (Gen. xxi. 9).

[17318] Little of his personal history is recorded. Not one word that he said has been written down. The chief incident of his life is the act that entailed his expulsion from his father's house. "Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, which she had born unto Abraham, *mocking.*" What this mockery was, and why it was, we might well doubt, unless it had been explained by the New Testament. It is Ishmael's first recorded act. We know also that he returned to bury his father, and performed that last act of love and duty together with Isaac. From this we gather that Ishmael loved his father, as we know that his father loved him. Beyond this, the man himself is a blank in Old Testament history.—*Ibid.*

III. HIS TYPICAL CHARACTER.

1 As a persecutor of the child of promise.

[17319] There never was any real friendship between Isaac and Ishmael. The one has the spirit of a slave, the other the spirit of a son. And in time the want of sympathy between them appears openly. In the day of the gladness of the family, when Isaac is no longer an infant dependent upon his mother, but begins to take the food of man—when Abraham has made a great feast, and the household is full of rejoicing because his son had begun to take hold on life, the son of the bondwoman is outside the circle. He is seen mocking, and by his mockery he shows plainly the spirit that is in him. He has no part nor lot in the joy of the true family. He puts himself outside. And where he is in heart, there he shall be altogether. "What saith the Scripture" by the mouth of Sarah, the new covenant, the city of God above? "Cast out this bondwoman and her son; for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman." Ishmael shall not be permitted to inherit with Isaac. They are separated, never to be brought together again. The mockery of Ishmael, which parted the two brothers, is thus explained by St. Paul (Gal. iv. 29): "As then, he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now."—*Ibid.*

2 As an outcast at the point of death.

[17320] When Ishmael and his mother were outcasts, and at the point to die, "God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water." Is not this a prophecy of the restoration of outcast Israel, when the veil shall be taken from their hearts, and their eyes shall be opened to see "the fountain open for sin and for uncleanness"—the fountain of living waters that is so near at hand? Ishmael's very name contains a prophecy resting upon a fact—God will hear his

prayer. He was so named of God before he was born, because God heard the affliction of his mother. The name was verified afterwards, when he was an outcast. "God heard the voice of the lad where he was," though he was outside the family of God; and from this we may preach the gospel even to the children of the bondwoman, for there is hope that God will find them and bring them home. If any man have not the spirit of adoption, let him ask of God, and God will give him life. If he be an Ishmael, God will hear the voice of his prayer when he cries to Him where he is. God will open his eyes, and show him the well of living water, and give him the spirit of adoption, and make him a child of God by faith in Jesus Christ.—*Ibid.*

IV. HOMILETICAL REFLECTIONS.

Ishmael's is a type of character not yet extinct.

[17321] There are children of the bondwoman in the Church of Christ now. There is a spirit of bondage, and there is a spirit of adoption. Some take hold of the new covenant, and some remain under the old covenant, though it has passed away. Some think that the essence of Christianity consists in outward forms and ceremonies; they look upon themselves as bound to keep certain rules, and they ask Christ to fill up their shortcomings; they look upon God as a taskmaster rather than a loving Father. These are very like Ishmael, even now. Others take hold of the new covenant. They look to be saved by union with Jesus Christ, who is safe already. They have the spirit of adoption, the confidence of children, rather than the spirit of slaves. They are indeed, as St. Paul often called himself, bondsmen of Jesus Christ; yet they are also the Lord's freemen. Their bondage has been thus described:

"I will not work my soul to save,
For that my Lord hath done;
But I will work like any slave
From love to God's dear Son."—*Ibid.*

ESAU.

I. HIS GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS.

[See JACOB, pp. 79-81.]

II. HIS CHIEF DEFECT.

The undervaluing of spiritual blessings.

(1) *As shown in the contempt which he evinced for his birthright.*

[17322] Esau despised his birthright: "Behold, I am at the point to die; and what good shall this birthright do me?" Here was a want of faith. Abraham was content to slay his son, his only one, the child of all the promises, rather than displease his God. Isaac was content to die with his birthright rather than incur the loss

of it by disobedience. If the kingdom of God had been as precious to Esau as it was to his father or grandfather, he would have valued life less, or the birthright more.—*Ibid.*

[17323] Esau's guilt was not at its highest in the moment of necessity. If he had been thoroughly ashamed of his act when he recovered his strength and spirits, if he had repudiated the disgraceful bargain or shown any regret for his folly, we might have pitied him and thought him hardly used. But Esau was guilty of despising his birthright at other times when he was *not* at the point to die. "He did eat and drink, and rose up, and went his way," confirming, by his indifference when he recovered, the bargain which was extracted from him when he was at the point to die.—*Ibid.*

[17324] Aristotle taught that human actions done under compulsion or in ignorance are to be considered voluntary or involuntary, according to the behaviour of the person when he is set free to realize what he has done. This maxim well illustrates the sale of the birthright by Esau, and the bestowal of the blessing by Isaac. Both were strictly voluntary actions, for both were approved after they were done.—*Ibid.*

[17325] When we ask ourselves what Jacob intended to purchase, or Esau to sell in the "birthright," we answer that in later times it conveyed a double share of the paternal possessions. In patriarchal days it included "lordship" over the rest of the family, and especially succession to that spiritual blessing which through Abraham was to flow out into the world, together with possession of the land of Canaan and covenant communion with Jehovah. What of these things was spiritual, we may readily believe, Esau discredited and despised; and what was temporal, but yet future, as his after conduct shows, he imagined he might still obtain either by his father's favour or by violence. But that for the momentary gratification of the lowest sensual appetites he should have been ready to barter away such unspeakably precious and holy privileges, proved him, in the language of the Epistle to the Hebrews, to have been "a profane person," and therefore quite unfitted to become the heir of the promises. For profanity consists in this: for the sensual gratification or amusement of the moment to give up that which is spiritual and unseen; to be careless of that which is holy, so as to snatch the present enjoyment—in short, practically not to deem anything holy at all, if it stands in the way of present pleasure. Scripture puts it down as the bitter self-condemnation which Esau, by his conduct, pronounced upon himself—"and he did eat and drink, and rose up, and went his way: thus Esau despised his birthright."—*Rev. A. Edersheim, D.D.*

[17326] A careful study of the life and character of the father of the Edomites leaves on the

mind and memory a deep impression of one conspicuous crime—the undervaluing of spiritual blessings; and of one terrible result—their final and irrevocable forfeiture (Heb. xii. 16, 17). The Word of God makes this one thing most emphatic in Esau's life and character—it swallows up all else; in comparison with it all else is forgotten—viz., with the spirit of a "profane person" he sold his birthright, parted with that which he could not recover, which even repentance could not restore.—*Rev. A. Picraon.*

[17327] "Thus Esau despised his birthright." How did he do it? He did it thoughtlessly, like many of you, but he did it irrevocably. How did he do it? He did it flippantly. Many a young man does it flippantly, sacrificing his highest interests with a joke; but he did it, and his tears and cries could not atone for his fatal levity. How did he do it? Quite casually. He had never made up his mind to lose the blessing and to win the curse, and I never yet met a man who had made up his mind to go to hell. But I am afraid I may have known many who are there now. Men do not make up their minds to take a downward road. No, no; that is not the way souls are lost. It is done quite casually, by a process of drifting, drifting, drifting a little further and a little further—down the broad road, until all possible hope of return is gone. And "thus Esau despised his birthright."—*Rev. H. Atken.*

[17328] "Esau despised his birthright." That terrible word "despised." He would never have lost it if he had not despised it; but you know it is the law of God that whenever we despise His gifts He takes them from us. I do not care how a man be endowed with natural gifts. Let the man despise the gifts, and the Giver will soon see to it that the gifts are withdrawn. So it was with Esau.—*Ibid.*

[17329] Esau proved himself to be a profane man; a common, secular, sense-bound man, in whose soul there was no sanctuary for those thoughts which transfigure our nature; who, heedless of everything beyond this petty and visible present, could part with his grand dower of eternal gifts and privileges, even as many a man now parts with "use and name and fame" for the stalling of some momentary, passionate craving.—*James Moorhouse.*

(2) *As shown in the choice of his wives.*

[17330] By marrying his two Hittite wives Esau broke through one of the most important rules of life which had been given to the family whom God had chosen to inherit His blessing. Abraham was called of God to leave his country and his kindred because "they served other gods." When Isaac was to have a wife, his father made his servant swear that he would not take a wife of the daughters of the Canaanites. The reason is given in Deut. vii. 6: "For thou art an holy people to the Lord thy God." The

people whom God had chosen were to be a separate people; if not, they could not inherit His blessing. Esau might have known the care which Abraham had taken to keep Isaac separate. And yet he behaved as if no such rule had ever existed, and married Canaanitish wives without, as it seems, giving himself a thought about the matter.—*Rev. C. Waller.*

III. QUESTION AS TO HIS REPROBATION.

"For ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears" (Heb. xii. 17).

(1) *His sin was aggravated by the length of time allowed to him for repentance, of which he did not avail himself.*

[17331] The narrative goes straight on from the record of the marriage to the story of the blessing, but we are not to suppose that the blessing was given to Jacob immediately after Esau's marriage. Between the end of Gen. xxvi. and the beginning of chap. xxvii. there is an interval of thirty-seven years. It is important to note this fact, because it shows the length of time allowed to Esau for repentance. Even after these marriages he was allowed a space of thirty-seven years to repent of his errors and to return to the appointed path. Every day of grace, however, has its appointed limit; and the end of Esau's day came at last—came most unexpectedly in a catastrophe which it was impossible to provide against, because it was altogether unforeseen.—*Ibid.*

[17332] Esau might have found room for the repentance if he had cared to seek it in due time. Either when he recovered himself after he sold the birthright, or any time before he married Canaanitish wives, or even after his marriage, during those thirty-seven years while his conduct was a grief to Isaac and Rebekah, he might have inquired what rules God had given for the chosen people, and severed himself, if necessary, from the connection which stood in his way. For more than forty years Esau had space for repentance, but he neglected it, he despised it, he did not need it, and he let the time go by. At last he had no warning. He went out from the presence of his father, secure of the blessing; he came back, and lo, it was gone!—*Ibid.*

[17333] "For ye know how that afterwards, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears." The lesson comes out here that regret and remorse have no availableness in restoring a soul's ruin. He deliberately refused the call to a better life. For this does not mean that he found no place in his own mind for repentance; *he never tried to find any*; he went out with murder in his heart, not any sort of contrition. It means he found no second chance in Isaac's mind. "He cried with a great and exceeding

bitter cry—Bless me, even me also, O my father! And Esau lifted up his voice, and wept.”—*Rev. C. Robinson.*

(2) *It would seem that we are not warranted in pronouncing on his eternal state.*

[17334] Was Esau a reprobate? Are we warranted to pronounce upon his eternal condition? Certainly not, from what is said of him either in the Old Testament or in the New Testament. We know that what was said about God’s hating Esau or preferring Jacob related to their temporal condition and that of their posterity. It established the sovereignty of Providence in its dispensations, and the apostle employs the case to illustrate the same sovereignty of God in the dispensations of grace. But farther than this we are not warranted to go, either in reference to Esau or to others.—*Rev. J. Leifchild.*

IV. THE CONTRAST WHICH HE PRESENTS TO JACOB.

[17335] The estimate which is formed of the characters of Jacob and Esau depends entirely upon the aspects under which they are regarded. Judged by a non-religious and customary standard Esau decidedly possessed the nobler and more attractive qualities of the two; but if measured by a higher standard, Jacob far excelled Esau, who seems to have been devoid altogether of spiritual instincts, and who consequently degenerated. In Jacob’s life we have a splendid record of spiritual achievements when we take into account the naturally bad moral outfit with which he was born, coupled with home influences certain, in his case, to be especially hurtful.—*C. A.*

[See JACOB, p. 79.]

V. LESSONS TAUGHT BY HIS LIFE AND CHARACTER.

1 His was a typical history.

[17336] Esau stands, for all the ages, as the type of those who, for the brief gratification of a sensual taste, will barter away a whole heritage of manhood, and suffer a whole future of spendthrift poverty and shame. Look around you—where is the family circle that is not to-day drawing the mantle of its loving apology over the presence or the memory of some Esau among its inmates? There are misers selling their souls for gold. There are silly women bartering every jewel of hope and home for the meretricious displays of dress and equipage. There are men ambitious for office, surrendering truth and honour for mere authority and chance of plunder. There are filthy “fornicators,” like Esau, who buy sensual gratifications at the price of heaven and the cost of hell.—*Rev. C. Robinson.*

[17337] Esau is the pattern of those who are born within the visible Church of God, brought up in its best families, with every advantage and every privilege a Christian family can give.

And yet do we not know those that forfeit these advantages by utter heedlessness and neglect? Profanation, not sanctification, is the rule of their lives. Esau is not exactly what we should call a wicked man; but he is a “profane person,” who deals so lightly with his religious opportunities that he may be said to fling them utterly away. Such persons entirely put out of mind the “holiness without which no man shall see the Lord.” God’s own children “mind the things of the Lord, that they may be holy in body and spirit. Those who are like Esau think nothing of holiness at all. They may understand how to avoid certain sins which are disapproved of; but as for holiness, they cannot even tell what it means. Yet it has a very definite meaning in the sight of God. Without it “no man shall see the Lord.”—*Rev. C. Waller.*

2 His was no uncommon bargain.

[17338] Surely, you say, the dearest mess of pottage ever eaten! and the strangest and foolishlest act ever done! no one else can ever have been so unspeakably senseless! On the contrary, this selling of the birthright, this selling of the soul, ay, and selling it invariably for nought, is a very, very common thing. If Esau sold it for a morsel of meat, why, Eve sold it for a forbidden fruit; Balaam sold it for a promise that was never fulfilled, and a death on the battlefield among the foes of God; Achan sold it for a dress which he never put on, and for some gold which lay for a few weeks under the turf of his tent-floor; Ahab sold it for a vineyard, at the gate of which the very next morning the prophet met him and made it abhorrent to him; Judas sold it for thirty pieces of silver, not one of which he ever spent, and all of which he flung down in horror a few days after on the temple pavement; the prodigal sold it for a banquet which began with revelry and ended with the husks of swine.—*Archdeacon Farrar.*

[17339] For one morsel of meat? Yes. That is how it was done. When we come to see things in the light of eternity, as we one day shall, the one morsel of meat will look a very little thing indeed. The sensual gratification that stood between you and Christ—ah! that one morsel of meat—how poor a thing it will seem when the light of eternity flashes into your soul; the good opinion of your fellow-men, the desire to be thought much of, the wish to shine in the eyes of those who surround you—it may seem much to you now; but what will it appear when the light of eternity flashes upon your soul! The pride of your heart that stands between you and the cross, it may seem a worthy and a manlike thing to you now. How mean and despicable it will appear by and by! Would to God that it might stand between you and the cross no more. The love of pleasure rather than the love of God, it may seem natural enough now; but when the light of eternity flashes into your soul, how little will the memory of your pleasures please you then!—*Rev. H. Aitken.*

17340—17345]

JEWISH ERA.

ELIEZER.

I. INTRODUCTORY.

His position in the household of Abraham.

[17340] When Abraham came into Syria by way of Damascus, he probably found this Eliezer, who became not only a sort of bailiff, but a trusted friend. He had been selected by Abraham to be his heir, but of course when Isaac was born he could not hold that position. He became honoured as "the eldest servant of his (Abraham's) house, that ruled over all that he had" (Gen. xxiv. 2). To him probably was committed the delicate business recorded in this chapter; and the way in which it was executed was just that which would be expected from one who had so won the confidence of Abraham as to be selected as his heir.—*F. Hastings*.

II. HIS CHIEF CHARACTERISTICS.

They appear in his discharge of the difficult and delicate mission entrusted to him.

(1) *Disinterested fidelity.*

[17341] No man in the Bible plays a more high-minded and honourable part than Eliezer—though a servant, and in one sense a slave. Fully to comprehend that, and appreciate his fidelity, it must be remembered that the birth of Isaac, though a happy event to Abraham and Sarah, was far otherwise, in a worldly point of view, to him. It inflicted a blow on Eliezer, which it needed uncommon magnanimity and piety to bear. Till Isaac appeared this man had good hopes of succeeding to his master's fortune. Such is the way I read, and the meaning I attach to, these words of Abraham: "I go childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus. Behold, to me thou hast given no seed: and lo, one born in my house is mine heir"—this Eliezer, one of my slaves, or a child of his.—*Rev. T. Guthrie, D.D.*

[17342] We cannot doubt that Eliezer bore his disappointment nobly; and for his dear master's sake welcomed and even loved the boy who had come between him and a splendid fortune. And yet one hope may still have lingered, and risen sometimes unbidden, in his bosom. Might not Isaac choose to live unwedded? and die, leaving no heir behind? But this expectation, if he ever cherished it, was also to be extinguished; and it was surely no small trial to his fidelity when, commissioned to seek a wife for Isaac, Eliezer had, with his own hand, to quench his last hope of rising in the world—of exchanging poverty for affluence, and a state of servitude for freedom. In such circumstances most people would have intrusted the office to another agent. Committing it into the hands of one who had strong temptations to play his master false, Abraham, more than by any language, expressed his confidence in the

fidelity of his servant; and that he believed this Eliezer of Damascus to be true as its famous steel. What a pattern of faithfulness the servant in whom his master could repose such faith!—*Ibid.*

(2) *Practical piety.*

[17343] Eliezer's piety is no more than his fidelity and diligence matter of conjecture. In this story he appears pre-eminent as a man of prayer. He displays an extraordinary confidence in the providence and faithfulness of God. He casts himself on Him whom he loves to call his master's God with almost as much faith as his master could have done. With the first dawn of success he bows his head and worships the Lord. "Blessed," he cries, "be the Lord God of my master Abraham, who hath not left destitute my master of His mercy and His truth." Not in our judgment only, but in his own, it is not his own skill, but the Lord who leads him; it is not good fortune, but the Lord who speeds him. The saying, "Like master like man," had never a happier illustration than in the venerable patriarch and his pious steward.—*Ibid.*

[17344] Eliezer did not hesitate to ask God's guidance in respect to a subject which many would account as quite within the scope of their own judgment to decide. Many also would have thought it beneath the notice of God. Many would have made their way direct into the city to Nahor's house to choose for themselves. And many would have left the matter to be decided by chance; but Eliezer seeks guidance from God. Only those who are ignorant of the value of trifles, of their relative power, or who are ignorant of the fact that there are no trifles but which may become all-important circumstances, would think such an affair as that Eliezer had in hand, as beneath God's notice; and if not beneath God's notice, it may properly be the subject of prayer. Many who contemplate forming relationships might with the greatest advantage imitate the example of Eliezer in this case, and seek direction from God. Were this the practice there would be fewer unhappy marriages. Eliezer in carrying out his master's wish seeks success from God.—*F. Hastings*.

[17345] He casts himself on providence, saying, "O Lord God of my master Abraham, I pray Thee, send me good speed this day, and show kindness unto my master Abraham. . . . And let it come to pass, that the damsel to whom I shall say, Let down thy pitcher, I pray thee, that I may drink; and she shall say, Drink, and I will give thy camels drink also: let the same be she that Thou hast appointed for Thy servant Isaac; and thereby shall I know that Thou hast showed kindness unto my master." What an unselfish, noble regard to his master breathes out in this prayer; and what wisdom also in seeking one for Isaac who, by her bearing to himself, should prove herself not high-

minded, but humble ; not idle, but industrious ; not rude, but courteous ; not cold, but kind.—*Rev. T. Guthrie, D.D.*

[17346] At the most suitable time the steward prays. He committed his way unto the Lord at the period when he felt most strongly that he needed His guidance. God honours the man's trust. "It came to pass that before he had done speaking Rebekah came out." She was the very one whom God had appointed. She knew not that she was moving to fulfil the intention of God. In her acts and in her words she was doing that which was in harmony with the sign the man had asked. Courteously, on being asked for a draught from her vessel, she offered even to draw for the camels also. In the very first person he addressed Eliezer had the answer to his prayer. Thus in Isaiah lxx. 24 it is said, "Before they call I will answer," &c., and in Daniel ix. 23, "At the beginning of thy supplication the commandment came forth."—*F. Hastings.*

III. HOMILETICAL REFLECTIONS.

1 His success in his mission encourages to prayer.

[17347] Everything fell out better than the steward could have expected ; he could only see in it God's hand, God's mercy in guiding him and in confirming his hope. God is as willing to answer us as to answer Eliezer of Damascus. Prayer can overcome difficulties that seem insurmountable. When the cup of sorrow is not removed, the strength is given to bear it, and so prayer is answered. If the way we expected does not open up in answer to our supplication, another and better is sure to be made plain. Prayer also "makes the darkened cloud withdraw."—*Ibid.*

2 The record of his fidelity as a servant teaches an important lesson.

(1) To masters.

[17348] Were there more masters like Abraham there would certainly be more servants like Eliezer—more who would in their honesty, fidelity, and piety show the results of a master or mistress's holy example ; the benefits, by some servants too lightly esteemed, which may be expected from dwelling with a religious family, in a house where the Sabbath is carefully observed and God is daily worshipped. I have heard servants loudly complained of, and unfavourable contrasts drawn between those of our own and of older times. I would not conceal their faults. Though with a kind hand, I would rather lay them bare, that they might be amended. Yet, when I have heard some complaining, for example, of the ingratitude of servants, I have been tempted to ask what many of them have to be grateful for. They have feelings to be hurt as well as others ; and how have I seen them lacerated and rudely torn ! Removed from home and friends, they are peculiarly sensitive to kindness ; but its words

in many instances never fall on their ear. Affections that, like tendrils torn from their support, would attach themselves, in lack of father or mother, to master or mistress, are left to lie bleeding on the ground ; and in many instances are trodden under foot. Far from parental care, no kind eye watches over them, nor kind voice warns them of the snares that beset their feet.—*Rev. T. Guthrie, D.D.*

[17349] Many show no more interest in their servants' souls than if they had no souls to be saved ; and less care is taken to preserve their virtue from seducers than the family plate from thieves. They may well ask in such cases, "What have we to be grateful for ?" I do not defend their faults ; but, so far as my knowledge and experience go, it is but justice to them to say that, were more regard paid to the feelings of servants, more forbearance shown with their failings, more pains taken to make them happy, to keep them from the paths of vice, to cultivate their virtues and bless their souls, there would be less occasion to complain of their depravity.—*Ibid.*

(2) To servants.

[17350] Servants often have themselves to blame. They forfeit respect by a miserable aping of the manners of their superiors. They waste on their indulgences or on vain and showy attire the means which would save a parent from the degradation of public charity, and provide for the wants of their own old age. Yielding to the temptation of higher wages, they will leave a Christian house for one where they will see no good, but much bad example, imperilling their precious souls. If crimes are committed against servants, they are also committed by them. Falsehood and dishonesty are not the worst they may commit, and the guilt of receiving some simple and unsuspecting one into a house to accomplish her ruin is only equalled by that of the servant who carries vice into a virtuous family, and more wickedly betrays her trust than it were to steal down at midnight with muffled foot and open the door to thieves.—*Ibid.*

MELCHIZEDEK.

I. THE MYSTERIOUS RETICENCE OF SCRIPTURE CONCERNING HIM.

[17351] Mystery hovers about him. Not a word is said of his father or mother, his "beginning of days or end of years." Nothing is told of his achievements, nothing of his history before or after that single circumstance which is related in the Book of Genesis. Solitary, mysterious, unrelated—like a flash from another world, like an apparition that slowly slides into light, scintillates for a moment on the vision, speaks forth some awful hint, and then fades away, so this august personage seems to

come and go. Before we can ask, What is thy name? Whence comest thou? Whither goest thou? he is gone.—*C. Stanford.*

II. VARIOUS SPECULATIONS AS TO HIS PERSONALITY.

[17352] No character has been more fruitful of speculation than that of Melchizedek. Some have conjectured that he was a theophany of Christ or the Holy Ghost. The Gnostics considered him an æon, or a man formed before the creation out of spiritual matter. Origen said he was an angel. Others, Ham, Shem, Arphaxad, or Job.—*Rev. A. Maclaren, D.D.*

[17353] We cannot read impartially the apostle's argument without seeing that the special similitude between Melchizedek and Christ was in this very mystery of perpetuity. In Heb. vii. 15, 16, it is clearly shown: "After the similitude of Melchizedek there ariseth another priest, who is made not after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an endless life." The power of force which an endless life gave is the chief point of likeness between Melchizedek and Christ. We are thus shut up to the conclusion that Melchizedek was Christ Himself; that in that early age the Messiah reigned in Jerusalem, before He came to Jerusalem to die, even as hereafter He shall reign in the New Jerusalem. It may be that none (unless Abraham) knew His true character, but that it was only known that One of unblemished purity, coming no one knew whence, was the holy Priest and King of Salem. His remarkable sanctity had approved itself to the people of this pious city, and they had made Him their King. This appearance of Christ we take to be a theophany like so many recorded in Scripture, but of longer duration. That Christ should appear on earth before His birth from the Virgin Mary is no novel doctrine. It is admitted that the captain of the Lord's host, who appeared to Joshua before Jericho, was the Messiah, and that He who walked with the three Jews in the fiery furnace at Babylon was the same. Indeed, in this latter case, the phraseology is very similar to that which Paul uses of Melchizedek. Paul says of Melchizedek: "Made like unto the Son of God:" and of the companion of the three Jews it is said: "The form of the fourth is like the Son of God." A like theophany, but of longer duration, was this, we think, of Melchizedek at Jerusalem; and to this we refer that remark of our Lord to the Jews: "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad." To Abraham there was probably given some notion of the Divine character of Salem's King, and hence his remarkable acts of homage, which would be inexplicable toward any Canaanitish monarch.—*Rev. H. Crosby, D.D.*

[17354] In our view Melchizedek was probably the last representative of the race of Shem in the land of Canaan, which was now in the

hands of the Canaanites, who were children of Ham, as well as that he was the last representative of the faith of Shem, in the midst of idolatry—being a "priest of the Most High God."—*Rev. A. Edersheim, D.D.*

III. HISTORICAL FACTS RECORDED OF HIM.

[17355] The historical facts concerning are: (1) that he came into contact with Abraham at the close of the first war recorded in the annals of the human race; (2) that he was a priest and king; (3) that he was greater than Abraham; (4) that he lived at Salem, which was probably Jerusalem.—*Rev. C. Stanford.*

IV. SPIRITUAL SIGNIFICANCE OF HIS PERSON AND RECORDED ACTS.

He was an eminent type of Christ.

(1) *Viewed generally.*

[17356] He is a symbol: (1) Of the mysterious character of our Saviour's person in that he is "without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days nor end of life." (2) Of his priesthood, in (a) its antiquity, before Aaron, before Abraham, (b) its catholicity, not restricted, like that of Aaron, to a race, a nation; (c) its independence: he shines apart as if he had no earthly connections; (d) its perpetuity. (3) Of Christ's royalty, in (a) the fact of his kingship. There was no symbol of this in the Levitical economy. If Christ is our Priest He must also be our King. Many are ready in their creed to trust Christ as their Priest, who will not in their practice serve Him as their King; (b) the character of his administrative righteousness and peace. (4) Of Christ's ministry. He comes forth from God to Abraham with a benediction.—*Ibid.*

[17357] Melchizedek, the last representative of the Shemitic order, is the type of Christ, as the last representative of the Abrahamic order. What lay in germ in Melchizedek was to be gradually unfolded—the priesthood in Aaron, the royalty in David—till both were most gloriously united in Christ. Melchizedek was, however, only a shadow and a type; Christ is the reality and the antitype. It is for this reason that Scripture has shut to us the sources of historical investigation about his descent and duration of life, that by its silence it might point to the heavenly descent of Jesus.—*Rev. A. Edersheim, D.D.*

(2) *Viewed in special relation to the kingship of Christ.*

[17358] The name of "Melchizedek," or King of Righteousness, fitly symbolizes the Messiah. Christ is the King of Righteousness, first in the sense of being Himself "Jesus Christ the righteous," the only righteous man that ever lived; also being made our righteousness through our faith in Him; and then again being the source, through His Holy Spirit, of all

our individual righteousness.—*Rev. H. Crosby, D.D.*

[17359] The name of King of Salem, or “King of Peace,” is a typical indication of the Messiah, who is called the “Prince of Peace.” The peace which Christ gives the soul is the result of the righteousness both imputed and implanted, which assimilates the soul to God, and ends the war between the soul and God. Jesus is the King of my peace, because He is the King of my righteousness. There can be no other real peace for the soul. The peace that is founded on forgetfulness, or thoughtlessness, or compromises, is a very short one, and must end in bitterness, but the peace which is founded on righteousness is indestructible. It is God’s peace. We never could have attained to it, but it was given us by our King. Blessed be our Melchizedek—our Melek-Shalem—Christ Jesus, the King of our righteousness, the King of our peace!—*Ibid.*

(3) *Viewed in special relation to the priesthood of Christ.*

“Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek” (Psa. cx. 4; Heb. v. 6).

[17360] Melchizedek brought forth bread and wine. It was, doubtless, in the first instance, refreshment to Abraham and his troop. It was bread to strengthen, and wine to cheer them after their long and rapid march to Anti-Lebanon and back, some 400 miles. But typically this was a foreshadowing of the flesh and blood of Christ which strengthens and cheers the weary, fainting soul of sinful man, and which was authoritatively indicated by bread and wine in the institution of the Eucharist. Christ brings forth this Divine bread and wine to the world, and says: “Eat, O friends; drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved.” The offer is full and comprehensive. It conveys the bread and wine of eternal life, and it is “brought forth” or published to our dying race.—*Ibid.*

[17361] Melchizedek was the priest of the Most High God. In the midst of idolatry he taught and represented the true religion. He officiated at the altar of God, offering up the victim for the sins of the worshippers. As a priest he served by no genealogical and hereditary right; he was not the ritual priest of a written law; but he stood alone, acknowledged for his own worth and inherent excellence, as the priest of the Most High God. So was Christ Jesus a priest after the order of Melchizedek. He came not of the Levitical line. He performed no ceremonial service of prescription, and stood, not one of many, but alone, without example or peer, as the Mediator between man and God. We do not look upon Christ as the Jew looked upon the high priest—as one of a line, the dignity being in the office and not in the man—but we look upon Jesus as our only High Priest, whose power is supreme in excellence. He is a High Priest, not after the order

of Aaron, but after the order of Melchizedek.—*Ibid.*

[17362] Melchizedek blessed Abraham. This was an authoritative priestly blessing. He stands between God and Abraham and pronounces each blessed. Hear the blessing: “Blessed be Abram of the Most High God, possessor of heaven and earth; and blessed be the Most High God, which hath delivered thine enemy into thy hand.” So Christ pronounces all blessed who, like Abram, will receive the blessing, and also glorifies the Father for His deliverance of man. Christ’s blessing saves the soul, and through Christ’s blessing God is acknowledged as having delivered our enemies into our hands.—*Ibid.*

[17363] Melchizedek received tithes of Abram. By this act of homage Abram acknowledged the dignity of the royal priest. He yielded to him both tribute and reverence; and while he bowed before his blessing as a priest, he offered him of the booty as his lord paramount. The reception of tithes by priests marks clearly a kingly element in the priesthood (for as priests they offer sacrifices, but as kings only they receive tribute); and this kingly element is necessary to express the royalty of Christ’s priesthood. Jesus possesses, back of all His work for us, a power supremely regal to make effective that work and put our salvation and glory beyond all peradventure; and to Him as our Omnipotent Lord we yield the tribute of obedience.—*Ibid.*

[17364] Christ is a priest after the order of Melchizedek. 1. That order was unique. (1) In its loneliness, Melchizedek stood alone. Other priests sacrificed to idols or the powers of nature; he to the “Most High God.” He was the one true priest before the Mosaic dispensation. Christ is the one true Priest after it, and He stands alone. “One Mediator.” No other order but His is found in the New Testament, or is now possible, or necessary. (2) In that it was underived and untransmitted. Melchizedek did not follow, nor was he succeeded by, a priestly line. So Christ’s priesthood is “not after the order of a carnal commandment;” nor does it “pass over to another.” (3) In its efficacy. The priesthoods contemporaneous with Melchizedek were founded on superstition; his only on Divine revelation. So all other priesthoods but that of Christ are now effete or vain. His alone is efficacious. 2. That order was righteous. His very name “King of Righteousness” is significant of that. But in a far more real and valuable sense is this so with Christ. (1) He is absolutely righteous in Himself. He of all the sons of men alone could say, “Which of you convinceth Me of sin?” As such He was predicted (Isa. liii. 11; Jer. xxiii. 5). As such He was by the confession of both friends and foes (Luke xxiii. 4; 1 Peter ii. 23). (2) As the King of righteousness, He makes His subjects righteous (Isa. liii. 11). By

cleansing away their unrighteousness and imparting His Holy Spirit, and encouraging and directing their holy lives. 3. That order was peaceful. He was "King of Salem, which is King of peace." In this the order was a strong contrast to the order of Baal, and indeed to the warlike sons of Aaron. Not more so does the priesthood of Christ contrast with the arrogant assumptions, worldly ambitions, devilish craft, and cruel persecutions of the orders of paganism and Rome. Christ is (1) absolutely peaceful in Himself. As such He was predicted and acknowledged. "The Prince of peace." "He shall not cry," &c. (2) As King of peace Christ gives peace, promotes it, and reigns over peaceful subjects. "My peace I leave with you," &c. "Blessed are the peacemakers," &c. "The fruit of the Spirit is . . . peace." 4. That order was royal. He was king as well as priest. So is Christ a "priest upon His throne." These two orders are seldom found united. Once when a king arrogated priestly functions he was smitten with leprosy. Terrible calamities have invariably resulted when political power has been wielded by sacerdotal hands. But in Christ their union is an unmixed blessing. Why? Because Christ's royalty is based upon the great offering of Himself, whereas other priestly rules have invariably been founded on arrogant assumptions without corresponding service. Christ rules from His Cross: "I, if I be lifted up," &c. And adoring Christendom says: "Thou art the King of glory, O Christ," because "when Thou hadst overcome the sharpness of death Thou didst open the kingdom of heaven to all believers." 5. That order was superior. (1) In its antiquity. It was before the authorized priesthood of Aaron. So Christ is "the Lamb slain from before the foundation of the world." (2) In its perpetuity. "For ever." Christ "continueth ever," and "ever liveth to make intercession." (3) In its universality. Heathen priests sacrificed for their particular tribes. Aaron's priesthood was for the Jews; but Melchizedek offered for Abraham, and also for the Gentiles among whom he lived. So Christ is a propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.—*Rev. A. Maclaren, D.D.*

V. HIS RELATIVE POSITION TO ABRAHAM.

[17365] It has been well observed, that "Abram's greatness consisted in his hopes, that of Melchizedek in his present possession." Melchizedek was both a priest and a king, Abram only a prophet; Melchizedek was recognized as the rightful possessor of the country, which as yet was only promised to Abram. True, the future will be infinitely greater than the present, but then it was as yet future. Melchizedek owned its reality by blessing Abram, and transferring his title, as it were, to him; while Abram recognized the present by giving tithes to Melchizedek, and bending to receive his blessing.—*Rev. A. Edersheim, D.D.*

VI. HOMILETICAL HINTS.

1 The perpetuity of Christ's priesthood is at once the guarantee of His people's future glory and the source of their present joy.

[17366] "Thou art a priest *for ever* after the order of Melchizedek." The new song which the redeemed in glory sing is: "Thou art worthy; . . . for Thou wast slain, . . . and hast made us unto our God kings and priests;" and the Apostle John anticipates that song in the opening words of the Revelation. This royal priesthood, which is the possession of power and holiness, and of power by holiness, is the reflection of (or participation in) the royal priesthood of Christ. In Christ, our great High Priest, we can offer up our praises to the Father; through Christ our King we shall possess a regal sway, sitting with Him in His throne. In the perpetuity of our Melchizedek we have the guarantee of our perpetual glory. Christ does not take us to heaven and leave us there. As He is the source of attraction, so is He the centre of permanency. Were He not a priest for ever, we should be lost for ever. His death was our life, that His life might be our glory. We shall have glory while He has life, and we have life only as out of His death. The cross will never be forgotten. Its efficiency will be felt to all eternity. The theme of redeeming love will never lose its youth and freshness. It is now our joy to know that in this love we have a permanent home. Christ is our "priest for ever, after the order of Melchizedek."—*Rev. H. Crosby, D.D.*

2 Thoughts suggested by the interview between Abraham and Melchizedek.

[17367] This venerable man, in whom we behold, as it were, the glorious sunset of the primeval dispensation, met Abram and brought unto him bread and wine, evidently as symbols of the gifts of God in creation, to sustain and gladden fallen man; and he blessed Abram, as belonging by faith to the same God; and he blessed God, as having given through Abram and his victory a new manifestation of Himself. Abram received the blessing, and gave tithes of all unto him, thereby recognizing Melchizedek's superiority. What did Melchizedek see in Abram? Evidently the future—a new dispensation of Divine grace and truth. What did Abram see in Melchizedek? The past, in its universal character embracing all tribes and families of the earth; in its character of simplicity and fulness, the blessing of God in the reign of righteousness, priestly intercession, and peace—type of the ultimate future, which shall terminate the period of Israel and the Church. Melchizedek is thus greater than Abram, because the past dispensation, which he represents, is a type of that future dispensation of which Abraham is only preparatory. As the last chapters of the Apocalypse correspond with the first chapters of Genesis, as the garden of Eden was a type and earnest of the ultimate reign of blessedness, which the last pages of the Book of

Revelation describe, so the Melchizedek reign and priesthood prefigure the glory of the Christocracy, which we await, and which is the consummation of the period commencing with Abram, and including the history of Israel and the times of the Gentiles. In the bread and wine Abram saw the pledge of God's abundant grace. After the expulsion of Paradise, and the judgment of the flood, bread and wine are the gifts by which man's life is nourished and invigorated, and which, though, like all good gifts, coming primarily from God, are yet obtained through processes symbolic of suffering. Abraham is blessed of the Most High God, possessor of heaven and earth. The expression "possessor" is significant. The patriarch "possessed" nothing actually; but by faith he possessed all things promised unto him. Abraham had to buy even the burying-place for Sarah of the sons of Ephron. But He in whom he trusted was the possessor of heaven and earth, and the promised inheritance was therefore sure. Abraham, like all the faithful, was blessed of God. In Him he was rich; by Him he was strong and victorious. All things are ours if we are God's—if His blessing rests upon us.—*A. Saphir.*

ABIMELECH.

I. HIS VIEWS OF THE ALMIGHTY.

Although a Philistine he possessed correct views of the justice of God and the heinousness of sin.

[17368] It is remarkable that the Philistine king of Gerar should have possessed such cor-

rect ideas (so far as they went) of the justice of God and His anger at sin. Possibly he may have been thus instructed by Abraham. Abimelech's question to God when He visited him in a dream upon the king's appropriation of Sarah, is: "Lord, wilt Thou slay a righteous nation?" (Gen. xx. 4.) It reminds us of the question of the patriarch himself, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?"—*M. J.*

II. THE DIGNITY AND DELICACY OF HIS REBUKE.

1 Of Abraham.

[17369] The great patriarch certainly shows in no superior light to Abimelech at Gerar. Just but dignified are the remonstrance and rebuke which he addresses to Abraham: "What hast thou done unto us? and what have I offended thee that thou hast brought on me and on my kingdom a great sin? Thou hast done deeds unto me that ought not to be done" (Gen. xx. 9).—*Ibid.*

2 Of Sarah.

[17370] The delicacy of Abimelech's reproof to Sarah is very clearly marked. Although he knows now that she is Abraham's wife, he yet speaks to Sarah of the patriarch as her brother, delicately and considerately maintaining the illusion. He tells her that he has given to that brother a thousand pieces of silver—a generous compensation indeed for the affront which had been unintentionally and by her own fault put upon her, and that he is a covering of the eyes in regard to her to all those that are with her and to all others. "Thus," significantly adds the inspired historian, "was she reproved."—*Ibid.*

PART B. (Continued.)

JEWISH ERA.

(Continued.)

DIVISION II.

CHIEF PERIOD OF NATIONAL LIFE.

a. *The Theocratic Portion.*

(Moses to Saul, B.C. 1571-1095: 476 years.)

SYLLABUS.

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PART B. (Continued.)

JEWISH ERA.

(Continued.)

MOSES.

I. INTRODUCTORY.

His eminence and renown.

(1) *Among the characters of Scripture none stands out more grandly than Moses.*

[17371] He stands alone, without antecedent or successor, in severe and naked simplicity, a grand instrument, doing a grand work, in a grand spirit. The Son of Sirach, many ages after, spoke the national sentiment towards him who was a nation's founder and father in such a sense as no other man ever could be, when he calls him a "man which found favour with God and man, whose memorial is blessed." "God," says he, "made him like to the glorious saints, and magnified him, so that his enemies stood in fear of him. He made him glorious in the sight of kings, and gave him a commandment for His people, and showed him part of His glory. He sanctified him in his faithfulness and meekness, and chose him out of all men. He made him to hear His voice, and brought him into the dark cloud, and gave him commandments before His face, even the law of life and knowledge, that he might teach Jacob His covenants, and Israel His judgments." The reverence of the nation half-deified him. It was the accusation of Stephen, that they "had heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and against God." And at the very end of Scripture, in the Apocalypse, the redeemed are heard in their everlasting praises, mingling "the song of Moses the servant of God with the song of the Lamb."—*Rev. R. Hallam, D.D.*

[17372] Take him all in all, regard him not in one but many aspects, Moses is the greatest character in history, sacred or profane.—*Rev. T. Guthrie, D.D.*

(2) *He was admitted to close and familiar intercourse with the Almighty.*

[17373] In the caption of the ninetyeth Psalm, by whomsoever prefixed, he is called "Moses the man of God;" while God Himself says of

him, "My servant Moses who is faithful in all My house, with him will I speak mouth to mouth, even apparently, and the similitude of the Lord shall he behold." And his history is finally summed up in the declaration, that "There arose not a prophet in Israel like unto Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face."—*Rev. R. Hallam, D.D.*

(3) *From Moses sprang the germ of Israel's civil and religious polity.*

[17374] To him Israel owed whatever it came to be in time, whatever it learned to look for in eternity: purer morals, better ideas of God, wiser institutions, holier hopes and aspirations than were known to the peoples round it. His transmitted influence it was that in after days gave Jerusalem an honour above Tyre, and Damascus, and Babylon, and Memphis, and that made it "the glory of the whole earth," not so much because beautiful for situation as because "God was known in her palaces for a sure refuge."—*Ibid.*

[17375] Moses was pre-eminently one of the greatest men of all time. Coming from the lowest ranks of life—born a slave under the iron tyranny of an Eastern despot—he rose to become the emancipator of his people from that bondage, and the founder of a nation that held the light of heaven through the darkness of ages; and which, of all nations, has had the mightiest influence in advancing the true progress of the world.—*Rev. E. Hull.*

II. FORMATION OF HIS CHARACTER.

1 His training fitted him for his life.

[17376] He knew hard life and soft life. He grew up in the atmosphere of a court the most voluptuous and elegant of the age, the acknowledged ward and charge of its royal house, as the adopted son of the sovereign's daughter. He walked in the halls of the Pharaoh as a prince among the nobles. And yet he dwelt many years in the *wilderness*, and there chose

the companion of his life, a shepherd, a herdsman, living on rude fare and wandering from place to place. He was equally at home in Pharaoh's palace and in Jethro's tent, in the green meadows of the Nile and in the deserts of Horeb. And it was in this life of strange vicissitude and contrast, of alternate luxury and hardship, that he became fitted for his life-task, and when he came to it he knew *how* to do it, and did it well. This life it was that had taught him how to lead a huge army of slaves through a forty years' sojourn in the wilderness, and at the same time to frame them into a nation, give them a firm and enduring polity, teach them the arts of life, and not a few of its embellishments and elegances, and fit them for a settled life in the land to which he was leading them.—*Rev. R. Hallam, D.D.*

[17377] How wisely and beneficently ordered was it that he did not step at once from the voluptuousness of Memphis to the wastes of Sinai, but went to them through the rougher but not ungenial hospitalities of Jethro, and the ruder scenes and occupations of a pastoral and nomadic life, amidst the solitudes of Horeb. Egypt was the university in which the elements of general knowledge and intelligence were acquired and stored up, leavened by the private and gentle lessons in the fear of God that went along with them; and Midian, the higher school, in which he was taught to apply this knowledge to the uses of that form of life in which the remainder of his work on earth was to be performed.—*Ibid.*

[17378] He entered the wilderness; he became a shepherd of a priest of Midian. I do not know a more beautiful instance of the guidance of God throughout a man's life than that. Moses needed calm thought after recent excitement. He needed to learn the hard but grand lesson of waiting God's time; and he had to wait and think for forty years longer. Everything in that shepherd-life was favourable to reflection. The whirl and rush of life had grown still. In distant silence he could ponder the wrongs and sufferings of his race. The silent wilderness, the great lonely hills, the common dull round of life, were all fitted to teach him to believe, in patience, until God should see him strong enough in meek trust to become the Deliverer. And we can well, and doubtless truly, fancy how, during those years, his soul would now and then sink into dark doubt, and now and then rise into faith and hope. Above him, while watching his flocks under the brilliant sky of an eastern night, were the same stars that Abraham saw, when told that thus should his seed be—there they were, the bright, still witnesses of the covenant that could not change.—*Rev. E. Hull.*

2 His education was specially adapted to the desired result.

An Egyptian and a Hebrew training were united.

[17379] Jochebed, unknown to her employer

in her true relation to her charge, with a true mother's heart and a mother's tireless assiduity, under the shade of her humble office had opportunity to teach him better ideas of God and sounder views of religion than Egyptian schools could impart: to tell him who he was, and keep alive in him that Hebrew heart which preserved him from ever becoming an Egyptian in more than appearance, and prepared him in due time to become the avenger of his people's wrongs, and its deliverer from the degradation and baseness of its servitude. Two women were thus conspiring to make him what he became, all unconsciously, and without foreknowledge of God's intent; the one, following, it may be, a mere freak of pity or indulging a princess's pretty fancy to display a fair and handsome boy for her minion and her pet among the swarthy nobles of her father's court; the other, inspired by the deep instinct of maternal affection. And these two, each in her sphere, were working *together* to imbue him with learning, secular and Divine, and send him forth to his work, the work for which God had made him, a Hebrew with Egyptian intelligence and culture, as a patriot and a prophet, the best possible instrument to do just that particular work that God was to put into his hands. And then began the *second* stage of his education, not *less* fit and appropriate than that which had preceded it. He was sent out into the *wilderness*, there to learn *wilderness* life, and to become a Midianite, as he had been an Egyptian, while he should be still not the less in heart a Hebrew.—*Rev. R. Hallam, D.D.*

III. INTELLECTUAL ENDOWMENTS.

1 As a prose writer he takes precedence of the most venerable writers of antiquity in the power of graphic description and picturesque narration.

[17380] Consecrating, so to speak, the press, the first book type ever printed was a copy of the Holy Scriptures; and in beautiful harmony with that remarkable providence, it is more than probable that the first book pen ever wrote was one of the five of which Moses was the author. Certain it is that if his were not the first ever written—written long ages before Herodotus composed his history or Homer sang his poems—his are the oldest books extant. Before all others in point of time, what author occupies himself with themes of such surpassing grandeur? Like one who had met God face to face within the cloudy curtains of the awful mount, he introduces us into the counsels of the Almighty; and records events which, receding into a past, and stretching forward into a future eternity, had God for their author, the world for their theatre, and for their end the everlasting destinies of mankind. Apart from the surpassing grandeur of his subjects, even in the very manner of handling them, the world's oldest is its foremost writer.—*Rev. T. Guthrie, D.D.*

[17381] Moses was a man of accomplish-

ments. He was learned in all the wisdom of Egypt, and was mighty in words and in deeds. Like Cæsar, he was the historian of his own achievements; and that he was a historian in the best sense, none can doubt, who read his clear, terse, graphic narrations in the pages of the Pentateuch.—*Rev. R. Hallam, D.D.*

2 As a poet he is distinguished by loftiness of style and conception, united to sublimity of expression.

[17382] What other poet rises to heights or sustains a flight so lofty as Moses—in his dying song, for instance, his parting words to the tribes of Israel, ere he ascended Nebo to wave them his last farewell, and vanish for ever from their wondering, weeping gaze? The inimitable pathos of his style, as illustrated in the story of Joseph, the tears and trembling voices of readers in all ages have acknowledged. In simple, tender, touching narrative no passages in any other book will compare with it; and yet so wide and varied is his range that the writings of Moses contain, infidels themselves being judges, the sublimest expressions man has spoken or penned. By universal consent, for example, no other book, ancient or modern, the production of the highest mind and of the most refined and cultivated age, contains a sentence so sublime as this: “And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.”—*Rev. T. Guthrie, D.D.*

[17383] That he was a poet is plain from the ninetieth Psalm, if he was its author; from his magnificent ode on the passage of the Red Sea; from the memorial song which he left to be sung by the Israelites in after ages; and from his dying benedictions of the tribes.—*Rev. R. Hallam, D.D.*

3 As a theologian he was remarkable for his clear and comprehensive estimate of the Divine character.

[17384] Compared to his knowledge of the attributes and character of God, how gross the notions of the heathen; how puerile, dim, and distorted the speculations of their greatest sages! Since his day—removed from our own by almost four thousand years—science has made prodigious strides; but those who have discovered new elements, new forces, new worlds, new stars, new suns, have brought to light no new attribute of God, nor a single feature of His character with which Moses was not acquainted.—*Rev. T. Guthrie, D.D.*

[17385] During long ages philosophers and divines have been studying morals, the duties men owe to God and to each other, the laws that bind society and hold its parts together; but they who have added a thousand truths to science and a thousand inventions to art, have not discovered any duties which Moses overlooked, or added so much as one law to his code of morals. Yet he had no Bible, as we have, whereby to acquaint himself with God:

nor was he reared, like us, in a Christian land, but among those who, with all their boasted learning, worshipped the ox, and serpent, beasts of the field, fowls of the air, and creeping things—divinities so innumerable, that it was said there were more gods than men in Egypt. Let the character of his age, and the circumstances in which he lived, be taken into account, and he is the greatest of divines: nor does his sublime knowledge of God, of the mysteries of religion, and of the moralities of life, admit of any but one explanation. The glory of his writings and of his face are to be traced to the same source. He was admitted into the secret counsels of the Eternal; and spake, like other holy men of old, as he was moved by the Holy Ghost.—*Ibid.*

4 As an inspired philosopher he stands alone in his marvellous intuitions of natural truth.

[17386] From Moses' account of the creation he represents light as having been formed before the sun was hung in heaven to rule the day, or the moon to rule the night. According to him, ere day or night was, God sent forth the fiat, “Let there be light, and there was light.” And taking their stand on an apparent impossibility, infidels have challenged the soundness of his philosophy; asking in tones of undisguised triumph, “How could there be light before, and without, the sun?” The difficulty, however, has vanished, and Moses' account is found to be in perfect harmony with the discoveries and the doctrines of modern science. Inspired of God, he anticipated our tardy discoveries.—*Ibid.*

[17387] It was thousands of years before the telescope was invented and Galileo had turned it on the starry heavens, before Newton had discovered the laws of gravitation, before anatomists had studied the structure of a fossil bone, before geologists had explored the bowels and strata of our earth; it was long ages, in fact, before true science was born, that Moses lifted the veil from the mysteries of creation—stating facts in regard to its order, and laws, and phenomena, that are in perfect harmony with the greatest discoveries of our day.—*Ibid.*

[17388] Moses represents the earth as having been, antecedent to the present epoch, without form and void—an expression denoting a state of extreme and violent confusion, of death, and drear desolation. And how is his statement, not confuted, but corroborated by the remarkable discoveries of the nineteenth century? The very same story is written on the rocks, which we read in the Book of Genesis. The solid strata above which we walk, build our houses, and reap our harvests, have been explored by the lights of science; and in their strange contortions, irregularities, and confusion, and those remains of innumerable and extinct creatures that, retaining the postures of a violent and sudden death, have been entombed within their stony sepulchres, they present a most remarkable commentary on Holy Writ.—*Ibid.*

IV. SPECIAL CHARACTERISTICS.

I Meekness.

[17389] He was humble as a child : a deeply gifted man, but self-distrustful ; “very meek above all men who were upon the face of the earth.”—*Rev. F. Robertson.*

[17390] If you can conceive a man who had hoped for forty years for the deliverance of his people discovering that they had been careless, faithless, and sensual, and yet silently bearing their reproaches—a man with a passionate, impetuous spirit, enduring their daily murmurings, and, after giving way to anger, praying for their success, till worn with emotion his strength gave way—a man enduring constant, ignorant, perverse unthankfulness, in the hope of leading the people into their own land, and then calmly surrendering that hope, and dying with it unfulfilled, you can form some idea of the sublime meekness that characterized the leadership of Moses.—*Rev. E. Hull.*

[17391] There is a kind of gentleness which belongs to men whose feelings are too placid to be stirred by injustice, and who maintain a mild calmness even in the presence of flagrant wrong,—that gentleness was not his who, in his youth, fired at the sight of the oppression of his people, struck down the oppressor at the peril of his own life. There is an amiability of character which springs from the absence of powerful feelings, and which is seldom disturbed—that was not characteristic of him who, roused into fury at the people's murmurings, smote the rock in disobedience to his Lord. The nobler meekness is that which comes forth victorious from the struggle with strong emotion, and wins a glory from the passion it has subdued.—*Ibid.*

[17392] Few have been equally tried, and fewer have borne trial with equal patience. It is recorded of him : “Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth.” And in catechisms of Scripture characters, which we teach our children, meekness is ascribed to him as his characteristic quality. And surely, what is recorded of him abundantly justifies the encomium. He had borne provocations, many and various, with a truly wonderful equanimity. The wearying waywardness of his people, their stupidity, their dulness, their cowardliness, their ingratitude, their frequent rebellions against his wise and rightful rule, their vehement reproaches, their mistrust of his motives, or his wisdom, or his fidelity, produced in him no disturbance of temper, availed not to shake his settled self-control.—*Rev. R. Hallam, D.D.*

2 Chivalry.

[17393] Observe him in defence of Jethro's daughters at the well. He is ever the champion of the oppressed. The shepherds drive the women away. Moses says, “Not so ; this is God's well ; you shall not have it. By the law

of the Most High God might is not right. I stand one man against you all.”—*Rev. F. Robertson.*

3 Patience.

[17394] It was a hard thing for a man so earnest to fail in his first effort, and to have to wait for forty years in solitude before God called him to act. It was a hard thing . . . to go alone into the presence of a stern and cruel king, and summon him to obey the will of the Lord, but it was harder for him to guide that slavish, selfish host, and receive from the very people for whom he had given up everything the repeated proofs of cowardly distrust and dark, murmuring ingratitude. Now, every one will admit that the record of this most trying period in the life of Moses manifests a patience, meekness, and constancy which is perhaps the most wonderful ever displayed by a man. This book, indeed, tells us of occasional outbursts of wrath that bore down all meekness ; and men have pointed to them as proofs that Moses was not so wonderfully patient ; but those very outbursts of anger seem to be the strongest proofs of his patience.—*Rev. E. Hull.*

[17395] To Moses was entrusted the noblest, but at the same time the weariest, life-task ever committed to the hand of man. As a nurse with a sick and fractious child, he had borne through the life of a long generation the burden of that people's follies and sins. The same sensual cry, “What shall we eat, what shall we drink?” was ever, with a few bright intervals, sounding in his ears ; and the dread foreboding, that the Lord in righteous anger would break forth on them and consume them, was ever weighing on his heart. Moses had fathomed the meaning of intercession. He had lived for years the life of an intercessor, standing between God and a faithless and sensual race.—*Rev. J. Brown.*

4 Diffidence.

[17396] Notwithstanding the solemnity and emphasis of his appointment, he could not feel that he was the man for such a vocation. The most self-confident do not always prove the most faithful. When the Most High sent the Prophet Jeremiah to Israel in their apostasy his only answer was, “Ah, Lord God, I cannot speak, for I am a child !” When he called the heaven-born Paul to be the apostle to the Gentiles, he could not refrain from exclaiming, “Who is sufficient for these things !”—*Rev. G. Spring, D.D.*

[17397] Moses saw at a glance the greatness of the enterprise intrusted to him. He was to treat with a haughty monarch, expostulate with an ignorant and degraded people, and confront a learned and frowning world. He anticipated scenes of trial and conflict, and his answer was, “Who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt?” He would fain have

said, It needs a more consecrated and a bolder heart than mine, and a more eloquent tongue to stand in such a presence, and a mightier arm than mine to deliver Israel. More than once was he embarrassed by this shrinking diffidence; he even carried it so far, that God's anger was kindled against him. More than once did he bring his commission back and lay it at God's feet, because he felt himself unequal to its fulfilment. He did not question the importance of the service; it was a view of its importance that overwhelmed him. He would cheerfully be a subaltern in such a campaign, but he could not consent to become its chief. He seems sometimes to complain of the burden that was put upon him. When the Israelites discouraged him, he would go to God, and say, "Behold, the children of Israel have not hearkened unto me; how then shall Pharaoh hear me who am of uncircumcised lips?"—*Ibid.*

5 Perseverance.

[17398] The office he sustained was environed with difficulties; there never was a more important or a more difficult office. It was not the promptness and ardour which he brought to this service which so much distinguished him, as the steadiness and energy of his purpose, and his patient and indomitable endurance.—*Ibid.*

[17399] History records instances, not a few, in which precipitation in great enterprises was only ominous of their failure; while it furnishes very many instructive examples in which the failure would have been complete and inevitable but for the unconquerable perseverance of a single man. Never was this truth more signally verified than in the character of Israel's great leader. It was not the growth of a moment. Very early did his thoughts become habituated to solicitude, to obstacles and danger; while by slow degrees he ascertained they were inseparable from every step of his progress. He united so much steadfast integrity with such heroic enthusiasm, that his firmness became invincible. His moral courage rose in sublimity, and was the more invigorated with every accumulated burden. There were scenes in Egypt, at the Red Sea, and in the wilderness, which would have disconcerted the plans of, and unnerved, any man in the world who had not the bone and sinew of his firm character. Irresolution might have been looked for under such circumstances; but he was a stranger to everything but resoluteness. The courage of Israel might fluctuate; but there was no fluctuation with him. They might despair; but despondency, when he had once entered upon his work, was a feeling he knew nothing of. It was not a beaten path that he travelled, nor were the obstacles such as had been before surmounted; yet he went forward without distrust or apprehension.—*Ibid.*

[17400] A life of wonderful vicissitudes and

violent contrasts, of stupendous labours, of unequalled trials, of faithfulness, of untiring, single-hearted, unselfish devotion to a great end, of unshaken faith in God, of unswerving benevolence to men.—*Rev. R. Hallam, D.D.*

6 Self-denial.

[17401] Self was nothing; God and Israel were all that that large heart thought of. That meek spirit covered a soul of the most exalted self-denial. High thoughts had a dwelling in his lofty mind. He might have been the "world-famed" founder of an empire; but "he chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God." He might have been the proudest among the proud, and among the rich the richest, but "he chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God." He might have procured aggrandizement, office and wealth for his sons; but he left them no inheritance save the tent in which he encamped in the wilderness, because "he chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season."—*Ibid.*

[17402] We do not know of such an example of moral excellence, in which religious principle gained such an ascendancy over secular advancement, and the man of God over the man. He was the same devoted servant of God and his people to the last; the same man everywhere, from the hour when he took his shoes from off his feet at Horeb, to the hour when he went up to the top of Pisgah, nobly doing and bravely suffering the Divine will. Tempests beat upon him, nor did they cease to beat, nor he to contend manfully with the storm. It is this steady, unbroken self-denial which sheds increasing light and brightening honours upon his fair name.—*Ibid.*

7 Self-sacrifice.

[17403] Glance at the godliness of their leader, manifesting itself in self-sacrificing sympathy: "And Moses returned unto the Lord, and said, Oh, this people have sinned a great sin, and have made them gods of gold, yet now, if Thou wilt forgive their sin—and if not, blot me, I pray Thee, out of the Book which Thou hast written." Some men, unable to comprehend the sublime self-devotion of Moses, have thought that he spake these words under the hasty excitement of anger, being chafed and indignant at such slavish debasement in the people. But I cannot conceive it. His first anger at their sin had passed away. Could he be angry while three thousand of the people were lying dead? Could he speak thoughtlessly and hastily in the presence of Jehovah? Impossible! He must have measured his words, and have meant what he said. Fronting death and its mystery, he stood sublimely, willing even to be cut off from God if the sin of the people might thereby be forgiven! But the questions still arise, How could he thus feel for that people then? How could he dare to offer himself as an atonement for their sin? To

enter into this we must remember how close his connection with them had been. They had been the burden of his thoughts during those years in the desert. He had battled for them with Pharaoh. To lead them forth into freedom had been the great purpose of his life. He was one with them in all things; and if in all ages there have been patriotic men, ready to die, if need be, for their people or their land, can we not conceive something of the sublime self-sacrifice of this mighty patriot of old?—*Rev. E. Hull.*

[17404] A Godlike man verily, a man not afraid of suffering for men; a man willing, if he might, to save men by the sacrifice of himself.—*Rev. N. Brown.*

[17405] If Moses is ever to be held as one of the greatest men of olden times, and of all times, then it must be confessed that no man ever paid a heavier penalty for his greatness. Never did human being stand so completely solitary and alone; never were motives and actions so misconstrued or misunderstood; never were noble and generous deeds so requited; never were charges and criminations so unfounded; never were labour and suffering so depreciated; never was heart so afflicted, or life so embittered, or death so isolated; and all this in the prosecution of an object which involved a nation's freedom and a world's weal. Though his soul was filled with one of heaven's sublimest purposes, his heart was all but broken by the ingratitude and rebellion—the selfishness and the sensuousness of those whose cause he had made his own. So continued was the crucifixion of thought and feeling to which he was subject—such was the total immolation of self to which he was called, that his life was more than a martyr's death. His mental anguish threw all physical suffering into the distance, and the outward privation was as nothing in comparison with the inward affliction. But under the crushing pressure of all that was laid upon him, he still stood erect—manly in his attitude and heroic in his mien.—*R. Ferguson.*

8 Acquiescence in the will of God.

Under keen disappointment.

Moses dies, with the purpose of his life apparently unfulfilled.

[17406] If we reflect on his circumstances at the time of his death, we shall find that they must all have brought before him the mysterious fact that the grand purpose of his life was never to be realized. One thought had given meaning to his history for eighty years—the thought of guiding the nation into the land promised to his forefathers—that must often have cheered him through many a desolate day in the wilderness, and it must have helped him to be calm when the people's murmurings grew loud. The difficulties of their progress, and the apparent disappointment of their hopes, would react on him in new power. His feelings towards the people, too, would exert on that

purpose a higher and a holier power. Their welfare had become part of his life. His sympathy with their weakness, their ignorance, their sorrow, must have kindled into burning ardour the desire to bring them to their home. But on the very verge of its accomplishment—on the very border of the land, with its hills in sight, that purpose must be surrendered and he must die.—*Rev. E. Hull.*

[17407] The mystery did not lie only in this, that his great desire must remain unreachd, but that in fact all his life must have appeared to have been a lost discipline. It is evident Moses felt this as one of the saddest aspects of his departure. The earnest prayer that the Divine sentence should be recalled, and that he should lead his people into their own land, shows how keenly this thought pressed upon him.—*Ibid.*

[17408] At last he had reached the goal, so long desired, of all his thoughts. The promised land was there before him, and the waves of Jordan alone separated him from it. The promised land! Oh, how often he called for and contemplated it beforehand in his solitary dreams during the long nights of the desert, when, under the starry heaven, he conversed with Jehovah! It was there that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had planted their tents; it was there that their tombs awaited Israel; there the reign of God was to be established on earth; there, to the mind of Moses, was to be found repose, the realization of all his desires, the recompense of all his fatigues. It is then that the voice of the Lord is addressed to him, saying, "Ascend the mountain, behold the land of thy fathers, but thou shalt not enter it!" From the silent summit of Mount Nebo the overworked old man directs his eager looks before him and in every direction: he sees all the country from Gilead to Dan; there stretches out Jericho, the city of palm trees; there the rich plains of Naphtali, of Ephraim, and of Manasseh; there Judah; there, beyond, towards the distant horizon, the Mediterranean Sea. Yes, it is certainly the promised land, but—he is forbidden to enter it! For a moment his heart bends under its load of anguish; but, losing sight of himself, he thinks of the future of Israel; he contemplates with emotion those places in which God will establish His sanctuary, those valleys from whence there will issue one day the salvation of the world; on the north the distant mountains of Galilee; on the south, Bethlehem, Moriah, and the hill where the cross in which we glory was to be erected. Then, having embraced with one last look that land, so long desired, Moses bows his head and dies.—*E. Bersier.*

[17409] In judgment, but full of deep tenderness, his Father led him forth from the camp which he was to guide no longer. His eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated, as he climbed that summit—his eye ranging with a

solemn joy, as he ascended, over fresh breadths of his promised land. Was the sunset glow upon it when he reached his resting-place? Was the land, in that splendid transparent air, bathed in the lustrous sunset tones of which we have all had vision sometimes, and dreamed of the glories of celestial worlds? We know not; nor know we how, as the gloom settled on the vision, a darker, colder shadow fell around his spirit; but this we know, the Angel of Death who met him there had no unwilling follower; the spirits who watched for the spoils of mortality had not long to wait for their prize. Something of that longing for rest, which seizes on the faithful servants of duty when their work is well-nigh done, he bore with him up those mountain paths, where the steps of his young manhood had first learnt strength and swiftness, where his aged feet were now bearing him, how joyfully, to his rest. And some deep sense of the tenderness of His hand who had thus ordained for him, the perfect love of the Lord whom he should see at length in His glory face to face, inspired thanksgiving, as he prepared to pass from the solemn summits of that mountain world which had long been the sanctuary of his spirit, and in the sublime moment of vision, to that land of rest of which the Canaan at his feet was but the dim foreshining, the rest where all the faithful ones are at home with God, and for ever.—*Rev. J. Brown.*

V. TRAITS OF CHARACTER DISPLAYED IN HIS POSITION AS COURTIER.

1 Unworldliness.

[17410] Behold ancient Egypt at the time when that country was the cradle of the civilization of the world. Arts and sciences appeared there for the first time on our globe, and at the first bound Egypt announced her great destinies. To-day even the mind is arrested with a sort of stupor before the prodigious monuments built by this people; we ask ourselves by what secrets, unknown to our engineers, they erected the gigantic pyramids, and in our universal exhibitions I have seen great artists contemplating with admiration the delicate work of the jewellers of the court of the Pharaohs. It was in this centre that a young Israelite grew up, called by a strange concurrence of circumstances to the most brilliant future which has ever been able to flatter the ambition of man. The son of an exile, he can attain to every glory; the world tenders its most intoxicating cups to him; he has only to stoop in order to drink long draughts. If he is eager for enjoyments, where shall he find them more exquisite and more refined than in that court where an entire people of slaves live only to satisfy the caprices of its masters? If knowledge attracts him, how can he better penetrate its secrets than in gathering round him all the sages, all the investigators of nature who crowd into the schools and into the mysterious sanctuaries of this privileged country? If, finally, it is power which tempts him, if he

wishes to command crowds, to direct armies, to behold enthusiasm break out as he passes, to hear his name cheered by thousands of voices, and to assist while alive at his deification, the throne is open to him. Moses saw all those dreams and all those splendours pass before him; perhaps some day his heart was troubled by those seductive visions; but other thoughts pursue him, another love, another ambition possess him and leave him no repose. He thinks of his people and of his God; the people is enslaved, God is disregarded; Moses has seen his brethren struck by the rod of the exactor, bowed down under the burning sun of Africa, and loaded with ignominy; he has seen in the palaces of kings and on public places the monstrous idols before which Egypt bent the knee, and, like St. Paul, at a later period, in the streets of Athens, his believing heart is filled with an intense bitterness. The seductions of riches, of pleasure, and of visible glory may assail him. The waves of that sea will move him no more than a rock.—*E. Bersier.*

2 Modesty.

[17411] He gained at court the lighter embellishments which adorn knowledge and too often take its place, or are valued above it. With his fair, handsome Hebrew face, an Egyptian in garb, in manners, and in mode of life, he played his part among the dusky sons of Misraim, their admiration and their envy, but guarded from insult and from harm by the mildness and modesty of his nature, and by the shield of Pharaoh's authority.—*Rev. A. Hallam, D.D.*

VI. TRAITS OF CHARACTER DISPLAYED IN HIS POSITION AS LEADER AND COMMANDER.

Indefatigable energy and promptitude.

[17412] History records no such achievements as his, who, without help from man, struck the fetters off a million and more of slaves. Placing himself at their head, he led them forth from the land of bondage; reducing them to order, controlled more turbulent and subdued more stubborn elements than any before or since have had to deal with; formed a great nation out of such base materials; and, casting into the shade the celebrated retreat of the ten thousand Greeks, conducted to a successful issue the longest and hardest march on record—a march continued for forty years in the face of formidable enemies, through howling wildernesses and desert sands.—*Rev. T. Guthrie, D.D.*

VII. TRAITS OF CHARACTER DISPLAYED IN HIS POSITION AS STATESMAN.

1 Wisdom.

[17413] Look at the sacred and secular polity which he established in Israel! That constitution which makes our country the envy of the world has been, like an oak, the slow growth of

ages; and it was often only after long and sometimes bloody struggles that right here prevailed over might, and laws were established that render equal justice to all classes of the community. But, event unparalleled in any other age or country, Moses established in Israel a form of government and a code of laws which neither time nor experience has been able to improve. Like the goddess fabled to have sprung, full grown and full armed, from the head of Jupiter, or like those who never hung on mother's breast, the man and woman whom Eden received to its blissful bowers, it was mature and perfect from the beginning. What a man was he who, in that rude and early age, inculcated laws that have formed, through all succeeding ages, the highest standard of morality! Since his long-distant day men have run to and fro, and knowledge has been increased; the boundaries of science have been vastly extended, but not those of morality; nor has one new duty been added to those of the two tables he brought down from Sinai. A perfect code of morals, adapted to all ages, circumstances, and countries, time has neither altered nor added to the Ten Commandments.—*Ibid.*

[17414] He was not so much the great Hebrew warrior, but he was the great Hebrew statesman. He was not only the man of his age, but we are strongly inclined to believe the greatest man of whom we have any account in sacred or profane history. A modern historian remarks of the elder Pitt, "that he made himself the greatest man in England, and England the greatest country in the world." With far stronger emphasis may it be said of Moses that, under God, he made himself the greatest man in the Hebrew nation, and the Hebrew nation the greatest in the world. The poets and orators, the philosophers and historians, the statesmen and warriors, the princes and monarchs of this world, with all their talents and power and splendour, never reached the summit of human greatness which was occupied by the man whose lifeless body was buried by his Maker in the land of Moab.—*Rev. G. Spring, D.D.*

2 Justice.

[17415] Moses established criminal and civil laws which, unless in so far as they were specially adapted to the circumstances of the Israelites, our senators and magistrates would do well to copy. Inspired with the profoundest wisdom, they are patterns to all ages of equity and justice. For instance, how much kinder to the poor, and less burdensome to the community, than ours, are what may be called the "poor laws" of Moses. How much more wise than ours those that dealt with theft—thus far that, requiring the thief to restore fourfold the value of what he had stolen, and work till he had done so, they assigned to that crime a punishment which at once secured reparation to the plundered and the reformation of the plunderer. Nor less wise, I may add, those sanitary laws of which, though long

neglected, late years and bitter experience have been teaching us the importance. It is only now, with all our boasted progress in arts and science, that we are awaking to the value of such regulations as, securing cleanliness in the habits and in the homes of the people, promote their health and preserve their lives. Anticipating the discoveries of the nineteenth century and the plans of our modern sanitary reformers, Moses was four thousand years ahead of his age. Judged, therefore, either by the civil or criminal code he enjoined, or by those Ten Commandments which lie at the foundations of all human justice, and shall continue the supreme standard of morals so long as time endures, Moses claims precedence over all the sovereigns and senators and legislators the world has seen.—*Rev. T. Guthrie, D.D.*

3 Integrity.

[17416] Devoutest of men, he aimed at the glory of God; he forgot his own interests in those of his people. These, the Divine glory and the good of Israel, were his aims, and their attainment his sufficient reward—his motives as unselfish as the man's who leaps into the boiling flood to save a drowning child; and whose reward is, not the plaudits of the crowd that watch him from the banks.—*Ibid.*

4 Patriotism.

[17417] Unlike many who, yielding to the generous impulses of youth, espouse the cause of the wronged, and fight their first battles under the flag of liberty, but in maturer years, or old age, live to desert it, Moses never swerved from the good part he had chosen. He pursued it onward to his grave with a pure, unselfish patriotism no time could weaken, nor injustice and ingratitude cool. If ever man was tempted to abandon a cause which he had undertaken, it was he. Why should he have entered on it, and left his happy household, and the quiet hills of Midian, to cast himself into a sea of troubles? Other actors have been hissed from the stage where they were once applauded; other benefactors have had to complain of public ingratitude; and under the impulse of a temporary madness, other nations have brought their truest patriots to the scaffold. But for forty long years what reward, else than abuse, murmurs, opposition, unjust suspicion, and repeated attempts on his life, did Moses receive from those for whom he had rejected the most splendid offers, on whose behalf he had made the costliest sacrifices? If patriotism is to be measured not only by the wrongs it bears, but by the sacrifice it makes, he stands far ahead of all whose deeds grateful nations have commemorated in monumental marble, or poets have enshrined in song.—*Ibid.*

[17418] Bred in a palace, he espoused the cause of the people: nursed on the lap of luxury, he embraced adversity; reared in a school of despots, he became the brave champion of liberty; long associated with oppressors, he took the side of the oppressed: educated as her son,

he forfeited the favour of a princess to maintain the rights of the poor ; with a crown in prospect, he had the magnanimity to choose a cross ; and for the sake of his God and Israel, abandoned ease, refinement, luxuries, and the highest earthly honours, to be a houseless wanderer ; " esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt," and " choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season."—*Ibid.*

[17419] Presenting a noble contrast to the proverb long common in Italy, *Dolce far niente*—"It is sweet to indulge in idleness," the old Roman sang, *Dulce et decorum pro patria mori*—"It is sweet and graceful to die for one's country." The lofty patriotism of the poet may be only the sentimentalism of song, and the hero of the gulf only such a fable as adorns traditional lore. But Moses was a patriot of that type.—*Ibid.*

VIII. THE GREAT MORAL ELEMENTS OF WHICH HIS CHARACTER WAS COMPOSED.

1 Faith in God.

[17420] Like Noah and Abraham, he believed God. God's word of command and promise was the starting-point in his high career, and his constant support and stimulus. When he knew that God had spoken, with a single-hearted and whole-souled confidence he believed that God was true. His soul rested on the bare word and promise of God, and, in so doing, not only enjoyed the repose, but the vigour and decision of a satisfied assurance. He was embarrassed and agitated until he heard God's voice ; then all was tranquil and determined. He had crossed the sea of doubt, and stood on solid rock. He was not weak enough to be credulous, but he was strong enough to be believing.—*Rev. G. Spring, D.D.*

[17421] He was of a brave and resolute spirit, a man of mettle and of faith. He did not despair of a cause because it had met with a reverse. He believed that the cause was God's. He believed in himself as God's instrument to make it victorious. He believed in his own mission as having in it such clear marks of a Divine origin that he dared not question or distrust them. Why God thus seemed to falter and forsake His own work he could not tell. But he knew that God does not change, and that none of His purposes shall fail. "He is in one mind, and who can turn Him? and what His soul desireth that He doeth." Here was a rock on which his feet might stand firmly. He stood upon it, and it did not fail him. Nay, in the questionings which arose in his mind he became more conscious of the depth of his convictions, and the strength of his purposes. And in the exercise they gained greater depth and strength. And so he arose to renew his struggle with fresh vigour ; and with renewed evidences of the Divine favour and assistance, he prose-

cut it to an illustrious success. The people caught his resolution, followed his guidance, and grew from a race of slaves to a numerous and powerful nation.—*Rev. R. Hallam, D.D.*

2 Realization of the Divine presence.

[17422] At first, Moses was unwilling to go to Pharaoh. He had learned enough, during those strange years, to feel the difficulty of that task. Who was he, that he should face the king and his armies? Then came that grand revelation of the name of God, which was to abide with him until his work was done—"I am that I am." There is an awful power in these words to bring us face to face with God, conveying as they do the Reality of all realities, the Mystery of all mysteries. And observe, this revelation of the name of God made him feel the glory of the vision as an *ever present* power. The bush might burn no more ; but the unchanging Presence would still be with him. Under that consciousness, the sense of his own insignificance faded. His terror of Pharaoh passed away. What were human obstacles to him, before whose eye was ever present the glories he had seen in the desert, and to whom had come that revelation of the Lord? Should the people sneer at, and reject him ; should he have to stand alone ; should he seem to fail ; and should he die with his work undone, still, that mighty vision had given him a grasp on eternity which would keep him strong and true!—*Rev. E. Hull.*

[17423] For Moses the struggle begins anew every day. At each step his work is compromised. Food is wanting, drought makes the people languish, insubordinations are multiplied, revolt is even among the best, among those on whom he counted the most ; in decisive hours Moses is alone before an idolatrous people. At the very foot of Sinai, where the holy law has just been proclaimed, he sees them making a calf of gold and saying, "These be thy gods, O Israel, which have brought thee up out of the land of Egypt;" he sees them joining in the obscene feasts of neighbouring tribes, or trembling like a leaf on learning that the enemy is making ready to defend Canaan. At moments also his soul is wearied by so many murmurings and by so much cowardice, he staggers beneath the weight. What is it that then lifts him up? what is it that gives him a new impulse and an indomitable courage? It is that he *sees Him* who is invisible, Him who has said, "Go, I will be with thee." As he has not received his investiture from men, he does not expect his reward from them, and their impatience, their revolts, their ingratitude will not succeed in making his firmness give way.—*E. Bersier.*

3 Conviction of the paramount importance of the things unseen and eternal.

[17424] Moses was a fool to the men of his time, for he sacrificed all that the world envies to the sublime foolishness of the kingdom of God in an *unknown future*.—*Ibid.*

IX. THE GRANDEUR OF HIS CHARACTER VIEWED AS A WHOLE.

[17425] He united in himself the warrior and the sage, the man of letters and the man of action. He was lawgiver, judge, and king; the maker of a nation, its historian and its bard; its leader in war, its teacher in religion, its guide and director in the arts of peace.—*Rev. T. Guthrie, D.D.*

[17426] He was "King in Jeshurun, when the heads of the people and the tribes of Israel were gathered together." He "commanded them a law, even the inheritance of the congregation of Jacob." He was their captain in war and their governor in peace. His words came to them with the lively impress of Divinity, armed with an authority that none dared to question or gainsay. He was their champion, their advocate, their guardian, their leader, their monitor, their legislator, their protector, their sovereign. Never did man sustain to people so complex a relation, such various and distinct offices, all executed so wisely, so beneficently, so efficiently, without interference or confusion. No perils daunted him, no suffering unnerved him, no waywardness and ingratitude of the people wearied out his patience. This on his secular side; and even secular eyes, looking upon it fairly, must own him surpassingly, wonderfully grand, and see that the great ones of history in whom they are wont to glory as the top and flower of man, pale and grow dim in his presence. Where can they find such a combination of excellences, such a wealth of resources, such a variety of functions, relations, and offices, and all so wisely and justly combined and balanced, employed with motives so pure and unselfish, for ends so great and so salutary, exhibiting versatility without inconstancy, and variety without contradiction?—*Rev. R. Hallam, D.D.*

[17427] If the rapid march of scenes and events, of things done and suffered by a great doer in a great cause, with manhood, bravery, steadiness, and singleness of aim, can stamp an epic character on the story of a life, the life of Moses fulfils the conditions. And yet it is not an epic in any embellishment of fictitious or poetic colouring, but only an epic in its stern truthfulness, and in the solemn grandeur of its hero, the loftiness of his aims, and the magnitude of his achievements.—*Ibid.*

X. HOMILETICAL HINTS.

1 All have not Moses' career to sacrifice, but all may imitate him in his choice.

[17428] All have not a crown to resign: but every man has passions to conquer. All cannot reach the summit of a hero's fame; but all may choose the lot of Moses. They may be destitute of his talents, of his literature, of his rank; but they may adopt his decision; and in this was he most eminent, and most glorious. Here is a guiltless field for the noblest ambition!

And here is a lesson for the proudest heart! Behold the eulogy of the greatest man that ever lived! And in what is it founded? Not on his distinction as a legislator—his skill as a general—his elevation as a monarch—his attainments as a scholar—nor even his superiority as a prophet—these are all waived—upon this alone his character rests—he chooses "rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season!"—"Go, and do likewise!"—*Rev. R. Bond.*

2 His choice, if adopted, will never be regretted.

[17429] What did he embrace? A life of danger—a sphere of humiliation—a tract of ignominy. He did not withdraw to spend his days in ease, and in elegant retirement. He neither shrunk from the painful duties of life, nor expected exemption from its troubles. On the contrary, he walked along its most thorny path. He chose a portion which necessarily involved in it affliction. And he did it upon the conviction of his judgment, and the decisions of his heart. Had he been expressly called to it, we might have wondered less: but it was his choice: and he obeyed in the voice of God, the impulse of his own great mind. To such an individual, how sweet were the hours of retirement—of reflection—of repose! He did not meet, like Brutus, an apparition in his tent, raised by the accusations of conscience, to reproach him with a deed, which he had flattered himself would cover him with immortal glory. He did not, in casting the die, and taking his final resolution, decree, like Cæsar, the ruin of his country's liberties. He did not, like Alexander, first subdue the world, and then weep that he had not another world to conquer. These all had something to tarnish their glory—something to disturb their repose: and they felt how vain and how unsatisfactory is human greatness. They often repented of their choice: but he never.—*Ibid.*

3 This choice involves a threefold victory.

[17430] Of all Moses' distinctions, that which the apostle seized is the most conspicuous; of all his achievements, it is the most noble; of all his conquests, it is the most brilliant. It was at one and the same time a victory over the world, a victory over sin, and a victory over himself. "By faith, Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt. By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible."—*Ibid.*

N.B.—In order to understand the lofty nature of Moses' choice it is necessary to vividly realize the self-sacrifice involved in it. He gave up the comforts of civilization, the princely honours of a world's first-rate power; in fine, the immediate, tangible, and fully estimated present for a distant, shadowy, and precarious future.—*C. N.*

AARON.

I. GENERAL ESTIMATE OF HIS CHARACTER.

[17431] Judging from the acts of his life we should suppose him to have been, like many eloquent men, a man of impulsive and comparatively unstable character, leaning almost wholly on his brother; incapable of that endurance of loneliness and temptation which is an element of real greatness; but at the same time earnest in his devotion to God and man, and therefore capable of sacrifice and of discipline by trial.—*Bp. Barry.*

II. HIS CHIEF DEFECTS.

I Want of strength of mind.

This was lamentably displayed in the matter of the golden calf

[17432] Unhappily, Aaron possessed but little strength of mind; a sad and fatal infirmity of purpose marred his natural goodness and nobleness of disposition: indeed, he was only too easily led to the commission of acts which militated greatly to his discredit, and brought the severest after-consequences in their train. He displayed a fearful weakness of character in yielding, on the very first appeal, to the wilful yearnings of the people after idol worship.—*I. Mocatta.*

[17433] So long as Aaron was the spokesman of Moses' thought, we cannot but admire him; but when he was left to himself, the eloquent orator became, as many another merely eloquent orator has become, the willing dupe in the hands of a maddened people, and the very moulder of the golden calf which they set up to worship.

[17434] We are struck with the absence of strength and point in Aaron's character; we might almost say with the want of character altogether. So that gifted as he was in speech beyond Moses, yet no saying of wisdom is recorded of him; and though he bore so eminent a part in the most important history of the world, and the miraculous events which accompanied the establishment of the Law, yet no memorable action is mentioned of himself alone; all is in conjunction with Moses. And even his sins seem to have been owing rather to a want of strength in his character, than to a disposition to evil; his making the golden calf was in obedience to the people; his contention against Moses appears to have been rather at the instigation of Miriam than his own; and when Moses himself failed in faith at the Rock, Aaron was combined with him in that fall; it is spoken of as the sin of both in common (Numb. xx. 12).—*Isaac Williams.*

[17435] Moses having been called up to the presence of God on Mount Sinai, Aaron was

left without a colleague, and, like a substance released from chemical combination, exhibited his uninfluenced and true character. How immediately we see the defects which naturally attend upon the very gift, which qualified him for partnership in ministry with Moses, breaking forth, when no longer controlled by the yoke of fellowship! We see a melancholy example of the common fact, that he who has an aptitude to persuade others, has an aptitude to yield to the persuasion of others, and that he who exerts himself to influence a multitude must bow to its influence. The mind that will weave nets must be content to be entangled in the meshes, when its thoughts are driven into distraction by the urgent pleading of the tempter without.—*Rev. R. Evans, B.D.*

2 Presumption.

Evidence of this was given in his murmuring with Miriam against the supreme authority of Moses.

[17436] The only occasion on which his individual character is seen is one of presumption, prompted, as in his former sin, chiefly by another, and, as before, speedily repented of. The murmuring of Aaron and Miriam against Moses clearly proceeded from their trust, the one in his priesthood, the other in her prophetic inspiration as equal commissions from God (Numb. xii. 2). It seems to have vanished at once before the declaration of Moses' exaltation above all prophecy and priesthood, except that One who was to come: and, if we may judge from the direction of the punishment, to have originated mainly with Miriam.—*Bp. Barry.*

III. REASON WHY THE DEFECTS IN HIS CHARACTER DID NOT UNFIT HIM FOR HIS OFFICE.

By reason of his infirmity he was the better fitted to sympathize with the weak and erring.

[17437] It has been well observed that the very defects of Aaron's character, and especially his sin and repentance in the matter of the golden calf, fitted him the more for the office of high priest (Heb. v. 2, vii. 28). And he could also sympathize with deep suffering, such as he felt when his sons Nadab and Abihu were slain for their sacrilege (Lev. x. 3). All these points are placed by the apostle in striking contrast to His priesthood whose perfect and sinless human nature makes them have sympathy without infirmity (Heb. v.—viii).—*Smith's Old Testament History.*

IV. THE ALLOWANCES TO BE MADE FOR HIS DEFECTS.

I A long life of slavery had crushed his spirit.

[17438] Aaron was more than eighty years of age when he quitted the land of bondage, and though he could for a time rise to vigour of pur-

pose and vigour of action through the interposition of the Deity, his spirit was so cowed by long, long years of slavery, that he had become weak and nerveless. Weak and faulty then, as he proved himself on various occasions, we have this extenuating circumstance to bear in mind when considering the high position to which he rose.—*I. Mocatta.*

2 **Overshadowed by his brother's greatness, only misfortunes bring Aaron into prominent notice.**

[17439] It is principally through his misfortunes that Aaron is known to us; and his character, in consequence, does not meet with all the regard which is his due, as holding so high a station in the Church of God, as founder of such a splendid line of typical forerunners of the great High Priest. His very position, as second in command, was such as to make his defects his own, but transfer his merits to his superior.—*R. Evans.*

3 **God spake not to him face to face, but he was dependent upon the mediation of a younger brother.**

[17440] We should always take into the account that Moses had to rely on the direct word of God; but Aaron was obliged to rely on it mediately through the word of Moses, and had not, therefore, the same sureness of foundation for the confidence of faith. Nor should we grudge to Aaron the fair allowance that should be made for him in consideration that he was the elder brother, and was therefore subject to continual trial when put under the orders of the younger.—*Ibid.*

[The writer of the above, though ingenious and suggestive, indulges somewhat in special pleading. When we reflect on other events in the lives of the two brothers, all the foregoing statements cannot be fully sustained.—*C. N.*]

V. **THE CONTRAST BETWEEN MOSES AND AARON.**

[17441] In point of natural temperament Aaron presents a contrast to his brother. In Moses we behold a man of innate robustness of mind—a man born to command—a man of the same heroic type with such later saints as Elijah, Daniel, and Paul. Aaron, on the contrary, falls to be classed with those pliant dependent characters who, unable to wage the battle of life single-handed, inevitably take their place, not among leaders, but among the led. Aaron is an eloquent man, but only when Moses puts words in his mouth. Aaron is mighty in deeds as well as in words, but only when Moses goes before him to set him the example. If Moses may be likened to the sturdy oak, Aaron's appropriate emblem is the clinging ivy.—*J. McCulloch.*

[17442] Moses and Aaron lived thousands of years ago, and it is not at all probable that portraits of them were then taken or thought of; yet see how the conventional portraits of these

two great founders of an immortal school agree with the description of their characters as handed down to us. Moses had intellect; he had executive ability; he had spirituality and force; he had the qualities to organize and direct; yet with all his great and wonderful powers he is weak. The theological world says *humble*. What is the trouble? Aaron is made his lieutenant, and supplies the needed quality. It is not firmness, for we see that Moses is firm; it is not intellect, for in this Aaron is inferior to Moses; it is not spirituality or force, for Moses is not lacking in these; it is not steadfastness of purpose, for in this Moses is a most superior character. Moses lacks self-trust; lacks the power to use his great ability for the great purpose of developing a new system. Some may think it a want of language; but had he had self-esteem well developed there would have been no trouble on account of language. Moses had great ideas; he had power to grasp the right and to reject the wrong; wisdom to perceive that which was best for his people and to make the best use of the wisdom of the age. But the mind lacked faith in itself; it lacked control or mastery of its great faculties and powers. The world is full of such men; and many a Moses has sighed for an Aaron, and many an Aaron has been lifted up above the plane of mediocrity by some unseen power directing him to unite himself with a Moses. Moses and Aaron united, to use a forcible yet common phrase, made a "strong combination." Independent of each other, they were weak.—*Phrenological Journal.*

VI. **HIS DEATH.**

[17443] Behold the three persons, Aaron, Moses, and Eleazar, going up the mountain. The first is distinguished by his priestly habit. He is clad in the mitre, the ephod, the fine linen, the Urim and the Thummim, and those bells, which formerly, when heard within the holy of holies, told of his life, now seem sounding the signal for Death to meet him on the summit, and their tinkle lessening up the mountain strikes like a death-watch in the ear of the people of the great congregation assembled before their tents to trace the progress and to witness the event, not a murmur or groan heard throughout them all, but millions, it may be, weeping in silence. See with what calm, majestic, uninterrupted, and unreverted steps the three pursue their journey, talking, perhaps, of that promised land which one of them is never to see, which another is to see from a mountain in Moab, and which the third only is to enter, or talking of that better country to which the first is so near. Mark the eager look cast forward by Aaron toward the top of the hill as if he expected the Angel of Death to be waiting for him there; but when he gains the summit, lo! all is empty and sternly silent, the victim is there, but no wood and no fire for the offering; one mighty sacrificer has arrived, but the other

is not yet come to keep the dread engagement. Mark the last glance cast by Aaron to the camp and the multitude far below, a glance speaking of sorrow and of remorse too, since it is owing to his sin at Meribah that he is dying so soon, and dying so publicly, but speaking still more of submission, confidence, and hope in the mercy of God. See the slow and solemn manner in which the hand of Moses, although the younger brother, tenderly, like a mother her babe at eventide, strips Aaron of his garments. And behold now the high priest clothed only with his long grey hair, as is that ardent sun overhead with his old beams, laying himself down upon the hill, watching with an eye of love and pride his son Eleazar, as Moses arrays him with ephod, and linen, and breastplate, and mitre; and as the bright rays from the Urim and Thummim flash for the last time upon his dim and dying eye, blessing his noble son whose ornament they are henceforward to be, and blessing the brother with whom he has so long held sweet counsel and united in marvellous achievement; and then fixing his look upward as if waiting for the advent and the dart of his adversary, who comes not; but instead there is heard a "still small voice," saying, "Come up hither," and lo! a dead body lies on the granite of Mount Hor, and a living soul, suddenly clothed by the hands of angels with robes that shall never be stripped away, has joined the great assembly in the heavens.—*Rev. G. Gillilan.*

[17444] With trembling hand
He hasted to unclasp the priestly robe,
And cast it o'er his son, and on his head
The mitre place; while with a feeble voice
He bless'd, and bade him keep his garments
pure
From blood of souls. But then, as Moses
raised
The mystic breastplate, and that dying eye
Caught the radiance of those precious stones,
By whose oracular and fearful light
Jehovah had so oft His will reveal'd,
Unto the chosen tribe whom Aaron loved
In all their wandering—but whose promised
land
He might not look upon—he sadly laid
His head upon the mountain's turfy breast,
And with one prayer, half wrapp'd in stifled
groans,
Gave up the ghost.—*Lydia Sigourney.*

[17445] Though aware that every step is taking him to his grave, he proceeds with firm and unfaltering tread. Without a murmur he suffers himself to be stripped of his official attire. Calmly, though not unconcernedly, he witnesses the investiture of his son and successor. And that over, he awaits "the shadow feared of man." Draw near and behold the venerable saint during this interval of awful suspense. He casts a westward glance across the desert towards far-off Sinai, and penitently recalls the flagrant sin which he committed at its base. He takes a farewell look of the goodly tents of Israel spread

out in the valley beneath him, and repents anew of his guilty compliance with the people's will. Upon his brother too, and upon his son, does he look for the last time with inexpressible emotion. And then, as he turns his eyes from them towards heaven, and breathes a silent prayer to his God, a change passes upon his countenance, and he falls to the earth—a corpse! How solemn such a death! How sublime such resignation in the prospect of it! Oh, as we gaze upon Aaron thus calmly meeting death, we forget the infirmities of his life. In view of a sunset so grandly serene, we no longer remember the murky clouds which blackened the noontide sky.—*J. M'ulloch.*

VII. HIS PRIESTLY DUTIES.

[17446] Let me distinguish what those duties were which Aaron was consecrated to perform. They resolve themselves into these three: first, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sin; secondly, to burn incense before the Lord; and lastly, to bless the people in His name. Accordingly, with regard to the first of those functions, we read, that on every occasion, whether ordinary or extraordinary, where sin-offerings or burnt-offerings were required from the people, it was Aaron, and Aaron only, who officiated at the ceremony; presenting the animal sacrificed at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, and afterwards its blood within the holy place. With regard to the second, we read that it was he likewise who offered the burning incense before the Lord; of which his exclusive prerogative, the punishment which befell Korah and his company for usurping the same privilege, was an awful confirmation. And lastly, with regard to the ceremony of blessing the people, not merely was it commanded that Aaron should be the organ of dispensing the Divine benediction, but the form itself also, which he was to use for this purpose, was expressly prescribed (Numb. vi. 23-26).—*W. Greswell.*

VIII. LESSONS TAUGHT BY THE BUDDING OF AARON'S ROD.

No limit must be set either to the election or the power of the Almighty.

[17447] Before God's calling, all men are alike: every name is alike written in their rod. There is no difference in the letters, in the wood; neither the characters of Aaron are fairer, nor the staff more precious. It is the choice of God that makes the distinction. So it is in our calling of Christianity; all are equally devoid of the possibility of grace, all equally lifeless; by nature we all are sons of wrath. If we be now better than others, who separated us? We are all crab-stocks in this orchard of God. He may graft what fruit He pleases on us, only the grace and effectual calling of God make the difference.—*Bp. Hall.*

[17448] That a rod cut off from the tree should blossom, it was strange; but that in one

night it should bear buds, blossom, fruit, and that both ripe and hard, it was highly miraculous. The same power that revives the dead plants of winter in the spring, doth it here without earth, without time, without sun; that Israel might see and grant, it was no reason his choice should be limited, whose power is unlimited.—*Ibid.*

IX. AARON VIEWED AS A TYPE OF CHRIST.

[17449] Aaron was a type of Christ:—1. As high priest, offering sacrifice. 2. In entering into the holy place on the great day of atonement, and reconciling the people to God; in making intercession for them, and pronouncing upon them the blessing of Jehovah at the termination of solemn services. 3. In being anointed with the holy oil by affusion, which was prefigurative of the Holy Spirit with which our Lord was endowed. 4. In bearing the names of all the tribes of Israel upon his breast and upon his shoulders, thus presenting them always before God, and representing them to Him. 5. In being the medium of their inquiring of God by Urim and Thummim, and of the communication of His will to them. But though the offices of Aaron were typical, the priesthood of Christ is of a far higher order. Aaron's priesthood was designed as "a shadow of heavenly things," to lead the Israelites to look forward to "better things to come," when "another priest" should arise, "after the order of Melchizedek" (Heb. vi. 20), and should "be constituted not after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an endless life."

[17450] The importance of the Aaronic priesthood lay wholly in its typical character. It had no value save in so far as it directed the eye of the worshipper to the death of Christ on Calvary, and the life of Christ in heaven, and pointed to the office and work of Him who, having suffered once for all upon the cross, now ever stands within the veil, in the Holy of Holies, pleading ceaselessly on our behalf. . . . Aaron and his sons have no successors in their office, for when the triumphant words, "It is finished," burst from the lips of the Saviour upon Calvary, they rang the death-knell of the old Levitical economy. The shadows have given way to the substance. "The law came by Moses, but grace and truth by Jesus Christ."—*C. Bell.*

X. CONTRAST BETWEEN CHRIST'S DEATH AND THAT OF AARON.

[17451] As Aaron, the high priest of Israel, was the type of a greater priest, so Aaron's death may fitly remind us of the death of Christ. Yet how marked is the contrast between the scene at Hor and the scene at Calvary! Aaron goes up to Mount Hor with sympathising friends beside him, and a regretful nation behind; but Christ takes the dolorous way to Calvary amid all but universal scorn and execration. Aaron

dies between two beloved friends; Christ dies between two convicted felons. Aaron's death is the penalty of his own sin; Christ's is the expiation of the sins of the world. Aaron, when about to die, is denuded of his priestly attire and office; Christ by dying obtains the office and honours of an everlasting and unchangeable priesthood. Ever blessed be God for giving us a high priest so pre-eminently superior to Aaron.—*J. M. McCulloch.*

XI. HOMILETICAL REFLECTIONS.

1 The comparative valuelessness of facile speech by itself.

[17452] Speech is only noble when, like an honest currency, it represents the gold of thought; but when it is merely inflated fluency, it is then like the rags of a dishonest currency, which is the symbol of poverty, and not of wealth.—*Rev. W. Taylor, D.D.*

2 The mere external surroundings of a life are no criterion of the importance or non-importance of that life's work.

[17453] How little can we judge of the importance of a life or character merely from the scene on which it was acted! The pontificate of Aaron was discharged in one of the most obscure corners of the world, it was hidden in the recesses of a gloomy wilderness. And yet how does it exceed in dignity and importance, not only that of all his successors, who stood before the eyes of the world in the thoroughfare of the Holy Land, but also surpasses the ministry even of the Christian bishops, who were conspicuous in the patriarchal chairs of Antioch, Alexandria, and Rome? So little can we judge from merely outward accidents. What then? but that every minister must take heed to himself, how he reckons his responsibility merely in proportion to the conspicuousness of his charge. However obscure in this world, it is, at all events, fruitful of consequences in the world to come.—*Rev. R. W. Evans, B.D.*

JOSHUA.

I. HIS SIMPLE YET LOFTY CHARACTER.

[17454] The character of Moses' successor, under whose leadership Israel entered the land of promise, is, like that of many soldiers, simple and easily understood. He was strong and of a good courage; a man fit not only for battle, but for tedious campaigning; full of resources, and able to keep up the heart of a whole people by his hopeful bearing. That he should have been able to fill the place vacated by so great a man as Moses, gives us the highest idea of his calibre. That Moses was missed there can be little doubt; yet not Moses himself could have led the people more skilfully and successfully from victory to victory, nor have

in the full tide of conquest held them more thoroughly in hand, and settled them more quietly in the land. It was one of the most difficult of tasks which was entrusted to Joshua. He was to lead the people through a series of the most brilliant and exciting military successes, and then to turn them to the most peaceful pursuits. He was to teach them to shed blood pitilessly, to harden them to such sights as the sacking of towns, and then to enforce laws which in many points were singularly humane.—*Rev. M. Dods, D.D.*

[17455] Of his character we cannot speak too highly. It is transparent as the light itself. He was indeed "strong and very courageous." He feared no danger; he shrunk from no hardships; he was deterred by no difficulties. Arduous was the enterprise he was called to undertake, and, to human appearance, the barriers to its accomplishment were all but insurmountable. But Joshua had faith in God. Seldom, if ever, did his confidence in the Divine promises give way; and if it did, under special trials, for a moment waver, it rose again and took hold on the arm of Omnipotence afresh.—*Rev. Thornley Smith.*

II. HIS PARTICULAR EXCELLENCES.

1 Courage.

It was both physical and moral.

[17456] Joshua's courage was both physical and moral; that is, it was courage in its lower and higher manifestation. Many things by which we are surrounded, perhaps all natural objects, are composed of two distinct parts, that which is external, enclosing an internal substance of the same shape, possibly, but distinct from it. The nut has its kernel and its shell; the orange its rind and its pulp. One may exist apart from the other, but both are needed to form a complete whole. We are made up of soul and body, each can exist apart from the other, but they must be united to be a complete man. So it is with physical and moral courage; the first is but the shell, the second is the kernel, the former is but the body of that of which the latter is the soul. The first may, and often does, exist without the other, but a perfect man possesses both, and except in cases of defective bodily organization, moral courage always develops physical. Many a man, alas! who would face ten thousand bodily perils, or lead a forlorn hope in the day of his country's need, would not dare to be known as a man of prayer, would not dare to stand up for the rights of his conscience in the midst of scoffing comrades. But a man who is not afraid to pray, who can bear to be laughed at because he is a Christian, will not be wanting in the hour of bodily danger.—*Rev. W. Harris.*

[17457] Joshua's courage was sustained by constant meditation on the Divine precepts. "This book of the law shall not depart out of

thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest 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" (Josh. i. 8). Just as the bread we eat from day to day, or the life-blood that courses through our veins is not the same in identity, but ever the same in nature and in its end—the sustaining of life in the human body,—so the promises and precepts of the word of God, various in form as the circumstances of those to whom they were first addressed, have the same effect and aim, the nourishment of the human Spirit by begetting and maintaining faith in the living Father and in His Son Jesus Christ.—*Ibid.*

2 Piety.

This was the motive-power which prompted the actions of his life from first to last.

a. It underlay his acts of courage and decision. [17458] Piety was the source of Joshua's courage and decision, and the means by which they were sustained. He rested on the promise of God. He meditated on the precept of God. The Divine promise was, "As I was with Moses, so will I be with thee," and with such a leader Joshua felt he could go anywhere and do anything. If men have confidence in their captain they will always follow him anywhere. You know, when Franklin set out on his expedition to try and discover the North-West passage, how eager the seamen were to sail with him. They knew their leader, and were assured that, if the undertaking could be successfully carried through, he was the man to do it. Joshua had seen the mighty works of God during the forty years' sojourn in the wilderness, and he rested on the assurance of the Captain of the Lord's Host that He would not fail or forsake him. "Fear thou not, for I am with thee," is the great inspiration of all true courage; "The Lord of Hosts is with us," has been the battle-cry that has echoed through the ages from rank to rank in the noble army of witnesses for God's truth, and the same Angel-Jehovah who appeared to Joshua says to every man, woman, and child who looks to Him for strength, "Lo, I am with you alway."—*Ibid.*

b. It furnished the incentive to the perfect discharge of the fearful commission of extermination entrusted to him.

[17459] When God commanded Joshua to execute this fearful commission, it was enough for this obedient servant of the Most High that God had commanded it. Fearful as the commission was to execute, he was urged to execute it by all the principles of religion and all that bound him to his Maker. It was not for him to sit in judgment upon the wisdom of the Divine procedure; to hesitate where God had decided, or to inquire into the reasons of the edict, even were they ever so inexplicable to his own mind. God had already told him that one reason of it was that the Hebrews might be filled with horror at the character and vices of the nations

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they were thus required to exterminate; another, that he designed by their conquests over a foe so superior, to bring "the fear of them and the dread of them" upon all who heard the report of their wondrous triumphs; and more than all, that they were nations which, for their seducing and corrupting wickedness, must no longer be tolerated on the earth, much less as usurpers of the land which by covenant and by oath had been given to the children of Israel.—*Rev. G. Spring, D.D.*

[17460] Few trials could have furnished more decisive evidence of Joshua's religious character, or of his fitness to be Israel's leader, than this command of extermination. Leader as he was, he felt himself to be but a subaltern under the Great Captain of their salvation, ready to understand and hearken to His word, and prompt and cheerful to do His bidding. This was the first and motive-principle of his conduct.—*Ibid.*

c. It was very marked in his last address to the people committed to his charge.

[17461] Throughout his last address we observe this zealous and faithful servant of God anxiously labouring to press into the service of his Divine Master every pure feeling which could animate their bosoms; and to touch every chord in their hearts which might be taught to vibrate to the praises of God, and tuned into harmony with religion.—*Rev. J. Hiffenau.*

3 Fidelity.

[17462] A noticeable trait in the character of Joshua was his fidelity to the trust reposed in him. He was not the mere patriot. He was the servant of the people because he was the servant of their God. He felt his responsibility to the Lord Jehovah, who had appointed him to the charge of the hosts of Israel; and whether he pleased the Israelites or not, please the Lord Jehovah he must. Some men, through cowardice or through fear, are no sooner placed in an eminent position in society by the providence of God, than, to keep it, they have recourse to all kinds of mean and dishonourable plans. Instead of doing their duty, whatever it may cost them, they conform to custom and court the favour and the smiles of men. There was nothing of this kind in the conduct of Joshua. . . . He thought of nothing but of fulfilling the task assigned to him, and would sooner have laid down his charge and retired into private life than have proved faithless to his trust as the servant of the Lord his God.—*Rev. Thornley Smith.*

4 Thoroughness.

[17463] Of Joshua it is said, that "he drew not his hand back wherewith he stretched out the spear, until he had utterly destroyed all the inhabitants of Ai." Intrepid warrior. "As if his hand had been fastened to the spear, he exhorts the soldiers to look to God alone, to whom he resigns the success of the battle." There was, however, no mystical power in the

spear of Joshua, as there was in the elevation of the hands of Moses during the battle with the Amalekites. Rather is the fact mentioned as illustrative of the noble spirit of perseverance displayed by Israel's commander, for he was a man who feared neither toil nor danger so long as duty called him to the work.—*Ibid.*

5 Self-effacement.

[17464] Joshua lived, not for himself, but for his people. Unlike Alexander and other conquerors of the East, he sought no glory, was ambitious of no greatness, and aimed at no sinister purposes or ends. There is not a circumstance in his history which indicates that he had any personal designs to gratify; for, indeed, he was too great a man for this. True greatness consists not in aspiring to place and power, not in the carrying out of ambitious projects, not in trying to be great, and wishing that the world may think us great; but in lowliness and humbleness of mind, and in self-forgetfulness for the common good. Hence few of the conquerors of the world—the Alexanders, the Cæsars, the Attilas, and the Napoleons, of human fame—were truly great, but miserably little. But Joshua was great—great as a patriot, great as a commander; for his aim was one, that of promoting to the utmost of his power the highest interests of the people of his charge. Let our rulers, our statesmen, our military commanders, imbibe the spirit of the noble-minded Joshua; and, instead of that hunting after place which is now so common for the sake of personal or family aggrandizement, there would be a prevalent desire to lose sight of personal advantage for the sake of the public good. Nor would society be in any way a loser, for the most disinterested servant of the State is always its best and most efficient one.—*Ibid.*

6 Tenderness.

This was displayed in his bearing towards Achan.

[17465] God had given a "perfect lot," and there could be no doubt in the mind of Joshua of Achan's actual guilt; yet he addresses him and says, "My son, give, I pray thee, glory to the Lord God of Israel, and make confession unto Him; and tell me what thou hast done; hide it not from me." How gentle are these words! There is no harshness, no severity, but a true paternal pity for the man who has placed himself in so fearful and perilous a position. "By this example," observes Calvin, "judges are taught that, while they punish crimes, they ought so to temper their severity as not to lay aside the feelings of humanity, and, on the other hand, that they ought to be merciful without being reckless and remiss; that, in short, they ought to be as parents to those they condemn, without substituting undue mildness for the sternness of justice.—*Ibid.*

7 Personal influence.

[17466] The influence of Joshua's example and instructions was such that Israel served

the Lord all his days, and all the days of the elders that overlived him, who had known the works of the Lord. Like every good man who occupies a prominent position in society, he left behind him a bright track of light, in which many walked long after his departure.—*Ibid.*

III. JOSHUA A TYPE OF CHRIST.

I In his name.

[17467] The new leader of Israel received a name, which, by identifying his leadership with God's, gave constant promise of victory. Originally called Hoshea, or Salvation, this name was changed, when he led the spies, to Jehoshua, or The Lord is salvation. And it has never ceased to seem significant to the Christian that this name of Joshua should have been that by which our Lord was called. In its Greek form, "Jesus," it was given to Him because He was to save His people from their sins. By His distinctive name among men He was linked to Joshua, and in the salvation He accomplishes for His people we are therefore led to expect the same leading characteristics as distinguished the salvation of Israel by Joshua.—*Rev. M. Dods, D.D.*

[17468] In more various points, and with a closer similarity of outline than belongs, perhaps, to any other figure in the Old Testament, is Joshua the type of Christ. His very name begins the great intimation. Changed by Moses—doubtless at the mouth of the Lord—*Oshea*, "welfare," to *Jehoshua*, or *Jesus*, "God the Saviour;" it pointed him out as the figure in the earthly of the heavenly deliverer. Joshua is pre-eminently one of the people whom he delivers; he has worked with them in the brick-kilns of Egypt, he knows their hearts; in all their afflictions he has been afflicted.—*Anon.*

2 In his life's work generally.

[17469] When Joshua has entered on his leadership, prophetic acts, full of typical significance, begin with a wonderful minuteness to repeat themselves. He, and not the great law-giver, is to bring the people into Canaan: Moses must depart to secure his every word of promise being fulfilled to Israel, as the law must pass away and be fulfilled before the spiritual Israel could enter on that kingdom. At the river Jordan, Joshua is shown by God to Israel as their appointed leader; there God began to magnify him. As Jesus comes up from the river Jordan, the heavens open, the Holy Ghost descends, and the voice of God declares, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." From Jordan's bed Joshua took twelve stones to be for evermore a witness to the people of their great deliverance; from His baptism in Jordan Jesus began to call His twelve apostles, the foundation-stones of that Church which witnesses to every generation of the redemption of the sons of Abraham by Christ. Twelve stones Joshua buried under the

returning waters of Jordan; and over the first twelve Jesus let the stream of death flow as over others. . . . Before Joshua departed, he called to him on that mountain of Timnath-Serah, which he was about to leave, all the heads of the tribes, and with the chant of a prophetic voice set before them all the grand future, which, if they clave steadfastly to God, should certainly be theirs; and so before He ascended into the heavens did the great Captain of God's spiritual army appoint to meet upon a mountain top in Galilee the heads of all the tribes into which His Church should multiply; and there, looking with them over the far outstretched dominions of the earth, utter to them, Joshua-like, the words of wonder which rang for ever in their ears, "All power is given unto Me in heaven and on earth: go ye, therefore, and evangelize all nations." Yea, and yet again, after a higher sort than belongs to this present world, was Joshua but the type of Jesus. For it is He who, for each one who follows Him, the true High Priest, divides the cold waters of death, setting against their utmost flood, even when that Jordan overfloweth his banks, as he doth all the harvest time, the ark of the body which He took of us, and in which God dwelleth evermore; so making a way for His ransomed to pass over. It is He who hath gone before to prepare amongst the many mansions of His Father's house the place which the golden lot marks out for us. It is He who hath trodden down all our enemies. It is He who hath built the golden city upon the "twelve foundation-stones which bear the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb."—*Ibid.*

IV. JOSHUA A TYPE OF THE CHRISTIAN.

The wars of Joshua suggest three facts concerning the Christian's true campaign.

(1) *In the true campaign God has committed to man a great work.*

[17470] It is an onerous work. The work to which God called Joshua on this occasion was the utter extermination of most formidable antagonists. . . . Our work in the moral campaign is still more onerous. We live in a world of evil. Corrupt principles, the mighty "powers of darkness," possess the world we live in. They crowd our spheres of action: and, alas! they are encamped within us! The work to which we are called is their entire extermination, both from within and without. It is a righteous work. . . . The man who consecrates his energies to the downfall of evil, whose life is one earnest struggle against the principalities and powers of darkness, is acting evermore in accordance with the eternal law of rectitude. He is fighting "the good fight of faith," and if he is faithful he shall receive "a crown of glory that fadeth not away." It is an indispensable work. Never will you possess the Canaan of spiritual harmony, moral approbation, self-control, uplifting thoughts, heavenly affections, ever-brightening hopes, and free and blessed intercourse with

the infinite Father of spirits, without the expulsion of evil from your soul. He only that overcometh shall inherit.—*Dr. Thomas.*

(2) *In the true campaign God blesses man with a great leader.*

[17471] Taking the description which is given of Christ as a figurative representation of Him as our moral chieftain, three facts are suggested concerning Him in that capacity: 1. *He is ever present when needed.* Joshua needed some special manifestation to reassure him of his duty, to inspire his courage, and to nerve his arm for his terrible mission. And here it is. "He lifted up his eyes and looked, and, behold, there stood," &c. So it ever is. "The Lord stood with me, and strengthened me," said Paul. 2. *He is always ready.* He was not only present in the hour of need, but prepared. He stood before Joshua "with His sword drawn in His hand." He stands by our side, and says, "All power is given unto Me in heaven and earth." "Lo, I am with you always." 3. *He is all-sufficient.* He is "the Captain of the Lord's hosts." He is the controller of all powers. The forces of the material universe are at His command. . . . All the forces of the spiritual universe are at His command. He is Captain of the hosts of heaven. "He maketh His angels spirits, and His ministers a flame of fire." "Him hath God exalted," &c. With such a chieftain as this, shall we fear our enemies, or can we fail in battle?—*Ibid.*

(3) *In the true campaign God requires a great spirit.*

[17472] *Joshua displays a spirit of indomitable valour.* "Art thou for us, or for our adversaries?" This is the courage which we want, which we honour, and which we must have, before we can win one victory in the battle of life. *He displays the spirit of reverent inquiry.* "He fell on his face to the earth," &c. This is the true spirit. Paul had this: "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" With this spirit, victory is certain; without it, defeat is inevitable. *He displays the spirit of solemn obedience.* "Loose thy shoe." . . . "And Joshua did so." On whatever place we stand, it is holy ground, because God is present. . . . Did we always feel His presence, we should walk this earth with reverent and solemn step; feel that

"Life is real, life is earnest;"

and that the great end and blessedness of our being consists in working out the will of the great All in All. . . . Would you be a hero in the strife? Then put yourself under the command of the Captain of the Lord's host. He will lead you on from victory to victory. His victories are real. They are not over the body, which is the mere instrument of the man; they are over the soul—over the man himself. He who subdues the mind is the only true conqueror. The Lord's victories are merciful. It is love that nerves His arm. He strikes not to wound, but to heal; not against life, but against

its evils and curses; not to destroy, but to save. Every blow He gives is to crush an evil and to save a soul.—*Ibid.*

[17473] The character of Joshua exemplifies the conflicts and triumphs of individual believers. Individual believers in every age of the world have their own personal conflicts; and it is a severe and deadly strife. Every true Israelite finds his bitterest foe within his own bosom. When he first puts on the armour he lays his account with enemies from without; but let him remain on the field of battle half a century, and he finds that he has another sort of enemy to deal with than the world and the devil. Sufficiently powerful indeed are these last, demanding more than human valour to overcome them; but they are not the covered, wakeful, deceiving, and rabid Canaanite within. Here is the conflict; and hence the exhortation so often repeated, to watch, to pray, to strive, to wrestle, to run, to fight. The subjugation of his sins is the great business of the Christian's life. This is his great warfare; and but for the strength that is made perfect in his weakness, not only might he well be cast down, but must be destroyed. We have been almost tempted to smile when we have recited these words of God so often repeated to Joshua, "Only be thou strong and of a good courage!" Oh, there is a fitness, a beauty, a force in them which ye may one day know. Yes, thou sinning and thou discouraged one, "only be thou strong and of a good courage," and thou shalt have the victory.—*Rev. G. Spring, D.D.*

[17474] Would that all God's servants were like him! But how many are there who, long before the battle is won, draw back the hand, and sheathe the sword, and retire from the conflict, leaving their enemies in possession of the field! Called to contend with spiritual adversaries, let us buckle on the armour, and take the spear or the sword, and resolve never to lay it down until the victory is sure. Joshua is a noble example for the Christian warrior; and our own national history presents other noble examples which we shall do well to imitate. Nelson, Wellington, Havelock, and others we might name, were men who drew not back their hands, but went on bravely, in spite of weariness and pain. Perseverance was their motto. *Nil desperandum* was their constant watchword.—*Rev. Thornley Smith.*

CALEB.

I. HIS CHIEF TRAITS OF CHARACTER.

1. Pious fidelity.

[17475] The news that the spies are returning, flies like wild-fire through the tents, and calls forth all the people. There they come—browned with the sun and dust of travel. They bring proofs of the fertility of the soil in the fruits which

they hold in their hands ; and in that one bunch of grapes, a cluster so weighty that it requires two men to carry it. The camp is full of joy ; and every ear intent as, addressing Moses in the hearing of the people, the spies say—"We came into the land whither thou sentest us, and surely it floweth with milk and honey ; and this is the fruit of it." Alas ! their joy is short-lived. How are their hearts struck with dread, and the hopes they have cherished changed into blank despair, as the spies go on to say—"Nevertheless the people be strong, and the cities are walled, and very great ;" adding, with voices that trembled at the recollection of their gigantic forms, "and we saw the children of Anak there!" The children of Anak? At this news the whole congregation grows pale with terror. Fear sits on every face, and expresses itself in a low murmuring wail that, unless it meets a timely check, will ere long break out into open mutiny. At this crisis Caleb interposes—not to deny the statement of his associates, but to repudiate the cowardly conclusion they suggested, and the people accepted. Faithful to the cause of God, he rushes to the front to deliver himself of words full of faith and courage. They sound like a battle trumpet. No doubt the Canaanites are strong ; their walls are high ; their ranks led on by giant warriors, the formidable sons of Anak. Nevertheless as one who knew that He who was with them was greater than all who could be against them, Caleb cries out, "Let us go up at once and possess it ; we are well able to overcome it."—*Rev. T. Guthrie, D.D.*

[17476] "All the people that we saw in it are men of great stature ; and there we saw the giants, the sons of Anak ; and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in theirs." So spake the spies. At their words, as if a thunderbolt or shell had dropped among them, the multitude suddenly disperse. Through the livelong night weeping fills the camp ; nor does joy come in the morning. They have abandoned themselves to despair. Regretting that they had ever left the land of Egypt, they resolve to retrace their steps. They cast blame on God, and give way to such grief, and rage, and wild, blind fury that Moses and Aaron are confounded. Knowing neither what to do, nor how to turn the people from their mad purpose, they fall on their faces ; and lie on the ground—as if they said, If you will go back to Egypt, it is over our bodies you shall go ! At this moment, though it was like laying hands on the mane of a raging lion, Caleb, supported by Joshua, once more steps forward ; and regardless of a life the people had armed themselves with stones to destroy, he reproaches their cowardice, saying, "Rebel not ye against the Lord, neither fear ye the people of the land ; for they are bread to us, their defence is departed from them. The Lord is with us ; fear them not !" Another moment, and, his life battered out of him by a shower of stones, Caleb had fallen a sacrifice to his own fidelity, and the people's fury. But suddenly, in the

form of some brilliant, dazzling, intolerable light, the well-known symbol of the Divine presence, "the glory of the Lord appears in the tabernacle before all the children of Israel." They, not Caleb and Joshua, nor Moses and Aaron, are in peril now. God is ready to destroy them ; and they had been swept from the face of the earth but for Moses' earnest and timely intercession.—*Ibid.*

2 Dauntless courage.

[17477] For that courage, true, calm courage, which does not lie in insensibility to danger, nor in the violent animal passion which may bear a coward forward as a whirlwind does the dust, or a wave the seaweed on its foaming crest, Caleb presents the very model of a soldier. How bravely he bears himself when the other spies prove traitors ! With fire in his eye and resolution seated on his brow, he steps forth to cry, "Let us go up at once and possess the land ! Away with these coward fears !" The speech this, be it observed, not of one who was to guard the camp or bring up the rear, Judah's place is in the front of battle. The bloody wave breaks first on that gallant tribe ; and of all its warriors, first on Caleb—its prince and head. Nor was this bold proposal to face and fight the sons of Anak, an empty boast, a mere bravado. Forty years thereafter his courage was put to that test—the portion of the land assigned him, at his own request, being held by the giant race whose descendant, Goliath of Gath, struck terror into the boldest hearts in Israel, as he went forth vapouring before their host—till he fell to the shepherd's sling, defying the armies of the living God. It was from the hands of giants Caleb wrung his inheritance. Undaunted by their towering stature, he met them, sword to sword, and foot to foot, in the bloody field ; the God in whom he trusted inspiring his heart with such courage, and endowing his arm with such strength, that they succumbed before his blows—their armour loudly clashing, and the very earth shaking in their fall.—*Ibid.*

II. HOMILETICAL REFLECTIONS.

1 God can forget sin against Him, but not fidelity to Him.

[17478] The rebellious and wicked people are but doomed for their sin to wander forty years in the wilderness, until the carcasses of all who were over twenty years of age on leaving Egypt have fallen there. God forgives them. Merciful and gracious, He forgets their offence, but not Caleb's fidelity. "Surely," he says, "they shall not see the land, but my servant Caleb, because he had another spirit with him and hath followed me fully, him will I bring into the land whereunto he went ; and his seed shall possess it." Even so shall it be with all who, faithful to the sacred interests of their Heavenly Master, prove themselves good soldiers of Jesus Christ. Remembering their fidelity in the hour of trial, how they stood by His cause, resisted tempta-

tions, by faith crucified the flesh, by the blood of the covenant overcame the world, how they denied themselves but not Him, how they were of "another spirit" from the mass of mere professors, and how in purpose, if not always in practice, they "followed the Lord fully;" them also will He bring into the land whither they go—the ransomed of the Lord, a sacramental host, pilgrims to the heavenly Canaan.—*Ibid.*

2 Piety is the root and support of the highest type of courage.

[17479] The source of Caleb's courage, of a bravery so admirable and dauntless, is not far to seek. In him, as in those noble Christian soldiers whom I have mentioned, and in others also who have maintained their religion in the camp, courage, if it did not spring from, was sustained by piety. He had faith in God. Therefore he did not fear the face of man, though that man were a giant; nor of death itself. From the same lofty source, and none other, the soldier of the cross, he who fights with foes more formidable than giants—the devil, the world, and the flesh, that trinity of evil—is to draw his courage. No grace more necessary than that in one who would do his duty to Jesus and to His cause. Courage to speak for Christ everywhere, and act for Christ always, is a grace of the highest value—yet one in which, alas! many a good man, to the dishonour of his Master, and the loss of others, has been sadly wanting. The Apostle Paul possessed it: and what he himself possessed in a degree so eminent, he enforced on his converts, saying, "Add to your faith virtue," or, as it were better translated, "courage." No greater bravery, indeed, in battle-fields than what the Christian may require! More of it may be needed to face the jeers of an ungodly world than a blazing battery of cannon.—*Ibid.*

[17480] "The fear of man bringeth a snare," but the fear of God bringeth freedom from every other fear.—*M. 7.*

THE JUDGES.—INTRODUCTION.

1 The character of the great men of any period of history is to a great extent the character of that period itself.

"The old order changeth, yielding place to new, and God fulfils Himself in many ways."

[17481] Our estimate of the general character of any period of history must to a great extent regulate our estimate of its leading men and of their actions. One of the difficulties which the student of any historical character has to overcome, is the difficulty of ascertaining the exact stage of physical and moral development to which that character belonged. To test the antique virtues by a modern standard would be as fallacious as to test the prowess of a mailed warrior by exposing him to the fire of modern

artillery instead of to the cloth-yard shafts of his own times. A man may have been serviceable and admirable in his own day, although by the side of Paul he would seem incongruous, formed on another model, and useless. The vigorous physique and martial qualities, the muscular strength that could break bows of steel in pieces, the crafty wiles of semi-civilized warriors were no longer the subject of exulting songs of triumph, when the work given to God's servants was to bring all men to the meek and lowly spirit of Christ. And one great purpose which is served by the long course of Bible history is to widen our minds and invite us to see God's purpose growing towards accomplishment through every generation, however apparently rude and unfit for so high a work, and by means of men most unlike one another.—*Rev. M. Dods, D.D.*

2 The dissimilarity of the times of the Judges to our own days.

"Every man did that which was right in his own eyes."

[17482] No period is more unlike our own times, and therefore further from our sympathies and understanding, than the period of the Judges of Israel. As our conception of what we do not perfectly understand is materially aided by comparing it to something we are already acquainted with, this period may perhaps best be apprehended by comparing it to that of the Homeric heroes or to the lawless and disturbed.—*Ibid.*

3 The Judges were moved by the Spirit of God, but they were babes, not men, in the quality of their faith.

[17483] It was on men who, like the barons who founded the liberties of our own country, could not read nor sign their own names; men whose hands one day held the plough or the pruning knife, and the next day the sword: it was on such men as these, we read, that the Spirit of God came, impelling them to rise and do battle for Israel. And it strikes every reader of this book that while in it, more than in any other book of the Old Testament, reference is made to the Spirit of God as instigating and empowering men, the deeds to which He impels them are anything but what we are accustomed to call spiritual. They were deeds for the most part of martial prowess. Still, it was deeds of this kind which were then needed to forward God's purpose with the world. And to do these deeds the Spirit enabled those who were chosen for the work; not supernaturally investing them with a refinement of character or sanctity of disposition which would have been incongruous with the times in which they lived—times in our own country when robber chieftains could hold a large district under subjection. Though many of the practices were barbarous, it would be a mistake to think of the Israelites of the period as mere savages; for some of the actions which most shock a modern reader of the nar-

rative, such as the cutting up of the Levite's concubine, and distributing the pieces among the tribes of Israel, as well as the horrible outrage which led to this, seem equally to have shocked the Israelites themselves. And we must also bear in mind that although there was no literature by which the people might be educated, yet there was stirring among them all that gives promise of a literature—love of song and of terse and witty sayings, a knowledge of the art of writing, as well as of those arts in which the mechanical and artistic faculties are both employed.—*Ibid.*

[17484] We do not rightly apprehend the period, nor what was required to be done in it, unless we give full insight to its roughness and fierceness. They were times in which a woman could wile a man to sleep under her roof, and, while he slept, drive a tent-pin through his temples. Like the North American Indians, the warriors with whom the Israelites engaged called themselves after the lower animals, as the wolf and the raven, that the qualities which fitted them for battle might be recognized. And that the Israelites were not on a much higher level of civilization themselves may be gathered from their treatment of Adoni-bezek, whose thumbs and toes they cut off. They were times when it was possible for a man to maintain himself by heading a band of freebooters; times when human sacrifices were not yet impossible.—*Ibid.*

[17485] The Judges went to their work in the strength of Jehovah, believing in Him as more powerful than all that could be against them, and believing also that it was His will to free His people from all oppression. They had, that is to say, faith in God, and what they did, as we are told in the Epistle to the Hebrews, they did by faith. It was this belief that gave them courage and success. But faith is the property of children as well as, or indeed much more than, of men of mature understanding; and how little understanding the Israelites yet had of the God who had adopted them is sufficiently shown by the story of Jephthah. God does not supersede nature in the development of the character of individuals or of nations.—*Ibid.*

SHAMGAR.

I. INTRODUCTORY.

The state of Israel when Shamgar became Judge.

[17486] Through the corrupting influence of their neighbours Israel had gone after other gods to serve them, and God's anger was kindled against them. The land was desolate, commerce of all kinds was abandoned, and even government was trodden down by the feet of injustice and cruelty. The highways, where honest men

used to travel, were deserted and infested with robbers and murderers who made no secret of their mission. The wells and the fountains were surrounded by them, making it death to the Israelites to come hither to draw. Who could imagine a more terrible state of things? and all, we are told, brought on by themselves.—*Rev. T. Kelly.*

II. POINTS OF CHARACTER.

1 Steady energy.

He pursued his daily avocations in the midst of surrounding disturbances.

[17487] Shamgar was ploughing in his field when the Philistines came upon him. It speaks well for Shamgar that he was ploughing in such a time of trouble, for the country was in a state of desolation. Few men, I presume, had either the courage or desire to plough. I learn here, that in times of national distress, or spiritual deadness or trouble in the Church, it is a great blessing to have a Shamgar here and there, driving on with their work as though nothing had happened. Such men impart a new impulse to the waning energies of those around them; and the energy and hopefulness they get at the plough fit them to mow down the Philistines when they come. In acquiring an education, or fitting yourself for any honourable profession, you will find the Philistines of discouragement pouring in upon you, and, as the condition of success, you must grapple with and overcome them. The road of advance must be cut right through them.—*Ibid.*

2 Intrepid valour.

[17488] Shamgar was ploughing in the field, when six hundred Philistines either went in the direction of his house or came upon him. Burning with indignation and a spirit of holy revenge, he sprang upon them, single-handed and alone, with no weapon but his ox goad, and never halted till the last man lay dead at his feet. To my mind there is something wonderful in this unique battle. I wonder that he escaped when surrounded by such a multitude. And I wonder the Philistines stood their ground till the last man was slain. In a higher realm of service than the field of physical conflict, we are told that "one shall chase a thousand;" but I think for Shamgar to kill "six hundred with an ox goad" was a feat of daring and valour equally marvellous.—*Ibid.*

III. THE LESSON OF HIS BRIEF HISTORY.

The spirit in which men grapple with difficulties in pursuing the avocations of life will shape and colour their future.

[17489] Shamgar was a humble labouring man; but his conduct at a crisis in the history of his nation raised him to be Judge of Israel. Learn from this, that the meeting of present emergencies, and the faithful discharge of present duty, is the true road to advancement and

honour. Let a man fill the place where he is, to overflowing with himself, and God will soon invite him to a broader place.—*Ibid.*

BARAK.

I. HIS HESITATING OBEDIENCE TO GOD'S COMMAND.

[17490] The Israelites were "sold into the hand of Jabin, the king of Canaan, that reigned in Hazor; the captain of whose host was Sisera." The yoke became very painful, and the cry for help became loud and perpetual. Men in adversity are driven to God. At that time Deborah the prophetess sent and called for Barak, to whom she made known that the Lord was about to deliver Israel from the hands of Jabin; and she commanded him to go with ten thousand men of the children of Naphtali and of the children of Zebulun to Mount Tabor. Barak was unwilling to execute this command unless Deborah promised to go with him; this she consented to do. When the hosts met, the Lord discomfited the army of Sisera, and the captain himself was slain by Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite.—*Anon.*

II. LESSONS TAUGHT BY HIS HESITANCY.

- 1 A man must have convincing testimony that the work is of God before he can engage in it with all his heart.

[17491] Barak seemed to hesitate when Deborah spoke to him of the work he was to take in hand; questioned whether the command did come from God, and in order to test her veracity, said, "If thou wilt go with me, then I will go: but if thou wilt not go with me, then I will not go." Deborah was known in Israel as a prophetess of the Lord; and if she staked her reputation and her life in the undertaking, there could be no doubt but that the Lord had spoken unto her, and that it was His will this expedition should be undertaken. Moses desired a sign before he went down to Egypt to deliver his brethren out of the oppressor's hand; Gideon also wanted a proof that God would be with him before he undertook the work of delivering the people from under the yoke of the Midianites. Such signs are not given to-day, but there are testimonies concerning God's work equally convincing if men were only to seek the truth with their whole heart. All thoroughly earnest people are conscious of being engaged in the service of the Most High, and that they are seeking to carry out His will; their consciousness is stronger than any argument or visible sign. Without this conviction it is impossible for a man to throw his whole energies into the work, whether it be by means of the press, in the mission field, or in the pulpit. The inward certitude that the work is Divine will rouse the soul's enthusiasm, all

fears and doubts will be banished from the mind.—*Ibid.*

- 2 Any hesitation on the part of man to carry out the Divine command will involve detriment and loss.

[17492] When the command was given to Barak to go against Sisera, the promise was, "And I will deliver him into thine hand;" but when he demurred, and said he would not go unless Deborah went with him, this promise was partially withdrawn: he would gain a glorious victory, but the honour of destroying Sisera would be given to a woman. Owing to his reluctance to obey the word of God, he lost a great deal of the honour that was within his reach as the general of the Jewish army. Jonah went at last to Nineveh, and preached with great success; the people repented and were saved; but the beauty of his character would have been far greater if he had not attempted to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. Business men who have risen to a position of wealth and influence have done so through their perseverance, and by being ever ready to take advantage of every opportunity which presented itself to extend their business transactions. It is strange there should be so much lukewarmness in connection with religious matters—so much time lost in determining whose duty it is to do this, that, and the other thing, when the voice of God is heard calling all persons to come to His help against the enemy. Thus men lose many opportunities of doing good, and the honour they could easily get is given to another.—*Ibid.*

[17493] Barak, in his hesitating obedience and the loss of honour which he thereby incurred, is the Old Testament beacon warning us of that against which the ascended Saviour exhorts us from heaven: "Hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown" (Rev. iii. 11).—*M. 7.*

- 3 Tokens of success in connection with God's work will fill the heart with praise.

[17494] Though Barak himself had not the honour of taking Sisera, still the enemy was thoroughly beaten and Israel liberated. This token of success was a cause of joy to every Jew; and every heart ought to have been filled to overflowing with thankfulness to the God who had come to their deliverance. One of the grandest poems ever written was composed on this occasion, and the name of Barak will be handed down to posterity in connection with it. Deborah and Barak sang the praise of the God who had avenged His people. It is man's duty to labour on in the vineyard of Christ, though no fruit appear; it is our duty to remain on the battle-field, though no signs of victory be given us; but when the fruit begins to appear, and when the forces of the enemy begin to waver and retreat, the Christian's hope brightens, his strength is renewed, and songs of praise burst from his lips. If the heart of the merchant is

filled with joy when his speculations succeed ; if the heart of the sailor is glad when he beholds the harbour, after having battled with many a storm on his voyage home, surely the heart of the Christian ought to rejoice when there are any signs of the dawn of that glorious day when righteousness shall be established on the earth, and when the power of sin shall be entirely and forever destroyed.—*Anon.*

GIDEON.

I. EPITOME OF CHARACTER.

[17495] This was indeed a mighty man of valour, humble, and yet terrible ; full of endurance, and yet unable to stir without the Lord ; full of natural fears, and yet shrinking from nothing that the Lord commanded ; full of the sorrows of his people, refusing the kingdom for himself, while his very countenance marked him for a king ; ready for any deed of valour, and yet letting others take the glory of what he himself had done. There were faults in his character, undoubtedly, but, from the day he threshed wheat by the wine-press to the day he refused the kingdom, he is a man from whom much may be learned. Some of the bravest men that ever lived have stained their valour by vainglory and self-exaltation. Gideon saved Israel, and took nothing of theirs except to make what he thought would be a means of communion with Jehovah, the ephod, that became a snare to Israel and to Gideon and his house.—*Rev. C. Waller.*

[17496] He was a man who felt deeply the degradation of his people. He could not enjoy his own harvest while the Midianites were robbing all around ; he had the patriot's wide sympathy. He was a man, also, of the strongest common sense, accustomed to look through words to things, and to look the facts of life fair in the face. And, above all, he was a man of abundant personal valour, but yet unwilling to move a step until he was sure God was with him ; bold to risk anything, once he was convinced God would stand by him, but fearful to hazard a single life without this conviction. This was brought out by the singular test which Gideon audaciously proposed to God, laying out a fleece, and asking God to show His presence and His power by causing the fleece to be soaked with dew while the ground was dry, and dry when the ground was wet. This he did, not from cowardice, but because it was not his nature to risk anything ; he was a thoughtful man, who had difficulties other men had not.—*Rev. M. Dods, D.D.*

[17497] Gideon's character is well vindicated in the sign of the fleece—cool in the heat of all around, dry while all around were damped by fear. Throughout we see three great qualities,

decision, caution, and magnanimity.—*Dean Stanley.*

II. SPECIAL DISTINGUISHING TRAITS.

I. Excellences.

(1) *Faith and obedience.*

a. As exhibited in his request for signs of God's approval and support.

[17498] The very smoothness and prosperity of everything till now dismays and staggers him. He knows that however flattering appearances may be for the time, all will come to nothing unless God be with him. If he has the assurance of the Divine presence, he can go on boldly in spite of his mean opinion of himself ; but he cannot go on without it. He resorts, therefore, again to God ; and the history tells how by two simple but impressive signs he reached the certainty that he longed for. Both signs were miraculous. The latter was very strikingly so. That a fleece which naturally attracts dew should remain dry when the ground was wet, was so plainly supernatural that even Gideon, self-distrustful as he was, could no longer doubt that he was in the path of duty. We are apt to think, and we should think correctly, if we judged by the standard of our own day, that Gideon acted with great presumption in thus prescribing signs to God. But we must bear in mind that miracles were in some degree the appointed signs of that day. It is different now. With the Saviour has come the Spirit ; and with the Spirit has come, or should have come, the power of discerning spiritual things, and being guided by spiritual signs. Each age and each phase of the Church's work has its appropriate characteristics, and to seek at any period for the signs that are suited for it is not presumption ; it is faith.—*Rev. W. Miller.*

b. As exemplified in his tactics in the battle with the Midianites.

[17499] In his strict adherence to the course marked out by simple faith in the living God, though every party among his soldiers must have been offended and must have doubted him—in this lay what remained of Gideon's long-continued preparation. He had trusted in God in spite of the opposition of enemies and the indifference of all men. He had trusted in God in the face of overwhelming outward difficulty when supported by the sympathy of a gallant host. But the harder lesson was still to learn of trusting in God alone, in spite of the opposition of those who not only professed to be God's friends, but who had shown by courage displayed and sacrifice endured that they were His friends in unquestionable reality. The first step commanded was that Gideon should put in force the old rule that any one who was fearful or dismayed should have permission to retire. It was no light matter for a general, so well acquainted as Gideon with all the necessities of war, to issue a proclamation

that might denude him at the decisive moment of a large proportion of his strength. The man who could so set natural wisdom at defiance was certainly exercising, and so strengthening, his faith in the Unseen in a most striking way.—*Ibid.*

[17500] The dismay in the army must have been great when it was found that there was to be no attack, and that after a mere empty parade, as it would be deemed, into the plain, they were ordered back to their old position, as if the nearer sight of Midian had daunted all their courage. And the dismay must have deepened when it was found on their return that their general was ordering home all except the paltry three hundred that had not knelt to drink. Suspicions of his treachery, certainty of his folly, must have been rife on every hand. . . . He was not one who could easily set his face as a flint against misapprehension and abuse; and he knew well enough that not one of his countrymen would fully understand or sympathise with him in the step that God would have him take. He had to bear his burden all alone. Yet in spite of hindrances so great he obeyed—obeyed at once and without a murmur. So carefully had God trained His servant; so greatly had the servant profited by His training. The man who had shrunk back at first, overwhelmed by the bare idea of his undertaking such a duty, now stands alone amidst all obloquy, all suspicion, all temptation, all weakness—alone, with God only on his side, trusting in God and obeying Him right in the teeth of all the dictates of natural feeling and of ordinary worldly wisdom. If we take rightly into account the whole circumstances of the case and the whole character of the man, I question if the Old Testament can afford such an instance of the power of living faith as Gideon was showing at this moment when his preparation reached its climax.—*Ibid.*

(2) *Valour and heroism.*

a. He presents a noble example as the most heroic of the judges.

[17501] Helps says—"The heroic example of other days is in great part the source of the courage of each generation; and men walk up composedly to the most perilous enterprises, beckoned onward by the shades of the brave that were." Gideon is the most heroic of Israel's judges. He stands out sublime in ancient story; and the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews mentions his name as an illustration of the power of faith. His shade still walks the earth. He has beckoned men onward to heroic enterprises, and he has lessons for the men of the nineteenth century.—*Rev. W. Burrows.*

b. He displays the nature of true valour.

[17502] *Valour does not despise lowly but necessary occupations.* Gideon threshed wheat. He was ready to take the flail, or the stick, as well as the weapons of reform, or the sword of the warrior. Greatness is not shown by a neg-

lect of common necessary duties. Do the best thing is a rule of life for all. Those who fancy themselves too great to do lowly deeds must not expect to be called by angel voices to sublime deeds.—*Ibid.*

[17503] *Valour may have its misgivings.* "My family is poor in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house." A sense of smallness may be at the first crushing, but afterwards strengthening as it leads to take a firmer hold of the strength of the Omnipotent. Earth's greatness as well as heaven's have come from unlikely quarters. A crowd of names could be given as illustrations—Columbus, Molière, Homer, Hesiod, Demosthenes, Howard, De Foe, Wolsey, Cromwell, Whitefield, &c. Gideon was the least of a poor family. The greatest of Israel's kings and the sweetest of the world's minstrels came from the sheepfold.—*Ibid.*

[17504] *Valour may walk in the darkness of the Divine hidings.* "If the Lord be with us, why then is all this befallen us?" asked Gideon. So "many a poor soul is ready to say, If God had loved me He would never have let me fall into so gross and scandalous a sin, or He would never have afflicted me nor suffer me to be tempted as I have been."—*Goodwin.*

(3) *Prudence and forethought.*

[17505] It was in no degree personal fear that led to Gideon's breaking down the altar of Baal by night. There was no attempt at concealment. When men began to ask, "Who hath done this thing?" they were told at once: "Gideon the son of Joash hath done this thing." The motive simply was to avoid the disturbance, and perhaps the bloodshed, that would have attended the removal of the altar by day. The work could be best done by night, and therefore night was waited for. So it is always with men of Gideon's stamp, with men who have made up their mind fully to be God's servants. Firm as they are, because they depend on Almighty strength and not upon their own, they can afford to wait. They can afford to watch for and to use the opportunities that Providence affords. It is those who have some secret fear lest their resolution change, or who have no deep belief that the world and all that it contains is guided by the living God, who rush without consideration to put in hasty execution their ill-matured designs.—*Rev. W. Miller.*

(4) *Humility and self-distrust.*

[17506] Observe his answer to Him who spake to him: "O my Lord, if the Lord be with us, why is all this befallen us? and where be all His miracles which our fathers told us of, saying, Did not the Lord bring us up from Egypt? but now the Lord hath forsaken us, and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites." Gideon's first thoughts in this answer are for his people rather than himself. Many men would have taken the words addressed to him vaingloriously, as a compliment to themselves.

"The Lord is with *thee*, thou mighty man." Gideon replies, "O my Lord, if the Lord be with *us*, why," &c. He has no thought of setting himself above others. If the Lord is not with His people, how can He be with me? What am I, that I should be more under His protection than others?—*Rev. C. Waller*.

[17507] We gather that though Gideon called his family "poor in Manasseh," and himself "the least in his father's house," yet there was no immediate pressure upon them at this time. Still Gideon's mind was full of the distress of his people. We find traces of humility, unselfishness, and true patriotism in his character from the first. And the same character which appeared in this answer pervades all Gideon's work. He will do anything that God commands him, but he absolutely refuses to act for himself. Sign after sign he asks at each stage of his work until he has actually met the enemy. He will be sure that the Lord is with him at every turn. This is not cowardice; it is that true discretion which is the best part of valour—to attempt nothing without the Lord. But with the Lord Gideon will do anything.—*Ibid.*

[17508] This countryman is Gideon—the future deliverer and judge of Israel; and threshing is his humble task. Fired with ambition, it might have been natural for him to leave such obscure employments to others; and, panting to deliver his country and also distinguish himself, aim at something better suited to his talents and position. "What manner of men were they whom ye slew at Tabor?" was his question to the conquered and captive kings, Zebah and Zalmunna. "As thou art, so were they; each one resembled the children of a king," was their answer. Now this answer, though fatal to themselves (for their victims were Gideon's brethren), presents his case as one of those where the body seems to take form from the mind it lodges, and to reveal, by a certain nobleness of bearing and expression, the greatness of the soul within. Yet Gideon, though belonging, if we may judge from this, to the order of Nature's nobility, abandoned himself to no dreams of ambition; but was called of God from the quiet, diligent, and contented discharge of the humblest duties, to honours and usefulness he never dreamed of. If God should call him to a higher place, well; if not, also well.—*Anon.*

[17509] History offers many remarkable parallels; but none perhaps more remarkable than that between the self-distrust and diffidence of Moses and the self-distrust and diffidence of Gideon. In this they present a remarkable and instructive contrast to the ready confidence with which the disciples of our Lord—by nature very inferior men—responded to His call. It was from no aversion to the work that both Moses the leader, and Gideon the deliverer, of Israel shrunk from it; but from the very humble estimate they had

formed of their own powers. The disciples seem to have been troubled with no such scruples; but the contrary. Their mutual jealousies and unseemly strifes for precedence argued a self-sufficient spirit. So strong was this in Simon that swelling waves and roaring storm were not formidable enough to deter him from an attempt to rival his Master, and also walk upon the sea—in Thomas, that when Jesus by repairing to Bethany was to put his life in jeopardy, troubled with no misgivings, he said, "Let us go also and die with him"—in the whole band, that amid the dangers of that ever-memorable night in which our Lord was betrayed, they made professions heroic and brave as Peter's, declaring, "We will die with Thee rather than deny Thee."—*Ibid.*

[17510] All his fears sprang from no want of confidence in Jehovah, but from doubt whether Jehovah could possibly have chosen *him* to be the instrument of triumph. With the profound modesty and self-distrust that accompany the noblest kind of greatness, he was inclined to think humbly of himself, not only absolutely as in the sight of God, but even as compared with other men.—*Rev. W. Miller.*

(5) *Tact and self-command.*

[17511] We notice the admirable self-command and tact displayed in Gideon's answer to Ephraim. He is flushed with victory when Ephraim ventures to chide him thus, he has at his back his three hundred invincibles, he knows himself God's chosen chief: what would most men have done if sharply reprimanded in such circumstances? Probably not made the exquisitely skilful answer of this most sagacious of commanders: "What have I done now in comparison of you? Is not the *gleaning* of the grapes of Ephraim better than the vintage of *Abi-ezer*?" My household has no doubt cut the first-fruits, but what is our harvest in comparison with these rich clusters, the heads of Oreb and Zeeb, the princes of Midian which you have gleaned?" Then their anger was abated toward him when he had said that.—*Rev. M. Dods.*

(6) *Thoroughness and perseverance.*

[17512] Gideon's was no easy work in this battle. His limbs were weary running; his hand was weary slaying; and the way was long, and the sun high and hot, when he arrived with his three hundred followers, panting and exhausted, at Jordan's shore. To sit down? No. It had been sweet to lie on its green banks, and, lulled to sleep by the song of birds and murmur of the stream, rest under its cool shades awhile; but, bent on their purpose, they dashed right into the waters, and, stemming the flood, passed over, "he and the three hundred men, faint yet pursuing." "Faint, yet pursuing," be that our chosen motto. Till we are dead to sin, and sin is dead to us, be it our daily work to crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts; and while asking that the God of hope would give us all

joy and peace in believing, be the prayer we daily offer for ourselves that of St. Paul for his Thessalonian converts, "The very God of peace sanctify you wholly."—*Anon.*

[17513] Gideon's success is so far great, and though faint he can still pursue. God's past dealings are a pledge for the future. Ebenezer is a strengthening inscription. There is a sense in which the things that are behind ought not to be forgotten. The Church and the individual may be faint, but perseverance must be the motto remembering what God hath wrought. Gideon considers that things half done are not well done. No time is to be lost. The enemy must be pursued while the panic prevails. To leave off now would be to give an opportunity to the return in greater force and virulence, and the last state of Israel might thus be worse than the first. Half a victory is disastrous. The Church must pursue. To stand still is to let the enemy gain ground. The individual must pursue. Not to him that runs a little way, but to him that continues to the end is the prize given. The perseverance of the saints must be a practical article of belief.—*Rev. W. Burrows.*

(7) *Disinterestedness and self-denial.*

[17514] He stood on the pinnacle of glory. He exhibited as prisoners the two proudest monarchs of the East, and, according to the ideas of his time, completed his triumph over them by slaying them with his own hand in public. His countrymen were around him, not only freed but enriched by his success. For the wealth acquired by generations of wholesale plunder had been in the tents of Midian, and was now in the possession of their conquerors. And from first to last the glory was all his own. He was no mere victorious general who had brought to a successful issue a war in which his country had been long engaged. He was the sole originator and organizer of the war. For every step from its commencement to its unexampled close he deserved all the credit. He was at once the Wallace and the Bruce of his native land. And his very modesty in claiming so little for himself made his glory greater. None in that assembly would be more disposed to honour him than the chiefs of haughty Ephraim. In the first flush of their humbled pride they had needed little to make them fall on him. But his soft answer had turned their wrath away. Now, touched by his nobility and ashamed of their own petty arrogance, Ephraim was—I should think certainly—the very loudest in his praises. Vanquished by his generosity as much as Penuel and Succoth had been vanquished by his arms, Ephraim probably took the lead in the offer of kingly authority that was made to him. That offer was the climax of his natural glory. His rejection of it was the climax of his moral and spiritual glory.—*Rev. W. Miller.*

[17515] His motive was not any mere absence of ambition, still less any slothfulness indis-

posing him for kingly labours. Had he felt that duty called, he would certainly have assumed the kingly office, and, there is little doubt, would have assumed it gladly. But that he felt such assumption of royalty not to be his duty, and felt to some extent the reasons why it was not, appears from his reply: "I will not rule over you," said he; "neither shall my son rule over you. The Lord shall rule over you." Evidently the words are but the conclusion and the summary of a long and careful speech in which the reasons for refusal are set forth at large.—*Ibid.*

[17516] Gideon admits, as it were, that deliverance from the Midianites was a sufficient ground on which to appoint a king, only he denies that the credit was due to him. Jehovah had been their deliverer; therefore, on their own showing, Jehovah ought to be their king. He saw from the very way in which the proposal was made to him that Israel was not yet fit to be governed by a human king. He wished to make them see it; and it is well that we should see it too. Every precaution had been taken to make it plain that the victory had come from God. The summoning in the name of Jehovah, the miraculous signs, the disbanding of most of the army, the insignificant number of the original victors—all had been intended to make it plain that the deliverance was not of man, but direct from God. Yet the nation had so completely failed to learn this plainest of lessons that here they were giving all the praise to a mere instrument, as if God had had nothing to do with the affair at all. Such failure to understand the lesson made it plain enough that it required to be repeated.—*Ibid.*

2 Defects.

(1) *Despairing melancholy.*

[17517] When the angel appeared to Gideon by the oak at Ophrah, accosting him with these hopeful words, "The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valour," his answer expressed the deepest disappointment. Looking around him on the desolation of his country, and at that moment in terror lest the Midianites should appear before he had got his corn threshed and buried out of their sight, he returned this melancholy reply, "O my Lord, if the Lord be with us, why then is all this befallen us?—the Lord hath forsaken us, and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites."—*Anon.*

(2) *Blindness to present duty.*

[17518] Gideon, filled with a sense of his people's wrongs, had been impatient that God did not manifest Himself in some striking deliverance; but how could God come to a people who were unprepared to receive Him? His path was choked with the people's idolatry. Gideon was waiting for God to work, and beginning to speak somewhat bitterly of God's indifference, whereas the delay was altogether caused by Gideon's own household. God was waiting for him to work. God could not come

among them while they were all turned away from Him to Baal. No sooner had Gideon hewed down the altar of Baal than he received his commission against Midian.—*Rev. M. Dods.*

[17519] Gideon was wrong in not seeing what it was that prevented God from being present with His people. He was right in arguing, What God was, He is ; why then does He not do for us what He did for our fathers ? He was right in debating with himself, and asking : Is this what it means to be God's people ? What is the use of living at this price ? But he was wrong in thinking that the fault lay with God, and not with himself ; wrong in not seeing his very obvious duty, which, until he performed, God could not be expected to work for Israel. Just so we are right in refusing to accept a religion which makes no practical difference upon us ; right in impatiently throwing aside the mere traditional assurances whereby men soothe the sinners and promise them deliverance ; right in looking straight at the facts of our own experience, and testing religion by its power on ourselves ; but we often add to this the mistake of Gideon, and fall out with God for not interfering more powerfully in our behalf, when it is we ourselves who are preventing Him from interfering. You wait for God to do something while He is waiting for you.—*Ibid.*

(3) *Impatience.*

[17520] Gideon grew impatient at the people's dulness, and at the slowness of the evolution of the scheme of Providence. He had done much to make Israel feel the nearness of the God whom he trusted in and loved so fervently. Might he not now take a further and more influential step ? Might not means be devised by which this wonderful deliverance could be effectually commemorated, and coming generations be made really to feel that it was Jehovah alone that had delivered or that could deliver ? Thus he would help on God's plan by his own shrewd contrivance. With this object he took advantage of the enthusiasm that prevailed—an enthusiasm of admiration for himself that was only heightened by his refusal of the crown, unwelcome though that refusal was. He asked for a certain portion of the spoil, and it was placed at once at his disposal. With this we are told that he made an ephod and placed it in his own city, Ophrah. An ephod was a mere priestly garment, and the sum mentioned is far too large to have been expended on that alone. It seems that some special religious celebration was instituted, the centre point of which was an ephod of unusual value. The ephod and its accompanying ceremonies, of whatever kind they were, grew in course of time into a centre of spiritual evil, which corrupted in some degree the whole of Israel, and especially Gideon and his house themselves. So it has always been with everything, however well intended and however skilfully contrived, that is not according to the plan of God. Better far to wait on that and to bear a humble part in it, than by

making haste to be rich even in spiritual things to fall into the wiles of the devil. Gideon thought to hasten the evolution of God's purposes, and he only held it back.—*Rev. W. Miller.*

[17521] His natural fondness for devices, and his skill in shrewd contrivance, kept in check till now, and made useful by his living faith and strict obedience, had led him at last astray. Forming plans of his own without being in direct communion with the God who had guided him till now, he failed to meet the wants of his time ; nay, he pandered to its most dangerous vices. That happened here which happens so continually in the Church's tangled story. Excessive reverence for the past was made a substitute for walking with the personal God in the living present.—*Ibid.*

III. LESSONS FROM HIS LIFE.

1 It teaches that work for God should be done in a way that will bring honour to God.

The "soft answer turneth away wrath," where a violent reply might cause "the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme."

[17522] As Gideon answered the men of Ephraim, so let us answer any who may find fault with our way of managing God's work : let us answer in good temper and self-command ; let us give those who find fault their due, and point them to the rich gleanings that remain to be gathered ; let us, like Gideon, beware of allowing some good work we are engaged in to become the occasion of introducing wrangling, envy, and unseemly discord among God's people, who ought to be bound together against the common foe.—*Rev. M. Dods.*

2 It teaches that thorough work should be made of what belongs to deliverance from the powers opposed to God.

[17523] In closing the account of what God did for him, and through him for his people, the historian says, "Thus was Midian subdued before the children of Israel, so that they lifted up their heads no more." And how was this accomplished ? The remarkable victory God wrought for Gideon, without any effort on his part, may be regarded as a type of that greater, better victory which, without any effort on ours, God's Son wrought for us, when He took our nature and our sins upon Him—dying, the just for the unjust, that we might be saved. Gideon followed up this victory by calling all possible resources to his aid. He summoned the whole country to arms, as, accompanied by his famous three hundred men, he hung on the skirts of the broken host, and with sword bathed in their blood cut down the fugitives. So by resolute self-denial, by constant watchfulness, by earnest prayer, by the diligent use of every means of grace, and above all by the help of the Holy Spirit, we are to labour to cast sin out of our hearts—crucifying it, killing it, thrusting it

through and through with the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, till its power is broken, and there is no more life in it, and it becomes hideous and hateful as a rotting corpse; and it can be said of the sins that were once our cruel masters and oppressors, *They lift up their heads no more.*—*Anon.*

3 It teaches that God's rewards are not for the idle and the careless.

[17524] Gideon's was no easy work. And heaven is not to be reached by easy-going people. Like a beleaguered city, where men scale the walls and swarm in at the deadly breach, the violent take it by force. The rest it offers is for the weary. The crowns it confers are for warriors' brows. Its rewards are bestowed on such as, cutting off a right hand or plucking out a right eye to cast it away, deem it profitable that one of their members should perish, than that their whole body should be cast into hell.—*Ibid.*

4 It teaches that "in due season we shall reap if we faint not."

[17525] No doubt you may often feel spent and exhausted like Gideon's men. Indeed, the words in which he reported the condition of his troops have become one of the favourite mottoes of the Christian life, "Faint, yet pursuing." The motive, the impelling power seems to have died down, and to have left you becalmed. The good works you have engaged in become utterly distasteful. The high tone you have been endeavouring to maintain in your spirits, you sink from with weariness and loathing. You ask, Why am I to be always fighting other people's battles? "putting right the numberless things wrong among them, supplying their deficiencies and necessities, doing for them what they ought to do for themselves, and apparently little good resulting after all?" It is so weary to go through, day after day, the same resolutions, the same efforts, the same failures, the same repentances. Faint we all of us must often be who are striving with any earnestness against sin, and who are concerned for the numberless varieties of distress exhibited by our fellow-men. Faintness is the lot of all who undertake laborious and difficult tasks. But while we experience the one sensation of Gideon's men, let us endeavour to imitate them in the other part of their experience. Faint, let us still be pursuing; keeping the enemy in sight; not yielding to our natural love of ease, nor wearying of the perpetual labour; but remembering our duty, that these wearisome conflicts and efforts ought to be gone through, and must be gone through, if we are to be and do what we ought; remembering how our Lord endured the contradiction of sinners, and resisted unto blood, striving against sin; and remembering the promises of God, which assure us that in due time we shall reap, if we faint not—that every effort, every sincere renewal of our labour, is seed sown, which may for the time

seem to have gone for nothing, but which is certainly not lost, but only hidden, to spring up and reward us with the only harvest worthy of a human life.—*Rev. M. Doas.*

ABIMELECH.

I. THE CONTRAST PRESENTED BY HIM TO HIS FATHER.

[17526] Gideon, who kept Midian and all other enemies in awe for forty years, was now dead. Who is to be judge? Who is to rule? Who is to be the head of Israel? He has left seventy sons; but there is one at Shechem, called Abimelech, whose name suggests something of royalty, for it means, "My father is king." The name may have had some reference to the time when Gideon was offered the kingdom, and nobly declined it (Judg. viii. 22, 23); for as yet there was no king in Israel. Abimelech resolves to be king.—*Christian Treasury.*

[17527] Gideon the Great being offered a crown refused it; Abimelech the Little not only solicited it unasked, but dared to "wade through slaughter to a throne."—*M. J.*

II. HIS ARGUMENTUM AD HOMINEM.

1 Its well-chosen nature.

[17528] His manner of winning the men of Shechem to his purpose is remarkable. We find in Judges ix. 1-3, that he knew man's nature well, and what chords to touch. He persuades them thus: "Your circumstances require a ruler, a king. Your old foes exist still, and others will soon be on the field; you must have a head. Without a defender your quiet valley would soon be a scene of desolation, and none could draw water at Jacob's well in peace. You could never think of having seventy rulers, the sons of Gideon; that would distract and cause petty jealousies without end; you must have one, and one fit for the office. Now, my sympathies are all with you. A son of great Gideon, as well as the seventy, I am one whose mother is one of yourselves. Who so likely as I to care for your interests? 'Remember, I am your bone and your flesh.'"—*Christian Treasury.*

2 Its success.

[17529] His argument prevailed. He had judged human nature right. The men of Shechem said one to another, "He is our brother!" They at once felt that he must have interest in them—he is their "bone and flesh." They felt as Judah did regarding Joseph (Gen. xxxvii. 27); or Laban (Gen. xxix. 14); or the men of Judah (2 Sam. v. 1); or David (2 Sam. xix. 13). *We feel for him*, as well as *he for us.*—*Ibid.*

III. HOMILETICAL HINTS.

His argument respecting the claims of brotherhood spiritualised and applied to Christ.

[17530] Our human nature is appealed to by Him who “knows our frame.” He solicits us by this argument. We are in need of a ruler. No creature can do without a head. We must have a head to whom we look, and from whom we receive; in whom we confide; from whom we get counsel; who can and does feel as well as think for us. And who so fit as God-man? who so entirely fit as God manifest in the flesh? “He is our brother.” He cannot but feel interest in earth, for His body is of earth. The story of His brotherhood cannot but affect us. Shall not the Son of the King of kings, Himself God of gods, who stooped to put on our humanity out of love for us—shall not He prevail? “He is our brother.” He became incarnate because He would be our brother (Heb. ii. 14). He wished to be able to say, and to enable us to say, “He is our bone and our flesh.”—*Ibid.*

JOTHAM.

I. HIS MAGNANIMOUS CHARACTER.

[17531] Jotham, the youngest son of Gideon, who, by a special providence, escaped the common ruin of his family, dealt plainly with the Shechemites; and his speech shows him to be a man of such great ingenuity and wisdom, and really such an accomplished gentleman, that we cannot but the more lament the fall of Gideon’s sons. Jotham did not go about to raise an army out of the cities of Israel, in which, one would think, he might have made a good interest for his father’s sake, to avenge his brethren’s death, much less to set himself up in competition with Abimelech, so groundless was the usurper’s suggestion that the sons of Gideon aimed at dominion; but he contents himself with giving a faithful reproof to the Shechemites and fair warning of the fatal consequences.—*Matthew Henry.*

II. FORCE OF HIS PARABLE.

[17532] His parable is very ingenious, that when the trees were disposed to choose a king, the government was offered to those valuable, noble trees—the olive, the fig-tree, and the vine; but they refused it, choosing rather to serve than rule, to do good than to bear sway. But the same tender being made to the bramble, he accepted it, and talked big upon it. . . . He hereby applauds the generous modesty of Gideon, and the other judges who were before him, and perhaps of the sons of Gideon who had declined accepting the state and power of kings when they might have had it. . . . 1. There was no occasion at all for the trees to choose a king; they are all the trees of the Lord which He has

planted (Psa. civ. 6), and which, therefore, He will protect. Nor was there any occasion for Israel to talk of setting a king over them, for the Lord was their King. 2. When they had it in their thoughts to choose a king, they did not offer the government to the stately cedar, or the lofty pine, which are only for show and shade, and not otherwise useful till they are cut down, but to the fruit trees the vine and the olive. Those that bear fruit for the public good are justly respected and honoured by all that are wise more than they that affect to make a figure. For a good, useful man some would even dare to die.—*Ibid.*

[17533] In the reason which all these fruit trees gave for their refusal, it is intimated, *first*, that government involves a man in a great deal both of toil and care; he that is promoted over the trees must go up and down for them, and make himself a perfect drudge to business. *Secondly*, that those who are preferred to places of public trust and power must resolve to forego all their private interests and advantages, and sacrifice them to the good of the community. The fig-tree must lose its sweetness, its sweet retirement, sweet repose, and sweet conversation and contemplation, if it go to be promoted over the trees, and must undergo a constant fatigue. *Thirdly*, that those who are advanced to honour and dignity are in great danger of losing their fatness and fruitfulness. Preferment is apt to make men proud, slothful, and that spoils their usefulness, wherewith in a lower sphere they honoured God and man; for which reason they that desire to do good are afraid of being too great.—*Ibid.*

[17534] He hereby exposes the ridiculous ambition of Abimelech, whom he compares to the bramble or thistle. . . . The bramble, a worthless plant, not to be numbered among the trees, useless and fruitless, nay, hurtful and vexatious, scratching and tearing, and doing mischief, it began with the curse, and its end is to be burned. Such an one was Abimelech, and yet chosen to the government by the trees, by all the trees. Let us not think it strange if we see folly set in great dignity (Eccles. x. 6), and the vilest men exalted (Psa. xii. 8), and men blind to their own interest in the choice of their guides. The bramble being chosen to the government, he takes no time to consider whether he should accept it or not; but presently, as if he had been born and bred to dominion, hectors and assures them that they should find him as he found them. . . . A goodly shadow to trust in! How unlike to the “shadow of a great rock in a weary land,” which a good magistrate is compared to (Isa. xxxii. 2). Come trust in his shadow! More likely to be scratched if they came near him. Thus men boast of a false gift. Yet he threatens with as much confidence as he promiseth. “If ye be not faithful, let fire come out of the bramble;” a very unlikely thing to spit fire, and devour the cedars of Lebanon; more likely to catch fire, and be itself devoured.—*Ibid.*

JEPHTHAH.

I. HIS GENERAL CHARACTER.

[17535] The various incidents of Jephthah's life give ample proof that want of discretion was with him rather the exception than the rule, and that he generally displayed great prudence combined with no small degree of judgment. This is especially observable in his embassy to the king of Ammon, where firmness and temper, sound arguments and fair dealings, are conspicuous features.—*I. L. Moccatta.*

II. HIS RASH VOW.

1 It was characteristic of the age and of the man.

[17536] The fatal vow at the battle of Aroer belongs naturally to the spasmodic efforts of the age; like the vows of Samson or Saul in the Jewish Church of this period, or of Clovis or Bruno in the middle ages. But its literal execution could hardly have taken place had it been undertaken by any one more under the moral restraints, even of that lawless age, than the freebooter Jephthah, nor in any other part of the Holy Land than that separated by the Jordan valley from the more regular institutions of the country. Moab and Ammon, the neighbouring tribes to Jephthah's native country, were the parts of Palestine where human sacrifice lingered longest. It was the first thought of Balak in the extremity of his terror (Micah vi. 7); it was the last expedient of Balak's successor in the war with Jehoshaphat (2 Kings iii. 27). Moloch, to whom even before they entered Palestine the Israelites had offered human sacrifices (Ezek. xx. 26), and who is always spoken of as the deity who was thus honoured, was especially the God of Ammon. It is but natural that a desperate soldier like Jephthah, breathing the same atmosphere, physical and social, should make the same vow, and, having made it, adhere to it. There was no high priest or prophet at hand to rebuke it. They were far away in the hostile tribe of Ephraim. He did what was right in his own eyes, and as such the transaction is described.—*Dean Stanley.*

[17537] Jephthah's sin was a sin of ignorance. He lived in a time of great religious degeneracy. The priesthood was powerless for good, and the people had become familiar with the gods of Moab and Ammon, who were worshipped with human sacrifices. He was separated by the misfortune of his birth from the congregation of the Lord, and had been driven from his own home, living amid scenes of plunder and bloodshed. Much charitable allowance must be made for such a man, and for the strong but mistaken sense of right, which led him, after having made a rash vow, to consider it his terrible duty to perform it.—*Luke H. Wiseman.*

2 It was inspired by no low motive.

[17538] He knew enough of war to understand that the undertaking he had entered into against the Ammonites would either make or mar him. It was the golden opportunity that comes once in a man's life. Through all his nature he was moved in prospect of the approaching battle. It made him thoughtful, concentrated, grave. He felt more than usually thrown back upon God's help; he wished to feel sure of God, and so, according to his light, vowed his vow.—*Rev. M. Dods, D.D.*

[17539] Though not positively unlawful, the vow betrayed reminders of doubt and weakness of faith. Though the Spirit had come on him, whose presence might have sufficed to assure him of victory without bargain on his part, he suffered the flesh to suggest the thought, that by promising some great sacrifice to God he could ensure it.—*A. Fausset.*

3 It was redeemed from the charge of being a gross human sacrifice by the filial obedience and love which it evoked.

[17540] The sacrifice of Jephthah's daughter, taking it at its worst, was not a human sacrifice in the gross sense of the word—not a slaughter of an unwilling victim, as when the Gaul and Greek were buried alive in the Roman Forum, but the willing offering of a devoted heart, to free, as she supposed, her father and her country from a terrible obligation. It was indeed, as Josephus says, an act in itself hateful to God. But, nevertheless, it contained just that one redeeming feature of pure obedience and love, which is the distinguishing mark of all true sacrifice, and which communicates to the whole story the elements of tenderness and nobleness.—*Dean Stanley.*

III. QUESTION AS TO THE MORALITY OF HIS VOW.

[17541] Was it right of Jephthah to make a vow? We know he was wrong in the terms of it, but was he wrong in making any vow in the circumstances? It is open to any one to say that he had a merely heathen idea of God, as a Being to be bribed, to be secured by gifts and promises. It was very common with heathen generals to record such a vow before engaging; and it is common still to see men who wish to acknowledge God in some way, but don't know how to do it. They wish to be religious, think it a good and right thing, but neither knowing nor loving God, they are pitifully awkward in their demonstrations of religious feeling. But as we have no distinct evidence regarding Jephthah's state of mind in making this vow, it is the part of charity to believe that though he was incomprehensibly rash in the terms of his vow, yet he was justified in vowing to make some offering to God should He deliver the Ammonites into his hand.—*Rev. M. Dods, D.D.*

IV. QUESTION AS TO THE OBLIGATION OF HIS VOW'S FULFILMENT.

[17542] Supposing Jephthah to have been right in making his vow, was he right in keeping it? Might he or might he not have broken his promise to God when he saw what it had involved him in? Some persons seem to confound a promise made to God and a promise to man, and to apply to the one the same rule as to the other. They argue that as you cannot break a promise to man, even though you find you have sworn to your own hurt, so neither can you break a vow made to God. Luther, *e.g.*, has been freely blamed on this ground for breaking his monastic vow and marrying. But the distinction between a promise to man and a vow to God is sufficiently obvious. When you have made a promise or entered into an engagement or contract with a man, and it turns out to be to your disadvantage to keep it, it may still be to the other party's advantage, and you are not entitled to defraud him of his interest in the transaction. However much you dislike fulfilling the agreement, you cannot break faith with him, unless it is positively sinful to fulfil it. But the case often happens that both parties to a contract eventually see it to be wise to fall from it; and when both parties honestly and heartily wish it cancelled, to fulfil it ceases to be a duty. Now this is precisely the case in which a man finds himself who has vowed to God what turns out to be sinful, for God can never wish him to fulfil a contract which, he now sees, involves sin. A man swears to do a certain thing because he thinks it will be pleasing to God, but if he discovers that, instead of being pleasing, it will be hateful to God to perform his vow, to do that vowed but hateful thing, is to insult God. By the very discovery of the sinfulness of a vow, the maker of it is absolved from performing it. God shrinks much more than he can do from the perpetration of sin. Both parties fall from the agreement.—*Ibid.*

[17543] To keep a vow to God merely as we would keep a human contract, even though we regret it and reproach ourselves with making it; to deal with Him as Jephthah did when he promised to sacrifice the first living thing that met him on his return home; to treat Him as a Being who expects us to keep our bargains literally, even when we recognize that such bargains were rash and evil, is to think of God as a heathen deity, who lives outside us, and neither knows nor cares what judgment we pass upon ourselves for having made such a bargain; whereas He is really at the very centre of the thought which condemns the bargain, and it is His Spirit, not our own, which tells us it was rash and wrong.—*Spectator.*

V. QUESTION AS TO THE MANNER OF HIS VOW'S OESERVANCE.

[17544] It has often been urged that Jephthah did *not* keep his vow, but compromised the

matter by causing her to take a vow of virginity—to become a nun, in fact. In a question thus debated one can, of course, only give his own opinion, but this supposition does seem to me to sacrifice the plain and obvious interpretation of the narrative. It is distinctly said that Jephthah's vow ran in these terms: "Whatsoever cometh forth of the doors of my house to meet me shall surely be the Lord's, and I will offer it up for a burnt offering." In Judges xi. 39 we are as plainly informed that her father did with her according to the vow which he had vowed. If he did not offer her as a burnt offering, then he did not do with her according to the vow. Moreover, why all this wailing and anguish if, after all, all that was going to happen to her is what happens to thousands who seem to stand in little need of compassion? Then, again, why did she ask for the one favour of a respite of two months to bewail her virginity, if she was to have thirty or forty years with leisure for that purpose? And, lastly, if the mere fact of her remaining unmarried fulfilled even that part of the vow which specified that she was to be the Lord's, then what objection can we make to other young women giving themselves to the Lord in the same way? If Jephthah's daughter became a nun, and if this was judged a fulfilment of his vow, if by being a virgin she was somehow more the Lord's than by being a married woman, a stronger foundation need not be sought for the establishment of nunneries.—*Rev. M. Dods, D.D.*

[No doubt persons driven to desperation to find in Holy Writ any countenance given to the system of nunneries in their objectionable features were led to adopt the non-natural interpretation of Jephthah's manner of fulfilling his rash vow. The age, on account of its semi-barbarous character, would feel no shock at this terrible deed of their warrior judge.]

VI. MORAL SUGGESTED BY HIS VOW.

Beware of bargaining with God.

[17545] Perhaps it has been your lot to hear the grossly selfish promises some sick men make, fancying this to be religion; their greedy lust of the world and life prompts them to promise God anything if only they get well, and they think this a good state of spirit. And there are more subtle and disguised ways in which the same superstitious vowing goes on. Have you never found yourself seeking success in something, and endeavouring to get God on your side to secure it by the unworded tacit promise to live better? You feel encouraged to hope for God's help, because you will conform your life more to His will—as if you could live better without getting God's help for this also; as if everything with which you propose to coax or bribe God into aiding you must not itself be taken from God's own treasury.—*Ibid.*

[17546] Our vows ought not to be in order to purchase God's favour, but to testify our gratitude.—*A. R. Fausset.*

SAMSON.

I. HIS COMPLEX CHARACTER.

Its contrasts and contradictions.

[17547] Samson, when strong and brave, strangled a lion, but he could not strangle his own loves. He burst the fetters of his foes, but not the cords of his own lusts. He burned up the crops of others, and lost the fruit of his own valour when burning with the flame enkindled by a single woman.—*Ambrose.*

[17548] Ushered into the world by an angelic herald, we expect that he will inaugurate some great movement, or accomplish some glorious reformation. But he inspired no enthusiasm, secured no confidence, organized no army, wrought no great deliverance, and he failed in all these things, not because he lacked ability, but because that ability was neutralized by sin. He is a signal instance of a man who, with the finest opportunities and the fairest prospects, mars both by his own folly and sin. Physical vigour is of little value without moral firmness. Samson could slay a thousand Philistines with no other weapon than the jawbone of an ass, but he could not slay his own lusts, and so at length we find him a poor blind slave, whose very strength was turned to account by his oppressors, as they set him to grind for their advantage, and wrestle for their sport. But with all his sinfulness we must not forget his penitence, or fail to note the pity of God for him, when, with earnest entreaty, he sought the Divine favour; for, as we read the record, we feel sure that he obtained at last acceptance with God, and this impression is confirmed by the fact that his name is introduced by the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews into the catalogue of the elders who “by faith obtained a good report.” Hence we may conclude that at length he sought the Lord, and we may regard his death, not as the suicide of a despairing sinner, but as the self-sacrifice of one who was willing to devote himself for the welfare of his country and the glory of his God. On the whole, therefore, we ascribe it to his faith in God that he did so much, while we trace it to the feebleness of that faith that he did no more. Had he been as powerful spiritually as he was physically, his life would have been one of the grandest in the annals of humanity; but as it was, a man outwardly weaker, but possessed of firmness of character, would have accomplished more than he effected.—*Rev. E. Chaplin.*

[17549] Samson was a strange compound of good and bad, and, in some respects, he is a complete enigma. He was certainly commissioned by the Almighty to be a deliverer and judge for His people, and he accomplished very much for their good. Possessing a vigorous and powerful mind, he showed wonderful determination of purpose, and yet he manifests, at

the same time, all the simplicity of a child. He was not the first person of large mental endowments who has become a slave to inferior influences, and it is pitiable to see him bowing his haughty head in degrading subjection to his intriguing wife.—*Rev. J. Norton, D.D.*

[17550] Samson was a judge in Israel for twenty years, and was less than forty when he perished by a sort of self-martyrdom amidst the ruins of the temple of Dagon. In the life of Samson we have both an example and a beacon. He lived, laboured, and suffered as a public servant of God; he was candid, generous, and noble-hearted, and, in these respects, he may well be regarded as a pattern. The same man, however, who possessed these excellent qualities, and who was really distinguished for the services rendered to his country, was also the victim of sensual passions, and his history is deformed by many unfortunate blemishes. For this reason he must also be held up as a warning. His irreligious marriage, which was the cause of so much of his wretchedness, gives point to the apostle’s warning, “Be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers” (2 Cor. vi. 14).—*Ibid.*

[17551] In Samson we have the spectacle of a man in whom faith was mighty, but who, nevertheless, failed to subdue his own passions, and to keep his body under subjection. We see in him a living illustration of the warning of our Lord, that it is possible to cast out devils and to do many wonderful works in His name, and yet be strangers to His love.—*L. Wiseman.*

[17552] The story of Samson is a sunny page, but it has a dark ending. The glorious twenty years which ensued closed in the awful gloom of a terrible and ignominious fall. Terribly and ignominiously as he fell, he did not fall unwarned. The young lion which roared against him in the vineyards of Timnath he had rent in the mighty power of God, and the strong passion of his lower nature, like a wild beast of sin crouching at the door of his heart, might have been, like that, vanquished and made the minister of blessing and refreshment in days to come. But the strong man who slew the lion could not overcome self.—*Sunday Musings.*

II. HIS RULING SPIRIT.

[17553] His name, Samson, refers not to his strength, but to his temper. It means “Sunny.” This was what the people saw in him—an inexhaustible joyousness of disposition that buoyed him up in danger and difficulty, and made him seem to the down-trodden people, whose future was clouded and gloomy, as the sun rising upon and cheering them. This joyousness comes out in the lightheartedness with which he fights against countless odds; in his taste for witty sayings and riddles; and in the gigantic practical jokes he perpetrated in carrying off the gates of Gaza, and in tying the foxes tail to tail,

and sending them through the standing corn with burning brands. Nothing could have been better calculated to reanimate Israel, when oppressed by the Philistines, than a spirit like this which could treat them with such contempt. And in sending this judge to Israel God meant the people to admire and catch His spirit; He meant them to see that He expects His people to be "sunny," to overflow with health and vivacity even under protracted misfortune and strife. And this God produced in them, not by giving His Spirit, as a spirit of joy and vigour, to all, but to one man only.—*Rev. M. Dods, D.D.*

[17554] He was full of the spirits and the pranks, no less than of the strength, of a giant. His name, which Josephus interprets in the sense of "strong," was still more characteristic. He was the "Sunny"—the bright and beaming, though wayward likeness of the great luminary which the Hebrews delighted to compare to a "giant rejoicing to run his course," "a bridegroom coming forth out of his chamber." Nothing can disturb his radiant good-humour. His most valiant, his most cruel actions, are done with a smile on his face, and a jest in his mouth. It relieves his character from the sternness of Phœnician fanaticism. As a peal of hearty laughter breaks in upon the despondency of individual sorrow, so the joviality of Samson becomes a pledge of the revival of the greatness of his nation. It is brought out in the strongest contrast with the brute coarseness and stupidity of his Philistine enemies, here, as throughout the sacred history, the butt of Israelitish wit and Israelitish craft.—*Dean Stanley.*

[17555] Looking at his successive acts in the light of his ruling spirit they assume a fresh significance. Out of his first achievement he draws the materials for his playful riddle. His second and third achievements are practical jests on the largest scale. The mischievousness of the conflagration of the cornfields, by means of the jackals, is subordinate to the ludicrous aspect of the adventure, as, from the hill of Zorah, the contriver of the scheme watched the streams of fire spreading through cornfields and orchards in the plain below. The whole point of the massacre of the thousand Philistines lies in the cleverness with which their clumsy triumph is suddenly turned into discomfiture, and their discomfiture is celebrated by the punning turn of the hero, not forgotten even in the exaltation or the weariness of victory: "With the jawbone of an *ass* have I slain one *mass*, two *masses*; with the jawbone of an *ass* I have slain an *or*-load of men." The carrying off the gates of Gaza derives all its force from the neatness with which the Philistine watchmen are outdone, on the very spot where they thought themselves secure. The answers with which he puts off the inquisitiveness of Delilah derive their vivacity from the quaintness of the devices which he suggests, and the ease with which his foolish enemies fall into trap after trap as if only to give their conqueror amusement.—*Ibid.*

[17556] The closing scenes of his life breathe throughout the same terrible, yet grotesque, irony. When the captive warrior is called forth, in the merriment of his persecutors, to exercise for the last time the well-known raillery of his character he appears as the great jester or buffoon of the nation; the word employed expresses alike the roars of laughter and the wild gambols by which he "made them sport;" and as he puts forth the last energy of his vengeance, it is in a stroke of broad and savage Lumour that his indignant spirit passes away. "O Lord Jehovah, remember me now; and strengthen me now, only this once, O God, that I may be avenged of the Philistines" [not for both of my lost eyes, but] "for *one* of my two eyes." That grim playfulness, strong in death, lends its paradox even to the act of destruction itself, and overflows into the touch of triumphant satire, with which the pleased historian closes his story. "The dead which he slew at his death were more than they which he slew in his life."—*Ibid.*

III. HIS RADICAL DEFECT.

[17557] There was in Samson one great defect that left him exposed to all his special temptations—his lack of any devout regard for his Divine endowment. He must have known of its miraculous character. He should have felt an awe of God's indwelling might. He should have felt an awe even of that man, promised of Jehovah, whom he found himself to be. Yet at every step he was himself traitor to his Divine commission.—*Rev. H. Gause.*

[17558] Sometimes he rose up to a just apprehension of his glorious mission. But—and here we come upon the great lesson of his history—he did not keep that sense of his calling, and those godly desires for its fulfilment, habitually in view. Instead of ruling his dispositions he gave way to them. He brought himself under the condemnation of sad unfaithfulness, as well as inflicted the most serious injuries on his own spirit, by his desultory, self-indulgent, and often infamous pursuits. How fearful the retribution which came upon him is known to every reader of the Bible. It was an example and illustration of a law of heaven, which, in some form or other, will surely take effect in every unfaithful man's experience.—*Rev. G. Drew.*

IV. THE SECRET OF HIS STRENGTH.

I It did not lie in the mere possession of a powerful bodily frame.

[17559] What was it that constituted Samson's strength? And in answer to this. Samson's life says: First of all, his strength was not the natural physical strength that accompanies a powerful frame and well-developed muscle. It was not this, because it vanished when his hair was cut off, and grew again with his hair. That his strength was, strictly speaking, supernatural, you would conclude also from the manifestations of it, which were not merely ex-

traordinary, but superhuman. But the fact that it disappeared when he lost his hair, which has no such natural connection with a man's strength that in other cases a similar result follows, this is the final proof that his strength was supernatural. Probably he had a powerful frame by nature, just as a powerful engine needs a substantial frame, but this frame was not his strength.—*Rev. M. Dods, D.D.*

2 It did not consist in the choice, or skillful use, of effective weapons.

[17560] His strength or success did not consist in his skill in the use of his weapons, or choice of the most effective weapons. On the contrary, the greatest slaughter he ever made with a weapon was when he flew upon the well-armed Philistines with the jawbone of an ass he had hastily picked up. This struck Samson himself so much, that he called the scene of the achievement "Lehi," or *the Jawbone*, and composed a witty epigram on the subject, the point of which, however, is lost in our translation.—*Ibid.*

3 It was closely connected with, and indeed wholly depended upon, his fidelity to God.

[17561] The grand idea of Samson's life is that his strength abode with him so long as he was faithful to his Nazarite vow, and departed as soon as, for the sake of a fleshly lust, he tampered with that vow, and put himself into the power of Delilah and the enemies of the God of Israel.

[17562] Before his birth he was consecrated to God: his parents dedicated him to the work God meant him to do upon earth, and he himself accepted the vows they had made for him. With some right feeling of the sanctity of the call of God he had listened to it, and allowed his hair to grow as the visible pledge that he was under vow to God. When a Nazarite cut his hair it was understood that his vow was at an end, and that he no longer was God's servant. This Samson would never have done with his own hand: but, overcome by sensual indulgence, and giving way to the solicitation of a harlot, whom he knew to be also in league with his enemies, and a traitress, he recklessly put himself into her hands. Had she cut off his hair without any connivance of his own, this would, of course, have wrought no alteration in his spiritual state, nor any diminution of his strength. But the loss of his hair being due to his own recklessness, to his almost deliberate sale of God's favour for this harlot's endearments, to his want of zeal or even of ordinary prudence in guarding the Divine gift—for he knew he was in danger, and at first scrupled to tell her his secret—the loss of his hair thus representing a loss of spiritual life, a loss of a fit apprehension of the sacredness of his person as one vowed to God—was immediately followed by loss of strength. It was a simple struggle of flesh and spirit, and flesh won, and the spirit left the field to the conqueror.—*Rev. M. Dods, D.D.*

V. HIS FALL.

1 It was marked by the pathos of self-deception.

[17563] Especially touching is it to read that when he awoke on Delilah's lap he said, "I will go out, as at other times, and shake myself. And he wist not that the Lord was departed from him." The Spirit had been wont to come upon him in gusts, impelling him as in a kind of frenzy, and he thought he could now be the same—thought he could shake off this unwonted lassitude he felt, and imitate the mighty inspiration of the Spirit of God. In every previous case, when occasion had presented itself to attack the Philistines, and when his own spirit urged him to battle, it was because "the Spirit of the Lord had come mightily upon him." He expected the same backing now. He did not know the extent of the damage; he wist not that the Lord was departed from him.—*Ibid.*

2 It was not sudden, but the natural issue of a gradual decline.

[17564] Such falls as that of Samson sound like some sudden catastrophe, which comes upon the victim of it unawares, with swift, unwarning violence. But the truth is, that little by little the subtle enemy was making headway against the soul. The few verses which tell us of the fearful ascendancy which Delilah gained over Samson, clearly show that, not all at once, but by insidious arts, patiently practised, half playfulness, half petulance, combined with undivided treachery, she worked cautiously and untiringly towards the hideous end. Again and again the witching eyes of that Philistine woman drew the son of Manoah down to the fair luxuries of her flowery valley, and every time the charm grew stronger, and the terrible end more sure. The single act of sin, like the solitary seed, unfolds itself in ever-branching stems of wickedness, which tyrannize over the soul, and terrify the drowsy conscience into silence:

"Sow an act, reap a habit;
Sow a habit, reap a character;
Sow a character, reap a destiny."
—*Sunday Musings.*

3 It was not irremediable.

[17565] Observe how God returned to Samson, and gave him back his strength. There is no better instance of the use God can make of the wreck of an ill-spent life. He had ruined himself beyond repair for this life; he could never be the man he was; but in those lonely days in the Philistine prison-house, when his blindness cut him off from converse with outward things, his own humbling, remorseful thoughts were his company, his own past life his only view. He saw the ruinous folly he had been guilty of, saw his betrayal of the trust God had reposed in him, saw that out of the best material for a life of glory that any man of that period had received he had wrought for himself a life of shame and a degrading end. His heart

was broken ; the strong man was crushed, and had, like the weakest sinner, to cry to God, to seek that last comfort that abides when all others are gone, and that more than makes up for the loss of all others—to seek that light, the light of God's own presence, that restores brightness to the most darkened life, and that does not refuse to shine on the most benighted soul. And what he sought, he found. Slowly his hair grew, and with it slowly returned his strength : as health comes slowly back to the man that has been shattered by disease or accident—as spiritual vigour slowly returns to him who by one rash act has let his soul be trodden in the dust.—*Rev. M. Dods, D.D.*

VI. PRINCIPLES OF DIVINE DELIVERANCE ILLUSTRATED BY HIS LIFE.

1 In a state of universal depression all must ultimately depend on the indomitable strength which is aroused in individuals.

[17566] God loves to deliver His people from the multitudes of their enemies by single champions. This was never brought so prominently out as in the life of Samson. The other judges were backed by the people : the movement for freedom began with them individually, but the mass of the people rose at their call. But Samson, throughout, fought the Philistines single-handed. He despised their whole collected armies, went down alone into their strongest cities, and when they would shut him in, carried away gates and bars in the grim satiric mood that was his fighting humour ; and that was the nearest approach to seriousness the presence of armed enemies could induce. Samson was qualified by his natural gifts thus to stand alone and to hearten the people, and give them more courageous and hopeful thoughts.—*Ibid.*

2 God has often to deliver His people in spite of themselves.

[17567] This was impressed on the minds of all observant persons by the fact that the Israelites, instead of flocking to Samson's standard and seconding his effort to throw off the Philistian yoke, bound him and gave him into the hands of the Philistines, complaining bitterly that he had brought them into trouble with their masters, and willing to buy peace at the price of Samson's life. Just as the Pharisees said of our Lord : If we let Him thus alone the Romans will come and take away our place and nation ; and subsequently gave Him up bound to the Romans. They would not strike a blow in defence of their own liberty, still less in defence of their champion. These 3,000 men of Judah, armed and equipped, stood by as idle spectators whilst Samson burst the bonds they had bound upon him, and, snatching up the only weapon he could see, the jaw-bone of an ass, fell upon the common enemy,

and slaughtered as many as did not flee. Put yourself into the position of these abject and cowardly men of Judah, and you will see that they must have been deeply ashamed of their pusillanimity and treachery to themselves in delivering up Samson ; and must have seen that God meant to deliver them, and had delivered them in spite of themselves.—*Ibid.*

3 The greatest deliverances are wrought by self-sacrifice.

[17568] Through mere love of fighting, and in the joy of battle, which is a selfish gratification to a strong man, he had slain many : in the mere overflow of physical vigour and exuberance of his own spirits, he had borne down the enemies of God ; but his greatest victory, the most overwhelming and appalling blow he struck, was when he himself was humbled to the dust, when life had lost its charm, when no joy for himself was thought of, and when his only motive was to assert the might of Jehovah against the boastful worshippers of Dagon. It cost him his own life, but his life could not have been better spent. Those former victories, in which he sustained no hurt, displayed no devotion, no character, scarcely any daring—for he trusted in his talisman of hair, and knew he could overpower all opposition. But in his death his heroism first appears ; and we understand how he should be enrolled among the glorious names of history ; we forget all his faults in his noble disregard of his own life, in his magnanimous scorn of those Philistines and their god. In this one moment, as he bows his mighty frame between the two pillars, a new light shines upon him, and we see that he is indeed a saviour worthy of Israel and worthy of God. Would not every one go with his brethren and gather out the mangled remains of the hero, and tenderly separate them from the carcasses of his enemies, and carry them up to the burial-place of his fathers, in pledge that his spirit too had been gathered to the assembly of the faithful who "loved not their lives unto the death, but laid them down for the brethren" ?—*Ibid.*

[17569] As in his death Samson slew more than in his life, so the manner of that death may have been more effective to the great ends in view than his own living efforts. The very weakness of the strong man, concurring to his fall, may have led to a greater victory—to the fame of the hero lending the inspiration of the martyr. Humanity gathers its grandest energies and its final triumphs not from occasions of splendid success, but from the sad memories of great men, and the most mournful tragedies of history. There is no such inspiration in Austerlitz as in Thermopylae. The fervour of patriotism is kindled quicker by the bloody snows of Valley Forge than by the triumphant cannon of Yorktown. In her slow procession around the world, Liberty bears not laurel-wreaths and flags of victory, but the pale and bleeding effigies of her martyrs.—*Anon.*

VI. HOMILETICAL HINTS.

- 1 The strength by which alone evil can be overcome is to be obtained from the Spirit of God.

[17570] Samson did not realize that his strength was from God. This is the sad, fatal mistake so many are making. Oh, think not that you can be sober, honest, virtuous, without the help that cometh from above. It is sad experience that teaches men what Philip Melancthon learned at last, "that Satan was stronger than Philip."—*Rev. H. Wiles, D.D.*

[17571] Repeatedly do we read that the Spirit of the Lord came upon Samson, and invariably we find in connection with that expression that some exploit was done by him; while, again, in the text the loss of his accustomed power is thus accounted for, "The Lord was departed from him." It is precisely so with us in spiritual things. Let a man try to conquer self, or to vanquish temptation in his own strength, and he will be surely worsted; but if he obtain the help of the Holy Spirit, he will be more than a conqueror. The soul of the unconverted man is held by Satan and his own lusts, even as the land of Israel was possessed by the Philistines; and he cannot expel these unhallowed intruders, or enter into the glorious liberty of the sons of God, save by the grace of God's Spirit. It is, therefore, a vital question how that is to be obtained; and here, also, the narrative before us may give us light, for it was on Samson, the Nazarite, specially consecrated to God and His service, that the Divine influence rested, and now, through Jesus Christ, if we unite ourselves in holy covenant with God, the Spirit will be imparted to us, and we shall be mighty through Him to the pulling down of Satan's strongholds within us and around us. Be this, therefore, your constant prayer, that God would grant you to be strengthened with all might by His Spirit in the inner man.—*Rev. E. Chaplin.*

- 2 Spiritual strength is lost in yielding to sin.

[17572] So long as Samson was true to his Nazarite vow, the Spirit of the Lord remained with him, but when he allowed himself to be beguiled by Delilah, he gave over to her that which ought to have been kept for God, and so his power went from him. He departed from God, and so God departed from him. That is God's way of dealing with men still, and it is of the greatest consequence that this principle of His government should be considered by us. We have no security that God will strengthen us to overcome evil or to perform duty, unless we set ourselves rigidly to keep away from all iniquity and devote ourselves to His service. It may seem as if such a statement were inconsistent with the truth, that they who are truly God's are kept by Him in all emergencies; but it is not so, for the efforts which they make to resist evil are the means by which He preserves them, and it is in the forth-putting of these efforts

that the Divine energy works through their souls. A man is strengthened to overcome his spiritual enemies only in the measure in which he sets himself to oppose them; and if he cease to strive against them, the Divine help will dry up within him, and he may become "a cast-away." Sin always separates from God. It puts you out of sympathy with Him. It breaks the connection between you and Him, and even as the machine stands still when the belt which joins it to the engine is snapped in twain, so you will be spiritually powerless when you yield yourself to iniquity. Beware, therefore, how you let yourself be entangled with the Delilahs of ungodliness, and dread them most when they seem to smile.—*Ibid.*

- 3 Spiritual strength may be lost without consciousness of privation at the moment.

[17573] Samson "wist not that the Lord was departed from him." He arose as before, feeling nothing unusual or strange, but when he tried to put forth his might, he could do nothing. That was melancholy enough, but its spiritual antitype infinitely more so, for it is terribly true that one may become most feeble through habitual indulgence in sin, and yet at the time be unaware of the change that has passed upon him.—*Ibid.*

[17574] Some of you may have had an experience which puts you into sympathy with, and enables you to interpret easily, that part of Samson's history which deals with his fall. You may at one time have had grace, you may have been equal to duty, you may have found it easy to pray, easy to engage in religious conversation, easy to do service among your fellows that not every one can do; but through carelessness, through want of considerate prizing of this as God's grace bestowed in trust upon you, through sensual indulgence, you have quenched the Spirit, and now you in vain seek to stir up the grace of God that was once in you; you imitate the influence of the Spirit, you try to exert and move yourself, but it will not do. You say, "I will go out, as at other times, and shake myself;" but the Lord has departed from you. . . . Your efforts, consequently, are thwarted; you find that your spiritual strength is gone, that there is now hollowness, feebleness, and a blank where once was the Almighty Spirit. He that has vowed his strength to God, he that has received some grace from God, some godliness of feeling and aim, and yet yields to a wretched lust, fancying that afterwards he will shake himself as at other times, and be as fit for duty as ever, will find himself most disastrously deceived.—*Rev. M. Dods, D.D.*

[17575] In an unfounded conviction that at any time a little effort will restore us to the position which we wantonly abandon, we do wantonly abandon it and slumber unconscious of our loss, until at last, like Samson, awakened out of sleep, we say, "I will go out, as at other times before, and shake myself," not knowing

that "the Lord is departed from us." Through his own fault, Samson lost that in which his strength lay.—*Rev. J. Coghill, D.D.*

4 Spiritual strength once lost cannot be quickly regained.

[17576] If you have fallen into sin, you must not expect your soul to recover its tone quickly; it is like the growth of hair, you cannot hasten it, can only let repentance slowly work its perfect work, thankful that even thus you may get back to God.—*Rev. M. Dods, D.D.*

ELI.

I. HIS CHIEF VIRTUES.

1 Godliness and kindness.

[17577] He is a godly man, and as kind as he is godly. The brief notices of his connection with Samuel are singularly affecting. He seems never to have forgotten the little injustice he had inadvertently done to his mother, Hannah, when he mistook her unwonted fervency in prayer for a sign of intoxication.—*Rev. R. Candlish.*

[17578] With what affectionate tenderness does Eli initiate Samuel in the right manner of receiving the word of the Lord! Eli, old and well-nigh blind, is "laid down in his place;" and Samuel, hearing himself called by name, naturally starts up to see what service his now almost helpless friend may be requiring from him: "Here am I, for thou didst call me." "I called not, my son; lie down again," is the simple reply—until the third repetition of the incident awakens Eli to its real meaning: "Eli perceived that the Lord had called the child" (1 Sam. iii. 8). Nor is there any grudging in the old man's bosom that he should be passed by, and another, a mere child, chosen to receive one of those Divine communications which in these degenerate days had become so precious, because so rare (ver. 1). On the contrary, we almost seem to see the lighting up of his dim eye, and to feel the throbbing of his heart, as with tenderest interest he tells the favoured youth how to demean himself under so high an honour: "Go, lie down: and it shall be, if He call thee, that thou shalt say, Speak, Lord; for Thy servant heareth;" and then quietly composes himself to await the issue of the scene.—*Ibid.*

[17579] Eli was a man of extraordinary magnanimity, never resenting that God should speak to him, the aged priest, through a prattling child that did not know God's voice when he heard it. He was a man not only mild and kindly when it cost him nothing to be so, as in the case of Hannah, but able to cherish one who was destined to supplant his own family, and who, to a smaller man than Eli was, must have seemed like the evil genius of his house.—*Rev. M. Dods, D.D.*

2 Meekness and resignation.

[17580] "It is the Lord; let Him do what seemeth Him good." What acquiescence is here—what patience—what faith! There is no justifying of himself—nothing like charging God foolishly. The old man's "sin is ever before him." He acknowledges it all to the Lord. He owns the perfect righteousness of the sentence. God is just in judging. Eli's mouth is stopped. He is verily guilty. That he should be thus rebuked and chastened is no more than he deserves; nay, it may even be fitting that the stroke should come through that dear child, in whose opening and expanding graciousness of character he has been apt, perhaps, too readily to find comfort and compensation for the unbridled license of his own sons. For it could not but be a more congenial task to Eli to train the docile Samuel than to restrain unruly Phinehas and Hophni; and there might be something of retribution in the arrangement, that the very first act of Samuel's ministry, in the prophetic office for which Eli had, with so fond and deep an interest, been preparing him, should be, to denounce the parent's neglect of parental discipline and duty, and open his eyes to all its inexcusable guilt! At all events, Eli makes no complaint. There is no feeling of even momentary resentment, either against God or against Samuel. He sees nothing amiss, either in the dreadful message or in the channel through which it comes. He blames only himself. Samuel is as dear to him as ever, although reluctantly the bringer of evil tidings. And God is honoured by the exercise, not of a mere stern and stubborn bravery, submitting sullenly to an irrevocable and irresistible decree, but of meek faith;—faith accepting judgment, and yet clinging to and confiding in the very judge himself; faith, in short, still seeing, even in the God of judgment, a pacified and reconciled God—a father, and a friend!—*Rev. R. Candlish.*

[17581] It would have been no wonder if, on hearing such a message through such a messenger as the child Samuel, some little of the irritation of wounded love had ruffled Eli's spirit, and some impatient words had escaped from his mouth. But nothing of the kind appears. The grey-haired saint of God is as a little child, and meekly takes rebuke from the little child he has himself nursed. Reversing the prophecy, "The child shall die a hundred years old,"—the man all but a hundred years old is to die a child; for it is the "quiet spirit and mild" of a little child that breathes in the simple utterance, "It is the Lord; let Him do what seemeth Him good."—*Ibid.*

[17582] His one exclamation when the terrible message was delivered by Samuel, "It is the Lord; let Him do what seemeth Him good," reveals an enviable state of mind, a submissiveness which could not be picked up on a sudden, but must have been wrought in him by a long

thoughtfulness about God's ways, and a real godliness of disposition.—*Rev. M. Dods, D.D.*

II. HIS GREAT DEFECT.

Moral weakness and indecision.

(1) *As displayed in his character generally.*

[17583] He was a good man of the easy type; the kind of man who makes an admirable servant, who does his duty to perfection so long as his duty merely troubles himself, but who has not force of character to interfere with others; to command, to regulate the conduct of others, to incur the ill-will of others. He had no wicked intentions, no godless practices like his sons; he was a pure-minded, amiable, sincere, gentle, well-disposed man; but it was his misfortune to be in a position which required other qualities besides these, and which he had not. He could control himself, but not others. He would grieve over his sons, but not correct them. He could speak seriously to them, but could not enforce his words. He recognized the abuses which were being introduced into God's worship, but he continued day by day to delay cleansing the house of God, trusting to circumstances, or time, or chance, or anything, to do what he himself could not find nerve to do. An amiable indolence overspread his whole nature; he would be a delightful man to talk with, but most disappointing to have to do with: a man ever ready to do pleasant things, but never able to do disagreeable things. He was one of the men who have great faith in the power of things to right themselves, in the virtue of leaving things alone, of letting nature take its course.—*Ibid.*

(2) *As displayed in his capacity as head of the state.*

[17584] As a judge, then, in his capacity of civil governor, Eli evidently saw the affairs of the commonwealth brought to the lowest ebb of fortune. It is true, that little or nothing is recorded of his administration; but in the last act of it, the war waged with the Philistines, and in the way in which that war is conducted, we see indications of imbecility not to be mistaken. There is an evident want of due consideration and concert. The contest is obviously begun rashly, without a previous appeal to God; and the army marches without the Divine sanction; for the first clause in 1 Samuel iv. 1 is evidently connected with the previous chapter, indicating the general acceptance of Samuel in his prophetic character, and has nothing to do with the Philistian war. The expedition, then, wants that symbol of the Divine presence, which of old was wont to strike terror into the foe, and inspire every heart in the host of Israel with holy zeal; according to the usage described in the Book of Numbers: "And it came to pass, when the ark set forward, that Moses said, Rise up, Lord, and let Thine enemies be scattered; and let them that hate Thee flee before Thee. And when it rested, he said, Return, O Lord, unto the many thousands of Israel" (Numb. x.

35, 36). No such ringing battle-cry, Rise up, Lord, is heard on this occasion; and no glad note of peace concludes the fight. The sudden expedient or afterthought of remodelling the ark to help in retrieving the disaster only brings out more sadly the absence of all sound and godly counsel in the whole affair at the first, and the conduct of Eli is throughout that of a habitual waverer. One thing is clear—as a ruler he left the state on the very brink of ruin.—*Rev. R. Candlish.*

(3) *As displayed in his capacity as high priest.*

[17585] As high priest, set over the affairs of the house of God, he lets his weakness shamefully get the better of him. The scandalous outrages and excesses committed by his two sons when they were associated with him in the priesthood, never could have taken place had "things been done decently and in order." The law as to offerings, and the shares which the altar, the priesthood, and the worshippers were to have in them respectively, was clear enough, if due authority had been put forth to enforce it; nor, with all their greed, could Hophni and Phinhas have so used their flesh-hooks as to make "men abhor the offering of the Lord," if there had not been prevalent already a grievous laxity in the mere routine of the tabernacle service, which Eli must have tolerated, or at least wanted firmness to repress (1 Sam. ii. 12-19). . . . We do not speak of the actual misconduct of the miserable young men themselves who prostituted to vile purposes their priestly character and office; we found rather on the mere fact, that misconduct like theirs was possible, as proving that the reins of spiritual government must have fallen into the hands of one himself either very wicked or very weak. And as, in the case of Eli, the former side of the alternative is out of the question—for he was a holy man, and hated sin—we are forced to conclude, that in his capacity of priest, as well as in that of judge, he was the victim of indecision and infirmity.—*Ibid.*

(4) *As displayed in his capacity as a parent.*

[17586] It is as a parent that Eli chiefly shows his weakness; and it is in that character that he is especially reprovèd and judged. "Thou honourest thy sons above Me," is the charge which the Lord brings against him (1 Sam. ii. 29). And yet Eli feared God, and had no sympathy with his sons in their vile crimes. On the contrary, he remonstrated with them faithfully: "Why do ye such things? for I hear of your evil dealings by all this people. Nay, my sons; for it is no good report that I hear: ye make the Lord's people to transgress. If one man sin against another, the judge shall judge him; but if a man sin against the Lord, who shall entreat for him?" (chap. ii. 23-25.) What more could he do? Instruction, admonition, expostulation, persuasion, are all in vain. The resources of his parental influence are exhausted. What farther remains to be tried? Ah! he forgets that he is

invested with parental authority—authority, in his case, backed and seconded by all the powers of law, and all the terrors of religion. Nay, it is not so much that he forgets this, as that he has not nerve to act upon the recollection of it. He knows his right and duty as a father; but he weakly shrinks from enforcing his right and performing his duty, out of false tenderness and pity to his sons.—*Ibid.*

[17587] Nothing falsifies the character like softness; and the want of power to say No, when it would give pain. Eli was not a bad man, but there was a softness and feebleness of character which left him powerless to say No to his sons.—*Rev. F. Robertson.*

[17588] Eli restrained not his sons. At first he might have restrained them with comparatively a very gentle hand; a firm voice, a decided look, might have been enough; a few instances of patient, persevering determination, with an absence of all angry passion provoking them to wrath, might have taught the little rebels how hopeless it was to think of making their father yield to them; judicious kindness, not being bitter against them, would make them feel the relief and gladness of yielding to him; and thereafter he might have guided them with his eye. Failing at that first stage to form in them the habit of obedience, Eli's task became of course more difficult as his sons grew in strength and stature, as well as in force of will. The waywardness and impetuosity of early youth, succeeding to the insubordination of spoiled and fondled childhood, presented a stouter aspect of resistance or defiance. Still he might have restrained them; his parental resources were not yet exhausted; they had not yet outgrown the power of the parental arm; nor could they yet dispense with the support of parental love. He has a hold over them still by many ties, if only he will summon resolution for the task of first thoroughly studying their characters, and then vigorously and wisely using bit and bridle, if need be, to keep them in. It may be a struggle; but calm consistency will gain the day. For a parent's rule commends itself to the conscience, as a parent's kindness touches the heart; and an effort put forth even at the last hour, in faith and prayer, to resume the reins of parental discipline, will have God's countenance, and will not fail of success. But, alas for Eli! This second opportunity also is allowed to pass. His sons have become men; they have left the parental roof; they have families of their own; they take rank on their own account in the world; they hold office in the Church. They are their own masters now, and, availing themselves of their liberty, they let loose their unruly passions, and make themselves vile. Still Eli should have restrained them; for it is expressly mentioned that his restraining them not even then, was his sin. He had power to restrain them. He had the power every parent has when his children make themselves incurably vile. He could disown

them, discountenance them, solemnly renounce their fellowship, and cast them off. He had power also as their ruler in the state, and their superior in the priesthood. . . . But he had not the heart; he could not bring himself to be severe. Even God's highest honour must give place to the indulgence of his fond and feeble dotage.—*Rev. R. Candlish.*

III. HIS MANIFOLD DISGRACE AND PUNISHMENT.

"I have told him that I will judge his house for ever for the iniquity which he knoweth; because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not. And therefore I have sworn unto the house of Eli that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be purged with sacrifice nor offering for ever" (1 Sam. iii. 13, 14).

[17589] Of the utter ruin of Eli's household we need not speak. The priesthood passes away from his family; the government is upon other shoulders; his seed are a beggared race. The last incident recorded concerning his children is most profoundly touching; it is the birth of his grandson, the child of his son Phinehas. The unhappy mother hears of her husband Phinehas, fallen in the disastrous fight, and of her father-in-law Eli, suddenly dead. She cannot stand the shock. She bows her head and travails. But though the women about her say, "Fear not, for thou hast borne a son"—there is no joy for her because a man-child is born into the world. She is a godly woman, broken-hearted by the sin and fate of an ungodly husband. She is like-minded with her husband's godly father, Eli. When the women tell her of the son she has borne, "she answers not, neither regards it." But with her dying breath she names the child "Ichabod;" for she says "the glory is departed from Israel, because the ark of God is taken." The whole house is a ruin;—the priesthood degraded; the nation defeated; the ark taken; and amid the wreck his own family broken up, and the sole survivor launched on the stream of time with an ominous name, and under a heavy curse. And all this in connection with one of the meekest and holiest of the saints of God!—*Ibid.*

[17590] The messenger of evil delivered his tidings; and his hearer could stand the accumulation of horrors—Israel fled before the Philistines—a great slaughter among the people—ay, and his two sons, Hopli and Phinehas, dead also. But when the crowning calamity burst upon him—"the ark of God is taken"—Eli could bear up no longer. Bending under the weight of ninety and eight years, and crushed by the stunning blow of this disastrous intelligence, "he fell from off the seat backward by the side of the gate, and his neck brake, and he died; for he was an old man, and heavy." No words could add to the pathos of this simple and summary announcement. It is all the

epitaph Scripture has for one who had spent nearly a century beside the altar, and for some- what less than half that time had occupied the seat of power—for “he had judged Israel forty years.” Such was the end of so protracted a life; thus miserably died this man of God.—*Ibid.*

IV. ELI AND MOSES CONTRASTED.

[17591] The conduct of Eli at a crisis may be contrasted with that of Moses on a similar occasion. When the Israelites, discouraged by the report of the spies, refused to go up and take possession of the promised land, and were condemned, in consequence, to wander for forty years in the wilderness—stung with remorse, they resolved hastily to repair their fatal fault; “They rose up early in the morning, and gat them up into the top of the mountain, saying, Lo we be here, and we will go up unto the place which the Lord hath promised: for we have sinned.” Moses not only opposed their resolution—“It shall not prosper; go not up, for the Lord is not among you; that ye be not smitten before your enemies;” but peremptorily refused, either to lead them himself, or to let the ark of God go with them:—“They presumed to go up unto the hill-top: nevertheless the ark of the covenant of the Lord, and Moses, departed not out of the camp.” The issue of the engagement was disastrous to the Israelites; for “the Amalekites came down, and the Canaanites which dwelt in that hill, and smote them, and discomfited them, even unto Hormah.” But, by the moral courage of Moses, the ark of God was safe (Numb. xiv. 40–45). Eli is placed in circumstances not unlike those in which Moses acted so nobly. The army of Israel is smarting under a defeat sustained at the hands of the Philistines. It is proposed to send for the ark of God: “Let us fetch the ark of the covenant of the Lord out of Shiloh unto us, that, when it cometh among us, it may save us out of the hand of our enemies” (1 Sam. iv. 3). Eli being both high priest and chief magistrate—for he is at the head of civil affairs as well as ecclesiastical—has of course the custody of the ark; and has in fact, in virtue of his double office, more power over it than even Moses himself could possess. Evidently he has misgivings as to the step about to be taken; and well he may, considering all things. A heavy cloud of judgment overhangs himself and his household. If the ark is to accompany the army, it must be under the custody of his sons. Are they fit keepers of it, vile as they have made themselves, and doomed to perish miserably? Is the army itself engaged in so righteous a warfare, and animated by so good a spirit, as to warrant their carrying with them what, in better times, was wont to be the pledge of victory? Eli may well hesitate; and, when the message from the army reaches him, it must cause him deep distress. Is he to consent? Hophni and Phinehas are ready to run every risk; not unwilling, perhaps, to seize the op-

portunity of somewhat recovering their character, and gaining a little credit with their countrymen. The elders and people are importunate. The old man does not resist, though in the very act of yielding his mind misgives him, and his heart cannot but tremble for the ark of God.—*Ibid.*

V. HOMILETICAL REFLECTIONS.

1 “Add to your faith virtue” (2 Pet. i. 5).

[17592] Let individual Christians ponder the lesson of Eli’s character. Much, very much, is there in it to be admired and imitated, especially the grace and godliness of his walk, the tenderness of his affections, and the way in which he takes the Divine rebuke. But his defects—or, shall we say at once, his sins?—are recorded for our especial warning. His want of firmness is very sad; it mars and hinders the exercise of every other grace, and stamps upon the whole man the character of one like a wave of the sea, driven by the winds and tossed. “Add to your faith virtue,” or moral courage, is a precept to be again and again repeated and pondered well.—*Rev. R. Canulish.*

2 The evil of mere passivity and softness.

[17593] Eli’s life is an instance in which we may read the calamitous result of a merely passive life, of refusing to arrest or mend the evil practices around us, of conniving at sin which it is our business to put an end to; of contenting ourselves with keeping our own hands clean. For the fact is that not interfering when we ought to interfere is the surest way to be entangled with the results of those very sins, and the fate of those very sinners from whom we wish to keep separate—a lesson which our own country is now learning from its past treatment of Ireland. By many natural ties men are bound to us, and while we take the benefit of their service, or the pleasure of their affection, or any advantage their society brings, it is cowardly and unjust, and besides impossible, to shake off any responsibility regarding their conduct. Parents who, like Eli, are afraid to lose the affection of their children, and who pretend not to see their growing faults, must know that this can only end badly. Eli did not see his life written out, a completed story; after the retribution fell, he had no time to revise and remodel it—as God said, “When I begin, I will also make an end.” We also are living out our lives day by day, and each day are coming nearer to that sudden retribution which will finish all, and reveal the completeness and at once show the value of our life. It will show the pitiful and utter incompetence of all mere resolutions of amendment, the barrenness of mere good intentions and amiable dispositions; it will show how diametrically different are the veritable things we do, have done, and go on doing, from all that we have merely thought of doing and known to be right to do.—*Rev. M. Doas, D.D.*

[17594] The character of Eli is far from uncommon, and a far larger amount of disaster is produced in the world by such softness than by deliberate wickedness. There can be no more fatal guide to a man setting out in life than the instinct which chooses what is agreeable, and avoids everything that is harsh and difficult. Many a graceful, amiable, and well-intentioned youth has thus reached an end of infamy. The character which shrinks from all collision with other men, which cannot face obloquy, which shrinks from inflicting pain, not because it hurts other people so much as because it shakes their own nerves, which does all in its power to preserve the belief that this life is before all else for comfort and pleasure—this character is one of the most dangerous that wanders over this earth—dangerous for itself and dangerous for others also. Its apparent gentleness and goodness in the beginning, arise mainly from the gaiety and good spirits of youth, and from the desire to stand well with everybody, which very desire will ultimately entangle him with sin, and devastate his life. There are times in most lives when the current of circumstances sets strongly towards sin, and when a man will certainly sin if his rule of life has been to avoid all that is painful, and to choose what will for the time give him security and ease. The life of such a man, however promising it seems in youth, becomes weighted and entangled by a constantly accumulating burden of difficulties and sorrowful remembrances, and unavailing regrets, until at last he is, like Eli, almost glad to hear that what he has so long seen must be a losing game is over, and that his doom is imminent. Times have been given him when, by a little effort, and by some self-denial, he might have recovered himself and started afresh, with possibly a sullied fame among men, but with a conscience cleansed from offence, and with the strength which comes from the consciousness of having for once acted nobly and with energy : but these times are all gone by, and he now merely awaits the end, heartless and without hope.—*Ibid.*

3 A warning to parents.

[17595] How offensive to God must be a parent's want of firmness in enforcing his authority ! For what, in fact, is that authority but the authority of God Himself ? God has delegated His own authority to the parent ; and so far as the parent has any right of rule at all over his child, he has it as representing God. In the exercise of it, therefore, he has properly no discretion ; if he rule as God, he must rule for God ; and to let any partial leaning of the natural heart towards his child tempt him to act as if it were otherwise, as if he ruled in his own right and for himself, and not in God's right and for God—and might, in consequence, please himself or his child as he sees fit—this is evidently to usurp a power independent of that of God ; it is to dishonour the Lord of all.—*Rev. R. Candlish.*

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[17596] It is a most emphatic warning that the fate of Eli gives to parents ; and not to parents only, but to all who have influence or authority of any sort in families. Whoever in a family has any power at all to restrain evil, and fails to use that power to the uttermost, incurs a responsibility from which a thoughtful man would shrink. The power may be of various kinds ; it may be superior strength, or superior station, or weight of character, or example, or that control which reasonable and tender affection wields, and gratitude gladly owns. But whatever it be, let it be faithfully and fully used. The positive duty lying upon all heads and members of households to seek one another's good in the highest and most spiritual sense, is not more binding, and scarcely more important, than the negative duty of restraining one another's evil. Nor is this a harsh or invidious task. It may be done with all the meekness and gentleness of Christ. And the secret of its being rightly and effectively done is this : Let no one, let nothing, be honoured above God—let God be honoured above all. Let your intercourse with children, or brothers, or sisters, or domestics, or any with whom you dwell together in families, be upon this principle. Honour God—honour God supremely—honour God alone. Consider not merely what may be best for them, but what, in every instance, is due to God. This will prevent compromise, concession, and fond indulgence on your part ; while it will place your power of restraining evil on the highest of all grounds of advantage—the law and the will of God Himself.—*Ibid.*

4 A warning to the ungodly.

[17597] Let the ungodly tremble. Let them look on, and see how God deals with sin in His own people. Does He spare sin in them ? Does He spare them in their sins ? Behold the severity of God in His treatment of the good and gracious Eli, and tremble at the thought of what may be His treatment of you ! “ If the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and sinners appear ? ” Or as a greater than Eli reasoned, when, bearing the cross up the hill of Calvary, He pointed to His own sufferings for sin as a pledge and presage of judgment against sinners—“ If these things be done in the green tree, what shall be done in the dry ? ” —*Ibid.*

[17598] Let all lay to heart the irrevocable decree and determination of God, that sin shall not pass unpunished ; let them look and see the end of the wicked, while they stand in awe at the chastisement of the just. Whatever excuse the wicked may frame out of the weakness of those who should have restrained them ; and whatever promise the just may plead as warranting assurance and good hope through grace ; the law of the Divine procedure is fixed, as announced to Eli and his sons—“ I said indeed that thy house, and the house of thy father, should walk before Me for ever ; but now the Lord saith, Be it far from Me ; for them that

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honour Me I will honour, and they that despise Me shall be lightly esteemed" (1 Sam. ii. 30).—*Ibid.*

5 Ad clerum.

[17599] This is perhaps the greatest responsibility the clergy of any country have to bear, that they are taken as samples of what the religion they profess is worth—and it is perhaps the greatest difficulty which we in our own time have to solve, viz., how to live a really unworldly life in an age and society which will not suffer any marked external separation from the world, which hates, and very justly hates, all those old modes of separation by celibacy, monasticism, priestly separation from social intercourse. It is an age which says to its clergy, You must do all that we do, and yet be quite different from us, you must move about in society, buy and sell, marry and bring up families just like the rest of us, but you must be throughout superior to the world, and to all the temptations these connections with the world bring. This age, I say, sets this task to its clergy, and then stands by and notes, not without triumph, how they fall short of it.—*Rev. M. Dods, D.D.*

[17600] The vices which Eli suffered in his sons did not terminate in themselves, but had the effect of making the worship of God abhorrent and despicable in the country. This may be done not only by the sensuality and greed of the clergy, but in other ways as well. These sins are very apparent, and the world is very quick to detect and resent in the clergy the grasping spirit and keen eye to worldly interests which it counts meritorious, or at least very pardonable, in other men. But other sins work more unobservedly, but not less certainly, to the same end of deadening the spirit of worship, and bringing God's service into contempt. The carelessness about truth, which merely preaches traditionary opinions, does so: the indolent formality which accepts stereotyped phrases of devotion or of sentiment, and puts no meaning or spirit into them; the wrangling and hastiness in discussion which show that love of party is stronger than love of truth; the preaching of doctrine which lowers men's ideas of God and of righteousness—these and many such things make the worship of God contemptible.—*Ibid.*

[17601] In God's message to Eli, He traces the sins of the priesthood to their root. "I chose you to be priests, to serve Me, and ye have made yourselves fat with the offerings of My people." To be truly servants of God, this is the difficulty; to put aside as illegitimate everything which merely forwards our own interests; to abstain from cherishing purely personal hopes; to sink our own cause, and prospects, and will in the cause of God; to be truly in God's hand, to be used as He wills; to come back day by day and wait for orders from Him; to acquire thus the understanding of what He seeks to do in the world, and gradually to abjure every other thought than how to accom-

plish this; to be consecrated and to be faithful—this is what God requires of us all; this is what no man who knows God will rest without doing; but this is what needs the discipline of a life to accomplish.—*Ibid.*

SAMUEL.

I. INTRODUCTORY.

The influence of Hannah in forming his character.

[17602] There are several strong points in the character of Samuel to which it would be interesting and profitable to direct our thoughts, while we may perhaps illustrate and impress them all by dwelling on one feature of his character. The one fact in his history which throws brightness over his whole course—which demands a memorial—which makes his character just such a one as ought to be drawn—which gives it all its excellence, and which may well be engraven especially on the tablet of the youthful mind, is that his piety, like that of thousands, goes back to the prayers of a pious mother. She was no sceptic, no formalist, and no distrustful suppliant. She had great strength of religious principle, great hope and confidence in God, and great peace in believing.—*Rev. G. Spring, D.D.*

[17603] His parents left him, even when a child, within the precincts of the sanctuary, and under the fostering care of its teachers and its service. And God accepted their offering, and bestowed upon their child the "prophet's reward" and the blessings of his covenant. He was not left in ignorance of his mother's wishes and prayers and renewed acts of consecration, nor of the object for which he was left at Shiloh; for though a child, we read of no grief on his part that he was thus early separated from those he loved, and no reluctance at the service to which he was devoted. His religious devotion to the sanctuary was a lesson he learned from his mother's lips while she dandled him upon her knees; nor is it probable that the thought ever entered his mind, that it was a possible thing for him to be otherwise employed.—*Ibid.*

II. GENERAL VIEW OF HIS CHARACTER.

[17604] The character of Samuel is, in every stage of his career, one of the grandest in the Old Testament. Standing at the meeting-point of two diverging eras in the national life of Israel—the last of the Judges and the first of the Prophets—the inaugurator of the monarchy—no figure occupies a more prominent place in Jewish history. Nor is there one that challenges a more unqualified admiration. The exquisite beauty of his holy childhood, the vigour and wisdom of his administration as judge; the calm dignity with which he yields to the demands

of the people, and bows to what he feels to be the Divine will; the energy with which he throws himself into the new system, alien as it was to his own personal feelings and cherished convictions; the self-forgetting zeal with which he devotes the whole of his powers to the efficient carrying out of its requirements; his warmth of affection for the youthful monarch who has supplanted him in the popular favour; the depth of his sorrow at the repeated failure of the chosen one whom he had been the instrument of raising to his high office; the reluctance with which he regards the breach as final, and seals Saul's rejection by anointing a successor;—all combine to make up a portrait of no ordinary attractiveness, on which the mind rests with more complete satisfaction than on most of the heroes of the earlier and less perfect dispensation.—*E. Venables.*

[17605] His character has a singular elevation and purity. His life is rounded to an unusual completeness. He lived long enough to become the Nestor of the nation, pre-eminent in wisdom, sanctity, and devoutness. In their difficulties the people sought him; and in their feebleness they leaned upon him; and in their sins and penitences they sought his prayers.—*Christian Globe.*

III. HIS CHIEF EXCELLENCES.

1. Conspicuous piety.

(1) *By this he was distinguished very early in life from his contemporaries.*

[17606] How early he became pious, the Scriptures do not inform us; that it was during his childhood is apparent from the whole scriptural narrative. We are told that "he ministered before the Lord, being a child." It is recorded of him also that "he grew, and was in favour with the Lord and also with men." God moreover spake to him upon his pillow; He had frequent interviews with him in the night-watches, and made him, even when he was a child, the medium of communicating His designs, and truth, and will to the venerable priesthood which had so long been established at Shiloh. He was not merely a godly youth, but a godly child. Unassuming and childlike as his piety was, for a child it was rich and matured, undissembling and unfeigned, well-proportioned and harmonious, dignified and lovely. It was this his early piety which so distinguished him from the young and the old of his times.—*Rev. G. Spring, D.D.*

(2) *By this he was protected from the pernicious influence of many very perilous surroundings.*

[17607] Samuel began his career in an evil day. Moses and Joshua, the great lights of the Hebrew nation, were dead. The Israelites had taken possession of the promised land; the law of property was established; each estate was held on the tenure of military service, and "all Israel was one standing army." The government had long been in the hands of men

distinguished for military activity and daring, and not a few of them of so corrupt a character that the nation was on the verge of apostasy. There was little to retard the progress of the Philistine conquests; Eli, the high priest and judge of the nation, had become an old man; while his sons had introduced disorder and licentiousness into the sacred office that threatened to degrade the worship of God at Shiloh to the gross impurities of idolatrous lands. In this critical period of the nation's history, and amid this depravation of public morals, young Samuel was growing into power within the very precincts of the sacred but polluted tabernacle. A single false step and he was ruined; all his future usefulness was eclipsed by an impenetrable cloud. He stood on an eminence where a doubtful character or even an ungenerous suspicion might have been his ruin. Difficult and perilous as young Samuel's condition was, his mind was imbued with the teachings of heavenly wisdom, the law of his God was in his heart, and the great torchlight upon his path.—*Ibid.*

(3) *By this he obtained many plain tokens of the Divine favour.*

[17608] It is recorded of the child Samuel, that "the Lord was with him." He heard the beatings of that young heart when it throbbed at midnight because He had called the child. From that hour he was God's special care. He kept him as the apple of His eye, and watched over him with more than a mother's tenderness. God was his helper, and made him strong in weakness, resolute and faithful in duty, bold and successful in his high vocation. God was his comforter, and gave him tranquillity in the midst of confusion, peace in the midst of war, light in darkness and embarrassment, hope in despondency, and promised grace in every time of need. God never lost sight of his first love, his early vows and devotements. God never does lose sight of these.—*Ibid.*

(4) *By this he was led to a long life of great usefulness.*

[17609] The great beauty of his usefulness was, that it began so early and was continued so long. The prime of his youth, the vigour of his manhood, and the experience of age were also devoted to the best interests of Israel. His entire life aimed at making this people a better and happier nation. There is a vast difference between the bright and illumined career on which he so early entered, and the flickering dead light of that religion which is first kindled in a dusky old age. It is the morning brightness that shines clear, that waxes in the strength of noon, and which, though sometimes obscured by clouds, sweeps its strong and steady course to the western sky. The gracious God, indeed, rejects not those who come into His vineyard at the eleventh hour; even the wretched remnant of a life, jaded with toil and pleasure, and worn out in sin, that is truly devoted to Him, shall not meet the discouragement of His refusing frown.

Yet should the fact never be lost sight of, that for one veteran enemy of God that finds access to His family and service, a thousand youthful offenders set their faces toward Him with penitence and hope.—*Ibid.*

(5) *By this he prepared for himself a happy old age and a peaceful death.*

[17610] The fountains of Samuel's joy were not broken cisterns; nor was the stream poisoned; nor did it provoke the thirst it could not assuage. His religious enjoyments began in early life, and were subsequently associated with his earliest and happiest remembrances.—*Ibid.*

[17611] The fearful consequences of early wickedness did not visit him; he had no youthful infidelity, no vicious and ensnaring companionships, no corrupting vices to look back upon; nor was his mind fascinated by the recurring and lingering power of those early habits which are so fatal to cheerful piety. His childhood, his youth, his manhood received the delightful and the progressive tokens of God's favour. The seal of his early adoption into the Divine family was never obliterated, and never faint. Not only had he God's testimony, but the testimony of his own conscience, and the testimony of all Israel, that both in his private and public character he was without reproach.—*Ibid.*

[17612] He lived to the advanced age of ninety-eight years; and though he had been a wanderer and oppressed with public cares, his old age was tranquil and happy. It was a rich and green old age. The spring of life extended itself into the brown, luxuriant autumn, and showered its blossoms upon the snow-clad clods of winter. And when the winter of his long life broke up, and his rigid frame was laid in the dust, it slept in his father's sepulchres, and by the side of those beloved and venerated parents who early consecrated him to God. Precious spot to be consecrated as the last earthly rest of such a man! And is it not something more than a picture of the imagination when we say, there was one sepulchral stone there, bearing this short inscription, "The mother of Samuel"? There, by the side of Elkanah and Hannah, he "rests in the grave until the resurrection."—*Ibid.*

2 Lofty patriotism.

[17613] A finer contrast to the general character of the princes and statesmen, and, whether they occupied a high or a low place, of the rulers of this world, we cannot imagine than that which Samuel presents. Place, honour, and power sought him; not he them. He became the judge of Israel, or its ruler, at the call of God; and when, without respect to his grey hairs and long years of honourable, successful service, an ungrateful country called him to resign his office, like the sun which looks largest at its setting, he never seems so great, so grand, as in the last scenes of his public life.

It had been a sublime, though painful, spectacle to see this great man, wounded by ingratitude and smarting under the stings of those he had nursed in his bosom, uncomplainingly, simply, cheerfully lay down his office. He did more than that. Remonstrating with the people, he warned them of the evils a king would bring in his train; and thereby exposed himself to unjust suspicions, and the foul tongues of many who would represent him as clinging to the possession of power rather than seeking the good of his country. And when Saul at length was fixed on as his successor, see how nobly he bore himself to the man who was to thrust him from his seat! There is no more magnanimous thing in history.—*Rev. T. Guthrie, D.D.*

[17614] His object was not the possession of power—that for which so many kings and statesmen have had recourse to the meanest devices; have trodden the foulest paths; and, casting all honour to the winds, have abandoned the principles, and betrayed the friends of their life.—*Ibid.*

3 Entire disinterestedness.

[17615] A rare example of such virtues, in these days especially, Samuel's hands were as clear of bribes as of blood. The public good his only object, he neither aimed at political ascendancy nor pecuniary aggrandisement. Neither animated with the love of power, nor, like Herod of worms, eaten up with the love of money, he made no use of the opportunities his office afforded to enrich himself; and very probably retired from his post a poorer man than he entered on it.—*Ibid.*

[17616] His hands were clean. No stain tarnished the brightness of the old man's name; nor, though feeling, no doubt, all the partialities of a father for his children, did he attempt to palliate their crimes, or screen them from public indignation. Walking in his integrity; fearing God, but no man's face; upright; the soul of honour; his bosom glowing with the purest patriotism, how grand is his last appearance on the stage of public life!—grander far than all the pomp and lustre which, amid the blaze of beauty, the blare of trumpets, and the roar of cannon, surrounds the coronation of a king. The sun never looked down on a more touching and impressive spectacle than the scene of his justification of himself. With Saul, their anointed king, towering head and shoulders, in royal vestments, above the crowd of nobles, the tribes of Israel are met; and Samuel, bent with age and dismissed from office, is there to meet them. Conscious of rectitude, not fearing the face of any man, he comes to challenge them. They had rejected him; he is there to ask them what grounds they had for doing so. Treated as one who had betrayed his trust, he calls on them to allege it openly if they dare, and to prove it if they could. Long years of service, now forgotten, they had repaid with base ingratitude; and he is here,

old and grey-headed, to ask them what he had done to suffer such an ignominious fate.—*Ibid.*

[17617] Unlike those statesmen who are driven from place only to brood over their wrongs and stir up the people to recall them, he lamented the errors and bewailed the fate of him to make way for whom he himself had been thrust from power and honour. I cannot fancy a nobler or more touching picture than this venerable, grand old man who had been the safety and honour of the commonwealth, sitting in his house forgetting all his personal wrongs in grief for the public calamity, and allowing the evening of his days to be darkened with sorrow for the crimes and misfortunes of Saul. If ever breast was pure of selfish ambition and the love of power, it was his who exposed himself to this honourable reproach—to whom the Lord appeared, saying, “How long wilt thou mourn for Saul, seeing I have rejected him?”—*Ibid.*

4 * Unwavering consistency.

[17618] In the character of most other good men of whom we have an account in the Scriptures, there is some visible blemish, some drawback upon their great excellences; but there is no recorded blemish in the life of Samuel. Though he lived to be an old man, he was without reproach from youth to old age. The piety which so early budded in the house of God, and which blossomed on the head of the child in Shiloh, remained unwithered by the corruptions of a degenerate world, a degenerate church, and a degenerate priesthood; nor, as the seasons of human life followed, did it wilt under the summer's sun, nor was it blighted by the wintry blast.—*Rev. G. Spring, D.D.*

[17619] Some men die better than they live. England's great dramatist says of one who made a good end, that “nothing in life became him so much as the leaving it.” But more may be said of Samuel's career—its close was not better, but in perfect harmony with its whole course.—*Rev. T. Guthrie, D.D.*

[17620] Unlike those days the hues of whose bright and gorgeous dawn are succeeded by a gloomy change—clouds that, gathering like foes around him, close in upon the sun, and spread, and thicken, and burst out at length into lashing rain and roaring tempest, making the day, down to its close, belie all the promises of the morning—the close, and indeed the whole course of Samuel's public life, were in beautiful harmony with its commencement. He fulfilled all a fond and pious mother's hopes. He disappointed none. God was the centre around which he, as well as heaven, turned. In all his difficulties he repaired to God for counsel. The laws which governed his acts as a statesman and his decisions as a judge were those of God's Word; and, unlike this world's statesmen, never turned aside by considerations of expediency, of this or that present advantage, he steered his

course by those principles of eternal truth and justice which give consistency to conduct; because fixed as the pole star that, changing neither with seasons nor circumstances, abides immovable in the sky—sure guide of the mariner, both in calm and tempest, along the rocky shore and out on the open sea.—*Ibid.*

[17621] Samuel forms one of the noble trio concerning whom the Holy Ghost has recorded no actual transgression in the Scriptures. As partakers of the taint of Adam's sin, they must have erred at least in thought, but the fact remains that of Joseph, Samuel, and Daniel, the faithful Scriptures record no fault.—*M. J.*

IV. HIS POSITION IN THE THEOCRACY.

[17622] Samuel was clearly one of those great men of manifold gifts and functions whom God raises up in great crises and for great services. He was not like Moses, the founder of the economy, not like Elijah, its restorer. But he was its preserver through a revolution that had become inevitable, which he opposed as long as he could, which he reluctantly accepted when he could oppose it no longer, and which, by sheer force of character, he regulated and moulded so as to prevent national disorganization. Like Luther, he built the new upon the foundations of the old. As far as circumstances permitted he reformed his age; and by his genius, his piety, and his wisdom, he powerfully controlled the turbulent elements of national life.—*Christian Globe.*

V. THE MORAL OF HIS LIFE FOR OUR OWN DAY.

[17623] What an example Samuel presents to our magistrates, our judges, our members of Parliament—to all entrusted with authority, from the Queen to the humblest parent whose kingdom is the narrow walls of a household: and how should all who love their God and country pray that every post of honour and of public trust may be filled with a man of the type of Samuel! The fear of man bringeth a snare; but who, like Samuel, has the fear of God is raised above it. The favour of God is life; and who, like Samuel, seeks it will not be drawn aside by that of man. God is the judge of all, both of the quick and of the dead; and who, like Samuel, carries a sense of that to the bench of justice will keep the ermine of his robes unstained, and give righteous judgment; who, like Samuel, takes the word of God for his rule, and looks to the recompense of reward, may meet with the ingratitude, but will never betray the interests of the crown or of his country. I put unlimited confidence, indeed, in no man—“How have the mighty fallen; and the weapons of war, how have they perished!” But I put little confidence of any kind in that man, whatever his office be, who has not the fear of God before his eyes, and higher motives of action than belong to earth and end with

time. Religion is the root of honour; piety the only true foundation of patriotism; and the best defence of a country, a people nursed up in godliness—of such virtue, energy, and high *morale*, animated with a courage which raises them above the fear of death.—*Rev. T. Guthrie, D.D.*

VI. HOMILETICAL HINTS.

- 1 The character of Samuel strongly emphasizes the importance of youthful piety.

[17624] Thousands never seek the Lord because they do not seek Him while they are young, and because they allow this seedtime of human life to run to waste, and become overgrown with tares. "Childhood and youth are vanity;" but they are the season of hope. Middle life is the season of peril to the soul because it is then that she intrenches herself within the strongholds of sin and boasts of the impregnable strength of her citadel. Old age is the season of discouragement, of despondency, and not unfrequently of despair. You who are young our subject counsels. Take heed lest you shut this door of hope! Let Samuel's piety mingle its light and hopes with your young years, and illumine all the dark passages of your pilgrimage. Saul and Samuel—how great the contrast! In life, in death, in eternity, how great the contrast! Yet is every youth pursuing a course that will terminate either in this mournful or this joyous end. Most affecting is it to see how early the tokens of reprobation sometimes show themselves in those youthful minds that are lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God! Thus it is that many a young man lives. He is wise, and has a strong will to do evil; but "to do good he has no knowledge." He lives fast and he dies soon; the grief of his parents, the pity of angels, he lives and dies without God and without hope. You may "sow the wind and reap the whirlwind;" or you may sow under the mild sun and dropping rain of the opening year, and reap the ripe, mellow harvest. There is but one day of grace, and one bright morning to that day. In a little while—who can tell but it may be to-morrow?—and the light of that morning will fade; a sickly cloud will overshadow it; it will fade away in the night of the grave.—*Rev. G. Spring, D.D.*

- 2 The character of Samuel strongly urges the devotion of young men to the work of the ministry.

[17625] Although we cannot go back and enter with the young around us into all the emotions and hopes of youth, we can better understand than we once could that they are the flower of the world and the hope of the Church. We are greatly desirous to see them more truly dedicated to God, and nurtured in His fear. The time was in this land when, at the close of the last century, we heard our fathers express the fear that the ministry of

reconciliation was being so diminished in numbers that the Church knew not where to look for an adequate supply of religious teachers. There were not a few Elkanahs and Hannahs among them who felt it to be a dark day, and who, with one accord and great earnestness, besought the God of Zion not to forget the children of His covenant. He heard their prayers; and when, at the beginning of the present century, He poured out His Spirit upon the American churches, that blessed work of grace, which continued more than thirty years, was distinguished for nothing so much as the conversion of great multitudes of the children of His people, and the early consecration of their sons to God in the gospel of His Son. The active and full-grown Christianity which now prevails in this land, and the missionary spirit which is its glory, were chiefly the fruits of those visits of heavenly grace.—*Ibid.*

[17626] It is a dark day which now overshadows us, and one of the alarming indications of the age in which we live, not simply that there is a dearth of youthful piety, but that, of the fair youth who become pious, so few are devoted to the service of the sanctuary. Old ministers are dying off, and few among the young step forward to occupy their places. Never was the demand for ministerial labour so urgent, and never were the minds of young men, fitted for this service, so diverted from it to other and more lucrative vocations. From causes, some of which are obvious, the ministry of reconciliation in the minds of the intelligent and honoured seems to be a profession from which their sons are proscribed. The mother of Samuel did not reason, and did not feel, as the mothers of the present day feel and reason. . . . Where is the Lord God of Hannah and Samuel? What Christian parent . . . is not filled with earnest desires that his children may live to some purpose? And what nobler purpose than to serve God as young Samuel served Him?—*Ibid.*

BOAZ.

I. A DILIGENT FARMER.

[17627] Boaz was not one whom necessity compelled to labour. He was rich; and is indeed called "a mighty man of wealth." Yet he made that no reason for wasting his life in ease and idleness. Nor though, as appears from the Scripture narrative, he employed overseers—men no doubt of character and integrity—did he consider it right to commit his business entirely into their hands. Here is a lesson for us. In the first place, such irresponsibility is not good for servants. It places them in circumstances of temptation to act dishonestly; and yielding to temptations to which no man is justified in unnecessarily exposing others, many a good servant has had his ruin to lay at the

door of a too easy and confiding master. Neither is it, in the second place, for the master's interests. "The eye of the master maketh a fat horse," says an English proverb. "The farmer ploughs best with his feet," says a Scotch one—his success turning on the attention he personally gives to the superintendence of his servants and the different interests of his farm. Boaz in the field among his reapers, or at the winnowing season foregoing the luxury of a bed to sleep at the back of a heap of corn, that, losing no time in travelling between his house and the distant threshing-floor, he might resume his work by the break of day, is an example of these old, wise adages; and how, pattern to others as well as farmers, a Christian should be—as the apostle says, and Jesus was—"not slothful in business," while "fervent in spirit, serving the Lord." Religion, sanctifying the secularities of life, does not teach us to neglect our business; but, on the contrary, to attend to it—making it as much our duty to repair to our farm, or shop, or counting-house, during the week, as turning our back on them and dismissing their cares from our minds, to repair to church on the Lord's Day.—*Rev. T. Guthrie, D.D.*

II. A CHIVALROUS YEOMAN.

[17628] What true Christian chivalry born of faith there was in the heart of this Bethlehem yeoman! Boaz was not only sternly honest, but sensitively honourable, bearing his escutcheon without a sinister brand on it. We trace the same quality in some of the most memorable passages in the early life of his illustrious descendant, the greatest of Israel's kings. David knew from the prophet Samuel that he was divinely selected for the throne of the Hebrew commonwealth. The life of Saul was more than once in his power, and the unrelenting persecution with which he pursued him and sought to destroy him, would have seemed to a conscience that was less informed and scrupulous, almost to warrant his taking his life, and seizing the sceptre as it fell from his hands. But he will not so much as lift up his finger "against the Lord's anointed," or ascend to a throne by steps that are stained with blood. He dare not force Providence, or enjoy a blessing while sitting on the grave of a murdered duty. To wait God's time is to prove that "we believe in God" is not only an article in our creed, but an active principle in our Christian life.—*Thomson.*

III. A COURTEOUS GENTLEMAN.

[17629] "Be ye courteous" is a duty which Paul—himself a fine example of it—enjoins on Christians. He who began his defence before Agrippa in this graceful fashion—"I think myself happy, King Agrippa, because I shall answer for myself this day before thee touching all the things whereof I am accused of the Jews; especially because I know thee to be expert in

all customs and questions which are among the Jews: wherefore I beseech thee to hear me patiently"—was no rude, coarse, vulgar man. His was courtesy to a superior; but a still finer ornament of manners, and of religion also, is courtesy to inferiors. And what a fine example of that is Boaz! It is with no cold looks, nor distant air, nor rough speech, nor haughty bearing, making his reapers painfully sensible of their inferiority—that they are servants and he their master—Boaz enters the harvest field. "The master!" spoken by one who has espied him approaching—words that strike with dread the noisy urchins of a school—neither turns their mirth into silence, nor makes them start to reluctant labours. Benevolence beams forth in his looks; and as the children who have attended their mothers to the field, won of old by his gifts and ready smile, run to meet him, he approaches with kindness on his lips. These are not sealed in cold silence, or opened but to find fault with his servants, and address them roughly. "The Lord be with you," is his salutation. They, dropping work, face round, sickles in hand, health in their ruddy cheeks, and the sweat of honest labour on their brows, to welcome their master, and, his inferiors in rank, but his equals in pious courtesy, to reply, "The Lord bless thee!" More beautiful than the morning, with its dews sparkling like diamonds on the grass, and its golden beams tipping the surrounding hills of Bethlehem, these morning salutations between master and servants! Loving him, they esteemed his interests their own.—*Rev. T. Guthrie, D.D.*

[17630] Walking his farm as a little kingdom—as the captain of a man-of-war his quarter-deck—and surrounded only by servants and inferiors, the circumstances of a farmer are not the most conducive to the acquisition of very courteous manners. Yet what he, as well as all other masters, may and should be is seen in Boaz. A farmer, he was in the old, true sense of the word, every inch a gentleman; pious, yet of polished manners; wealthy, yet gracious to the poor, and esteeming virtue above rank or riches: with dependents, yet treating the humblest of them with respectful courtesy; one in whom were beautifully blended the politeness of a court and the simple virtues of a country life.—*Ibid.*

IV. A PIOUS MASTER.

[17631] Boaz in his own life set an example of piety to his servants which could hardly fail to produce a favourable impression on their minds. Some are content to get work out of their servants: they take no interest in their souls—no more than if, like the cattle they tend, they had no souls at all. Unlike these, Boaz spoke to his servants as a God-fearing man. One who felt himself responsible to God and to their parents also, he charged himself with the care of their morals. This appears in the warnings and kind instructions he gave, both to them and

to Ruth. So soon as he found her in his fields she became the object, not of his compassion only, but of his pious regards; and though but a poor gleaner, no servant of his at all, he took as much pains to protect her from contamination or insult as if she had been his own daughter.—*Ibid.*

[17632] “The Lord be with you”—his address to the reapers on entering the harvest field has the ring of sterling metal. What a contrast Boaz offers to many farmers now by whose lips God’s name is frequently profaned, but never honoured—their servants, like their dogs and horses, being often cursed, but never once blessed! And in accordance with the apophthegm, “Like master like man,” what shocking oaths have we heard, vollying as it were out of the mouth of hell, from the lips of coarse, animal, sensual farm-servants! Boaz almost never opens his mouth but pearls drop out. His speech breathes forth pious utterances. All his conversation is seasoned with grace; and, though the result of a Divine change of heart, how natural his religion seems!—not like a gala-dress assumed for the occasion—not like gum-flowers worn for ornament, but such as spring living from the sward—not like an artificial perfume that imparts a passing odour to a thing that is dead, but the odours exhaled by roses or lilies bathed in the dews of heaven. One who could say, “I have set the Lord always before me.” God is in all the good man’s thoughts; and His holy name as often in his mouth to be honoured as it is in others to be profaned.—*Ibid.*

[17633] It was not only in the language of piety that his piety expressed itself. It did not evaporate in words. We hear him speak, but we also see him act! One night, sleeping by a heap of corn alone, as he supposed, he wakes to find a woman lying at his feet. It is Ruth. Instructed by Naomi, she takes this strange Jewish fashion to seek her rights and commit her fortunes into his hands. There is not in all history a passage more honourable to true religion than the story of that midnight meeting. Silver seven times purified never shone brighter as it flowed from the glowing furnace than Boaz’s high principles then and there—not purer or brighter the stars that looked down on the scene of such a trial, and such a triumph. The house of God, the holy table where, by the symbols of Christ’s bloody death, saints have held high intercourse with heaven, never begot purer thoughts than this threshing-floor that night. A noble contrast to such as, disgracing their profession, have received women beneath their roof to undermine their virtue and work their ruin, Boaz, in his fear of God and sacred regard to a poor gleaner’s good name, is a pattern to all men. Ruling his own spirit, he stands there “better than he that taketh a city.” He is enrolled among the progenitors of the Messiah; nor, take him for all in all, was there

one in the list of whom Christ had less cause to be ashamed; more worthy to be the ancestor of an incarnate God, of Him who was “holy, harmless, and undefiled, separate from sinners.”—*Ibid.*

V. A SIMPLE MAN.

[17634] There seems in Boaz a certain fearlessness of disposition that would have prevented his holding back the truth under any circumstances, whether addressing the day-labourer, the attractive young female, or the elder in the gate. I could not dovetail the character of Boaz into any plan of expediency, so much in vogue amongst us; nor fancy him shrinking from the straight course in any matter, on a comparison of the probable numbers who might be with him or against him in the path. Simplicity and godly sincerity mark the man: they do not abound among us as might be wished.—*Church of England Magazine.*

KORAH, DATHAN, AND ABIRAM.

I. THEIR REBELLION.

[17635] The rebellion is the most important event recorded in connection with the thirty-eight years’ wandering in the desert, and it probably took place at Kadesh. The ringleaders were Korah, a Levite (perhaps a near relative of Moses and Aaron), and Dathan, Abiram, and On (the last-named appears to have prudently withdrawn from the conspiracy). Korah seems to have been the moving spirit; hence St. Jude omits the names of his confederates. On account of the camp arrangements, these persons would be in close proximity on the south side of the tabernacle (Numb. i. 10), and thus had the necessary facilities for secretly organizing their plans (two hundred and fifty leading personages were won over, xvi. 2).—*C. A.*

II. THEIR AIMS.

[17636] Korah wanted *sacerdotal* preferment, and raised a popular church cry, viz., that Aaron’s supremacy was inconsistent with the universal priesthood of the people (Numb. xvi. 3). Dathan and Abiram aimed at *civil* power, with a political cry, that Moses’ leadership proved disastrous, and his promises fallacious (13, 14). The real motives which actuated these rebels were jealousy, discontent, personal vanity, and self-aggrandisement. The sympathy and support given to them by the great bulk of the people was due to the doomed generation wishing to vent their spite upon their leader for exclusion from the promised land; hence doubtless the severity of the Divine judgment, when 14,700 died of the plague (xvi. 49).—*Ibid.*

III. MODERN PARALLELS.

1 In our national government.

[17637] 1. Those who needlessly interfere with present arrangements when circumstances clearly indicate their continuance being for the common weal and the glory of God, present a parallel with the sin of Korah and his company. It is not wrong, however, to seek change in the constitution of states, in order to adapt them to altered circumstances of modern life. 2. Those who effect even necessary reforms by illegitimate and premature steps, or by unlawful organizations and secret agencies which are now, Korah-like, honeycombing modern society everywhere. Yet it is not wrong, however, to effect readjustment of political privileges. In these days special rights, indeed, can only be permanently maintained when their possessors exercise them for the public welfare. 3. Those, too, resemble Korah, Dathan, and Abiram who allow pride, personal vanity, jealousy, presumption, and self-seeking to influence them in proposed remedial measures. Let all reformers ask, in every step they take, what is the mind and will of God.—*Ibid.*

2 In our ecclesiastical polity.

(1) *As regards priestly assumption.*

[17638] Any claims of ministers as to their office and mode of administering the sacrament, which encroach upon or obscure the dignity of Christ, the antitypical High Priest, are here condemned. Not, as some suppose, those who differ concerning the threefold order of the ministry. In Scripture, while this is indicated, yet there are no definite injunctions; in fact, the distinction between these grew up gradually. While, therefore, highly valuing our own church government, we dare not unchurch non-episcopal reformed churches, or accuse them of "the gain-saying of Core." To take enlarged views of the relations between the clergy is by no means to fall into the error of Korah. So long as the clergy do not claim to be alone the Church, nor the laity intrude upon strictly ministerial functions, there is no reason against the process of continual and friendly readjustments; e.g., as in lay preaching, the House of Laymen, &c.—*Ibid.*

(2) *As regards excessive value placed upon ritual.*

[17639] Any return to Judaistic liturgical principles of Divine worship is unscriptural and reprehensible (see Gal. iii. 3, iv. 9-11, v. 2-4).—*Ibid.*

(3) *As regards slights offered to Divine appointments.*

[17640] The desecration of, or dishonouring the Sunday, the despising Christian sacraments rightly administered, or the Christian ministry in its due position, and also the substitution of man-made doctrines for Divine teaching, respecting the Atonement or other fundamental

verities, prepare the way for Divine judgments.—*Ibid.*

IV. HOMILETICAL APPLICATION.

[17641] Though possibly we may not rebel after the form of Korah, yet all are guilty before God (Eccles. vii. 29), and in danger of a spiritual death, from which they can alone be delivered by a Divine Intercessor, of whom Aaron was the type (Numb. xvi. 48).—*Ibid.*

NADAB AND ABIHU.

I. THEIR SIN.

1 It sprang from the presumption of a novitiate but just entered upon.

[17642] It doth not appear that they had any orders to burn incense at all at this time. It is true their consecration was completed the day before, and as priests it was part of their work to serve at the altar of incense; but it should seem the whole service of this solemn day of inauguration was to be performed by Aaron himself, for he "slew the sacrifices" (Lev. ix. 8, 15, 18), and his sons were only to attend him (vers. 9, 12, 18), therefore Moses and Aaron only "went into the tabernacle" (ver. 23). But Nadab and Abihu were so proud of the honour they were newly advanced to, and so ambitious of doing the highest and most honourable part of their work presently, that, though the service of this day was extraordinary, and all done by particular direction from Moses, yet without receiving orders, or so much as asking leave from him, they took their censers, and they would enter into the tabernacle at the door of which they thought they had attended long enough, and would burn incense.—*Matthew Henry.*

2 It was one of profanity and disobedience.

[17643] Their offering strange fire is the same with offering strange incense, which is expressly forbidden (Exod. xxx. 9). Moses, we may suppose, had the custody of the incense which was prepared for this purpose (Exod. xxxix. 38); and they, doing this without his leave, had none of the incense which should have been offered, but common incense, so that the smoke of their incense came from a strange fire. God had indeed required the priests to burn incense, but at this time it was what He commanded them not. The priests were to burn incense only when it was their lot (Luke i. 9), and at this time it was not theirs.—*Ibid.*

[17644] Instead of taking the fire from the altar, which was newly kindled "from before the Lord," and which henceforward must be used in offering both sacrifice and incense (Rev. viii. 5),

they took common fire, probably from that with which the flesh of the peace-offerings was boiled, and this they made use of in burning incense. Not being holy fire it is called "strange fire"; and though not expressly forbidden, it was crime enough that God commanded it not; for, as Bishop Hall well observes here, "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.—*Ibid.*"

3 It was very possibly the outcome of intemperance.

[17645] There is reason to suspect they were drunk when they thus acted, because of the law which was given upon this occasion (Lev. x. 8). They had been feasting upon the peace-offerings, and the drink-offerings that attended them, and so their heads were light, or at least their hearts were merry, with wine, they drank and forgot the law (Prov. xxxi. 5), and were guilty of this fatal miscarriage.—*Ibid.*

II. THEIR PUNISHMENT.

1 It was sudden and overwhelming.

[17646] "They died." Might it not have sufficed if they had been only struck with leprosy, as Uzzah; or struck dumb, as Zacharias, and both by the altar of incense? No, they were both struck dead. The wages of this sin was death.—*Ibid.*

[17647] They died suddenly in the very act of their sin, and had not time so much as to cry, "Lord, have mercy upon us!" Though God is long-suffering to us-ward, yet sometimes He makes quick work with sinners; sentence is executed speedily; presumptuous sinners "bring upon themselves a swift destruction," and are justly denied even space to repent.—*Ibid.*

2 It was markedly retributive.

[17648] "They died before the Lord," that is, before the veil that covered the mercy-seat, for even mercy itself will not suffer its own glory to be affronted. They that had sinned before the Lord, died before Him. Damned sinners are said to be tormented "in the presence of the Lamb," intimating that He doth not interpose on their behalf (Rev. xiv. 10).—*Ibid.*

[17649] They died "by fire," as by fire they sinned. They slighted the fire that came from before the Lord to consume the sacrifices, and thought other fire would do every jot as well; and now God justly made them feel the power of that fire which they did not reverence. Thus they that hate to be refined by the fire of Divine grace, will undoubtedly be ruined by the fire of Divine wrath.—*Ibid.*

III. HOMILETICAL REFLECTIONS.

The fate of Nadab and Abihu reminds us that the Lord our God is a "jealous God."

[17650] The sudden and overwhelming doom which fell upon the sons of Aaron clearly enough displays to us the heinous nature of their offence in the eyes of God. He is a jealous God, and will not give His honour to another. Even the sons of the high priest cannot be permitted to act with irreverence towards the God in whose worship they engage. There is a danger arising from familiarity with sacred things, and against this it is necessary to guard. "The temple mouse fears not the temple idol," says the proverb; and those especially who minister in holy things need to be careful, on the one hand, not to arrogate to themselves any of the glory which belongs only to God; and, on the other, to keep ever before them the sacred nature and importance of all the acts of that service in which they are continually occupied.—*M. J.*

UZZAH.

I. HIS OFFENCE.

It might appear to be little, but in reality must have been great.

[17651] Uzzah's offence seemed very small. He and his brother Ahio, the sons of Abinadab, in whose house the ark had long been lodged, having been used to attend it to show their willingness to prefer the public benefit before their own private honour and advantage, undertook to drive the cart in which the ark was carried; this being perhaps the last service they were likely to do for it, for others would be employed about it when it came to the city of David. Ahio went before to clear the way, and, if need were, to lead the oxen. Uzzah followed close to the side of the cart; it happened "the oxen shook it." The critics are not agreed about the signification of the original word; "they stumbled," so our margin; "they kicked," so some, perhaps against the goad with which Uzzah drove them; "they stuck in the mire," so some. By some accident the ark was in danger of being overthrown: Uzzah thereupon laid hold on it to save it from falling, we have reason to think with a very good intention, to preserve the reputation of the ark, and to prevent an ill omen: yet this was his crime. Uzzah was a Levite, but priests only might touch the ark. The law was express concerning the Kohathites, that though they were to carry the ark by the staves, yet "they must not touch any holy thing, lest they die" (Numb. iv. 15); and yet Uzzah's long familiarity with the ark, and the constant attendance he

had given to it, might occasion his presumption, but would not excuse it.—*Matthew Henry.*

II. HIS PUNISHMENT.

It might appear to have been unduly severe, but in reality must have been just.

[17652] His punishment for this offence seems very great; “the anger of the Lord was kindled against him; for in sacred things He is a jealous God; and He “smote him there for his rashness,” as the word is, and struck him dead upon the spot. There he sinned, and there he died, “by the ark of God;” even the mercy-seat would not save him. Why was God thus severe with him? 1. The touching of the ark was forbidden to the Levites expressly under pain of death, “lest they die.” 2. God saw Uzzah’s heart, and the presumption and irreverence of that; perhaps he affected to show before this great assembly how bold he could make with the ark, having been so long acquainted with it. Familiarity even with that which is most awful is apt to breed contempt.—*Ibid.*

III. HOMILETICAL HINTS.

1 The fate of Uzzah demonstrates that God jealously guards His own honour.

[17653] To lay a hand on the sacred ark was a sign and an action of irreverence of which none would have dared to be guilty in Israel’s earlier days. For, since the ark was the acknowledged representation of God’s presence with His people, for a man to lay a hand on the ark was for him to make as though he would lay a hand upon God Himself. But prompted by that contempt which is bred of long familiarity, Uzzah hesitated not for a moment to do even this. God jealously guards His own honour, and for Israel’s sake rather than His own must punish for this slight put upon His majesty. The same God is still the same, being the Unchangeable, and knows now, as then, how to maintain men’s reverence for Him, and to avenge an insult offered to the honour of the God of heaven and earth.—*M. J.*

2 The fate of Uzzah demonstrates that the end may not justify the means.

[17654] God would hereby teach us that a good intention will not justify a bad action: it will not suffice to say of that which is ill done that it was well meant. He will let us know that He can, and will, secure His ark, and needs not any man’s sin to help Him to do it. If it were so great a crime for one to lay hold on the ark of the covenant that had no right to do so, what is it for those to lay claim to the privileges of the covenant that come not up to the terms of it? To the wicked God saith, “What hast thou to do to take My covenant in thy mouth?” (Psa. 1. 16.) “Friend, how camest thou in hither?” If the ark was so sacred, and not to be touched irreverently, what is the blood of the covenant?—*Matthew Henry.*

PHARAOH.

I. HIS RULING SPIRIT.

Unbounded pride.

[17655] One figure, a figure of giant stature, so to speak, stands up, like King Saul, above the crowd, and is so prominent in the early chapters of Exodus, so that none can ever forget his daring presumption, his dogged pertinacity, or his miserable end. In the whole range of human character we know of nothing to equal Pharaoh’s towering pride, his prolonged resistance in the face of appalling judgments, or the unappeasable enmity which made him gather his armies for a fresh encounter on the morrow, after his palace and his kingdom had resounded with the cry for the first-born.—*Rev. J. Gurney.*

[17656] “Who is the Lord that I should obey His voice?” has a sound of hellish impiety about it; and verily we must look beyond the sphere of human action, and call to mind what Scripture tells us of “the Prince of the power of the air,” before we can find anything to match the heathen monarch before whom God made bare His arm, and who said, almost in words, “Smite,” till the blow fell, and his power was crushed, though his name survives as a lesson and a warning for all time.—*Ibid.*

II. HIS POLICY TOWARDS ISRAEL.

Dictated by fear, it was at first that of attempted extermination, and afterwards that of selfish and determined cruelty.

[17657] The rapid increase of the Israelites—quite unexampled in its way—by which God’s promises to Abraham were strikingly fulfilled, makes Pharaoh’s heart beat with solicitude. What if those strangers, should a war break out, join with the enemy?—or, in a time of peace, when they grow strong and arrogant, expel those who at first inhabited the fertile valley of the Nile? The tree is now too strongly rooted in the soil to be destroyed, both root and branch, without great danger every way; but it will be enough to stop the growth of new fruit-bearing branches, and thus let it die, stripped of its leaves and fruit. The burden laid on Israel increases every day; some say that even the pyramids, those palaces made for the dead, that still continue to excite the wonder of the living, must in part have been erected by those Jewish hands. Next is matured the secret plot, by which the innocents are doomed to cruel death just at their birth; and when even that is frustrated, cold-blooded tyranny is not ashamed even to order publicly that all male children shall be cast into the Nile. If the elders have no heart to carry out the ordinance, there must be had a multitude of executioners. Hark! there resounds a voice in Goshen, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning; and the waters, in their detestation of the horrid cruelty,

blush crimson with the blood of innocence!—
Van Oosterzee, D.D.

[17658] Pharaoh, alarmed at the prospect of losing so large a number of useful servants, attributed, or affected to attribute, their discontent of the Israelites to idleness. He increased their burdens to crush out the rising spirit of resistance, while he characterized the brothers as the fomenters of dissatisfaction and disorder. "Wherefore do ye, Moses and Aaron, let the people from their work?" "Let there more work be laid upon the men, that they may labour therein, and let them not regard vain words."—*Anon.*

III. HIS TEST BY GOD.

1 He was tested as to his faith in God.

[17659] To Pharaoh, in the call to let Israel go into the wilderness to serve God, there was a test of faith, and of that obedience in which all real faith finds its true expression. God came forth from His obscurity and spoke to him. Would he hear that voice, recognize it as the voice of Him who is "King of kings," "by whom princes reign," and before whose supreme greatness the sons of men, "high and low, one with another," stand on the same level? Would he acknowledge himself a dependent and subject creature, and bow to the Divine behest? True, he was a heathen, and prided himself on being the child of the sun. But heathenism, in all but its most abject forms, does not obliterate the sense of a supreme Divinity. In humanity there is a chord that ever vibrates to God's touch, and an ear that hears His voice. Not in vain was God's message sent to another heathen monarch. At Jonah's call the king of Nineveh arose from his throne and put on sackcloth; and a threatening danger was averted. Would Pharaoh recognize in the God, whose message Moses brought to him, a Divinity greater than the deities of his country, the "gods many and lords many" to which civilized and enlightened Egypt offered their unworthy homage, a Divinity whose very conception proved itself true, asking such a service as an intelligent being can alone fitly render?—*Rev. R. Hallam, D.D.*

2 He was tested as to his compassion towards man.

[17660] The call was an appeal to his humanity. Relief was asked for a large body of useful slaves, a brief respite from their wearing toil, and for the holiest of purposes, even to afford them an opportunity to worship their national deity. Was there any chord in Pharaoh's heart that would respond to the appeal, that would vibrate to the touch of human sorrow and suffering, and prompt concession to their claims? Or had the soul of the pampered king, in affluence and splendour and sensuality, in unlimited indulgence and the wantonness of despotic power, grown callous to all such pleas, and in the self-idolatry which a solitary exaltation too often begets, come to think the toil and

pain of unthanked and uncompensated vassals but a fit offering to its greatness and its pleasure?—*Ibid.*

3 He was found wanting when thus put to the proof.

[17661] To the Divine claim he returns only an insolent defiance: "Who is the Lord, that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? I know not the Lord, neither will I let Israel go." To the human yearning he gives only the harsh requital of an increased severity: "Let there more work be laid upon the men, that they may labour therein, and let them not regard vain words." Pharaoh failed under the test. "Weighed in the balances, he was found wanting," by moral weight "altogether lighter than vanity itself." And this critical failure was the prelude of that long series of downward steps which ended in the fatal disaster of the Red Sea, and the passage of his disembodied spirit unprepared into the presence of its Maker. Had his answer been different, how different, also, might have been the result to himself and to his kingdom! Israel, by what steps it is useless to conjecture, might have gained their liberty and leave to depart peaceably, the land been saved from impoverishment and deadly disgrace, Pharaoh have found an honourable place among the benefactors of the Church, and Egypt have obtained in spiritual advantages far more than an equivalent for her material loss. How much often depends for the individual and for others upon his single determination! How often a step fixes a man's subsequent progress to good or evil, to salvation or perdition!—*Ibid.*

IV. HIS PUNISHMENT.

His heart was hardened.

[17662] It is after the sixth plague that God says, "And in very deed for this cause have I raised thee up, brought thee to this high estate, and sustained thee in it; for to show in thee My power, and that My name may be declared throughout the earth." There is a change of regimen at this point, and it is judicial and penal. But what is this change of regimen? Simply leaving Pharaoh to himself, ceasing to resist his determination, leaving him to "go on still in his wickedness," withdrawing those checks which, hitherto, had operated to retard his downward progress. It was simply a fulfilment of the threat, "My Spirit shall not always strive with man;" simply saying of him what the prophet represents God as saying of Ephraim, "He is joined to idols, let him alone." All along through this hardening process up to this time, in addition to outward means, the miracles and the words of God, there had been inward influences secretly operating on the soul of Pharaoh, appealing to his conscience and his will, and seeking to draw him back from a course of self-destruction. Now they cease to operate. He is left to nature; and the condition of that man who is

left to nature is hopeless. This is reprobation. The human will is not free to do good without Divine help; and, when Divine help is withdrawn, its bondage to evil is complete. This is the clear teaching of the gospel, but even the heathen have dimly seen it. These influences had been given, and had been ineffectual. They did not overbear Pharaoh's will, and force him to compliance; for God made us all free agents, and He will treat us as free agents. He will help us, but He will never compel us. But there is a stage of help beyond which men may pass, and then it ceases. Pharaoh had passed beyond it, and it had ceased with him. Then the man goes on his evil course without counteraction, "as the horse rushes to the battle;" and the bent of the will to evil unchecked rushes, with ever accelerating force as the currents that are running to the cataract, to its final plunge into the abyss of perdition.—*Ibid.*

[17663] Not till after the sixth plague is God said to have hardened Pharaoh's heart. Seven several times had God distinctly announced His will to him, accompanying the demand with supernatural demonstrations of His power, and with solemn expostulations and threatenings. Pharaoh's heart had been growing hard through all this lengthened process, more obstinate, more unfeeling, more unimpressible. Yet, up to this point, it is not said that God hardened his heart. This seems to indicate a change of dealing, a second stage in this dreadful process. Doubtless it does. It is indeed said, in connection with the preliminary miracle of turning the rod into a serpent, as it stands in our English version, that "He hardened Pharaoh's heart," leaving the agent in this hardening somewhat doubtful. But there is little reason to doubt that this is a mistranslation. The true rendering is, The heart of Pharaoh was hard and did not yield.—*Ibid.*

[17664] The hardening on the part of God was not arbitrary, Pharaoh was not foredoomed. He was a free agent, and his free agency was carefully respected. At no point were his right and his power of choice infringed. Motives and influences from opposite quarters were brought to bear upon him, and the question of yielding to the one or the other was left to the determination of his own will. There was never any force employed to prevent his consenting to the departure of the Israelites, or any power exerted to render his heart insensible to the appeals in their behalf. The soul of the man was left open for all the influences that were at work upon it to have free access to it and unfettered operation upon it. Would he obey God, or would he follow the dictates of his own pride and the instigation of the devil? Never was man freer than Pharaoh to listen to God's call. No bondage whatever upon him, but that bondage which sin creates, according to that law which runs, "He that committeth sin is the servant of sin;" nor were there, at least at first, any stint of those gracious

influences by which this servitude is counteracted and overcome. His hardness was not decreed nor created by God. He made it himself, just as every soul makes it that refuses to hear God's voice, and "goeth on still in his wickedness." He is no victim of an arbitrary decree that first ordains him to be obstinate, then works the obstinacy in him, and then punishes him for persisting in it—a decree which Calvin himself, while he coolly propounds it, calls a horrible decree. God only did not bring such overpowering influences to bear upon his will as would have virtually annulled his freedom, and forced him into an obedience which, for the very reason that it was forced, would have been no true obedience, and been robbed of all moral value and commendableness. Under this state of things he grew hard, just as every man grows hard who sees duty and will not do it, who feels motions to good and will not follow their guidance.—*Ibid.*

[17665] When Pharaoh hardens his heart, God is said to harden it, because He allows him to harden it, in order, thereby, more effectively and splendidly to accomplish the beneficent designs of His holy government towards His people. And thus the difficulty in regard to Pharaoh at once vanishes, and his case loses all peculiarity. It immediately falls into the common order and routine of God's providence. Nothing befalls him but that which is common unto men. His heart is hardened just as the hearts of men around us now are hardened; just as, alas! a hardening process may be going on in our own hearts. There is a similar conjunction of the Divine and devilish when it is said, "Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil," while yet it is unimpeachably true that "God cannot be tempted of evil, neither tempteth He any man." And the fact of such temptation, and of such permission, and even of providential arrangements apparently looking to it, is patent and palpable in our ordinary experience and observation.—*Ibid.*

V. HOMILETICAL REFLECTIONS.

I The case of Pharaoh does not stand alone.

[17666] Pharaoh's case is not exceptional; it conforms itself to the ordinary laws of our spiritual constitution and of God's moral government. He is no solitary monster in the pages of history, nor were God's dealings with him strange and unexampled, or capricious and tyrannical. It is just a piece of human life, remarkable for nothing but the exalted sphere in which it was exhibited, and the important results that attended upon it. What Pharaoh was doing, multitudes are doing; what God was doing then, He is doing continually. To these results no conspicuous station is needful, nor grossly wicked lives. And, therefore, we may not flatter our souls that we are safe from them because we are obscure and are not vile

criminals. Just such awful mischiefs are being wrought in very quiet lives, and with just such terrible consequences. God lays His commands upon us, and we know them to be His commands, and we will not do them. God forbids our doing certain things, and we do them, while we know that we ought not to do them. We leave undone the things that we ought to do, and we do the things that we ought not to do.—*Ibid.*

- 2 God hardens men's hearts by allowing them to persist in hardening their own hearts.

[17667] It seems fair to infer from the case of Pharaoh that God hardens men's hearts, or withdraws those influences by which the process of hardening the heart is counteracted and opposed, only when they obstinately resist those influences, and persist in hardening their own hearts. God, in the language of Scripture, is said to do that which He permits another to do, who in so doing accomplishes, whether designedly or not, some end of His just and holy government. A remarkable instance of this way of speaking may be seen in the case of David's numbering the people. The author of the Second Book of Samuel says, "And again the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and He moved David against them to say, Go, number Israel and Judah;" while the writer of the First Book of Chronicles says, "And Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel." The contradiction is only verbal and superficial.—*Ibid.*

- 3 There are recognizable signs of a hardened or hardening heart.

[17668] There have been inward remonstrances, twinges of conscience, inclinations in the soul from time to time for a different course. And this is God's voice in you, the presence of His Spirit in your soul, calling you, enabling you to turn from your evil way and live. Grace has come to you. You are not waiting for it; it is here. Do you think that your baptism was nothing, and that it has brought you no help from on high? Or, if you are not baptized, do you think that it is for nothing that you are included in the scope of redeeming mercy? No; it will not do. You have "grieved the Holy Spirit of God, whereby you were sealed unto the day of redemption." You have "quenched the Spirit." You have "done despite to the Spirit of grace." We may say to you, as St. Stephen said to the persecuting Jews, "Ye do always resist the Holy Ghost." You might renounce sin, and resolve to serve God at any time if you would, and that, not in your own strength, but in God's, which has been freely imparted to you. And now, have these inward remonstrances grown feebler? Do you sin with more ease, with less reluctance, with less discomfort? Do you lead a worldly life with less sense of its wickedness, with less fear of its results? Then you are being hardened, you

are hardening yourselves, "the god of this world" is hardening you, you are letting him harden you. And have these remonstrances ceased altogether? I trust not; but there may be too close approximations to it. Do you live on without compunction and without fear? Ah, then, God is hardening you. He has given you up. Beware! "To-day if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts."—*Ibid.*

- 4 The judgments of God, whilst they harden some, soften others.

[17669] Now it is not incorrect to say that the sun, by one and the same power of its heat, melts wax indeed, but dries up and hardens mud; not that its power operates one way upon mud and in another way upon wax, but that the qualities of mud and wax are different, although according to nature they are one thing, both being from the earth. In this way, then, one and the same working upon the part of God, which was administered by Moses in signs and wonders, made manifest the hardness of Pharaoh, which he had conceived in the intensity of his wickedness, but exhibited the obedience of those other Egyptians who were intermingled with the Israelites, and who are recorded to have quitted Egypt at the same time with the Hebrews.—*Ibid.*

BALAAM.

I. HIS CHARACTER.

- 1 He was inordinately selfish and covetous.

[17670] The features of his besetting sin are plainly marked. The first description of Balak's embassy suggests it; the messengers set forth to win the prophet to their side with "the rewards of divination in their hands." The power of money over him seems to have been known; and so, when he refused to come, Balak hoped to overpower his scruples by the bribe of great promotion. And the prophet's conduct well justified these expectations. God appeared to him in the visions of the night when first the messengers of Moab were lodged within his house, and distinctly told him that he should not go; that he should not curse the people, for that they were blessed. Had Balaam's heart been right, this would have settled the question for ever; and, when the messengers returned, he would at once have refused them. The faltering answer, "Tarry ye here also this night," betrayed all. He did not dare to go in the face of a refusal, but he hoped to win permission. He longed for the gifts, and he thought that perhaps, at the last, he might extract such a license as would allow him to earn them.—*Bp. Wilberforce.*

[17671] Balak struck the keynote of Balaam's character when he said, "Am I not able to promote thee unto honour?" Herein, then, lies the first perversion of glorious gifts—that Balaam

sought not God's honour but his own by making those gifts subservient to his own greed. It is evident that Balaam half suspected his own failing. Otherwise what mean those vaunts, "If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold"? Brave men do not vaunt their courage, nor honourable men their honesty, nor do the truly noble boast of high birth. All who understand the human heart perceive a secret sense of weakness in these loud boasts of immaculate purity. Silver and gold, these were the things he loved, and so, not content with communion with God, with the possession of sublime gifts, he thought these only valuable so far as they were means of putting himself in possession of riches. Thus spiritual powers were degraded to make himself a vulgar man of wealth.—*Rev. F. Robertson.*

2 He was distinguished by his religious and moral sentimentalism.

[17672] He not only appears to be a religious man, but a very religious man. He had spiritual visions and ecstasies, and gave utterance to some of the most beautiful and precious truths ever uttered by human lips. No true prophet and no divinely commissioned apostle could say more than he when he uttered the words, "Hearken unto me, thou son of Zippor: God is not a man that He should lie, nor the son of man that He should repent: hath He said, and shall He not do it? or hath He spoken, and shall He not make it good?" His mind is fixed, and his thoughts are arrested and borne away by visions of heavenly truth: "He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob; neither hath He seen perverseness in Israel." There is enthusiasm and rapture in his emotions: "How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob! and thy tabernacles, O Israel! As the valleys are they spread forth, as gardens by the rivers' side, as trees of lign-aloes which the Lord hath planted, and as cedar-trees beside the waters. There shall come a star out of Jacob, and a sceptre shall rise out of Israel!" There is great elevation of thought, and great tenderness, not only when he thinks of Israel, but when, in such hallowed words, he speaks of himself: "From the top of the rocks I see him, and from the top of the hills I behold him. Who can count the dust of Jacob, and the number of the fourth part of Israel? Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!" Such things as these, to the eye of man, are indications of piety, but with all these exalted spiritual sentiments, and this desire to die the death of the righteous, . . . we inspect his character more closely, and . . . see its rottenness.—*Rev. G. Spring, D.D.*

3 He was remarkable for his doublemindedness and inconsistency.

(1) *This was exhibited in the wide variation between his deeds and his words.*

[17673] There are two parallel lines in the history of Balaam, which, unfortunately for him,

were like parallel lines in this also, that they never met, and though produced to infinity, never can meet. These are his conduct and his words; how he acted and what he said. His conduct was of the meanest; his words were of the noblest that ever came from mortal lips. Alas! how often do these two—noble words and ignoble conduct—run on alongside each other in the life of man, and never meet. The words abide; the man, identified not with his words, which were from him but not of him, but with his conduct, which was the true expression of himself, perishes for ever.—*Anon.*

[17674] We observe in Balaam perfect veracity with utter want of truth. Balaam was veracious. He will not deceive Balak. And yet there was utter truthlessness of heart. Balaam will not utter what is not true; but he will blind himself so that he may not see the truth, and so speak a lie, believing it to be the truth. He will only speak the thing he feels; but he is not careful to feel all that is true. He goes to another place, where the whole truth may not force itself upon his mind—to a hill where he shall not see the whole of Israel: from hill to hill for the chance of getting to a place where the truth may disappear. But there stands the stubborn fact—Israel is blessed; and he will look at the fact in every way, to see if he cannot get it into a position where it shall be seen no longer. Ostrich like!—*Rev F. Robertson.*

(2) *This was exemplified in the fact that he tried to serve two masters.*

[17675] Balaam wanted to please himself without displeasing God. The problem was how to go to Balak, and yet not offend God. He would have given worlds to get rid of his duties, and he sacrificed, not to learn what his duty was, but to get his duty altered. Now see the feeling that lay at the root of all this—that God is mutable. Yet of all men one would have thought Balaam knew better, for had he not said, "God is not a man, that He should lie; neither the son of man, that He should repent: hath He said, and shall He not do it?" But when we look upon it, we see Balaam had scarcely any feeling higher than this—God is more inflexible than man. Probably had he expressed the exact shade of feeling, he would have said, more obstinate. He thought that God had set His heart upon Israel, and that it was hard, yet not impossible, to alter this partiality. Hence he tries sacrifices to bribe, and prayers to coax God. How deeply rooted this feeling is in human nature—this belief in God's mutability—you may see from the Romish doctrine of indulgences and atonements. The Romish Church permits crime for certain considerations. For certain considerations it teaches that God will forgive crimes. Atonements after, and indulgences before sin, are the same. But this Romish doctrine never could have succeeded, if the belief in God's mutability and the desire that He should be mutable, were not in man already.—*Ibid.*

[17676] What Balaam was doing in these parables, and enchantments, and sacrifices, was simply purchasing an indulgence to sin; in other words, it was an attempt to make the Eternal Mind change. What was wanting to Balaam to feel was this—God *cannot* change. What he did feel was this—God *will* not change. There are many writers that teach that this and that is right because God has willed it. All discussion is cut short by the reply, God has determined it, therefore it is right. Now, there is exceeding danger in this mode of thought, for a thing is not right because God has willed it, but God wills it because it is right. It is in this tone the Bible always speaks. Never, except in one obscure passage, does the Bible seem to refer right and wrong to the sovereignty of God, and declare it a matter of will: never does it imply that if He so choose, He could reverse evil and good. It says, “Is not My word equal? are not your ways unequal?” “Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?” was Abraham’s exclamation in a kind of hideous doubt whether the Creator might not be on the eve of doing injustice. So the Bible justifies the ways of God to man. But it could not do so unless it admitted eternal laws, with which no will can interfere. Nay more, see what ensues from this mode of thought. If right is right because God wills it, then, if God chose, He could make injustice, and cruelty, and lying to be right. This is exactly what Balaam thought. If God could but be prevailed on to hate Israel, then for him to curse them would be right. And again: if power and sovereignty make right, then, supposing that the Ruler were a demon, devilish hatred would be as right as now it is wrong. There is great danger in some of our present modes of thinking. It is a common thought that might makes right, but for us there is no rest, no rock, no sure footing, as long as we feel right and wrong are mere matters of will and decree. There is no safety, then, from those hankering feelings and wishes to alter God’s decree.—*Ibid.*

[17677] Balaam wished to go with Balak’s messengers, only he felt he ought not to go; and the problem which he attempted to solve was, how to go and yet not offend God. He was quite resolved he would, anyhow, act religiously and conscientiously; he was too honourable a man to break any of his engagements; if he had given his word, it was sacred; if he had duties, they were imperative; he had a character to maintain, and an inward sense of propriety to satisfy; but he would have given the world to have got rid of his duties; and the question was, how to do so without violence; and he did not care about walking on the very brink of transgression, so that he could keep from falling over. Accordingly, he was not content with ascertaining God’s will, but he attempted to change it.—*Cardinal Newman.*

[17678] The object we have now before us is the most astonishing in the world; a very wicked

man, under a deep sense of God and religion, persisting still in his wickedness, and preferring the wages of unrighteousness even when he had before him a lively view of death, and that approaching period of his days, which should deprive him of all those advantages for which he was prostituting himself; and likewise a prospect, whether certain or uncertain, of a future state of retribution; all this joined with an explicit ardent wish, that, when he was to leave this world, he might be in the condition of a righteous man. Good God, what inconsistency, what perplexity is here! With what different views of things, with what contradictory principles of action must such a mind be torn and distracted! It was not unthinking carelessness by which he run on headlong in vice and folly, without ever making a stand to ask himself what he was doing: no; he acted upon the cool motives of interest and advantage. Neither was he totally hard and callous to impressions of religion, what we call abandoned; for he absolutely denied to curse Israel. When reason assumes her place, when convinced of his duty, when he owns and feels, and is actually under the influence of the Divine authority; whilst he is carrying on his views to the grave, the end of all temporal greatness; under this sense of things, with the better character and more desirable state present—full before him—in his thoughts, in his wishes, voluntarily to choose the worse—what fatality is here! Or how otherwise can such a character be explained? And yet strange as it may appear, it is not altogether an uncommon one; nay, with some small alterations, and put a little lower, it is applicable to a very considerable part of the world. For if the reasonable choice be seen and acknowledged, and yet men make the unreasonable one, is not this the same contradiction; that very inconsistency which appeared so unaccountable?—*Bp. Butler.*

[17679] Although the power of conscience is greatly impaired by sin, and has lost its mastery, it has not lost its rod. Men are sometimes whipped into courses of conduct which look like piety, when true piety itself has no attractions for them. Balaam well knew that he was treading a doubtful path; the experiment was a hazardous one to curse a people whom God had not cursed. That he was deeply conscious of his inconsistency and embarrassment, is most obvious from his management and contrivance to *get round* the Divine command. He was pursuing a course in defiance of conscience; and the best thing he could do to alleviate her reproaches was to put on the semblance of religion.—*Bp. Wilberforce.*

II. HIS DEPARTURE FROM GOD.

1 It flowed directly from his first false step, which was prophetic of his whole downward course.

[17680] Balaam replied to all the king of Moab’s tempting offers, “If Balak would give

me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the word of the Lord my God, to do less or more." But then he added, "Now, therefore, I pray thee, tarry ye also here this night, that I may know what the Lord will say to me more." Now, it is just here that Balaam failed first. He ought not to have inquired a *second* time. God had said, "Thou shalt not go with them," and this ought to have been sufficient. When God has once revealed His will, it is sinful to make further inquiry, as if it were not revealed, or as if circumstances would change it. This it was that Balaam secretly wished. He did not dare to go without God's permission; but notwithstanding all his professions, he could not quietly resign all Balak's offers of promotion and gold. We take this, then, to be the great crisis in Balaam's life. We take this *act*, which to many appears so excellent, to be the *first* step in his downward course. It was a solemn moment for Balaam, the turning-point in his history; but he knew it not. It was not only the day of God's power towards Israel, but a day of grace to Balaam; but, alas! he *knew* it not. The precious moment on which so much depended was lost and perverted; henceforth his downward course was rapid and fearful. He perished in the rejection of grace and mercy. How full of solemn warning is this period of Balaam's history!—*G. Wagner.*

2 It was diabolical in the ingenuity of its final crime.

[17681] He recommends Balak to use the fascination of the daughters of Moab to entice the Israelites into idolatry (Numb. xxxi. 15, 16; Rev. ii. 14). He has tried enchantments and sacrifices in vain to reverse God's will. He has tried in vain to think that will is reversed. It will not do. He feels at last that God has not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath He seen perverseness in Israel. Now, therefore, he tries to reverse the character of these favourites, and so to reverse God's will. God will not curse the good; therefore Balaam tries to make them wicked; he tries to make the good curse themselves, and so exasperate God. A more diabolical wickedness we can scarcely conceive. Yet Balaam was an honourable man and a veracious man; nay, a man of delicate conscientiousness and unconquerable scruples—a man of lofty religious professions, highly respectable and respected. The Lord of heaven and earth has said there is such a thing as "straining at a gnat, and swallowing a camel."—*Rev. F. W. Robertson.*

III. HIS PUNISHMENT.

1 It was begun in his being allowed to do according to his own will and pleasure.

[17682] The permission which God gave to Balaam to go with the princes of Moab is certainly difficult and perplexing, especially when taken in connection with what follows.

If God gave him permission to go with them, why was an angel sent to arrest his progress? and why was God angry? We should answer to questions of this kind: The great crisis of Balaam's life was now past. He had shown his insincerity. Though he would not outwardly break away from God, he had really chosen evil—his heart upon gold. The permission, therefore, on God's part was really a punishment. It was as if God had said to him, "You wish to go with the princes of Moab. Notwithstanding all your professions, your heart is set upon it. Go then, but know this, that your sin shall find you out."—*G. Wagner.*

2 It was in strict conformity with his whole career, and culminated in the total loss of both the opposite objects which he had striven to obtain.

[17683] A bad man prophesies under the fear of God, restrained by conscience, full of poetry and sublime feelings, with a full clear view of death as dwarfing life, and the blessedness of righteousness as compared with wealth. And yet we find him striving to disobey God, hollow and unsound at heart; using for the devil wisdom and gifts bestowed by God, sacrificing all with a gambler's desperation, for name and wealth: tempting a nation to sin, and crime, and ruin; separated in selfish isolation from all mankind; superior to Balak, and yet feeling that Balak knew him to be a man that had his price; with the bitter anguish of being despised by the men who were inferior to himself; forced to conceive of a grandeur in which he had no share, and a righteousness in which he had no part. Can you not conceive the end of one with a mind so torn and distracted?—the death in battle; the insane frenzy with which he would rush into the field, and finding all go against him, and that lost for which he had bartered heaven, after having died a thousand worse than deaths, find death at last upon the spears of the Israelites?—*Rev. F. W. Robertson.*

[17684] He thought to secure this world and the next; he lost both: he had too much truth to secure the rewards of Balak, he had too little truth to escape the wrath of God. Not that he was what we commonly describe by the appellation, hypocrite: he did not study to appear one character whilst he was another: he did fear God, but he did not fear Him in the right way; it was the fear of a slave, not of a son; the fear bred by the thought of punishment, not the fear of awe—he did not love God at all; he was weak and irresolute in purpose; his reason approved of God's service, but the low cravings of a covetous temper were not cast out of his heart by a true spirit of love, and so in time they stifled all its higher aspirations. It was in vain that he knew the blessedness of being on God's side; in vain that the Spirit of the Highest rested on him; in vain that his eyes were opened, and that visions of God's glory, such as man knows not, passed in unveiled majesty before him; he was failing in the

great trial of his own moral being, and so he fell at last, and fell hopelessly.—*Bp. Wilberforce.*

IV. QUESTION AS TO THE TRUE OR FALSE NATURE OF HIS PROPHETIC OFFICE AND GIFTS.

[17685] Balaam was blessed with God's special favour. You will ask at once, How could so bad a man be in God's favour? But I wish you to put aside reasonings, and contemplate facts. I say he was specially favoured by God. God has a store of favours in His treasure-house, and of various kinds—some for a time, some for ever; some implying His approbation, others not. He showers favours even on the bad. He makes His sun to rise on the unjust as well as on the just. He willeth not the death of a sinner. He is said to have loved the young ruler, whose heart, notwithstanding, was upon the world. His loving mercy extends over all His works. How He separates, in His own Divine thought, kindness from approbation, time from eternity; what He does from what He foresees, we know not, and need not inquire. At present He is loving to all men, as if He did not foresee that some are to be saints, others reprobates to all eternity. He dispenses His favours variously—gifts, graces, rewards, faculties, circumstances, being indefinitely diversified, nor admitting of discrimination or numbering on our part. Balaam, I say, was in His favour; not indeed for his holiness' sake, not for ever; but in a certain sense, according to His inscrutable purpose who chooses whom He will choose, and exalts whom He will exalt, without destroying man's secret responsibilities, or His own governance, and the triumph of truth and holiness, and His own strict impartiality in the end. Balaam was favoured in an especial way above the mere heathen. Not only had he the grant of inspiration, and the knowledge of God's will, an insight into the truths of morality, clear and enlarged, such as we Christians even cannot surpass, but he was even admitted to conscious intercourse with God, such as even Christians have not.—*Cardinal Newman.*

[17686] The probability is that he was in many respects a superior man, with illumination enough to seize and present not a little of that common heritage of truth which had survived the several stages of corruption; and quite possibly he was used of God for the purpose of doing good among the ignorant and degraded people around him. Indeed, his subsequent utterances . . . give evidence of an intimate acquaintance with some of the most important parts of the Hebrew Scriptures, so that we may without improbability regard him as a worshipper of the true God in that far-off land, and yet one who had by no means shaken himself free from the corrupt influences around him, as is evident from his subsequent career.—*Avon.*

V. REFLECTIVE SUMMARY OF GENERAL CHARACTER.

[17687] The narrative in Numbers, though brief according to the spun-out biographies of modern times, makes us feel that Balaam was no ordinary personage. He was one of those poets, prophets, geniuses, who exercise for good or evil immense power over their fellows. A century, usually, only can boast of a handful of such richly gifted men. Balaam, the son of Beor, combined high intellectual with high moral and spiritual culture. As there are some men who have quicker mental perception, so there are others who have keener moral susceptibilities. The majority of mankind have not too large an outfit of intellectual and moral gifts. Ordinary men are usually slow to discern good and evil, right and wrong, in any but the simplest and most obvious forms. The longer I live the more I feel that there is a limited responsibility—yet a responsibility—with numbers of the human family. Masses of men sin ignorantly and in unbelief. It is not so, however, with men of Balaam's stamp. They intuitively see the right and the wrong, and it is very painful to their elevated nature to act shabbily, meanly, and dishonestly. They cannot sin without the semblance of acting rightly, and resort to the aid of sophistry and a masterly ingenuity in order to mystify the truth.—*C. N.*

[17688] From the record of this dweller in Aram, we learn that something more than noble traits of character, moral sensibility, high ideals, prophetic lore, theological knowledge are necessary for a virtuous and a godly career. We may have the gifts without the graces; prophecy, religious knowledge without the self-denial, devoted spirit of holy teachers who use that knowledge solely for the glory of God. Avarice, ambition, or any one master passion, whether in a refined or religious, or in an unrefined or irreligious kind, will with cancerous effect destroy the true life within. Balaam loved the wages of unrighteousness, he loved supremely money, or what money could obtain or sustain, rank, station, and position. He loved indeed, but only secondarily, honesty, truth, and rectitude. The fierceness of the struggle between the good and evil elements in this man of many parts, explains the inconsistencies and the enigmas of his history. Nor did his spiritual knowledge and intellectual endowments prove real advantages to him in the conflict. In short, they only seem to have made his case the more absolutely hopeless. A less gifted man would not have been so perfectly blind as he at last became. A less skilled casuist would not have been able to persuade himself that he could please himself and not displease God, that he could get God to alter His laws and plans, and that obligations could be relaxed, and duties relieved of their plain character, to suit the wishes of a mere mortal man however gifted and favoured. Never was it more clearly shown that the wages of sin is

death than in Balaam's perversion of great gifts, the prostituting of extraordinary talents until he ended his career, being one of the accursed race of panderers and pimps deservedly being destroyed with the sword of the Israelites.—*Ibid.*

VI. SIMILARITY BETWEEN THE CHARACTERS OF BALAAM AND JUDAS.

[17689] The figure of Balaam stands out alone in the history of the Old Testament. The only counterpart to it is that of Judas, the traitor. Balaam represented the opposition of heathenism; Judas that of Judaism. Both went some length in following the truth; Balaam honestly acknowledged the God of Israel, and followed His directions; Judas owned the Messianic appearance in Jesus, and joined His disciples. But in the crisis of their inner history, when that came which, in one form or another, must be to every one the decisive question—each failed. Both had stood at the meeting and parting of the two ways, and both chose that course which rapidly ended in their destruction. Balaam had expected the service of Jehovah to be quite other from what he found it; and, trying to make it such as he imagined and wished, he not only failed, but stumbled, fell, and was broken. Judas, also, if we may be allowed the suggestion, had expected the Messiah to be quite other than he found Him; disappointment, perhaps failure in the attempt to induce Him to alter His course, and an increasingly widening gulf of distance between them, drove him, step by step, to ruin. Even the besetting sins of Balaam and of Judas—covetousness and ambition—are the same. And as, when Balaam failed in turning Jehovah from Israel, he sought—only too successfully—to turn Israel from the Lord; so when Judas could not turn the Christ from His purpose towards His people, he also succeeded in turning Israel, as a nation, from their King. In both instances, also, for a moment a light more bright than before was cast upon the scene. In the case of Balaam we have the remarkable prophetic utterances, reaching far beyond the ordinary range of prophetic vision; at the betrayal by Judas we hear the prophetic saying of the High Priest going far beyond the knowledge of the time, that Jesus should die, not only for His own people, but for a ruined world. And, lastly, in their terrible end, they each present to us most solemn warning of the danger of missing the right answer to the great question—that of absolute and implicit submission of mind, heart, and life to the revealed covenant will of God.—*Rev. A. Edersheim, D.D.*

[The type of character which these two men represent is no uncommon one. It should be carefully studied; for although in few instances do we see such ripened fruits of sin, yet the ambitious and covetous spirit, if unchecked in religious professors, is sure to tend to an alarming moral catastrophe.—*C. N.*]

VII. HIS LIFE'S LESSON FOR OUR OWN TIMES.

1 It declaims against the love of money.

[17690] There never was an age when men needed more to be warned against avarice; not against money, but the love of it. Mere denunciations of money are always foolish, and nearly always insincere; but warnings against the love of it are perpetually needful (1 Tim. vi. 9-19). No vice lays hold of the soul more imperceptibly, acquires power over it more rapidly, debases it more completely, or cleaves to it so long. Therefore let us guard against its beginnings. (Krummacher's "Parable of the Crocodile.") If we are prospering in the world, we must take care not to let the vice of avarice come to life in the soul. We can prevent this: (1) By setting our affection on things above (Col. iii. 1, 2). If we truly apprehend the fact that our "conversation" (our citizenship) is in heaven, we shall not be too powerfully attracted by the baubles of earth. (2) By causing our benevolence to keep pace with our prosperity. A habit of benevolence is the best safeguard against avarice. The philanthropist has joys far exceeding any the miser ever knows (Acts xx. 35). Such a man's wealth is a blessing, not only to others, but to himself. In this life it procures for him happiness of the best, because of the most God-like kind. After death it secures for him an honoured memory, and loving welcome to the heavenly mansions (Luke xvi. 9). In the day of judgment, when the covetous man's gold shall sink him down to hell, the wealth of the man who went about doing good shall purchase for him welcome from the Judge of all (Matt. xxv. 34-36).—*Ibid.*

2 It emphasizes the meanness, dishonesty, and consequent disaster of attempting to serve "God and Mammon."

[17691] The one great lesson of Balaam's career is that which has been enforced with great spirit and power by Bishop Butler: that he who counts the cost of honesty is dishonest. He who sets a price upon his religious convictions has no true religious principle. Either Christianity is worthy of our whole heart, or its claims are worthless. The most pitiable class in Christian lands consists of those who clearly see the excellence of Christ, but who love the wages of unrighteousness, and are for ever attempting to compromise both with the Lord and with the devil.—*Ibid.*

3 It displays the disastrous impotence of a merely intellectual hold upon sacred truth.

[17692] Alas for the deadly gift of cleverness! alas for the danger of that sharpness of wit which leads us to endeavour to compass our ends by indirect and circuitous means! The politician, who could not forego true words, tried his craft. He succeeded, and he failed. He succeeded against man; he failed against God. The evil that he planned, by means of other men's sins he brought about. The personal

advancement that he sought was overthrown by a miserable death, and a name blasted to all generations in the inspired oracles of God. Oh, let us turn our eyes upon ourselves! Can we not read ourselves in much, at least, of this history? How apt we are to totter thus and stagger upon the edge of truth and duty! Not indeed visibly, intentionally, distinctly giving it up and forsaking it, but trying to hold it together with as much of worldly indulgence and prosperity as we can; trying to serve God and mammon, God and our own heart's lusts; trying by all sorts of cunning self-deceit to keep truth (so at least as not to abandon it) and be prosperous, to keep truth and be rich, to keep truth and be popular, to keep truth and be comfortable. But if a man does thus allow himself to palter with that which ought to be the foundation and basis of all else; if he divides his aim between two objects in his life; if he goes on so, venturing to the very edge of duty and truth continually—going, so to say, as near to the wind on every occasion as he possibly can, without actually disowning and forfeiting the truth which he believes, and thinks that he is holding fast—do you suppose that that conflict will continue long? do you imagine that so painful a balance and inward battle can last? No; by no means: that which the intellect holds will yield and give way; that which the heart loves will gain strength and have victory. At last it must needs be so, whether the ultimate condition of the man be produced by the gradual dying away of the intellectual hold of truth, or by some sudden device of cleverness, like the counsel of Balaam, designed, by a stroke of policy and skill, to gain both objects at once. One way or the other, the worldly heart will have its way. It smother the intellectual faith. It necessarily kills it. The world cannot be taken in to share the empire of the heart without becoming ere long the ruler of it.—*Dp. Moberley.*

ADONI-BEZEK.

I. HIS CRUEL PRACTICE.

[17693] Probably it was to brand men as cowards that Adoni-bezek carried on such a cruel practice as that of cutting off their thumbs. This method of branding afforded a certain malign gratification to those who had the power thus to punish others, while it did something towards crippling the power of revolt. The excision must have been performed in a particular way—which would be most painful—otherwise death would have speedily ensued. Doubtless many would, even with this precaution, die from the infliction. It seems, however, to have afforded amusement to those who were onlookers. It is strange how men can behold such things without, mentally, placing themselves in the position of those compelled to submit to such cruelty. But men get, by education, gradually

accustomed to such sights. Frequently the process of education in evil begins very early. A child forms the habit of tormenting insects and mute creatures. That is the preparatory process. Doubtless the education of Adoni-bezek began early. Certainly if he had others to help him he was an apt pupil. He had evidently delighted in practising as much cruelty as possible. It had been his boast at one time that so many kings had not only suffered by excision of their thumbs, but had been reduced also to the position of dogs. "To gather meat under a table," was the proverbial expression for such a position. If he had thus treated seventy-two kings it is probable that he had maltreated, or caused to be tormented, many others of inferior rank.—*F. Hastings.*

II. HIS RIGHTEOUS RETRIBUTIVE PUNISHMENT.

1 He observed in it a remarkable correspondence between past barbarity and present suffering.

[17694] The victorious Israelites advance, and Adoni-bezek has to fight a battle in which, instead of being the victor, he is the vanquished. He is taken and led, a prisoner, into the presence of his conqueror. Never had he anticipated this: much less that he himself would have to suffer as others had done through him. The Israelites knew of this horrible practice. It had been a matter of common report how cruelly he treated the vanquished. To punish him they inflict the same penalty. With hands and feet writhing from the recent excision, he makes this acknowledgment: "As I have done, so God hath required me."—*Ibid.*

[17695] When men suffer they look back and ask themselves why such a trial has come upon them—what action of their own has caused it? Men are never willing at first to blame themselves for any evil that may befall them. But the nature of the punishment in this case compels Adoni-bezek to trace his suffering to his own act. Had he suffered from a wound in battle, or fallen as he led his army, or had he been simply imprisoned or had his eyes put out, as were those of one of the kings of Judah, he would not so readily have connected his misfortune with his previous wrong-doings. There is, however, in his sufferings something so forcibly recalling his own misdeeds that he himself calls his torture a requital. He sees a similarity between his own sin and that which had fallen upon him. He takes it in the sense of retribution. Why? Because conscience told him he had done evil.—*Ibid.*

[17696] It was the conscience of Adoni-bezek which led him thus to tremble at what he understood as the consequence of his own sin. Had he suffered the same treatment, never having injured others in the same way, it is not probable that he would have seen in it a requital of his own sin. That he should so see it shows

that when he had thus cruelly used the seventy-two kings one after the other, the voice of conscience had protested against it. It had been for some long time silent. Now, however, its power returns, and with fearfully startling emphasis asserts, "Thou didst this to others, now it comes upon thyself. Thou didst mock at the calamity of others, now it comes upon thee, and thou shrinkest." He sees that he had acted proudly and wantonly. He has to suffer, but it would be far more easy to bear his sufferings if conscience would not so bitterly remind him of the correspondence between previous performances and present pains.—*Ibid.*

2 He ascribed it to a Divine hand.

[17697] The recognition of the correspondence between past acts and his present misfortune leads Adoni-bezek to ascribe it to a Divine hand. "God has requited me." He was not an Israelite, but was probably an idolater, and he may have trusted in false gods for a long time. He had ascribed to their power his success in previous campaigns, but at last, finding himself beaten, he acknowledges the superior power of the God of the Israelites. It was a dread of that God which compelled the confession. He had heard of God, and what He had done to other nations; now he finds himself conquered, and is led to attribute his personal sufferings to the God of the Israelites. The God of Israel was known as a holy and just God. Hence he tacitly recognizes the justice of the punishment which had fallen upon him. It is a righteous and Divine requital.

III. HOMILETICAL REFLECTIONS.

1 Retribution dogs the feet of sin.

[17698] God has so arranged natural law that it works in harmony with eternal justice. There is a subtle connection between our acts and our sufferings. We may see illustrations of this every day. A man may act in a certain loose and careless way and prepare for himself consequences the most terrible and unlooked for. Another gives way to fierce and ungoverned passions, and makes himself, thereby, wretched. Another chooses to spend his time only in the pursuits of pleasure, and to squander his money on every foolish thing that pleases his eye; he soon finds himself without either the power to enjoy, or the money to procure enjoyment. Another gives way to pilfering, and soon finds himself discharged characterless. Or a youth may have kind parents, and every opportunity of making his way in the world, but he gives way to dissipated habits, and finally, when character is gone and friends are dead, is glad to earn the most trifling sum under men whom he once despised. A just retribution in all such cases certainly follows the sin. Like Adoni-bezek, such must confess that "God hath requited" the wrong-doing.—*Ibid.*

[17699] Many trees around have fallen, but one tree still stands. You say, "It will stand for ever!" One night, however, a storm, less severe perhaps than many that have preceded it, sweeps over the land. The morning breaks, and men look out to see the damage done, and the very tree that seemed as though it would stand for ever is the only one fallen. How is this? Some slight gash with a knife when it was a sapling, just above some branch, has let the rain soak in. Gradually the heart rotted out, and a mere shell of bark has been left. The appearance was good, but it had no solidity. Hence its fall. Thus with many whose sin is prolonged and whose punishment seems delayed. It will come by and by. Then, writhing under the bitter consequences, the transgressor is compelled to say, "As I have done, so God hath requited me."—*Ibid.*

2 The natural sequence of punishment to sin will be discovered hereafter if it is not perceived now.

[17700] We shall see in another world that each punishment is natural, that God does not go out of His way to punish, but that it grows out of our sin. It is not an arbitrary appointment. Death has been aforetime the appointed penalty for stealing. That was not a natural but an arbitrary consequence. Man appointed it. Death following upon the wilful leap from a lofty precipice is a natural consequence. All will see clearly hereafter that ruin is the natural effect of folly. We have thrown ourselves from a high vocation into the deep abyss of sin, and, if without Divine help, must perish.—*Ibid.*

[17701] May not the dishonest man there have to cringe and hide himself still more? May not the drunken man have a constant craving, a burning thirst, a racking brain? May not the ambitious man have a constant anxiety to obtain power, and the torment of always being supplanted, or effectually checked, by others? May not the avaricious man be in a constant fever of suspicion? May not the ill-tempered man be in a constant whirl of passion, and make himself more and more wretched? May not the ruthless and cruel fear the scorn of their victims and clutches of their enemies? May not the voluptuary have to bear the torment of an inflamed heart and ungratified lusts? There is a frightful force in the Saviour's figure of "the worm that never dieth, and the fire that shall never be quenched." Every hasty word, every evil thought, every malicious action, every wilful neglect, will receive its appropriate retribution. God hath established the unswerving law that "whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." Even an idolatrous Adoni-bezek saw the correspondence between past cruelty and present anguish, and confessed the justice of the requital in the remarkable words, "As I have done, so God hath requited me."—*Ibid.*

PART B. (Continued.)

JEWISH ERA.

(Continued.)

DIVISION II. (Continued.)

CHIEF PERIOD OF NATIONAL LIFE. (Continued.)

b. *The Monarchical Portion.*

(1) Of Undivided Kingdom.

(Saul to Rehoboam, B.C. 1095-975: 120 years.)

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PART B. (Continued.)

JEWISH ERA.

(Continued.)

INTRODUCTION.

I. ISRAEL'S ORIGINAL POLITY.

1 It was a pure theocracy.

[17702] The civil polity given to the children of Israel at their first establishment in the land of Canaan was a pure theocracy. What then is a theocracy? The word signifies the rule of God. In a sense this word is applicable to every form of human government, for by him "kings rule and princes decree justice." "There is no power but of God; the powers that be are ordained of God; whosoever therefore resisteth the power resisteth the ordinance of God." Whoever is the ruler, however he obtained his rule, and by whatsoever tenure he holds it, he is but a subordinate and a deputy, and holds his authority in subjection to the dominion of Him whose "kingdom ruleth over all." But God was pleased to establish over His chosen people a close and more immediate authority of His own, one that ordinarily dispensed with the intervention of a human head, and that was designed to stand to them in the direct relations of their civil chief magistrate.—*Rev. R. Hallam, D.D.*

[17703] They were to have no human king or chieftain, elective or hereditary, no visible throne or sceptre, no man whose word should be law to them, or whose guidance they were to trust in peace and in war. Their sovereign was invisible: His palace was in the skies far above out of their sight; His behests were made known to them supernaturally by direct communication from heaven. This was a great honour and a great privilege, for it ensured to them a control absolutely perfect and infallible, a direction in which there could never be the slightest defect, error, or fickleness.—*Ibid.*

[17704] There is a matchless sublimity—the sublimity of condescension and graciousness—about the very idea of a theocracy. But if its sublimity did not appeal to their moral sense, its peculiar advantageousness might have appealed to their self-regard. No other form of government could be compared with it for beneficial results to its subjects. For consider what it involved—the equal accessibleness of the

sovereign to all his subjects—the certainty of having the best counsel under all circumstances—the largest resources both of power and skill at their command—the impossibility of wrong motives affecting the sovereign's acts—the freedom from the ordinary burdens of government when He was king who could say, "Every beast of the forest is Mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills. If I were hungry I would not tell thee: for the world is Mine and the fulness thereof." Set, then, we say, against such an administration the form of sovereignty which the Israelites desired.—*Rev. J. Miller.*

[17705] Surely no people on the earth were ever so favoured as Israel was in having God in so close and intimate a relation to them as He was under the theocracy, to take the immediate direction of their affairs and order all things for them with an infallible wisdom and goodness, free from all the errors of judgment and defects of ability which must attend on any earthly guidance. And yet they thought the theocracy not good for them, and it was not. It was better than anything that could be substituted for it in itself, as much better as a Divine thing is than anything human. But in order to get from it the good it offered, they needed to be raised to a higher plane of spirituality than they were willing to maintain. They must be spiritually-minded men, and their God must be to them a present and living reality, the God with whom they daily and hourly had to do. This they did not like, and would take no pains to attain or preserve it. And without it the theocracy was *not* a blessing to them. Nay, it became a disadvantage, for while it did not confer upon them its own special benefits, it did serve to intercept the benefits of that far inferior rule of which it took the place.—*Rev. R. Hallam, D.D.*

2 It proved a failure because of the lack of the requisite conditions for success—faith and obedience in the Israelites.

[17706] If the spirit of a perfect faith and obedience had been in them, the theocracy must have brought to them perfect bliss and perfect prosperity. But these qualities were indispensable to its well-working. They must *see* Him that is invisible. He must be real to them, habitually recognized, His presence felt, and His

agency remembered. He would "guide them with His eye," and they must be always looking to His eye to discover the import of its glances, to heed the direction of its outlook.—*Ibid.*

[17707] The pure theocracy under which they at first lived was the noblest form of government ever bestowed on men. But to its salutary working, a correspondent nobleness was needful on the part of its subjects. This Israel had lost. Faith and love, the true principles of loyalty, had grown weak in them. They no longer saw "Him that is invisible." They no longer felt the pressure of His guiding and controlling hand. The spiritual was fading, the material was gaining the mastery. They were getting to be altogether unfit to be ruled by an invisible Master, whose laws were written in their hearts.—*Ibid.*

II. ISRAEL'S CHANGE OF POLITY.

I Various motives prompted the desire for a change.

(1) *Pride and vanity.*

[17708] A king—is there not something lofty in the name? Will he not be a living embodiment of *grandeur*, and so vanity will be flattered—a visible representative of *power*, and so pride will be gratified—a real source of strength, a visible rallying point, the centre of rapid and vigorous movements, and so all fear of foes may be dismissed?—*Rev. P. Richardson.*

[17709] The motive which operated in the minds of the Hebrew nation—that they might be like other people. "We will have a king over us, that we also may be like all the nations." They saw other nations with kings, leading them out to battle, and they contrasted the pomps of regal splendour with their own simplicity, and the imposing effect of kingly magnificence with the perfect absence of anything approaching to it in their own case; and they thought—but it was a foolish thought—that they suffered by the contrast; forgetting all the while that that which gave them real honour and essential dignity was, that they were unlike other nations.—*Rev. J. Miller.*

(2) *Dislike to the manifested nearness of God.*

[17710] They shrank from the reproachful vicinity of a holy observer. They would have a dimming medium interposed. Moreover, the judge was a representative and embodiment of a special providence, and therefore an irksome sight to man's rebellious independence. He was, besides, a gift of God to deliver from the effects of sin, and to vindicate His discarded claims and neglected worship, and so a visible remembrancer of former backslidings. The people hated an institution which taught so impressively that protection and prosperity come in the wake of obedience.—*Rev. P. Richardson.*

2 Criminality was inherent in the desire for a change.

(1) *It involved distrust of God.*

[17711] This craving after royalty involved a sinful distrust of God. He was ever at hand, mightier than the mightiest foe. But they saw Him not. They felt not the touch of His potent presence. And hence, with the arm of Omnipotence round them, they deemed themselves defenceless. Living by sense, they would not trust an invisible guardian. "The name of the Lord was a strong tower;" but they would not "run into it." And, as of old, the cry of their impious idolatry had been, "Make us gods to go before us," so now the demand of their criminal distrust is this: "Make us a king, like all the nations."—*Ibid.*

(2) *It had its root in rejection of God.*

[17712] Wherein lay the criminality of this desire for a king? The pride of power and vanity of display are both blameworthy. But, more than this, the desire embraced a change in that administration which sprung from Divine wisdom, and reposed on Divine authority. Further, this change was a displacement of God. "They have rejected Me." He had been their king. Their legislation was from Him. Tithes were a royal impost. Priests were His palace guards. Their desire, then, was a revolt from His government.—*Ibid.*

3 The change was foreseen by God and by Moses.

[17713] The history of the nation soon proved the theocracy a failure, not on account of any fault in it or in its all-wise Author, but in them. This result their great lawgiver foresaw, their God foresaw, and therefore provided for them in due time the abandonment of this system and the substitution of another, not so good intrinsically as the first—not so good practically if they had used that well; but better for them, yes, necessary for them, being such as they were, if they were not to be left a prey to anarchy, and given up to "confusion and every evil work."—*Rev. R. Hallam, D.D.*

4 The change was germinant in the days of the Judges.

[17714] From time to time this monarchical tendency in the Israelitish constitution came out in the days of the Judges, under whom the nation, or some part of the nation, were temporarily governed by the leadership of a single man. So that when at last, in answer to their wish, God "gave them a king in His anger," it was the development of a principle known before, and already partially acted upon; but the substitution, for an unconnected and irregular series of individuals called forth by a special exigency, of a continuous and hereditary line of sovereigns charged with the customary functions of government in ordinary as well as in extraordinary times.—*Ibid.*

[17715] Look at the history of Israel during the period of the Judges. For, remember, the

Judges were not stated rulers, but exceptional chiefs, raised up for emergencies, when ruin seemed to be impending under the theocratic rule against which they had grown rebellious. They forgot God—that is the descriptive and pregnant phrase under which their defection is described. They ceased to recognize Him; they did not look after His will; they did not resort to Him for guidance and protection. They were not subject to His will when they knew it. God ceased to be to them a present God, a God active in their concerns, the God whose love encompassed their nation, and kept it as the apple of His eye. He grew to be to them a God afar off. The nations about them had visible gods and visible kings. They tired of the theocracy, and would be as the nations, and have a court and worship, palpable, ornamental, dazzling. God left them to themselves, and they were soon plunged in disaster and distress. There was anarchy at home, abroad defeat and captivity. In their distress they remembered God, and He sent deliverers to them. But their repentances were shallow and brief. Another and another human saviour came, but there was no permanent recovery of the lost principle of faith and obedience. These Judges were prophetic outcomings of that monarchical principle which was finally to be established in a continuous line of kings that was to be at once the punishment and the remedy of their apostasy from the true principles of that glorious theocracy which they had so miserably rejected and disgraced.—*Ibid.*

5 The change was effected gradually.

[17716] The transition was not abrupt. Preparation had been made for it in previous time. The administration of the last two Judges wore much the appearance of a settled and ordinary magistracy. In Eli the office of judge was held by the high priest. Samuel seems to have succeeded him without an interval, and he established and maintained a regular system in the discharge of his official functions. "He went from year to year in circuit to Bethel, and Gilgal, and Mizpeh, and judged Israel in all those places. And his return was to Ramah; for there was his house, and there he judged Israel; and there he built an altar unto the Lord." Plainly, his orderly and systematic rule was something quite unlike the rude wild exercise of power by Gideon, or Jephthah, or Samson. He was the agent of God in effecting the transition when the time had come for it.—*Ibid.*

6 The desire for the change was a sure sign of deterioration.

[17717] The request of the Israelites brings before us a melancholy view of the progress of degeneracy in a community. Looking at their history from the time of their entrance upon the actual possession of the land of Canaan, though now and then there breaks out to view a hopeful glimpse with regard to their moral and spiritual condition, yet on the whole the scene

presented is that of successive generations rising up to depart farther and farther from God; and now we have the dismal consummation in their effort to destroy, as far as they were concerned, that peculiar and interesting link between themselves and God which existed in the fact—that besides being to them, as He is to all His creatures, their supreme Ruler, He condescended to act as such in a direct and immediate form—standing actually, and to all intents and purposes, in the same relation to them as that which an earthly sovereign sustains towards his subjects. It requires no effort to perceive in this desire of the Israelites the renewed manifestation of the discontented and rebellious disposition which prevailed in the camp at the Red Sea, and on subsequent occasions in the wilderness; but now it was marked by a greater fixedness of criminal resolve and of God-dishonouring purpose.—*Rev. J. Miller.*

III. THE DIVINE PURPOSE IN THE MISRULE OF THE FIRST OF ISRAEL'S KINGS.

[17718] The first king, selected, according to the low standard of the national ideas, more for physical stature, strength, and comeliness, than for any higher qualities, was never intended to be the progenitor of a sacred line and the ancestor of the Messiah; but rather by his frenzied misrule to teach the nation their folly, that "they might perceive and know that their wickedness was great in asking them a king."—*Rev. R. Hallam, D.D.*

SAUL.

I. INTRODUCTORY.

1 The history of Saul presents a useful, though disappointing, study of character.

[17719] On many grounds the history of Saul should fix upon itself the attentive gaze of the student of Scripture. Its interest is peculiar. It is not the interest of long-continued excellence commanding our satisfaction, nor of high-toned piety appealing to our reverence and exciting our gratification; there is nothing of this, but precisely the opposite of it all. If we were asked what is the prevailing feeling which the study of this history is calculated to produce, we should answer in one word—*disappointment*. It presents a thoroughly disappointing character. We have the opportunity of looking at it in no abbreviated form; of contemplating it in a great variety of circumstances; of contrasting that which was outward in conduct with subsequently revealed and ascertained motive; and when to the full we have availed ourselves of this opportunity, we cannot describe our emotions in any other expression than that of the most painful disappointment. He who is willing to carefully and extensively dissect character—to anatomize conduct—to watch the connection between the external and the internal, and to

discriminate between the two—cannot but be thankful for the opportunity which is given him of doing it all, by the preservation in the Scripture records of a remarkably full and complete memoir of the first king of Israel.—*Rev. J. Miller.*

2 The history of Saul is a summary and reflection of that of Israel.

[17720] We can understand alike the choice of Saul at the first, his failure afterwards, and his final rejection. The people obtained precisely what they wanted; and because he who was their king so corresponded to their ideal, and so reflected the national state, he failed. If, therefore, it is with a feeling of sadness that we follow this story, we must remember that its tragic element does not begin and end with Saul; and that the meaning of his life and career must be gathered from a deeper consideration of the history of his people. In truth, the history of Saul is a summary and a reflection of that of Israel. A monarchy such as his must first succeed, and finally fail when, under the test of trials, its inmost tendencies would be brought to light. Such a reign was also necessary, in order to bring out what was the real meaning of the people's demand, and to prepare Israel for the king of God's election and selection in the person of David.—*Rev. A. Edersheim, D.D.*

3 The history of Saul possesses a personal value.

[17721] To my mind there is no history which, as we read it, brings home to us a stronger sense, perhaps none so strong a sense, of this life which each one of us is living, as a life of probation; no history which makes us so vividly to realize the fact, that God takes men and puts them in certain conditions to try them; to see how they will bear themselves under these conditions, how far they will profit by the opportunities for good, resist the solicitations to evil, which these will inevitably offer to them.—*Abp. Trench.*

II. GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS.

[17722] His character is in part illustrated by the fierce, wayward, fitful nature of the tribe (Benjamin), and in part accounted for, by the struggle between the old and new systems in which he found himself involved. To this we must add a taint of madness, which broke out in violent frenzy at times, leaving him with long lucid intervals. His affections were strong, as appears in his love both for David and his son Jonathan, but they were unequal to the wild excesses of religious zeal or insanity which ultimately led to his ruin. He was, like the earlier Judges, remarkable for his strength and activity, and he was, like the Homeric heroes, of gigantic stature, taller by head and shoulders than the rest of the people, and of that kind of beauty denoted by the Hebrew word "good," and which caused him to be compared to the gazelle, "the gazelle of Israel." It was probably

these external qualifications which led to the epithet which is frequently attached to his name, "chosen," "whom the Lord did choose," "See you him whom the Lord hath chosen!" (1 Sam. ix. 17, x. 24; 2 Sam. xxi. 6.)—*Dean Stanley.*

[17723] Saul had much to recommend him to minds greedy of the dust of the earth. He was brave, daring, resolute, gifted, too, with strength of body as well as of mind—a circumstance which seems to have attracted their admiration. He is described in person as if one of those sons of Anak, before whose giant-forms the spies of the Israelites in the wilderness were as grasshoppers. "A choice young man, and a goodly. There was not among the children of Israel a goodlier person than he; from his shoulders and upward he was higher than any of the people." Both his virtues and his faults were such as became an Eastern monarch, and were adapted to secure the fear and submission of his subjects. Pride, haughtiness, obstinacy, reserve, jealousy, caprice—these in their way were not unbecoming qualities in the king after whom their imagination roved. On the other hand, the better parts of his character were of an excellence sufficient to engage the affection of Samuel himself.—*Cardinal Newman.*

III. SPECIAL CHARACTERISTICS.

I Virtues.

(1) *There are singular elements of nobleness to be traced in his natural character.*

[17724] His moral stature did not altogether belie the stateliness of his outward frame. Let me briefly remind you of some of those nobler features which we can have scarcely failed to recognize in him. There is nothing which so often disturbs and, indeed, oversets the whole balance of a mind, which reveals faults unsuspected before, as a sudden and abrupt elevation from a very low to a very high position. Now, there has been seldom a more abrupt elevation than was Saul's. But he gives no token, at all events at the outset of his career, that it has wrought this mischief in him. The Lord's anointed, Israel's king, he bides his time, returns with a true simplicity to humblest offices in his father's house. He would gladly, and that out of a genuine modesty, hide and withdraw himself from the people's choice. Sights and offences done to himself he magnanimously overlooks; absolutely refuses to punish the authors of these, when mischievous sycophants would prompt and urge him to a bloody revenge.—*Abp. Trench.*

[17725] There are not wanting in him genuine traits of that which, indeed, is as old as any human nobleness, but which in modern times we have learned to call the spirit of chivalry; he will venture his life for the people whom he rules, as one who has rightly understood that foremost in place and in honour means also foremost in peril and in toil, that he who has accepted the one pre-eminence has implicitly

also accepted the other. Saul, so far as we know, is clear from every charge of that sin which left the darkest blot upon David's life; he seems very sparingly to have allowed himself that licence which almost all Oriental monarchs, alike in old times and in new, have so largely claimed. There was in him, as we cannot refuse to acknowledge, a true capacity for loving. Of David we are told, that Saul "loved him greatly;" however that love of his was afterwards, under the influence of a jealous envy, transformed into hate.—*Ibid.*

[17726] Saul is very far from absolutely repelling all impressions from a higher world. He too, though to the wonder of many, is "among the prophets;" and prophesies with them. God, we are told, "gave him another heart;" "he was turned into another man," though, alas! too soon returning to the old man and to the old nature again. And even at his worst, when he has given place to the devil, to those powers from beneath which do battle in every human heart against the powers from above, what glimpses of a better mind from time to time reappear. The old affection revives for an instant: "Is this thy voice, my son David?" He can understand magnanimity, and for the moment is prepared to reply to it with an equal magnanimity. The deep discords of his spirit are not incapable of being subdued into harmonies, as sweet bells jangled and out of tune, which for an instant, though, alas! but for an instant, recover their sweetness.—*Ibid.*

[17727] For one altogether unworthy to be loved, Samuel would have never interceded, would have never mourned, as he interceded and mourned for Saul; persisting in this until God, almost in displeasure that his will was not in more perfect conformity with the Divine will, demanded, "How long wilt thou mourn for Saul?" When, too, David sang of him and of Jonathan, "They were lovely and pleasant in their lives," this was not an example of that flattery in which men too often allow themselves concerning the dead, but expressed what one who had known Saul, as almost none other could have known, who had suffered from him nearly all which one man could suffer from another, yet felt to be the truth; not, indeed, all the truth, but truth notwithstanding. If, then, there was a shipwreck here (as who can deny it?), they were not paltry wares, but treasures of great price, which went down into the great deep.—*Ibid.*

[17728] When Saul had irrevocably lost God's favour, we are told "Samuel came no more to see Saul until the day of his death; nevertheless Samuel mourned for Saul." Such sorrow speaks favourably for Saul as well as for Samuel. It is not only the grief of a loyal subject and a zealous prophet, but, moreover, of an attached friend; and, indeed, instances are recorded, in the first years of his reign, of forbearance,

generosity, and neglect of self, which sufficiently account for the feelings with which Samuel regarded him. David, under very different circumstances, seems to have felt for him a similar affection.—*Cardinal Newman.*

(2) *There are singular elements of modesty to be traced in his natural character.*

[17729] All the feeling experienced and displayed by Saul was sincere, and gave promise of noble fulfilment. We have seen the thrilling prospect which was opened so suddenly to his view; more than enough in itself to dazzle, intoxicate, and whirl away in a fit of vain self-glory, an inexperienced youthful mind. But we observe no symptoms even of such infirmity on the part of Saul. On the contrary, we find present, in a very marked degree, that beautiful modesty of spirit, that unconsciousness of self, which is the foundation-stone of greatness of character, giving it purity and firmness, and which affords to the Spirit of God the freest channel of ministry in which to flow.—*Rev. R. Lorimer.*

[17730] When the most eminent and influential man in all Israel, who had grown grey in its service, hailed Saul with questions, which had in them the very tone of homage, and imparted to him the glowing secret, there was no eager grasping at it on the part of the youth, but a simple-minded and dignified deprecating of it. Honoured by Samuel in a very marked manner, before a large company of the leading men of the day, Saul preserved uncorrupted the simplicity of his demeanour. Returning home, with the anointing oil still moist upon his head, he said nothing to his relatives of the matter of the kingdom. When the lot had singled him out before all the people, and there was a demand for the God-given king to show himself, he was found hiding himself among the baggage. He meekly bore the insult of envious fault-finders, when popular enthusiasm would have upheld him in punishing them. And finally, with gorgeous days beckoning him forwards, he returned to the plough, there to await the further unfolding of the mysterious and exciting drama. There was an element of good in the character of the youth who could bear himself through so searching an ordeal with such sobriety and self-command, and the element in which that strength lay was his modesty.—*Ibid.*

(3) *There are singular elements of filial affection to be traced in his natural character.*

[17731] "Come, and let us return; lest my father leave caring for the asses, and take thought for us" (1 Sam. ix. 5). There is a beautiful delicacy about this feature in filial character. Aware of the love which his father felt towards him, and of the value in which he held him, he thought more of his father than of himself, and converted that very parental esteem into a fresh reason for regard for his father's feelings.—*Rev. J. Miller.*

2 Vices.

Declension as seen in his general instability.

[17732] We have recognized the finer and nobler elements which the character of Saul displays, and we must not now lose sight of the very significant fact, that all these display themselves at the outset of his career; that they gradually fade and fail from him—the humility, the generosity, the disregard of slights offered to himself, with whatever else of better he may have owned at the first; pride meanwhile, and caprice, and jealousy, cruelty, an excessive avenging of himself, and at last an open contempt and defiance of God, coming in their room; until of all the high qualities which he once owned only the courage, generally the last gift to forsake a man, often abiding when every other has departed, until, I say, this only remains. I know not whether the world has anything to show at all so mournful as the spectacle which we have here; namely, the gradual breaking down under the wear and tear of the world, under the influence of unresisted temptations, of a lofty soul; the unworthy close of a life worthily begun—as though some clear and rolling river should lose itself in a sullen and stagnant marsh, instead of bringing in due time the volume of its tributary and ever-waxing waters to the main.—*Abp. Trench.*

[17733] The sinfulness of his past life was clearly discerned and fully confessed, and a perfect revolution in spirit and conduct was promised for the future. Explicit acquiescence in the Divine purpose which rejected him and promoted David, and which he had resisted for years, was frankly declared, and yet, in spite of all this, incredible to say, Saul sank back into his old position immediately that the first thrill of feeling had subsided. The man who, looking back upon his life, felt that he could not grovel low enough in the confession of his sinfulness, who felt that he had “played the fool and erred exceedingly,” who saw and said that the man whom he had spent years in persecuting, was better far than he, having rewarded evil with good; and who felt persuaded that the Divine purpose which set him aside would be fulfilled, stood out against all this combination of good influences which was drawing him into the kingdom of God, and refused to give one atom of positive obedience to it. Dark soul! a year later, and he knew, in his despair on Mount Gilboa, the preciousness of the spiritual opportunity which he here missed.—*Rev. R. Lorimer.*

[17734] Some features in the character of Saul stand out so conspicuously as to need only simple mention. Proud preference of his own will to God's, carried out boldly in the life; deadly jealousy, that coloured and distorted his view of things, determined the special mould of his character and destiny, and threw over both deep shades of darkness; cruelty, that was causeless as against an innocent man, unnatural as against a son-in-law, and because not only employing for its purposes the most

sacred feelings of daughters, but reviling a godly son, and on several occasions offering him violence; sacrilegious, in smiting without scruple a whole city of priests with their families; impiety, that dared to stand up against God, and fearlessly, perseveringly, earnestly, bent itself, and enlisted the resources of the kingdom, in violent resistance to His immutable counsel—these features stand out in the inspired portrait with appalling vividness and breadth of colouring.—*Rev. P. Richardson.*

[17735] Unbelief and wilfulness are the wretched characteristics of Saul's history—an ear deaf to the plainest commands, a heart hardened against the most gracious influences. Do not suppose, because I speak thus strongly, I consider Saul's state of mind to be something very unusual. Let us only reflect on our hardness of heart, and we shall understand something of Saul's ambition when he prophesied. We may be conscious to ourselves of the truth of things sacred as entirely as if we saw them; and yet we often feel in as ordinary and as unconcerned a mood as if we were altogether unbelievers. Again, let us reflect on our callousness after mercies received, or after suffering. We are often in worse case even than this; for to realize the unseen world in our imagination, and feel as if we saw it, may not always be in our power. What makes our insensibility still more alarming is, that it follows the grant of the highest privileges. There is something awful in this, if we understood it; as if that peculiar hardness of heart which we experience, in spite of whatever excellences of character we may otherwise possess—like Saul, in spite of the benevolence, or fairness, or candour, or consideration, which are the virtues of this age—was the characteristic of a soul transgressing after it had “tasted the powers of the world to come,” and an earnest of the second death.—*Cardinal Newman.*

2 Hypocrisy.

[17736] Saul was a hypocrite. He was a bad man, though his wickedness is not fully apparent in the early part of his reign. Men who are unexpectedly elevated to places of trust are not unfrequently so impressed with a sense of their responsibility as to shrink from the evil-doing with which, in the progress of their aggrandizement, they at length become familiar. Their self-diffidence and their purposes of rectitude disappoint both themselves and others. The dawning hopes of their usefulness go out in darkness. There were scenes in the early history of Saul which at first view indicate that he was a religious man. He himself was a member of the Jewish Church, a professed disciple of Moses, and an avowed friend of the God of Israel. He showed great reverence for the prophet Samuel and for the institutions of the Hebrew Church. When the man of God first intimated to him the Divine purpose, that he should be the king of Israel, conscious of his unfitness for this high trust, his modest and humble reply was, “Am I

not a Benjamite, of the smallest of the tribes of Israel? and my family the least of all the families of the tribe of Benjamin? Wherefore speakest thou to me?" When, on leaving Samuel, he came to the hill of God, and there met him a company of prophets, the Spirit of God came upon him, and he prophesied among the prophets. These things have the semblance of piety, although, as subsequent events show, they did not arise from the fear and love of God, but were mere acts of expediency, and arose rather from a transient sense of responsibility, and of the prerogative and dignity of his kingly office, than from any deep-seated rectitude.—*Rev. G. Spring, D.D.*

[17737] Saul, in his youth, was probably a self-deceived man rather than a deceiver. But the delusion of youth became the hypocrisy of manhood and the perfidy of still riper years. He could not long maintain a mere religious profession amid the danger of arms and the rivalry for power. He dealt falsely with God, and he dealt falsely with man.—*Ibid.*

3 Irreligion.

(1) *His religion was strangely partial in its operation.*

[17738] The faint and distressed state of the people led them, as soon as they had the opportunity, to "fly upon the spoil," and to eat the animals which they had slain "in their blood." This was against the ceremonial law which regulated matters of outward observance. And it being told Saul, he immediately took steps to prevent the continuance of this infringement of the ritual. So far, of course, he was right. But the eagerness with which he condemned the sin of the people in regard to a ceremonial omission—"Ye have transgressed"—contrast strangely with the moral obtuseness which prevented him from seeing that his own folly had been the occasion of their sin. And we can hardly read his exhortation, "Sin not against the Lord in eating the blood," and find him a little after actually determining to shed the blood of his own son Jonathan for not regarding an oath, of the existence of which he was perfectly ignorant, without coming to the conclusion that Saul's religion was not of a very deep character; that it was of that order which allows its professor to be vastly more affected by the neglect of something outward and formal than by the indulgence, within himself, of a wrong and impious state of mind.—*Rev. J. Miller.*

[17739] The unfavourable circumstance which first introduces him to the inspired history is not in his favour. While in search of his father's asses, which were lost, he came to the city where Samuel was; and though Samuel was now an old man, and from childhood known as the especial minister and prophet of the God of Israel, Saul seems to have considered him as a mere diviner, such as might be found among the heathen, who, for "the fourth part of a

shekel of silver," would tell him his way. The narrative goes on to mention, that after his leaving Samuel, "God gave him another heart;" and on meeting a company of prophets, "the Spirit of God came upon him, and he prophesied among them." Upon this, "all that knew him beforetime" said, "What is this that is come unto the son of Kish? is Saul also among the prophets? . . . therefore it became a proverb." From this narrative we gather that his carelessness and coldness in religious matters were so notorious, that in the eyes of his acquaintance there was a certain strangeness and incongruity which at once struck the mind in associating him with a school of the prophets. Nor have we any reason to believe, from the after history, that the Divine gift, then first imparted, left any religious effect upon his mind. At a later period of his life we find him suddenly brought under the same sacred influence on his entering the school where Samuel taught; but instead of softening him, its effect upon his outward conduct did but testify the fruitlessness of Divine grace when acting upon a will obstinately set to do evil.—*Cardinal Newman.*

(2) *His religion, even when influencing his conduct, was tardy and dilatory.*

[17740] When he was found doing that which was right, he appeared to act, quite as much as when he did wrong, from mere impulse. On the occasion which suggests this remark we read, "And Saul built an altar unto the Lord;" and it is added, "The same was the first altar which he built unto the Lord." He had been king some time, he had received a great many mercies, had acquired honours, had gained victories, had known anxieties, but had also found relief and succour; but he had never yet built an altar to the Lord, as his own testimony on behalf of the God of Israel. And now that he did it, it appears probable that all at once and in a moment he conceived the idea of converting into an altar the great stone on which the animals, used for food by the people, had been slain. But that it should never have entered his mind to build an altar to God before, this was the point on which the Spirit of God directed that the sacred historian should pronounce emphatically. How keenly significant is that parenthetical sentence: "The same was the first altar which he built to the Lord" !—*Ibid.*

(3) *His religion was of a kind which allowed him to put God on one side when he was too busy to attend to Him.*

[17741] He was anxious to pursue the Philistines. "Let us go down," said he, "by night, and spoil them until the morning light, and let us not leave a man of them." The people assented; but a happier, holier suggestion was made by the priest: "Let us draw near hither unto God." But for this, the king would have gone, without any reference to God in the matter. He had, it is true, built an altar, but when he saw that the people had rested, and

that there was a possibility of gaining a fresh advantage, he was for hurrying off, without the slightest thought of Divine guidance and counsel. There could not be a more affecting mark than this of his want of sincerity in religion.—*Ibid.*

(4) *His religion does not appear to have been characterized by the slightest self-suspicion.*

[17742] There is to be detected throughout a singular want of humility. It never seems to have entered his thoughts that he could, by any possibility, have been in the wrong; but he was most ready to suppose that any one else might be to blame. In the right direction of the lots as they were cast, it was the evident design of God to bring out to view the evil of Saul's inconsiderateness. He was the only culpable person, and God made that fact evident. Now, one would have thought that if anything could have brought him to a sense of his error, it would have been the discovery that his rash decree and oath had implicated his own son Jonathan in liability to suffering and death. But no! he did not see it; he would not see it. Our indignation rises when we hear him say, "God do so and more also: for thou shalt surely die, Jonathan;" and we are ready to exclaim, "What! another oath? Has not one done mischief enough? cannot you see it? do you not feel it?" Nothing can exceed the hardening influence of that professed religion which leaves a man unsuspecting and ignorant of himself. History has told us, indeed, of fathers who have been constrained, in their judicial capacity, to pronounce sentence on their own children; but in such cases it has been done with a dignity which was impressive, and in a manner which showed that while the claims of law must be upheld, the feelings of the father were not lost in the act of the judge. But here, Saul himself being the real transgressor, when he proceeded to pronounce sentence on Jonathan, there meets us a manifestation of conduct so cold, so coarse, that we turn away in disgust, or stay to give our hearts the relief of joining in the indignant cry which dared the inhuman parent to carry out his purpose, "Shall Jonathan die? God forbid: as the Lord liveth, there shall not one hair of his head fall to the ground; for he hath wrought with God to-day."—*Ibid.*

(5) *His religion had "no root in itself."*

[17743] His character is obscure, and we must be cautious while considering it. Still, as Scripture is given us for our instruction, it is surely right to make the most of what we find there, and to form our judgment by such lights as we possess. It would appear, then, that Saul was *never under the abiding sense of religion*, or, in Scripture language, "the fear of God," however he might be at times moved and softened. Some men are inconsistent in their conduct, as Samson, or as Eli, in a different way; and yet may have lived by faith, though a weak faith. Others have sudden falls, as David

had. Others are corrupted by prosperity, as Solomon. But as to Saul, there is no proof that he had any deep-seated religious principle at all. Rather it is to be feared that his history is a lesson to us, that the "heart of unbelief" may exist in the very sight of God, may rule a man in spite of many natural advantages of character, in the midst of much that is virtuous, amiable, and commendable.—*Cardinal Newman.*

4 Self-sufficiency.

[17744] His heart was never broken by a sense of sin, or melted with the love of God, or touched by the marvellous grace that shone in the economy of type and shadow. "The glorious gospel of the happy God" was impressively preached by that symbolic ritual. The glad tidings of unutterable mercy reached his ear. But they never moved his heart. He was too proud to feel or own his need. In criminal yet most pitiable self-beguilement, he stood erect before the Holy One, as if he had done nothing to offend His purity, or subject himself to His sovereign justice. He who has incurred no wrath needs no propitiation; he who has given no offence needs no atonement. Alas! this proud man has got no glimpse of that Divine majesty before whose throne the principalities and powers of heaven cover their faces and cry in adoring reverence: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts." It would have broken the stiff neck of his pride, and emptied his heart of its high independence, and marred his self-satisfied peace, and sent him to seek healing for his hurt in the balm distilled by that early gospel which proclaimed forgiveness from every blood-stained altar. But haughty self-sufficiency made him an infidel.—*Rev. P. Richardson.*

5 Impenitence.

[17745] The most terrible fact of all is the total absence of all penitence on the part of Saul. He was clear of offences which make some pages in David's history nothing better than one huge blot. But oh! how much better it would have been to have sinned like David, if only he had repented like David; if a temper resembling at all the temper which dictated the fifty-first Psalm had found place in him. But all this was far from him. Darkness is closing round him; anguish has taken hold of him; but the broken and the contrite heart, there is no remotest sign or token of this; no reaching out after the blood of sprinkling. We listen, but no voice reaches us like his who exclaimed, "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow;" but dark and defiant and unbelieving, he who had inspired such high hopes, he who for a while seemed about to justify them all, goes forward to meet his doom.—*Abp. Trench.*

[17746] A noble soul which falls into sin will see a richness and a wonder of mercy in the fact, that the very discipline which condemns and punishes the sin, exerts a healing and a

renewing influence upon itself the transgressor, giving it a new hope in the midst of its despair, and a fresh impulse of life in its deadness. But Saul refused to yield even the minimum amount of spiritual return to the discipline with which he was visited. He refused to accept punishment. He extinguished the last spark of light which lingered with him, and the consequence was that when new troubles arose and his kingdom was in danger, he plunged into that despair which he had prepared for himself by refusing to yield to discipline, and died the death of the suicide.—*Rev. R. Lorimer.*

IV. ANALOGY BETWEEN THE CHARACTERS OF SAUL, KING OF ISRAEL, AND SAUL OF TARSUS.

[17747] Many have loved to trace the points of resemblance between the two Sauls of Scripture, the two illustrious Benjamites, in whom all which was worst, and all which was best in that fierce and daring tribe, so capable of evil and so capable of good, came to a head—the one belonging to the Old Covenant, the other to the New. These points of resemblance are not merely superficial and external. There is something more than name and tribe which is common to them both. The second Saul for a while followed only too faithfully in the footsteps of the first. If the one persecuted David, the other—with an energy of hate which did not fall short of his—David's greater Son. Presently, however, their lives divide, and one is the Saul of reprobation, the other, not being disobedient to the heavenly voices, the Saul of election; although he, too, in the prompt audacities of his apostolic career, does not allow us to forget, as we know he did not himself forget, of what tribe he was, of that tribe of Benjamin, which produced its noblest representative in him.—*Abp. Trench.*

V. CONTRAST BETWEEN THE CHARACTERS OF SAUL AND MOSES.

[17748] In Saul we see the bright promise and hopeful sunrise of character, soon overcast and falsified, because he never adequately perceived the kind and measure of spirit which he required, in order to use aright the great gifts of position and opportunity entrusted to him. In Moses, on the contrary, we mark a going forward from strength to strength. The inward harvest of spiritual light, power, and wisdom, which he was ever gathering from the discipline of his lot, strengthened him for the better execution of his life-work. And thus the one stands before us a noble statue, colossal but harmonious; while the other is but a block of marble, worthless, because vitiated by a dark vein, and never wholly removed from the quarry.—*Rev. R. Lorimer.*

VI. CONTRAST BETWEEN THE CHARACTERS OF SAUL AND SAMUEL.

[17749] There is no more unexceptionable

character in the Old Testament, and no more fitting contrast to the character of Saul, than that of the prophet Samuel. It does not dazzle by its splendour so much as attract by its gentleness and beauty. It has none of those inequalities that ordinarily belong to great minds, but is rather distinguished for its equable and uniform excellence. Men immortalize themselves by other means than the brightness of their intellectual endowments. It is not always that the most brilliant characters are the most praiseworthy. There have been, and there are those, who, although they do not occupy so prominent a niche in the temple of fame, occupy a wider space in the hearts and memories of mankind. Who would not rather have been the diffident and amiable Cowper than the splendid Chesterfield; or the unpretending and attractive Montgomery rather than the blazing Byron? The moon silently walks in her brightness *for ages*, while the flaming meteor darts across the heavens and is seen no more. Samuel and Saul flourished at the same period; their history is inwoven, and is also blended, with all the leading facts in their own times. They were the two leading men at the close of the Hebrew commonwealth, and until the reign of David, its second king. They occupied the highest stations, the one in the State, and the other in the Church; the one a prince, the other a prophet. It was by their influence and authority, sometimes combined and sometimes in collision, that the kingdom assumed its first form and character, and, by the subjugation of its enemies, prepared the way for the most brilliant and prosperous periods of its history.—*Rev. G. Spring, D.D.*

VII. HOMILETICAL HINTS.

I Two stages may be observed in this history of human depravity.

(1) *Man deserts God.*

[17750] Saul stands before us, throughout more than the last year of his life, as a soul beyond the range of discipline, beyond the reach of correction—a soul proof against chastisement. The two chief constituent elements in our moral life are probation, or the testing of our inclination, principle, and strength, and discipline, or the correction of our sins. In regard to both of these Saul failed. He sank, almost at the beginning of his reign, by his disobedience, when he was tested to show whether he possessed the moral disposition which it became the king of Israel to have; and he underwent a long discipline for that sin, without receiving any benefit from it.—*Rev. R. Lorimer.*

[17751] We see the spirit of good rallying to make its last stand in an undecided soul. How it gathered from every quarter all the force it could command, which might exert a saving influence upon it! How loth was it to allow this soul to take its own way and to destroy it—

self! Brief although the vision was, how bright and clear and overmastering was it whilst it lasted! How clear then the fact which was often so dim before, that the earthly life in its long line of events, great and small, had a spiritual meaning and value; that the voice of God was trying to speak out of it, and if indistinct, was so only because it had so much to say, and cried to one who fled from it. How unmistakable in that retrospect was the moral character and value of the past life! Many excuses, justifications, and fine names had been found for it while it was being lived, but when the true light flashed upon it, nothing could be written over it but the simple epitaph, "I have sinned; behold, I have played the fool, and have erred exceedingly."—*Ibid.*

[17752] There is in human nature a tendency to growth in evil. Here Saul stands for the race. And in him this growth is terribly conspicuous. Behold him at first in humility declaring his unworthiness of the crown, and in modest backwardness hiding from the offer of it; vigorous in action, yet in the flush of victory so temperate as generously to forbear punishing the opposers of his power; with all his careless indifference, and ignorant misapprehension of the nature of prayer, yet feeling the necessity of "making supplication to the Lord" before his warlike enterprises. Even when ungodliness has grown so strong within him as to make Divine commands but cobwebs in his path, he casts about him eagerly for an apology to Samuel; and when the offended prophet turns away, and the deserted king implores to be "honoured before the elders of Israel," we seem to discern in him even yet some spark of honourable feeling. The sense of shame, however, made up mostly of pride, had in it, notwithstanding, a tincture of nobleness. To desire and value the good opinion of others ranks deservedly among elevating influences. Behold him at last desperately clinging to his throne in proud defiance of God, and scornful disregard of man, deliberately setting himself against the declared purpose of Omnipotence, and in his mad career trampling audaciously in the dust all laws of God, and all interests, feelings, and opinions of men. The modest man has come to stand without shame in the light of a public exposure; and he who had been so winningly regardful of the life of rebels now pants for the blood of the righteous, and barbarously sacrifices to the Moloch of his passion the whole innocent population of a city.—*Rev. P. Richardson.*

[17753] Keeping pace with the monstrous growth of evil, and probably accounting for it, we observe in him the gradual consolidation of infernal agency. The human nature refused to admit its full operation all at once. At first the dark influence came in pulses over him, like the sullen ripples of the sea of death on a boat's resisting sides. But soon that influence gained so thorough a mastery that all sounds of resis-

tance ceased. With terrible facility the infernal power abated the reluctance of his nature, and at last identified itself so completely with him that all trace of a struggle vanished, and the occasional impulses of its first contact changed eventually to a steady and uniform influence.—*Ibid.*

[17754] Reverting to the time when he first comes before us—as a son serving his father, obeying his will, and consulting his interests—we can readily conceive of him continuing to move quietly and unobtrusively along the retired paths of life, his conduct marked by exemplary modesty, and his course, until his latest day, confirming all the hopes concerning him which are expressed in the words "a choice young man, and a goodly." We should scarcely have suspected the existence or the strength of those evil passions which found a home in his heart. Exposed to no temptation to pride, with no cause exciting to jealousy, and exactly in those circumstances which are the least likely to stir the feelings of ambition and determination for the mastery, we only see him amiable, affectionate, and humble. But the throne and the crown and the newly-acquired authority appealed to these principles of pride and ambition, gave scope to their activity, and, as will always be the case, they gathered strength by exercise, and eventually completed Saul's ruin. The suddenness of his elevation, and the greatness of his popularity, tended, too, to enhance the mischievous power with which temptation wrought—the former precluding that discipline of the mind which has often been found so helpful for safely effecting the transition from an inferior station to one which is superior; the latter inducing that self-complacency which imposes an effectual silence on the whispers of self-suspicion, and exposing him, too, to other perils, which constantly attend popularity.—*Ibid.*

[17755] Saul, who abode in his old nature to the end; who, anointed captain of the Lord's inheritance, and endowed from on high with gifts for an office of surpassing dignity, he yet after a while miserably forgot from whom he held, and for whom he wielded, all; he refused to follow on to know the Lord, and let go that good thing which had been committed to him. Nor was this all; for he who has once tasted of the powers of the world to come, can never be, for good or for evil, merely what he was before; but made in the end such a shipwreck of faith and a good conscience as leaves his story among the saddest which Scripture anywhere contains.—*Abp. Trench.*

(2) *God deserts man.*

[17756] The Eternal departs from him. By this is meant, not that the Almighty withdraws from man his life-sustaining energy, or foregoes any of his claims to human love and homage. No, He will keep the human spirit in existence, and bind it by the laws of moral obligation to

His throne for ever. But it means a discontinuance of the overtures of His love, and His agencies to restore; it is leaving man to himself, to reap the labour of his own hands; it is the physician giving up the patient; the tender father closing the door against his reprobate child. In the first stage, we find the vast majorities of mankind in every age; in the second, we may find some on earth, in every period. This stage is hell. The first stage is probation; the second stage is retribution: in the first stage, man says to God, "Depart from me, I desire not the knowledge of thy ways;" in the second stage, God says to man, "Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire:" in the first stage, all is Divine mercy; in the second stage, all is justice. This second and final stage Saul reached.—*Auon*.

2 The career of Saul displays valuelessness of an impulsive character in comparison with one of steadfast principle.

[17757] The man of impulse is often an attractive man. Saul was so. Saul inspired strong affection. Samuel mourned him. David loved him. His son cast in his lot with him, never forsook him, even when the javelin sought his friend's life, or sought his own. "Lovely and pleasant were they in their lives, and in their death they were not divided." The armour-bearer died with him—would not, could not, survive him. But there comes a time when even attractiveness loses its value, in comparison of one other thing—steadfastness, solidity, a heart right with God and a life given to Him. Then we see what impulse is worth, weighed against principle. And let none confound the two things, impulsiveness and warmth of heart. Calmness and coldness are not always found together, nor yet (in the region of affection) heat and warmth.—*Dean Vaughan*.

[17758] Some say, "I am impulsive, and I cannot change my nature." But you can correct, you can discipline, you can elevate it. Practise self-denial in this thing. That extravagant outburst, that passionate feeling, whether of anger or affection—check it. You can. That letter, written in hot haste, under impulse, your heart misgiving you as you wrote, your better judgment telling you that it was neither wise, nor considerate, nor kind, nor Christian—destroy it. Rewrite it to-morrow. In everything judge, in everything pray, and the habit of thoughtfulness, the habit of religion, will gradually, through grace, be formed within.—*Ibid*.

[17759] There is one word which occurs to all of us as we study Saul's character, and it is the word impulsiveness. We mean by it a habit of mind, natural and not corrected, which is the opposite of steadiness, of consistency, of balance—in one word, of principle. The impulsive man is the creature of circumstance, of emotion, of excitement. Feeling is strong, and it outruns reflection. An object is presented, and, without waiting to set it in its place, with-

out waiting to make it consist with other objects, without waiting to see whether, or how far, it is either prudent, or right, or indeed possible to attain it, the will adopts it as its aim, and the whole being rushes to seize it. The result must be a life of perpetual mistakes and perpetual disappointments. Many objects cannot be attained. They never ought to have been made for. By the nature of the case, they are out of reach. In the best form, that of benevolence, they must be coerced by the judgment. You see one case of distress. The impulse of benevolence is to relieve. You will bring comfort, happiness, virtue, into that home. It is a generous, a noble, a Christian impulse. But, while you are pursuing this one object, other objects, nearer and more urgent, are neglected—and that is an evil. Presently the impulse itself weakens: perseverance seldom depends upon such efforts: failure soon daunts, and the result is double weakness. The impulsive never continues in one stay—and that is a second and a greater evil.—*Ibid*.

3 The history of Saul should furnish a warning to self and a ground of sympathy with others.

[17760] We cannot review this story even superficially without feeling a strong sympathy for the unhappy man whose lot is before us here. I venture to think that Scripture intended us to feel that sympathy, and the longing wish that such a one as Saul was once, and might have been always, had been prospered and blessed, and saved and brought from an earthly kingdom to a crown of glory at the last. And with what object are we brought to this state of feeling? Is it that, having mercy in our thoughts upon King Saul, we may learn to have mercy upon ourselves, and pray that God would keep us from the snares and pitfalls into which he fell? Is it also that we may have mercy upon others who have been tempted, and have fallen like Saul the king of Israel, and that we may learn by the example of David to stretch forth no hand against them while they live, but rather plead with them and mourn for them as Samuel; and as David did when Saul was slain in Gilboa, speaking nothing but good of him when he was gone? "Saul and Jonathan were lovely and pleasant in their lives, and in their death they were not divided."—*Rev. C. Waller*.

4 The history of Saul illustrates the danger which attends the sudden elevation of the young.

[17761] That is safe eminence into which a man grows by degrees, whose successive increments, gradually attained, are less felt, and so are less liable to engender pride and lead to unbecoming exhibitions and excesses. Greatness so gained may be worn safely and gracefully. "Behold," says Habakkuk, "his soul that is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith." If that counterbalancing, regulating faith be there, all is safe. But "pales set upon an high place can never stand

against the wind ;" and what but weak and unstable palings are young men, suddenly lifted into the high places of society, without firm and well-settled principles, there to encounter the winds of passion and pride, of adulation and self-interest, and, in the irresistible onset, sure to be blown down into wreck and ruin. Seek not high things for thyself prematurely, but rather seek patiently the qualifications that shall fit thee for high things, if God shall assign them to thee.—*Rev. R. Hallam, D.D.*

- 5 The rapid declension of Saul furnishes an instance of the swiftness with which the disease of sin spreads.

[17762] If Saul, when he took the first step out of the way in which God had bidden him walk, could have been told what it involved, he might have said, "Is thy servant a dog, that he should do this thing?" But sin is a disease that spreads very rapidly. A cancer may be eradicated from the human body if taken in its earliest stage, but let it once begin to extend its roots and all hope of recovery is gone. Amputation of a sin may save a soul, says the Great Physician, but leave it to work its way, and every faculty becomes affected by its deadly influence. "If thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee; for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell" (Matt. v. 30).—*Rev. W. Harris.*

- 6 The dark passions of Saul bid us beware of jealousy.

[17763] Guard against the influence of jealousy. No temper of mind is more wretched and pernicious, more painful to the individual, more unjust to others. It is a creative and prolific feeling, and brings in its train a host of evils whose name is legion. Crowds of imaginary troubles spring up under its power, and those that have any substance and reality are frightfully magnified and exaggerated; trifles grow into monsters, and the life is haunted with spectres of its own creation that go with it into all its walks, till the soul becomes "a miry sea that cannot rest," and dwells in an atmosphere of universal mistrust and suspicion. See all this forcibly exemplified in the case of Saul. When once the thought had entered his mind that David was his destined successor, the innocent young man, exemplary and long-suffering, as he was in all the duties of a son-in-law and a subject, became an object of continual suspicion. In the eyes of the unhappy king, he was transformed into an intriguing supplanter, and all his words and motions became indications of sinister designs. His own virtuous and faithful son grew in his estimation to be a plotter against his throne and life. And the priests of God were changed into a band of conspirators, linked with the son of Jesse in his aspirations. He could trust no one; he could see nothing as it really was; everything became to him an omen of approaching rebellion. His fancies became realities; and he dwelt in a

world of imaginary wrong and horror, crazed and frenzied by his own distempered thoughts.—*Rev. R. Hallam, D.D.*

- 7 God's forbearance towards Saul is a special instance of the exceeding great love which He bears to sinful man.

[17764] The life of Saul has been drawn for us by one who loved him, longed for him, would have died for him, and would willingly have saved him and forgiven him after all. The love of God must be more than the love of Samuel that mourned for Saul though he came no more to see him, more than the love of David who "mourned and wept and fasted until even, for Saul and for Jonathan his son." Why did He let Samuel come back from the grave to answer him? Why do we read that even after he had been to the woman at Endor and received his sentence to die on the morrow, yet ere he departed they "killed for him the fatted calf"? What is the meaning of all this intense tenderness for such a one as Saul, exhibited in Holy Scripture, except to teach us that while there is life there is hope for sinners, and not only hope, but *love*? "How excellent is Thy loving-kindness, O God!" Why do we not draw the right conclusion? "Therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of Thy wings." Let it not be said that this gives encouragement to lawlessness and transgression. No, "The goodness of God leadeth thee to *repentance*." "I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth," and yet the very words, "him that dieth," prove that there are some that die.—*Rev. C. Waller.*

DAVID.

I. INTRODUCTORY.

- 1 David occupies the central place in Old Testament history.

[17765] In point of chronology, he stands almost midway between Abraham and Christ, distant from each about a thousand years. In point of historical importance, his position is still more commanding. Under him, the Hebrew nation made a prodigious advance; and from a feeble State that any neighbouring tribe could humble, became a first-rate Power, honoured by all the East. The cause of religion made an equally remarkable advance, both outwardly and spiritually; the Levites were organized throughout the country for their sacred service, the plan of the temple was prepared, and the temple service was arranged; while a great addition was made to the Divine revelations respecting the Messiah; much light was thrown upon his kingly office, his lot of suffering, and the peaceful glories of his kingdom; and materials were supplied for a personal acquaintance with him, such as that which gives its great charm, in a spiritual point of view, to the Song of Solomon.—*Rev. W. Blaikie.*

2 His position is virtually that of founder of the Jewish monarchy.

[17766] His name is repeated in every possible form. "The city of David"—"The seed of David"—"The house of David"—"The key of David"—"The oath sworn unto David"—are expressions which pervade the whole subsequent history and poetry of the Old Testament, and much of the figurative language of the New. The cruelty, the self-indulgence, the too-ready falsehood, sufficiently appear in the events of his history. But there was a grace, a charm about him, which entwined the affections of the nation round his person and his memory, and made him, in spite of the savage manners of the time and the wildness of his own life, at once the centre of something like a court, the head of a new civilization.—*Dean Stanley.*

3 He was a born king of Israel by his natural gifts.

[17767] His immense activity and martial spirit united him by a natural succession to the earlier chiefs of Israel, whilst his accomplishments and genius fitted him especially to exercise a vast control over the whole future greatness of the Church and commonwealth. The force and passion of the ruder age was blended with a depth of emotion which broke out in every relation of life. Never before had there been such a faithful friend, such an affectionate father. Never before had king or chief inspired such passionate loyalty, or given it back in equal degree. The tenderness of his personal affection penetrated his public life. He loved his people with a pathetic compassion, beyond even that of Moses. Even from the history we gather that the ancient fear of God was, for the first time, passing into the love of God.—*Ibid.*

4 No one of the Old Testament heroes lived so marvellous a life.

[17768] Called in youth from the quietude of the sheep-folds to be king over Israel; elevating the kingdom to a state of power and splendour which is seldom equalled, and perhaps never surpassed; and guiding it amid a crowd of perils with a wisdom and courage which made his name proverbial amongst his countrymen;—this man seems to stand far off from us in an atmosphere of wonder and glory; yet none of the Old Testament heroes comes nearer to our personal sympathies.—*Rev. E. Hull.*

II. PERSONAL ASPECT AND MIEN.

[17769] He does not appear to have been of commanding stature, but he was eminently handsome. He was distinguished by a fair and ruddy complexion, and the beauty of his eyes is particularly noticed (1 Sam. xvi. 12, marginal reading). In them the fire of genius shone, and from them beamed that enchanting expression of kindness and generous warmth, by which the hearts of men and women were drawn to him as by a charm. Altogether he was goodly

to look to. The eyes of men rested on his engaging and happy countenance with pleasure, and withdrew from it with regret. The rare combination in him of all that was gentle, tender, and mild, with the most exalted enthusiasm, the most noble aspirations, the most generous sentiments, the most manly deportment, the most heroic daring, and the most invincible prowess—joined to his invariable consideration for others, his open-heartedness, his humbleness, and the entire absence of all pretension in him, made men feel better when they looked upon him, and it exalted their hearts to know that they were sharers of the nature which, under Divine grace, became capable of such impressive development. He was known to be a man of God, and to be much in communion with Him; and this diffused an ineffable grace over his demeanour and conversation, to which, beyond question, much of the extraordinary influence he possessed over the minds and hearts of others must be ascribed.—*Rev. J. Kitto, D.D.*

III. HIS CHARACTER VIEWED AS A SAMPLE OF DIVINE EDUCATION.

i The shepherd's life, in preparation for his calling, endues him with a sense of responsibility.

[17770] As a shepherd, keeping his father's sheep, the sense of responsibility to another was powerfully called into exercise. The flock was not his own. In keeping it, he was acting merely as his father's servant. He was bound to take his father's directions in all that he did, to lead the flock by the paths and pastures his father might appoint, and, in his whole management, have regard to his father's will. The servant-feeling thus beautifully called into play, was transferred, in full integrity, to the higher sphere of the kingdom. To the people of Israel he felt that he stood in the same relation as he had occupied to his father's sheep, and to God in the same place in which he had stood to his father. Israel was the flock of God, David the shepherd whom God employed to feed them. It was thus that David earned the title by which God distinguished him, "My servant David," and became the man "after God's own heart." And this formed one of the most striking resemblances between David and Christ.—*Rev. W. Blaikie.*

[17771] On him lay the responsibility of bringing the people through the lowering storm, and winning their fidelity to God. The age demanded a man at once courageous and tender—powerful in daring to do the right against the people's will; yet trustful in casting all his dependencies on the aid of Heaven. And thus in David—young and unknown, with a heart tender as a woman's and strong as a hero's; with a deep, far-seeing eye that could read the glorious music of nature, and a soul quivering already under the sublime sense of a

present God—there, amid the quiet flocks and silent hills of Bethlehem, was the man whom God had chosen to lead the nation through its day of peril into long and glorious repose.—*Rev. E. Hull.*

2 The shepherd's life, in preparation for his calling, endues him with a sense of duty.

[17772] The shepherd occupation of David led him, from its very nature, to seek the welfare of the flock. It demanded unceasing attention to its condition as a whole, and to the state of each several animal; frequent exposure to danger; and constant readiness to sacrifice his own ease or comfort. Suitable pasture had to be provided; shelter had to be found from the heat by day and from the cold by night; protection had to be secured from wolves and lions; the diseased had to be nursed, the wounded cared for, wanderers had to be followed, rescued from danger, and brought back to the fold. These were the ideas of duty with which David became familiar as a shepherd. And when his charge was changed, these ideas of duty remaining in his heart, and influencing his public conduct, made him the eminent ruler he became. The welfare of his people was his constant aim. His vigilant eye kept watch over all that tended to their real good. Their *physical* welfare was not a matter of indifference to him; their *intellectual* welfare was not overlooked; while, high above all, their *religious* welfare was most anxiously and unweariedly promoted, and every means used to persuade them to regard the favour of God as the fountain-head of every real blessing, and the indispensable condition of all true prosperity. In the view of duty to the flock, all thoughts of fear and danger fled from David's mind. The same contempt of danger met in discharge of duty, and the same trust in the Invisible, that carried the fearless boy against the lion and the bear, bore him against the champion of the Philistines, when every other heart quailed before him. This admirable self-possession, fostered amid the dangers of the wilderness, stood often in stead in after years, in the suddenness of a surprise, or amid the awful din of battle. Self-sacrifice for the welfare of others was the ruling principle at once of the shepherd and of the king.—*Ibid.*

[17773] The shepherd employment of David, by leading him to give special attention to the weak, the helpless, and the distressed of his flock, trained him for one of the most blessed and Christ-like functions of a godly ruler. Instead of regarding the "poor and needy" as unworthy of his care, he treated them like a kind and faithful shepherd, with peculiar consideration. The great impulse to such deeds of kindness, whether to the feeble of the flock, or to the poor of the people, was the sympathy of a tender heart, pained at the sight of suffering, and finding happiness in relieving it.—*Ibid.*

3 The shepherd's life, in preparation for his calling, endues him with a sense of dependence upon God.

[17774] "And the Spirit of the Lord," so the history announces, "came upon David" (*i.e.*, the beloved) "from that day forward." The youth entered upon a new stage in the development of his inner life, which was wholly consecrated to God. The rich talents wherewith he was endowed from his birth received on all sides fresh unfolding. The law, the holy record of the books of Moses, in which he had been instructed from his earliest years, opened themselves to his enlightened eye more and more. The peaceful stillness of nature amid which, tending his father's flocks, he spent his days, and often also the mild, starry nights, favoured his penetration into the secrets of the Divine revelation. His heart, moved and directed from above, already poured itself out in sacred song and poem, which he sang to the accompaniment of his harp, to the praise of that God before whom from his childhood he had learned to bow the knee; and it may well be assumed that even then, amid that rural loneliness, psalms streamed forth from his heart, such as the eighth, which overflows with adoring wonder at the condescension and grace with which the glorious Creator of heaven and earth has concerned Himself with frail man, and has raised him up to be lord over the works of His hands; the nineteenth—"The heavens declare the glory of God;" the twenty-third—"The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want;" the hundred-and-fourth—"Bless the Lord, O my soul. O Lord, my God, Thou art very great; Thou art clothed with honour and majesty;" and others of a similar kind. At all events, a great part of the lovely and thoughtful pictures borrowed from nature, which we meet with in such rich fulness in almost all his psalms, owe their origin to his shepherd-life, spent amid the pasture-fields and hills around Bethlehem.—*Krummacher.*

[17775] God led David the round of all human conditions, that he might catch the spirit proper to every one, and utter it according to truth; He allowed him not to curtail his being by treading the round of one function, but by every variety of functions. He cultivated his whole being, and filled his soul with wisdom and feeling. He found him objects for every affection, that the affection might not slumber and die. He brought him up in the sheep-pastures, that the groundwork of his character might be laid amongst the simple and universal forms of feeling. He took him to the camp, and made him a conqueror, that he might be filled with nobleness of soul and ideas of glory. He placed him in the palace, that he might be filled with ideas of majesty and sovereign might. He carried him to the wilderness, and placed him in solitudes, that his soul might dwell alone in the sublime conceptions of God, and His mighty works; and He kept him there for long years, with only one step between him and death, that he might be well schooled to trust and depend upon

the providence of God. And in none of these various conditions and avocations of life did He take away from him His Holy Spirit.—*E. Irving.*

4 The disciplinary element in his education endues him with trust in God.

[17776] It was most necessary that the spirit of trust in God, and all the graces depending on it and derived from it, should be exercised and nurtured to the highest measure of strength and endurance. One great object for which David had been preferred to Saul was, that in his government he might vindicate and maintain the supremacy of God—always regarding Jehovah as the real King of the nation, and himself as but His viceroy. That he might faithfully fulfil this purpose, it was necessary that the spirit of trust in God should acquire the force and constancy of a rooted habit—that he should learn to view all public measures instinctively in the light in which they would appear to God—to apply in all difficulties to Him for direction—to shun all mere carnal expedients for avoiding dangers or securing advantages; and to follow the Divine instructions with implicit confidence, assured that in the end they would guide him to safety, though at first they might seem to be plunging him into the very jaws of destruction. And no discipline could have been better fitted than David's for impressing this lesson and securing this end. In the course of his weary wanderings he was brought again and again to his wits' end; refuge failed him—despair was at the door. Invariably, in these extremities, it was impressed on him that recourse to God by prayer was the first step to relief. The habit acquired additional strength by the practice of recording his experience in the Psalms, many of which were commemorative of his wilderness trials, and seem to have been designed to deepen and perpetuate his wilderness impressions. Thus, by the time he reached the throne, the habit of trustful fellowship with God had almost become in him a second nature.—*Rev. W. Blaikie.*

[17777] The discipline of the outlaw fitted him for the high duties of the king; the bough that had been turned Godwards in youth by the storms of adversity, continued, for the most part, when the pressure ceased, to retain the same direction.—*Ibid.*

[17778] His godliness was not the offspring of a soul naturally saintly and beautiful, but it rose amid perpetual conflict with the fiercest passions of our common nature. His spiritual strength was not the holiness of an untempted heart, but a thing constantly assaulted by the combined power of the most tremendous temptations. And his psalms, in their plaintive lamentations—in their loud wail of misery—in their joyous bursts of exultations—have been felt by all men to be the most faithful record of the changing gloom and glory which forms the experience of the earnest soul through every age of time. If

we could bring out the real similarity underlying the splendour of David's career, which exists between his history and our own; if we could show how there was in him the earnest human soul struggling as we struggle, falling as we fall, and yet faithfully struggling on—then we should find that his life is full of glorious meaning and practical power.—*Rev. E. Hull.*

5 The disciplinary element in his education endues him with self-control.

[17779] The germ of this grace was exhibited in the combat with Goliath; but it too required to be strengthened into a steady, constant habit ere he was qualified to hold the reins of government. The man after God's own heart must not be liable to those ebullitions of temper or those fits of caprice which so often disgrace the conduct of kings, and others in exalted situations. He must not be liable to have his judgment clouded by passion, when devising and executing measures involving the welfare of millions. Nothing could have been better adapted than his wilderness training for strengthening the habit of self-control. It was essential to his very existence there, that he should keep a constant rein upon his inclinations, and check every wild or tumultuous feeling. His trust in God, when in active operation, obliged him calmly to consider, and piously adopt such measures only as the righteous God would own and bless. His sparing the life of Saul, when he lay asleep at his feet, was a striking evidence of his high attainment in self-control. And though the grace was not complete—though in one department, especially, it was palpably defective—yet the great mass of his public actings bore clear and beautiful testimony to the self-mastery he had attained.—*Rev. W. Blaikie.*

[17780] When the haughty and scornful Eliab assailed him with taunting words, the young shepherd kept his temper, and we feel how difficult that must have been for him, when, as we read the story, our own hearts rise in burning indignation at the spirit which the elder brother evinced. Probably this was not the first time that Eliab attempted to lord it over him, but David kept himself calm, and, like another, in a yet more trying hour, "when he was reviled, he reviled not again." "He that ruleth his spirit is greater than he that taketh a city;" and to my thinking this calmness of soul under Eliab's taunt was a greater thing in David than his boldness before the giant. I do not, of course, in thus emphasizing David's meekness, extenuate the rudeness of Eliab. On the contrary, it was worthy of all reprobation, but David felt that he was called not to fight with Eliab in this matter, but with himself, and so he held his peace.—*Rev. W. Taylor, D.D.*

[17781] The strong faith by which he was actuated was attended with a meek temper and a forbearing heart. "And David said, What have I now done? Is there not a cause?" No railing returned for railing, when his noble spirit

of self-sacrifice met with this volley of undeserved abuse; but, just like the Son of David afterwards, the sweetest meekness and patience. This admirable spirit of self-command, under all sorts of disturbing influences, already marked out David as a ruler of men.—*Rev. W. Blaikie.*

IV. FRUITS OF THE DIVINE CULTURE AS TRACED IN HIS SPECIAL CHARACTERISTICS.

1 Sensibility.

[17782] Was not he the true son of Boaz who, when the ark was placed on Mount Zion, “dealt among all the people, even among the whole multitude of Israel, *as well to the women as men*, to every one a cake of bread, and a good piece of flesh, and a flagon of wine?” Ruth, again, was remarkable for the extraordinary tenderness and depth of her affection; her very life was a poem—a psalm; her words to Naomi breathe the very soul of piety and of poetry: “Entreat me not to leave thee, nor to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God.” Did not all Ruth’s tenderness fall to the lot of the man who was bound to Jonathan by such a romantic attachment—who exhibited such emotion when a fatal illness attacked his infant child—who poured out such a flood of anguish when his rebellious Absalom was hurried into eternity? And was not all Ruth’s piety, too, poured out into the heart that pleaded so plaintively for God’s presence: “Hide not Thy face far from me; put not Thy servant away in anger; leave me not, neither forsake me, O God of my salvation?” There cannot be a doubt that the history of Boaz and Ruth would occupy much of David’s attention, and take deep hold of his mind. Not only was it marked by that dash of romance which suited his poetical temperament; and not only did it probably form part of those holy oracles in which he ever felt such boundless delight; but the very house in which he lived—the fields where he tended his sheep—every object around him would probably be associated with their memory; aged people would tell him stories of their benevolence; pious people would give him traditions of their godliness; the whole place would be fragrant with the memory of their goodness; everything would convey the strongest impression of the beauty of their character. Such, most probably, was one of the influences which the Holy Spirit employed for developing the tender and amiable spirit of King David; and thus the foundation was laid of a character, in which all the tenderness of a woman was combined with the piety of a saint, and the courage and spirit of a man.—*Ibid.*

2 Modesty.

[17783] He does not boast or talk of his strength and courage in killing the lion and the bear; for he knew that that strength and courage came from God, not from himself; therefore he

says that the Lord *delivered him* from them. He knew that he had been only doing his duty in facing them when they attacked his father’s sheep, and that it was God’s mercy which had protected him in doing his duty.—*Rev. C. Kingsley.*

3 Prudence.

[17784] He would not use Saul’s armour, good as it might be, because he was not accustomed to it. He would use his own experience, and fight with the weapons to which he had been accustomed—a sling and a stone. You see he was none of those presumptuous and fanatical dreamers who tempt God by fancying that He is to go out of His way to work miracles for them. He used all the proper and prudent means to kill the giant, and trusted to God to bless them. If he had been presumptuous, he might have taken the first stone that came to hand, or taken only one, or taken none at all, and expected the giant to fall down dead by a miracle. But no; he chooses five smooth stones out of the brook.—*Ibid.*

4 Heavenly wisdom.

As displayed in his public position in the palace of Saul.

a. He followed the guidances of Providence.

[17785] His simple rule was to meet the present duty as it came. He was sent to feed the sheep. He did it well. He was called to be anointed as the future king. He received his anointing, and as God opened the way no further, he went back, without complaint, to his simple shepherd life. Summoned to be Saul’s minstrel, he performed the menial task, and, when no longer needed, retired to his father’s farm. The war with the Philistines opened. Jesse’s elder sons were permitted the exciting life of the camp, but David was needed at home; and though he might have pleaded his ability in war (1 Sam. xvi. 18), his position as royal armour-bearer, his future kingship, he submissively remained at Bethlehem. But at last his patience was rewarded; his opportunity came. Sent on a message to the camp, the way opened for a deed which won the applause of the people and the notice of the king. He was immediately appointed to the colonelcy of a regiment, and afterwards, as the king’s son-in-law, he became, it is supposed, commander of the royal body-guard. These honours David neither sought nor declined. Whatever a Divine Providence laid on him he cheerfully undertook. He did not urge his claims. He was not troubled that his merits for a while should go unrecognized. He had no anxiety to precipitate the promotion divinely promised. He was content to wait God’s time. A rare quality in human nature!—*Sermons by the Monday Club.*

b. He did not shirk responsibility.

[17786] When a Divine Providence plainly opened the way, he would not decline to enter. It is not for us rashly and unsought to venture

on responsibilities, but when they are urged on us by others, whose interests are at stake, why should we hesitate to test our ability by a trial? David had a modest and praiseworthy ambition to equal the demands made on him. Some men fail in life because too timid or self-depreciatory to take positions for which they are well fitted, and to which others invite them. David never ran from responsibilities. If wild beasts attacked his sheep, he met them. If Goliath of Gath shook his ponderous spear over cowering Israel, David, when others failed, faced the insolent Philistine. If Saul appointed him a military chief, and challenged him to dangerous expeditions, he would not refuse.—*Ibid.*

c. He was uncalculating.

[17787] David did his duty well, in that he did it unselfishly. The public man, deputed to represent the people, must not neglect their interests that he may use his position to reap a harvest for himself. When the gangrene of corruption eats into the national heart, there is no hope for the national life. Fortunate was Saul to have a servant who met his duty without a selfish eagerness to advance himself. How many in David's place would have leaped to the throne over the dead body of the king! The histories of ancient empires are dreary catalogues of such bloody usurpations. Goaded by Saul's cowardly attacks upon his life, David might naturally have found justification in the deed. Did not Saul's wretched misgovernment call for interference? Was not David popular? had he not military authority? was he not divinely anointed as the king's successor? Why not anticipate a little, rid the country of a tyrant, and further his own interests? But such conduct was impossible to David. He was too unselfish and too true to principle to advance himself by deeds of wrong.—*Ibid.*

d. He cherished exalted virtues.

[17788] His acts were not superficial, the mere dictate of a worldly prudence; they were born of the heart. His standard of morality was altogether different from that of the barbarian age in which he lived.—*Ibid.*

e. He was faithful to his trust.

[17789] He stood in his lot till God permitted him to retire. It was not pleasant to be brought in daily contact with one whose distempered brain was plotting him mischief, and whose swift javelin might any moment drink his blood. It was not easy to bear the cruel wrong without a swift revenge; and if revenge were forbidden, either by prudence or piety, he was, at least one would think, at liberty to withdraw. But David would not cowardly flee from his responsibilities. It must first be plain beyond mistake that there was no recovery for the insane king, and that not mere momentary bursts of passion sought him harm, but rather a deliberate purpose of evil. Poets have embalmed for us the heroism of Horatius: at the bridge across the Tiber, of Casabianca, of the sentinel at Pompeii. A like

spirit did David show in the palace of Saul.—*Ibid.*

f. His conduct was based on religious principle.

[17790] The same spirit animated him in the palace that sustained him in his terrible conflicts, as a shepherd, with wild beasts, and his still more dangerous encounter with the Philistine giant. The Lord that had delivered him hitherto (1 Sam. xvii. 36) should deliver him still. It were impossible for David to have had such wonderful success, and to have behaved so wisely, had he not been controlled by religious principle. David's soul was on fire with the poetry of devotion. His days and nights of shepherding had been favourable to meditation. The loneliness of the Judæan hills, the flocks of sheep browsing happily through the valley, the wild deer drinking at the brook, the firmament of blue through which he peered in heavenward aspirations, the thunder clouds marshalling heavily athwart the sky, the golden sunsets decking all the west in grandeur, the silent night through whose lengthened hours solemnly marched the mysterious stars—all these, as many of his Psalms prove (Psalms l. 10; xxiii. 1, 2; xlii. 1; xix. 1; lxxvii. 17, 18; xxix. 3-9; lxxiv. 17 (?); xxxiii. 6; viii. 3), had made a deep impression on him, and, joined to his familiarity with the written word, had stirred in him the profoundest religious feelings. As a result, when he left his retirement for the perils of court, he came not alone. The Lord was with him; and he who could not wear the armour of Saul was yet clad in a coat of mail, which, welded by no human artificer, defended him from a more dangerous foe than the giant of Gath. David lived not in his own strength, but in the strength of God.—*Ibid.*

5 Steadfastness.

[17791] He was tried in the early years of his life and found faithful; before he was put in power, it was proved whether he could obey. Till he came to the throne, he was like Moses or Samuel, an instrument in God's hands, bid do what was told him and nothing more; having borne this trial of obedience well, in which Saul had failed, then at length he was intrusted with a sort of discretionary power, to use in his Master's service.—*Cardinal Newman.*

[17792] Observe how David was tried, and what various high qualities of mind he displayed in the course of the trial. First, the promise of greatness was given him, and Samuel anointed him. Still he stayed in the sheepfolds; and though called away by Saul for a time, yet returned contentedly when Saul released him from attendance. How difficult it is for such as know they have gifts suitable to the Church's need to refrain themselves till God makes a way for their use! and the trial would be the more severe in David's case, in proportion to the ardour and energy of his mind; yet he fainted not under it. Afterwards for seven

years, as the time appears to be, he withstood the strong temptation, ever before his eyes, of acting without God's guidance, when he had the means of doing so. Though skilful in arms, popular with his countrymen, successful against the enemy, the king's son-in-law, and on the other hand grievously injured by Saul, who not only continually sought his life, but even suggested to him a traitor's conduct by accusing him of treason, and whose life was several times in his hands, yet he kept his honour pure and unimpeachable. He feared God and honoured the king, and this at a time of life especially exposed to the temptations of ambition.—*Ibid.*

6 Forbearance.

(1) Various motives induced to revenge.

a. Desire of retaliation.

[17793] The victories of David over Goliath and the Philistines were but vulgar triumphs, compared to his victories, on the two different occasions recorded in these two chapters, over the spirit of revenge, and other passions of our fallen nature. It is only when we think of such awful fruits of the spirit of revenge that we become truly alive to the singular excellence of the spirit of forbearance which David so remarkably displayed. We see the striking contrast between nature and grace—between the heart of man as sin has made it, and the heart of man as grace renews it; breathing slaughter and death in the one case, breathing goodwill and forgiveness in the other. Who can fail to admire the spirit of forbearance triumphing over the spirit of revenge?—*Rev. W. Blaikie.*

[17794] No temptation could well have been stronger than that of David to despatch his enemy. In the first place, there was the prospect of getting rid of that most weary life he had been leading—more like the life of a wild beast hunted by its enemies, than of a man eager to do good to his fellows, with a keen relish for the pleasures of home, and the holy services of the house of God. Then there was the prospect of wearing the crown, and wielding the sceptre of Israel—the splendours of a royal palace, and its golden opportunities of doing good. Further, there was the voice of his followers urging him to the deed; urging him, too, in a holy name, and with the semblance of the Divine permission and command. And further still, there was the suddenness of the opportunity. The discipline of David's spirit at this time must have been exceedingly admirable. The purpose of God in all these trials to train him to self-government was beautifully fulfilled. Not only was he enabled to restrain himself, but also to restrain his ardent and impetuous followers. He would neither strike his artless enemy, nor suffer another to strike him. The first time he spared Saul, it might be with a lingering hope that his forbearance would turn Saul's heart, and disarm his hostility.

On the second occasion, he could have no hope of the kind. It was pure regard to sacred duty that swayed him. He acted in utter contempt of all that was personal and selfish, and in deepest reverence for what was holy and Divine.—*Ibid.*

[17795] David had great wrongs to revenge. On three occasions Saul had attempted his life. He had taken from him his wife and wedded her to another. He had cast his javelin at Jonathan, David's bosom friend. When David fled the court Saul had pursued him, like a wild beast, from refuge to refuge, till he was weary of life. He had driven him to remove his father and mother to the protection of a foreign prince. Such wrongs called for blood.—*Sermons by the Monday Club.*

b. Ambition.

[17796] He had been anointed by Samuel; he might now be king; only one life interposed between him and the throne.—*Ibid.*

c. The consideration of Saul's misrule.

[17797] We can scarcely conceive the resulting miseries of the nation. Whence came David's company of six hundred hopeless men, some criminals, but many of them of the best men in the nation? Under Saul, public affairs had grown desperate. He had trampled upon law; he had even violated religion. By the hand of Doeg, the Edomite, he had murdered the high priest and all his household of eighty-five souls, because Ahimelech had dared, on a single occasion, to harbour David in his flight. The land was overrun by armed marauders, and by Philistines. This ruin David surveyed with grief and indignation. The people were his flock; he beheld them as sheep without a shepherd; he felt himself competent to rule; was it not his duty? Why not wrest the helm from the hand of this God-forsaken madman, at a blow put an end to anarchy, and immediately commence, before it should be too late, that brilliant course of foreign war and internal administration which was to make his reign and that of Solomon, his son, for ever illustrious? Nevertheless, with all the motives impelling to his destruction, David spared Saul.—*Ibid.*

(2) Other influences restrained him.

a. Love.

[17798] For Jonathan's sake, for Michal's sake, for Saul's own sake, for what he had been, for what he still was, he loved him.—*Ibid.*

b. Religious philosophy.

[17799] He was a man who sought to live reasonably; he was a man of proverbs. Thus he quoted to Saul, in justification of his conduct, this sentence of the ancients: "Wickedness proceedeth from the wicked." It would be a most interesting inquiry to seek the influence of his training in inspiring Solomon's love of wisdom, and inclination to proverbial discourse. Scattered throughout the Psalms are passages which belong rather in a collection like Solo-

mon's proverbs than in a book of prayers and hymns. One psalm, in particular, has, throughout, this proverbial structure, and should be read in connection with the release of Saul. It is the thirty-seventh, and commences thus: "Fret not thyself because of evildoers." On David's theory of conduct, it was not wise to take the king's life.—*Ibid.*

[17800] The morality of David was not a fruit of human philosophy. It was a much deeper thing; it was religious. It was a result of spiritual insight. The Golden Text aims to gather up for us the practical instruction of our passage. Its inference is just. David had anticipated, in some directions, the Christian morality; he had gained a view, more or less clear, of the principle, "Recompense to no man evil for evil." He is an example to us, in Old Testament times, of the beauty of the Golden Rule.—*Ibid.*

c. Loyalty.

[17801] David was an outlaw, but not of choice. He had been driven into the rocks; he never lifted hand against the king; he called him, "My master, my lord, the king;" his attitude was almost abject; "he stooped to the king, with his face toward the earth, and bowed himself." He used expressions only to be understood as we think of the humiliations of an Eastern court. These expressions are to be understood as protestations of steadfast loyalty. David had still another reason for sparing Saul. He was loyal to a greater King; he owed a higher allegiance. This is his own explanation of his conduct.—*Ibid.*

7 Generosity of disposition.

[17802] We turn to contemplate David's conduct when the intelligence reached him that his persecutor was dead. Nothing could have been more truly noble. David was now just thirty; and never did man at that age, or at any age, act a finer part. The death, and especially the sudden death of a friend or acquaintance, has usually a remarkable effect on the tender heart. It blots out all remembrance of little injuries done by the departed; it fills one with regret for any unkind words one may ever have spoken, or any unkind deeds one may ever have done to him. It makes one very forgiving. But it must have been a very wonderful heart that could so soon rid itself of every shred of bitter feeling to Saul—that could blot out, in one great act of forgiveness, the remembrance of many long years of injustice, oppression, and toil, and leave no feelings but those of kindness, admiration, and regret, called forth by the contemplation of what was favourable in Saul's character! Does not this show forgiveness to be a Divine spirit?—*Rev. W. Blaikie.*

[17803] The death of Saul had removed the only obstacle that stood between David and the throne, and had rid him of an enemy who had pursued him for some years with rancorous and unrelenting hatred. It is a common and a just

saying that we should say no ill of the dead. They are not here to defend themselves; and, unless where great interests are concerned, their ashes should not be disturbed. In his circumstances, the utmost required of David would have been to preserve a decent and becoming silence about Saul, burying all recollections of him in the grave. But he was incapable of this; he was cast in a finer mould; he was made of nobler metal. His generous heart, forgiving and forgetting every wrong, warmed at the recollection of those early, happy days, when the king drew the shepherd boy from obscurity, received him into the bosom of his family, showered royal favours on his head; and when, harp in hand, he threw the chains of music over Saul's stormy passions, bidding the waves be still. David has buried Saul's faults in the grave, "earth to earth, dust to dust, ashes to ashes." But while he leaves the dross to lie undisturbed among the cold embers, he brings out the gold—the finer elements of Saul's character; and without, after the fashion of many lying tombstones, imputing to him virtues which he never possessed, he tells all the good of Saul he can, and crowns his memory with the honours due to a king, a dutiful son, a kind-hearted father, and a man as brave as ever faced a foe.—*Rev. T. Guthrie, D.D.*

8 Devotion.

[17804] Surely the blessings of the patriarchs descended in a united flood upon "the lion of the tribe of Judah," the type of the true Redeemer who was to come. He inherits the prompt faith and magnanimity of Abraham; he is simple as Isaac; he is humble as Jacob; he has the youthful wisdom and self-possession, the tenderness, the affectionateness, and the firmness of Joseph. And, as his own especial gift, he has an overflowing thankfulness, an ever-burning devotion, a zealous fidelity to his God, a high unshaken loyalty towards his king, an heroic bearing in all circumstances, such as the multitude of men see to be great, but cannot understand.—*Cardinal Newman.*

V. DECLENSION.

1 Self-indulgence.

The depth of David's fall was due in some measure to the intensity of his general character.

[17805] How can you account for such enormous iniquity in such a man as we have seen that David was? To this I answer, that we may explain it by the absence for the time being of that restraining influence which his better nature was wont to exercise over his life. Passion had dethroned conscience; and then, owing to the intensity of his character, and the general greatness of the man, his sins became as much blacker than those of others as his good qualities were greater than theirs. In every good man there are still two natures striving for the mastery. "The flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the

flesh." The new nature is generally in the ascendant, but sometimes the old evil nature will reassert its supremacy, and the effect of this temporary revolution will be determined by the temperament and characteristics of the individual. Now there are some men in whom everything is on a large scale. When their good nature is uppermost, they overtop all others in holiness; but if, unhappily, they should be thrown off their guard, and the old man should gain the mastery, some dreadful wickedness may be expected. This is all the more likely to be the case if the quality of intensity be added to their greatness; for a man with such a temperament is never anything by half. But it was just thus with David. He was a man of great intensity and pre-eminent energy. He was in every respect above ordinary men; and so when, for the time, the fleshly nature was the stronger within him, the sins which he committed were as much greater than those of common men, as in other circumstances his excellencies were nobler than theirs. We often make great mistakes in judging of the characters of others, because we ignore all these considerations; and many well-conducted persons among us get great credit for their good moral character, while the truth is that they are blameless not so much because they have higher-toned principle than others, as because they have feeble, timid natures, that are too cautious or too weak to let them go very far either into holiness or into sin. But David was not one of these. Everything about him was intense; and hence, when he sinned, he did it in such a way as to make well-nigh the most hardened shudder. In all this, observe, I am not extenuating David's guilt. It is one thing to explain, it is another thing to excuse. A man of David's nature ought to be more peculiarly on his guard than other men. The express train, dashing along at furious speed, will do more mischief if it runs off the line than the slow-going horse-car in our city streets. Every one understands that; but every one demands, in consequence, that the driver of the one shall be proportionately more watchful than that of the other. Now with such a nature as David had, and knew that he had, he ought to have been supremely on his guard, while again the privileges which he had received from God rendered it both easy and practicable for him to be vigilant. To sum up all, then, taking David's nature as it is here set before us, I can perfectly well understand how, when he sinned, he sinned so terribly; while having regard to his privileges and position, his sin appears to be utterly inexcusable. Nothing can be said either in its vindication or extenuation. From first to last it illustrates the climax of the apostle; and as we trace its course we call it "earthly, sensual, devilish."—*Rev. W. Taylor, D.D.*

[17806] The force of his character was vast, and the scope of his life was immense. His harp was full-stringed, and every angel of joy and of sorrow swept over the chords as he passed;

but the melody always breathed of heaven. And such oceans of affection lay within his breast, as could not always slumber in their calmness. For the hearts of a hundred men strove and struggled together within the narrow continent of his single heart: and will the scornful men have no sympathy for one so conditioned, but scorn him, because he ruled not with constant quietness, the unruly host of divers natures which dwelt within his single soul? Of self-command surely he will not be held deficient, who endured Saul's javelin to be so often launched at him, while the people without were ready to hail him king; who endured all bodily hardships, and taunts of his enemies, when revenge was in his hand; and ruled his desperate band like a company of saints, and restrained them from their country's injury. But that he should not be able to enact all characters without a fault, the simple shepherd, the conquering hero, and the romantic lover; the perfect friend, the innocent outlaw, and the royal monarch; the poet, the prophet, and the regenerator of the Church; and, withal, the man, the man of vast soul, who played not these parts by turns, but was the original of them all, and wholly present in them all; oh! that he should have fulfilled this high priesthood of humanity, this universal ministry of manhood without an error, were more than human. With the defence of his backslidings, which he hath himself more keenly scrutinised, more clearly discerned against, and more bitterly lamented than any of his censors, we do not charge ourselves, because they were, in a manner, necessary, that he might be the full-orbed man which was needed to utter every form of spiritual feeling; but if, when of these acts he became convinced, he be found less true to God, and to righteousness; indisposed to repentance, and sorrow, and anguish; exculpatory of himself; stout-hearted in his courses, a formalist in his penitence, or in any way less worthy of a spiritual man in those than in the rest of his infinite moods, then, verily, strike him from the canon, and let his Psalms become monkish legends.—*E. Irving.*

2 Insensibility to sin.

[17807] Punishment for his sin preceded his penitence and forgiveness. For a whole year David remained in that strangest greatest guilt of all—an unconsciousness of guilt. We do not know with what opiates he drugged his conscience; but how fast asleep it was we learn from the trouble Nathan had to arouse it. How blind he must have been not to have instantly discerned an image of himself in the mirror the prophet held up before him! His spiritual sensibilities were so deadened he did not imagine there was any reference to him in the story Nathan told. There is no evidence that he would have dreamed of applying it to himself, if the prophet had not said, "Thou art the man." If his conscience had been tender and wakeful, he would have caught Nathan's meaning before the story was half told, and he would

have thought that men were referring to his fall when they had no intention of alluding to it. With great beams in both his own eyes, he was yet determined to put another man to death for having a mote in one of his. This long-lasting and deep forgetfulness of his own state is one of the most fearful things belonging to David's declension.—*C. Vince.*

VI. RETURN TO GOD.

I David as an example of godly sorrow.

[17808] We must, in connection with this history, read the Psalms to which David's penitence gave birth, namely, the 51st and the 32nd; and if these are not the genuine utterances of a passionate sincerity, where shall we find that quality in any literature? Admirably has Chandler said of the 51st Psalm, "The heart appears in every line, and the bitter anguish of a wounded conscience discovers itself by the most natural and convincing symbols. Let but the Psalm be read without prejudice, and with a view only to collect the real sentiments expressed in it, and the disposition of heart that appears throughout the whole of it, and no man of candour, I am confident, will ever suspect that it was the dictate of hypocrisy, or could be penned from any other motive but a strong conviction of the heinousness of his offence, and the earnest desire of God's forgiveness, and being restrained from the commission of the like transgressions."—*Rev. W. Taylor, D.D.*

[17809] Voltaire once attempted to burlesque this Psalm, and what was the result? While carefully perusing it that he might familiarize himself with the train of sentiment which he designed to caricature, he became so oppressed and overawed by his solemn devotional tone, that he threw down the pen and fell back half senseless on his couch, in an agony of remorse. This is told as an undoubted fact by Dr. Leander Van Ess. Hence we cannot but admit the depth and fervour of the penitence out of which such a prayer arose; and though the 32nd Psalm is more jubilant in its tone, as referring to forgiveness in actual possession, the very gladness which it expresses is a witness to the sadness for sin which had gone before.—*Ibid.*

[17810] As an evidence of the genuineness of David's repentance, we point to the words of Nathan, "The Lord also hath put away thy sin," and ask if the prophet, as Jehovah's representative, would have said anything like that, if the penitence of David had been insincere. While, therefore, we mourn over the grievous iniquity of which David was guilty, let us be thankful that we have, along with the record of his sin, the account of his repentance—a repentance, let us say, as much more intense than that of ordinary men as his sin was more heinous. There was no attempt at self-vindication; there was no plea in palliation; there

was nothing but the frank confession, "I acknowledge my transgression;" "I have sinned;" "My sin is ever before me." Nor was it the shame of his iniquity before men, or the fear of the punishment which he had incurred, that distressed him. His deepest anguish was that he had displeased the Lord: "Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned."—*Ibid.*

[17811] David, the Hebrew king, had fallen into sins enough; blackest crimes; there was no want of sins. And, thereupon, 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, true, often-baffled, never-ending struggle of it—be forgotten? "It is not in man that walketh to direct his steps." Of all acts, is not, for a man, repentance the most Divine? The deadliest sin, I say, were that same supercilious consciousness of no sin. That is death. The heart so conscious is divorced from sincerity, humility, and fact—is dead. It is pure, as dead, dry sand is pure. David's life and history, as written for us in those Psalms of his, I consider to be the truest emblem ever given 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 toward what is good and best. Struggle often baffled sore, baffled down into entire wreck, yet a struggle never ended; ever with tears, repentance, true, unconquerable purpose begun anew.—*Ibid.*

[17812] It could not have been without a great moral struggle that David made up his mind to deliver "to the chief musician" his first psalm of penitence, and thus aid in keeping alive among his own people, and among all future generations, the remembrance of his trespass. Most men would have thought how the ugly transaction might most effectually be buried, and would have tried to put the best face on it before their people. Not so David! He was willing that his people and all posterity should see him the atrocious transgressor he had confessed himself to God—let them think of him as they pleased. He saw that this everlasting exposure of his vileness was essential towards extracting from the miserable transaction such salutary lessons as it was capable of yielding. With a wonderful effort of magnanimity, he resolved to place himself in the pillory of public shame; to expose his memory to all the foul treatment which the scoffers and libertines of every after age might think fit to heap on it. It is most unjust to David to overlook the fact, that the first public record of his sin (for the history was not written till afterwards) came from his own pen, and was delivered with his own hand to the chief musician, for public use. Infidels may continue to scoff; but the whole transaction will afford a lasting proof that "the foolishness of God is wiser than men."—*Rev. W. Blakeie.*

[17813] "Then will I teach transgressors thy ways, and sinners shall be converted unto thee." This, his promised vow and resolution, if only he may regain peace, David sees, when that peace is once more his, he will best observe by publishing his shame and his repentance in a psalm, for the expression of the woes of all future transgressors for all time.—*M. J.*

[17814] The deep and earnest exercise of soul to which David was led, after his sin, produced very remarkable and abiding effects on his character. It was not a passing emotion of grief, deep for the moment, but soon over, and leaving his spirit much the same as before, but a pervading, penetrating exercise, like one of those fevers that plough up the whole tissues of the frame, and often leave the patient, in constitution and appearance, ten years older than before.—*Rev. W. Blaikie.*

[17815] There was in all things a great change in David. Broken in spirit by the consciousness of how deeply he had sinned against God and against man; humbled in the eyes of his subjects, and his influence with them weakened by the knowledge of his crimes; and even his authority in his own household, and his claim to the reverence of his sons relaxed by the loss of character, David appears henceforth as a much altered man. He is as one who goes down to the grave mourning. . . . The infirmities of his character, formerly concealed by the splendour of his other qualities, now appear in strong relief. . . . Still he is pious, but even his piety takes an altered aspect. It is no longer buoyant, glad, exulting, triumphant; it is repressed, humble, contrite, patient, suffering. . . . Alas for him! The bird which once rose to heights unattained before by mortal wing, filling the air with its joyful songs, now lies with maimed wing upon the ground, pouring forth its doleful cries to God.—*Rev. J. Kitto, D.D.*

[17816] Many have sinned even more deeply than David sinned; few, very few, have repented as deeply as did he. It is easy to sin with his passion, but how difficult to repent with his grief!—*M. J.*

2 David as an example of resignation and submission to God.

[17817] The child died, and the servants of the king, with a real delicacy of heart, and with genuine consideration for his feelings, were afraid to tell him that all was over. But they need not have been so timid; for, though exceedingly honourable to them, the fear lest the knowledge of the child's death should thoroughly unman the king, proceeded from ignorance of his true character. He knew that in the case of an infant, when death comes, the time for fasting and grieving is over, and so he arose and washed, and anointed himself, and went into the house of God and worshipped; "then he came to his own house; and when he required, they set bread before him, and he did eat." As-

tonished at his behaviour, his servants asked for an explanation. He gave this noble answer, evidencing at once the strength of his character and the firmness of his faith in the future life: "While the child was yet alive, I fasted and wept: for I said, Who can tell whether God will be gracious to me, that the child may live? But now he is dead, wherefore should I fast? can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me." Here was true resignation. Here was strong faith. Here was a holy and a glorious hope—alike for the living and the dead—and in the assurance of future and eternal reunion before the throne he was comforted.—*Rev. W. Taylor, D.D.*

[17818] David's resignation was not a mere stoical submission to the inevitable, still less was it a stolid insensibility; but it was the result of his persuasion of the happiness of his departed child, and of his humble hope of joining him therein.—*Ibid.*

3 David as an example of humiliation before God.

[17819] It can hardly be thought that David's scheme, when he numbered the people, was just a scheme of vulgar conquest; far more probably, it was a sincere but mistaken plan of extending far and wide the blessings of good government and true religion. So firm was the hold which the purpose took of his mind, that even the remonstrances of Joab and the captains of the hosts failed to shake it; and it was nearly a year after, when the census had been completed, before his eyes were opened to the sin of which he had been guilty. The sense of his sin seems to have come upon him with the force as well as the suddenness of a thunderbolt. "And David's heart smote him after that he had numbered the people. And David said unto the Lord, I have sinned greatly in that I have done; and now I beseech thee, O Lord, take away the iniquity of Thy servant, for I have done very foolishly." No hint is given as to how this conviction of sin was produced, or in what light he was led to view his conduct. One consideration that might greatly affect him was, that this vast enterprise had been contemplated, and even begun, without solemn consultation of God; that he had acted in disloyalty to that heavenly King whose lieutenant he was; that he had been about to imperil thousands of valuable lives, and endanger the very existence of his kingdom, by an unwarranted project of his own; and that he had been proudly regardless of the obstacles which Providence had mercifully thrown in his way, when Joab and his other officers entered their remonstrances against his scheme. Once alive to his sin, his humiliation is very profound. His confession is frank, hearty, and complete. He shows no proud desire to remain on good terms with himself, or to make the amount of confession as small as possible. He says, "I will confess my transgression unto the Lord;" and his plea is one with which he is familiar of old: "For Thy name's sake, O Lord, pardon

mine iniquity, for it is great." David is never greater than in humiliation.—*Rev. W. Blaikie.*

VII. GENERAL DEFECTS OF CHARACTER.

1 Ultra-Conservatism.

[17820] While we speak strongly of the devotion of King David to his own people, we must add that, in its very intensity, that devotion was not unaccompanied by traces of human infirmity. His love was confined to his own people; and, for all beyond that circle, he not only had no warm love, but hardly even the ordinary feeling of brotherhood. His position towards the outer world, like that of every true Jew, was indeed a difficult one. The Hebrew people were the Lord's anointed, and all else were not only not holy, but, for the most part, open enemies both of the Lord and of His people. It would have been most difficult for a Jew to attain the happy medium, the right equipoise of feeling for the uncircumcised nations around, lying somewhere between brotherly love on the one hand, and bitter hatred on the other. But David gave himself no trouble to find this happy medium. He gave free rein to the spirit of enmity to the heathen, and no pity for the sharers of a common nature softened the rigour with which he treated them. It is a mystery how such tenderness and such relentless severity should have been found in the same man. Whatever may be urged in extenuation of his severity, rests on his position as a Jew.—*Ibid.*

2 Weakness in domestic rule.

[17821] Every one must have been struck by the remarkable fact that while David was so admirable as a governor of a kingdom, he was so unsuccessful as a ruler of his own house. He did not so absolutely submit his own will to God's will in his family, as he did upon the throne; he did not so constantly inquire what God would have him to do; he allowed himself to be too much guided by his own inclinations—to float down the stream, when he should have breasted the billow. You will ask, Why did God permit this? Why did God, who had trained him so well for the higher office, not train him as well for the lower? Would not David's history have been far more useful if he had been equally admirable as a father and as a king? Kings are comparatively few in number, and very seldom have a heart to consult the Bible for direction in kingly duties, or endeavour to form their character on the model of such kings as David. But masters and fathers of families abound everywhere; many of them earnestly search the Scriptures; and if David had been equally eminent as a father, would not the sphere of his influence have been immensely widened? To such questions as these we can hardly reply. It is, and must remain, very mysterious why God, who took such pains in training David to be a king, left him so much to himself as a parent. The most that we can say

on the subject is, "Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Thy sight."—*Ibid.*

3 Despondency.

[17822] "And David said in his heart, I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul: there is nothing better for me than that I should speedily escape into the land of the Philistines." We have here the feelings and the resolution of a discouraged man. David had been driven from place to place by Saul, until he began to feel there was no security for his life in Judæa; and he resolved to leave his country, and to go among the Philistines. But this was a rash resolve. God had promised the kingdom to him after Saul's death; how then could he fear that he should "one day perish by the hand of Saul"? He who had ordained the end would provide the means. David was just as secure in Israel as in Gath; and this he might have known from repeated providential deliverances. By going among an idolatrous people, the enemies of his own nation, he also made many sacrifices of religious privilege and integrity. He was induced, on one occasion, to equivocate, and to give the king of Gath the impression that he was ready to fight under him against the Israelites, when such was not his intention. What was still worse, when David and his followers went out against some of the neighbouring tribes, they were led into the cruel policy of massacring men, women, and children, lest some should escape and tell the king of Gath that David had fought against his allies. These tribes again, suspecting his incursions, came upon David's encampment during his absence, and carried away his family and the families of his soldiers into captivity, and David's life was threatened by his own men in their grief at their dreadful loss.—*Rev. W. Lewis, D.D.*

[17823] Great evils came upon David, and he was led into sins and sacrifices, because in a hasty moment of discouragement he lost his confidence in God, and turned aside from the plain path of duty. By that one rash resolution, formed in a moment of despondency, he was led into falsehood, and cruelty, and the sacrifice of religious principles; and in consequence of it his family were carried into captivity, and his own life endangered. He could hardly have suffered more if he had remained in Judæa under Saul's persecutions; and certainly he would not have been led into so many sins. Had he continued there, he might indeed have been driven from place to place, but his life would have been secure; and, moreover, he would have been in the midst of his countrymen of the same religion, and perhaps had he been there at the time of Saul's death, his presence might have prevented the evils of a disputed succession, and the long civil wars that ensued. But he became discouraged; and then, not satisfied with the Lord's way of taking care of him, he must mark out some better plan of his own.—*Ibid.*

VIII. CHIEF QUALITIES OF THE RULER.

Systematic energy.

(1) *As displayed in his government generally.*

[17824] In the minds of most readers of the Bible, the name of David, king of Israel, is associated mainly with military prowess, poetic genius, and personal piety; and only on the rarest occasions do we hear any reference made to his administrative ability. Yet in this last quality he was, at least, as remarkable as in any one of the others which we have named; and great injustice is done to him if we leave out of view the eminent services which he rendered to his country by the exercise of his governmental and organizing faculties. It has happened thus with the son of Jesse, as with many others, that the showier and more dashing talents which he possessed have eclipsed, or cast into the shade, his other less ostentatious, but, in their own places, equally valuable characteristics.—*Rev. W. Taylor, D.D.*

(2) *As displayed in his civil administration.*

[17825] Whatever changes David introduced in the central government, he did not supersede the local government of the tribes. Each tribe had still its prince or ruler, and continued, under a general superintendence from the king, to conduct its local affairs. The supreme council of the nation continued to assemble on occasions of great national importance; and though its influence could not have been so great as it was before the institution of royalty, it remained an integral element in the constitution; and in the time of Rehoboam, through its influence and organization, the kingdom of the ten tribes was set up almost without a struggle.—*Rev. W. Blakeie.*

[17826] Without superseding the tribal governments, David greatly strengthened them by a systematic distribution through the country of a large portion of the Levites. No fewer than 6000 of these were made officers and judges. Of these "chief fathers," as they were called, very nearly a half were allocated among the tribes on the east of the Jordan—probably because their comparatively isolated situation demanded a more thorough superintendence than was necessary for the rest of the country. It is extremely probable that this large and able body of Levites were not limited to strictly judicial duties, but that they performed important functions also in the education, the healing, and the general elevation of the people. Infinitely more was done for the instruction and enlightenment of the people than was ever attempted or dreamt of in any eastern country. It is nowhere said whether Samuel's schools received a special share of attention, but the deep interest David must have taken in Samuel's plans, and his early acquaintance with their blessed effects, leave little room to doubt that these institutions were carefully fostered, and owed to David a share of that vitality which they continued to exhibit in the days of Elijah and Elisha.—*Ibid.*

[17827] In developing the material resources of the country, King David seems, with rigorous conscientiousness, to have applied the rule of Christ—"let nothing be lost." He had storehouses in the fields, in the cities, in the villages, and in the castles; there were vineyards and wine-cellar, and cellars of oil, superintended each by appointed officers; in different valleys, herds and flocks grazed under the care of royal herdsmen and shepherds; an officer, skilled in agriculture, presided over the tillage of the fields; the sycamore and olive trees were under the eye of skilful foresters; nothing was wasted; nothing done lazily; all was regularity, order, and care.—*Ibid.*

(3) *As displayed in his ecclesiastical administration.*

[17828] Jerusalem became the religious as well as the civil and military metropolis of the kingdom. From the time when David brought up the ark to Mount Zion, it was his care to provide for the due celebration of all the services of the law of Moses, and to accustom the nation to look on Jerusalem as the scene of the great festivals of Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles. The utmost attention was bestowed on arranging the priests and Levites, with a view to the effective discharge of their duties. The priests were divided into four-and-twenty courses, each course to serve in its turn, for a limited period—an arrangement that still subsisted in the days of Zacharias, the father of the Baptist. By far the largest number of the Levites, 24,000, were allocated to the service of the house of God; these, like the priests, could have been required at Jerusalem only for brief periodical services. Another section of the Levites, 4000 in number, were porters; another, amounting to 6000, were officers and judges; and a fourth, amounting to 4000, were singers. These last appear to have been most regularly and skilfully trained; and though they too were divided into four-and-twenty courses, so that from only one to two hundred would be on duty at a time, yet on such great occasions as the bringing up of the ark, or the consecration of the temple, or even the annual festivals, a general muster might take place, whose combined performances must have been transcendently sublime. It is scarcely possible to say how far these careful ecclesiastical arrangements were instrumental in fostering the spirit of genuine, inward piety. But there is too much reason to fear that even in David's time that element was sadly deficient.—*Ibid.*

(4) *As displayed in his military administration.*

[17829] The general military arrangements of the kingdom were made on the same principle as the distribution of the priests and Levites. The men who bore arms were divided into twelve courses of 24,000 each; these were regularly officered; and for one month of each year the officers, and probably the men of one of the twelve courses, attended in succession

upon the king at Jerusalem. Thus the whole people were kept ready for war, while, as they were under arms but one month out of twelve, their ordinary occupations were hardly interrupted. In addition to this mass of militia, a small body of regular troops appears to have been kept constantly under arms. These are sometimes called the Cherethites and the Pelethites; and it has been thought, with good reason, that they consisted of the troops that followed David in the wilderness, and of those who joined his standard at Ziklag. It was quite natural that ever after these should be treated with peculiar honour.—*Ibid.*

[17830] From the long list given in Samuel, of David's "mighty men," it appears that the nation must have been singularly rich in war-like heroes—a circumstance due in some degree to the example of David himself. He appears to have established something like a legion of honour, or order of valour, embracing different classes, like the military and civil orders of the present day. His own military ardour seems to have passed by a kind of electric current into his followers, animating them with the same spirit as his own.—*Ibid.*

IX. TRAITS OF CHARACTER DISPLAYED IN THE PSALMS.

1 Spirituality.

[17831] There is the whole music of the human heart, when touched by the hand of the Maker, in all its tones that whisper or throb, for every hope and fear, for every joy and pang, for every form of strength and languor, of disquietude and rest. There are developed all the innermost relations of the human soul to God, built upon the platform of a covenant of love and sonship that had its foundations in the Messiah, while in this particular and privileged Book it was permitted to anticipate His coming.—*W. E. Gladstone.*

[17832] The feeling that recognized God as the author of all his deliverances was intensely strong, as is indicated by the use of every expression that can be accumulated—"My rock, my portion, my deliverer; the God of my rock, my shield, the horn of my salvation, my high tower, my refuge, my Saviour." He takes no credit to himself; gives no glory to his captains; does not ascribe his safety in any case to his skill, or to their bravery; but with admirable humility gives all the credit to God. In the chapter in Samuel that immediately follows this song, the names of his great captains are faithfully recorded and their exploits duly chronicled; but in his address to God there does not occur the name of a single human being; it was his object to set the Most High in His place of unapproachable eminence. In the intensity of the gaze which it fixed on Him who is invisible, the eye of faith lost sight, for the time, of the human instruments through whom much of the

work was done. He who, in the depths of his penitence, saw but one injured Being, and said, "Against Thee, Thee only have I sinned"—now, at the height of his prosperity, sees but one gracious Being, and exclaims, in the same spirit, "He only is my rock and my salvation." It was a great attainment for a soldier, whose besetting sin is the love of glory, thus to overcome the desire for human applause, and give all the glory to God.—*Rev. W. Blaikie.*

2 Faith.

[17833] What strikes us first, or ought to strike us, in these psalms, is David's utter faith in God. I do not mean to say that David had not his sad days, when he gave himself up for lost, and when God seemed to have forsaken him, and forgotten his promise. He was a man of like passions with ourselves; and therefore he was, as we should have been, terrified and faint-hearted at times. But exactly what God was teaching and training him to be, was not to be faint-hearted—not to be terrified. He began in his youth by trusting God. That made him the man after God's own heart, just as it was the want of trust in God which made Saul not the man after God's own heart, and lost him his kingdom. In all those wanderings and dangers of David's in the wilderness, God was training, and educating, and strengthening David's faith, according to His great law—"To whomsoever hath shall be given, and he shall have more abundantly; but from him that hath not, shall be taken away even that which he seems to have." And the first great fruit of David's firm trust in God was his patience.—*Rev. C. Kingsley.*

3 Love of the poor.

[17834] Another thing which strikes any thinking man in David's psalms, is his strong feeling for the poor, and the afflicted, and the oppressed. That is what makes the Psalms, above all, the poor man's book, the afflicted man's book. But how did he get that fellow-feeling for the fallen? By having fallen himself, and tasted affliction and oppression. That was how he was educated to be a true king. That was how he became a picture and pattern—a "type," as some call it, of Jesus Christ, the man of sorrows. That is why so many of David's psalms apply so well to the Lord; why the Lord fulfilled those psalms when He was on earth. David was truly a man of sorrows; for he had not only the burden of his own sorrows to bear, but that of many others. His parents had to escape, and to be placed in safety at the court of a heathen prince. His friend Abimelech the priest, because he gave David bread when he was starving, and Goliath's sword—which, after all, was David's own—was murdered by Saul's hired ruffians, at Saul's command, and with him his whole family, and all the priests of the town, with their wives and children, even to the baby at the breast. And when David was in the mountains, every one who was distressed, and in debt, and discontented, gathered them-

selves to him, and he became their captain.—*Ibid.*

4 Thankfulness.

[17835] Unlike the mass of men, he was as careful to thank God for mercies past and present, as to entreat Him for mercies to come. Every mercy vouchsafed to him was turned into material for praise; the whole Book of Psalms resounds with hallelujahs: "O give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good"—"Praise ye the Lord, for He is good, for His mercy endureth for ever"—"Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless His holy name." As he advanced in years, he appears to have grown in thankfulness; and it is delightful to see him, as it is delightful to see any old man, not turning sour, as the infirmities of age gathered upon him, but more grateful, more humble, more genial than ever. It was not enough for him to have sung his hallelujah at each mercy as he received it, or to have set up his Ebenezer at each deliverance as it came; at the close of his active life, he sets up one grand Ebenezer, commemorating the whole; he utters one grand Hallelujah, thanking God for all the deliverances of the past, and expressing unbounded confidence in His goodness and mercy for the time to come.—*Rev. W. Blaikie.*

X. THE RICH AND VARIED EXCELLENCE OF HIS CHARACTER VIEWED AS A WHOLE.

[17836] The personal character of David was remarkably fitted to leave its mark on the men of his own and of later times. Never, among the mere sons of men, has there appeared on so prominent a stage such a character. Like the single heir of a number of wealthy families, he seemed to unite in himself the moral wealth of nearly all that had gone before him. The heavenly conversation of Enoch; the triumphant faith of Abraham; the meditative thoughtfulness of Isaac; the wrestling boldness of Jacob; the patient and holy endurance of Joseph, no less than his talent for administering a kingdom; the lofty patriotism of Moses, as well as his brilliant fancy; the warlike skill and energy of Joshua; the daring courage of Gideon; the holy fervour of Samuel—all met in measure in the character of David.—*Ibid.*

[17837] In every department of exertion where eminence usually gives fame and influence, David shone. A great king—a great warrior—a great poet—a great religious reformer, he held at once four of the great sceptres that rule the hearts of men. Though he wanted the domestic faithfulness of Abraham, the continence of Joseph, and, on some occasions, the manly openness of Caleb, he had yet such richness and fulness of gifts as gave him an unprecedented influence over the hearts of men.—*Ibid.*

[17838] There never was a specimen of man-

hood so rich and ennobled as David, the son of Jesse, whom other saints haply may have equalled in single features of his character, but such a combination of manly, heroic qualities, such a flush of generous, Godlike excellences have never yet been seen embodied in a single man.—*E. Irving.*

XI. DAVID A TYPE OF CHRIST.

[17839] As a type of Christ it was designed that he should throw fresh light on the person, character, and work of the coming Deliverer. How far the godly of those times were able to comprehend in detail this typical relation of David to Christ, is a problem full of difficulty, and incapable of exact solution. It is the light of the New Testament thrown back on the Old, that enables us to perceive the closeness of the resemblance. We see, for example, in David's oneness with his people, an interesting type of the oneness of Christ and the believer. The king of Israel was the same bone and flesh as they; he had no interests apart from theirs; for them alone he lived and laboured, thought and fought. Then, too, in David's kingly character there was exhibited that remarkable union of majesty and mildness, of indomitable courage and ineffable tenderness, which in Jesus Christ are expressed by the figures that represent Him as at once the Lion and the Lamb. Further, God's covenant with David as king of Israel, raising him to the throne, subduing his enemies, and making him a blessing to his people, was to prefigure the covenant between God and Messiah; was to indicate how the great Son of David would be divinely chosen, divinely called, divinely gifted; how the Spirit would be poured on him without measure, and how the blessings of his reign would be solemnly ratified and confirmed to his people in all coming time.—*Rev. W. Blaikie.*

[17840] Even the minuter details of David's life were to have events corresponding in the life of Christ. His being passed by among the sons of Jesse, when Samuel was sent to Bethlehem to anoint a king, and his long rejection afterwards by the tribes of Israel, were to prefigure the world's treatment of Christ. The hard discipline of his early years was to be a type of Christ's baptism of suffering.—*Ibid.*

[17841] For a thousand long years the shepherd-son of Jesse fulfilled the sublime office of foreshadowing to all the faithful, more vividly than any other type, the glorious Deliverer that was to come. The person of David became a framework around which the Messianic prophecies clustered, conveying the impression of One like unto this son of Jesse, yet fairer than the sons of men. As the painter makes use of some actual face or scene, when he wishes to draw a sketch of perfect beauty, but removes every flaw, perfects every feature, and gives an ideal purity and elevation to the whole; so might the Old Testament believer

make use of the person, the character, and the life of King David, as the basis of his conception of the person, the character, and the life of Christ. And hence, at the time of His appearance in the flesh, the popular name by which Christ was known, was the Son of David. "All the people were amazed, and said, Is not this the Son of David?" "What think ye of Christ? Whose son is He? They say unto him, The Son of David." "The multitude that went before and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord!" It is especially interesting to observe, that when any blessing of compassion was asked of Jesus, the appeal was made to Him as the Son of David—the proverbial goodness of the Shepherd-King having evidently awakened the largest anticipations of beneficence in the Shepherd-Saviour. "Thou Son of David, have mercy on us!" was the cry of the two blind men in Galilee. "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Thou Son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil," was the prayer of the Syro-Phœnician woman. Blind Bartimeus tried no other plea, and so convinced was he of its efficacy, that when he seemed at first to be disregarded, and he was told by the bystanders to hold his peace, he could but cry the more a great deal, "Thou Son of David, have mercy on me!" It had come to be the common sentiment regarding David, that to his warm, fatherly heart, no appeal of compassion could have been made in vain; and faith acted on the same conviction regarding his glorious Son.—*Ibid.*

XII. SIMILAR EXPERIENCES OF DAVID AND JOSEPH.

[17842] There is a resemblance between the early history of David and that of Joseph. Both distinguished for piety in youth, the youngest and the despised of their respective brethren, they are raised, after a long trial, to a high station, as ministers of God's Providence. Joseph was tempted to a degrading adultery; David was tempted by ambition. Both were tempted to be traitors to their masters and benefactors. Joseph's trial was brief; but his conduct under it evidenced settled habits of virtue which he could call to his aid at a moment's notice. A long imprisonment followed, the consequence of his obedience, and borne with meekness and patience; but it was no part of his temptation, because, when once incurred, release was out of his power. David's trial, on the other hand, lasted for years, and grew stronger as time went on. His master too, far from "putting all that he had into his hand" (Genesis xxxix. 4), sought his life. Continual opportunity of avenging himself incited his passions; self-defence, and the Divine promise, were specious arguments to seduce his reason. Yet he mastered his heart—he was "still."—*Cardinal Newman.*

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XIII. HOMILETICAL HINTS.

- 1 The study of King David's life and character is one of unusual interest and importance.

[17843] Every man's life, it has been remarked, is a plan of God; in the obscurest history there is some Divine purpose; what God said of Cyrus, He may say of the most commonplace man that ever passed unnoticed through life—"I girded thee, though thou hast not known Me." But in the case of such a life as that of David, God's plan, from its conspicuous and commanding grandeur, is fitted to arrest the attention of all. This man is to serve no ordinary purpose in the economy of Providence. He is not to be one of the little stones or chips of an edifice, but one of the great pillars on which its stability, its character, and its beauty are to depend. What can be more interesting than to accompany the great Builder, see him rough-hewing the block that is to form this pillar, then slowly fashioning it into its destined form, rearing it in its place, and turning it to the great uses for which it has been ordained? This study is fitted moreover to instruct as well as to interest. Exalted though David was in station, the lessons of his life are in the main applicable to all. His enemies and his weapons, his victories and his defeats, are in substance common to every one whose purpose in life is to fight the good fight of faith, resist temptation, and do his duty faithfully to God and to man.—*Rev. W. Blaikie.*

- 2 There is a deep fellowship in such lives with our common humanity.

[17844] No remark concerning the histories of the Bible could be more old and obvious than this—that a large proportion of those histories are the lives of individual men. We all know how Abraham, Moses, Joshua, David, and Paul, stand out in lonely and individual grandeur amid the story of their time. We have all felt how real those men have become to us, and how marvellously they fascinate our hearts. They are the heroes of childhood; the guides of manhood; the consolers of old age. But familiar as this fact may be, it implies a truth we are very prone to forget—viz., that the histories of those men are pictures, on a grand scale, of the common sorrows and battles of the human soul. We are perpetually prone to fancy that the lapse of centuries, the change of circumstances—above all, the supernatural marvels of their history, divide us from them by a wide and impassable gulf. Hence they become to us heroes with whom we dare claim but little sympathy, and the power of their history to strengthen us is, in a measure, taken away. But the whole tendency of God's record is to bring them near. It never omits their weaknesses and failures; it never depicts them as powerful saints, but as men subject to the temptations and liable to the passions that beset ourselves; and could we realize this brotherhood, we should gain from them new light on life's story; new power for

its battles; new life amid the defects and failures of this perplexed and careless world.—*Rev. E. L. Hull, B.A.*

[17845] David falling into sin is a fiery beacon of warning—certainly to the habitual sinner; for if the man after God's own heart suffered for sin as David suffered, what shall be the portion of the openly careless and ungodly? But just as certainly is the lurid light of his fall reflected through the ages for the warning of the believer; for if such a spiritual giant as David fell, how well may others, cast in a far weaker mould, who think they stand, "take heed lest they fall"!—*M. J.*

[17846] We must have felt, all through our study of this great man's life, how honest the biographies of the Bible are. Here is no hiding of imperfections, no cloaking of sins, no palliating or excusing of iniquity. David is spoken of as he was; and we see him to have been a man of like passions with ourselves, very far from being perfect, sorely marked, indeed, by sin, yet in the main a man of God. Though often falling into errors, he never made his rest in sin; frequently overtaken in a fault, yet not delighting in iniquity, he proved that the polarity of his soul was heavenward. Who so bitterly bewailed his sins as he did himself? Who so broken-hearted for his iniquities as he was himself? If his sins were exceptional, so was his repentance; and He on whom he rested would not cast him out. The voyage of his life had been long and perilous, and at one time such a storm overtook him that he had well-nigh gone down; but after many turnings and tackings, he bore up anew and steered right onward; and now he enters the harbour—not, indeed, with all sails set, and banners flying, and the firing of salutes, and the sound of merry music, but battered and weather-beaten; the canvas torn and the masts broken, and with every evidence of having passed through a fearful gale. Yet he enters the harbour, and that is a great thing; let the Judge of all determine the measure of his blame. To be blamed he certainly was; and as we see in all this that he was a man like ourselves, let us remember that there is another life recorded here in which there is no flaw.—*Rev. W. Taylor, D.D.*

3 David left behind him various and splendid legacies.

[17847] David died, not only "full of days," according to the remark of the historians, but also "full of riches and honour." His legacy was great and glorious. What he left to his people was, besides a system of government excellently regulated on all sides, an army crowned with fame and experienced in war, and general prosperity prevailing among the inhabitants of town and country, the public worship of God again established according to the Divine ordinance, a large number of excellent officers, of pious and zealous servants in the sanctuary, and, in addition, a considerable public treasury, to be expended for the general welfare of the

land, and, moreover, a divinely-approved plan for the building of the temple, and the richest and most precious material for the carrying out of this plan. But something greater than all this he left as an inheritance to the whole world, first in his personal portrait, then in his gracious experiences, and, above all, in his Psalms. In spite of his transgressions, which he always bitterly repented of, and which were therefore blotted out of the Book of God, his character is a splendid one.—*Krummacher.*

[17848] Who could number the souls which for almost three thousand years have comforted, strengthened, and raised themselves up in their conflicts and their heart-anxieties, by contemplating it? Whoever seeks a God with whom there is "plenteous redemption"—who hears prayer, who numbers the very hairs on the heads of His people, has an unchangeable love for them, and, as a Protector who neither slumbers nor sleeps, is by their side at every step—will meet with such a God in the experiences of David, the king of Israel. No word of consolation is found in Scripture which was not confirmed in the actual experience of David. The golden chain of Divine condescensions, and of gracious manifestations, by which his whole life was penetrated, marks it out as an introductory gospel, written in the characters of the actual life. Oh, how did David verify that word of the eighty-fourth Psalm, "They who pass through the valley of weeping make it rich in springs"!—*Ibid.*

SOLOMON.

I. INTRODUCTORY.

1 His prominent position in Holy Writ.

[17849] Solomon, the third king of Israel, is as unlike either of his predecessors as each of them is unlike the other. No person occupies so large a space in sacred history, of whom so few personal incidents are related. That stately and melancholy figure—in some respects the grandest and the saddest in the sacred volume—is, in detail, little more than a mighty shadow. But, on the other hand, of his age, of his court, of his works, we know more than of any other. Now, for the first time since the Exodus, we find distinct traces of dates—years, months, days. Now at last we seem to come across monuments which possibly remain to this day. Of the earlier ages of Jewish history, nothing has lasted to our time except it be the sepulchre and the wells; works of Nature rather than of men.—*Dean Stanley.*

2 The epoch of his reign is remarkable not only for its distinctness, but for its splendour.

[17850] It was June in Hebrew history, the top tide of a nation's happiness. Sitting like an empress, between the Eastern and Western oceans, the navies of three continents poured

their treasures at her feet ; and, awed by her commanding name, the dromedaries of Midian and Ephah brought spontaneous tributes of spice, and silver, and precious stones. To build her palaces, the shaggy brows of Lebanon had been scalped of their cedars, and Ophir had bled its richest gold. At the magical voice of the sovereign, fountains, native to distant hills, rippled down the slopes of Zion ; and miraculous cities, like Palmyra, started up from the sandy waste. And whilst peace, and commerce, and the law's protection, made gold like brass, and silver shekels like stones of the street, Palestine was a halcyon-nest suspended betwixt the calm wave and the warm sky ; Jerusalem was a royal infant, whose silken cradle soft winds rock high up on a castle tower : all was serene magnificence and opulent security.—*Rev. J. Hamilton, D.D.*

3 His reign may be viewed as the Augustan age of the Jewish nation.

[17851] Solomon was not only its Augustus, but its Aristotle. With the accession of Solomon a new world of thought was opened to the Israelites. The curtain which divided them from the surrounding nations was suddenly rent asunder. The wonders of Egypt, the commerce of Tyre, the romance of Arabia, nay, it is even possible, the Homeric age of Greece, became visible. Of this the first and most obvious result, as has been hinted, was the growth of architecture. But the general effects on the whole mind of the people must have been deeper still. A new direction seems to have been given to Israelite thought. In Solomon we find the first beginnings of that wider view which ended at last in the expansion of Judaism into Christianity. His reign contains the first historical record of the contact between Western Europe and Eastern India. In his fearless encouragement of ecclesiastical architecture is the first sanction of the employment of art in the service of a true religion. In his writings and in the literature which sprung from them, is the only Hebrew counterpart to the philosophy of Greece. For all these reasons, there is in him a likeness, one-sided indeed, of the "Son of David," in whom East and West, philosophy and religion, were reconciled together. . . . Prophets and psalmists retire into the background, and their place is taken by the new power called by the name of "Wisdom." A class of men sprang up, distinct from both priest and prophet, under the name of "the Wise." A change must have come over the nation through the new world which Solomon thus opened.—*Dean Stanley.*

[17852] Half-way between the call of Abraham and the final capture of Jerusalem, it was the high summer of Jewish story, and Hebrew mind unfolded in this pre-eminent Hebrew. Full of sublime devotion, equally full of practical sagacity ; the extemporiser of the loftiest litany in existence, withal the author of the

pungent Proverbs, able to mount up on Rapture's ethereal pinions to the region of the seraphim, but keenly alive to all the details of business, and shrewd in his human intercourse ; zealous in collecting gold, yet lavish in expending it ; sumptuous in his tastes, and splendid in costume ; and, except in so far as intellectual vastitude necessitated a certain catholicity—the patriot intense, the Israelite indeed ; like a Colossus on a mountain top, his sunward side was the glory toward which one millennium of his nation had all along been climbing—his darker side, with its overlapping beams, is still the mightiest object in that nation's memory.—*Rev. J. Hamilton.*

4 The character of Solomon in its secular aspect serves as a connecting link between the common and the sacred world.

[17853] Of all the characters of the sacred history, he is the most purely secular, and merely secular magnificence was an excrescence, not a native growth, of the chosen people. Whilst Moses and David are often mentioned again in the sacred books, Solomon's name hardly occurs after the close of his reign. Although his secular aspect has withdrawn him from the religious interest which attaches to many others of the Jewish saints and heroes, yet in this very circumstance there are points of attraction indispensable to the development of the sacred history. It enables us to study his reign more freely than is possible in the case of the more purely religious characters of the Bible. He is, in a still more exact sense than his father, "one of the great men of the earth," and, as such, we can deal with his history as we should with theirs. To have had many such characters in Biblical history would have brought it down too nearly to the ordinary level. But to have one such is to show that the interest which we inevitably feel in such events and in such men has a place in the designs of Providence, and in the lessons of Revelation.—*Dean Stanley.*

II. GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF HIS POLICY AS A MONARCH.

[17854] As a monarch Solomon was in some respects the greatest of the kings of Israel. He had not, indeed, the personal courage of Saul, or the military genius of David ; but he had the ability to turn the conquests of his father to the best account, and make them contribute to the glory of his name. He was the first of Israel's monarchs that sought to go beyond the boundaries of the land of promise, and cultivate the friendship of other nations. He learned the value of commerce, and his fleets brought the wealth of distant countries to his feet, while by his erection of the cities in the wilderness he tapped the streams of trade that were flowing on to other lands, and made them yield something to his support. He was more cosmopolitan than any of his predecessors, and yet so national that he made his intercourse

with other people tributary to the supremacy of his own. Yet, with all this far-seeing sagacity, he overlooked the effect which his own extravagant expenditure was producing on his own people. His immense buildings, his lavish use of gold and silver, his costly equipages, and his luxurious harem, impoverished his subjects, and sowed among them the seeds of discontent, the first fruits of which were seen in the disaffection of Jeroboam, and the full harvest of which was reaped by his son Rehoboam. His reign is thus the highest tidal mark of the prosperity of Israel.—*Christian Globe*.

[17855] The glory of the temporal kingdom culminated in him; and in him also its decay began. The high-water mark on the river margin is indicated by the *débris* left behind it by the receding wave; and here, too, in Solomon's history we have rubbish enough, which, while it testifies to the height of the tide on which he floated, shows also that it was muddy and full of corruption. While we admire the energy and originality which he evinced in making gain, we cannot but condemn many of the things he did with the gain after he had made it.—*Ibid*.

III. GENERAL VIEW OF HIS CHARACTER AS A MAN.

[17856] Solomon as a man disappoints us in his career, and it is with inexpressible sadness that we see him, who offered that remarkable prayer at the dedication of the temple, falling into the grossest idolatry. He sank during the mid-time of his days into religious indifferentism, and viewing all religions as equally true, he erected in his capital temples for the worship of heathen divinities, which were only second in magnificence to that which he reared for the service of Jehovah. All this was done by him under the influence of the foreign wives whom he had taken; and thus, though he knew the truth so well, he failed to act upon his knowledge, so that the promise of his early days was blighted by the follies of his later life. His history is thus another added to the many portrayed in the Book of God, which go to enforce the injunction of His own words: "Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life."—*Ibid*.

[17857] Solomon was chosen of God, and afterwards rejected as Saul had been; he was full of wisdom and understanding, and, what is far more, of holiness and goodness. There is perhaps no one of whom the early promise of good seemed so decisive. It has been said, as by St. Augustine, that Solomon was more injured by prosperity than profited by wisdom. Yet we may observe, that his falling away is not in Scripture attributed to his wealth, his power and honour. We cannot conclude that Solomon himself did not at last repent; but this has always been considered by the Church as very doubtful, to say the least. All we know is, that

Scripture has fully made known to us his falling away from God, but has said nothing of his repentance. The very silence is awful and impressive. What more melancholy than the fall of one so great—so wise? What words could have been spoken to him more powerful than his own? What eloquence could describe his fall with more feeling and beauty than his own words? What could more powerfully paint the loveliness of that holiness from which he fell? What the overpowering sweetness of that Divine love which he has consented to give up to feed on ashes? Who can describe the temptations to those very sins by which he was ensnared in a more searching manner than he has done? . . . How must his own sweet and Divine words sound to him like music of Paradise to the lost spirits; yea, as songs of heaven would come back to fallen angels in sad remembrance? . . . It is very awful to think how God may use men as instruments of good that His Spirit may teach them, and through them teach others, and guide them to the living fountains of waters, yet they themselves at last fail of the prize of their high calling. What a warning for fear!—*Rev. I. Williams*.

IV. SPECIAL CHARACTERISTICS.

1 Piety, faith, and devotion.

[17858] Happy the country where the sovereign sets an example of piety, and throws the weight of the crown into the scale of virtue and religion. Nor in this respect, though the day sadly belied the bright promises of the morning, did Solomon fail to set an example to kings. He preferred God's honour to his own—building the temple first, and his own palace afterwards. Again, we find him, very soon after his accession to the kingdom, leaving Jerusalem with all its attractions, to repair to the house of God in Gibeon; and stand—an impressive spectacle—before the majesty of heaven as a worshipper and a sinner, on a level with the meanest of his subjects. There, teaching the needful, but oft-neglected lesson, that as our mountain lakes discharge at their outlet as much water as they receive from their parent streams, we also should give as we get, Solomon presented offerings corresponding to his position and his wealth. A thousand animals, Solomon's gift, bled in sacrifice at Gibeon—a thousand victims, a burnt-offering for his sins, were consumed to ashes on its altar.—*Rev. T. Guthrie, D.D.*

[17859] "Ask what I shall give thee." Never was there such a munificent offer; nor, we may say, such an answer. The reply pleased God, we are told; and if we take into account Solomon's inexperienced youth, the temptations to which his rank exposed him, the kind of pleasures kings have commonly pursued, and the usual objects of their ambition, it may well astonish us. 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.—*Ibid.*

[17860] The author of the first book of Kings tells us “that Solomon loved the Lord, walking in the statutes of David his father.” And though the latter expression is perhaps descriptive rather of a particular portion of his life than of its whole, it would certainly appear to indicate a character in its beginning and outset in some good degree under the influence of religious faith and feeling. His prayer for wisdom at the entrance of his reign breathes a spirit of deep humility and of childlike simplicity and trust. No young monarch could have entered upon a great trust like his more worthily or becomingly. God accorded to him an answer “above all that he could ask or think.”—*Rev. R. Hallam, D.D.*

2 Wisdom.

(1) *As a ruler he stands unrivalled for keen judgment and sagacity.*

[17861] The first characteristic of this wisdom was carefully defined by Solomon himself in the dream at Gibeon: “An understanding heart, to judge the people, to discern judgment.” This was the original meaning of the word. It was the calm, judicial discretion, which was intended to supersede the passionate, chivalrous, irregular impulses of the former age. The maladministration of justice by the sons of Samuel had been one ground of the establishment of the monarchy. In Solomon’s reign it seemed as if the change were to be completely justified. The first example was the keen-sighted appeal to the instincts of nature in the judgment between the two mothers. Of a like kind is the Oriental tradition, which describes how he peacefully adjudicated between two claimants to the same treasure by determining that the son of the one should marry the daughter of the other. . . . In the Proverbs the phrases *judge, judgment*, occur again and again. “The king by judgment establisheth the land.” “The throne of the king shall be established in justice.” In later times this image has been either superseded by his more splendid qualities, or overcast by the gloom of his later years. But in his own reign it must have been the basis of his greatness. “All Israel heard of the judgment which the king had judged, and they feared the king”—young as he was—“for they saw that the wisdom of God was in him to do judgment.” And not only in his own age, but long afterwards did the recollection of that serene reign keep alive the idea of a just king before the eyes of the people, and enable them to understand how there should once again appear at the close of their history a still greater Son of David.—*Dean Stanley.*

[17862] Co-extensive with the all-embracing character of Solomon’s wisdom, was its far-spreading renown and its variety of forms. Both alike are spoken of, the one as the counterpart of the other. “Thy soul covered the whole earth, and filled it with dark parables. . . . The countries marvelled at thee for thy interpretations, and songs, and proverbs, and parables” (Ecclus. xvii. 17).—*Ibid.*

[17863] Solomon held the scales of justice, and with a hand equally skilful and firm he held the reins of government. On his accession to the throne he did not find himself on a bed of roses; nor in circumstances that belied the saying, “Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown.” The kingdom was suffering from the depression and disorder which long years of war are apt to produce under the most vigorous government; and this evil was greatly aggravated at that time in the land of Israel by certain peculiar circumstances. The royal house was divided against itself. The rent extended from the palace to the people, and produced rival factions, each supporting its own candidate for the throne. The army was commanded by military chiefs. These having distinguished themselves in David’s wars, had obtained an influence which the crown could not afford to despise, and yet had not the power to control. Old, less indeed in years than in the decay of faculties which battles, and a life of domestic troubles and public broils had prematurely weakened, David in the closing years of his life held the reins of government with a feeble hand. Such were the circumstances of the country on Solomon’s accession; and nothing could be more admirable than the order his sagacity evoked out of this chaos and confusion. Without any breach of the laws of justice, or encroachment on the rights of the subject, he dexterously rid himself of every person dangerous to the government. What his head planned with wisdom, his hand executed with vigour; till his government, admirably organized in every department, resembled a vast machine, complete in its details, beautiful in its construction, with its numerous wheels all revolving in silent and perfect harmony.—*Rev. T. Guthrie, D.D.*

[17864] Solomon’s endowments were regal. He possessed a mind of rarest balance, clearest insight, widest comprehension. Doubtless, as a child, he was gentle, thoughtful, serious; as a youth, meditative and studious, yet generous in act and noble in sentiment; as a young man, discreet beyond his years, wise in the wisdom of the world, full of expedients, a man of peace, yet a man of activity, and skilled in affairs.—*H. S. K.*

(2) *As a philosopher he may justly be regarded as the father of natural science.*

[17865] Without pronouncing him superior either to Plato or Socrates, he was certainly one of the greatest men any age, ancient or modern, has produced. Cuvier—and there is no more competent authority—says that “he

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JEWISH ERA.

deserves as a naturalist to be taken as a model;" that so far as the animal kingdom is concerned, "he has treated this branch of natural history with the greatest genius;" and that "the principal divisions which naturalists still follow are due to him"—to a man who lived nearly a thousand years before the Christian era. This is high praise; nor do I mean to detract from it. Yet, if any comparison were to be made between Aristotle and Solomon, it should be remembered that the Greek pursued his studies under peculiar advantages. Eight hundred talents of the royal revenue were spent on his researches; and not only was he encouraged by a sovereign who was smitten with a desire to know the nature of animals, but several thousand persons, according to Pliny, were engaged throughout Greece and the whole of Asia in providing him with materials; and while he had his whole time to devote without interruption or distraction to his studies, there is reason to believe that his great work on the animal kingdom is less the result of his own observation than a collection of all that had been observed by others. Whatever be the merits of the Stagyrite, he was not the first who earned laurels in this department of science. Five hundred years before his birth, Solomon had entered and explored the same field.—*Ibid.*

[17866] Embracing a vast range of subjects, "he spake," says the inspired historian, "of trees, from the cedar-tree that is in Lebanon even unto the hyssop that springeth out of the wall; he spake also of beasts and of fowl and of creeping things and of fishes." That brief and simple record, that glimpse of the vast range of Solomon's studies, may well excite our wonder and admiration; especially when we take into account that this remarkable man devoted himself to those pursuits amid the temptations of an Eastern court, the cares of commerce, and the distractions and vast enterprises of a kingdom. His is a rare chapter in the history of kings. Where shall we find its parallel?—*Ibid.*

[17867] It is only a few fragments that remain to us. . . . Of his writings we may venture to say that had more been extant, Solomon's name would have occupied a foremost place in the roll of science. His discoveries and researches would have supplied abundant reasons for his unexampled fame, and for the pilgrimages which men, and women also, made from all parts of the world to hear his wisdom, and see his glory. Possessed of these writings, we should have read, not with more faith, but with a higher appreciation of its meaning, the eulogium of the inspired historian—"And God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding exceeding much, and largeness of heart, even as the sand that is on the seashore."—*Ibid.*

(3) *As a poet and moralist he displayed the highest genius.*

[17868] Two at least of the Psalms are as-

cribed to Solomon; these are the 72nd and the 127th. Besides these, we have, first, the Book of Proverbs; secondly, the Book of Ecclesiastes, a treatise on the vanity of this world written under the solemn shadows of another, with the tears and trembling hand of a late but true repentance; and, thirdly, his Song, that wonderful ode which, with its double and hidden meanings, the fervour of its language, and its highly Oriental imagery, it requires no common measure both of genius and piety to properly appreciate. Yet these are but fragments of his works. Whether the Songs that are lost were written under no truer inspiration than what is loosely attributed to poets, and of what character they were—amatory, pious, or patriotic—we know not. But his muse was prolific; his songs, the Bible tells us, being a thousand and five, and his proverbs not fewer than three thousand in number. Neither do we know whether these three thousand wise saws were over and above those preserved in the Book of Proverbs. It is more important to observe that in that book, of the greater part of which Solomon was undoubtedly the author, there is an amount of wisdom, knowledge of men and manners, sound sense and practical sagacity, such as no other work presents. It fulfils in a unique and pre-eminent degree the requirements of effective oratory—not only every chapter, but every verse, and almost every clause of every verse expressing something which both "strikes and sticks."—*Ibid.*

(4) *As a poet and moralist he possessed the keenest insight into the philosophy of practical life.*

[17869] The chief manifestation in writing of Solomon's wisdom was that of the Proverbs. The inward spirit of his philosophy consisted in questioning about the ends of life, propounding and answering the difficulties suggested by human experience. Its form was either that of similitudes, or short homely maxims. "Proverbs," in the modern sense of that word, imply a popular and national reception—they imply, according to the celebrated definition by one of our most eminent statesmen, not only "one man's wit," but "many men's wisdom." This is, however, not the case with Solomon's proverbs. They are individual, not national. It is because they represent not many men's wisdom, but one man's super-eminent wit, that they produced so deep an impression. They were gifts to the people, not the produce of the people. "The words of the wise are as goads," as barbed points to urge forward to inquiry, to knowledge. This is one aspect. They are also "as nails or stakes driven" hard and home into the ground of the heart "by the masters of the assembly, by the shepherds of the people." Their pointed form is given to them to make them stimulate the heart and memory; they are driven in with all the weight of authority to give fixedness and firmness to the whole system. The extent of this literature was far beyond what has come down to us. "He spake three

thousand proverbs." But of these, a considerable number are actually preserved in the Book of Proverbs. The whole book emanates from his spirit. They abound in allusions, now found for the first time, and precisely applicable to the age of Solomon—to gold and silver and precious stones; to the duties and power of kings; to commerce. In them appears the first idea of fixed education and discipline, the first description of the diversities of human character. In them the instincts of the animal creation are first made to give lessons to men.—*Dean Stanley.*

[17870] The Book of Proverbs is not on a level with the Prophets or the Psalms. It approaches human things and things Divine from quite another side. It has even something of a worldly prudential look, unlike the rest of the Bible. But this is the very reason why its recognition as a sacred book is so useful. It is the philosophy of practical life. It is the sign to us that the Bible does not despise common sense and discretion. It impresses upon us, in the most forcible manner, the value of intelligence and prudence, and of a good education. It deals, too, in that refined, discriminating, careful view of the finer shades of human character so necessary to any true estimate of human life. "The heart knoweth its own bitterness, and the stranger doth not intermeddle with its joy." How much is there, in that single sentence, of consolation, of love, of forethought! And, above all, it insists, over and over again, upon the doctrine that goodness is "wisdom," and that wickedness and vice are "folly."—*Ibid.*

3 Humility.

[17871] "Seest thou a man," says Solomon, "wise in his own conceit?—there is more hope of a fool than of him." The tallest trees spring from the deepest roots; the lark rises from her lowly nest among the dewy grass to sing and soar the highest of the feathered choristers; and like these, in many instances, the humblest have attained to the highest greatness. Of this Solomon presents one of the most illustrious examples. Endowed with the wisdom that has made his name so famous, he presented a living commentary on the words: "God exalteth the humble."—*Rev. T. Guthrie, D.D.*

V. DECLENSION.

1 Its cause.

The too smooth and even tenor of a wholly prosperous life.

[17872] The prosperity of Solomon was his great misfortune. Not uncommonly is it so. He was born a prince, and grew up in unrestrained ease and indulgence. In his early life there was no hardship, no self-denial, no struggle; gratification outran want, and assiduity and adulation waited on every wish. What knew he of that stern discipline in which firmness and steadfastness of principle and conviction are most effectually acquired and estab-

lished? When he came to the throne the wealth his father had amassed fell into his hands. There were no foreign wars to tax his energies, no internal strifes to occupy or disturb his mind. He had abundant leisure to enjoy the good things so profusely furnished to him. His enterprises prospered, and riches flowed into him by his commercial operations from every quarter. A natural taste for beauty and splendour had opportunity to gratify itself to the utmost extent. Rank, wealth, power, in the largest abundance, were his. His fame was spread abroad, and the voice of admiration and flattery came to him not only from his own subjects, proud of a sovereign that had made their country great and raised it to a pinnacle of glory among the nations of the world, but from foreign lands. Why should not such a man begin to think himself almost a god? Why should it not be with him as he himself says it was: "Whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them. I withheld not my heart from any joy, for my heart rejoiced in all my labour, and this was my portion of all my labour." Why should he not worship himself, think all offerings due tributes to this self-constituted divinity, all indulgences and delights lawful exercises of his right? This is not an atmosphere in which religion can prosper; if it do not utterly expire, if it continue to live at all, it must move with languid pulse and speak with "bated breath."—*Ibid.*

2 Its effects.

(1) *Ambition.*

[17873] The ambition of filling the position of a great Oriental monarch took possession of his mind, and seems to have become his paramount and overmastering passion. He must needs imitate the sovereigns on either side of him, and lack nothing that went to swell the state of the kings of Assyria and Egypt. He allied himself to paganism for political advantage and factitious honour by marrying the daughter of Pharaoh.—*Rev. R. Hallam, D.D.*

(2) *Self-indulgence and luxury.*

[17874] A bright morning that promised the best thing was soon sullied; and if the noon is brilliant, it shines with a sickly and pretentious glare, and not with the clear, full radiance of the sunlight that shineth more and more unto the perfect day. The life of Solomon, in its general aspect, as it is portrayed to us in Scripture, is sadly like that of a worldling and a voluptuary. We do not discover, indeed, that the sense of God and his claims ever wholly forsook him; but if the good seed still grew, it was among thorns, so surrounded with "cares and pleasures of this life" as to mature no excellent fruit. Luxury and splendour blinded his eyes and hardened his heart.—*Ibid.*

[17875] His domestic life became encumbered with an overgrown seraglio. The means of unlimited indulgence, love of luxury and display, had intoxicated him, and shut out God and

spiritual interest from his soul. And here the direct testimony of history leaves him with all the bright auguries of his early life hidden under a dismal eclipse, and he recites as the experience of his life "vanity of vanity."—*Ibid.*

[17876] He did not obey his own maxim. He ceased to rejoice with the wife of his youth; and loving many strangers, they drew his heart away from God. Luxury and sinful attachments made him an idolater, and idolatry made him yet more licentious: until, in the lazy enervation and languid day-dreaming of the Sybarite, he lost the perspicacity of the sage, and the prowess of the sovereign; and when he woke up from the tipsy swoon, and out of the swine-trough picked his tarnished diadem, he woke to find his faculties, once so clear and limpid, all perturbed, his strenuous reason paralyzed, and his healthful fancy poisoned. He woke to find the world grown hollow, and himself grown old. He woke to see the sun bedarkened in Israel's sky, and a special gloom encompassing himself. He woke to recognize all round a sadder sight than winter—a blasted summer. Like a deluded Samson starting from his slumber, he felt for that noted wisdom which signalized his Nazarite days; but its locks were shorn; and, cross and self-disgusted, wretched and guilty, he woke up to the discovery which awaits the sated sensualist: he found that when the beast gets the better of the man, the man is cast off by God. And like one who falls asleep amidst the lights and music of an orchestra, and who awakes amidst empty benches and tattered programmes—like a man who falls asleep in a flower-garden, and who opens his eyes on a bald and locust-blackened wilderness—the life, the loveliness, was vanished, and all the remaining spirit of the mighty Solomon yawned forth that verdict of the tired voluptuary, "Vanity of vanities! vanity of vanities! all is vanity!"—*Rev. J. Hamilton, D.D.*

[17877] The king became a pleasure-seeker. Solomon was a man of enthusiastic and generous nature. He had, as the Scriptures expressly put it, largeness of heart. There was nothing small or narrow about him. He never did anything by halves. He felt the cravings of a mighty soul. Leaving God, he endeavoured to satisfy its hunger with sensual pleasures. In so doing he did not sip daintily of her goblets, but drained them to the bottom. He did not, as many do, walk ankle-deep into earthly pleasures, but plunged in headlong and wholly.—*H. S. K.*

(3) *Apostasy.*

[17878] Solomon became an idolater, addicting himself not only to idolatrous, but to cruel and obscene rites. What a fall was there! He who built the sacred temple, and offered up with devout lips the sublime prayer with which it was dedicated to the service of Jehovah, the only and true God, lived to "go after Ashtaroth." As if in open contempt of Jehovah, he

raised within sight of His holy temple "an high place for Chemosh . . . and for Moloch." There is much in the degradation into which Solomon fell, in the scenes in which this wisest of men appears playing such an unworthy and wicked part, to call from our lips still stronger expressions of grief and wonder: "How art thou fallen, son of the morning!"—*Rev. T. Guthrie, D.D.*

[17879] His wives, who were heathen women, turned away his heart in his old age after other gods. So Scripture tells us; and not to our surprise. He may have flattered himself that he would persuade them to embrace the faith; and that though he failed, he himself should suffer no injury by tolerating their idolatry and granting them liberty of worship. The result was otherwise; and the issues of his experiment warn us against tolerating vice, lending any countenance to error, or allowing liberty to run into license.—*Ibid.*

[17880] As the record of his grandeur contains a recognition of the interest and value of secular magnificence and wisdom, so the record of his decline and fall contains the most striking witness to the instability of all power that is divorced from moral and religious principle. As Bacon is in English history

"The wisest, greatest, meanest of mankind,"

so is Solomon in Jewish and sacred history.—*Dean Stanley.*

VI. HOMILETICAL HINTS.

1 The history of Solomon teaches us in what lies true wisdom.

[17881] Solomon desired that spiritual wisdom which consists in a harmony with God's will. This is the only wisdom which we ought to choose supremely. Long before Solomon, the Scriptures declared, "The fear of the Lord, that is wisdom;" and the inspired father of Solomon, in words afterwards repeated by Solomon, affirmed, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." The New Testament is equally explicit. It reveals to us Christ as "the wisdom of God," in distinction from the wisdom of human philosophy (1 Cor. ii. 17-25), and declares that he "of God is made unto us wisdom and righteousness." In him, it says, "are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." The highest wisdom, then, consists in religion, which declares one's duty to God and the way to meet it; that is, unfolding and enforcing the way of salvation through Jesus Christ.—*A. P. F.*

2 The history of Solomon teaches us that this wisdom is indispensable to everything else.

[17882] Without it worldly advantages may be an injury. It instructs one as to the real value and proper place of all else. It prevents too great an attachment to these inferior things. It points out the way in which these may be

made subsidiary to God's glory. It is also the legitimate stepping-stone to such earthly privileges as God may be pleased to give us. We have the Divine promise, no less than the teaching of the text, for the connection of the two: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you." And if such results, under God's knowledge of what is best, do not follow, through this true wisdom the Christian endures their absence without repining; this inward peace, springing from a knowledge of the wisdom of God's ways, and the assurance of God's favour, more than compensate for earthly trials. How supereminent, too, the advantage of this heavenly wisdom in its permanence! Riches, honour, power, long life, all end. Wisdom is an eternal possession, for it lies too deep to be attacked by outward disadvantages. It is a treasure we can lay up in heaven. And this true wisdom, best of all, secures salvation. It teaches the way of life. It sets before us, so impressively that we do not resist their influence, the reasons why we should serve God rather than this present evil world. The other advantages we have been considering pertain solely to earth, but here is something of limitless blessing, giving us an eternal escape from the miseries of a false choice, an endless possession of perfect bliss.—*Ibid.*

3 The history of Solomon presents the strongest protest against unhallowed marriage.

[17883] They expose their souls who, fascinated by beauty or blinded by affection or under the influence of other and less creditable motives, become, as the case may be, the husbands or wives of the ungodly. They tempt the fate of the poor moth, that, attracted by its glare, flutters around the candle, to plunge at length into the flame, and lose its wings—perhaps its life. Does not almost all experience prove that, in the case of such incongruous and unhallowed marriages, the good are more likely to be perverted than the bad converted? When, springing from the bank into the pool where one is perishing, the brave swimmer approaches the object of his pity, and circles round and round him to catch his hair or hand, what care he takes to keep clear of the drowning grasp!—knowing how much easier it would be, should he once come within his clutches, for the drowning to pull him down than for him to pull the drowning out. And that such a fate is most likely to be the result of unhallowed marriages is proved as well by the earliest records of mankind as by all later experience. I read their condemnation in words which represent them as one of the chief sources of that monstrous pollution from which God washed the world by the waters of Noah's flood. The one inequality from which God's people should allow neither interest nor affection to blind their eyes, is that from which Solomon suffered, and God, by the mouth of Paul, forbids, saying, "Be not unequally yoked with unbelievers."—*Rev. T. Guthrie, D.D.*

JONATHAN.

I. INTRODUCTORY.

1 The character of Jonathan furnishes one of the noblest exhibitions of sanctified human nature.

[17884] The highest place of honour amongst David's friends must be given to Jonathan, by whom there was set an example of friendship which for steadfastness and self-forgetfulness has probably been surpassed only once, and then by Him who in this, as in every other grace and glory of character, is fairer than any of the children of men.—*C. Vince.*

[17885] He is not among the worthies named in the Epistle to the Hebrews, though doubtless he was one "of whom the world was not worthy." A more uncommon example of Christian virtues is not easily found. His character appears to illustrate every one of the eight graces named in 2 Pet. i.: "Faith, virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, charity." These things in him did abound, and surely he has obtained an abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.—*Rev. C. Waller.*

[17886] Many a fond lie has been written on tombstones; and with all their good qualities magnified by the tears through which we gaze on them, the dead appear fairer, dearer, and better than they ever seemed in life; but Jonathan was altogether worthy of this grand eulogium:—

"The beauty of Israel is slain upon thy high places: how are the mighty fallen!

From the blood of the slain, from the fat of the mighty, the bow of Jonathan turned not back, and the sword of Saul returned not empty.

Saul and Jonathan were lovely and pleasant in their lives, and in their death they were not divided: they were swifter than eagles, they were stronger than lions.

How are the mighty fallen in the midst of the battle! O Jonathan! thou wast slain in thine high places.

I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan: very pleasant hast thou been unto me: thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women.

How are the mighty fallen, and the weapons of war perished!"—*Rev. T. Guthrie, D.D.*

2 The character of Jonathan furnishes a pleasing illustration of romantic friendship.

[17887] The chief interest of his career is derived from the friendship with David which began on the day of David's return from the victory over the champion of Gath, and continued till his death. It is the first Biblical instance of a romantic friendship, such as was

common afterwards in Greece, and has been since in Christendom; and is remarkable both as giving its sanction to these, and as filled with a pathos of its own, which has been imitated, but never surpassed, in modern works of fiction.—*Dean Stanley.*

[17888] To man's nature, companionship is an equal delight, and need and history affords some pleasing illustrations of that closer relation which bears the name of friendship. But neither in ancient nor modern prose or verse is there any other so remarkable and charming as the story of David and Jonathan. As a picture of mutual devotion rising above every adverse influence, it is of unsurpassed beauty. To its simple truthfulness to nature, the kindred classic tales make only distant approaches.—*Sermons by the Monday Club.*

[17889] There are friendships that stand the test of time and the severest strain, but among these, what poet or panegyrist has recorded with glowing pen one to be compared with Jonathan's! It is quite unique. The words of the poet may be justly applied to Jonathan.

“None but himself could be his parallel.”

—*Rev. T. Guthrie, D.D.*

II. SPECIAL CHARACTERISTICS.

1 He illustrates the character of a model friend.

(1) *As seen in his strong affection.*

[17890] It came to pass, to use the beautiful language of Scripture, that, when David, modestly replying to Saul's question, “Whose son art thou?” “I am the son of thy servant Jesse the Bethlehemite,” had made an end of speaking, the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul. So their friendship began; and its continuance, under the most adverse circumstances, was even more remarkable than its commencement.—*Ibid.*

[17891] Many friendships—traceable to near neighbourhood, a common playground, the same form at school, some accidental meeting on a road or in a room—spring from trivial circumstances. Growing strong only with the progress of years, they resemble our streams, which, though at length swelling into rivers, are at first but tiny rills; feeble in their beginning, and springing from mossy wells, of obscure and humble birth. It was not so with Jonathan's friendship. It finds its type in those rivers, the Rhine and Rhone for instance, which, fed by exhaustless snows, and springing into light in lofty regions, high above the sea to whose distant shores their waters wend, are rivers at their birth; bursting from the icy caverns of Alpine glaciers in full, impetuous flood.—*Ibid.*

[17892] The reed that bends its head to a breath of wind, and the old grey rock which

withstands the hurricane that strews the plain with trees and the foaming shore with wrecks, are not more unlike than Jonathan where his own interests, and the same Jonathan where David's interests, were concerned. Such was the depth and power of his affection for his friend. Here neither Saul's entreaties, nor anger, nor violence, could move him. He would part with life to please his father, but not with his love for David. When Saul, to the astonishment of the host, proposed to sacrifice his son to a rash and wicked vow, Jonathan neither made resistance nor remonstrance—like Him whose Divine friendship his recalls, he “was dumb, opening not his mouth.” But when Saul threatens David's life, he refuses obedience, and becomes the advocate of his friend; in words replete with affection, a pious spirit, and unanswerable arguments, he pleads with his father; he remonstrates with him, saying, “Let not the king sin against his servant, against David; because he hath not sinned against thee, and his works to thee have been very good: for he did put his life in his hand, and slew the Philistine, and the Lord wrought a great salvation for all Israel: thou sawest it, and didst rejoice; wherefore then wilt thou sin against innocent blood, to slay David without a cause?”—*Ibid.*

[17893] Severe trials this friendship endured; and enduring, triumphed over. Saul's gloomy eye fixed on David, the javelin he hurled to pin him to the wall, the cries of his soldiers echoing from the rocks as they hunted the fugitive from cave to cave, and hill to hill, not more illustrating the words, “Jealousy is cruel as the grave; the coals thereof are coals of fire,” than the friendship of Jonathan did those which follow, “Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it.”—*Ibid.*

(2) *As seen in his disinterestedness.*

[17894] In the outset we cannot fail to be impressed with the disinterested nature of this friendship, as far as Jonathan was concerned. The king's son had, humanly speaking, at this date nothing to gain from the shepherd of Bethlehem. Jonathan might be of great service to David, but it was scarcely likely that David could do very much for him. His taking of David to his heart, therefore, was a purely unselfish thing. It was the outgoing of his affections toward an object to which they were attracted, and all his joy was in yielding to the charm by which he was influenced. Too frequently the favourites of kings, and perhaps more frequently of kings' sons, have been those who have risen to their position by pandering to the prejudices, or toadying to the weaknesses, or, worse than either, by ministering to the vices, of those by whom they were valued. But Jonathan had no such reasons for binding David to him. He saw in the young hero a congenial soul and a true man. He was attracted by his piety, his patriotism, and his prowess, and he yielded up his heart to him in the un-

selfish impulse of disinterested affection.—*Rev. W. Taylor, D.D.*

[17895] Jonathan's friendship for David was eminently unselfish. It was much that he could do for David; it was but little that David could do for him. Personally, he had no interest in David's continued life and increasing power; but, speaking after the manner of men, his interest lay in the opposite direction. If David were to be king, it would be Jonathan's throne rather than Saul's that he would take. Jonathan was the heir to the kingdom, and all the help he rendered to David was help to the man who would come between him and his inheritance. This was the fact Saul used with such power, and sought to make a firebrand wherewith to set Jonathan's soul all on flame with jealous hatred.—*C. Vince.*

(3) *As seen in his generosity.*

[17896] Jonathan's love for David must be commended as something altogether peculiarly rare and precious. High, yea, seemingly impassable barriers raised themselves, separating between the king's son and the humble shepherd boy; but the affection of the young prince, founded only on a similarity of disposition and of aim, devoted towards that which is holiest and loftiest, not only easily overleaped the barrier of rank and position which separated them, but also stood the test of many heavier trials. Jonathan saw his fame-crowned friend honoured by his people with an enthusiasm which might well have had the effect of infusing into him something of that poison which Solomon styles, in his Book of Proverbs, "the rottenness of the bones." But Jonathan's love, born of God, was pure and strong enough to tread under foot the offspring of envy and jealousy. Perhaps, also, he might feel already within him a foreboding that his father's crown would not descend to him, the natural heir to it, but to his friend David. But even this was not powerful enough to make any breach in his friendship for David. Jonathan's love was truly great; but it was no blossom of nature's growth—it was the fruit of the operation of the Spirit of God, such as one could almost scarcely look for in such perfection in the time of the Old Covenant.—*Krummacher.*

[17897] The secret of David's future greatness had already begun to unseal itself to him. Whether he had arrived at this conclusion from marking the course of his friend's life hitherto, or whether he received it as a Divine revelation—enough; it is no more a hidden mystery to him, what has been concluded regarding David in the counsel of his invisible Protector. What other heir to a throne would not have been placed in extreme perplexity by such a discovery as this which Jonathan made, and have flamed up into unextinguishable hatred against his unrighteous rival? Jonathan, on the contrary, not in feeble obsequiousness, but with manly self-denial and joyful resoluteness, laid down

the crown and sceptre, his future inheritance, at the feet of David, because it was to him, beyond all question, that he made this offering to the Most High Lord in heaven, who had reserved to himself the undivided sovereignty over Israel. He presented to his friend, as if he now already saw him clothed with royal purple, the request that, when the just judgment of God would descend upon all his enemies, he would deal gently and kindly with him and his house.—*Ibid.*

[17898] Where, in the wide world, do we meet with such an example of self-sacrificing submission to the Divine determination, and of hallowed friendship so full of self-denial, as this which now lays claim to our admiration? One must have lived the life of a hermit, and passed his days far from the courts of the "gods of this earth," to be able to deceive himself with the imagination that, even in the midst of the light of Christianity, souls like Jonathan's are not as pearls which are very rare.—*Ibid.*

[17899] Men will praise their friends, but how few are generous enough without jealousy to hear others praise them, at their expense, in eulogiums they feel to be disparaging to themselves. There is no passion more natural to us, man or child, than jealousy. See how it broke out against David from the lips of his own brother! Indignant at the stripling for talking as if he would meet the giant, and carry off the palm from his brethren and all the host of Israel, Eliab sharply rebuked him, asking, "Why camest thou down thither? and with whom hast thou left those few sheep in the wilderness? I know thy pride, and the naughtiness of thine heart." And who that knows his own heart will refuse some sympathy to Saul for taking offence—however unjustifiable his way of expressing it—at the disparaging comparison in the song of the maidens when, dancing before David, they sung, "Saul has slain his thousands, but David his tens of thousands." We wonder not at Saul's offence, but at Jonathan's generosity. The song that grated so harshly on his father's ear, stirred up no envy nor jealousy in him. Rejoicing in another's honour, he hailed the rise of a sun that paled his own star; as though, as Saul's eldest son, standing next the throne, Jonathan was content to be second to the good, brave, gallant shepherd who had gone forth in the name and strength of the Lord to shut the mouth of the blasphemers, and peril his life for the safety of his country and the honour of his God.—*Rev. T. Guthrie, D.D.*

[17900] It remains to be said of this friendship that it was lasting. Of much called by this name, this cannot be said. It springs up in a day, and dies as soon. The breath of envy blows it away. A new friend supplants the old. It is ruptured by imagined slights, or hasty words, or conflicting interests, or the intermeddlings of jealousy or hate. None or all of these could shake that of David and Jonathan. Hardly any-

thing has come down to us, even from David's seraphic pen, which surpasses, one might almost say equals, in lofty sentiment and poetic fervour the elegy called forth by Jonathan's death. It is no disparagement of David to say that Jonathan shines most in this friendship, because it was he that had least to gain, and most to lose in connection with it. He knew that David would succeed to his father's throne, yet he loved him; he knew that to befriend David was to incur the king's displeasure, yet he befriended him; he knew that he must decrease, and that David must increase, but not one atom of jealousy soured or even disturbed his pure and noble spirit.—*Ibid.*

[17901] Tender as a woman, and yet true as steel, overflowing with generous kindness, utterly devoid of selfishness, trusting as much as he was trusted, with a heart that reflected David's, as face answereth to face in water, Jonathan was the paragon and perfect pattern of a friend.—*Ibid.*

[17902] In its freedom from all jealousy, Jonathan's conduct was most exemplary. Saul, at first, had some liking for David, and employed him in posts of honour; but the sight of David's growing popularity effectually chilled the heart of the king. As soon as David rose above Saul, and the people gave him first place in their songs, jealousy crept into Saul's spirit, and swiftly changed the shining angel of love into the dark demon of hatred. It was here that the son proved himself to be so much more noble than the father; for Jonathan saw himself surpassed by David, and yet was his faithful friend, and indeed found one reason for his love in that superiority which David had secured.—*C. Vince.*

[17903] Jonathan was a soldier as well as David, and had won renown on the field before there was any thought of turning the shepherd into a warrior. With only his armour-bearer to accompany him, he had gone amongst the Philistines, and by his cool daring had struck terror into all their hosts, and had achieved a victory which made him the idol of the people—the hero of his generation. He knew that he was now no longer the greatest soldier in Israel, but that he must take his place below this shepherd from the wilderness. To his saintly heart this was no insuperable difficulty, for he had greatness and goodness enough to recognize and rejoice in the gifts God had granted to another.—*Ibid.*

[17904] Jonathan was a prince; the king's son. He was heir to the crown. And so much had he been in favour with the people, that, on one occasion, their uprising had saved his life. But popular favour now turns in another direction. Jonathan's name is obscured. A shepherd boy is greater than he. The acclamations of the multitude are no longer either for his father, the king, or for himself, the prince. They are for the hitherto unheralded son of Jesse. More

than this, it soon begins to appear that, in other respects, he is the declining and David the rising star. It looks more and more as if David is to be future king; not he. How natural that, towards such a rival in favour and fortune, there should be uprisings, in the heart, of jealousy, even of hate! Here is where Jonathan's nobility comes out in a way that is truly wonderful. Not a trace is disclosed of bitterness or of envy towards his appointed supplanter. So far is he from that, he watches for David's life and interests as one would for his own.—*Sermons by the Monday Club.*

(4) *As seen in his practicalness.*

[17905] The friendship of Jonathan was eminently practical. It did not consist of fair and flattering words which he uttered, or of a mere luxury of sentiment which he enjoyed. On the very first day of its life it proved its power by prompting Jonathan to put his royal robes on David's shoulder, to gird his sword on David's thigh, and to place his bow in David's hands, as much as to say, "I will give thee of my best. Thou art more of a king's son than I am. These befit thee more than me." When Saul's envy enkindled hatred, and hatred plotted murder, he whispered his foul purpose to his son and to his servants, and bade them seek for the opportunity of putting David to death. It must have been a sore struggle for Jonathan, filial love restraining him from any undue exposure of his father's wickedness, and faithful friendship impelling him to warn David of his danger. Having put his friend out of harm's way, he went into his father's presence to speak of all the good service David had rendered; and his words were like a shower from heaven falling into the fiery soul of Saul, and, for awhile, subduing the hellish flame which burned so fiercely there, he persuaded his father to take an oath that David should be spared; and, through his intercession, David had his home in the palace once more. In after days, a like spirit was displayed when a similar danger arose, and, to save his friend, Jonathan braved his father's fury and risked his own life. The affection which Jonathan cherished for David proved to be a costly one, but he grudged not the charges.—*C. Vince.*

(5) *As seen in his chivalry.*

[17906] It is easy to be a patron, and, stooping down from a lofty height, to take by the hand some struggling beginner; it is easy, too, to be an admiring pupil of one who is acknowledged to be a great way above us; but it is a much harder, and therefore a much nobler, thing to be the warm, appreciative friend of one who is in the same calling with ourselves, and who is bidding fair to outshine and surpass us. But it was just this hard and noble thing that Jonathan did, when he took to his heart the youthful David. He did not seem to care that the duel with the giant would, in the after history of the nation, be seen to rival his own brilliant achievement at Geba. He did not think of himself at all; but, having found a man whom he could

love and trust, he “grappled him to his soul with hooks of steel.” Nay, even when he came to discover that David was the predestined occupant of his father’s throne, the heart of Jonathan was never alienated from him. He accepted the lot which was before him, and rejoiced in it for David’s sake, saying only, “Thou shalt be king in Israel, and I shall be next unto thee.” I have a high idea of David’s magnanimity, but I doubt whether it could have equalled this of Jonathan; and so, in the matter of this friendship, I am disposed to give the palm to the son of Saul. And I greatly mistake if, as you read the record, you shall not grow into the belief which I have long entertained, that there are few characters in Old Testament history which, for genuineness, chivalry, self-sacrifice, and constancy at once to his father and his friend, can be put into comparison with Jonathan.—*Rev. W. Taylor, D.D.*

(6) *As seen in his prudence.*

[17907] I do not know many instances in which we have such a manifestation of prudence and principle combined as we have in the case of the expostulation of Jonathan with his father. Prudence did not go so far as to make him silent about the sin which Saul was purposing to commit; principle was not so asserted as to arouse his father’s indignation. Neither was weakened by the other; but both were so admirably interblended as to produce the result on which his heart was set.—*Ibid.*

(7) *As seen in his constancy.*

[17908] Jonathan’s friendship had the crowning grace of constancy. It began in the midst of David’s new-born popularity, but it lasted through all his reverses. The time came when David was hated at court, when he was reviled by all who wanted to stand well with the king, and when he was a hunted outlaw at the head of a band of men, many of whom were far from the best in the land. These circumstances must have brought his character under suspicion; and we may be sure that many tongues were set talking against him: but through it all the heart of Jonathan was true as the needle to the pole. The two friends were much separated, and only once for a long season did they enjoy an interview; and then Jonathan spoke with strong confidence and sincere gladness of the certainty of David’s exaltation, and dwelt in glowing strains upon the happy future when David should be king and he be the prime minister. It was evident that David was losing heart about his own prosperity. Adversity was so lasting, and hope was deferred so long, it is no wonder that his faith became feeble. The constant friend, who before had defended his life, now goes forth to deliver him from dependency. At the very time that Saul went searching for David to kill him, Jonathan went in quest of him that he might speak words of comfort to him, and keep alive that which was more precious than all besides—his trust in God.—*C. Vince.*

[17909] Saul makes many attempts to awaken Jonathan’s jealousy and kindle in his son’s bosom the hatred that burned and raged in his own. But they are vain. Nor does he succeed any better when all his pent-up passions burst forth in volcanic fury on discovering that David is to be the successor to his throne. In that discovery he flatters himself he holds a spell of power to turn Jonathan’s love into the bitterest hatred, and raise all the devil in his son. There was no devil to raise. The dreadful secret is revealed; but whatever pain it inflicted, whatever struggle it cost, whatever tears it wrung from Jonathan’s eyes, it kindles no bad passions in that pious, generous, and loving heart.—*Rev. T. Guthrie, D.D.*

[17910] David is to supplant him; David is to enter on the honours and fortune he expected to enjoy; and out of the ruins of Saul’s house David is to build his own; yet Jonathan ceases not to regard him with unabated and the tenderest affection. For this his father loads him with cruel reproaches; and, borne away on the foaming torrent of his passions, insults the very name and memory of his mother, calling him “the son of a rebellious and perverse woman.” But these reproaches, like the javelin his mad hand hurled at his son, are all in vain.—*Ibid.*

2 He illustrates the character of a godly man.

[17911] It is impossible to doubt that Jonathan was a man of God. It would have been more than the human nature of a high-spirited prince could compass to regard David with perfect complacency, though he knew that he was to take his place on the throne, and to cut out both him and his family from all their hereditary honours. It must have been Divine grace, enabling him to rest in the conviction that what God ordained must be right and wise and good for him and for all, that suppressed every feeling of envy, and filled his heart with overflowing affection.—*Rev. W. Blaikie.*

[17912] In the whole conduct of Jonathan we recognize a constant and very solemn sense of God’s presence, and a very profound appreciation of the value of His favour. He was clearly a man that habitually honoured God, not perhaps in the way of loud profession, but in the way of firm practical recognition of the excellence of all His ways, His spirit bent in silent, unquestioning reverence to the appointments of God. And thus he was not only enabled, without a murmur, to surrender every earthly hope, and to rejoice in the prospect of David’s enjoying all that he might himself have looked forward to; but also to strengthen the faith of his friend, both by a demonstration of the firmness of his own, and by words expressly designed “to strengthen him in God” (1 Sam. xxiii. 16). At the time when they entered into covenant together (1 Sam. xx.), Jonathan’s faith was stronger than David’s. David’s faltering heart was saying, “There is but a step between

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me and death," while Jonathan, with implicit confidence in God's purpose concerning David, was thus looking forward to the future: "Thou shalt not only, while I live, show me the kindness of the Lord, that I die not, but also thou shalt not cut off thy kindness from my house for ever, no, not when the Lord hath cut off the enemies of David every one from the face of the earth." There has seldom if ever been exhibited a finer instance of triumphant faith, than when the prince, with the resources of the kingdom at his beck, made this request of the helpless outlaw. Standing on the revealed word of God, Faith saw the outlaw throned and crowned—perhaps saw in him the type of a King far higher—and Sight was not allowed to throw one shadow over the picture. It does not appear that at the time, this display of Jonathan's steadfast faith made much impression on David; but it may afterwards have recurred to his mind, and often proved the means of sustaining him, when heart and flesh were like to faint and fail.—*Ibid.*

[17913] What piety in the words he addresses to his armour-bearer, when, pointing across the gorge to a garrison of the Philistines, he proposed, single-handed, to attack it, saying, "Come and let us go over; it may be that the Lord will work for us: for there is no restraint to the Lord, to save by many or by few!"—*Rev. T. Guthrie, D.D.*

3 He illustrates the character of a dutiful son.

[17914] There is one fact belonging to this history which has seldom had the attention it deserves. While Jonathan was always faithful to David, he was never false to his father. Some men will cultivate one virtue alone, and make it an Aaron's rod—swallowing up all the other virtues; but this man did not suffer his virtues as a friend to devour his virtues as a son. His position was one of great difficulty, and it was little less than a miracle of grace that he was able to keep the true path, when there was so much to turn him to the right hand or to the left. Here were his father and his friend, and the former counted the latter the greatest foe he had, and fought against him with relentless cruelty! How could Jonathan stand between them both, and be to them what a son and a friend ought to be? But he did it; for he was simple-hearted and pure-minded, and anxious to do right. Amid all the strife and conflict between Saul and David, no one can point to a single incident and say, "There Jonathan forgot his friendship for David," or, "There he broke the first commandment with promise." He never forsook his father's standard, and he died at last nobly fighting by his father's side. He did not say, "It is the purpose of God to bring David to the throne, and I will go and help him to get it." . . . He knew that he was to find his rule of action, not in God's purposes, but in God's precepts, one of which is, "Honour thy father and thy mother," &c.—*C. Vince.*

[17915] That death on Gilboa was a fitting finish to his career! It was well that he who in life had given the world its greatest example of faithfulness to a friend should in death show to all sons, down to the end of time, that neither a father's failings, nor even a father's crimes, must be allowed to quench filial affection and fidelity. It was a noble thing in Jonathan that when sin had come with its desolating hand and destroyed the beauty of his father's character, he carried himself as one who would say, "He is my father still; I will live for him; and, if need be, I will die for him."—*Ibid.*

[17916] His father has made a rash vow, and required that Jonathan shall die. It was hard to leave the world in the flush of life and the very hour of victory. Yet he submits himself to his father's will. Baring a bosom seamed and scarred with wounds suffered in that father's cause, he stands ready to receive the stroke—a sacrifice to filial piety—and had fallen, but that the people, throwing themselves before Saul, said, "Shall Jonathan die, who hath wrought this great salvation for Israel? God forbid: as the Lord liveth, there shall not one hair of his head fall to the ground. So the people rescued Jonathan that he died not."—*Rev. T. Guthrie, D.D.*

[17917] From the time that he first appears he is Saul's constant companion. He was always present at his father's meals. As Abner and David seem to have occupied the places afterwards called the captaincies of "the host" and "of the guard," so he seems to have been (as Hushai afterwards) "the friend." The whole story implies, without expressing, the deep attachment of the father and son. Jonathan can only go on his dangerous expedition (1 Sam. xiv. 1) by concealing it from Saul.—*Dean Stanley.*

[17918] Jonathan found himself in very difficult circumstances. Not only was he under the necessity of mediating between his father, who was at the same time his king and master, and his friend, who was persecuted by his father, but of taking part with the one against the other. But he knew how, on all sides, to discharge the very difficult duty with a truly holy tact. He could not be led to give to his friend a final divorce from his friendship, notwithstanding the hatred which his father cherished against him. The covenant with David was, as we have seen, truly entered into *in the Lord*. Jonathan loved David, the beloved and chosen of God, and his companion in the kingdom of God. He would have regarded a renunciation of his friend as the tearing asunder, with a wicked hand, of a bond which Jehovah Himself had formed; and a denial in the person of David, who was to the Lord as the apple of His eye, of the Most High Himself. Yet in all this Jonathan offended not, in a single instance, against the reverence, and love, and sincerity of affection which were due from him to his father

and king. By means of the plan which he formed for the protection of David, he intended only to cut off occasion of sin from his father, on account of which the anger of God would have descended on his anointed head. Jonathan had not for a moment been unmindful of the Divine command, which enjoins that honour should be rendered to father and mother; and on that account, also the promise which accompanies this command was in him richly fulfilled.—*Krummacher*.

4 He illustrates the character of a brave warrior.

[17919] What exploits in the annals of war braver, or so brave, as that when, scaling their rocky fastness on his hands and knees, he leaped headlong among a swarm of Philistines, and, receiving the battle on his single shield, mowed them down like grass before the scythe? Thus gloriously broke that day on Israel, filling the hearts of her warriors with courage for the coming battle.—*Rev. T. Guthrie, D.D.*

[17920] Saul “blew the trumpet;” Saul had “smitten the officer of the Philistines.” But now it would seem that Jonathan was resolved to undertake the whole risk himself. “The day,” the day fixed by him approached, and without communicating his project to any one, except the young man, whom, like all the chiefs of that age, he retained as his armour-bearer, he sallied forth from Gibeah to attack the garrison of the Philistines stationed on the other side of the steep defile of Michmash. His words are short, but they breathe exactly the ancient and peculiar spirit of the Israelite warrior. “Come, and let us go over unto the garrison of these uncircumcised.”—*Dean Stanley*.

III. THE VALUE TO DAVID OF HIS PERFECT FRIENDSHIP.

[17921] It needs no word to prove that the friendship we have been studying must have been a great help and blessing to David. How great, is known only to Him by whom the boon was bestowed. Great trials were before him, and God, who foresaw them all, granted him this provision against them. When his character was traduced, how it would solace him to remember that the second man in the land in point of worldly position, and the first man in the land in point of spiritual life, still believed in him and counted him worthy of all love!—*C. Vince*.

[17922] His soul was prostrate in the dust, bowed down in humility before God. But, without taking into account the view which was thus opened to him into the future of his own life, how could he find words sufficient to express the feelings which overpowered him at the sight of that love, and self-denial, and resignation, which, like a glance into the mind of heaven itself regarding him, he here discovered in the conduct of Jonathan towards him? His whole

soul was melted within him in thankfulness to the Most High for the treasure with which He had blessed him in his friend Jonathan—*Krummacher*.

[17923] It was not a worldly friendship, in which one, in loving another, in reality loves only himself and his own personal interests, but one of a higher nature which formed the uniting bond. They loved each other truly in God, to whose service they had devoted themselves in the hours of holy consecration; and all their views and aims, their judgments and endeavours, were in perfect harmony. They understood the slightest indication of each other's mind; yea, the faintest tone which vibrated on the harp-strings of the soul of the one, echoed full and harmonious in the soul of the other. When such conditions meet together, there grows the beautiful flower of that love which the apostle calls peculiar, in contradistinction to that which is common.—*Ibid*.

IV. THE ATTRACTIVE POWER OF VIRTUE ILLUSTRATED BY THE SPONTANEOUS LOVE OF JONATHAN FOR DAVID.

[17924] At the time of their first recorded meeting, David was a youth not far from twenty years of age. He was ruddy, and of a beautiful countenance; goodly to look to; agile and strong. He was a cunning player upon the harp. Already he must have given some signs of those poetical gifts which made him, for after ages, the “sweet singer of Israel.” He was a mighty valiant man, and a man of war; prudent also, and magnanimous. Best of all, the Lord was with him. That he had been anointed future king seems to have been as yet known only to the prophet Samuel and in his own father's house. Jonathan was older. Judging from an allusion to a younger brother, he must have been at least thirty. Like his father Saul, he was powerful and active. In language similar to that often applied to ancient heroes, both father and son are described as “swifter than eagles, and stronger than lions.” Like David, he was skilled in archery and slinging. As commander of a portion of Saul's standing army, on more than one occasion he had exhibited heroic daring. He was large-hearted, unselfish, and a favourite with the people. How natural that these two should be powerfully drawn together! So, at least, it was. As the youthful David, unassuming in his demeanour as he was in his simple shepherd garb, returned from his victory over the Philistine, and was hailed, in triumphal song, as Israel's deliverer, “the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul.” At once they entered into a mutual covenant, and sealed with gifts a bond which, for all ages, has been the best model of true friendship.—*Sermons by the Monday Club*.

[17925] When the stripling David, so young and yet so brave, crowned with such honour and

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yet so modest, so full of love to his country and piety to his God, advances to lay his bloody trophy at the feet of Saul, Jonathan's whole heart flows out to him; he becomes *at once* the object of a deep and deathless love.—*Rev. T. Guthrie, D.D.*

V. GENERAL GRACE OF CHARACTER VIEWED AS A WHOLE.

[17926] Many a son has had a better father, but what father ever had such a son? In some respects, at least, Jonathan stands without a rival in all history, sacred or profane. Had we known him better, no doubt we might have thought less of him; we would have found some faults in him, and said that it was true of him as of the best of fallen men, that the brightest sun is dimmed by spots. Yet there is no fault recorded of Jonathan; and conferring on him more honour than on any one else whose name stands in this sacred book, God has not left a stain to blot his memory.—*Ibid.*

[17927] If there ever was friendship in this world, pure, unalloyed by any inferior metal, disinterested, free of envy, without an element of selfishness, incapable of harbouring a suspicious thought, and capable of rejoicing in another's gain, even to his own loss, it had glowed in the bosom that now lay cold on Gilboa's mountains. Battle spear never pierced such a generous heart; nor had war ever such a graceful victim offered at her blood-stained shrine. Man never possessed a friend such as David lost in Jonathan; for he stood in his love as much above the common crowd of men, as his father did in stature—towering head and shoulders high above the assembled tribes of Israel. If ever man loved his neighbour as he did himself, that man was Jonathan; and none with a head and heart can read his tragic history without feeling that he was worthy of this extraordinary, but not extravagant, laudation: "Thy love to me was wonderful."—*Ibid.*

[17928] Jonathan "lived long in the land which the Lord his God had given him." In the ninth chapter of the first book of Chronicles we find mention made of his descendants to the twelfth generation, and perceive that this race were distinguished for their knightly virtues hundreds of years after their noble ancestor.—*Krummacher.*

VI. HOMILETICAL HINTS.

1 Gilboa vanishes, and Calvary rises to view.

[17929] The battle scene, with Jonathan standing like a lion at bay, or faint from loss of blood, sinking beneath his wounds, shifts; and I see Jesus standing alone amid the impious crowd, or fainting beneath His cross in the streets of Jerusalem. The hill where, in the pale moonlight, all stiff and stark

and bloody, Jonathan lies surrounded by heaps of dead, his face to heaven and his foot to the foe that have fallen before his arm, gives place to another scene. A tall cross tops the summit of Mount Calvary; and the sun's level beams shine on the drooping head and mangled, bloody form of the Son of God. To Him these words best belong. We hang the harp of David on that cross; and, Jonathan himself consenting, we take this garland from his brows, to weave it into the crown of thorns—saying, as we turn to Jesus, "Thy love to me was wonderful."—*Rev. T. Guthrie, D.D.*

2 The unalterable attachment of Jonathan for David, "passing the love of women," reminds us of the unchangeable love of the Divine Friend which "sticketh closer than a brother."

[17930] Jonathan loved well—passing well—but Christ loves even better. That which we naturally esteem most in friendship, in a world full of changes, is unchangeableness. A perfect, unchangeable friend, we all, I suppose, at some time in life, desire to meet with, and in proportion as we value our friends are we sensible of any, the slightest, imperfection in their characters. But there is, as we discover to our sorrow, yet greatly to our comfort, One only who will perfectly answer our expectations—"Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever." It may be long before we go hence, strength may decay and hair whiten and limbs totter—Jesus Christ will be still the same. There may be terrible trials before us, we may be called upon to bear much, very much, but He in whom we have trusted will be ever the same. He will not love us to-day and turn His back upon us to-morrow. He will not support us one day and let us go the next. Ay, "though we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, we will fear no evil," for He is with us, and will be there. President Edwards, when he came to die, after bidding his relatives good-bye, said, "Now where is Jesus of Nazareth, my true and never-failing Friend?" And so saying, he fell asleep.—*M. J.*

ABSALOM.

I. GENERAL VIEW OF HIS CHARACTER.

[17931] The character of Absalom appears depicted in Holy Scripture in colours altogether dark and sombre, and unrelieved by a single bright tint. Natural advantages to a considerable degree he certainly possessed, but he wholly failed to turn any of them to a good account. Vanity and pride, cunning and revenge, hatred and treachery, rebellion and unnatural wickedness—these are the gloomy traits of character of him whose hands were stained with the murder of his half-brother, and whose name has been ever since his death synonymous with dishonour and defiance to a

kind and godly parent, and is even yet mentioned with a curse in the land where he obtained a dishonoured grave.—*Ibid.*

II. HIS NATURAL ADVANTAGES.

[17932] Amongst Absalom's natural advantages, we note his position as the king's son, his striking beauty, tact, and large measure of popularity—no despicable gifts for even a prince to start out in life with—yet how were the whole of them turned to his disadvantage and his hurt, when, properly used, they might have stood him in such good stead!—*Ibid.*

[17933] "In all Israel there was none to be so much praised as Absalom for his beauty: from the sole of his foot even to the crown of his head there was no blemish in him." The weight of his hair was two hundred shekels. He was fond of his locks: one day they were to cost him his life. What a pity that strength and beauty should be turned to so bad an account! That God's gracious gifts should be used by the creature for the furtherance of arrogance and despicable pride!—*Rev. H. Cust Nunn.*

III. HIS DOMINANT EVIL PRINCIPLES.

1 He was the willing slave of pride.

[17934] It seems highly probable that, for some time, he had been meditating his own association in the kingly power, as his father's heir-at-law. The very period of his restoration to favour is made the hour for his project. The elevation which had just become his lot, calculated to incite great contentment of mind as all true Christians would say, proved too much for his pride. It has been well said by some one: "Pride takes for its motto, great *I* and little *you*." It knows no bounds. In its elevation of self, it would dare to dethrone even justice itself; and looks for the prostration of all other designs before its own insatiable will. We see, in the case before us, how it induced a son to dethrone a father, how for a while it gloried in vaunting itself, how, in the end, it met with an ignoble fall. As soon as pride was absolute in Absalom's heart, patience had her notice to quit. If he could have waited for a few years more, in all human probability he would have succeeded in peace to the throne of David his father.—*Ibid.*

2 He guided his course by unmistakable cunning.

[17935] Now mark the cunning of this aspiring youth. He feels that some stately show would be in his favour, he surrounds himself with a body of fifty foot-runners, as well as some chariots and horses. In early morn, day after day, he stations himself at the city gate, and here he chats with the disappointed suitors as they go to and fro to the king: some are wishing for a speedy settlement of their causes, but, owing to the king's engagements, he cannot

gratify their wishes. The crafty Absalom is aware of their grievances; and he wishes aloud, to their great admiration, that he were the judge of the land. "Some deputy at least there should be," he argues. His own heart gives answer, "Who so good as Absalom?" In keeping with his words are his acts of politeness. "When any man came nigh to do him obeisance, he put forth his hand and took him and kissed him." So Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel.—*Ibid.*

3 He was guilty of treachery.

[17936] Taking advantage of the fact that his father kept himself more aloof from his subjects, and took a less active part in attending to their complaints and healing their differences since the period of his grievous fall, he skilfully insinuated among them the spirit of disaffection, affected a style and splendour of living almost equal to that of royalty, and sought to win the hearts of the people to himself, by all the vulgar arts of popular blandishment. In a little time, while the too confiding king was still unaware of the unnatural treason that had meanwhile been secretly hatching in his capital, Absalom had raised the standard of rebellion and revolt at Hebron, and gathered towards him a most formidable multitude of followers who were bent on making him king.—*Rev. A. Thompson, D.D.*

4 He was not above descending to hypocrisy.

[17937] The plot is nearly ripe: there is nothing wanting but a cloak of religion to perfect his treachery. He desires leave from his father to pay a vow, made long since in exile, at Hebron. The leave is given perhaps with a feeling of joy at having such a pious son, and the traitor leaves the holy city with his band of two hundred men. These attendants had embarked on an enterprise, entirely ignorant of its vastness and wickedness. How easy is it to beguile harmless intentions! But this small band is soon increased, and spies announce among all the tribes the forthcoming signal for rising.—*Rev. H. Cust Nunn.*

5 He gave way to a vindictive spirit.

[17938] Accustomed to have his wishes indulged, even when they were unreasonable, and held in by few restraints, he readily became selfish and froward; and these dispositions, when he passed into public life, were not long in shaping themselves into great follies, and even flagrant crimes. It was natural that he should deeply feel the foul dishonour done to his sister Tamar by his half-brother Amnon. But instead of seeking to have the crime fitly punished by the proper public authorities, he concealed his resentment and feigned indifference for two years; at the end of which, having invited Amnon to a feast, he abused the rites of Eastern hospitality, and treacherously put him to death.—*Rev. A. Thompson, D.D.*

6 He indulged in unnatural and unlimited wickedness.

[17939] The unnatural Absalom had entered Jerusalem, and had perpetrated a public deed of insult and infamy upon his father which was designed to make the breach between him and the exiled king irreparable, and his own followers desperate. While as if to fill up his wickedness to the brim, and to make it doubtful whether he had one redeeming quality of goodness left, he had concurred in the counsel of his chiefs, that in the intended pursuit his father's destruction should especially be sought. Thus was the arrow doubly barbed.—*Ibid.*

IV. HIS PUNISHMENT.

It was complete and retributive.

(1) *It consisted in defeat and the death of a criminal, whereas he had looked for victory and the life of a king.*

[17940] The battle took place somewhere in the wooded district of Ephraim, and the first stern onslaught of David's men seems to have driven Absalom's vast army into universal confusion and rout. They fled panic-stricken into the neighbouring woods and thickets, only to become there the more easy prey to their pursuers. As the wretched Absalom, now deserted by all, hurried in terror and flight through some part of the forest, his long and beautiful hair which had been his pride became entangled among the branches of a terebinth or prickly oak, and two of these branches closing suddenly upon him and lifting him up, and the mule on which he rode moving from under him, he hung suspended between earth and heaven. What a terrible position! Full of life, and yet hanging helpless in the momentary dread of death! And what a change within the period of a brief hour! For it was but an hour since myriads were at his command, and a crown shone dazzling almost within his grasp. And now behold the vain youth in this mingled plight of helplessness and shame, "with none so poor as do him reverence."—*Ibid.*

[17941] It is no marvel if his own hair turned traitor to him who durst rise up against his father. That part which is misused by men to sin is commonly employed by God to revenge. The very beast whereon Absalom sat, as weary to bear so unnatural a burden, resigns over his load to the tree of justice.—*Bp. Hall.*

(2) *It consisted in posthumous dishonour and the curse of posterity, whereas he had looked for splendid sepulture and the praise of men unborn.*

[17942] Ambitious of posthumous fame, though utterly indifferent about posthumous usefulness, he had long before caused a mausoleum or pillar to be erected for himself in a valley near Jerusalem, with the intention that this should be his sepulchre. But even this last honour is denied him, and he fitly receives a

hasty burial without solemn funereal rites, unwittingly resembling that which the Mosaic law had prescribed for those who should be guilty of flagrant and persistent filial ingratitude.—*Rev. A. Thompson, D.D.*

[17943] He had prepared for himself a splendid monument in Shaveh or "The King's Dale:" in pride had he penned such a memorial of his name, "for he said, I have no son to keep my name in remembrance;" in disgrace, poor soul, did he descend to the grave, the inexcusable plotter of his own father's disgrace.—*Rev. H. Cust Nunn.*

[17944] Jewish writers tell us that, for many an age and century afterwards, every passer-by was accustomed to throw a stone on the heap which covered Absalom's remains; and as he threw it, to say, "Cursed be the memory of rebellious Absalom, and cursed for ever be all wicked children that rise up in rebellion against their parents."—*Rev. A. Thompson, D.D.*

V. HOMILETICAL HINTS.

1 The Absalom character is by no means extinct, but has numerous representatives in our own day.

[17945] There are many Absaloms in the world just now, who despise parental authority, jeer at all proper and needful advice, give heed to the poisoned whispers of the worst of companions, cause aching hearts and tearful eyes in the old house at home, and at last run riot to their hearts' content, but to their souls' utter damnation. The disrespectful son is but a bad citizen. You cannot depend on him for any good work, as his heart is void of duteous principle and his bent is crooked and perverse. False pride is absolute within his breast; it prompts him to construct a bridge of his own all-important shadow; he dares to cross life on this evanescent pile, and his vain attempt hurries him to destruction. It is hard to save a reckless youth once he has embarked on a life of folly.—*Rev. H. Cust Nunn.*

2 The history of Absalom in relation to David furnishes a grave warning to parents.

[17946] The whole scene of David's lamentation over Absalom speaks with an immediate and awful voice to parents, and urges them to make the training and commanding of their children earnest work, and especially to beware of looking tenderly upon their disobedience, or of only feebly and hesitatingly restraining them in their wickedness. Not a little of the foolish indulgence which parents show to their children is the simple effect of an aversion to be troubled, and is, therefore, with all its look of amiable but fatal weakness, just "self-indulgence under an alias." But much of it also is affection grievously misdirected, the fruit of simple unwillingness to give present pain. But will delayed interference until sin becomes stronger and habit has hollowed out for itself a deeper channel to flow in,

make restraint more easy when it is at length put forth? Are you to expect that the laws of God's moral government will be reversed in their natural action when you are unfaithful to your duty? And have you considered that the "wild oats" which your son is sowing, and of which many think and speak so lightly, usually spring forth in stinging serpents and in a very brood of hell?—*Rev. A. Thompson, D.D.*

[17947] In David's case there was more than his over-indulgence of Absalom to account for, though not to excuse, that son's unnatural rebellion, and to explain the long and melancholy train of social troubles that were associated with it. His one great two-fold sin had broken the arm of his moral strength. He could not with boldness and effect reprove the very sins which he himself had committed with aggravation; while they formed the secret apology and sanction in the hearts of his children for some of their worst enormities. The report or recollection of them had made Joab and other chiefs insolent, and his people alienated and ready for disaffection and revolt. Any one who should look attentively into the history of David's life, might see the contrast between its general features before his fall and after it. That sin separates between the two periods by a line almost as distinct and broad as that between summer and winter. It is true that God has forgiven him his iniquity, in so far as respects its eternal penal consequences; but do not imagine that it has not left most bitter fruits behind it. David is no longer the same man. His sky is never without a cloud. His joy is shaded, the spring and freshness of his life are blighted and gone. His children grow up only to be thorns in his flesh and heavy burdens upon his spirit; his people are by turns fickle and turbulent; his very judgment has lost much of its former clearness and foresight in respect to his kingly duties and the public exigencies, and he holds the reins of government now with a relaxed and hesitating grasp.—*Ibid.*

[17948] It cannot be questioned that David had been culpably neglectful of his duties to his children. No doubt he had often prayed for them, and had not been unmindful of their religious instruction; but he had often shown himself to be sinfully and weakly indulgent to their excesses and faults, and, unlike Abraham, had failed to "command his children and his household after him." We are expressly told respecting Adonijah, another of his sons, that "his father had not at any time displeased him, saying, Why hast thou done so?" And there are sufficient indications, even in the brief narrative of Absalom's career, that he had indulged him in the same injudicious manner, and by so indulging him had unconsciously helped to ruin him. It is a most presumptuous and perilous mistake on the part of some pious parents, when they imagine that, if they should prove unfaithful in the discharge of their parental duties, God will interpose by some sovereign act to prevent

the effects of their undutifulness, and will on no account allow their children to perish. They have far more reason to anticipate that they shall be left to reap according as they have sown.—*Ibid.*

3 The history of Absalom in relation to David supplies a solemn admonition to children.

[17949] Let those children who have begun to spurn parental authority, and to laugh at the remonstrances of a father as antiquated and drivelling folly, read in the career and end of Absalom, in what direction and to what certain issues their course is leading them. It is far from improbable that the good king was proud of his boy, and charmed with his exceeding beauty. The cares of his earlier life may sometimes have been lightened by looking on his still innocent sports, and the recollections of his own youth brought vividly back as the echoes of his palace were awakened by the laughter and the glee of Absalom's childhood. Who can doubt that he would often, at such times, weave his boy's future history in bright colours, that partook far more of sunshine than of shadow? But how soon did his ripening manhood begin to belie all those "prophecies that went before of him," while, at the last, those bright dreams melted away in a tragedy of horrors! The growing wickedness of this favourite son brought him to an untimely grave, dimmed to his father's vision even the glories of the everlasting covenant, and made him descend to his royal sepulchre mourning that "his house was not so with God." I ask the immoral son of a pious parent whether he has made up his mind to similar terrible and tragical issues? Are you to become the opprobrium and the living sorrow of your kindred, and your name the dark shadow that rests as with the wings of death over an otherwise happy home? Is the continuity of holy character in your ancestry to be violently sundered in you? Is your name only to be mentioned in whispers and sighs in the family gatherings? And when, amid your wrecked fortunes and wasted gifts, death comes upon you prematurely, shall a father have to look upon your inanimate body and say, "Would God I had died for thee!" and, not daring to think of "the most terrible of all terribles" that is beyond death, to lay you in your grave in hopeless silence, and drop bitter tears, that have no comfort in them, upon the dust of his prodigal son?—*Ibid.*

4 The history of Absalom demonstrates the fact that it is possible to sin beyond the reach of forgiveness.

[17950] The story of Absalom's rebellion against David seems to carry with it one of the most solemn lessons in the whole of the Word of God: the lesson that a point in sin may be sometimes reached which is beyond the power of love. That point, as regards this life, Absalom reached. In his death he is a terrible example of the Word of God, "If a man will not turn, He will whet His sword; He hath bent His

bow and made it ready. He hath prepared for him the instruments of death." It is not for us to pronounce judgment against any one as regards the world to come. We can only listen to the Word of the Lord, and tremble at it; and that word is, that "When a righteous man turneth from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, and dieth in them, for his iniquity that he hath done shall he die." And those words certainly imply a second death, for it is said that when a man committeth iniquity, and dieth in them, then he shall die. Now in the case of Absalom, this most searching truth of God's Word, that there is a death and a judgment, is put side by side with another that makes it even more impressive than it would otherwise be; we see the hardened and impenitent sinner pursued to the very end by faithful and untiring love; we hear the outburst of grief that comes when love is seen to be useless, no longer of any avail. And in the lament of David we cannot help being reminded of one that is greater than David, who might say these words over a lost child that He had long looked for, but who had at last succeeded in escaping his Saviour's hand; and He would say then with far deeper love and far more awful grief, "Would God I had died for thee, my son, my son!"—*Rev. C. Waller.*

JOAB.

I. INTRODUCTORY.

His family and constitutional relationship to David.

[17951] Joab was the eldest and most remarkable of the three nephews of David, the children of Zeruiah, David's sister. Their father is unknown. They all exhibit the activity and courage of David's constitutional character. But they never rise beyond this to the nobler qualities which lift him above the wild soldiers and chieftains of the time. Asahel, who was cut off in his youth, and seems to have been the darling of the family, is only known to us from his gazelle-like agility (2 Sam. ii. 18). Abishai and Joab are alike in their implacable revenge. Joab, however, combines with these ruder qualities something of a more statesmanlike character, which brings him more nearly to a level with his youthful uncle, and unquestionably gives him the second place in the whole history of David's reign.—*Dean Stanley.*

II. HIS MIXED CHARACTER.

1 He exhibited ambition side by side with contentment.

[17952] There was now no rival left in the way of Joab's advancement, and soon the opportunity occurred for his legitimate accession to the highest post that David could confer. At the siege of Jebus, the king offered the office of chief of the army, now grown into a "host," to

any one who would lead the forlorn hope, and scale the precipice on which the besieged fortress stood. With an agility equal to that of David himself, or of his brother Asahel, Joab succeeded in the attempt, and became in consequence commander-in-chief—"captain of the host"—the same office that Abner had held under Saul, the highest in the state after the king. His importance was immediately shown by his undertaking the fortification of the conquered city in conjunction with David. In this post he was content, and served the king with undeviating fidelity.—*Ibid.*

2 He displayed a vindictive and treacherous spirit, together with regard for the wishes of God.

[17953] Joab's revenge on Abner was only postponed. He had been on another of these predatory excursions from Hebron, when he was informed on his return that Abner had in his absence paid a visit to David, and been received into favour. He broke out into a violent remonstrance with the king, and then, without David's knowledge, immediately sent messengers after Abner, who was overtaken by them about two miles from Hebron. Abner, with the unsuspecting generosity of his noble nature, returned at once. Joab and Abishai met him in the gateway of the town; Joab took him aside, as if with a peaceful intention, and then struck him a deadly blow "under the fifth rib." It is possible that with the passion of vengeance for his brother may have been mingled the fear lest Abner should supplant him in the king's favour.—*Ibid.*

[17954] Amasa was commander-in-chief, but Joab had still his own small following of attendants, and with him were the mighty men commanded by his brother Abishai, and the body-guard of the king. With these he went out in pursuit of the remnant of the rebellion. In the heat of pursuit he encountered his rival Amasa more leisurely engaged in the same quest. At "the great stone" in Gibeon the cousins met. Joab's sword was attached to his girdle; by design or accident it protruded from its sheath. Amasa rushed into the treacherous embrace to which Joab invited him, holding fast his sword by his own right hand, whilst the unsheathed sword in his left hand plunged into Amasa's stomach; a single blow from that practised arm, as in the case of Abner, sufficed to do its work.—*Ibid.*

[17955] His last remonstrance with David was on the announcement of the king's desire to number the people. "The king prevailed against Joab." But Joab's scruples were so strong that he managed to avoid numbering two of the tribes, Levi and Benjamin (1 Chron. xxii. 6).—*Ibid.*

3 He gave proof of unshaken fidelity through a long life, but closed it by a faithless departure from his master.

[17956] The services of Joab to the king were

not confined to military achievements. In the entangled relations which grew up in David's domestic life he bore an important part. The first occasion was the unhappy correspondence which passed between him and the king during the Ammonite war respecting Uriah the Hittite which led to the treacherous sacrifice of Uriah in a sortie. It shows both the confidence reposed by David in Joab, and Joab's too unscrupulous fidelity to David.—*Ibid.*

[17957] The same keen sense of his master's interests that had prompted the desire to heal the breach in the royal family ruled the conduct of Joab no less when the relations of the father and son were reversed by the successful revolt of Absalom. His former intimacy with the prince did not impair his fidelity to the king. He followed him beyond the Jordan, and in the final battle of Ephraim, assumed the responsibility of taking the rebel prince's dangerous life in spite of David's injunction to spare him, and when no one else had courage to act so decisive a part. He was well aware of the terrible effect it would have on the king, and on this account possibly dissuaded his young friend Ahimaaz from bearing the news; but when the tidings had been broken, he had the spirit himself to rouse David from the frantic grief which would have been fatal to the royal cause. His stern resolution (as he had himself anticipated) well-nigh proved fatal to his own interests. The king could not forgive it, and went so far in his unreasonable resentment as to transfer the command of the army from the too faithful Joab to his other nephew Amasa, the son of Abigail, who had even sided with the insurgents.—*Ibid.*

[17958] There is something mournful in the end of Joab. At the close of his long life, his loyalty, so long unshaken, at last wavered. "Though he had not turned after Absalom, he turned after Adonijah." This probably filled up the measure of the king's long cherished resentment. We learn from David's last song that his powerlessness over his courtiers was even then present to his mind (2 Sam. xxiii. 6, 7), and on his deathbed he recalled to Solomon's recollection the two murders of Abner and Amasa, with an injunction not to let the aged soldier escape with impunity.—*Ibid.*

III. HIS END.

Murder and treachery were not protected by the sanctuary of refuge.

[17959] The revival of the pretensions of Adonijah after David's death was sufficient to awaken the suspicions of Solomon. The king deposed the high priest Abiathar, Joab's friend and fellow conspirator,—and the news of this event at once alarmed Joab himself. He claimed the right of sanctuary within the curtains of the sacred tent, under the shelter of the altar at Gibeon. He was pursued by Benaiah, who at first hesitated to violate the sanctuary of the refuge; but Solomon urged that the guilt of

two such murders overrode all such protection. With his hands on the altar, therefore, the grey-headed warrior was slaughtered by his successor. The body was carried to his house "in the wilderness," and there interred. He left descendants, but nothing is known of them, unless it may be inferred from the double curse of David (2 Sam. iii. 29) and of Solomon (1 Kings ii. 33) that they seemed to dwindle away, stricken by a succession of visitations—weakness, leprosy, lameness, murder, starvation.—*Ibid.*

HUSHAI.

I. HIS ATTACHMENT TO DAVID.

[17960] Hushai strongly wished to accompany David, to whom he was deeply attached. He was troubled greatly at the calamity which had overtaken the king, and the latter was equally troubled to think of the pain and inconvenience Hushai must suffer for his sake in following his changed fortunes. David also knew that Hushai could do better service for him by remaining in the city and counteracting by judicious counsel some of the evil intentions of Absalom. He has great difficulty in persuading Hushai to remain, and has to appear almost rude and even ungrateful in the effort to accomplish his desire. He could bear anything for himself, but he could not permit another to undergo such exhausting experiences for his sake. Hence he puts as his final argument this strong sentence, "If thou passest over with me thou wilt be a burden."—*F. Hastings.*

II. HIS MEETING WITH ABSALOM.

[17961] David suggested that Hushai should assume the character of a friend of Absalom. The suggestion must not be measured by present standards of morality. At that time it would be thought quite lawful to endeavour to circumvent an opponent by placing a spy in his court, even as at this day some triumph of diplomacy would be extolled by politicians. David had a lingering hope that in some way Hushai might be able to save his son. He felt sure he would be able to defeat the counsel of Abithophel, the one most likely to lead Absalom further astray. Hence he urged and insisted on Hushai's return. Almost at the same moment the Archite and Absalom enter the city, the one in silence, the other with pomp; the one aged and depressed, the other young and elate; one sorrowing over the treatment of David, the other rejoicing over his easy success. Soon the two are face to face. Absalom meets his fate. The meeting was as significant as some that have taken place later in history, as that, for instance, between Philip and William, afterwards named the Silent. To him Philip confided casually the knowledge of

his intention to exterminate all the Protestants of the two countries, and William, while startled and saddened at the information, gave no sign, but mentally determined to counteract the intended cruelty. Philip met his fate in William the Silent, and Absalom met his when he came in contact with Hushai.—*Ibid.*

III. HOMILETICAL HINTS.

- 1 The meeting of Hushai with Absalom teaches that we may sometimes find unexpectedly useful guidance.

[17962] Hushai might have been a useful guide, but Absalom is bent on evil, and Ahithophel helps him in his wickedness. Hushai only seeks to defeat the evil counsel of the latter. This he attempts for David's sake, as well as Absalom's. Absalom could, if he had been true, have had a most valuable counsellor in Hushai, but under the circumstances all Hushai can do is to endeavour to help David, or to give him time to escape, by counselling delay on the part of Absalom. Life is like a many-tracked common or heath; so many paths run side by side or cross each other at different angles. We pass numberless wanderers like ourselves, but here and there we meet casually with some one who is most useful, because he chances to know the direction of the paths, and a word at a perplexing juncture is invaluable. For such guidance we are thankful. Absalom had in Hushai one who would have done his best to counsel him for good, but his heart was set on evil, so that Hushai's influence was unavailing.—*Ibid.*

- 2 The meeting of Hushai with Absalom teaches that God sometimes grants men warnings of the retribution which waits upon sin.

[17963] Just as Hushai meets Absalom unexpectedly, so retribution may meet him also at the point where he seems to have reached the full extent of his expectations of success. There is indeed that which a French writer calls *force cachée*, or hidden power, checking us often at the very moment of success wrongly gained. It is not always noticed, but sometimes it comes startling us with its suddenness. Ahab goes down to seize the vineyard of Naboth, and at the door Elijah meets him with the sentence, "In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick thy blood, even thine." The courtiers who wrought against Daniel were themselves doomed to the death they designed for him. A cardinal introduced iron cages into France, and was afterward himself imprisoned in one. A man who during the first revolution in France was condemned to death by the criminal tribunal of Lyons, was the first to suffer under the very guillotine that he had sent for from Paris to decapitate his enemies. The poisoned chalice prepared for another is in tragedy represented as being unwittingly drunk by the Danish king and queen. The bell put up by the good Abbot of Aberbrothok on Inchcape Rock is represented

by the great Scottish novelist as having been taken down by a pirate, and he, a year after, being unwarned, perished on that very rock.—*Ibid.*

- [17964] "Stories have been told of men whose lives

Were infamous, and so their end. I mean That the red-handed murderer has himself been murdered;

The traitors struck with treason; he who let The orphan perish came himself to want. Thus justice and the great God have ordered it So that the scene of evil has been turned Against the actor; pain paid back with pain, And poison given for poison."

If in secular history we discover the operation of this *force cachée*, how much more in sacred! There the working of the law is laid down thus: "The wicked shall fall by his own naughtiness;" the ungodly falls into the net he spreads for his neighbour's feet.—*Ibid.*

JASHOBEAM, ELEAZAR, AND SHAMMAH.

I. THEIR DEVOTED LOYALTY.

[17965] During the wars with the Philistines David, heated with the sun while scanning the hosts of his enemies, suddenly gave expression to a desire for water from the well of Bethlehem. "Oh that one would give me drink of the water of the well of Bethlehem, which is by the gate!" He had probably been thinking of his boyhood, and gave utterance to this, which was a sort of passionate outburst of home longing. It was just like David with his intense nature to speak and act in the way recorded in these verses. Just as an Italian in a northern region longs for the fruits and blue skies of his own land, so David longed for this water. He contrasts its limpid freshness with the muddy liquid brought to him from the much-used well or shallow pond near his encampment. Perhaps wearied of rule, he desired to be a boy again, and so thought of the well around which he had played. His remark was heard by the men who formed his body-guard or staff, and they resolved to obtain the water for him. What ought they not to do for a king of such courage, and at the same time such affection? Jashobeam, Eleazar, and Shammah determine that his wish for the water shall be gratified, and they plan their sortie with caution, and carry it out with courage and celerity. At dusk they steal up, break through the lines of the enemy, overpowering and silencing the sentinels, and reach the well at last. Two defend the one who draws the water, then, putting it into a skin, that one slings it over his shoulder, and they fight their way out of the surrounding host, bearing the water to the king.

Brave men! Brave act! Loyal service!—
Ibid.

II. HOMILETICAL HINTS.

1 The devoted loyalty of these men to David teaches loyal devotion to his "greater Son."

[17966] What ought not we to venture for the sake of *our* Leader and King? What ought not we to be ready to do to gain the water of life? It is far better than that of the well of Bethlehem. It only can satisfy the soul; and it will be as a "well of water springing up into eternal life." Having found this great boon, we should show our devotion to Christ in every way possible.—*Ibid.*

[17967] We should be loyal to Him who is a greater leader than David. Men have been true to conscience and to Christ at the peril of life, and this should stimulate us to greater devotion and faithfulness. Listen to old Condé, when his king told him to choose between three things—either to hear Mass, to go to death, or imprisonment. He said, "With regard to the first, I have fully determined never to hear it; and as to the second and third course, I am perfectly indifferent, and I leave the choice to your majesty." Brave bold words, the outcome of a true faith. Oh, it does us good to listen to such words, and to contemplate such devotion. Such loyalty to Christ thrills us. We want, all want more of the heroic spirit. The world wants *men*, not weaklings, and Christ and His Church call now for such loyal, manly souls.—*Ibid.*

[17968] An incident has been recorded concerning that great Italian patriot who did so much towards promoting the unity of the Peninsula, which shows his kindness of heart, readiness of action, and persistency of purpose, and explains, in a measure, the secret of the power he had gained over others. One evening in 1861, as the patriot was returning home, he met a Sardinian shepherd lamenting the loss of a lamb out of his flock. The soldier patriot at once turned to his staff, and announced his intention of scouring the mountain in search of the lamb. A grand expedition was immediately organized—lanterns were brought, and old officers of many a campaign started off, full of zeal, to seek for the fugitive. But no lamb was found; and the soldiers were ordered to their beds. The next morning the general's attendant found him in bed fast asleep. He was surprised at this, for the general was always up before anybody else. The attendant went off softly, and returned in half an hour—still the general slept. After another delay, the attendant thought he was doing his duty by awakening his master. The general rubbed his eyes, and his attendant rubbed his too when he saw the old warrior take from under the covering the lost lamb, bidding him convey it to the shepherd. The head of the forces at least had kept up the

search, and, when all others abandoned it, was successful. Now, what would not be the effect on the soldiers and officers of such persistency on the part of so great a man? What ought not to be the effect of Christ's love upon us? Surely to Him we ought to give our truest gratitude and most loyal service. Christ seeks us, and values our devotion, even as David valued that of those who were numbered among his brave ones. We can be faithful and courageous; we should fight hard against the temptation to postpone or to put aside the question as to whether we will serve Him thus fully or not. Break through the ranks of opposition as Jashobeam, Eleazar, and Shammah. As Christians we should be ready to obey our Master's slightest desire, and should stand before the Saviour consciously and absolutely consecrated, even as the three brave men were to David.—*Ibid.*

2 The example of their love and courage directs attention to the far greater display of these virtues by Christ.

[17969] Let us not speak of what we have done, but of what has been done for us by our King. He has broken through the ranks of evil, to gain for us the water of life. In solid phalanx the evil powers stood around His cross, but He penetrated the dark hosts, and secured for us the waters of salvation. He opened the fountain also for the washing away of sin and all uncleanness. We know not the cost, because we know so little of the nature of Him who, though He was rich, for our sakes "became poor." None could measure the depth of the sufferings of the Redeemer, the anguish of soul arising not only from man's rejection and sin, but the hiding of the Father's face. But He was willing to endure all that He might effect His purpose of love and save that which was lost.—*Ibid.*

DOEG.

I. HIS DESPICABLE CHARACTER.

1 He displayed an informer's utter selfishness.

[17970] Jonathan had revealed to David that it was not safe for him to remain near the court; so he departed and went to Nob, to Abimelech the priest, who was afraid when David made his appearance, knowing that whosoever showed kindness to him would become the object of the king's wrath: however, he acted the part of the good Samaritan towards him, and gave him the hallowed bread, as well as the sword of Goliath, which was wrapped in a cloth behind the ephod. It so happened that Doeg, an Edomite, the chiefest of the herdsmen that belonged to Saul, was present that day, having been detained before the Lord. It was by no means a congenial place for him to be in; but, inasmuch as he was a proselyte, and certain rites must be observed, he could not disobey the law

and retain his place in the service of the king. When this religious detention came to an end Doeg attended on Saul, who was very anxious to know who had befriended David his enemy. It is possible that many of those who were around him had heard that Abimelech had been kind to him, but they would not tell this to the king, well knowing his nature and the punishment which would inevitably fall on the priest. No one but Doeg would inform on the servant of the Most High. — *Preacher's Emblematory Helps.*

[17971] Saul had studied human nature to some purpose, so a bribe is suggested. This would open the lips if anything would. Then Saul said unto his servants that stood about him, "Hear now, ye Benjamites; will the son of Jesse give every one of you fields and vineyards, and make you all captains of thousands and captains of hundreds?" as if he said, "I can do that, and will do it to the man that will inform me who the friends of my foe are." The moment these words were spoken Doeg said, "I saw the son of Jesse coming to Nob, to Abimelech the son of Ahitub. And he inquired of the Lord for him, and gave him victuals, and gave him the sword of Goliath the Philistine." This was a splendid opportunity for Doeg to become rich, no longer to have any care or trouble, and he avails himself of it: he cared not what would become of David nor Abimelech, provided he could gain the favour of the king and the reward that was likely to be given for such information. Bribery has a tremendous power over unprincipled men. Nothing is too base for them to accomplish if the bribe be tempting enough. There is a certain amount of selfishness in all hearts; but the informer is ruled and governed entirely by this low principle. There is a certain class of people living to-day very much like Doeg, skulking about the household and the sanctuary to see what is going on, and who delight in giving information of the faults and shortcomings of others, thinking that they will be able to exalt themselves thereby. Selfishness withers all manly virtues, it is only as man frees himself from its power he can rise in moral worth.—*Ibid.*

2 He displayed an informer's heartless cruelty.

[17972] The cruelty of the man was sufficiently manifested when he revealed the name of the priest who had assisted David, inasmuch as he was perfectly aware that the king's vengeance would fall upon him. But his cruel nature was more clearly revealed in the execution of the priest: the servants of Saul risked their lives in disobeying, but Doeg was ready to do the work without hesitation.—*Ibid.*

[17973] Among many deeds of cruelty and bloodshed, which stain the pages of even Holy Writ, that of Doeg stands out conspicuous for its heartless savagery, when he first butchered eighty-five ecclesiastics and then put their city

to the sword, destroying women and children and cattle in his insatiable lust of murder.—*M. J.*

3 He displayed an informer's shameless want of self-respect.

[17974] Many of Saul's servants were tempted to mention some persons who were friends of David; but no one was so degraded as to turn an informer but this Doeg. Whatever might have been the political opinion of the people at the time, and whatever view they might have taken of the enmity of Saul towards his son-in-law, they honoured the priesthood, and held them in esteem on account of their office; everything connected with the sanctuary was held sacred. This fellow Doeg, however, was ready to disclose all he knew; it mattered not whether the priest would be disgraced or not, provided he could gain his own end. There are degrees in degradation; the informer seems to have reached the lowest step. He is considered the most despicable, all persons shun him; they do this for self-protection, because nothing is sacred to him; they shun him also because his character is so vile; he must have lost all self-respect before he could become a traitor.—*Preacher's Emblematory Helps.*

NABAL.

I. INTRODUCTORY.

His social position.

[17975] This man was placed by Providence in a condition to enjoy as much happiness as the world can give. David salutes him as *the man who lived in prosperity*. He was distinguished from all around him by extensive possessions, success in business, the multitude of his flocks, the number of his servants, and the grandeur of his entertainments. In addition to all this, he was highly favoured in his domestic connection. The woman whom he had chosen for his companion in life was beautiful in her person, superior in her accomplishments, sweet in temper, soft in her manners, and engaging in her address.—*Rev. J. Lathrop, D.D.*

II. HIS DOMINANT CHARACTERISTICS.

I Selfishness.

[17976] Nabal was morally bad. "He was evil in his doings. He made a feast like a king, and was very drunken. Those who accumulate wealth cannot tell who will inherit it, nor how it will be employed. Caleb saved—Nabal spent. Nabal was intensely selfish. His true character came out when David appealed to him for help. The appeal was reasonable, respectful, and seasonable; the reply was selfish and insolent. "Shall I take my bread, and my water, and my flesh, and give it unto men whom I know not?"

Selfishness is one of the greatest evils we have to contend against.—*Rev. J. Woodhouse.*

[17977] The repulse which Nabal gave to David's messengers shows him to have been of a contracted, illiberal mind. If the happiness of man consisted in the abundance of the things which he possesses, Nabal had been happy. But quite the reverse—an abundance without discretion to use it, capacity to enjoy it, and benevolence to apply it, tends only to misery. To a narrow and covetous soul it is a source of jealousy, anxiety, and fear.—*Rev. J. Lathrop, D.D.*

2 Moroseness and churlishness.

[17978] This Nabal appears to have been peculiarly fractious and troublesome in his own family. His servants, too well acquainted with his temper and manners, characterize him as such a son of Belial, that a man cannot speak to him. His wife, when she saw danger arising against the family, ventured not to speak with him on the subject. The happiness of domestic life consists most essentially in peace and harmony. The peace of a family depends on nothing so much as on the soft and easy manners, the courteous and obliging language, the smooth and placid tempers of the heads toward each other, and toward the inferior members. Government in a household is much better supported by goodness than by rigour. There is a low, grovelling familiarity, which renders a man contemptible; but to avoid this, he need not be a tyrant. Wanton severity is inconsistent with domestic authority. This may produce a fear and dread, which will operate occasionally; goodness only will inspire with that calm reverence and steady affection which are the true principles of obedience.—*Ibid.*

[17979] View the man only in regard to his social position and you would pronounce him one of the happiest of mortals. In the sequel, however, you find him quite the reverse. He stands distinguished, as much for his infamous life and miserable death, as for his worldly greatness and prosperity. If you ask, What could make so prosperous a man unhappy? the historian tells you, The man was churlish and evil in his doings. The character of the churl ascribed to Nabal is drawn at large by the prophet Isaiah (chap. xxxii. 5): "The vile person shall no more be called liberal, nor the churl said to be bountiful; for the vile person will speak villany, and his heart will work iniquity, to practise hypocrisy, and utter error against the Lord, to make empty the soul of the hungry, and he will cause the drink of the thirsty to fail. The instruments also of the churl are evil. He deviseth wicked devices to destroy the poor with lying words, even when the needy speaketh right: but the liberal deviseth liberal things, and by liberal things shall he stand."—*Ibid.*

[17980] The answer which he returned to David's polite request, discovered the savage more than the man. "Who is David? Who is the son of Jesse? There be many servants nowadays that break away every man from his master. Shall I then take my bread, and my water, and the flesh which I have killed for my shearers, and give them to men whom I know not whence they be?" Whatever allowance may be made for a harsh expression under a sudden provocation, such cool, unprovoked scurrility, such railing in return for civility, indicates a heart thoroughly vitiated and depraved. Religion requires that our speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that we be gentle to all men, courteous, and easy to be entreated.—*Ibid.*

3 Ingratitude.

[17981] Ingratitude was conspicuous in the character of Nabal. He rendered evil for good. David politely suggests the good offices which his people had done for Nabal, while his flocks were abroad in the fields. Nabal's shepherds confess the justice of the representation. "The men," say they, "were very good to us; we were not hurt, neither lacked we anything, as long as we were conversant with them in the fields, but they were a wall to us by night and by day." The smallest sense of obligation would have prompted a voluntary acknowledgment to those who had yielded him such friendly protection, at a time, too, when their necessities were urgent, and they had power to have taken with impunity whatever their occasion required. But instead of this, to reject their decent application, and revile them as a gang of runaway servants, was a striking proof of a base and ungrateful heart.—*Ibid.*

[17982] In point of fact, David had a right to a share of Nabal's profits. The harvest was in part David's harvest, for without David it never could have been reaped. The sheep were in part David's sheep, for without David not a sheep would have been spared by the marauders of the hills. Not a sheaf of corn was carried to Nabal's barn: nor a night passed in repose by Nabal's shepherds, but what told of the share of David in the saving of that sheaf, and the procurement of that repose (not the less real because it was past and unseen). The right which the soldier has by law to his pay was the right which David had by unwritten law; a right resting on the fact that his services were indispensable for the harvest.—*Rev. F. Robertson.*

4 Intemperance.

[17983] A habit which added much to the infamy of his character, and probably aggravated the ruggedness of his temper and manners, was intemperance. At the time when his wife was interposing to divert the storm which his rudeness had raised against his family, the brute himself was drunk. "He held a feast in his house, like the feast of a king; and his

heart was merry within him, for he was very drunken." The manner in which he flew on David's messengers gives reason to suspect that his spirit had already been heated.—*Rev. J. Lathrop, D.D.*

5 Cowardice.

[17984] This Nabal was as infamous for his pusillanimity as for the violence of his passions and the rudeness of his manners. When Abigail related to him David's high resentment and bloody resolution, and the manner in which she had prevented the approaching evil, "his heart died within him, and became as a stone." Such a fatal shock did the story give him, that he survived it only ten days. Though he could rail on David at a distance, in haughty and blustering language, yet he had not fortitude to meet a danger when it was coming, nor even to bear the recital of it after it was past. His soul, enfeebled by passion and intemperance, immediately sunk under the thought of calamity. A firmness to meet danger and bear adversity is seldom found in those who give indulgence to appetite and passion. "This takes away the heart." If we would be prepared for the vicissitudes of an inconstant world, we must habituate ourselves to sobriety and self-government. If we would enjoy the blessings of friendship, and the comfort of our worldly possessions, we must restrain our appetites, rectify our tempers, and rule our tongues. The greatest affluence can never make a man happy without a virtuous mind and prudent manners.—*Ibid.*

III. HIS DOOM.

1 It was death direct from the hand of God.

[17985] "The Lord smote him that he died." The same chapter contains the record of two deaths. Samuel had been devout and useful, and now they make great lamentation. Nabal had been selfish and wicked, and now they experience a feeling of relief.—*Rev. J. Woodhouse.*

2 It was preceded by no warning.

[17986] The death of Nabal was a great surprise. It was a surprise to David; to his servants; to his wife. Death is always a surprise. Even the sick cherish a secret hope that they will recover. We know that death is in the world, but we do not think he is near to us, or to those we love.—*Ibid.*

[17987] The death of Nabal was very sudden. Ten days ago he was reaping, now he is reaped: then he was full of mirth, now he is overwhelmed with misery: then he was drunk, now he is dead. He perished for his sin. He withheld bread from the perishing, and God smote him that he died. God will not let the selfish go unpunished. He speaks before He smites.—*Ibid.*

IV. HOMILETICAL REFLECTIONS.

1 The churl is a solitary and miserable man.

[17988] The man who can never give an answer mildly, nor grant a request cheerfully—who can never pass over the smallest fault without menaces, nor reward a virtuous action with his smiles—who can never speak but with stern and forbidding airs, nor reprove and advise but with rough and boisterous passion—who never can enter into easy conversation with his companion, nor invite his children to the entertainment of instructive or amusing discourse—who can show no tokens of approbation when they have endeavoured to please him, nor restrain the storm of passion if a cross accident happens—such a man, however he may be feared, cannot be revered; though he may be dreaded, he cannot be loved. . . . This man can enjoy none of the pleasures of domestic friendship—the pleasure of mingling souls, exchanging sentiments, and communicating the feelings of the heart. His state is a kind of solitude; he has free intercourse with none; and they who are compelled to be near him think their state worse than solitude, because they are in perpetual fear. Abigail, in her important adventure to pacify David's exasperated spirit, conferred with her servants rather than with her husband. From his advice she could expect no aid; and it was dangerous to speak to him.—*Rev. J. Lathrop, D.D.*

[17989] The churl incapable of doing good is more miserable in proportion to his abundance. His only enjoyment is mere animal gratification; and this is often accompanied with regret. He is vexed with perpetual suspicions of the envy and ill intentions of his neighbours. If he gives, it is with reluctance. His alms are extorted rather than bestowed. He reflects upon them with pain. He upbraids those who have received them. He accuses himself with folly and imprudence, and resolves to guard in future against such waste and misapplication. The action which in good men would be a virtue, becomes a vice in him by the evil passions which it awakens; and that which would gratify their benevolent feelings is a torment to him, by crossing the intentions of his illiberal heart.—*Ibid.*

2 That selfishness which was the root-evil of Nabal's character is an almost universal vice.

[17990] Selfishness shows itself in every period of life. In childhood, youth, old age. Selfishness shows itself in various ways in life. We see it in eating, drinking, and in dress. Selfishness shows itself in every grade of society. Among the rich and the poor; the learned and the ignorant. Who does not make gold God? It conquers poets, politicians, and priests. It degrades merchants, members, and ministers. Selfishness is everywhere. We find it in the market—buying or selling; in the palace—

dressed in purple and fine linen. Even in God's house and in God's presence we bow to the idol self—dress it; feed it; pamper it; and worship it. Selfishness is opposed to the genius of the gospel. It is contrary to the life of Christ. "He gave Himself a ransom for many." "Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for our sakes He became poor, that we, through His poverty, might be made rich."—*Rev. J. Woodhouse.*

3 The history of Nabal furnishes an instance of the impotence of mere wealth.

(1) *It cannot ensure true happiness.*

[17991] Nabal was a rich man. His house was well furnished; his table well spread; his barns well filled; his sheep and goats well fed; but his possessions did not make him happy. He was a churlish, miserable, wicked man. Riches cannot satisfy the deep cravings of the soul. Many a rich man's heart bears the same inscription that a great man had put on his tomb—"Most miserable."—*Ibid.*

(2) *It cannot command genuine respect.*

[17992] Nabal's servants despised him, and his wife apologized for his boorish manners. Rich men have followers and flatterers, but, like swallows, they are only seen in the summer. There are loungers in every court; drones in every hive. Riches cannot purchase genuine respect; cannot ensure sincere love.—*Ibid.*

(3) *It cannot impart true greatness.*

[17993] Nabal was called great; he looked great; he probably felt great, but his heart was shrunk and shrivelled. True greatness does not consist in what a man has, but in what he is. Greatness is not measured by gold, but by goodness: not by the length of a man's purse, but by the depth of his piety. An artist's eye is worth more than a king's pictures; a poet's mind is more than a prince's gold. Nabal was a rich man. He had bread, cattle, land, but he had a miser's heart and a miserable home.—*Ibid.*

4 Nabal the churl is an example of the baseness of ingratitude.

[17994] The happiness of mankind depends much on reciprocal courtesies. It is often in our power to render essential services to our neighbours without sensible inconvenience to ourselves. A liberal mind rejoices in such opportunities. Who of us on recollection will not find that he has frequently received unsolicited benefits from those around him? We easily feel and remember an injury. But the kindnesses done us are more numerous than the injuries. Men seldom offer a direct intentional wrong, unless they are pressed with great temptations, or impelled by accidental passions, and these usually are transient. But there are a thousand little offices of goodness, which they voluntarily perform because they come naturally in their way, and fall in with the common feelings of humanity. It would tend much to

cement friendship, unite neighbours, and preserve the peace of society, if instead of seriously noticing every trivial and casual wrong, we should acknowledge and requite the good turns which are done us. The man who finds that his goodness is well accepted feels himself repaid, and is encouraged to repeat it. But indifference and inattention in those whom he has studied to oblige, mortifies his feelings, and damps the ardour of his benevolence. Be sure, if a substantial kindness is done us in the time of our calamity, to neglect the benefactor in the day of our prosperity and his misfortune is a degree of ingratitude not easy to be borne. Indifference, in such a case, wounds more deeply than a positive injury in another; a positive injury in this case will wound more deeply still. Nabal's ingratitude was provoking; the scurrility added to it was intolerable.—*Rev. J. Lathrop, D.D.*

BARZILLAI.

I. A MODEL PHILANTHROPIST.

[17995] David, during the rebellion of his son Absalom, had to leave Jerusalem, and, with the faithful followers who still remained true to his cause, crossed the river Jordan with all haste, lest they should be overtaken by the army of Absalom. When they had marched as far as Mahanaim, they were much fatigued, and their supplies had become exhausted. A few persons who lived in the neighbourhood had compassion on them, and made all the provision they could to satisfy their hunger. "And it came to pass, when David was come to Mahanaim, that Shobi the son of Nahash of Rabbah of the children of Ammon, and Machir the son of Ammiel of Lo-debar, and Barzillai the Gileadite of Rogelim, brought beds, and basins, and earthen vessels, and wheat, and barley, and flour, and parched corn, and beans, and lentils, and parched pulse and honey, and butter, and sheep, and cheese of kine, for David, and for the people that were with him, to eat; for they said, "The people is hungry, and weary, and thirsty in the wilderness." That is the first thing we hear recorded concerning Barzillai. After the rebellion had been stamped out, the people demanded the return of David to Jerusalem; and among those who formed the escort of the king on his return, we find that Barzillai, aged as he was, had come down from Rogelim to conduct the king over Jordan. David invited him to accompany him all the way, and to make his home with him at Jerusalem. This invitation was gracefully declined, assigning as a reason his old age; and after going a little beyond the banks of the Jordan, he returned to his home to die in peace. This brief record proves him to be a true philanthropist.—*Anon.*

1 He manifested his philanthropy in the right spirit.

[17996] This man never dreamed of being paid for what he did to David, "The people are hungry, and weary, and thirsty in the wilderness," was the only consideration which prompted the deed. True sympathy needs only the sight of misery and distress, activity instantaneously will follow. There was a splendid opportunity for Barzillai to be lionized at Jerusalem, as the great philanthropist who had come to the aid of the king and his army when in distress; but he modestly retired to his home, with a thankful heart to God for having enabled him to do his duty towards his fellow-creatures. It may be that there is a little overmuch anxiety to see our names flourish in missionary reports and on relief-fund lists. Doubtless many would be ashamed to see this and the other subscription list in the daily paper, as they leisurely sip their coffee in the morning, without a respectable sum after their names; so the money is wrung out of their pockets, not that they care for the poor any more than Judas did of old. However, we are confident that in no age of the world has genuine philanthropy been manifested to a larger extent than in the present: larger amounts are contributed, and greater personal efforts are made to redeem man from the grasp of vice, disease, and want, than in any other period in the world's history. Thank Heaven, there is a large and noble army of self-sacrificing men and women battling bravely every day with the enemy in the courts and alleys of our cities and large towns, who have not the remotest idea of having their names trumpeted before men; neither have they ever dreamt of being invited to a king's table. They do it from love to the great King, "Go, and do thou likewise."—*Ibid.*

2 He manifested his philanthropy in the right season.

[17997] A few months before such a gift as that presented by Barzillai would not have been despised perhaps, but it would not be valued as it was in the wilderness. Now, David and his men were in need of rest and food, the gift therefore was exceedingly precious. It is often the case, that many philanthropic efforts are useless, inasmuch as they are bestowed on persons utterly worthless, and because they are not made at the proper time. When a man is really in need, then is the time to help him. . . . It is too late to sympathize with that poor widow who has been driven out of the room she occupied in the court not so very far from your house, when she is found one morning on your doorstep frozen to death. A neighbour has spent

his life in sin; you had plenty of opportunities to do him spiritual good, but never thought of it, till one day you heard he was dying; then you ran to see him, and tried to lead him to Christ. The man, however, had too much to do to fight with death to take any notice of your exhortations and to join in your prayers. Your philanthropy was too late. The greatest Philanthropist that the world ever saw died in due season for the ungodly.—*Ibid.*

3 He manifested his philanthropy in the right way.

[17998] Sympathy is good, sometimes better than gold, though it be expressed only in words. There is a vast amount of spurious sympathy in society. You have probably met with a person who looked very sad when you related to him the tale of the manner in which your mutual friend had been ruined in his business, and who gave expression to his sorrow in the stereotyped phrase, "I can't tell how deeply I sympathize with him," at the same time, though enormously rich, would permit the friend and his family to remain in want, without lifting a finger to help them. There is a certain amount of sacrifice in philanthropy of the right stamp. The man who deviseth wise schemes for the good of the race is worthy of the philanthropic crown, if the thinking has cost him an expenditure of brain-power, though he may not be in a position to give a penny towards the execution of his plans. The world is more indebted to the sacrifice of brain-power and to the liberal expenditure of mind-wealth than many are ready to acknowledge. Barzillai could not be content to go out to the camp, and return to his home sighing over the sad condition of the king and his followers; he did his utmost to supply their need, and gave liberally of his substance to keep them from hunger and perhaps starvation. Alas! how many do we see rolling in wealth, spending their thousands annually upon luxuries, whilst scores within a few hundred yards from their mansions are in the greatest poverty, and some of them even die of want. At missionary and other public meetings not a few sigh over the degraded condition of the heathen abroad and at home, who are ready to pray by the hour for their conversion, and at the same time take the greatest possible care to select the smallest coin from their heavy purses when the collection is made. The cross is the noblest emblem of philanthropy in the universe: it is only as we try to imitate Christ in giving ourselves away for the temporal and eternal good of others, can we understand the deepest meaning of the term philanthropy.—*Ibid.*

PART B. (Continued.)

JEWISH ERA.

(Continued.)

REHOBAM.

I. INTRODUCTION.

He came to the throne at a crisis in the political history of Israel.

[17999] Breakers ahead!—the fearful sound, which is no sooner raised by the outlook, and passed along the deck, than the wheel flies round, and the ship's head, if haply not too late, is put on the other tack—this was the cry Rehoboam might have heard when his father's death called him to the helm. Like the flash of the snowy foam described through the pitchy night, and the hoarse roar that rises above rattling cordage, creaking timbers, and howling wind, as the waves thunder on the reef, there were many things in the condition of Israel at the time of Rehoboam's succession to warn and to alarm him. A crisis had arrived, requiring prompt but prudent action, consummate skill, a cool head, and a firm hand in him who would extricate the State and save the throne.—*Rev. T. Guthrie, D.D.*

[18000] A great political crisis had arrived. The peril was imminent. The nation was on the verge of rebellion; nor could a rebellion be averted but by the most skilful and, indeed, delicate management. The king stood above a magazine of combustibles. An angry word or look, and the spark falls which fires them, and shakes his kingdom to its foundations—shatters it in pieces; the ship hangs on a mountain wave, close by the thundering reef—a wrong turn of the helm, and she goes crashing on the rocks, to be scattered in fragments on the deep. A difficult post Rehoboam's, and to no man was the saying ever less appropriate than to him, the right man in the right place.—*Ibid.*

[18001] The way to the disruption was paved in his father's lifetime. The closing years of Solomon's reign were oppressive, and the people had grown restive and unquiet under the burdens that rested heavily upon them. A change in the administration offered an inviting oppor-

tunity to seek redress of their grievances. The extensive and costly erections, and the sumptuousness of his vast domestic establishment, had not been met by the gains of his widespread and lucrative commerce. Taxes had impoverished the country and weighed heavily on its people. Now that the charm of his great name was withdrawn the smothered discontent burst forth and loudly demanded a hearing. The nation rose up with one voice to ask for a reduction of their burdens and a relief of their grievances, with Jeroboam at their head, who was smarting under a sense of wrongs of his own, as well as swelling with the ambition engendered by a consciousness of ability.—*Rev. R. Hallam, D.D.*

II. HIS FOLLY.

- 1 It was strikingly evinced in his reply to Jeroboam in accordance with the young men's counsel.

[18002] Illustrating the adage, "Whom God wishes to destroy He first makes mad," Rehoboam rejected the counsel of the wise old men who had stood by the throne and sharpened their own wits on the wisdom of his father Solomon. A man at this time of forty years, he might have known that, to use a common proverb, a grey head is not found on young shoulders, yet in this crisis of his affairs he turns his back on aged councillors to follow the advice of rash and inexperienced youths—of his own gay companions, the ministers of his guilty pleasures and flatterers of his person. It was very foolish to seek their advice, but it was the height of folly, sheer madness, to take it, and at their suggestion lash the people into rebellion with words like these, "My father made your yoke heavy, and I will add to your yoke; my father chastened you with whips, but I will chasten you with scorpions." Adding insult to injury, to injustice haughty and intolerable insolence, this was not to drop a spark, but cast a blazing torch into a magazine of combustibles. With the suddenness and violence

of an explosion the pent-up indignation of years burst forth into open revolt. Struck with terror at his own work, Rehoboam leaps from his throne; and as he flies the tumult, hears the knell of his kingdom ringing in the cry, "To your tents, O Israel! what portion have we in David? neither have we inheritance in the son of Jesse."—*Rev. T. Guthrie, D.D.*

2 It was still further displayed in his selection of so unpopular a messenger as Adoram.

[18003] It seems hardly possible for Rehoboam to do anything more unwise. Yet his next act is one where he surpasses himself—like the capital on a pillar, it crowns his folly. Though it might be shutting the door when the steed is stolen, or the desperate action of one who grasps, as he drowns, at a passing straw, he will make an effort to recall the people to their obedience; he will send a man to reason with rebellion, and talk them out of their mutinous spirit. . . . But like a man demented, without a glimmering of common sense, he pitches on one, of all his court, the most unsuitable for his purpose. A messenger from the king! This cry lays a momentary arrest on the revolt, and when the expectation of the people is excited, who steps out to address them but Adoram—the officer that had exacted the taxes which drove them into rebellion. At the sight of this obnoxious tool of despotism, the object of their bitterest hatred, their rage knew no bounds. They rose, they fell on the unhappy man, they stoned the life out of him. Rehoboam has but made bad worse. Panic-struck at the news, he throws himself into his chariot to fly to Jerusalem, a sadder but not a wiser man, to prove by his future career that it is not the fear of man, but of God, which is the beginning of wisdom, and that, as his own father said, "though thou shouldst bray a fool in a mortar among wheat with a pestle, yet will not his foolishness depart from him."—*Ibid.*

3 It was also exemplified in his following his father's example in regard to polygamy and idolatry, as a judgment for which the dismemberment of the kingdom had already taken place.

[18004] Were it needful still further to justify the opprobrious epithet [of fool] we have attached to his name, we should find ample materials in his conduct on other occasions than the revolt. He might have seen, indeed he must have known, for instance, that the dismemberment of the kingdom was a judgment brought on his father's house for his father's sins. Yet, regardless of this, and reckless of consequences, moved neither by the injuries which Solomon produced nor by the repentance he expressed for his crimes, Rehoboam repeated them. "He desired," it is said, "many wives;" and had no fewer than eighteen, besides sixty concubines. In point of numbers, these, no doubt, fell far short of his father's. Yet, like the negative virtues which Pharisees boast of, like the

superiority some claim over such as have gone greater lengths than themselves in vice, this was probably due more to the want of way than the want of will, to the restraints of circumstances rather than the restraints of conscience. But however that may be, he set an example of immorality before the nation which, like the water that, falling on mountain-tops, descends through fissures into the valleys, was sure to find its way through the different grades down to the lowest strata of society—carrying corruption of morals and manners along with it.—*Ibid.*

[18005] Rehoboam had been a witness of the calamities idolatry had brought on his father and his father's house, and he had had experience also of the blessings which attend the steps and swell the train of piety. Properly affected by these circumstances he promised for a time to be another and a better man, but as a strong and impetuous river, though diverted for a while into a new, returns to its old channel, so he relapsed into idolatry. Nor did he sin alone. As it happens with crew and boats and cargo and floating wreck when some mighty ship sinks in the deep, this man whom no adversity could improve, nor experience warn, nor the most painful losses educate, dragged down the nation with himself.—*Ibid.*

4 It was again exhibited in his failing to take advantage of the influx of pious men into his kingdom when the calves were set up by Jeroboam.

[18006] When Jeroboam, his rival, set up the calves at Dan and Bethel a party in Israel taught future ages, the ministers and members of churches in our own times, what part they should act when earthly interests and religious principles conflict. Not the priests only, but the pious people of the land had to choose between abandoning their faith or their fortunes; between deserting their God or deserting their homes. Some, as will always happen in such circumstances, may have proved renegades, and broken down in the day of trial; but vast multitudes from her mountains, plains, and shores, poured out of Israel to settle, far from their sweet homes and paternal fields, in the land of Judah. This influx of piety, like that of the Huguenots on our own land, or of the suffering Protestants who fled from the Low Countries to escape the bloody cruelties of Philip and the Duke of Alva, brought a blessing with it to Judah; and under this holy influence and God's chastening hand, the conduct of Rehoboam and the fortunes of his kingdom underwent, though but a temporary, a manifest improvement. After relating how "the priests and Levites that were in all Israel resorted to Rehoboam out of all their coasts;" and how "the Levites left their suburbs and their possessions, and came to Judah and Jerusalem;" and how, following them—the natural leaders of the people in matters belonging to religion—"out of all the tribes of Israel such as set their hearts

to seek the Lord God of Israel came to Jerusalem;” the sacred historian tells us, “so they strengthened the kingdom of Judah, and made Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, strong.” But, alas, with no permanent result. In his prosperity, Rehoboam, like many others, forgot the lessons of adversity. Jeshurun waxed fat and kicked. The dog returned to his vomit—the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire.—*Ibid.*

- 5 It was invariably manifested, in spite of his having had for a father the wisest of men.

[18007] Rehoboam's, perhaps, is the most remarkable instance the world ever saw of this, that, whatever may be hereditary—titles, estates, health, or disease—wisdom, like saving grace, is not. Some of the best men have had the worst sons; and in Solomon we have the wisest man father of the greatest fool that ever verified the words, “they heap up riches, and know not who shall gather them,” wasted a fortune, or lost a throne. We have only to read his history to see how fully he realized those gloomy forebodings which have marred the pleasure many expected from their accumulated gains, and amid which the sun of Solomon set in clouds and darkness. “I hated,” he says, “all the labour which I had taken under the sun, because I should leave it unto the man that shall be after me, and who knoweth whether he shall be a wise man or a fool?”—*Ibid.*

III. CAUSES OF HIS FOLLY.

- 1 The unrestrained freedom allowed, and the pernicious examples and society afforded to his childhood and youth.

[18008] As to the causes which will account for Rehoboam's career of sin and folly, many may be adduced. It was his misfortune, as it has been that of others, to be the son of one whose public engagements left him little time to bestow on the home education of his family. It was also his fate, and, I may add, the same misfortune to him that it has been to others, to be born to wealth and power, and never to know in obscurity, in hardships, in early struggles, and in straitened circumstances, what it was to bear the yoke in his youth. A greater misfortune still, Rehoboam did not find in the court of his father a school, nor in his example a pattern of morals. Through his position and his prospects as heir-apparent to the throne he was exposed, in the society of parasites, flatterers, and gay companions, to a thousand dangers and seductive influences.—*Ibid.*

- 2 The alien nationality and heathen religion of his mother.

[18009] There is one short sentence in Rehoboam's history which supplies the key, more perhaps than anything else, to his sin and folly—“his mother's name was Naamah, an Ammonitess.” She was by blood an alien, and by

religion a heathen. Unhappy in many things, but unhappiest most in such a mother, he begins to be regarded more with pity than astonishment. The letters written on water are hardly formed when they are filled up: on the other hand, the finger that traces them on stone leaves no visible impression on its indurated surface; but plastic clay, midway between what is hard and soft, offers to the gentlest finger a substance which both receives and retains an impression. Such is the heart that youth and childhood offer to a mother's influences. Hence her power to mould, for good or evil, the character of her children; and hence the gratitude they owe to God who have had a mother that taught their little feet to walk in the ways of His commandments, and encouraged their feeble efforts to rise to heaven on the wings of prayer—at the piety of whose bosom their own was kindled. “I had a bad mother,” explains many a wreck. “I had a good mother,” is the way many account, under God, for their success in this life, and their salvation in the next.—*Ibid.*

[18010] Of this Ammonitish idolater Rehoboam was the offspring. Rarely does a good child come from a bad mother, and it has been well remarked that among the kings there is scarcely one known to be the son of a foreign, and consequently idolatrous, mother, who did not fall into idolatry.—*Rev. R. Hallam, D.D.*

[18011] To his heathen mother—one of the outlandish women tolerated in the idolatry of her native country by Solomon, like his other foreign wives whom policy or an affectation of grandeur induced him to assemble at Jerusalem in the dark decline of his life—and to her influence in his training, and indeed to the bad atmosphere of his father's court, thus fatally tainted in the later days of that splendid reign, his faults may reasonably be in no small degree attributed.—*Ibid.*

IV. HIS SUBSEQUENT SHREWDNESS AND SAGACITY.

[18012] The sacred historian says of him, “that he did wisely, and that under his rule in Judah things went well.” His policy drew almost all the priesthood into his dominions of the nation, and brought in large accessions of population from the territory of the revolted tribes; so that though his country, consisting only of the two southern tribes, was inferior in extent, and yet more in fertility and natural resources, it matched well the sister kingdom in the north, and during his reign and the reigns of his successors, he successfully warded off its enmity. “He fortified the strongholds and put captains in them, and store of victual, and of oil and wine. And in every several city he put shields and spears, and made them exceeding strong, having Judah and Benjamin on his side.” So much he did for external defence. And to preserve internal order and tranquillity,

and to prevent contention among his numerous sons—for it is recorded of him that he had twenty-eight—as well as to avert the danger of a disputed succession after his death, he separated them, “and dispersed all his children throughout all the countries of Judah and Benjamin, unto every fenced city: and he gave them victual in abundance.” Surely, here was some good statesmanship and political sagacity. And thus it appears that Rehoboam, through the great folly with which he started in his public career, has left on his fame an indelible blot—was not altogether a simpleton or a trifler, nor altogether unworthy of his birth as the son of the wise King Solomon.—*Ibid.*

[18013] It has been remarked as an evidence of shrewdness and sagacious forecast in this king that the fortresses which he built “were not, as might have been at first sight expected, on the northern frontier against the rival kingdom,” in the quarter where the danger was immediate and manifest, but on the southern and western side of the country toward Egypt, whence circumstances having broken the bond which united the house of David with the royal family of Egypt by a matrimonial tie, and brought about an alliance of that power with the new king of the new kingdom, a far more formidable danger was not unreasonably apprehended. This was good warlike strategy.—*Ibid.*

V. A MODERN CONTRAST TO REHOBOAM.

[18014] Napoleon, when but a distinguished officer of the French army, was ordered to meet a mob in the streets of Paris, and disperse them. At that time the slimness of his form corresponded to the smallness of his stature. As he advanced with troops and two or three cannon on the scene, the roar of the suffering and ferocious multitude announced their approach; and at a turn of the narrow street they came pouring down like an avalanche, that, uprooting trees and sweeping houses from their foundations, descends thundering into the valley. Ordering his guns to the front, he halted; and, struck by his formidable front and determined attitude, so did they. Averse to shed the blood of citizens, he began to parley with them. Whereupon a woman of fierce visage and enormous size stepped out—upbraiding him and his fellow-soldiers as living on the fat of the land, while she and her industrious compatriots were at the point of starving. With the promptitude that seizes the moment, and won him afterwards many a hard-fought field, he stepped out too; and placing his spare, tiny form beside that mountain of flesh, he addressed her companions, saying, “I appeal to you, my friends, whether this good lady or I look most like starving?” The effect was electric. The humour and tact of the reply carried the mob as by a *coup de main*; peals of laughter succeeded to rage; and both powder and blood were cleverly saved by a stroke of humour, and the people dispersed to

their homes in peace. There Napoleon was the right man in the right place: not here the son of Solomon. The first poured oil on the stormy waters, the second oil on a burning fire.—*Rev. T. Guthrie, D.D.*

VI. HOMILETICAL REFLECTIONS.

1 The folly of Rehoboam bids us not despise the counsel of the wise and experienced.

[18015] Counsel is good; any man that thinks he does not need it is a fool or worse. “Seest thou a man that is wise in his own conceit? there is more hope of a fool than of him.” Counsel in order to be good must come from a reliable source, a source entitled to respect and confidence, where there is information, where there is integrity, where there is honesty of purpose, where there is unselfish and unbiassed regard to truth and to our real good. Such counsel may not always be palatable, not such as we like or hope for, but in the end we shall either be thankful that we followed it or wish that we had. “He that rebuketh a man shall often find more favour than he that flattereth with his lips.” There is little doubt that Rehoboam soon thought better of his father’s old friends than of his own favourite companions. To go to another to think for us, simply because we are too indolent to think for ourselves, or wish to throw off the responsibility of deciding by quoting a name, is not wisdom. Nor is it wisdom to ask another’s opinion, simply for the purpose of being confirmed in some purpose of our own, to which we are strongly inclined, or on which we are determined already, and pick out our advisers with reference to that result. Very likely this was Rehoboam’s case. He did not wish to diminish his expenses, or curtail anything of his father’s luxury, and he was predisposed in favour of opinions that would sustain him in this disinclination. “The wish was father to the thought.” The previous bias gave a weight to the counsel which it had not in itself. We are prone to think that wise which we like.—*Rev. R. Hallam, D.D.*

2 The folly of Rehoboam teaches the irreparable mischief of a wrong choice.

[18016] When Rehoboam preferred the advice of the young men he took a step which he could never afterwards retrace, whose mischief admitted of no remedy. Seventeen years he lived and reigned, but he did nothing toward retrieving his mistake. He could not get back his lost dominions, he could not recover his alienated people. He could never be king of Israel. Another bore that title. Jeroboam dwelt in Shechem, the beautiful home of his fathers, and from Bethel, almost in sight of his capital, the calf challenged its rival on Mount Zion, and all because of a determination formed perhaps in an instant, and of words which it took but a moment to utter. There are crises in the lives of nations and of men on which their future

course and character depend, and they are usually compressed into very narrow limits. A moment, and it is an even chance whether we take one course or another; another moment, and the decision is made which can never be reversed, or its consequences averted.—*Ibid.*

[18017] We cannot go back to the point of divergence and revise the determination. It is made and cannot be unmade. We must accept the life it entails upon us, and make the best of it that we can. Such crises run all through life, but they are especially important when the young are setting out on their course of independent action, during their path in life, or when some serious change in our condition is placed before us. Then a step taken can never be taken back; and if it be a wrong step, to the end of our life we must vainly sigh, Oh that I had not done this! Oh that I had done that! But Esau's tears would not bring back his birthright, and ours will not. Acts are solemn things, specially acts in momentous junctures. And yet how carelessly men act, with how little reflection or forethought, on a momentary impulse, in obedience to a passing thought, a sudden inclination or desire! Life is too serious a thing for men to treat it so heedlessly. Act when you are called to act—and act oft-times you must, there is no alternative—with deliberation, with calmness, with such wise calculation as you can command, with such judicious counsel as you can call to your aid, above all looking to God by earnest prayer. One of our Lord's titles is "Counsellor." "If any man lack wisdom let him ask of God, who giveth to every man liberally, and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him."—*Ibid.*

3 The folly of Rehoboam emphasizes the need of heartfelt religion.

[18018] No reformation of manners can be relied on which does not spring from a change of heart. It was with Rehoboam and his country according to the parable, "When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he saith, I will return unto my house from whence I came out; and when he is come he findeth it empty, swept, and garnished: then goeth he, and taketh with himself seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in, and dwell there; and the last state of that man is worse than the first." This case of Rehoboam is by no means singular; to be regarded as exceptional or abnormal. In many others who for a while seemed reformed, the last state has proved worse than the first. They have left the austerities of Lent to plunge into the excesses of a carnival. Such cases are not without their lessons; they teach us to make sure of a true interest in Jesus Christ—to seek a new heart. Without that no change of manners contains the element of permanence; and thus they who maintain the most decent exterior have as much need as the vilest sinner to remember these solemn words, "Verily, verily," saith our Lord, "except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."—*Rev. T. Guthrie, D.D.*

[18019] Rehoboam had no true religion. He was the maintainer, to be sure, of God's true worship, in opposition to the idolatrous form into which Jeroboam debased it, and he is not directly called an idolater anywhere. For the first three years of his reign his people "walked in the way of David and of Solomon," and doubtless he walked in it with them. But when he had established the kingdom, and had strengthened himself, he forsook the law of the Lord, and all Israel with him; and it is distinctly said of him that "he did evil because he prepared not his heart to seek God." His "heart was not right in the sight of God," and without this all was "sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal." There was no religion of the heart; and without this, formality, ritualism, orthodoxy, exact definitions of faith, solemn respect for sacraments, zealous defence and assertion of the truth against errorists, schismatics, and unbelievers avail nothing. They may deceive the man. He may think he is religious. The Athenians, St. Paul said, were very religious. So they were in a sense. The Pharisees were the religious party of our Lord's day, and yet he called them a "generation of vipers." The great question is not whether you come here, and are decorous in your worship, and go to the Lord's Table, and give alms of your goods, and maintain a reputable conversation among men; but whether you are new creatures in Christ Jesus, whether as lost sinners you have come in faith and penitence to His cross for pardon, whether in humility and earnestness you are seeking continually the Spirit of Christ to dwell in you and make you alive unto God, and whether that blessed work is begun and going on in your souls which in its issue will make you meet for glory. Holiness in an *inward* thing, for which nothing outward can be a substitute, and without holiness no man shall see the Lord.—*Rev. R. Hullam, D.D.*

ABIJAH.

I. CHARACTER OF HIS RELIGION.

It was uncertain and ambiguous, being the outcome of a divided heart.

[18020] There was little in his short reign of importance to record; but there was in it one memorable incident, and in this he manifested manly heroism, and an appearance certainly of religious faith, whatever may have been his religious character. . . . An exigency arose which called into action the religious convictions of his mind, and they acted for the time with vigour and success. Abijah had inherited the war with Jeroboam along with his father's throne, as we have seen. It seems to have become, indeed, on the part of Abijah's kingdom, a war of self-defence. Jeroboam, not content with dominion

over the ten tribes, aimed to reduce the remaining two under his sceptre, to exterminate the family of David, and rear on the ruins of the true Mosaic economy the worship of the calves as the genuine symbols of the God of Israel. It was a struggle for existence, a strife to determine whether God's chosen people should be given up to apostatize from Him, and an idolatrous and insolent schism be allowed to swallow up and appropriate to itself the Church of God; and it was Abijah's lot, with his crude and imperfect religious ideas, to be the Church's champion in the crisis, and lead the sacramental host of God's elect, in its battle with sin, Satan, and death. And it is recorded to his honour, that he rose to the demands of the occasion, and entering into the spirit of his position for the time without reserve, became not only the valiant leader, but the victorious deliverer of his people. Abijah set the battle in array with an army of valiant men of war, even four hundred thousand chosen men; Jeroboam also set the battle in array against him with eight hundred thousand chosen men, being mighty men of valour. The numbers are so enormous, that it has been supposed that some error has crept into the text at some time in the process of transcription. There were at any rate huge masses of men, and in their dread arbitrament the fate of the Church stood trembling. It made Abijah religious for the occasion. The better convictions of his soul gained the mastery, and swayed over him a temporary control. To inspirit his troops for the fight, he addressed their adversaries with words of noble eloquence.—*Ibid.*

[18021] This brilliant achievement is but an episode or interlude in his life, the exception and not the general stamp of his conduct. And so, though it stands recorded of him that "he waxed mighty," and had many wives and numerous children, the summary of his life and reign, in the infallible words of the Holy Ghost, is only this, "that he walked in the sins of his father," and "his heart was not perfect," not upright, not consistent and harmonious with the Lord his God.—*Ibid.*

[18022] He made the old attempt to serve two masters, which no amount of failure will ever persuade men to forego. He would fain combine the service of Jehovah with his mother's ancestral heathenism, and side by side maintain the worship of God on Mount Zion, and the obscene filthy rites of a pagan idol on some neighbouring eminence, and thus be like the remnant of the ten tribes in a later age who "feared the Lord and served other gods." The result was a mongrel religion without cohesion or consistency. . . . His was not a perfect heart, but a heart weakened and dissipated by a double allegiance. The powers of his heart were not united to fear God's name, but scattered and confused in the vicious compromise of an attempt to get off with a half service.—*Ibid.*

II. HOMILETICAL HINTS.

I The case of Abijah teaches the worthlessness of mere occasional religion.

[18023] It follows in the way of warning from the case of Abijah, that religious belief and zeal, operating irregularly and upon occasions, and going out then into correspondent words and acts, may not be religion, and that they may not secure God's favour, nor the salvation of the soul. True religion is a principle that seasons the whole life, and puts away all forms of wickedness, and works equably and habitually in all the varying conditions and occasions of our earthly being. It will not be the companion of an idolatry, or divide the possession of a man with the world and the devil, and only be allowed to assert its supremacy, and speak out in full free tones in special emergencies. Such seems to have been Abijah's religion, and herein it proves its spuriousness, and bids us to take warning. There is much religion of this sort now. At times it is very specious. It speaks now and then loudly and positively, and acts energetically, and by its demonstrations of fervour quite puts to shame quieter piety. But at ordinary times it is languid and lukewarm, puts on very dubious appearances, gives few signs of interest and activity, and is so mixed up with different descriptions of worldliness and habits of unsanctified indulgence, if not flagrant sin, that it affords small evidence of life and reality.—*Ibid.*

[18024] It is to be feared that on no better grounds than Abijah possessed, not a few rest their pretensions to a religious character, and whatever hope they have of attaining eternal life. They are religious at times, and then perhaps very religious, in some great exigencies, when called to act some important part or fill some important position, or under the contagion of sympathy, when contact with others kindles the smouldering spark of religious feeling into brightness. But at other times they are indevout and careless, they countenance the idolatries of the world by bestowing upon them no marks of disapproval, and are themselves idolaters in their deep and undisguised immersion in temporal interest. If a host comes to do battle they will awake and put on armour; but in time of quiet they are in the enemy's camp, quite at home, there trafficking and making merry. And yet, because at times they feel religiously, and can, and in all sincerity on one occasion make a religious speech, as Abijah did, they think themselves religious, and the wide spaces of deadness and vanity which intervene are overlooked and not counted in the estimate of their spiritual condition.—*Ibid.*

[18025] With some, religious fits are the exception, and the chief part of their lives is occupied by the far broader trait of serving "divers lusts and pleasures." And all the high religious feeling and speech and action which in spots is embroidered on the dull ground of their idolatry

will never save them from being classed with those "who have their portion in this life," who "walk after the course of this world," and whose hearts are not right in the sight of the Lord. Abijah was sincere, and, for the time, outspoken and ardent in his profession of zeal for God; but his religion was a religion of occasions, and, like the early dew, it went away. Occasional religion is worthless.—*Ibid.*

2 The case of Abijah teaches the worthlessness of the religion of mere prominent place and distinguished service.

[18026] The religion of position or circumstances, whatever demonstrations in word or act it may call forth from us, may be utterly hollow, and have little relation to the things that accompany salvation beyond an outward alliance, wealth, or office, or some special conjunction of circumstances which bring us into prominent place in the things of God, while yet our hearts remain unchanged and unsanctified, and many motives beside a living faith may make us bear ourselves well in our station. Abijah on Mount Zemaraim, fighting for God nobly and successfully, and yet setting up his idols in his heart, is a solemn and profitable object of contemplation for us. A large giver may not be saved, a ready talker may not be saved, ministers may not be saved, nor wise and able champions of the faith, nor liberal and active laymen. There is no buying heaven in this way. We must put away our idols and give our hearts truly to God, and render to Him a whole, a true-hearted, an undivided service. There must be no Queen Maachah, whose idols we countenance and help her to serve. The religion of place is worth nothing.—*Ibid.*

[18027] We are admonished in the case of Abijah that prominent place and distinguished service in the Church of God are not saving religion. These he had very strikingly, and yet he walked in his father's wicked way, and his heart was not perfect, not sound and whole toward the God of Israel. He was the chief person in the Church by virtue of his kingly dignity; and in the hour of her jeopardy he did exploits, and accomplished her deliverance marvellously. Yet, *in* it, he was not *of* it, but paid homage to idols, and his heart was not right in the sight of God. We are not let into Abijah's thoughts, but we can fancy that the memory of his great act dwelt much in his mind during the residue of his life, and went far to persuade him that it would be well with him at the last. Such delusions, it is to be feared, are not uncommon. The accident of birth, as men say, had made him king of Israel. The honours of David's line were concentrated in his person. He was the highest in rank and the mightiest in power of any man in the nation, the nation that was the Church of God. He had a pride in the national religion, though he suffered it to be sadly debased and alloyed in himself and in his people. To defend it when assaulted was the instinct of his birth. The honour of a king and

the patriotism of an Israelite required it at his hands, and he met the call bravely and cheerfully. Not David before Goliath, or Judas Maccabeus against the host of Epiphanes, were heartier or more resolute. And yet, this religion for which he was fighting, and uttering bold and eloquent words, had no vital hold upon his soul.—*Ibid.*

ASA.

I. HIS GENERAL CHARACTER.

He was prudent and pious, and "his heart was perfect with God all his days."

[18028] Asa is, in the main, commended in the Scriptures. As soon as he ascended the throne of his fathers he began a vigorous reformation of abuses, overthrew the idol altars, restored in every place of his dominions the worship of Jehovah, and repaired the fenced cities. In consequence of such pious and prudent conduct, according to the promise of the Lord "the land had rest." This peace, however, was at length interrupted by the appearance on his borders of Zerah, the Ethiopian, with a host of a thousand thousand, and three hundred chariots. In this extremity, as might have been expected from Asa's previous conduct, he called upon the Lord for assistance with great earnestness of spirit and a strong faith. . . . The Lord heard his prayer; and the Ethiopians were destroyed before the Lord and before his host. After this interruption Asa resumed, under the directions of the prophet Azariah, his measures of pious reform, doing now for that part of Israel which the recent war had thrown into his hands what he had done before for his own hereditary kingdom. Not that he did all that he ought to have done; for the high places, that is, the altars which were usually on hill-tops, were not, at least all of them, taken away in Israel. Nevertheless the heart of Asa, we are told, was perfect all his days; *i.e.*, though in the midst of many errors he honestly sought to do his duty in that state of life to which it had pleased God to call him.—*Rev. W. Sparrow.*

II. HIS FAILURE IN FAITH.

[18029] The old war between the severed portions of Jacob's race still continued. In the northern kingdom, Baasha, having exterminated the posterity of Jeroboam, sat upon his throne. Insensibly he built Ramah, on the very dividing lines between the kingdoms, menacing Jerusalem, to the intent "that he might let none go out or come in to Asa, king of Judah." And to strengthen himself in his bold pretensions he had formed a league with the king of Syria, that dwelt at Damascus. Asa, by a stroke of policy, bought off the Syrian king, exhausting for the purpose the treasury of the kingdom,

and even the gathered wealth of the temple. The measure was successful ; Baasha retreated, and the materials which he had gathered at Ramah Asa employed in erecting fortresses to strengthen his frontier. This was prudence ; but it was trust in man and not in God, and it met with a severe reproof. " Hanani the seer came to Asa, and said unto him, Because thou hast relied on the king of Syria, and not relied on the Lord thy God, therefore is the host of the king of Syria escaped out of thy hand." If thy faith had been stronger, thy victory had been greater ; " yet because thou didst rely on the Lord "—because thou hadst some faith—" He delivered them into thine hand." So it always is : " According to thy faith be it unto thee."—*Rev. R. Hallam, D.D.*

[18030] On a trying occasion his faith in God proved insufficient. He resorted to worldly policy. He hired the help of a heathen neighbour, the powerful king of Syria even with the treasures of the house of the Lord, diverted from their sacred purpose to this worldly use, to defend himself against the attacks of the successor of Jeroboam in the kingdom of the ten tribes. This was political wisdom, but it was spiritual folly. Yet for the time it prospered. By the aid of this alliance he was successful, and triumphed in the war. It was a costly triumph, however, and, as all worldly policy in the Church does, entailed mischiefs that far overbalanced the gain. He set open a door to the heathen that could never be shut. He excited a cupidity in them that was satisfied with nothing but conquest. He provided an instrument which, when the nation's iniquity was full, God used to destroy it. In this respect his conduct contrasts unfavourably with that of his less religious father Abijah in like circumstances, who stood grandly up as the champion of his kingdom in danger, and single-handed achieved a signal victory. Yet of Abijah it is said that " he walked in all the sins of his father," and his heart was not perfect, not sound and upright with the Lord his God ; while of Asa it is recorded that " he did that which was *right* in the sight of the Lord." The Lord drew the line, and it was an infallible line ; men cannot draw such lines. Courage and manhood and patriotism are one thing, piety is another ; man cannot always distinguish them, God can. He knows the difference between blemished goodness and specious irreligion.—*Ibid.*

[18031] Asa had now been long enough in peace for his own and for his people's good ; therefore the Lord let loose another enemy upon him. Baasha, king of Israel, attacks him ; and what now, in this second emergency, was it to be expected Asa would do ? With his previous piety of character, and the delightful lessons he had learned from experience of the truth and faithfulness of God, we look for nothing but the same simple, childlike reliance on Jehovah's promises, united with the same diligent use of means. Alas ! our expectations

are disappointed ! He uses means indeed, but with such an exclusive and therefore irreligious trust in them, as would be utterly unaccountable in his case, were not the instability of man, yea, of the best of men, so common and so natural. Nay, not only does he dishonour God by a misplaced confidence in the creature, but when Hanani the prophet is sent to reprove him for this trusting in the king of Syria, and not in the Lord his God, Asa is wroth with the seer and thrusts him into a prison-house. Besides this we learn but two things more of the king, and they equally painful to learn. One is, that not content with persecuting the prophet for his faithful reproofs, which as a prophet he was sent and bound to give, he " oppressed some of the people at the same time." The other, that soon after he was seized with a violent and mortal disease in his feet, and that in his disease, though he had now had a lesson in the way of judgment, as formerly in the way of mercy, against trusting in an arm of flesh, he sought not to the Lord, but to the physicians.—*Rev. W. Sparrow.*

III. HIS PERTINACITY IN WRONG-DOING.

[18032] Asa exhibited pertinacity in his sin, and in consequence one transgression led on to another. David committed some most fearful sins, and a prophet was sent to reprove and warn him. A parable was made the medium of the message, and when Nathan came to the application with the direct and heavy charge, which involved murder and adultery, " thou art the man ;" he at once was conscience-smitten, and became melted down in penitence : his confession was, " I have sinned against the Lord." Not so Asa. His crime, though indeed not so horrible, was equally certain ; yet when the prophet reproves him, the historian tells us " he was in a rage with him because of this thing ;" and added to the sin, and to a denial of it, persecution of God's servant for delivering God's message. The sin of Asa, though certain and heinous, as I have said, was not so palpable and overt as that of David. It lay more exclusively between God and his own soul. It was an offence which short-sighted men, who cannot read the heart, could not with propriety charge him with ; when, therefore, the prophet laid the sin at his door, for aught we know perhaps in the presence of his courtiers, his poor fallen heart took advantage of the circumstance, and instigated him to deny the charge as unjust, and then, as a further apparent refutation of it, to punish him who made it.—*Ibid.*

[18033] The sins which are known with certainty only to Omniscience are the last which corrupt human nature is willing to acknowledge. It hides itself from its own guilt and from its obligation to confess and forsake its sin, under the cover of its fellow-creatures' ignorance. From this hiding-place, to which Asa had manifestly fled, man could not dislodge him. God's resources, however, were not exhausted.

When His prophet failed to do it He sent another messenger to the king in the shape of a most painful disease which finally proved mortal. What the issue was, perhaps cannot be confidently asserted. In view of the general character which the Scriptures give of the man, we may hope that this merciful expedient was finally successful in bringing him to feel and confess his guilt, and so to humble himself that he was, through grace, when he died, exalted to heaven. Be this as it may, it is a melancholy truth that in the beginning of his sickness he was far from a proper frame of mind, as our text plainly testifies, "in his disease he sought not to the Lord, but to the physicians." Whatever the continuance of pain and the near approach of death may, by the aid of God's Spirit, have done, the first onset of disease found him indulging a self-justifying spirit and even repeating the sin, for cloaking which God was now chastising him. This I say is a striking example of perversity in sin, which carries with it a solemn warning. Who would have expected this of the once devotedly 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, while it is called to-day, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin." That indeed must be a most treacherous and deceitful thing, which could lead a rational and religious being so far away from 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.—*Ibid.*

IV. HOMILETICAL HINTS.

- 1 The history of Asa emphasizes the need of humility and watchfulness.

[18034] "Lord, what is man! In his best estate, moral as well as physical, he is altogether vanity." Here is a person that appears to have been piously educated, that in his youth was piously and deeply impressed; that when clothed in royal purple still remembered his responsibility to a higher power, and felt and acknowledged his dependence on it; that in his mature years departed not from the way in which he had been trained up; and that knew by a single personal experience that it is a way of pleasantness and a path of peace; in his old age guilty of the greatest inconsistencies, to say the very least. If the facts mentioned do not prove that the Divine life in his soul was really extinct, they manifest most decisively that the things which remained were indeed ready to perish. May we not reasonably suppose that during his long prosperity his heart had become in a measure hardened by the deceitfulness of sin; that indolence had corrupted, and pride, taking occasion from the happy condition of

his people, of which he had been the instrument, had puffed him up; and that prayer, in consequence, had been restrained before God? However this lamentable declension of religion in his soul was brought about, his case stands forth, as a beacon light, to warn all those who have put forth to sea and are now voyaging towards the haven of everlasting rest. Be sober, be vigilant, be prayerful, be humble is the moral of this melancholy tale.—*Ibid.*

- 2 The history of Asa teaches that our strongest point of character may in fact prove our weakest.

[18035] Asa's distrust in Divine, and over-trust in human power, was the last sin, most probably, which he thought would ever beset him; and had it been foretold to him as his cruelties were to Hazael, like him he would have said, "Is thy servant a dog that he should do this thing?" So improbable, so foolish, so inconsistent, so ungrateful would it have appeared to him, that he would have been very slow to believe it, thinking that however frail and liable to fall, and however desperately wicked and deceitful the human heart, this sin could not be committed till every remnant of religion was banished from his heart, and his conscience was seared as with a red-hot iron. . . . But in spiritual things, when we are weak, then are we strong, and when we are strong, then are we weak. That is, when we are conscious of weakness, and in consequence lean constantly on an Almighty arm, then our strength never faileth. How can it? It is a borrowed strength, not our own—it is Divine, not human. . . . The lesson, then, to be learned from the history of Asa, in this view of it, plainly is, to glory in nothing as of ourselves, to distrust ourselves in our strongest point, and to count all our sufficiency as of God through Christ.—*Ibid.*

JEHOSHAPHAT.

I. HIS GENERAL UPRIGHTNESS.

[18036] The general uprightness of Jehoshaphat, his sincerity in serving God, is expressly acknowledged and commended by the prophet in the very act of condemning his sin (2 Chron. xix. 3): "Nevertheless there are good things found in thee, in that thou hast taken away the groves out of the land, and hast prepared thine heart to seek the Lord." And this high and honourable commendation corresponds with what we elsewhere read concerning his character and conduct. The seventeenth chapter of Second Chronicles gives an account of his piety and zeal at the beginning of his reign, and before the event to which the prophet refers; and the nineteenth and twentieth chapters prove the continuance of these excellent dispositions, even after that most sad and untoward occur-

rence. We read of his labours in removing idolatry out of the land, and restoring the worship of the true God (xvii. 3)—of his attention to the religious instruction of the people (xvii. 7)—of his concern for the administration of justice (xix. 5)—and of his care for the defence of his people against their enemies, by the best of all resources—an appeal to God (xx.); on all which accounts he was especially favoured by God with prosperity at home and honour from abroad; the attachment of his people, the submission of his hostile neighbours, the tribute of many nations, and the blessing of Jehovah, the God of David, whom he feared.—*Rev. R. Candlish, D.D.*

[18037] Jehoshaphat was a good king, one of the best of the Jewish sovereigns. He was, too, a prosperous and successful monarch. His country flourished under his sway. He sought to do his subjects good, and he did them good. God blessed and honoured him in his ways. He died in peace, and in favour with God. He rests among the righteous in Paradise, and awaits the resurrection of the just. But he leaned to his own understanding in a matter of great moment. He put policy for principle, conciliation for frank dissent, worldly advantage for manly firmness, and sowed the seeds of evil, that lived and thrived and bore fruit centuries after his decease.—*Rev. R. Hallam, D.D.*

II. HIS BESETTING SIN.

A tendency to connect himself with idolaters.

(1) *As displayed in the treaty of marriage that he made with Ahab.*

[18038] Jehoshaphat thought there had been war long enough. He resolved that there should be war no longer. He determined on a pacific policy. He thought it was wise. In the eyes of men it was wise. I am not about to say that it was not wise in substance; but it certainly was not wise in form. "Jehoshaphat joined affinity with Ahab," and cemented it by the marriage of his son and Ahab's daughter. There might not have been an obligation to perpetuate a national feud, but it was not well to staunch it by the admission of a domestic taint which in the end would prove to the country, whose royal line it infected, a worse evil than war—far worse. Peace is good, but it may be purchased too dearly. From the times before the flood, when the sons of God took wives of the daughters of men, matrimonial alliances with the wicked had been a prolific source of the spread and increase of sin. God had told His people not to make marriages with the idolaters around them, and plainly forewarned them of the evils that would follow. But Ahab was an idolater, and, not satisfied with the worship of Jeroboam's calves, had brought in the vile abominations of the Phœnician superstition.—*Ibid.*

[18039] He "joined affinity with Ahab" by marrying his son to Ahab's daughter (2 Kings viii. 18). This was the first overture towards an alliance. It is a policy common among princes—though, alas! too often ineffectual—for uniting their royal families and their respective nations. . . . In accordance with this policy, then, the king of Judah sought to conciliate the friendship of the king of Israel by mingling the blood of their royal races; . . . but, as it turned out, with most disastrous results.—*Rev. R. Candlish, D.D.*

(2) *As twice displayed in a league of war with the kings of Israel.*

[18040] Jehoshaphat twice joined in a league of war with the kings of Israel—first, in the expedition against Syria, . . . and again shortly after in an attack upon the Moabites. This last confederacy being formed against a common enemy, who had given both of them provocation, was not so unjustifiable, nor was it so unfortunate as the other: it received the sanction of Elisha's counsel, and of the Lord's signal interposition. But the warlike alliance into which, of his own accord, he entered, issued in nought but evil.—*Ibid.*

(3) *As displayed in a commercial alliance of his people with the ten tribes.*

[18041] Jehoshaphat consented, though reluctantly, in the close of his reign, to a commercial alliance of his people with the ten tribes. It appears (1 Kings xxii. 48) that once before, when asked by the king of Israel to concur in a joint expedition of their two navies to Ophir for gold, Jehoshaphat promptly and peremptorily refused, having then had fresh and recent experience of the danger of his connection with Ahab. But yet afterwards (2 Chron. xx. 37) he agreed to a similar proposal, on which occasion he was again rebuked by the prophet of the Lord, and again visited with the judgment of God. "The ships were broken," and the expedition ruined; they were not able to go to Tarshish.—*Ibid.*

III. PROBABLE REASONS FOR THE FASCINATION OF HIS BESETTING FORM OF EVIL.

Mistaken views of policy, and a too great anxiety to conciliate.

[18042] As to the sin itself with which Jehoshaphat is charged, and the probable reasons or motives of its commission, we cannot suppose that, in forming an alliance with the ungodly, Jehoshaphat was actuated by any fondness for the crime, or by any complacency in the criminals. We must seek an explanation of his conduct rather in mistaken views of policy than in any considerable indifference to the honour of God, or any leaning to the defections of apostasy and idolatry.—*Ibid.*

[18043] In his anxiety to pacify, to conciliate, and to reclaim, he was tempted to go a little too far—even to the sacrificing of his own high integrity, and the apparent countenancing of Israel's corruptions. Here lay the error of this

pious prince ; and here it was that he suffered the subtlety of worldly wisdom, and the spurious kindness of worldly liberality, to interfere with the simplicity of an upright and honourable faith in God, and a godly love towards men. To desire the restoration of his brethren of Israel to the privileges of the covenant which they had renounced was natural, just, and right, in one who himself valued these privileges so highly. But with this view, and under this pretence, to make friendly advances towards them, and show a disposition to unite with them, in their present state of apostasy and idolatry—this was imprudence—this was sin.—*Ibid.*

IV. CONTRAST WITH AHAB.

[18044] In Ahab we have an instance of a wicked man partially reclaimed, frequently arrested, but yet finally hardened in his iniquity. In Jehoshaphat, again, we have a still more affecting example. We see how a man—upright before God, and sincere in serving Him—may be betrayed into weak compliances, and how dangerous and melancholy the consequences of these compliances may be.—*Ibid.*

V. HOMILETICAL REFLECTIONS.

1 Jehoshaphat attempted the impossible task of serving two masters.

[18045] See illustrated in the case of Jehoshaphat the vital necessity of singleness and unity in the religious life. The want of it may not destroy its genuineness and reality, but it will greatly mar its symmetry, its comfort, and its usefulness. “Their heart is divided; now shall they be found faulty.” “Ephraim is a cake not turned,” says Hosea. “Unite my heart to fear Thy name,” prays the Psalmist; bring all the power of my soul into harmonious and concentrated action in Thy service. Let no one feeling or faculty stray away after alien and contrary interests. Alas, what want of unity there is in most Christian lives, what an alloy of the world cleaves to them and disfigures them, how little there is of that gathering up of all the forces of the life into one single purpose, which spoke in St. Paul’s “This one thing I do”! Alas that men will, despite the Saviour’s warning, essay the impossible task of serving God and mammon, and make their religious life like the religion of the Samaritans, who “feared the Lord and served other gods”! Our renunciation of evil, in any and in all of its forms, can never be too absolute, too thorough, and too complete, nor our watch against its intrusions too constant, too vigilant, and too earnest. In our lives, if we leave it there, or let it in, it can only be a cause of wickedness, deformity, and failure.—*Rev. R. Hallam, D.D.*

2 Jehoshaphat exceeded the due limit of compromise and conciliation.

[18046] Consider how great the temptation to compromises is; in what seemingly forms the

temptation presents itself; with what specious pleas it asks for admission. Peace was a good thing, war was a sad calamity. Surely it was well to put an end to it. And friendly neighbours must reciprocate friendly acts and form ties of friendship. Jehoshaphat at peace with Ahab must admit Ahab’s daughter into his family. And having family bonds with him, he must espouse his quarrel, and help him in battle, and join his ungodly son in sending ships to sea. So the evil crept in under a very seemly disguise. So it is wont to do. It is too wise to show its ugly face naked. It comes in a mask. Scrutinize things carefully; see if they will bear examination: see if they are indeed what they profess to be. Beware of careless alliances and hasty engagements. There may be that in some very well-looking associations that will poison our whole lives, and do harm to generations unborn.—*Ibid.*

[18047] If there are any in the Church of Christ who are sometimes tempted—and who shall say that he is not?—to advance too far in the way of concession and conciliation, and the overtures of friendly conformity to the world, and to plead that they are not thus contaminated themselves, but that they rather season the world’s corruption in the circles in which they move by the admixture of their own purer principles and practices—we bid them look to Jehoshaphat and his unholy alliance with the idolatrous king of Israel, and consider what the real effect of such conduct was in his case, and what must be the effect of similar conduct in theirs. Let them observe its vanity and folly; for it fails to serve, or rather tends to hinder, the good purpose they intend—its sin, as it regards their own testimony for God and maintenance of sound principle—its danger, as it hazards their peace and safety—and its mischievous tendency to encourage the evil course, and accelerate the ruin of the very men whom they profess that they desire to benefit.—*Rev. R. Caudlish, D.D.*

[18048] If, like Jehoshaphat, you make concessions to the weak, the wicked, or the worldly, and enter into their plans, and sit down with them in their indulgences, you renounce the advantage which the consciousness of untarnished honour and unimpeached consistency—and that alone—can give you over them; you put yourself on their level; you are at their mercy; you are one of themselves; and it must be with an ill grace and a feeble effect that you venture timidly to stand forth either as God’s witness or as their reprover. Whatever you gain by conciliation, you lose far more by forfeiting the respect and reverence which firm integrity commands. You may consent to mix with them familiarly on terms of friendship and companionship—you may thus gain their easy and indolent goodwill—but you gain something very like their contempt too; and a sort of feeble paralysis comes over you in the very attempt to be faithful. Your voice of censure loses all its commanding energy; your look of disapproba-

tion loses all its keenness; your presence is no longer felt to be a restraint on folly; your severity cannot awe, your tenderness cannot touch; you can but feebly "hint a doubt, and hesitate dislike." To assume a high tone and take high ground now, would but excite ridicule by its absurdity, or anger by its impertinence. Your right to testify, your influence to persuade, your power of rebuke—are all gone.—*Ibid.*

3 Jehoshaphat found the impossibility of retracing a false step once taken.

[18049] A wrong step once taken cannot easily be retraced, and an injurious engagement once entered into will hold us fast beyond possibility of extrication. If we watch the life of Jehoshaphat we shall see this strikingly exemplified. That bond which fastened him to Ahab was a tether beyond which he could never go; we see him all his life struggling to be a good man, to serve God, to promote the best interests of His kingdom, to strengthen God's Church, promote virtue, religion, truth. And he did it. But it was in shackles, and at a fearful disadvantage. How could he drive out idolatry, who must connive at an idolatrous daughter-in-law in His court, and go to battle with an idolatrous ally, attended by a retinue of four hundred lying prophets, and see the only true prophet there mocked and insulted by Zedekiah the son of Chenaanah? He could not do it. Yet from this alliance, which he looked upon as a master-stroke of policy, he could not disengage himself, he could not unmarry his son, he could not brave Ahab's wrath. "He that committeth sin is the servant of sin." It is so universally. Beware of a false step. Pray God to keep you from it. Once taken there may be no escape, and "no place for repentance," though you seek it "carefully with tears."—*Rev. R. Hallam, D.D.*

[18050] Here we might speak of the many evils which the weak and worldly policy of Jehoshaphat entailed upon his family and people. We might show how his connection by marriage with the house of Ahab led, in another generation, to the introduction of all the vices and abominations of that idolatrous house into his own court and kingdom. We might show also, how, in the present instance, notwithstanding his own escape, his army and his subjects suffered by his rashness; and we might remind you of the harm which you may do, by involving your friends, your children, or your dependents in the consequences of your folly, from which you may yourselves be delivered, by encouraging them through your example, and leading them on in the way of sin, and shame, and sorrow.—*Rev. R. Candlish, D.D.*

[18051] See what hazard Jehoshaphat ran. Not only did he sin with Ahab, but he well-nigh perished with him in his sin. Betrayed by his false ally and associate, who could meanly consult his own safety by exposing his friend, Jehoshaphat was saved, but scarcely saved, by faith and prayer, and that only in the last extremity.

"And it came to pass, when the captains of the chariots saw Jehoshaphat, that they said, It is the king of Israel. Therefore they compassed about him to fight: but Jehoshaphat cried out, and the Lord helped him; and God moved them to depart from him" (2 Chron. xviii. 31). And late and seasonable as the interposition was, was it not more than he had any reason to expect? Was it not a deliverance on which he had no right to calculate? It was by his own fault, and against express Divine warning, that he was involved in this danger, and he might justly have been left to take the consequences of his own perverseness. His narrow escape was a cause of peculiar thankfulness to himself, but not a warrant of presumptuous confidence to others. It was a signal and special act of most undeserved mercy. And think not, O Christian! that you may depend upon a similar act of mercy when you tempt the Lord as he did. If you consent to the schemes of vain, wicked, or worldly men, and compromise your devotion to God out of courtesy and complaisance to them, you may be very sure that, as in Jehoshaphat's case, they will take advantage of your easy and accommodating spirit to put the blame and the danger on you. But you cannot be at all sure that God will come so very opportunely to your rescue. He is in no way bound to do so. For it is not a hazard which in His service and at His call you have encountered, but a risk incurred by your own weak folly or wilful self-confidence. And why should you not be left to reap the fruit of your compliance with the world's sin by sharing the world's doom?—*Ibid.*

JEHORAM.

I. HIS FLAGRANT TRANSGRESSIONS.

Idolatry and fratricide.

[18052] He plunged into the idolatry of his wife's family with eagerness, and compelled his subjects to conform to the vile practices which it brought in its train. His brethren of his father's house, which were better than he, true to their father's principles, probably opposers of his infatuated and ruinous cause, he put to death. And soon the sad spectacle was presented of a king and people, in that land where alone the true God had revealed Himself, forsaking His service, and giving themselves up to the gravest excesses and abominations that disgrace the heathen.—*Rev. R. Hallam, D.D.*

II. HIS PUNISHMENT.

[18053] And now came the terrible retribution, the awful fulfilment of the prophet's threat. "Moreover the Lord stirred up against Jehoram the spirit of the Philistines, and of the Arabians, that were near the Ethiopians; and they came

up into Judah and brake into it, and carried away all the substance that was found in the king's house, and his sons also and his wives ; so that there was never a son left him save Jehoahaz, the youngest of his sons. And after all this, the Lord smote him in his bowels with an incurable disease. And it came to pass that in process of time, after the end of two years, his bowels fell out by reason of his sickness : so he died of sore diseases. And his people made no burning for him, like the burning of his fathers. Thirty and two years old was he when he began to reign, and he reigned in Jerusalem eight years, and departed without being desired. Howbeit they buried him in the city of David, but not in the sepulchres of the kings."—*Ibid.*

[18054] So died Jehoram, drawn in his youth by a good but unwise father's ambition into a fatal alliance with wickedness, the husband of the wicked daughter of the wicked Jezebel, corrupted, spoiled, ruined by association with irreligion and idolatry, visited with God's heavy displeasure, till in his royal palace, turned by suffering into a hospital and a tomb, impoverished and bereft, loathsome to himself, a nuisance to others, at the early age of forty he departed without being desired. Not loved in life, not lamented in death, denied a royal tomb, and only allowed a grave in Jerusalem out of respect for his exalted station. What a picture ! What a moral !—*Ibid.*

III. HOMILETICAL HINTS.

- 1 The history of Jehoram exemplifies the mischief of close association with the wicked.

[18055] All his misconduct and his suffering, and the evils his course bequeathed to successive generations of his descendants, which so afflicted his family, his kingdom, and the Church of God, grew out of the root of his marriage with Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel. It neutralized the effect of a pious education, and all the good influences which must have surrounded the early days of the son of the good Jehoshaphat. Sad is it to see that the father, for reasons of state and temporal advantage, betrayed the son into the ruinous connection—a warning to parents not to sacrifice their children's spiritual good to worldly interest, and especially in the fundamental particular of their associations in life. It made him an idolater, a worldling, and a profligate. It diffused its corrupting venom into every department and stage of his life. It made him a bad ruler, a bad father, a bad man. It filled his life with sin and his death with despair, and sent him unprepared to the bar of God, and then it transmitted its evil influence to successive generations of his posterity. Oh ! how true is it that "he that walketh with wise men shall be wise, but the companion of fools shall be destroyed"—true as an aphorism, on philosophical grounds, but

truer as an instance in the pregnant illustrations of such an example as that before us.—*Ibid.*

- 2 The history of Jehoram affords a warning to parents against forcing their children into marriages of convenience.

[18056] No doubt Jehoshaphat thought he was making a grand connection for his son when he was allying him to the daughter of Israel and the granddaughter of Tyre ; and unquestionably, upon worldly principles and calculations, he was strengthening himself and his kingdom. But he was, in fact, weakening both. He might better have married his son to the humblest of Judah's daughters that was virtuous and religious. Such things are being done continually in courts, and not in courts alone, in the marriages of policy or profit which ambitious fathers and scheming mothers promote, receiving, as in the case before us, the reward that is meet in misery to themselves and their posterity. Let parents guard well the associations, the intimacies, the alliances of their children. Let the young carefully avoid those who are wrong in opinion or evil in life, and in seeking associates and companions in any relations of life, but especially in those which are closest, never forget the paramount claims of truth, of goodness, of right principles, of worthy conduct. Their character, their honour, their usefulness in life, their hope in death, largely depend upon it.—*Ibid.*

AHAZIAH.

I. HIS CHARACTER.

Irreligious and licentious (it was the outcome of the wicked counsels of his mother).

[18057] The poor young king had no good training, much bad training. If he was bad—and bad he was, for the Bible tells us that "he did evil in the sight of the Lord"—it is not strange, when we consider what his parentage was, and what his bringing up had been. He was born, nurtured, and bred up to early manhood in a foul, wicked, and idolatrous court. "His mother was his counsellor to do wickedly," says the historian, and little more need be said. The fountain of his life was poisoned.—*Ibid.*

[18058] Athaliah survived to be the ruin of her son, as she had been already the bane of her husband. She was a woman of strong impulses and a determined will, and the young sovereign gave himself up to her directions. Under her counsels he began that career of irreligion and licentiousness which speedily ended in his destruction. The succinct and forcible statement of one of the two of the historians of his reign is, "He also walked in the ways of the house of Ahab : for his mother was his counsellor to do wickedly. Wherefore he did evil in the sight of the Lord like the house of Ahab : for they were his counsellors after the

death of his father to his destruction ;” and of the other, “And he walked in the way of the house of Ahab, and did evil in the sight of the Lord, as did the house of Ahab : for he was the son-in-law of the house of Ahab.”—*Ibid.*

II. HOMILETICAL REFLECTIONS.

The character of Ahaziah displays the strength of a mother's influence for good or evil.

[18059] He had a bad mother, and his bad mother was the evil genius of his life and reign. She was evil. She taught him evil. She set him an example of evil. Her strong qualities gave evil in her hands a tremendous and destructive force. She made him evil. He was evil. And he came to an evil end. He did not “live out half his days.” Misfortune slew the ungodly. And though a veil conceals what is beyond, we know that “the wicked is driven into darkness,” that outer darkness where is “weeping and gnashing of teeth.” The record is, “His mother was his counsellor to do wickedly”—Athaliah, the evil daughter of an evil mother, proud, energetic, daring, fierce, the devotee of a religion that fed the worst passions of our nature under a semblance of duty and devotion. She formed him in childhood. She advised and directed him as a man.—*Ibid.*

[18060] A mother : there is no one else in whom the life of a child is so much, as it were, contained, that so forms the atmosphere, in which it moves and has its being. And this influence is put forth at the period when the subject of it is the most impressible, the most ready to take its mould and colour from the objects around it. And of all these objects there is none so potent as the mother, none that works at so great an advantage, and with such powerful effect. There is none with which the child is so constantly and familiarly associated, and to which he is so strongly drawn by dependence, and the natural instincts of confidence and affection. He that has the making of the mothers of the nation makes the nation. Maternal influence is continually flowing forth ; and, entering deeply by avenues which the hand of time has opened for it, it embeds itself, as it were, in the child's nature, and sends itself into every department of its life, communicating a line of thoughts, ideas, feelings, sentiments, opinions, conceptions, as they come forth into shape from the chaos in which its life begins. And as the process of development goes on, impression grows more and more into guidance, and the young being learns to look with a more conscious intention for instruction and direction to her on whom his eyes have gazed with a blank, indefinite reliance, ever since they opened on an external world. A child when it begins to exercise a conscious will needs a guide, a guide to think, and a guide to act, and the mother is at hand to fulfil that office. None can do it so well or so effectively. She will discharge it if she has no deliberate intention. She discharges

it of necessity. And never had a being a substance easier to work upon. The child is unsuspecting, uncritical, trustful. He puts faith in the mother. To him the mother is the standard of right and truth. What the mother thinks, or says, or does, he is not disposed to question or doubt about. The presumption in his mind is always that she is what she ought to be, and that her beliefs, views, maxims, are worthy of confidence and adoption. Her very obliquities are not oblique to him ; and so her obliquities are adopted by him, and he does not begin to suspect them to be obliquities till his mind is so warped that he is incapable of judging of the question fairly. And now he is fashioned into her image ; and if she is evil, she has made him “two-fold more the child of hell” than herself.—*Ibid.*

JEHOASH.

I. INTRODUCTION.

By his preservation when a child he furnished a notable instance of the truth of God's promises.

[18061] The young prince had been snatched from the destroying fury of his ruthless grandmother, the miscreant Athaliah, by his Aunt Jehosheba, the high priest's wife ; and was securely kept and nurtured in secret in the ample courts of the temple till a fit time should come to throw off the hateful usurpation that oppressed the nation, and restore the rightful heir to his lineal inheritance. Thus within the very shadow of the palace was growing under God's care an unknown branch of the royal house, by whom, in God's good time, his “faithful oath unto David” was to be secured from failure, and the sceptre of Judah made sure till Shiloh should come. The light of David had burnt down to its socket, but there it still flickered. The stem of Jesse was cut down to the very roots ; one tender shoot was all that remained ; on him rested the whole hope of carrying on the lineage of David.—*Ibid.*

II. HIS INSTABILITY.

His religion was the child of circumstances, not of principles.

(1) *Under the tutelage of Jehoiada he was apparently pious and even zealous for God.*

This was especially shown in his restoration of the temple.

[18062] That which sheds the distinguishing glory over the reign of Joash among those of the kings of Judah is the repairing of the temple, and its restoration to its original beauty and perfection. Under the growing ascendancy of heathenism in the reigns of Jehoram and Ahaziah, and still more under the openly idolatrous usurpation of Athaliah, the temple had suffered from neglect and still more from

spoliation. Its treasures had been given away to invaders ; it had been plundered by Egyptians and by Arabs ; and it had probably been used as a quarry in Athaliah's time to furnish materials for the temple of Baal and her other costly constructions. It now retained but marred and faded remnants of its first glory, and dishonoured the religion of a people whose proudest boast it was that they had the Lord for their God. To Joash the temple must have been peculiarly dear, as the asylum and nursery of his childhood, and the abode of those who in its courts had shielded him from harm, and watched over his lonely orphanhood with a more than parental solicitude and tenderness. An early act of his reign, doubtless under the advice of the good high priest, was to make provision for the removal of this national scandal, and put back the proud shrine of the nation, so far as he might, into that condition of grandeur and dignity in which his great ancestors left it. A pleasing act of gratitude, as well as of religion, it was in the young king to restore and beautify the courts and cloisters which had formed the shelter and playground of his hapless childhood. Yet the work went on languidly in the hands of the Levites, one cannot determine whether owing to the indifference or the inability of the priestly tribe, to whom it was at first appropriately committed, so that "in the three and twentieth year of King Jehoash the priests had not repaired the breaches of the house." At last, however, in more efficient hands the work was happily consummated, and stood the glory of Joash's reign and of Jehoiada's administration.—*Ibid.*

(2) *At the death of Jehoiada he made shipwreck of his faith and became both an idolater and sacrilegious murderer.*

[18063] With Jehoiada's death came a dismal change in Joash. The good genius of his reign departed with the aged high priest. Accustomed to lean upon his wise and conscientious counsellor, when the prop was removed it appeared that he could no longer stand upright. He had no root in himself ; his virtue was but parasitical, and when the tree died, the mistletoe that clung to it withered away. Sadly does the last third of his reign compare with its earlier portion. A similar contrast there is in secular history in the Emperor Nero, before and after the death of his tutor, the philosopher Seneca.—*Ibid.*

[18064] Joash was not possessed of much natural force of character ; and religion, albeit he had been for a time its patron and protector, had gained no deep lodgment in his soul. Deprived of his wonted support when the high priest died, he looked about for another, and there was one at hand. The vices of idolatry had not died with Athaliah. Doubtless there were many who looked back to the sensuality and license of her reign with regret, and were ready to persuade her too-yielding successor to emancipate himself from the vigorous restraints imposed by his venerated monitor. Joash was

yet young. He died at the age of forty-seven : and it was in the twenty-third year of his reign that he set about the completion of the work on the temple more vigorously. This must have been when he was thirty years old. Within a few years of this time the work was finished and Jehoiada died. A period of ten years or a little more remains for his downfall in character and condition. He was in the maturity of his powers, when the restraints that had before holden him back were removed, and he was left free to follow his own royal will. A fatal freedom it proved to be, involving shipwreck for time and shipwreck for eternity.—*Ibid.*

[18065] The reign of Joash stands, in one aspect of it, marked with a singular honour, in another stained with a remarkable disgrace. The re-edifier of the temple lived to be the murderer of the priest that ministered at its altar. The grateful ward of Jehoiada was the destroyer of his son ; and now by the lips of the Son of Man Himself, the blood of "Zacharias the son of Barachias, who was slain between the temple and the altar," stands coupled with the "blood of righteous Abel," and, strange to tell, Jehoash, whose care had once restored that temple and that altar, was his slayer, the murderer of his kinsman, of the son of his best benefactor, of the head of his religion and its priesthood ; and the memory of a king of hopeful indications and beginnings stands branded with the mark of Cain, in whose way he went.—*Ibid.*

III. HIS DISASTROUS END.

[18066] Invasion, defeat, disease, and a bloody death came in quick succession. Hazael, king of Syria, came up against him, and, after stripping him of all his treasures as the purchase of a respite, soon returned, and a very great host was delivered into his hand. The disheartened and impoverished king was seized with great diseases ; and, while languishing on his bed, in anguish of body and mind, in the fortress of Millo, "Jozachar the son of Shimeath, and Jehozabad the son of Shomer, his servants, smote him and he died." "And they buried him in the city of David, but they buried him not in the sepulchres of the kings." The slayer of the son might not sleep with that father whose memory he had so ungratefully and atrociously dishonoured. So did the fair morning, for the want of depth and steadfastness of principle, give place to an evening of darkness and storm ; and the hopeful signs of early youth led into apostasy, crime, misery, disgrace, and ruin.—*Ibid.*

IV. HOMILETICAL HINTS.

I The history of Jehoash demonstrates the worthlessness of a mere religion of circumstances.

[18067] It stands by props, and when the props are withdrawn it totters and falls. It has

no deep roots well set in the earth that can support it when it is left to depend upon its own resources; and no inward channels of supply that can carry into all parts of it the vital current, and keep it fresh and living. The religion of Joash was but the reflection of Jehoiada's. It shone in the lustre cast upon it by his brightness. But when this sun went down the reflected brightness departed with it. Yet the goodness of Joash was both specious and useful. For years he stood the apparent bulwark of truth against error, of Jehovah's worship against idolatry; and, from his lofty position, "a city set on a hill that could not be hid," he was conspicuously the representative of the true God in the sight of men. And yet, all the time, "his heart was not right in the sight of God;" circumstances and not principles made him what he was; and with change of circumstances his life changed its phase, and the patron of truth became an idolater and a persecutor. All his religion was mechanical and external. It was on the outside of the man, and did not go down into his heart to possess its convictions, affections, and purposes. It arrayed him, but it did not inhabit him. And while, perhaps, he was by no means a conscious hypocrite, but was religious according to his conception of religion, he did but move through a routine of forms, under which lay hidden a cold, selfish, and unloving heart. The outward life obeyed the mould into which the high priest cast it, but there was not consistency and firmness enough in its texture to keep the shape when the pressure of the mould was withdrawn.—*Ibid.*

2 The history of Jehoash illustrates the exposure which frequently waits on the hollowness of a spurious virtue.

[18068] The guardian is removed, enticers and flatterers ply their seductive arts; the heart yields and shows its evil bent, and the life falls into sin, very often rushes into its excesses. The builder of the temple is the destroyer of the priest. Alas for that religion that depends for its stability upon circumstances! For circumstances are changeful. This world "never continueth in one stay." A religious education and virtuous association put a fair varnish on the life that passes for goodness. The open world dissolves the varnish, and underneath is nothing but deformity. The stream runs quietly in the straight channel that is cut for it. The bank gives way, and off it gambols in curves, through thickets, down dark ravines and foaming rapids. And, not unlikely, the life, once emancipated from an unnatural restraint, avenges itself on the power that kept it in. Who so bold and bitter and cruel as a renegade? Zechariah, foster-brother, playmate, cousin, holy priest of God, painful remembrancer of better days, thou shalt die. A lapsed professor of godliness is apt to be a strenuous enemy of God. And seldom will a life that has clothed itself in

seemly semblance be allowed to run undetected to its close. Providence alters its outward relations, and then comes undisguised sensuality or vengeful hate, or, as is strangely but not uncommonly the case, the two.—*Ibid.*

AMAZIAH.

I. CHIEF TRAITS OF CHARACTER.

1 He was the slave of a restless ambition.

[18069] He seems to have been a hardy man, of an adventurous and uneasy nature, ambitious of conquest and military renown, prone to "meddle to his hurt," when in fact "his strength was to sit still," and his real wisdom to cultivate the arts of peace and develop and improve the internal resources of his kingdom, to abide at home, as the historian phrases it. This craving to be a warrior and a conqueror, and the ill-judged acts into which it led him, are the great blemishes of his character and reign. "He did that which was right in the sight of the Lord," says the historian of the Kings in the parallel narrative, "yet not like David his father: he did according to all things as Joash his father did."—*Ibid.*

[18070] The great failing of Amaziah seems to have been a weak but restless ambition. He was always aiming to do grand, brilliant things beyond his power, and neglecting to do the simple ordinary things within his reach, in the faithful performance of which lay his plain duty, his true usefulness, and his real honour; and the measure of success which attended his efforts in this direction led him on to new undertakings which involved him in defeat and disgrace.—*Ibid.*

2 He allowed himself to be ruled by pride and revenge.

[18071] He is now settled in his kingdom, but alas! he is also an idolater, and he has acquired a passion for conquest and renown. He cannot keep still and cultivate the arts of peace. There is pride, hereditary ambition and bitter revenge in his heart, but there is no fear of God in him, to check them; and he does not know that an evil fruit of the victory in which he is exulting is that for his desertion of God, God has deserted him, and so the strength in which he glories is gone, and weakness has come in its stead. He cannot, I say, sit still and cultivate the arts of peace. He must punish his neighbour Israel for the wrong done him in his absence. His heart is burning with revenge and the pride of fancied power. How true it is that "the prosperity of fools destroys them"! So he sends to Joash, the son of Jehoiada, the son of Jehu, king of Israel, and says, "Come, let us look one another in the face." In other words, he proclaims war against him and challenges him to the combat. How bitter and contemptuous, and yet how wise and

monitory is the king in his parable of the thistle! . . . The warning was not heeded. On proud and wilful hearts admonitions fall with little force. The challenge was repeated. "So they went up and looked one another in the face at Bethshemesh which belongeth to Judah. And Judah was put to the worst before Israel, and they fled away every man to his tent." Amaziah was taken prisoner, the wall of Jerusalem was demolished, and the gold and silver and the vessels of the Lord's house were carried to Samaria.—*Ibid.*

II. HOMILETICAL REFLECTIONS.

I The case of Amaziah illustrates the natural fruits of a fool's prosperity.

(1) *In its idolatry.*

[18072] He went into Edom and conquered it, and then brought home the idols of Edom, and worshipped them. That was paying a dear price for his victory, a perfectly gratuitous one moreover, for nobody asked it of him. And it was a very senseless thing, for these idols had just shown their inability to protect their worshippers. Yet he adopts them, and brings them to Jerusalem, and puts them in the place of Jehovah. Probably there was some pomp and splendour in their worship that fascinated him, and led him to take it to himself, and idolatry is always attractive to the unholy. We borrow idols from the world. We make them in our hearts, we find them in our ways, and fall in love with them; success and prosperity cherish and develop the tendency. We worship ourselves as all-wise, all-puissant; we worship our instruments, and "sacrifice to our net." We see the garish show of the world, and fall down to it. It is very dangerous to succeed if we do not remember and serve God. It will estrange us further from Him. It will bind us faster to the worship of the false, unworthy gods of the world. Beware! idolatry is destruction. The prosperity of fools destroys them.—*Ibid.*

(2) *In its presumption.*

[18073] The appetite which unsanctified success begets is insatiable. It grows by that it feeds upon. Like the grave, it saith not, It is enough. It becomes bold, confident, daring. It presumes upon its strength, and fancies that there is nothing that it cannot attain, nothing that it cannot do. Its spirit is restless, boastful, aggressive. Amaziah has conquered Edom, and now he must avenge Israel's insult, and conquer that also. The king of Israel warned him of his folly, but he would not listen. Thou hast conquered Edom. Be content. Tarry at home, and mind thine own business. Take care of thy kingdom, and the welfare of thy people. Why wilt thou meddle to thy hurt? It was good counsel, but it was not heeded. The bold, bad spirit that unsanctified success had produced would not be quiet. The fire of revenge and ambition must find fuel to feed upon. This is

not Amaziah, it is human nature. There is nought in it peculiar to him, we share it with him. Let a man in whom religion has not its proper ascendancy have his way, and he always grows bold, arrogant, rapacious. His desire rapidly increases. There is nothing that he will not aspire after, nothing that he will not essay to achieve. "He is a proud man, neither keepeth at home, who enlargeth his desire as hell, and is as death, and cannot be satisfied." Alexander conquers the world, and weeps for other worlds too. Ah, there is nothing that will still conquer and satisfy the heart but God and His service. A restless, insatiable craving, that grows with success, and is hungrier the more it is fed—this is the fruit of ungodly prosperity. Is it not a destruction? Beware! surely the prosperity of fools destroys them.—*Ibid.*

(3) *In its incurable failure.*

[18074] "The triumphing of the wicked is short." The exultation is the prelude of a downfall, the more dismal and complete for the previous eminence. "Thou hast lifted me up," says the Psalmist, "and cast me down."

"And thou, to make my fall more great,
Didst lift me up on high."

How much more was Amaziah's defeat by Israel to him, because of his prior victory over Edom, coming as it did upon him in the exulting flush of gratified ambition, and the confident expectation of continued victory. This, again, is not Amaziah, but man. There is no real permanent success to the ungodly. In every success there is hidden a defeat, in every achievement a failure. All that is glorious and great about him is a "fading flower." He is but a gilded bubble that quickly bursts, an inflated film painted with iris, that shortly collapses and disappears. He may have reverses in life. Probably he will. But if he does not, death comes, and what a reverse is that! His gains, his achievements, his honours, buried in the dust of the grave, himself a wreck, naked in the presence of God. Do you crave such a prosperity? God forbid! "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you."—*Ibid.*

2 The case of Amaziah affords a practical illustration of the truth that the prosperity of fools shall destroy them.

[18075] This man began seemingly well. His first work was patriotic, lawful, perhaps commendable, the reduction of a rebellious tributary. He alloyed it indeed by a resort to instruments which God had not authorized. The Lord reproved his folly, and he yielded to the reproof; but there was in the submission no principle of fixed and conscientious obedience to the Divine government. Success followed, large, illustrious, complete. But the false step at the beginning, and the worldly wisdom in which it originated, clung to it, and turned it

in the end into a misfortune. It was an un-sanctified effort, and, though prosperous, its issue was unblest. It awakened resentment, and that in turn brought retaliation, and kindled those fires of an unholy vengeance, and a restless ambition, which ended in calamity and disaster; and so the victory was effaced in the defeat that followed.—*Ibid.*

UZZIAH.

I. HIS SUCCESS AS A KING.

[18076] As a king he looks well. There are about him unequivocal signs of ability and usefulness. He acts his part in the stage of life nobly. He fills his high office with credit to himself and with benefit to the nation. And in such capability as he has shown there is much promise for the future. If his course is prolonged, to what may it not attain? There is even a seeming, perhaps a real, goodness in him, while under the tutelage of the good high priest.—*Ibid.*

[18077] Success crowned all his enterprises, and very signally, till he committed the fatal error that blasted his reign and his life. "He built Eloth, and restored it to Judah." This was a port on the Red Sea, from which Solomon had carried on his lucrative traffic with the East. Thus he resuscitated and strengthened the commercial interests of his kingdom. He was also a brave and victorious warrior. "He went forth and warred against the Philistines, and brake down the wall of Gath, and the wall of Jabneh, and the wall of Ashdod, and built cities about Ashdod, and among the Philistines. And God helped him against the Philistines and against the Arabians that dwelt in Gur-baal, and the Mehunim. And the Ammonites gave gifts to Uzziah, and his name spread abroad even to the entering in of Egypt; for he strengthened himself exceedingly." He gathered a large army, fortified Jerusalem strongly, and provided a large store of weapons, and all the implements and resources of war.—*Ibid.*

[18078] He was equally assiduous and active in promoting works of internal improvement. "He built towers in the desert, and digged many wells; for he had much cattle both in the low country and in the plains; husbandmen also, and vine-dressers in the mountains and in Carmel; for he loved husbandry." Surely Judah might congratulate itself upon its active, efficient, enlightened, prosperous young sovereign. The palmy days of Solomon and David seemed coming back, and the disgraces and failures of preceding reigns about to be wiped

away. And so says the historian, waxing eloquent with his theme, "his name spread abroad, for he was marvellously helped, till he was strong."—*Ibid.*

II. HIS FAILURE AS A MAN.

Enervated by continuous prosperity, he gave way to arrogance and presumption.

[18079] Prolonged and uniform prosperity, especially when united with high place and the ostentation and subserviency that inevitably cling to its skirts, is a severe trial which none but a robust and hardy virtue can long endure. Uzziah's goodness gave way under it. Not content with his kingly honours, he will fain be a priest also. He is unwilling to admit that there is any important thing in his kingdom that he cannot do, any honourable function that he may not discharge. It seemed a disparagement and limitation of his supremacy. Perhaps he argued that priestly powers were inherent in royalty, and that in exercising them he was but reviving suspended rights, and bringing back the usage of primitive times. The king was the priest of the nation in patriarchal days, as in the case of "Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the most high God," and there would be no lack of flatterers to applaud his purpose, for the opinions of kings easily find advocates and supporters. And so "when he was strong," says the narrator—notice, it is strength that makes men presumptuous and arrogant and daring—"his heart was lifted up to his destruction: for he transgressed against the Lord his God, and went into the temple of the Lord to burn incense on the altar of incense. And Azariah the priest went in after him."—*Ibid.*

[18080] He intruded into the priesthood, and on a single occasion undertook to minister at God's altar. God treated the offence with great severity, as though it were in His eyes a crime of magnitude. It mattered not that Uzziah was a king, and, under the theocratic constitution of the Jewish monarchy, the earthly head of the Church. A king without a sacerdotal commission is no more a minister than a private man. Might does not make right, any more than popular notions of freedom and equality. David must not intrude into Aaron's office, any more than Aaron into his. Uzziah was smitten with a leprosy, and passed the remainder of his days in seclusion, and the government till his death was administered in his name by a regency. Crown, palace, sceptre he was forced to lay aside, and though still nominally the sovereign, he dwelt in a "several house"—shut up in a retirement, which, though it may have been royally adorned and splendid, no appliances could render aught but a virtual imprisonment, "and Jotham his son was over the king's house, judging the people of the land" in the father's stead.—*Ibid.*

III. HIS PUNISHMENT.

It was completely retributive.

Having invaded an office in which he had no right, he was debarred from the exercise of those powers which came properly within his province.

[18081] "And Uzziah the king was a leper unto the day of his death, and dwelt in a several house, being a leper, for he was cut off from the house of the Lord; and Jotham his son was over the king's house, judging the people of the Lord." Wretched eclipse of bright hopes and cheering promises! Miserable termination of a fair and successful beginning! And all because a man in his heady pride and grasping ambition could not be content with a position and a sphere grand, dignified, and ample enough to satisfy every reasonable desire, but must grasp at more; and because, moreover, a man not lawfully called and appointed to it would presume to usurp that sacred office, which none, however high in place, or abundant in gifts, can innocently and safely assume, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron.—*Ibid.*

[18082] Uzziah who, being a king, would in his greedy pride and presumptuous hardihood be a priest also, shall for his punishment be not even king, but his office shall be given to another, and he must live and see that other exercising those functions the dignity and importance of which he had failed rightly to estimate.—*M. J.*

IV. HOMILETICAL REFLECTIONS.

1 The sin of Uzziah illustrates forcibly the sacredness of the priesthood, and the danger of an unauthorized intrusion on its peculiar functions.

[18083] The act of Uzziah, however he might seek to cover it by a claim of prerogative, did in fact involve a virtual abrogation of the priestly office, and a defiance of the decree to which the older rebellion of Korah had given occasion, that no "stranger, which is not of the seed of Aaron, come near to offer incense before the Lord." If it was not rebuked, the barrier which hedged in the sacred calling would be broken down, and all the benefits which God proposed to confer upon the Church and upon mankind by its institution be dissipated and lost. It was rebuked in the person of Uzziah, signally, impressively, awfully; and the leprous king, that aspired to be a priest without a Divine calling and commission, stands a warning to all ages that men are not to take it upon them to "minister for men in things pertaining to God," without a clear and well-authenticated commission, on penalty of His awful displeasure. Where the act is, there the displeasure is, and as long as the act is prolonged the displeasure continues. Time can never sanctify or make valid that which began in disorder and self-will, though it may cover it with a show of

venerableness and dignity.—*Rev. R. Hallam, D.D.*

[18084] A chain grows no stronger by lengthening if its first link is not properly attached. And though now no opening in the earth or leprosy in the forehead marks God's anger as of old, because God no longer speaks to men supernaturally, an attentive observation of the signs of the times may perhaps discover proof of it in tokens scarcely, if at all, less unambiguous and decisive: in division and instability, in endlessly multiplying schism, in the decay of sound doctrine, and the substitution of fitful paroxysms of religious feeling for a steady and equable flow of spiritual life. 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. Nay, as the gospel is holier, purer, more perfect, the corrupting and marring of its institutions must be so much the more criminal and injurious. God may deal graciously with individuals and bodies unconsciously and involuntarily involved in the evil, and gather among them bright gems in the day when He makes up His jewels; but the act in which it began, and all by which it is prolonged, He will always discover and frown upon. And while this is so, King Uzziah, leprous at the altar in his unlawful offering of incense, will continue to be to the Church and the world, a profitable and instructive object of contemplation.—*Ibid.*

2 The sin of Uzziah demonstrates the necessity of due regard to the correlative obligations of life.

[18085] In the Church we are to obey them that are over us in the Lord, and in the family the child is to submit to the parent, the wife to duly respect the headship of the husband. We cannot all be chief. The result would be as monstrous and harmful as the absorption of all the limbs into the head. Nor are those in governing places to forget that they are under equal obligation to respect the rights of those inferior powers, which in their place rule by a right as Divine as their own. The husband is to "give honour unto the wife," the parent to the child, the magistrate to the citizen, the bishop to the inferior minister, the minister to the private Christian; "yea," says the apostle, "all of you be subject one to another," and "honour all men." The sun must not leave his supreme brightness to run in the orbit of an attendant planet. The system would be a wreck at once. Uzziah was a very good king, but he lost all honour when he undertook to play the priest; a sceptre became him; a censor made him a leper. You would gain nothing by

climbing up into the pulpit, and I do no good by giving orders in your ships, offices, parlours, and kitchens. The effect would only be "envying and strife" in which is "confusion and every evil work." Nor is the inconvenience and discomfort the worst of it: look at the sin; it is rebellion against God. God has set us in our places. To stay in them, to be content with them, and patiently, modestly, and faithfully to do the duty that pertains to them, is the obedience He asks—the measure of our service and our salvation if faith work in it. If we will not, there will be a leprosy upon us, a worse leprosy than Uzziah's, a leprosy of the soul, a leprosy that will consume us in everlasting death.—*Ibid.*

AHAZ.

I. GENERAL VIEW OF HIS CHARACTER.

1 It was exceptionally and unmitigatedly wicked.

[18086] King Ahaz is one of the stupendous monuments of guilt in Israelitish history. He is one of the few men in any history of whom not one good thing is recorded. His career was one uniform and unmitigated stream of iniquity from beginning to end. Not one virtue or virtuous act is thought worthy of mention in his whole life. So black and disgraceful was his reign, that when he died, the indignant and revolted conscience of the nation refused him burial in the royal sepulchre.—*Rev. A. Phelps, D.D.*

[18087] Ahaz was Jotham's evil son, intensely evil, God-defying, mischievous, bold, and energetic in his iniquity. How wickedness reached such an extraordinary development in him does not appear. Who his mother was neither of the histories that record his reign tell us. If Jotham had a bad wife, his weak goodness may have easily been neutralized by the corrupt example and influence of a wicked woman. So it was, at any rate, that Ahaz was bad, very bad—so bad that his name became a sort of proverb of badness. His father died when he was but twenty years old, and at that immature age he ascended the throne to encounter the temptations of power and wealth which none but well-settled principles can successfully surmount. Doubtless there hung around the young king a crowd of satellites and sycophants, ready to flatter and debauch him, like those who so fatally misled his ancestor Rehoboam. He reigned sixteen years, and they were throughout years of abomination and disaster. The historian says of him that he did not that which was right in the sight of the Lord his God, like David his father. But he walked in the way of the kings of Israel, yea, and made his son to pass through the fire, according to the abominations of the heathen, whom the Lord cast

out from before the children of Israel. "He sacrificed and burnt incense in the high places and in the hills and under every green tree." He "made also molten images for Baalim." "He burnt incense in the valley of the son of Hinnom, and burnt his children in the fire." He was a great patron of idolatry, a zealot for it. All the forms and varieties of heathenism known among the Israelites he maintained and practised.—*Rev. R. Hallam, D.D.*

[18088] He was not content with the paganism which he found already in the kingdom. He imported new shapes of idol worship. For when "King Ahaz went to Damascus to meet Tiglath-pileser, king of Assyria, and saw an altar that was at Damascus, King Ahaz sent to Urijah, the priest, the fashion of the altar and the pattern of it, according to all the workmanship thereof." . . . Thus "he sacrificed unto the gods of Damascus which smote him." "They were the ruin of him," says the historian, "and of all Israel." Meanwhile the true God and His temple and worship he treated with scorn.—*Ibid.*

2 It was entirely unimproved by the dealings of God with him.

[18089] The hand of God was lifted up to terrify and chastise him by the aggressive pride and cupidity of his neighbours. The timorous monarch, mean-spirited as well as base, quailed at the menace. "It was told the house of David, saying, Syria is confederate with Ephraim. And his heart was moved, and the heart of his people, as the trees of the woods are moved with the wind." It was now that the Prophet Isaiah was sent to the terrified king, with an admonition not to be faint-hearted, of the "two tails of their smoking firebrands," as he contemptuously calls the fierce and menacing allies; for it was God's purpose to frighten but not to destroy King Ahaz; and when the king in mock humility or superstitious terror declined the offer of a sensible sign of God's promise of forbearance, he gave him that wonderful prediction of the Virgin-born, which, whatever proximate fulfilment it may have had in days close at hand, found its true and only adequate completion ages after in the Divine Son of Mary. The oracle was fulfilled, and Ahaz and Jerusalem were spared. . . . But no dealings of God could cure him of his rooted love of idolatry and its attendant vices. "In the time of his distress did he trespass yet more against the Lord. This is that King Ahaz."—*Ibid.*

II. HOMILETICAL REFLECTIONS.

1 The career of Ahaz illustrates that law of character by which the wickedness of a man is proportioned to the amount of holy influence which he has conquered.

[18090] This Judæan king broke through a combination of holy influence, and therefore he became the man he was. The depth of his fall was proportioned to the momentum acquired in

bursting the bonds which held him. Such is the natural working of things in the experience of sin. It is a fundamental law of character. As virtue is proportioned in vigour to the temptations resisted, so depravity is proportioned to the forces of conscience, and inheritance, and education, and example, and persuasion, and the Spirit of God, which have been fought with and conquered. This must always be reckoned in forecasting a man's future in a career of sin. The best things perverted are the worst. Christian birth abused becomes a curse. Religious education trampled on becomes a fountain of moral disease. Sabbaths broken become an opportunity to vice. Natural sensibilities to religion, indurated by transgression, become a foundation for towering iniquity. Convictions of sin resisted are often transformed into beliefs of falsehood. The strivings of the Holy Spirit quenched become the basis of Satanic conquest. Devils fill the place from which the Spirit of God has been ejected. It used to be proverbial in the days of American slavery, that the most ferocious overseers were Northern men who had to override the convictions of their youth and their inherited faith in order to become slave-drivers. This was one variety of the universal law which governs the degree of character, good or bad. Tell me what good influence a man has defied and scorned in becoming what he is, and I will give you the gauge of his depravity. The worst of men are apostates from the best of faiths.—*Rev. A. Phelps, D.D.*

2 The career of Ahaz illustrates the faithfulness of God in chastising wicked men for their good.

[18091] "The Lord brought Judah low because of Ahaz." From the beginning to the end of his reign he experienced the truth that the way of transgressors is hard. In war he was whipped all around. In alliances he was cheated and checkmated. His people were made captives by thousands. Nothing went well with him. His public life was one long career of defying God, despite God's persistent efforts to save him by chastising him. This is repeated over and over again in the experience of wicked men. Such men often think it a great mystery that they suffer so much. They do not understand why it is that misfortune pursues them so. "Just my luck," says one, when ill success attends his business. Yet often the secret reason is that God is trying to save the man. He is contending with God in one way, and God is contending with him in another. There is no luck about it. It is God's faithfulness to the soul at the expense of the pocket.—*Ibid.*

[18092] The sufferings of this world are not in the strict sense retributive. They are disciplinary. The world of retribution lies farther on. In love, God holds the rod over many a bad man. He strikes him here, and He strikes him there. God's flail threshes him like wheat.

He surrounds him with trouble. He heaps up misfortunes. They come thick and fast. Life is one long disappointment. "Few and evil have my days been," is his lament as he looks backward: "all is vanity and vexation of spirit." Is not this the general feeling with which men reach old age without the consolations of religion? "Oh that I had never been born!" exclaimed Voltaire in his old age. But in this experience of the wicked, God is never vindictive. This is His way of striving to save men from eternal death. Sometimes He pursues it to the very last, till the grave closes over the incorrigible sinner, and he passes on to a world where the retributive decisions of eternity displace the benign discipline of time.—*Ibid.*

3 The career of Ahaz illustrates the extreme which sin reaches when men fight successfully against God's chastisements.

[18093] "In the time of his distress did he trespass yet more against the Lord." This is the tearful phenomenon sometimes witnessed in the developments of sin in this world. Some men are not subdued by suffering. They refuse to bow to chastisement. The more they suffer, the more they sin. Trouble angers them against God. They indicate their growing fitness for the world of woe in this induration of heart by which susceptibility to the softening effect of sorrow is destroyed.—*Ibid.*

[18094] Few things are so truthful a touchstone to the character of men as the way in which they treat the suffering which God sends as chastisement. One man turns at its bidding, and becomes an heir of glory; another defies it, and becomes a monument of perdition. Lord, who maketh us to differ?—*Ibid.*

4 The career of Ahaz illustrates the disappointments which wicked men experience in their hopes of happiness in sin.

[18095] "He said, Because the gods of the kings of Syria help them, therefore will I sacrifice to them, that they may help me. But they were the ruin of him." True to the life, every word of it! In no more truthful figure can we express the experience of many young men who enter on a career of worldliness. They see other men living for this world alone, as it seems to a looker-on, on the top of the wave of human felicity. A rich man seems to them a supremely happy man. A successful statesman appears to have all that an aspiring man can ask for. A man who has gained the summit of social rank and splendour becomes, to many who are below him, the model of earthly bliss. Any man at the top of the ladder seems very high up to a man at the bottom. So a young man is apt to look on the world to which he proposes to devote his being. "The world makes these men happy," he says; "and I will try it, that it may make me happy too." This is the secret experience, probably, of all who give themselves deliberately to a life of

irreligion. They are allured by the glamour of irreligious prosperity. But when they try the experiment for themselves "it is the ruin of them." The fruit turns to ashes. No such young man ever finds the world to be what it looked to be when he surveyed it from afar. It is a beautiful mirage. The testimony of experience is proverbial, that the richest men are not the happiest men. The most successful ambitious men are not the happiest men. The pleasure-seekers who seem to have their fill of all they planned for in life are not the happiest men. One word expresses the issue of all such experiments—disappointment. The world is full of soured and disappointed men. The more irreligious men are, the more profoundly they experience this inward consciousness of failure in their life's plans. They have "hewed out to themselves broken cisterns that can hold no water."—*Ibid.*

5 The career of Ahaz illustrates the distinction which it is possible for a man to gain in this world as a monument of guilt.

[18096] "He did trespass more against the Lord. This is that king Ahaz!" Such is the reflection of the annalist, after enumerating the monarch's crimes. "This is that king Ahaz. Look at him; mark him! let him stand in history as a monster of iniquity; let the world stand aghast at him." Such seems to be the spirit of the inspired recorder. We all naturally crave distinction,—one man for one thing, another for another: all hanker for it in something. Anything to lift us up and out of the common herd! This is the temper of a world without God. It is possible for a man of reckless impiety to become illustrious for guilt, and that only. Some such names stand out in history, and will stand thus for ever. Where all are sinners, some become guilty above their fellows—princes in depravity; royal dukes in iniquity; men so like to Satan in character, that he dwells with and takes possession of them before the time.—*Ibid.*

[18097] This is the legitimate ending of a long career of alternate chastisement and sin without repentance. A Cornish proverb says, "He that will not be ruled by the rudder must be ruled by the rock." This is the rock on which haughty and defiant guilt is wrecked. It is simply left to itself, to become what it has chosen to be—such a demon of iniquity as to be abhorred of God and man. God save us from ourselves! We carry within us the elements of hell if we but choose to make them such. Ahaz, Judas, Nero, Borgia, Alva—all were once prattling infants in happy mothers' arms. The first babe of our race—a marvel of joy to the first mother—was the first murderer. Who shall dare to encounter the possibilities of human guilt without the grace of God?—*Ibid.*

HEZEKIAH.

I. GRACES OF CHARACTER.

1 He displayed conspicuous piety and reforming zeal.

[18098] None of the kings of Judah sank lower in wickedness than Ahaz; none, before or after him, rose to so high a pitch of goodness as Hezekiah. An exception is not made even in favour of his pious and exemplary great-grandson Josiah. For worth and usefulness Hezekiah stands foremost among the kings of Judah. None were equal to him that preceded or followed him. This is large praise indeed. And as it is inspired praise, it must be just praise—"praise of God," and who shall gainsay that? He was a reformer, and his work was one of great magnitude and difficulty.—*Rev. R. Hallam, D.D.*

[18099] He possessed true riches, without which a man, whatever be the abundance of his worldly possessions, is poor. He "wrought that which was good, and right, and truth before the Lord his God. And in every work that he began in the service of the house of God, and in the law, and in the commandments to seek his God, he did it with all his heart, and prospered." "He clave to the Lord, and departed not from following Him, but kept His commandments which the Lord commanded Moses." A true lover of God, a true keeper of His law, a zealous maintainer of His ordinances, a liberal supporter of His worship, looking amidst his power and splendour for a heavenly crown, and setting his heart upon heavenly treasures. Such was Hezekiah spiritually; and if, in the annals of the kings of Judah, by deeds and services he came to be accounted the great, yet by virtues and acts of religion none earned for himself more truly the higher title of the good.—*Ibid.*

[18100] The temple worship was reinstated; the passover was kept with a splendour not witnessed for many years, the scattered remnants of the Ten Tribes, whose territory had been ravaged and depopulated by the Assyrians, were invited to participate in the solemnity; the altars and images of false gods were removed and destroyed; and even the brazen serpent which Moses made in the wilderness, for fear of its perversion to superstitious purposes, was broken in pieces and called Nehushtan. In all this work the king took a personal part, guiding the actors in it by his example, and cheering them by his counsel and instruction. So Hezekiah's reformation stands as a pattern of a true reformation. Its design and effect were restoration, not the invention and establishment of new methods and forms. He did not believe in development and progress of religious institutions.—*Ibid.*

[18101] The erection of altars in all parts of

the country had diffused the idolatrous venom into all orders and ranks of men. The palace and the cottage alike did homage to Baal, and Ashtaroth, and Moloch; and the rustic villager, as well as the elegant courtier, was poisoned and befouled with the reeking pollution. From the prophets of Jerusalem had profaneness gone forth into all the land, so that "the whole head was sick, and the whole heart faint." To purify such a country was indeed to cleanse an Augean stable, and called for a man of faith, nerve, zeal, energy, and wisdom; such a man was Hezekiah; and in his successful performance of the mighty work he won for himself the high praise contained in our text. And if his work was not as radical and permanent as his pious ardour aimed to make it, it was only because "man's breath is in his nostrils; and wherein is he to be accounted of?" Before a good man's work has had time to harden into sufficient strength to abide, he is forced to leave it, in obedience to the inexorable decree of mortality, to him that shall come after him; and "who knoweth whether he shall be a wise man or a fool?"—*Ibid.*

2 He possessed a childlike faith.

[18102] Sennacherib was a mighty monarch, and his invasion of the land filled it with terror and dismay. Isaiah, the noblest and most eloquent of the prophets, was the king's counsellor and comforter in this and in every emergency. From him the king gained the serene confidence with which he viewed the threatening danger, and the people too grew calm under the example of their monarch. "The people rested themselves on the words of Hezekiah, king of Judah." Well might any nation repose on one to whom even now the world may turn as a signal example of what is meant by faith, as distinct from fanaticism. A threatening and insulting message comes from the boastful invader. Hezekiah goes up to the temple, and spreads it before the Lord, and receives through Isaiah an assurance of safety. The land is overrun, and a mighty host is encamped near Jerusalem. To human eyes escape is impossible. But the king and the prophet are calm, for their trust is in God, and their confidence is not misplaced. "It came to pass that night that the angel of the Lord went forth and smote in the camp of the Assyrians a hundred fourscore and five thousand."—*Ibid.*

3 He exhibited resignation to the will of God.

[18103] The prophet was sent to say to him, "Behold, the days come, that all that is in thy house, and that which thy fathers have laid up in store unto this day, shall be carried to Babylon; nothing shall be left, saith the Lord. And of thy sons which shall issue from thee, . . . shall they take away; and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon." This was the distressing message to which the penitent king made reply: "Good is the word

of the Lord which thou hast spoken." He "humbled himself for the pride of his heart," and with a chastened and subdued spirit consented that the will of the Lord should be done. Here was submission: here was a glorious triumph over a selfish heart: here was, what every creature ought to render, a cheerful and absolute subjection to the empire of eternal rectitude and love.—*Rev. E. Griffin, D.D.*

II. DEFECTS OF CHARACTER.

He weakly gave way to vanity and ostentation.

[18104] He was one of the three eminent names, in after ages, held in chief estimation among the Jews. "All," says Ecclesiasticus, "except David and Ezekias and Josias were defective; for they forsook the law of the Most High, even the kings of Juda failed. Yet he was not a perfect man; success betrayed him into pride, and pride led him into ostentation. He was smitten and miraculously delivered from the jaws of death. A sign akin to that vouchsafed to Joshua, in the going back of the shadow on the dial of Ahaz ten degrees, attested the Divine purposes of mercy to him. To the ambassadors of the king of Babylon, who came to inquire after this wonder, he unwisely displayed his wealth, and provoked God's anger."—*Rev. R. Hallam, D.D.*

[18105] "God left him, to try him; and that He might know all that was in his heart." It was too much for Hezekiah. The latent pride of his heart showed itself. He was betrayed into an ostentatious display of his wealth and greatness. Hezekiah was glad of them, and "showed them all the house of his precious things, the silver, and the gold, and the spices, and the precious ointment, and all the house of his armour, and all that was found in his treasures; there was nothing in his house nor in all his dominion that Hezekiah showed them not." Dangerous, fatal ostentation. The sight awakened the cupidity that was never satisfied till, a few generations later, Babylon made the country a prey.—*Ibid.*

III. A MODERN PARALLEL IN REFORMATION.

[18106] When he would get things right, he would get them as they were when they came from the hand of God. There is in this particular a striking analogy between this reform and the English Reformation of the sixteenth century. The design was not to make a Church, or to adorn a Church with novel devices of man's wisdom; but to cleanse the Church from defilement and corruption, and make it what it was when it came from the hand of its Creator, and he pronounced it very good. And when religion has fallen into decay in any age, we are to profit by this hint, and

not to seek its resuscitation by new measures, by novel devices calculated to promote excitement or act upon the nervous sensibilities of men, but by a more diligent, careful, and serious use of appointed means and instrumentalities that have upon them the stamp of a Divine authority, the reparation of God's house, the orderly, solemn, seemly celebration of His ordinances, the regular and reverent observance of His worship, a due regard for His ministers and their sacred commission; in fine, by putting into a condition to act with more freedom and efficiency those old institutions which God has given, and promised to bless to the accomplishment of their sacred design.—*Ibid.*

IV. HOMILETICAL REFLECTIONS.

1 The piety of Hezekiah illustrates the sovereignty of God in conversion.

[18107] He was one of the model princes of Judah. Yet early in his life his conversion was one of the most improbable of events. He was the son of one of the most impious monarchs that ever sat on the throne of Israel. Bad blood was in his veins. His youth was cursed by a most polluted parental example. The abominations of Oriental idolatry were the atmosphere of his childhood. . . . It is the mysterious lot of many other men to be born and educated under circumstances which render their conversion to God intrinsically improbable. They seem born to vice. They are trained to immorality. Childish and even infantile lips are taught to profane God's name. This is not always the lot of the poor and the ignorant only. It was the favourite pastime of one of the statesmen of the first period of our Republic, to teach his beautiful little motherless daughter at four years of age to prattle the oaths with which his own conversation was polluted. It is one of the unsolved mysteries of God's government, that such enormities are permitted. Humming-birds seem to have a more blessed existence than the children of such impious fathers and mothers. Yet God often enters such homes with His saving grace. He speaks the word, "Thou art Mine," and a child of immortality is saved.—*Rev. A. Phelps, D.D.*

2 The piety of Hezekiah is an encouragement to the children of ungodly parents.

[18108] So much is often said, and justly, of the covenant of God with Christian parents, that sometimes in the contrast a cloud seems to rest over the destiny of those who do not share that blessing. Said one child of vice: "My father was a drunkard, and my grandfather was a drunkard before him. I shall be a drunkard too; we belong to a race of drunkards. I may as well accept my lot first as last: it is my fate." Said another, a man of high culture, but notorious for his ungoverned passions: "My father was just so: his boys are all so. We cannot live in peace together: we never did. We are

all possessed of the devil: I can't help it." Not so does God reason. "All souls are Mine," He declares. "The son shall *not* bear the iniquity of his father," is His law. . . . True, it is a great blessing to have been born in the line of a godly ancestry. But it is a greater blessing to have been born at all, under the grace of God, in a Christian land, amidst sabbaths, Bibles, churches, and under the gracious providences of God. Some of the best of men have been illustrations of Divine grace to the worst. What of heathen converts to Christianity? Heaven is already becoming populous with the children of idolaters, liars, drunkards, thieves, adulterers, murderers. Go back far enough in the ancestral line of any of us, and we come to a generation of cannibals. What but the love of God first took off that ancestral curse?—*Ibid.*

3 The piety of Hezekiah suggests that the conversion of men is often assisted by their natural recoil from extreme wickedness.

[18109] The young monarch must have come to the throne in a state of disgust with his father's crimes. He must have felt the dishonour of them to the royal name. He must have seen the wretched condition of the kingdom on account of them. His subsequent life shows that as a young man he must have been thoughtful and of tender conscience. He was just the man to blush for his father's disgrace, and to recoil with a young man's pride from his country's shame. This is one of the benevolent devices of God for the defeat of sin. Sin is often so used as to defeat itself. One of the reasons why it is permitted to run its course, and come to a head, is that men may see it in its hideous maturity. Only thus can we know it as it is. The delay of God in its punishment may be often due to this law. And it often works to the salvation of souls. God uses sin to defeat sin. When a prairie is on fire, and the traveller is in danger of being surrounded and suffocated by the roaring flame, he has a way of fighting fire with fire. So the Spirit of God sets guilt against guilt. Temptation is checkmated by the very ghostliness of the crime which it proposes. The young should cherish then, as for dear life, their first revolt of conscience from abounding sin.—*Ibid.*

4 The reforming zeal of Hezekiah illustrates the fact that when God converts men from amidst surroundings of great depravity, He often has some great and signal service in prospect for them to perform.

[18110] God summoned him to the reformation of a kingdom. He trained him for it by permitting him to see the guilt and the ruin of his father's reign. When the critical time came He lifted him out of the slough of iniquity, and made him one of the signal examples of a godly prince, whose name should give lustre to the Jewish throne for ever after. Thus God often works in humbler life. One of the most suc-

cessful clergymen in the history of the New England pulpit was the son of a drunkard and a thief. His youth was spent in extreme poverty and disgrace. The family name was a byword. When he resolved to work his way to college and to the pulpit, his father overwhelmed him with parental curses. In that man's boyhood, his ruin for this world and the next seemed to human view well-nigh certain. "Like father, like son," said his neighbours. But God had other plans for the unfortunate youth. That masterly pulpit was preparing for him, and he preparing for it. The earthly father's curses and the heavenly Father's blessing were pitted against each other. God brought him safely through those fires of Moloch. He called him to stand in a place more honourable than the courts of kings. He became greatly successful in revivals of religion. Before his death, more than twelve hundred persons were known to him who attributed their conversion to his ministry.—*Ibid.*

5 The reforming zeal of Hezekiah illustrates the moral power of one man in effecting a great work to which God has called him.

[18111] It appears that the reformation of the kingdom was at first the idea of Hezekiah alone. "It is in my heart," he says, "to make a covenant with the Lord." Nobody seems to have put him up to it. No prophet came to warn or to stimulate him. The movement grew up silently in his own heart. God and he planned it alone. Probably he had been brooding over it and praying over it for years. Men do not spring into such honour at a bound. At last he was the soul of the reform. The idea was his; the measures were his; the execution was his. So it often is in other great works of God. Some one man heads it; puts his soul into it; gives his life to it; rouses other men, and energizes them in it. There is almost no limit to the power of a live man called of God to a great life's work. Other men fall back to the right and to the left, and let such a man go up the highway of the King, while they fall in at the rear, and acknowledge His lead.—*Ibid.*

6 The reformation effected by Hezekiah illustrates the suddenness with which God often achieves by the hand of such men great changes in the progress of His kingdom.

[18112] Following the story of this ancient reformation, we learn at the end of the narrative that "Hezekiah rejoiced, and all the people, that God had prepared the people, for the thing was done suddenly." It was an instance of a very rapid work of grace. Although the king had originated the movement, and set others to work out the idea over which he had long brooded, he found things ready to his hand. God had "prepared the people for it." They had been reading God's providence as well as he. Secret currents of feeling were swelling in their hearts. All that they needed was a leader. When, therefore, the leader appeared in the person of their youthful prince, events moved

quickly. Results ripened fast. Before they had time to dally over it, the thing was done. The kingdom was righted, and brought once more into line in the service of the living God. This is another of the common laws of God's working. He prepares different agencies in different channels secretly. Each is quietly fitted to another by unseen strategy. The leader is fashioned for the people, and the people trained for the leader. Unknown to each other, men are set to thinking of the same thing. The same fire is kindled in many hearts; the same resolves are created, the same hopes cherished.—*Ibid.*

[18113] The abolition of American slavery illustrated this. How we used to talk and pray on that subject twenty years ago. We thought it one of the far distant events in our coming history. Centuries hence, in some golden age we dreamed that some happy generation of our successors would arise, who would devise some way of putting an end to the atrocious system. Nobody conceived it possible that the end was so near and would come so suddenly. But God was fitting events to events, and men to men. Had our spiritual senses been more alert, we should have heard the chariot wheels and the tramping of steeds. At last, when he was ready, the end came in the twinkling of an eye. Such phenomena suggest the possibility that the conversion of the world may be nearer than we think.—*Ibid.*

7 The confidence of Hezekiah at a critical period in his history points to the true source of all strength and power in the emergencies of life.

[18114] That question, "What confidence is this wherein thou trustest?" how it brought Hezekiah face to face with what was in reality the source of his trust and strength! The extremity brought the question, and the question solidified, so to speak, his faith in God. The same question is asked of all of us at various times in life. It is asked in temptations, trials, adversity of all kinds, but with emphatic insistence upon the approach of death—"What confidence?" The question has to do with the greatest realities of our inmost being. It reminds us that practically it is to us all one, as though there were but two beings in the world—God and each one's self. "What confidence?" Not the least terribly-mistaken reed-prop in the hour of some emergency will be found to have trusted in the shadow of a religion, to have gone through life imagining that we had a religion, and to find in the hour of trial or of death that we have had it not. Let us not wait till some dread crisis arrives before seeking honestly to answer to ourselves this question of questions. What is it wherein, above all else, we are at present in reality trusting? Is it the world? is it wealth? is it fashion? is it friends? is it the outward profession of religion—attendance at a round of services? Or is it God in Christ—His word, His work, the Rock of Ages? In that upon

which we are at present in reality resting, we shall, in all probability, find ourselves trusting at the last.—*M. J.*

MANASSEH.

I. HIS APOSTASY.

1 It was conspicuous for its exceptional depravity.

[18115] He fell back to the disgraceful level of his grandfather Ahaz. The catalogue of his crimes is fearful. "He made Judah to do worse than the heathen," says the historian. He practised sorcery and necromancy, and restored the furnace to Tophet. He worshipped the stars. He sacrificed his own children to pagan deities. He named his son Amon after an Egyptian idol. He was the first persecutor in Judah of the true religion. He removed the ark out of the holy of holies. Tradition says that the name of Jehovah was erased from all public documents and inscriptions. His reign was a "reign of terror" to the prophets of the Most High. The secular historian says that "day by day a fresh batch of the prophetic order were ordered to execution. From end to end of Jerusalem were to be seen traces of their blood." Tradition says that the prophet Isaiah, nearly ninety years of age, perished by Manasseh's order. Yet the same tradition declares that his mother was Isaiah's daughter. He was one of three kings who in Jewish story had no part in the life to come—Jeroboam, Ahab, Manasseh. His name became in Jewish annals the synonym of infamy.—*Rev. A. Phelps, D.D.*

2 It was probably due in great measure to the early loss of his father and the counsels of evil advisers.

[18116] How different might have been his career and character if he had grown up under the reforming and restraining hand of such a father as Hezekiah! How irreparable to a child the loss of a good parent, especially if he be born to the inheritance of wealth and consequence! We know not into whose hands he fell upon his father's demise, but probably into the hands of such men as were wont to haunt the court and palace of a minor king—men bent only on their own selfish schemes of aggrandizement and gain; men ready to ingratiate themselves with their youthful and confiding sovereign, by flattering his vanity and ministering to the gratification of his desires, that they may prey upon his bounty and use his name to justify and sustain their deeds of rapacity and oppression. It was the misfortune of Manasseh to pass the most critical period of his life, his 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.*

[18117] He became his own master and the master of a kingdom before he had attained any fitness for the difficult office of governing himself or others; unprincipled and selfish men, sycophants and corrupters, stood around his throne ready to pervert his principles and mislead his counsels for their own benefit or pleasure. Power and luxury tend to intoxicate youthful minds, powerfully operating to fill them with pride, wantonness, and presumption. To such men and such circumstances a child well-taught and well-trained, yet a child, fell an easy prey. . . . He plunged headlong into a career of irreligion and wickedness, and persevered in it many years. The beginnings of good in him, if any had been made, were destroyed and lost.—*Ibid.*

II. HIS REPENTANCE.

1 It was an exceptional instance.

[18118] 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.—*Rev. A. Phelps, D.D.*

2 It followed upon an exceptionally severe affliction.

[18119] God sent upon him at last a reverse of fortune, seemingly in wrath, really in unspeakable compassion. He was dethroned and carried into captivity. "By the rivers of Babylon we sat down and wept." Splendour, plenty, power, were gone. The greatness of his former condition served by contrast to aggravate the sense of his present wretchedness. But his tears were healing and restorative. To him, as an immortal and accountable being, Babylon was better than Jerusalem, his house of exile than his royal court. The departure of his pomp and honour made room for the entrance of salutary reflections. The season of sadness carries the soul back to childhood. Happily for him childhood contained provisions and promises of a better life than his history had realized. He heard once more his father's voice. He beheld once more his father's ways, and his father's prayers were pleading for him on high, even as his father's goodness was pleading with him below; and so "when he was in affliction he besought the Lord his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, and prayed unto Him; and He was entreated of him, and heard his supplication,

and brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the Lord He was God."—*Rev. R. Hallam, D.D.*

- 3 It was in accordance with God's law of showing mercy to Manasseh's father, as one of the "thousands of them that love Him and keep His commandments."

[18120] There were other influences besides the natural operation of His reverses in Manasseh's recovery, influences of truth and grace: of truth long before implanted and smothered, but not extinguished; of grace, that came not fortuitously or capriciously or arbitrarily, but according to a law of God's spiritual kingdom, the law whereby He shows "mercy to thousands of them that love Him and keep His commandments;" the law by which the prayers and deeds of good men are kept in heaven as a precious and enduring treasure; the law whereby Hezekiah wrought in the prevalence of his intercessions, after he had lain in his grave a half century, intercessions that were living seeds of a rich and happy harvest after long years of barrenness and apparent death; a law which brought upon the sinful monarch that severe but merciful dispensation, which, by virtue of the sources of spiritual life which were mingled with it, became the occasion of delivering his soul from death.—*Ibid.*

- 4 Its degree was in proportion to the heinousness of his former iniquity.

[18121] We are told, too, that in his captivity "he humbled himself *greatly*." A certain *proportion* runs through his history. A great sinner, a great sufferer, a great penitent. God works thoroughly. He is faithful in adjusting the discipline to the exigency. Whom He loves, He chastens proportionately to his necessities. He spares not the rod at the expense of the child's soul. He plans for eternity, not for time. So would we have it—would we not?—in the experience of our children.—*Rev. A. Phelps, D.D.*

- 5 It was permanent and reformatory in its effects.

[18122] His repentance was not superficial and transitory. It brought forth in him "the fruit of good living." It yielded to him the "peaceable fruit of righteousness." He devoted the remnant of his days to God and duty, to reform and reparation, to the practice of piety and virtue, and to the promotion of religion among his people. For we are informed by the historian that "he took away the strange gods and the idol out of the house of the Lord, and all the altars that he had built in the mount of the house of the Lord and in Jerusalem, and cast them out of the city. And he repaired the altar of the Lord, and sacrificed therein peace-offerings and thank-offerings, and commanded Judah to serve the Lord God of Israel." He went to his grave in peace, and was gathered at last to the company of his fathers and of all the faithful departed in the paradise of God. Is not

this "a brand plucked from the burning"?—*Rev. R. Hallam, D.D.*

III. COMPARISON WITH AHAZ.

[18123] Place these two royal sinners side by side. Both had the example and teachings and prayers of godly parents. Both broke loose from these restraints, and ran a career of wild and defiant crime. One was saved, the other lost; one taken, the other left. Why the difference, we know not. It is the way of God to do autocratic things. But woe to him who presumes upon God's regal mercy, to defy His laws and trample on His grace! The probabilities are incalculably great that he will be left to his own chosen way, and to mourn at last. The thorns which I have reaped are of the tree I planted.—*Rev. A. Phelps, D.D.*

IV. HOMILETICAL REFLECTIONS.

- 1 The fall of Manasseh was an exception to the general law respecting the history of children of a godly parentage.

[18124] The charge has been exultingly used against the credit of religion that the sons of Christian fathers are *generally* worse than others. The sons of bishops and clergymen and deacons and elders are often said to be proverbially wicked. The restraints of a religious home are sometimes criticised as tending by reaction to the extremes of vice. This assertion is not true historically. Statistics disprove it. In a certain New England town of some thousands of people the records of the Christian families were once examined thoroughly to test this question. I am unable to recall the exact numbers; but the proportion of the children of such families who became religious men and women, as related to those who did not, was more than five to one. Three or four such investigations have come within my knowledge, all ending in a similar result. In the Theological Seminary at Andover some years ago it was found on inquiry that out of its hundred and twenty students preparing for the ministry of the gospel, more than the hundred were from Christian homes, and more than twelve were sons of Christian ministers. A similar inquiry, with similar results, was once instituted in Amherst College. Had the common proverb on the subject been true, no such proportions as these would have been at all probable. The reverse should be the law; the Church should look for her clergy to families in which children have not the misfortune of religious restraints to lay the foundation for profane reactions.—*Ibid.*

- 2 The fall of Manasseh illustrates the fact that when the children of the godly become vicious they become worse than the average of wicked men.

[18125] The brief records of Manasseh's reign clearly hint this. . . . It is also an obviously

natural working of things. A steel spring will recoil one way with a force proportioned to the power with which it has been bent the other way. A cannon-ball dropped from the summit of a shot-tower reduplicates its velocity as it descends, and it strikes the earth with a concussion proportioned to the height of the tower. Similar is the law of character. Both virtue and depravity are in exact ratio to the resistance overcome. The child of godly parentage, therefore, if he becomes an outcast, does fall lower than the average of outcasts. In the natural course of things he becomes a more hardened sinner in the sight of God. His conscience suffers a more fatal violence. His subsequent conversion is less probable. Such is the law of natural progress in the evolution of character. This doubtless is the foundation of the proverb that the sons of ministers and elders and deacons generally become monuments of superlative vice. When they do so they attract the attention of observers by the very extreme of their wickedness and its contrast to the homes of their childhood. The child of godly progenitors cannot tamper with temptation without incurring greater peril of the loss of the soul than that incurred by other men. Exalted to heaven in privilege—thrust down to hell in guilt; such is the contrast as the Bible paints it.—*Ibid.*

3 The salvation of Manasseh affords strong encouragement to continued prayer and spiritual labour for the conversion of sinful men.

(1) *Generally.*

[18120] How much encouragement is there to hope and pray and labour perseveringly for the conversion of sinful men, and especially of those whose early youth has been blessed with holy prayers and pious instructions? We are not to despair of any man. Few cases ever presented a more desperate and discouraging aspect than that of Manasseh. His wickedness began early and continued long. He grew into manhood a bold transgressor. He "framed iniquity for a law." His sin was high-handed, public, and shameless. He grew hoary-headed in sin. He had not only thrown aside the restraints of truth, but he had sanctified falsehood, and found a religion to sanction his sins and turn them into a semblance of piety. Still he was not beyond repentance, not incapable of repentance, for he did repent. There were avenues to his heart still open to the approaches of the Spirit. There were resources in Divine providence sufficient to bring back his soul from the pit. May it not be so of any man who is going on still in his wickedness? Ah! let us never despair of the sinner. Let the sinner never despair of himself. God may not have given him up; it may be that He yet waits to be gracious to him. It is not ours to utter decrees of reprobation on ourselves or on others.—*Rev. R. Hallam, D.D.*

[18127] Let us not give over prayer and effort for any irreligious friend or relative on whom

time is setting the footprints of decay, and marking them for the grave. Who knows what purposes of mercy God may entertain toward them, and by us? Is their case more desperate than Manasseh's? And yet he was saved. Why may not they be saved? If their case ever does become desperate, it may be our neglect to pray and labour for them shall make it so. God reclaimed Manasseh by adversity. But He has other reclaiming agencies. Our word, our example might be such. While the wicked live, then, let us not cease to hope that they live to be subjects of mercy, nor fail to live and act before and toward them as those whose blessed mission it may be to become to them instruments of mercy.—*Ibid.*

(2) *Specially to godly parents.*

[18128] This consideration is forceful and inspiring to religious parents. We are impatient beings, and not ready to believe that we accomplish anything unless we see our tokens, and those very plain and unequivocal. The hearts of parents are too often discouraged because they are not favoured with immediate and visible evidences. They have had their children baptized; they have taught them; they have prayed for them; they have endeavoured to exemplify the influence of the gospel in their presence. Still they are worldly and wayward. They evince little sensibility to religious considerations, little tenderness of conscience, little knowledge of the truth. They are growing up in irreligion, as they have grown up to the service of the world, if not to "sit in the seat of the scornful." Now all this is truly melancholy, and yet it is no argument for unbelief or despair or negligence. It does not warrant them in saying that their labour has been in vain, nor authorize them or others to withhold their efforts in other instances. Though we believe not, "yet He remaineth faithful; He cannot deny Himself." It may be that God hath not forsaken your child; that "His seed remaineth in him" still; that your prayers are not forgotten, your labours not obliterated, the grace of holy baptism not withdrawn. Not every seed that is sown springs up and grows immediately. Not every seed that is buried in the soil, and mingled with it till it is no longer distinguishable, is lost. There is life in the Egyptian bulb that has lain in the shrivelled hand of the dead for thousands of years; and genial warmth and moisture will yet cause it to grow. "Be not weary in well doing, for in due season ye shall reap if ye faint not." "Cast thy bread upon the waters, for thou shalt find it after many days."—*Ibid.*

[18129] God remembers your prayers though He does not yet visibly answer them. Your good seed is embedded in the soil, and will yet spring up and bear fruit. Hezekiah's piety bore fruit after fifty years on the distant banks of the Euphrates. You, too, shall reap sooner or later, you cannot tell when or how; it may be on a death-bed, in a felon's cell, on the

battle-field, or the sinking wreck. Yes, then a parent's prayer and counsel may come into remembrance and save a soul from death.—*Ibid.*

- 4 The salvation of Manasseh should be both an encouragement and a warning to those children of godly parents who have left the paths of virtue.

[18130] Often is it said of the penitent thief on the cross, that *one* such case is recorded in the Scriptures, that none may despair of repentance on a deathbed; and *but* one, that none may presume. Similar is the twofold lesson to be learned from the recovery of this fallen monarch. He tried the fearful experiment of abandoning the God of his fathers, and becoming a monument of illustrious guilt. Through bitter disappointment and humiliating sorrow he was saved. The Scriptures expressly contradict the Jewish tradition. But he was one of a thousand. No other such is clearly declared in the Scriptures to have run that risk with safety at the last. God *can* save a soul in such an extremity of sin; but it is like lifting to its place again a fallen star. Fallen stars generally go out in darkness. That is an exceptional hazard which a young man incurs in such an experience. It is like crossing Niagara over the rapids on a tight-rope. One Blondin out of forty millions may have done it, and reached the other shore in safety; but would you or I risk it for that? The general law of God's dealings with men is that strange and unnatural wickedness shall be left to itself to work out its own penalties. This it did in the case of King Ahaz.—*Rev. A. Phelps, D.D.*

- 5 The salvation of Manasseh should be a source of great encouragement to all true penitents.

[18131] Manasseh's was a true and a deep repentance, and well it might be, for he had been a giant in sin. He had caused Jehovah's name to be despised in Judah; he had carried back the nation into the abominable idolatry from which his father had rescued it, and a relapse is more formidable than the original attack of disease. The sins of the whole people lay in a measure at Manasseh's door. And yet, notwithstanding even this, such is the mercy of God that he was pardoned and saved. Who then need despair? Are you a great sinner? I will be bold to say Manasseh was a greater. Have you influenced others for evil? Yet not so many certainly as Manasseh damaged in soul. Take courage, then, all true penitents, and hope for pardon on the strength of this case of Manasseh's, which the Holy Ghost has caused to be recorded for our learning.—*M. J.*

AMON.

I. HIS GENERAL CHARACTER.

- 1 It is summed up in the words: "He did evil in the sight of the Lord."

[18132] The two historians who tell us what little we know about him unite in saying that he was a bad man. He did evil in the sight of the Lord. He imitated the wickedness of his father Manasseh, but he did not imitate his repentance and reformation. He maintained the gross and manifold idolatry which Manasseh had established and patronized. He "sacrificed unto all the carved images that Manasseh his father had made and served." He walked in all the ways that his father walked in, and served the idols that his father served, and worshipped them. "And he forsook the Lord God of his fathers, and walked not in the way of the Lord." In all that was wrong and sinful he was like his father before him; but in the single particular that formed the redeeming feature of his father's life he was unlike him. "He humbled not himself before the Lord, as Manasseh his father humbled himself; but Amon trespassed more and more." His wickedness grew and increased to the very end of his brief career.—*Rev. R. Hullam, D.D.*

- 2 It may be urged, in extenuation of his evil reign, that idolatry was hereditary and educational to him.

[18133] His very name, Amon, supposed to have been given him in compliment to an Egyptian god, stamped it upon him. It was the form of religion in which he had been reared, and was all the religion that he knew or had opportunity of knowing. As he was but twenty-two when he came to the throne, it is evident that his whole previous life must have been spent under the influence of that base, gross superstition, which, saving in the few closing years of life, his father had delighted to promote and foster. And these years of reform at the close of Manasseh's life were all too few to undo the mischiefs of his many years of transgression, or loosen the hold of a showy and sensual worship on a youth who had grown up under the influence of a creed that preached to him indulgence and luxury as a religious service.—*Ibid.*

II. HOMILETICAL REFLECTIONS.

The corruptions of Amon's reign following upon the reforms effected by his repentant father illustrate the fact that a late repentance will not arrest the consequences of previous sin.

[18134] The reforming effects of Manasseh's repentant years but imperfectly remedied the mischiefs of his earlier course, and he handed on an idolatry in which his son had been reared and educated, to become again, under his favour and patronage, the religion of the

court and of the kingdom. A late repentance, though it may avail to save the soul, will not undo the consequences of a protracted life of error and wickedness.—*Ibid.*

[18135] Manasseh might repent and reform, ay, and be accepted by God, but could he undo the consequences—the effects upon others—of his life of wickedness? Nay, 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 of heart, but the son he begat 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. 7.*

JOSIAH.

I. HIS CHARACTER.

1 It was conspicuous for early piety and zeal.

(1) *As displayed in his reforms.*

[18136] Early in Josiah's life, in "the eighth year of his reign, while he was yet young"—but sixteen years old—"he began to seek after the God of David his father; and in the twelfth year," at twenty, "he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem from the high places, and the groves, and the carved images, and the molten images." Having before purified his own life, he now entered zealously upon the work of a reformer of his kingdom. He prosecuted the work from the first with energy and success; but an incident which occurred six years later, when he had arrived at the age of twenty-six, gave a new impulse to his zeal, and roused him to higher conceptions of the necessity, and urgency, and solemnity of the work before him. Henceforth he engaged in it with greater intelligence, and with exacter ideas of its nature and details. The temple, during the long reign of his idolatrous grandfather, and the short but corrupt rule of his father, had fallen into neglect and disrepair. Deserted for showier and more popular worship, it had become shabby and dilapidated; perhaps it had even been rifled and damaged to furnish adornment and material for the fanes of Manasseh's fanatic paganism. To restore the temple to its pristine and rightful beauty was one of the good king's worthy undertakings.—*Rev. R. Hallam, D.D.*

[18137] Jehovah's land was to tolerate no signs or reminders of the worship of the "gods many" that had defiled and dishonoured it. The idols were burned or ground to powder, and scattered to the winds. The shrines of all false deities were obliterated so as to be no more revered or recognized. And even the sacred groves, which partial reformatations had

hitherto spared, were cut down and burned with fire. The nation was solemnly reconciled to its God by a formal renewal of its covenant to be the Lord's. The services of the temple were resumed and performed with a punctilious obedience to the ritual injunctions of the Law. And such a passover was kept as had not been seen in Israel since the days of Samuel the prophet. The contagion of reform spread itself into the territory of the old kingdom of Israel, portions of which along the border were now, it might seem, subject to Josiah's authority. And at last the calf worship instituted by Jeroboam ceased, and the bones of its priests were dug up and scattered upon the altars; those of "the man of God which came from Judah," who had been told the event in the days of Jehoram, and of that "old prophet" that beguiled him, were alone excepted. The impetus of the royal earnestness carried the people along with it. The nation seemed to be regenerated, and henceforth during the remaining fifteen years of Josiah's reign stood before the eyes of mankind a God-fearing, a God-honouring, God-serving people.—*Ibid.*

(2) *As displayed in his bearing on the discovery of the Book of the Law.*

[18138] Hilkiah, the high priest, found in some obscure corner of the sacred edifice a book of the "law of the Lord given by Moses," which had lain neglected and forgotten during the long preceding period of apostasy. . . . Yet the discovery filled the king with consternation and dread. The book was a book of terror to him, and when Shaphan read it before the king "the king rent his clothes." Its awful denunciations showed him the imminent danger into which his kingdom had brought itself by its departure from God's service. The warning, however, did not benumb but stimulate his endeavours.—*Ibid.*

2 It was remarkable for undeviating consistency in well-doing.

[18139] His was the glorious distinction of a life in all its main course without deflection from the path of rectitude, a steady stream of goodness and righteousness and truth, the well-developed and matured fruit of the Spirit.—*Ibid.*

[18140] It is remarkable that through the whole of Josiah's long reign—one of the longest in Judæan annals—not one wrong thing is recorded of him. Doubtless he had faults, and did wrong things; but not one was important enough to be mentioned in the Bible. Other great and good men are mentioned in the Scriptures, who were very inconsistent. They did some very wicked things. Some of them had long periods of wickedness, in which they displeased God exceedingly, and had to suffer for it. The Bible is very honest about its great men. It does not conceal their faults, nor make them out better than they were. But of King Josiah it has not a thing to say with which God finds fault. The only important mistake

recorded of him was that in which he lost his life by fighting with the king of Egypt. The narrative appears to indicate that God incited the Egyptian king to warn him that he would lose his life if he went into the battle. But there is no evidence that he knew that the warning came from God. He thought it was the notion only of his enemy. He determined that his enemy should not outwit him in that way. Therefore, like the brave man he was, and the father of his country, he plunged into the thickest of the fight, and died as brave soldiers love to die. Except that one mistake of excessive bravery and patriotism, not a thing is recorded of him that went wrong.—*Rev. A. Phelps, D.D.*

3 It was thoroughly appreciated by his subjects.

[18141] Of the sovereigns of Judah, Josiah was in many respects the most remarkable and illustrious; certainly the most valued in life, and the most lamented in death. We do not even except his great-grandfather Hezekiah, of whom it is said that none excelled him who went before him or followed after him, but who seems not to have so enshrined himself in the nation's heart. His case stands in very striking contrast to that of that ancestor of his of whom it is said by the inspired writer that he departed "without being desired." Our text tells us what grief his death occasioned; how universal, deep, and lasting it was. It pervaded all classes in the nation. It awoke a universal wail among his people. A prophet made it his theme. The sons and daughters of music uttered the national sorrow in mournful numbers. Poets told it forth in elegiac verses. A permanent observance kept it alive.—*Rev. R. Hallam, D.D.*

II. HOMILETICAL REFLECTIONS.

1 The piety of Josiah shows that a child may become godly very early in life.

[18142] He was but fifteen years old when he is spoken of as "seeking the God of his father David." That was the first that people knew of it. But probably he had been a prayerful boy long before that. He had been a king then for seven years. If he had been a wild wayward youth, this would probably have been mentioned. There is no more difficulty now in a young person's becoming a Christian than there was in the case of King Josiah or of Samuel. When youth has been spent in sin, sin has become a habit. The habit of sin is quick in forming. Once formed, it is a powerful hindrance to conversion. The natural and easy way for a child is to *grow up* a Christian, so as never to remember the time when he was not one.—*Rev. A. Phelps, D.D.*

2 The piety of Josiah shows that young persons may become godly just when the pleasures of the world are most attractive.

[18143] He was at an age when the world is fresh and new to a young man. He was a king.

This world is a beautiful place to a youthful prince who has health and wealth and leisure and princely companions to make it such. One could be happy in such a world for ever. The young often plead it as an excuse for neglecting to obey God, that they are so young; the world so new; so many of their associates are irreligious; and they have so much to make a worldly life enjoyable. Not so did the youthful king reason. Life could scarcely look more attractive to anybody than it did to him. He might have made one long holiday of it. That was the fashion of the time. Nobody thought it necessary to be religious but a few old grey-haired prophets. It would have attracted no notice, and nobody would have blamed him, if he had lived a life of respectable neglect of God. But he loved God. He wished to please God.—*Ibid.*

3 The piety of Josiah suggests that one who becomes godly early in life is likely to be a better man than one who first lives through a career of sin.

[18144] He is likely to be a more consistent Christian. He will probably have fewer faults to get rid of, and fewer habits which his piety must break up. . . . Other things being equal, those become the best men and women who spend the largest portion of their lives in serving God. They have the least to undo, in consecrating their lives to Christ, the fewest old sins to overcome, the least headway of sinful habit to get rid of.—*Ibid.*

JEHOIAKIM.

I. HIS EVIL CHARACTER.

1 He exhibited impious defiance of God.

[18145] It was this king, Jehoiakim, that in his impious defiance of God, and his messenger, cut the prophet's roll in strips, and burnt it in the fire, when "Jehudi read it in the ears of the king, and in the ears of all the princes that stood beside the king;" as though God's threats would vanish in its ashes, and, "the Word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever," would depart with the shrivelling parchment on which it was inscribed. The futility of such a thought has been demonstrated oftentimes since. There is always a Baruch to revive perished truth and "write again the same words." Once, indeed, the sound advice of the prophet was taken, and "the plague was stayed" for a little time, by Jehoiakim's submission and vow of fealty to Nebuchadnezzar. But Jehoiakim was faithless. His covenant with Nebuchadnezzar was soon broken. The people at this time were given up to idolatry. The temple was the scene of such abominations as Ezekiel saw in it in his vision on the banks of the river Chebar. "Every form of creeping things" was portrayed upon its venerable walls. "There sat women weeping

for Tammuz," and there were "men with their backs toward the temple of the Lord, and their faces toward the east."—*Rev. R. Hallam, D.D.*

2 He lived in luxury sustained by oppression.

[18146] The infatuated king was busy constructing a splendid palace, and exacting from the impoverished people ruinous and oppressive taxes to sustain his luxury and magnificence; "building his house by iniquity, and his chambers by wrong;" "closing himself with cedar," and painting his gorgeous apartments "with vermilion;" living in oppression and luxury, and in reckless indifference to his approaching doom. But all this was only to provoke God, and dare the indignation of the resistless Nebuchadnezzar, and so deepen and accelerate the deluge that was rolling toward him.—*Ibid.*

3 He was wholly incorrigible.

[18147] Warning was lost upon him. He lived in the present just for the enjoyment of the passing hour. He would not look at the future or provide for it, clear as were its portents of disaster. He disregarded God, and when men dared to tell him the truth they felt his wrath, and were oppressed and distressed as enemies of the State. His father had fallen in battle as the penalty of an unwise meddling. His brother, after a short usurpation, had been carried captive, and was languishing in exile somewhere in Egypt. He himself held his throne only by Pharaoh's sufferance; and now that Pharaoh was unclosing his grasp through weakness, Nebuchadnezzar stood ready to pounce upon the deserted prey. If anything could make a man think, it might seem to be such a position of affairs. But Jehoiakim would not think. "Eat, drink, and be merry," was his motto; and he counted him an enemy who dared to suggest any such disagreeable business as thinking. He is my enemy that is the enemy of my pleasure. And if some bold man shall presume to bring his book of solemn warning into my royal presence, I will cut it in pieces, and burn it in the fire, and it will be well for him that he is not with it to share its fate.—*Ibid.*

II. HOMILETICAL HINTS.

The career of Jehoiakim is a warning against the folly of living for the present only, without regard to the future.

[18148] Shut up your views within this space of being, and care for nothing but to make the most of it. Shut out from your mind that awful retribution that soon will come in the shape of an inquiry into the use you have made of it. Let there be no entrance into your minds of the summons, "Give an account of thy stewardship." Grow unscrupulous and hard-hearted in your chosen pursuit, and treat all threats of a reckoning as a dream. If, startled into seriousness by some close pressure of troubles, you make a covenant with God to serve Him, forget it as soon as the pressure is removed, and live as be-

fore, as Jehoiakim did—like him, too, resolutely shutting your eyes to the account to which you will soon be called for it. Let your heart grow lax with sensuality, vain with display, contracted with avarice, or empty with thoughtlessness. Be willing to practise fraud, unkindness, and oppression, if they will advance your objects. You may think it all judicious self-love, making the most of life; but it is the self-love of a fool. "God is not mocked; whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. He that soweth to the flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption." "Men do not gather grapes of thorns, nor figs of thistles." You may not, like Jehoiakim, be "buried with the burial of an ass." "The rich man died and was buried," no doubt sumptuously, expensively, with a grand funeral. "But in hell he lifted up his eyes, being in torment."—*Ibid.*

ZEDEKIAH.

I. HIS FEEBLE CHARACTER.

1 He evinced moral weakness.

[18149] Zedekiah was far from being the most flagitious of the evil kings of Judah. Indeed, though not a high-principled man, he seems to have been rather weak than wicked, and "did evil in the sight of the Lord" chiefly in maintaining the idolatry which he found established, and in the exhibition of that mixture of pride and irresolution which is common to feeble characters when raised to a position of difficulty and responsibility in a critical juncture of affairs, and which leads them into vacillation and faithlessness. He was not equal to his place, nor to its emergencies, nor to his own ambitious views and aims.—*Ibid.*

2 He displayed restlessness and faithlessness.

[18150] He was weak and restless and aspiring and untrue. He could not acquiesce in a condition which he felt to be humiliating. The yoke was galling, and he longed to throw it off. He would be a king in reality, and not in such a marred and restricted sense. He soon began to intrigue with neighbouring peoples for concerted action in resistance of Babylonish tyranny, and thus render Jerusalem a nucleus of disaffection against the government of Nebuchadnezzar. Covert insubordination after a time ripened into open rebellion. His vows of allegiance were forgotten or disregarded, and he stood forth in avowed opposition to the gigantic power on whose sufferance alone the shadow of dominion that was left him hung for its preservation.—*Ibid.*

II. HIS DOOM.

He suffered more for the sins of his predecessors than for his own sins.

[18151] Nebuchadnezzar, having wreaked his vengeance on his offending tributary, had re-

tired to Riblah, on the northern frontier of Palestine. Thither the captive king was brought, and there, in the dismal fate that was appointed to him, fulfilled the oracles both of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, though seemingly contradictory and incompatible, that he should speak to the king of Babylon "mouth to mouth," and his eyes should behold his eyes, and that he should be brought to Babylon, yet not see it, though he should die there. For after being brought before the victor, and beholding him, and seeing his children slain, he was deprived of sight, and led off to the royal city, there to languish and die in a hopeless and cheerless captivity. The catastrophe had come. The consummation of the woe that had been gathering through many generations had arrived. The ripened fruit of the evil seed that had been sown centuries before by the good Jehoshaphat in mistaken views of expediency and conciliation fell from the tree.—*Ibid.*

[18152] Upon him fell the accumulated woes of long ages of misrule. The heaped-up guilt of many generations of his predecessors fell upon him, and upon his people; they were in a sense included in him and represented by him, and partook the same degeneracy and corruption. Nor is this caprice, but the working of a Divine law. A nation, a community, any organized society of men has a corporate life and personality, and in consequence has also a corporate character and accountability which is quite independent of the individual liability of its members taken singly; and its character is good or bad according as it is or is not true to the end contemplated in its existence, provided that be innocent or salutary in itself, and to its conformity to the law under which it is established.—*Ibid.*

III. HOMILETICAL REFLECTIONS.

The history of Zedekiah exemplifies the sacredness of solemn engagements, and the guilt and danger of infringing them.

[18153] It is a special count in the indictment of Zedekiah that "he rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar," who had made him "swear by God." And yet how much might be said in palliation, if not defence of his breach of faith. No allegiance was, on grounds of natural equity, due to Nebuchadnezzar, and he had no original right to demand or exact it. It was yielded under compulsion, and was a mere enforced concession of weakness to overmastering power. The moral obligation of such an oath it may be thought must always have been weak—the mere resort of necessity, the device of the time—and was always covertly underlaid by the condition that its force should only continue till the exigency should terminate. So Zedekiah may have reasoned. So nations and their rulers are apt to reason. And under such reasoning treaties and covenants become, like the

bonds of Samson, "threads of tow touched by the fire," when strength and opportunity return. Such are man's thoughts, but such are not God's thoughts. With him Zedekiah's oath, under whatever circumstances made, was sacred, and he could not be absolved from guilt in disregarding it on any plea of expediency or utility. Nay; the slighting of it was the drop that made the cup of the nation's guilt run over. The good man of Scripture is the man that "swareth unto his neighbour and disappointeth him not, though it were to his own hindrance."—*Ibid.*

[18154] We live in an age when the sanctity of oaths and the obligation of all promises and engagements are fearfully relaxed; when public swearing for official purposes has come to be little more than a legal form; when the marriage vow is lightly regarded and dissolved on slight pretexts; and truth between man and man is set at naught with little ceremony or compunction. Is it a foretoking of coming doom in a nation precociously old, and it may be feared precociously corrupt? Oh, if God be angry with us, small good will the rapid growth of wealth and knowledge and power accomplish for us; little way will it go to shield us from His ruinous displeasure. Let us rather imitate the fidelity of Joshua, who, though misled by false disguises into a covenant with the heathen Gibeonites, held it sacred and inviolable. Let our contracts with all peoples of the earth, and not the least with the poor, dependent race that are vanishing before our advancing steps, be sacredly kept. And in every relation of life, by our solemn respect for engagements and obligations, let us be examples of fidelity and steadfastness. We shall so save ourselves, and help to save our country.—*Ibid.*

JEROBOAM.

I. HIS SOLITARY VIRTUE.

He displayed a praiseworthy industry early in his career.

[18155] We meet with his name first in 1 Kings xi. 26. He is there an example of the truth of that proverb of Solomon his master, "Seest thou a man diligent in his business? he shall stand before kings; he shall not stand before mean men." Jeroboam was the industrious son of a widowed mother, industrious, perhaps, for her sake at first, rather than for his own. And yet even the widow's son, who is under the special protection of God the Father, does not always use his special opportunities of learning faith in Him. At this time, when Jeroboam was grown up, Solomon was engaged upon the great public works and buildings which were a part of the glory of his reign. On these buildings he employed chiefly the old inhabi-

tants of Canaan, the remnant of the seven nations whom the Lord had doomed to be destroyed. But he had also levied 30,000 Israelites, a very unpopular action, as the consequences proved, and he wanted an able and vigorous overseer for them. Jeroboam was the man for the place: "And Solomon seeing the young man that he did work, he made him ruler over all the burden or charge of the house of Joseph." The house of Joseph probably means the ten tribes, who always considered themselves to be a separate party in the nation, and were called the house of Joseph even in the days of the Judges.—*Rev. C. Waller.*

II. HIS NOTORIOUS SIN.

By idolatry he "made Israel to sin."

Idolatry sprang in his case from a want of faith in the promises of God, and the substitution of a worldly and sinful policy.

[18156] Disregarding both the commandment and the promise of God, "Jeroboam said in his heart, Now shall the kingdom return to the house of David: if this people go up to do sacrifice in the house of the Lord at Jerusalem, then shall the heart of this people turn again unto their lord, even unto Rehoboam king of Judah, and they shall kill me, and go again to Rehoboam king of Judah. Whereupon the king took counsel, and made two calves of gold, and said unto them, It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem: behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. And he set the one in Bethel, and the other put he in Dan" (1 Kings xii. 26, &c.). What can we say to such reasoning and such policy? God had given him the kingdom in spite of his mistakes at the first, in spite of the attachment of Israel to David's memory and David's house, in spite of the mighty army of Rehoboam, the trained followers of Joab, and all David's valiant men; in spite of the wisdom of Solomon's counsellors, God had given the ten tribes to Jeroboam. Yet now he brings in worldly wisdom and sinful policy to help out the promises of God! His reasoning is like that of many others, who can make every possible allowance for the weaknesses and passions of men, can understand all human probabilities, but can put no faith whatever in the power and providence of God.—*Ibid.*

[18157] He was far-sighted, as regards this world, in making the two calves of gold. A people must have some religion. The law of God required that every man of Israel should go up to the house of God three times a year. That house was at Jerusalem: a temple of unearthly design and almost unearthly magnificence stood there. The religion of all Israel had its centre in the chief city of Judah. Was it likely, thought Jeroboam, that the people's treasure could be in one place and their heart in another? . . . How could he keep

the hearts of his people from the house of David if they went on visiting the temple three times every year? To answer this question there was need of faith, and faith Jeroboam had none; and so he made the worship of the calves a part of the constitution of his kingdom.—*Ibid.*

III. CONTRAST WITH SAUL AND DAVID.

[18158] Jeroboam is put forward, in some respects, just as Saul had been, just as David had been. Jeroboam had been told by a prophet that he was to be the future king of the ten tribes, and therefore might plead a Divine warrant for all that he did. But when we read the history, the difference between him and either Saul or David is visible at a glance. Saul kept in the background when he was chosen, and even after the election went quietly home to wait till the need of him should be felt. David made no effort to possess himself of the throne till he was regularly invited. But from the first mention of him Jeroboam appears as the mere demagogue. He stands forward at once as the leader; and when he has gained his end, and sits on the throne, he thinks above everything else of his own security. No religious consideration stands in his way. He fears that the worship at Jerusalem may lead his people back to their old allegiance, so he sets up a new worship. And that he may make this more attractive, he degrades it by yielding to the weakness not yet cured in the Hebrew people, and sets up images of gold.—*Ep. Temple.*

IV. HOMILETICAL HINTS.

I Jeroboam is an example of the worldly man, who walks not by faith, but by sight.

[18159] Would to God that Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, stood alone in the records of the Book! But, alas! it is not so. We have only to interpret his name, and inspiration itself tells us that there are many more than he. Jeroboam is he whose people are many, and the son of Nebat is the Son of Sight. All his evil doings arise from one source in the beginning. He walks not by faith, but by sight, "in the way of his own heart and according to the sight of his own eyes." This is the man who cannot see the harm of breaking this precept, or the good of obeying that command. Or he is the man who thinks he sees, in Holy Scripture, some apparent contradiction, some witless puzzle, and so he sets himself up above Moses and the prophets, the apostles, and evangelists, and even our blessed Lord. He knows, of course, all that they meant to say. They meantime did not quite understand what they were writing, and so he sows doubts in the minds of his brethren concerning the truth and inspiration of Holy Scripture. And oh, how many are his followers! "Wide is the gate and

broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be that go in thereat."—*Rev. C. Waller.*

2 Jeroboam should be a beacon of warning against that covetousness which is idolatry.

[18160] The particular sin of this first Jeroboam was idolatry. Is there no danger amongst us that the covetousness which is idolatry should take hold upon us; that the corrupt practices, "the sin which sticks close between buying and selling, as a nail sticketh fast between the joinings of the stones," should be mixed up with the lawful business of our lives, as Jeroboam connected calf-worship with the constitution of his kingdom? He could not keep his kingdom without the golden calves; so said the Son of Sight. Surely we need not thus seek what we shall eat and what we shall drink, for if we seek first the kingdom of God, all these things shall be added unto us, and it is our Father's good pleasure to give us the kingdom. But "No covetous man who is an idolater hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God."—*Ibid.*

AHAB.

I. HIS GENERAL CHARACTER.

[18161] The keynote of his character is the weakness of wickedness, and the wickedness of weakness. Think of him. Weakly longing—as idle and weak minds in lofty places always do—after something that belongs to somebody else; with all his gardens, coveting the one little herb-plot of the poor Naboth; weak and worse than womanly, turning his face to the wall and weeping when he cannot get it; weakly desiring to have it, and yet not knowing how to set about accomplishing his wish; and then—as is always the case, for there are always tempters everywhere for weak people—that beautiful fiend by his side, like the other queen in our great drama, ready to screw the feeble man that she is wedded to, to the sticking-place, and to dare anything, to grasp that on which the heart was set. And so the deed is done: Naboth safe stoned out of the way; and Ahab goes down to take possession! The lesson of that is, my friend—Weak dallying with forbidden desires is sure to end in wicked clutching at them.—*Rev. A. Maclaren, D.D.*

[18162] This monarch was by no means the weakling he is commonly supposed to have been. Now and again, indeed, his whole nature seems to have been, for the time, paralyzed under the operation of what Maurice has described as "a troublesome conscience, checking an evil will," but in general he manifested those qualities which have secured for other kings the title "great." He was brave and successful on the

field of battle. Once and again he vanquished the army of the proud Benhadad; and at last he met his death while fighting valiantly, though in disguise, at Ramoth-gilead. This personal prowess was combined in him with a love of art and a desire to promote the commercial prosperity of his people. He made streets for himself in the great trading city of Damascus. He reared for himself a palace of ivory, and was, besides, the founder of several cities. But all this outward magnificence was dimmed by a darker shadow of iniquity than that which fell on the glory of any of his predecessors.—*Rev. W. Taylor.*

II. HIS PARTICULAR SINS.

1 In his utter repudiation of Jehovah, he exceeded all his predecessors in idolatry.

(1) *His transgression in this respect was more heinous than that of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, "who made Israel to sin."*

[18163] This was the policy of Jeroboam and his successors, to make the ten tribes independent of Jerusalem in things sacred as well as in things civil, by erecting separate altars, as well as a separate throne. Still they did not profess to differ in the object of their worship from their brethren of the two tribes, who continued subject to the house of David. But Ahab improved upon this device; he completed the separation, and consummated the apostasy. Having married, against the law, a heathen princess, he openly adopted the heathen worship. The daughter of the king of Zidon easily introduced and established the Zidonian idolatry, the worship of Baalim, or the heavenly hosts. This fierce and persecuting idolatry well-nigh suppressed the religion of Jehovah, and exterminated His prophets.—*Rev. R. Candlish, D.D.*

[18164] There is a clear distinction drawn between the sin of Jeroboam and that of Ahab. It is intimated that, as the son of Nebat took a new departure from the worship at Jerusalem, when he set up the golden calves at Dan and at Bethel, so the son of Omri took a new departure from the practice of Jeroboam, when he built a temple and set up an altar to Baal. The act of Jeroboam was, in the main, political. He foresaw that if the tribes who had chosen him to be their king continued to go to Jerusalem to attend the three great annual religious festivals, the spiritual union would speedily overcome the political division. So he established separate centres of worship at Bethel and Dan; and knowing the craving of the heart for some visible emblem of the Divine glory, he set up the Egyptian symbol of the calf. He could not have the real Shechinah, but he did set up an outward representation; and his particular selection of the calf may be traced to the influence upon him of Egyptian ideas consequent upon his long residence as an exile in that land. But he had no desire to give up the covenant claim of the people on Jehovah. In-

deed, he would not have admitted that he had ceased to serve Jehovah. His view of the case was that he was serving Jehovah under the symbol of the golden calf; and therefore the sin which he committed was not a violation of the first commandment, but of the second. He had not a thought of worshipping any other god than Jehovah; but he guiltily made to himself and to his people an outward symbol to represent Jehovah. That was bad enough; but the guilt of Ahab was greatly more heinous, for he abjured Jehovah altogether, denying His exclusive claim to deity, and repudiating anything like a covenant relationship between Him and Israel.—*Rev. W. Taylor.*

(2) *The policy he had in view was probably to increase the importance of the nation by uniting it with a strong heathen power.*

[18165] He could strengthen himself to the fullest extent against his Syrian enemies, while, at the same time, he developed the material resources of his country by an alliance with the Zidonians who held the seaboard. If he could only succeed in welding Israel and Zidon together, he felt that he could defy the dynasty of Damascus, and look forward to a time of great prosperity, from a participation in the unrivalled commerce of the Phœnicians. But there is no unifying influence so strong as that of religion. Hence he determined to carry the nation over bodily into the Zidonian worship; and, as the first step in that direction, he allied himself to the royal house of Zidon by marrying Jezebel, the daughter of Ethbaal, king of the Zidonians. Thus, if I have read the record aright, his worship of Baal was not the result of his marriage with Jezebel, but his marriage with her was the consequence of his determination to establish Baal-worship throughout his dominions. For political reasons, Jeroboam set up his calves; and now again, for political reasons, Ahab determines to convert the nation into worshippers of Baal. In this effort he found Jezebel a most efficient and unscrupulous assistant. She was the daughter of one who, being himself a priest of Baal, had, as Josephus tells us, murdered his own brother in order to gain the crown; so that he was both priest of Baal and king of Zidon. She inherited both the religious fervour of the priest and the unscrupulous cruelty of the man. She united in herself the strongest intellectual powers, the fiercest passions, and the fiercest will, while her moral sense was hardened almost into insensibility.—*Ibid.*

[18166] He dethroned Jehovah, and on the vacant seat he placed Baal and Ashtaroth, the two divinities of the Zidonians. These were the deities of the old Canaanites, for their homage to which these ancient tribes were driven out to make way for the descendants of Abraham. Hence the adoption of their worship by the ten tribes was a total apostasy from Jehovah, and a return to the ancient idolatry of the land. It was not merely a violation of the second commandment, in that there was an

image of Baal in stone, and of Ashtaroth in wood; but it was also a breaking of the first commandment, in that it involved the repudiation of Jehovah, and the adoption of another god in His room. And so Ahab, who introduced this new sort of idolatry, did worse than all that had gone before him.—*Ibid.*

2 He gave way to the most inordinate covetousness.

As notoriously exemplified in respect to Naboth's vineyard.

a. Covetousness indulged produced in him the sulky petulance of a spoiled child.

[18167] He lies on a bed in one of the royal chambers in helpless dejection, moaning and tossing in feverish and restless misery. What catastrophe has overtaken that regal mourner? Why that settled gloom on these regal brows? Has the hand of death been in the palace halls? Has one of the princes of the blood royal been borne to the sepulchre of the kings of Israel—and left the aching void of bereavement in that smitten heart? Or has it been some sudden overwhelming national disaster? Have the billows of war swept over his territories? Is the tramp of Benhadad's conquering armies heard at his gates, threatening to desolate his valleys, and carry the flower of his subjects captive to Damascus? No, no. His family circle is unbroken; and the trophies of recent victory adorn his walls. It is a far more insignificant cause which has led the weak and unworthy monarch to wrap himself in that coverlet, and to pout and fret like a petulant child. This lordly possessor of palaces cannot obtain a little vineyard he has coveted, and life is, forsooth, embittered to him.—*Rev. J. Macduff, D.D.*

[18168] Great prosperity had only filled his heart with pride and covetousness, and he desired to signalize his victories by making some splendid additions to the park surrounding his ivory palace at Jezreel. As it happened, there was a vineyard, the situation of which was hard by his land. Indeed, it probably abutted in upon his grounds, making what he conceived to be an ugly angle in his possessions. What more natural, therefore, than that he should wish to straighten his boundary? or what apparently more honest than his offer to its owner: "Give me thy vineyard, that I may have it for a garden of herbs, because it is near unto my house, and I will give thee for it a better vineyard than it, or, if it seem good to thee, I will give thee the worth of it in money." Perfectly fair, and in ordinary circumstances, or in another land, one would have expected that Naboth, to whom the vineyard belonged, would have been glad of an opportunity of obliging his royal neighbour by complying with his request. But the tenure by which the Israelite held his land was peculiar; and there was another party to all such transactions, of whom Ahab took no note. Throughout Judah and Israel, Jehovah was the real

owner of the soil ; and every tribe received its territory and every family its inheritance by lot from Him, with this added condition : "The land shall not be sold for ever, for the land is Mine." . . . Therefore it was with true-hearted loyalty to the covenant God of Israel he made reply, "The Lord forbid it me that I should give the inheritance of my fathers unto thee." . . . Like a spoiled child, who has been so much accustomed to his own way in everything that he knows not how to bear refusal, and lies down sprawling on the floor in the impotence of rage and disappointment, the monarch was actually so much affected that he took to his bed, and refused his food, at the same time declining to see or converse with any of his courtiers.—*Rev. W. Taylor.*

b. Covetousness indulged led to the murder of Naboth, and an increased ascendancy of Jezebel over Ahab.

[18169] Soon he was still further misled by that covetousness which in his case most emphatically was idolatry. The longing eye which he cast on Naboth's vineyard seduced him into a compliance with his wife's diabolical counsel, to get Naboth stoned to death on a false charge of blasphemy ; and that unscrupulous and unprincipled woman having regained her influence over him, soon hurried him again into the worst excesses of his former idolatry ; insomuch that "there was none like unto Ahab, which did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the Lord, whom Jezebel his wife stirred up ; and he did very abominably in following idols" (1 Kings xxi.).—*Rev. R. Candler, D.D.*

[18170] Ahab evidently had no thought of forcing Naboth to yield to his desires, or of laying violent hands either upon himself or on his property. But Jezebel was not burdened with any such conscientious regard for the rights of others ; and when she learned what the cause of her husband's moping was, she bitterly taunted him with his scrupulous timidity, and intimated that she would make short work with Naboth and his inheritance. "What," said she, "you, the king of Israel ! and allow yourself to be thus disobeyed and defied by a common yeoman ! You have been altogether too courteous and considerate in the offer you have made him. I will give you his vineyard, and pay nothing for it either !" So, taking the royal seal, she wrote letters to the elders of Jezreel, intimating that some dreadful sin had been committed in their city, for which it was needful that a fast should be proclaimed, in order to avert the wrath of Heaven. At the same time she named Naboth as the special object of the king's displeasure, and commanded that two false witnesses should be obtained, who should declare that he had blasphemed God and the king, for which, as she well knew, the law condemned every convicted one to death. To this precious document she affixed the royal seal, and transmitted it to Jezreel.—*Rev. W. Taylor.*

c. Covetousness indulged hardened his heart. [18171] One might have thought that Ahab would have expressed some condemnation of this awful conspiracy, culminating in such a tragic horror ! But no. Like many in modern times, though he was restrained by his conscience from committing murder himself, he had no scruple of the results of such a crime when perpetrated by another. . . . So, summoning Jehu and Bidkar to accompany him, he drove down from Samaria to Jezreel.—*Ibid.*

d. Covetousness indulged brought about his conviction by Elijah.

[18172] Haman thought he was sure to bring his scheme for the massacre of the Jews to a successful issue, and caused the gallows to be erected upon which Mordecai was to hang ; but Esther was watching him all the time, and when she fastened his crime upon him in the presence of the king, he might have said, "Hast thou found me, O mine enemy ?" And so it was in the case before us. The covetous king cast his eyes upon Naboth's little vineyard, and would have had God's commands set at naught (Lev. xxv. 23 ; Numb. xxxvi. 7) to gratify his desire. And though, when he could not get it, he was too cowardly to do anything beside sulk upon his bed, he had a wife who would stand at nothing. "Dost thou now govern the kingdom of Israel, arise, and eat bread, and I will give thee the vineyard of Naboth, the Jezreelite" (verse 7). Through the murder of the innocent man, she fulfilled her promise, and was soon in a position to say to her husband, "Arise, take possession of the vineyard." But one who had not been reckoned in this transaction said to another man, "Arise, and go down to meet Ahab in the vineyard of Naboth ;" and so the monarch, just entering into his newly acquired property, is confronted by God's detective, Elijah, saying, "Hast thou killed, and also taken possession ?"—*Anon.*

e. Covetousness indulged produced in him a distorted estimate of character.

[18173] "Mine enemy." So Ahab regarded Elijah. What we see an object to be, depends very much upon the medium through which we view it. The most glorious landscape in the world will appear dull if looked at through a blackened glass, and the fairest face looks ugly if the mirror which reflects it is imperfect. . . . So Ahab regarded Elijah as his enemy, though he was the truest friend he had in all the land, because he dared to speak openly to him concerning the fruit of his evil doings.—*Ibid.*

III. HIS REPENTANCE.

It was but half-hearted, and partook of the nature of remorse, yet it was accepted by God.

[18174] There was yet some sense of justice in him ; and the outward symbols of sorrow were not hypocritical. He did not feign the

feelings of which they were the signs. He was humiliated. He was sad. If it had been to be done again, he would not have allowed Naboth to be put to death. For so much let us give him credit. But though his repentance was sincere, so far as it went, yet it did not go far enough. He feared the punishment of his sin more than he hated the sin itself. There was no word of restitution. There was no change in the general current of his life. Yet, to show his gentleness unto him, and to give him another opportunity of coming to his full self, by returning wholly to his God, Jehovah said unto his servant, "Seest thou how Ahab humbleth himself before Me? because he humbleth himself before Me, I will not bring the evil in his days: but in his son's days will I bring the evil upon his house."—*Rev. W. Taylor.*

[18175] Elijah's address evidently produced unusual terror in Ahab's mind, and induced him to humble himself in some degree before God. Nor does this surprise us: for it contained not only an awful accusation which Ahab could not deny, but likewise an awful sentence upon himself and his posterity, pronounced, as from the mouth of God Himself, with singular impressiveness and power. . . . But the repentance of Ahab was not of a perfect kind. His enmity against the law was not abolished and slain by faith and love. It was the punishment, and not the sinfulness of sin, that made him tremble. Had no curse followed, his transgressions would have pained him but little. Nay, because this punishment was delayed, he turned back into the path of destruction, and by so doing furnished the clearest evidence that his sorrow proceeded only from selfishness, and that the dominion and love of sin still prevailed within him.—*Krummacher.*

[18176] Though Ahab's repentance was far from genuine, it was nevertheless regarded by the Almighty with some favour. He therefore sent His word to Elijah the Tishbite, and said to him, "Seest thou how Ahab humbleth himself before Me? Because he humbleth himself before Me, I will not bring the evil in his days: but in his son's days will I bring the evil upon his house." Here was a delay of execution; but no revocation of the sentence. The curse still rested upon Ahab and his house. Yet even this respect shown to a repentance which had so little intrinsic worth, this exemption of Ahab from personally experiencing those storms which impended over his house, was an instance of great condescension and favour. But why, it may be asked, if Ahab's humiliation was so little worth, was any Divine regard shown towards it? This, we answer, was to show by a living example that self-condemnation and abasement before God is the way to escape His anger, and obtain His favour. Just as a novice in any art or trade may be cheered by words of encouragement at the first favourable attempt which he makes, however imperfect it may be; so the ex-

emption which the Lord made in Ahab's favour on his repenting, was calculated to encourage him to aim at something better. Self-condemnation, self-abasement, and giving God the glory, are the first steps from spiritual death to spiritual life.—*Ibid.*

[18177] The repentance of Ahab was awakened by the fearful prediction of coming vengeance which Elijah delivered at the moment he had taken possession of Naboth's vineyard. This terrible denunciation strikes Ahab to the very soul. It is no longer national, but personal vengeance, ready to fall upon his head. He sees himself singled out from the multitude, the guilty leader of a guilty people:—his own slaughter; the slaughter of every child upon whom his hopes rested; the horrible destruction of Jezebel herself; the dogs licking up the blood; the birds of the air tearing and carrying off the flesh; these were the frightful images presented to the sight of Ahab, and these made his knees to tremble, and his eyes to weep. They stripped from him his robes of pride, covered him with sackcloth, and showed him, in the sight of God and men, a conscience-stricken penitent.—*Rev. J. Anderson.*

[18178] It was no mockery in Ahab, when he trembled before Elijah. Yet, after all, it was but the trembling of the hypocrite. He had no root in himself—no sincerity, no constancy, no depth of feeling in his heart whereby the precious seed which fell there might be treasured up and saved from withering.—*Ibid.*

[18179] The repentance of Ahab, however defective, seems, in a temporal sense, to have been accepted; for the punishment, denounced against him by Elijah, was suspended in his own days. "Because he humbleth himself before Me, I will not bring the evil in his days," is the language of the narrative before us. How can this be? Hath not the Lord said, by His prophet Isaiah, that He will not hear the prayers of men "whose hands are full of blood," and that His soul hateth the iniquity of their "solemn meeting"? They may afflict their souls, bow down their heads as a bulrush, and spread sackcloth and ashes under them, but that is not the fast which the Lord hath chosen; it is an abomination unto Him. There are, in fact, no denunciations more frequent or more awful than those which the sacred volume contains against the offerings of the hypocrite and impenitent. How, then, are we to understand the word of the Lord coming, as we find it did in the present instance, to Elijah the Tishbite, and reversing the sentence which he had before pronounced? Is it possible that the unchangeable God can change? or the specious semblance of piety deceive Him that knoweth all things? Nay, say not so. Say rather, that it is possible that the God of mercy should show mercy, and that His mercy should rejoice against judgment. The history of our own lives, still spared and still prolonged, not-

withstanding our manifold transgressions, is an evidence of this certain truth.—*Ibid.*

[18180] Grief is not ever a sign of grace. Ahab rends his clothes; he did not rend his heart: he puts on sackcloth, not amendment: he lies in sackcloth, but he lies in his idolatry; he walks softly, he walks not sincerely. Worldly sorrow causeth death; happy is that grief for which the soul is the holier.—*Bp. Hall.*

IV. HIS DEFEAT AND DEATH.

Although he endeavoured to avoid impending destruction by cunning and meanness, the hand of God sought him out unerringly.

[18181] The prophet has announced that it is the shepherd, or the king, that is to fall; and accordingly, as it turns out, the orders of the Syrian commander are (1 Kings xxii. 31), that his troops are to spare all meaner enemies, and bend their whole force against the royal captain of the Jewish host. Ahab, knowing the hazard, cunningly proposes to resign the post of honour to his ally: "And the king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat, I will disguise myself, and enter into the battle; but put thou on thy robes. And the king of Israel disguised himself, and went into the battle" (ver. 30). While Ahab is to disguise himself, or, in other words, to go forth in the ordinary armour of a common soldier, Jehoshaphat is to retain his royal robes and assume the command. The design of the crafty prince thus far succeeds. His too easy friend accepts the post of honour, as being the post of danger too. The dauntless spirit of this honourable man suspected no fraud in his ally, and shrunk from no force of the foe. How narrowly he escaped without paying the penalty of his confidence and complaisance, we may afterwards remark. Meantime, what are we to think of the meanness of him who could thus treacherously impose upon another the conduct and hazard of his own unholy enterprise, and that other, too, his sworn comrade, his friend? What but that there can be no friendship, no honour at all, in a confederacy of sin, a confederacy against God? Cowardice, treachery—these are the characteristics of an evil conscience and a doubtful cause. Ahab was, perhaps, no coward naturally, no traitor to the sanctities of friendship. Yet, how unscrupulously does he sacrifice his friend and ally to the dastardly hope of shifting away from himself the sin and danger of the step that he is taking? . . . But God is not mocked. He sees the trembling caitiff under his mean disguise. And in the random shot which struck the guilty prince we recognize the immediate hand of the Lord in judgment: "And a certain man drew a bow at a venture, and smote the king of Israel between the joints of the harness: wherefore he said unto the driver of his chariot, Turn thine hand, and carry me out of the host; for I am wounded" (ver. 34).—*Rev. R. Candlish, D.D.*

V. HOMILETICAL REFLECTIONS.

I The marriage of Ahab with Jezebel, and its consequences, remind us that an unhallowed alliance or an intimate relationship may be a contributing cause towards an immortality of infamy.

[18182] But for Jezebel, Ahab had not subjected himself to his dreadful doom. In this scene, more than in any other of their history, we see the distinctive character of each. Ahab was ambitious; he was brave; he had in him many elements of nobleness, and was not the weakling that many have portrayed him. Where his conscience was clean, too, he could be bold. But he was less daring and decided in evil than Jezebel, just because he had more conscience than she. This kept him both from the full enjoyment of the world, and from the invention of such diabolic plans as that which Jezebel laid on the present occasion. He was, indeed, bitterly mortified by Naboth's refusal to grant his request; but there is no evidence that he would ever have thought of murdering Naboth to get his vineyard; while his cry of anguish to Elijah, "Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?" shows that his conscience was quick to respond to the admonition of the prophet. Now, if, at the moment of his disappointment, he had been blessed with a godly wife, she would have led him to think of the comforts which he already possessed, and, far from setting herself to acquire for him the object of his desire by unlawful means, she would have urged him to seek his happiness in something nobler than the vineyard of his neighbour. As it was, however, Jezebel added the guilt of conspiracy and murder to that of covetousness; and so their names have come down to us stained with the infamy of a deed which has few parallels for cruel injustice and cold-blooded malignity. When he wedded her, he thought only of the glory of his Zidonian alliance, and the strengthening of his hands against his Syrian foes; but now she makes him participator in a crime which drew down the curse of extermination on his house, and poisoned the happiness of his remaining years upon the earth. Thus the very means which he used to secure the glory of his kingdom and the permanence of his dynasty proved the ruin of both.—*Rev. W. Taylor.*

[18183] How often, alas! in humbler instances have similar results followed a similar course to that of Ahab! Dazzled with the glitter of a fortune, or the glare of an exalted position, a young person enters into the sacred alliance of matrimony with one who has no moral stability or Christian excellence, and the issue is certain misery, with the probable addition of crime and disaster. For in such an intimate union there cannot but be a constant influence exerted by the one upon the other; and if it should happen that the greater decision of character is with the less scrupulous of the two, then both together shall descend to depths of wickedness

of which, at first, the more worthy had not dreamed. For weal or for woe, for eternity as well as for time, few things are more important in a man's or woman's history than the matrimonial connection which may be made; and yet with what thoughtlessness and frivolity too often is that connection formed! It is a thing for joking and buffoonery; or, perhaps, a matter of worldly wisdom or convenience; whereas it ought to be entered into "only in the Lord." Let young people prayerfully ponder this important lesson; and let them resolve that whensoever they take this solemn step, it shall not be "lightly or unadvisedly," but "soberly, discreetly, and in the fear of God."—*Ibid.*

[18184] "There was none like unto Ahab, whom Jezebel his wife stirred up" (1 Kings xxi. 25). That has been on record for nearly 3000 years, and has been read by millions as the ages have rolled on. Young men and women, I beseech you to take care with whom you connect yourselves in marriage union; an ungodly person may drag you down to their level, and cause your very memory to be held in dishonour; while a godly husband or wife will lift you up to a higher standard of goodness, and make you a blessing to yourselves and others throughout eternity.—*Anon.*

2 The covetousness of Ahab reminds us that those who are most frequently liable to fall into this sin are those whose possessions are not less but greater than those of their neighbours.

[18185] The singular and sad thing is, that such inordinate longings are most frequently manifested, as with Ahab, in the case of those who have least cause to indulge them. The covetous eye cast on the neighbour's vineyard is, strange to say, more the sin of the affluent than of the needy—of the owner of the lordly mansion than of the humble cottage. The man with his clay floor, and thatched roof, and rude wooden rafters, though standing far more in need of increase to his comfort, is often (is generally) more contented and satisfied by far than he whose cup is full. It was Alexander, not defeated, but victorious—Alexander, not the lord of one kingdom, but the sovereign of the world, who wept unsatisfied tears. Ahab had everything that human ambition could desire. The cities of Israel his father had lost, had been all restored; peace was within his walls, and prosperity within his palaces. His residences were unparalleled for beauty. His lordly park and demesne and gardens at Jezreel—stretching for miles on every side of the city—had every rare tree and plant and flower to adorn them. But what pride or pleasure has he now in all these? Plants bloom, and birds sing, and fountains sparkle, in vain. So long as that one patch of vineyard-ground belonging to Naboth is denied him, his whole pleasure is blighted. He cannot brook that insult of refusal. It has stung him to the

quick, and sends him to pout and fret, in unroyal tears, on his couch in Samaria.—*Rev. J. Macduff, D.D.*

[18186] How many there are, surrounded with all possible affluence and comfort, who put a life-thorn in their side but some similar chase after a denied good, some similar fretting about a denied trifle. They have abundance; the horn of plenty has poured its contents into their lap. But a neighbour possesses something which they fancy they might have also. Like Haman, though their history has been a golden dream of prosperity, advancement and honour such as the brightest visions of youth could never have pictured—yet all this avails them nothing, so long as they see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate!—*Ibid.*

3 The covetousness of Ahab reminds us of the danger of a want of restraint on evil glances and desires, and of the necessity for watchfulness in respect of besetting sins.

[18187] If Ahab, knowing his own weakness and besetting sin, had put a restraint on his covetous eye, and not allowed it to stray on his neighbour's forbidden property, it would have saved a black page in his history, and the responsibilities of a heinous crime. Let us beware of tampering with evil. "If thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee." "Avoid it," says the wise man, speaking of this path of temptation, "pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away." If Achan had not cast his eye on the goodly Babylonish garment, the shekels of silver, and the wedge of gold, he would have saved Israel a bloody discomfiture and himself a fearful end. But he *saw* them; and the sight fed and fostered and stimulated the covetous master-passion—the latent avarice of his greedy heart. It was David's wandering eye that led to the twin crime of adultery and murder. He, too, ventured to the place of temptation. He had become an idler when he should have been a worker. The old, heroic, chivalrous days were over, when he would have despised luxurious ease, and been away rather to share the hardships of his brave army than in the field. Instead of this, he was basking in inglorious, unsoldierlike fashion, after his noontide meal, on the roof of his palace. He was *out* of the way of duty, and *in* the way of temptation, and one fatal look, and one fatal thought, entailed a heritage of bitter sorrow on himself and on his children's children. Each has his own strong temptation—the fragile part of his nature—his besetting sin. That sin should be specially watched, muzzled, curbed; that gate of temptation specially padlocked and sentinelled. One guilty dereliction of duty, one unhappy abandonment of principle, one inconsistent, thoughtless word or deed—may be the progenitor of unnumbered evils.—*Ibid.*

- 4 The covetousness of Ahab, with its issues, reminds us of the price that must be paid for sin.

[18188] What weighty words are these of Elijah to Ahab, "Thou hast sold thyself to work evil in the sight of the Lord!" They imply not only that Ahab had given himself entirely over to iniquity, but also that he had done so at the price of himself. The great German poet has elaborated this thought into that weird production wherein he represents his hero as selling his soul to the mocking Mephistopheles. And it were well that every evil-doer laid to heart the moral of his tragic tale. That which the sinner gives for his unhallowed pleasure or dishonest gain is himself. Consider it well. O drunkard! you thought that you paid for your dissipation when you laid out your money on the counter of Boniface; but, bad as that was, there is another and far longer reckoning behind. You sold your senses into inactivity; your intellect into stupidity; your conscience into insensibility; your character into weakness; your business into bankruptcy; nay, if you continue in your dreadful habit, you will sell your life on earth, and your everlasting salvation too. The bill may be drawn at a long date; but it will come due, and when it comes, you will be held inexorably to your bond. All this is the price; and for what? oh, for what? For a temporary exhilaration, to be followed by a degradation to a level lower than that of the brutes that perish! O sensualist! when you left the haunt of wickedness, you fancied that you had done with cost; but no! You sold the purity of your nature, the honour of your manhood, the tenderness of your conscience, the health of your body, and the life of your soul. In one express word, you sold yourself, and that self, if you repent not, for eternity. All these were in the bond you sealed when you entered on your course of iniquity; and if you persist in it, no Shylock will hold you with a more remorseless grasp than he to whom you have given it.—*Rev. IV. Taylor.*

- 5 The covetousness of Ahab, with its issues, reminds us of the curse which cleaves to ill-gotten gains, and points the moral of Holy Scripture, "Be sure your sin will find you out."

[18189] Jezebel thought that by her cunning management she had obtained Naboth's vineyard for nothing; but it cost her very dear. It entailed upon her the loss of her husband and of her sons, and resulted ultimately in her own destruction. God is not indifferent to evil, though He do not interfere by miracle to prevent its commission. It might have seemed, indeed, that His moral government was a delusion when such a one as Naboth was permitted to be slain by the emissaries of Jezebel's malignity. But when we widen our range of observation, we discover that for all such dishonesty and oppression there is, even in this life, a terrible retribution. The gains of ungodliness are weighted with the curse of God; and, sooner or later, that will be made apparent. Let no one think

that because this record is in the Bible, and the fearful doom upon Ahab and his house was pronounced by Elijah, therefore there must be a difference between it and any modern instance of deliberate wrong-doing and injustice. For the moral government of God to-day is administered on the same principles as those which we find underlying this narrative. True, the dishonest man now pursuing his purposes in secret may have no Elijah sent to him, with the special commission to declare to him the sort of punishment which shall overtake him; but Elijah's God is living yet, and one has only to open his eyes, and mark the progress of events from year to year, to be convinced that "sorrow tracketh wrong, as echo follows song—on, on, on." He who holds gain by injustice will, sooner or later, come to ruin; and, if no restitution is made, they who inherit from him his blood-stained gold will be made sharers of his calamity. Let a man rudely trample upon the weak, and take by violence that to which he has no right, and it will cost him much; for the judgment of God is already on the way to him, and though it tarry long, it will fall heavily when it comes. Let a nation covet its neighbour's territory, and by force or fraud annex it to its own, then, though no Elijah come specifically to denounce it, the issue must be disastrous, and may be fraught with evil to many generations. "Be sure your sin will find you out," said Moses, on a solemn day, to the two and a half tribes that remained on the other side of Jordan; and it seems to me that few truths need to be more faithfully proclaimed in the ears of this generation. They dwell with much unction on the love and tenderness of God; and if they but took in the whole truth, they could not dwell too much upon it; but they forget the judicial aspect of Jehovah's character, and the awfully terrible nature of some of His retributions.—*Ibid.*

[18190] "Be sure your sin will find you out." Ahab and Jezebel had, indeed, managed to accomplish their accursed plot. The wheels of crime had moved softly along without one rut or impediment in the way. The two murderers paced their blood-stained inheritance without fear of challenge or discovery. Naboth was in that silent land where no voice of protest can be heard against high-handed iniquity. But there was a God in heaven who maketh inquisition for blood, and who "remembered them." Their time for retribution *did* come at last, although years of gracious forbearance were suffered to intervene. As we behold the mutilated remains of that once proud, unscrupulous queen, lying in the common receptacle of offal and carrion outside the city of her iniquities, her blood sprinkling the walls;—or, in the case of the partner of her guilt, as we see the arrow from the Syrian bow piercing through "the jointed mail,"—or as he lies weltering in his blood—his eyes closing in agony—the wild dogs, by the pool of Samaria, lick the crimson drops from the wheels of his chariot and the plates of his armour; have we not before us a solemn and

awful comment on the words of Him who judgeth righteous judgment:—"These things hast thou done, and I kept silence; thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself: but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes. Now consider this, ye that forget God, lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver." "He that, being often reprov'd, hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy."—*Rev. J. Macduff, D.D.*

[18191] Even should crime and wrong-doing be successfully hidden from the eye of man, *conscience*, like another stern Elijah in the vineyard of Naboth, will confront the transgressor, and utter a withering doom. How many such an Elijah stands a rebuker within the gates of modern vineyards, purchased by the reward of iniquity! How many such an Elijah stands a ghostly sentinel by the door of that house whose stones have been hewn and polished and piled by illicit gain! How many an Elijah mounts on the back of the modern chariot, horsed and harnessed, pillowed and cushioned and liveried with the amassings of successful roguery! How many an Elijah stands in the midst of banquet-hall and drawing-room, scowling down on some murderer of domestic peace and innocence, who has intruded into vineyards more sacred than Naboth's—trampled virtue under foot, and left the broken, bleeding vine to trail its shattered tendrils unpitied on the ground! And even should conscience itself in this world be defined and overborne, at all events in the world to come, sin *must* be discovered, retribution (long evaded here) will at last exact its uttermost farthing. The most awful picture of a state of eternal punishment is that of sinners surrendered to the mastery of their own special transgression; these sins, like the fabled furies, following them, in unrelenting pursuit, from hall to hall and from cavern to cavern in the regions of unending woe;—and they, at last, hunted down, wearied, breathless, with the unavailing effort to escape the tormentors, crouching in wild despair, and exclaiming, like Ahab to Elijah, "Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?"—*Ibid.*

6 The half-hearted repentance of Ahab is, in its acceptance by God, a ground of great encouragement to all true penitents.

[18192] The merciful and gracious God took account of this little evidence of sorrow given by Ahab, and withheld some judgment on account of it. How much more when a man turns wholly to Him, casting behind him his former rebellious life, and seeking strength to live as a new creature in Christ Jesus, when he comes with the cry, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and in Thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called Thy son!"—*Anon.*

[18193] Ahab was filled with bitter regret at what had been done, and God, who will not break the bruised reed, or quench the smoking flax, said that the evil should not come in his

day. He thus gave him another opportunity of becoming truly repentant. This, so far as appears from the narrative, Ahab did not improve; still, that God should have given it to him is an encouragement to the real penitent to come to Jehovah's feet; while the fact that he did not really and truly repent, after all, is a warning to the trembling procrastinator that, unless he avail himself of his present tenderness of feeling, he may never attain salvation. If God were so considerate of Ahab, the idolater, the murderer, the thief, will He not regard thee, O thou tearful one, who are bemoaning the number and aggravation of thy sins?—*Rev. W. Taylor.*

JEHU.

I. RULING CHARACTERISTICS.

1 As an instrument of Divine vengeance, he displayed deep sagacity, ready promptitude, and indomitable resolution.

(1) *In his inception of the revolution and the destruction of King Jehoram.*

[18194] In the conduct of the revolution which God had committed to his hands, Jehu displayed as much wisdom as energy. His conduct was like his driving—"he drove furiously;" but the times demanded it. Dangerous in all cases when the crisis has come, hesitation or delay had been fatal in his. Having—by appearing to consult them—won the favour of his companions in arms, enlisted them in his cause, and so turned into partizans those who might otherwise have been rivals, his first step is to catch the bird in the nest. He must seize the king, where he lay in Jezreel. Should tidings of this revolution reach him, Joram takes the alarm and escapes; so, with a promptitude that deserved and was likely to secure success, Jehu hurries trusty men to the gates with this order: "Let none go forth nor escape out of the city to go to tell it in Israel." He will be his own messenger. The snake rattles before it strikes; but the lightning strikes before it thunders—whom it kills never hears the peal. And it was with the suddenness and surprise of a thunderbolt Jehu sought to launch himself on the head of Joram. So the cry is, To horse, to horse! all is haste and bustle; men are arming; women are weeping; hasty farewells are said; and the gate thrown open at his approach, out drives Jehu with his chosen men to lash his foaming horses along the road that lay, a day's march, between Jezreel and Ramoth Gilcad.—*Rev. T. Guthrie, D.D.*

[18195] Jehu wastes no time, nor words, upon the king. The answer has hardly left his lips when an arrow leaves his bow; and swiftly cleaving the air, directed by a surer hand than his, quivers in Joram's heart. He dies. The mother speedily follows, treading on the heels of her son. Ere another hour has come, this

proud, painted, false, treacherous, cruel, implacable, bloody woman, flung from a window by her slaves in answer to Jehu's appeal, Who is on my side? who? is turned into dog's meat—the dogs are crunching her bones on the streets of Jezreel. A princess, a king's daughter, a king's wife, a king's mother, what a fall was there! So let the persecutors of the righteous, and the iniquity of high places perish!—*Ibid.*

(2) *In his slaughter of the seventy sons of Ahab.*

[18196] Jehu has still more bloody work to do; and in doing it—as when the lash is in hand and his chariot goes bounding on—“he driveth furiously.” His eye does not pity, nor his hand spare, till he has emptied the last drop of the vial of heaven's vengeance on the house and seed of Ahab. Seventy sons of that weak and wicked king are living in Samaria, ready to fill the vacant throne, and, if they are wanted, supply kings to all the neighbouring nations. These cubs, as well as the bear, must be slain; these saplings, as well as the old tree, cut down; nor a drop of Ahab's blood be left in a living vein. With one stroke of his pen Jehu strikes off their heads. A letter, couched in bitter irony, and borne with speed to Samaria, challenges its rulers, adherents of the house of Ahab, to set up the best and bravest of the seventy, that he and Jehu may have a fair fight for the crown. The proposal fills these cowards with dismay. “Two kings stood not before him,” they said, how then shall we stand? Honour, oaths, fidelity, are given to the wind. False to their God, these men, as may be expected of all false to Him, betray their trust. False to their masters, they barter their lives to save their own; and seventy ghastly heads are found one morning piled up by the gate of Jezreel.—*Ibid.*

(3) *In his destruction of the brethren of Amaziah.*

[18197] Not yet appeased, Naboth's blood, and that of the righteous whom Jezebel had slain, still cries on heaven for vengeance. Another quarry has to be struck down. Two-and-forty brethren of Amaziah, king of Judah, whose blood was tainted with that of Ahab, are, unsuspecting of evil, on their way to pay a visit to their cousins—those whose heads are bleaching in the sun by the gate of Jezreel. The cousins meet, but not in this world. An opportune visit for Jehu: at one fell sweep he encloses the whole brood in his net; and . . . Ahab has fulfilled his doom. His house is left unto him desolate; cut down root and branch.—*Ibid.*

(4) *In his plan for putting to death the priests of Baal.*

[18198] One great and yet bloodier work still waits Jehu's avenging arm. The priests and worshippers of Baal must be destroyed. For that purpose, and for such a sacrifice as was never offered in the idol's temple, he has a stroke of policy—a *coup d'état*—arranged, which

only a man with cunning as profound as his daring was bold, would have conceived or ventured on. His is one of the greatest, boldest, bloodiest plots in history; and he is on his way to carry it into execution, and so finish the work God had given him to do, when he meets Jonadab, the son of Rechab. Astute enough to see that though he held a Divine commission he must neglect the use of no means, and that none was more likely to promote his object than the countenance of Jonadab—a man distinguished alike for his patriotism and his piety, for the severity of his manners and the universal esteem of the people—Jehu invites him to a seat in his chariot; greeting this eminent Israelite, and original founder of all total abstinence societies, with these brave, pious words, Come, see my zeal for the Lord!—*Ibid.*

2 He was apparently governed rather by ambition for his personal advancement than by zeal for the honour of God.

[18199] Apparently congenial to his nature, he found in his mission the means of gratifying his passions, and that personal ambition which, rather than zeal for the Lord, was, I fear, his animating, ruling principle. We would not deal unjustly, nor even very severely by him; but when he had reached the summit of his ambition, and, leaving a bloody footprint on every step, had climbed to the throne, where was the zeal he boasted of—his zeal for the Lord? It looks as if he had all along been consciously playing a part; and, finding no further use of it, had now dropped the mask. We are told that “he took no heed to walk in the law of the Lord God of Israel with all his heart, but departed not from the sins of Jeroboam, which made Israel to sin.”—*Ibid.*

[18200] It may be that Jehu deceived himself. We are unwilling to regard him as a hypocrite: and it is certain that men—with a heart which the word of God pronounces to be deceitful above all things as well as desperately wicked—have sometimes deceived themselves, more than the most famous jugglers or impostors have deceived others. And what made it easier for Jehu to do so was this, that the reformation of the land and its religious interests did not conflict with, but rather ran in the same direction as his own passions and ambition. The public interests and his own personal objects were in dangerous accord.—*Ibid.*

II. SUMMARY OF CHARACTER.

[18201] Jehu was one of those quick, ambitious men, whom God raises up to change the fate of empires and execute judgment upon the earth. His zeal was great so long as it squared with his own interests, but cooled wonderfully when directed against them. He was not a great or good man, but an agent for the accomplishment of great purposes. In his sudden elevation to the throne; in the ruthlessness with which he carried out his purposes; in the union

of profound dissimulation with fanatic zeal, he is not without his likeness in modern times.—*J. Wolfendale.*

III. HOMILETICAL REFLECTIONS.

1 The history of Jehu furnishes an example of fidelity to a Divine commission, and the reward which fidelity inherits.

[18202] His was an eye looking right on, an arm ever uplifted, a course that saw nothing before him but the carrying out of God's word—"Thou shalt smite the house of Ahab thy master, that I may avenge the blood of my servants the prophets, and the blood of all the servants of the Lord, at the hand of Jezebel." He never for a moment looked behind till the Spirit of the Lord had finished the work at his hands—"So Jehu slew all that remained of the house of Ahab in Jezreel, and all his great men, and his kinsfolk, and his priests, until he left him none remaining." Oh for more spiritual Jehus! Oh for more of such faithfulness unto death! Now mark consecration's reward: "And the Lord said unto Jehu, Because thou hast done well in executing that which is right in Mine eyes, and hast done unto the house of Ahab according to all that was in Mine heart, thy children of the fourth generation shall sit on the throne of Israel." Here the faithful one is crowned. Glory rests upon him and, through him, on his descendants. "I will give thee a crown of life;" "Him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me on My throne, even as I also overcame and am set down with My Father in His throne." Christian, see the glory that awaits the consecrated life. Is this life thine?—*Rev. F. Whitfield.*

2 The history of Jehu suggests the necessity of examining into the real grounds and motives of apparent religious zeal.

[18203] Let a man examine himself, says an apostle: and nothing stands more in need of being sifted, analyzed, and tested than our zeal for the Lord. Have not men preached Christ for contention? Have not as large sacrifices been offered at the shrine of party as were ever laid on the altar of principle? Has not vanity often had fully as much to do as humanity with raising asylums for the orphan, the houseless, and the sick—men in what the world regards as monuments of their generosity seeking but to gratify their ambition—a monument to themselves more enduring and honourable than brass or marble? and have not men even burned at the stake, and died on the scaffold, and obtained a place for their names on the roll of martyrs, with no higher aim than that earthly glory which the soldier seeks in the deadly breach and at the cannon's fiery mouth? I do not say that any man's motives are altogether pure. Such an analysis as the Searcher of hearts could make would detect what was "of the earth earthy" in our noblest sacrifices and most holy services. Our wine is never without its water, nor our

silver without its dross; nor we less entirely and absolutely dependent on the mercy of God and the merits of His Son than he who, when one spoke to him of his good works, replied, I take my good works and my bad works, and, casting them into one heap, fly from both to Christ—to fall at His feet, crying, Save me, Lord, I perish. Still, when zeal for our own ends and interests appears so like zeal for God; when the counterfeit bears so close a resemblance to good money that it needs a close eye to discern the difference and detect the cheat; when such as, in their natural honesty, would scorn to impose on others, or make a stalking-horse of religion, may impose on themselves; it behoves us to see that God, and not self, is the centre of our system; and that, in the words of the apostle, whether we eat or drink, or whatsoever we do, not seeking our own glory, we do all to the glory of God.—*Rev. T. Guthrie, D.D.*

[18204] The worst passions have animated, and the most shocking crimes been committed by such as have said with Jehu, Come, see my zeal for the Lord! Paul persecuted the Christians; and exceedingly mad against them, haled men and women to prison, compelling them to blaspheme; and thought the while that he did God service. Many others have done the like. The Inquisition, with all its unutterable cruelty and bloody horrors, sprung from religious zeal—of a kind. If zeal has bravely borne the fires of the stake, zeal also has kindled them—all the difference in some cases between the martyr whose memory we revere and his murderers whose names we load with infamy this, in the one case the zeal was, and in the other it was not, according to knowledge. Excellent property as it is, when committed to such poor earthen vessels as we are, zeal is apt to turn acrid and sour. We have need, therefore, when most zealous for the Lord, or fancy ourselves to be so, to see what spirit we are of. Are the objects we aim at, and the means we use to accomplish them, such as God approves?—*Ibid.*

ISAIAH.

I. HIS CHARACTER.

1 He was of a contemplative habit.

[18205] It is not a violation of probability that Isaiah, after the death of Hezekiah, being an old man, withdrew much from public life; that he saw and felt there was little hope of producing reform during the impious career of Manasseh; and that in the distress and anguish of his soul he gave himself up to the contemplation of the happier times which should yet occur under the reign of the Messiah. It was during this period, probably, that he composed the latter part of his prophecies from the fortieth to the sixtieth

chapter. The nation was full of wickedness. An impious prince was on the throne; purity was banished, and the friends of Jehovah were bleeding in Jerusalem. In this dark and disastrous period he seems to have withdrawn himself from the consideration of the joyless present, and to have given his mind to the contemplation of future scenes. He thinks and feels and acts as if in that period. His mind is full of the contemplation, and he pours out, in describing it, the most elevated language and the most sublime poetry. It was in meditations such as these, we suppose, that he passed the close of his life, and in such visions of the glorious future that he sought a refuge from the gloom and despondency which must have filled a pious mind during the early part of the reign of the impious and bloodthirsty Manasseh. These contemplations, we remember, were under the teaching of the Spirit of God, but they show the previous bent and habit of the prophet's mind.—*Rev. J. Stoughton.*

2 He was a lover of peace.

[18206] He dwells, indeed, on the character of the Messiah, as a conqueror, as coming from the winepress, as trampling on his enemies with fury, as staining his raiment,—feeling very plainly that conflict must come before peace; that justice must do its work before mercy can have its reign; that before that bright age, which we call the millennium, there must be overturning after overturning. But looking on the peaceful sway of Christ as the reward of a victory involving a terrible contest, with what intense delight does he dwell on the dominion of love and the epoch of repose! From what a heart full of manly emotion—awakening sympathy in our own—does that picture of tranquillity come after the announcement of Him who “shall smite the earth with the rod of His mouth,” and who “with the breath of His lips shall slay the wicked.” “The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice’ den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.” Though Isaiah saw that war might be a stern necessity, though he felt that only through conflict of some kind in this world can peace be got at; though he acquiesced in Divine judgments, and preached and upheld the righteousness of God in the miseries of men—yet it was on the reign of peace, on the moral repose after the conflict, on the love of God and the love of man which are to shine when the judgments are over, that the prophet’s spirit rested as its desired haven, its glad home.—*Ibid.*

3 He was the possessor of wide-reaching sympathies.

[18207] He was a Jew. He was a patriot. He loved his country. You see it in every page. His soul was bound up in its welfare. He felt for its calamities, he exulted in the prospect of its returning prosperity. He trusted in God and did not despair of it, and came forth a moral hero for its help when the hearts of king and people were “as trees moved with the wind.” With the patriotism of a son of Israel he uttered prophecies against other countries; he meant them, as God did, for the good of his country, for the warning, and yet for the encouragement of the chosen nation. Does not patriotism, too, throb with piety when he records the vow, “For Zion’s sake will I not hold my peace, and for Jerusalem’s sake I will not rest, until the righteousness thereof go forth as brightness, and the salvation thereof as a lamp that burneth”? Yet with this patriotism there blended the most expansive sympathies. You see no bigotry in Isaiah, no hatred of other countries and other men. Rising superior to his age and race, he had a heart to take in Gentile as well as Jew. He saw the wall of division thrown down, and exulted in its overthrow. Again and again he spoke of the Gentiles as admitted to God’s Church, and it is almost with these words that he ended his ministry: “It shall come, that I will gather all nations and tongues; and they shall come and see my glory. They shall bring all your brethren for an offering unto the Lord out of all nations, as the children of Israel bring an offering in a clean vessel into the house of the Lord. And I will also take of them for priests and for Levites, saith the Lord.”—*Ibid.*

II. HIS CALL.

1 It was directly from God, and its vehicle was a vision of awe-inspiring grandeur.

[18208] The Divine appearance is most august, and the scenery most grand; in order, no doubt, to impress on the prophet, and through him on the people, a sense of the high authority which stamped his prophetic life and labours. Not simply as orator or poet, as a man of surpassing genius, having wonderful powers of thought and expression, who could vary his modes of address in numerous ways, and excel in all; not simply as a gifted man, with a mind of many coloured hues of beauty and glory, did Isaiah appear before the people; but, as a man of God—a servant of the Most High, receiving and delivering messages by immediate inspiration. It was not simply the music of his song and the force of his eloquence that established his claim to attention; not merely as a Homer or a Demosthenes that he charmed the imagination or “wielded the democracy,” but it was as a minister of the Lord of hosts, specially and miraculously appointed, with lips touched by “a live coal off the altar” of altars, that Isaiah stood in the court of

kings, or preached to a concourse of the people.—*Ibid.*

2 It was accompanied by Divine grace, which was thus united to the high natural endowments of the prophet.

[18209] His natural endowments ever, be it observed—only prior endowments from God—fitted him for this vision and his whole work. Upon the principle that he would never lose sight of that, there was harmony between the constitution and habits of the prophet's mind and the character and form of the revelations he received; it was the pure, bright, lofty imagination of Isaiah, an imagination not used merely to the grouping of natural objects, as the exponents of spiritual thought, but familiar with the temple scenes of worship, and employing its architecture and its adornments, its symbols and its songs, as steps to rise to heavenly things, as notes by which to indicate the beauty and glory of God: it was that imagination of his, wont to be so sacredly employed, which capacitated and trained him for the reception of this symbolical discovery of God's majesty, holiness, and condescension. It was that imagination which throughout his life served for the warp to be crossed by the woof of inspired impulses, covering it with patterns of manifold dyes. An intellect penetrating and comprehensive, a character firm, strong, bold, brave, fitted him to do the great work God called him to accomplish; and the Father of spirits having gifted him with all he needed by nature, superadded all that was wanted by grace. "Then flew one of the seraphim unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar, and he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged. Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me."—*Ibid.*

3 It was responded to by the prophet with the utmost readiness and the deepest humility.

[18210] Deeply abased by the sense of his own unworthiness and exceeding sinfulness, Isaiah yet hesitates not for a moment to respond to the Divine call. With a prompt alacrity, that reminds us of Abraham's, "Here am I," the prophet waits not for another volunteer to offer himself. Ignorant of the arduous nature of the enterprise to which he may be called, yet feeling safe in the conviction that the call is a Divine one, the question, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" is scarcely asked before the answer springs to Isaiah's lips, "Here am I; send me."—*M. J.*

[18211] It is not of the inferiority of the human mind, and of the cloudless height and power of the Divine mind, that Isaiah is here led to think so much, as of his own sinfulness and of God's holiness. The moral humility

ever goes lower than the intellectual. A sense of sin brings us down more than a sense of ignorance. . . . Isaiah hears the angelic antiphone, . . . "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts:" and the pureness, and truth, and equity, and justice, and love, and faithfulness of God, thus expanded and revolved before the prophet's thoughts, lead him to ponder, on the principle of contrast, his own ways, and his own heart, and he exclaims, "Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips, for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts."—*Rev. J. Stoughton.*

III. HIS MISSION.

It was a ministry of condemnation, and consequently of depression, yet its darkness was relieved by one ray of light.

[18212] He is forewarned of the forlorn hopelessness of his mission. The louder and more earnest is his cry, the less will they hear and understand—the more clearly he sets the vision of truth before them, the less will they see. "Make the heart of this people gross, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes, lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and be converted and healed." These mournful words, well known to us through their fivefold repetition in the New Testament as the description of the Jewish people in its latest stage of decay, were doubtless true in the highest degree of that wayward generation to which Isaiah was called to speak. His spirit sank within him, and he asked, "O Lord, how long?" The reply unfolded at once the darker and the brighter side of the future. Not till successive invasions had wasted the cities, not till the houses had been left without a human being within them, not till the land had been desolate with desolation, would a better hope dawn; not till the invasions of Pekah and Sennacherib had done their work, not till ten out of the twelve tribes had been removed far away, and there should have been a great forsaking in the midst of the land, would he be relieved from the necessity of delivering his stern but fruitless warnings against the idolatry, the dulness, the injustice of his people. But widely-spread and deeply-seated as was the national corruption, there was still a sound portion left, which would live on and flourish. As the aged oak or terebinth of Palestine may be shattered, and cut down to the very roots, and yet out of the withered stump a new shoot may spring forth, and grow into a mighty and vigorous tree, so is the holy seed, the faithful few, of the chosen people. This is the true consolation of all ecclesiastical history. It is a thought which is but little recognized in its earlier and ruder stages, when the inward and outward are easily confounded together. But it is the very message of life to a more refined and complex age, and it was the key-note to the whole of Isaiah's prophecies.—*Dean Stanley.*

IV. HIS PROPHECIES.

1 They are remarkable for their evangelical simplicity.

[18213] He was at once "great and faithful," in his "vision." Nothing escapes him in the events of his time. The older prophetic writings are worked up by him into his own words. He does not break with the past. He is not ashamed of building on the foundation of those who have gone before him. All that there is of general instruction in Joel, Micah, or Amos, is reproduced in Isaiah. But his style has its own marked peculiarity and novelty. The fierce impassioned addresses of Joel and Nahum, the abrupt strokes, the contorted turns of Hosea and Amos, give way to something more of a continuous flow, where stanza succeeds to stanza, and canto to canto, with almost a natural sequence. Full of imagery as is his poetry, it still has a simplicity which was at that time so rare as to provoke the satire of the more popular prophets. They, pushing to excess the nervous rhetoric of their predecessors, could not bear, as they expressed it, to be treated like children. "Whom shall he teach knowledge, and whom shall he make to understand doctrine? Them that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts!" Those constant recurrences of the general truths of spiritual religion, majestic in their plainness, seemed to them mere commonplace repetitions;—"precept upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little, there a little." It is the universal complaint of the shallow inflated rhetoricians of the professedly religious world against original genius and apostolic simplicity, the complaint of the babblers of Ephesus against St. John, the protest of all scholastic and pedantic systems against the freeness and the breadth of a greater than John or Isaiah.—*Ibid.*

2 They are remarkable for their high degree of evangelical inspiration.

[18214] To him with a distinctness which makes all other anticipations look pale in comparison, a distinctness which grew with his advancing years, was revealed the coming of a Son of David, who should restore the royal house of Judah and gather the nations under its sceptre. If some of these predictions belong to that phase of the Israelite hope of an earthly empire, which was doomed to disappointment and reversal, yet the larger part point to a glory which has been more than realized. Lineament after lineament of that Divine Ruler was gradually drawn by Isaiah or his scholars, until at last a Figure stands forth, so marvellously combined of power and gentleness and suffering, as to present in the united proportions of his descriptions the moral features of an historical Person, such as has been, by universal confession, known once, and once only, in the subsequent annals of the world.—*Ibid.*

[18215] Others, indeed, saw something of

New Testament times: he saw more. He has been called a fifth evangelist—more justly may he be called the first. He received in the greatest fulness, before the Christian era, gospel revelations; no doubt he was pre-eminent for his evangelical spirit. That he fully comprehended all that he uttered respecting Messiah and His kingdom, it would probably be going too far to say; but that he was a diligent inquirer and searcher into "what the Spirit of Christ which was in him did signify," we well know. He caught some experimental glimpses of gospel truth. Like Abraham, but with still greater keenness of vision, he saw the day of Christ afar off; "he saw it and was glad." We remark the comprehensive range of his evangelical faith. Guided by the Spirit, he took in and pondered the leading particulars of Christ's person, history, and work. He was enabled to contemplate Him, as a child born, as a son given, as a rod out of the stem of Jesse, as a branch growing out of his roots, and also as Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, and the Prince of Peace. He speaks of His teaching and of His miracles—of His life and of His death; fully and with wonderful exactitude does he portray His sufferings, and with unmistakable distinctness declare their sacrificial nature. He proclaims Messiah as Prophet, Priest, and King, and especially amplifies, under a variety of the most beautiful images, the glory and blessedness of His reign. And as his eye sweeps over this range of evangelical truth—as he seems as if reading beforehand the pages of the New Testament, we wonder not at his clear recognition of a future life, of the living again of the dead, of the dwellers in the dust awakening to sing, of a freshness of life covering them like the dew of herbs. The knowledge of a resurrection and a blessed immortality seems inseparably related to the knowledge of a Saviour, without whom there could be no resurrection, and future existence could not be life, but everlasting death. And therefore we see how to the man before whom there was lifted up the veil of futurity, to behold the Messiah so distinctly—there was also lifted up the veil for the beholding of immortality.—*Rev. J. Stoughton.*

3 They are remarkable for their vivid apprehension of evangelical doctrine.

[18216] How clearly he seems to see, for example, the doctrine of the atonement of Christ. . . . He saw the simple but glorious truth in a rudimentary form, that "all we like sheep have gone astray, and we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all." How touchingly, because experimentally, does he put it—how like a man who felt it—"All we"—identifying himself with all Israel, all the human race with the whole world of unclean lips—"all we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one"—individualizing as well as general-

izing, looking distinctly at his own sins, while he felt that depravity was universal—"we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on *Him*"—on Him, the holy and patient One—"hath laid on Him the iniquity of *us*"—connecting Himself and the people as the object of His wonderful atoning sacrifice—"the iniquity of *us all*."—*Ibid.*

4 They are remarkable for their full assurance of evangelical faith.

[18217] Sceptics have doubted whether certain prophecies in this book could have been written till after the events they referred to had taken place, because he speaks of them as if they were past. No one can doubt whether Isaiah wrote before Christ's coming and kingdom; yet he speaks of Him as present, and of His work as done. In this we see the full assurance of his faith. He had been taught by Divine inspiration what was determined by God: he therefore looked upon it as good as done. He had the belief which brings the distant nigh; which plants its foot on revelation, and, towering above the point of earthly vision, looks at objects in the light of the Divine prescience, "and calleth those things which be not as though they were." With such faith may we look on things promised by God as already done; our victory over all our enemies as already achieved; our safety within the heavenly temple as already secured; on the resurrection of the body as already accomplished; on the days of a glorious eternity as already come. Yes; for with God to will and to do are virtually the same: and it must be, "for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it."—*Ibid.*

V. HIS TRADITIONAL END.

[18218] It is said that Isaiah died a martyr. The tradition is that he was sawn asunder. Commentators suppose that Paul refers to him when he says of the Old Testament saints, they "had trial of mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: they were stoned, they were sawn asunder." This horrid martyrdom is considered to have taken place in the reign of Manasseh, who made the streets of Jerusalem to run down with blood. But Isaiah has had more than two thousand years of holy, happy life since then; for "God is not the God of the dead, but of the living: for all live unto Him." In the contemplation of the glorious future he now rests in the bosom of Abraham, waiting for the resurrection of the holy dead. If retired on earth he had such absorbing visions of Christ's kingdom, what visions must he now have among the retired saints in heaven! What a place for contemplation is that! What teaching, what inspiration and helps to thought are there! What a perfect absence of all that darkens and agitates!—*Ibid.*

VI. HOMILETICAL HINTS.

1 The prophet Isaiah, being emphatically the evangelical prophet, appeals to men in his writings with the power of the gospel.

[18219] How well may he be called the evangelical prophet, who provides us with so many texts for gospel sermons; whose words so often point our appeals, and wing our exhortations, and have been found many a time full of comfort for broken hearts, pining away in sin and poverty, in the workhouse or the hospital. "It was very early," says a simple narrative of a poor young man named Thomas, who had been a thief and in prison, and was now in an infirmary approaching his end—"It was very early on the last morning of July, when a rough sawyer, who lay in the same ward, heard the feeble voice of Thomas calling upon him; he got up and went to his bed. 'Jim,' he said, 'read a piece of the Bible to me—Isaiah lv., if you can find it.' The sawyer found it, and read on till he came to the 8th verse; when the sick youth stopped him, saying, 'Jim, think of them two verses, "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: and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon." Jim, that's good news for us, and that comforts me;' then clasping his hands, he continued, 'I am happy; I never thought I should feel like this; it seems so easy to die.'" Isaiah teaches people to die easy, because he preaches the gospel so fully.—*Ibid.*

[18220] No other prophet is so frequently cited in the New Testament, for none other so nearly comes up to the spirit of Christ and the apostles. No other single teacher of the Jewish Church has so worked his way into the heart of Christendom. When Augustine asked Ambrose which of the sacred books was best to be studied after his conversion, the answer was "Isaiah." The greatest musical composition of modern times, embodying more than any single confession of faith the sentiments of the whole Christian Church, is based in far the larger part on the prophecies of Isaiah. The wild tribes of New Zealand seized his magnificent strains as if belonging to their own national songs, and chanted them from hill to hill with all the delight of a newly discovered treasure.—*Dean Stanley.*

2 The prophet Isaiah as an example of the culture of contemplation reminds us that a contemplative habit is the growth of time and discipline.

[18221] A contemplative habit is not a gourd which grows up in a night; it is of growth as slow as it is rich of fruitage. Time, care, discipline, and supplication must be given to it. It will more than repay the sacrifice of worldly things. Rich returns will come out of the mean

investments. In this sense, Isaiah's beautiful words shall be fulfilled, "For brass I will bring gold, and for iron I will bring silver, and for wood brass, and for stones iron." In this sense, too, the bread-corn cast on the waters shall be found after many days. The business habits and demands of the age are unfavourable to the formation and culture of contemplative habits; but those who value things according to their true worth, will, at all sacrifices, attend to that self-training which will yield them harvests of comfort in old age, in times of trouble, and on the bed of death. It is ever the way of the world to cast men off when they need soothing: it is ever the way of religion to fold the weary to its heart. Wise and happy they, who in life's fresh morning, and at busy noon, cultivate friendship with meditative faith, that when evening comes, and the soul is weary of the world's rude noise and tumult, faith may open a window into the blessed future, whence there come breezes to cheer the spirits, and where there open prospects to charm the soul.—*Rev. J. Stoughton.*

JEREMIAH.

I. INTRODUCTORY.

1 State of Judah at the period of Jeremiah's ministry.

[18222] The whole Jewish nation was falling to pieces from its own sins. Brutish and filthy idolatry in high and low—oppression, violence, and luxury among the court and the nobility—shame, and poverty, and ignorance among the lower classes—idleness and quackery among the priesthood—and as kings over all, one fool and profligate after another, set on the throne by a foreign conqueror, and pulled down again by him at his pleasure. Ten out of the twelve tribes of Israel had been carried off captive, young and old, into a distant land. The small portion of country which still remained inhabited round Jerusalem, had been overrun again and again by cruel armies of heathens. Without Jerusalem was waste and ruins, bloodshed and wretchedness; within every kind of iniquity and lies, division and confusion. If ever there was a miserable and contemptible people upon the face of the earth, it was the Jewish nation in Jeremiah's time.—*Rev. C. Kingsley.*

[18223] Politically, the nation was rapidly approaching its ruin, during the forty years over which the prophet's mission extended: for morally it was in a state of hopeless and incurable corruption. It is with nations, as with individuals: the process of descent is rapid, the upward process of recovery is difficult and slow: and if it was true in Isaiah's time that "the whole head was sick, and the whole heart faint;" still more true was this of a people, who had joined greedily in the cruelties of Manasseh,

and had abandoned the worship of Jehovah for that of Baal and Astarte.—*Rev. Sir E. Bayley, B.D.*

2 State of the neighbouring chief powers at the period of Jeremiah's ministry.

[18224] At the time of Jeremiah's entrance upon public life, the strength of Assyria was rapidly diminishing, whilst Egypt had lately grown into a first-rate power. The Jewish statesmen were not slow to see the political importance of a close alliance with Egypt. The youthful Jeremiah vehemently opposed this policy apparently, . . . because . . . it was a violation of the principle of the theocracy, . . . and . . . because he foresaw with keen prophetic insight that although the power of Assyria was on the wane, a new power, that of Babylon, was about to take its place, before which that of Egypt must give way.—*Ibid.*

II. HIS CALL.

[18225] It was in the thirteenth year of Josiah's reign that "the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah." Two symbols were shown him, by which he learned the main purpose and scope of his mission. By the first, the branch of an almond tree (Jer. i. 11, 12), he was taught that judgment was awake in the land. The time of forbearance had passed. Judah must make her choice, or her doom would be irrevocable. For, secondly, by the symbol of the seething caldron (chap. i. 13), the prophet learned that a great national calamity was about to break over his country from the north; that his function was to proclaim the coming woe; and that, whatever comfort he might minister to individual penitents, his ministry to the nation was to be one of judgment: "See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out and to throw down, to destroy and to tear in pieces" (chap. i. 10, "Speaker's Commentary").—*Ibid.*

III. HIS MINISTRY.

1 It was one of denunciation and condemnation.

[18226] The mission of Jeremiah differed widely from that of Isaiah and the earlier prophets. That unshaken belief in the invincibility of Jerusalem which Isaiah had preached, it was the duty of Jeremiah to oppose. "Even the yet diviner truth of the possibility of restoration for the most hardened character, which Isaiah had set forth in words whose fire lives to this day, was to Jeremiah overclouded by the sense of ingrained depravity which seemed to have closed up every entrance to the national conscience. The message, 'Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool,' was exchanged for the desponding cry, 'Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots?' Jeremiah saw his country, not as

he wished and hoped it to be, but as it really was : he was prepared not merely to admit as an inscrutable fate, but to proclaim as his heaven-sent message, that Jerusalem was doomed. He was to acknowledge that the temple, with all its hallowed associations, was of no avail ; that the newly-discovered law had come too late. . . . He was the prophet of un-welcome, unpalatable truth, from whose clear vision all illusions had vanished away. . . . Against the whole land, against the kings of Judah, against the princes, against the priests, against the prophets, he was 'to gird up his loins, and arise and speak ;' he was to be the solitary fortress, the column of iron, the wall of brass, fearless, undismayed, unconquered—the one grand, immovable figure, which alone redeems the miserable downfall of his country from triviality and shame."—*Ibid.*

[18227] It was his mission to tell the people of their sins, to rebuke the nobles for their oppression, the humbler orders for their vileness, the priesthood for their falseness, even his fellow-prophets for their infidelity to the living God. The whole nation, from prince to beggar, had reached the very bottom of national depravity ; and this lone man was set to tell them of it, and to forewarn them of the frightful doom which was impending. He was the prophet of un-welcome truth. He had to face the facts of an age of retribution. He had to tear away the illusions with which people were deceiving themselves. They were bragging of the recovery of the Bible, which Josiah had found in the rubbish of their desecrated temple. They claimed that that sacred treasure was going to make all things right with them. They treated it much as an African savage regards the fetich which he worships, or the amulet which he wears around his neck. The possession of the Sacred Book, they thought, would save them. This young prophet knew better, and he had to tell them so.—*Rev. A. Phelps, D.D.*

2 It was naturally most unpopular.

[18228] It is easy to see that a ministry which maintained an uncompromising opposition to the dominant party, which from the first condemned the Egyptian alliance, and in its later stages counselled submission to the hateful rule of Babylon, must have been unpopular. The prophet's antagonism to Egypt may have been looked upon as folly : his submission to Babylon was treachery to the state. Hated as a preacher of righteousness, he was hated as a politician who had wrought his country's ruin : and no punishment would seem too great for one, who, as his enemies maintained, had abused the highest gifts for political purposes, and who, claiming to speak in the name of the Most High, had sealed the fate of the nation and contributed in no slight degree to accelerate its fall.—*Rev. Sir E. Bayley, B.D.*

3 It was a burden to himself.

[18229] He struggled, we find, again and again

against this strange and sad calling of a prophet. He cried out in bitter agony that God had deceived him ; had induced him to become a prophet, and then repaid him for speaking God's message with nothing but disappointment and misery. And yet he felt he must speak ; God, he said, was stronger than he was, and forced him to it. He said, "I will speak no more words in His name ; but the Word of the Lord was as fire within his bones, and would not let him rest ;" and so, in spite of himself, he told the truth, and suffered for it ; and hated to have to tell it, and pitied and loved the very country which he rebuked, till he cursed "the day in which he saw the light, and the hour in which it was said to his father, There is a man-child born." You who fancy that it is a fine thing, and a paying profession, to be a preacher of righteousness, and a rebuker of sin, look at Jeremiah, and judge ! For as surely as you or any other man is sent by God to do Jeremiah's work, so surely he must expect Jeremiah's wages.—*Rev. C. Kingsley.*

[18230] A sad calling, truly, to have to work at ; and all the more sad because Jeremiah had no pride, no steadfast opinion of his own excellence to keep him up. He hates his calling of prophet. At the very moment he is foretelling woe, he prays God that his prophecy may not come true ; he tries every method to prevent its coming true, by entreating his countrymen to repent. There runs through all his awful words a vein of tenderness, and pity, and love unspeakable, which to me is the one great mark of a true prophet ; a sign that Jeremiah spoke by the Spirit of God ; a sign that too many writers nowadays do not speak by the Spirit of God.—*Ibid.*

IV. HIS PERSECUTIONS.

They may be divided into three stages of ever-increasing tribulation.

(1) *Under Jostah, consisting of reproach and derision.*

[18231] He seems to have confined himself to the distinctly religious part of his mission ; from time to time he appeared in his native Anathoth and in the streets of Jerusalem, "rising early," and repeating the great summons of God to mankind, "Turn ye again now every one from his evil way, . . . and I will do you no hurt" (Jer. xxv. 3-6). His earnest warnings provoked opposition : "reproach and derision" were heaped upon him "daily" (xx. 8) ; his own relations, as Luther translates, joined the hue and cry against him (xii. 6) ; his fellow-townsmen first tried to frighten him into silence, and then conspired to take away his life (xi. 21). Of him, first in the sacred history, as Dean Stanley points out, was the saying literally fulfilled, "A prophet hath no honour in his own birthplace" (Luke iv. 24). And there were inner spiritual trials, as well as these outward ones. Not only was he mocked with the taunting question, "Where is the word of Jehovah?"

(xvii. 15), he began to doubt within himself whether his whole work was not a delusion and a lie (xx. 7), and was tempted at times to fall back into silence. During the reign of Josiah, however, the king was his friend: it was probably owing to his counsel that Josiah opposed the Egyptian alliance; and the death of the king at Megiddo may have proved the first great sorrow of Jeremiah's life. He mourned over him as a personal friend: he mourned over the seeming failure of a wise policy: and he mourned over the sudden and disastrous close of a righteous reign. During the first stage, then, of Jeremiah's ministry he was shielded from personal injury; but a most bitter feeling was aroused against him. Let us rid ourselves, men said, of this prophet of evil: let us catch hold of his words: let us watch for his halting: let us tell our rulers of his treason (xx. 11). The spirit of persecution was awake; and there lay before the prophet the prospect of a lifelong martyrdom.—*Rev. Sir E. Bayley, B.D.*

(2) *Under Jehoiakim, extending to a demand for his life and to acts of personal violence.*

[18232] This king ascended the throne as the vassal of Egypt, and for a time the Egyptian party was dominant in Jerusalem. The policy therefore of submission to the Chaldean supremacy which Jeremiah advocated was directly opposed to that of the Jewish rulers. Soon after the accession of Jehoiakim on one of the solemn feast-days, the prophet appeared in the temple court and proclaimed before the assembled worshippers that Jerusalem should become a curse, and that the temple should share the fate of the tabernacle of Shiloh (Jer. xxvi. 6). This was to offend the most cherished prejudices of the nation; and priests and prophets and all the people, laying aside all respect for the prophet and his office, loudly demanded his life (xxvi. 8, 9).—*Ibid.*

[18233] The fourth year of Jehoiakim was very memorable. The battle of Carchemish overthrew the hopes of the Egyptian party; and the armies of Nebuchadnezzar invaded the land. Again the great prophet stood forth, not to counsel resistance, but to preach repentance and submission. Prophecies which had been long uttered were gathered together, written in a book, and read as a whole in the hearing of the people. The king vented his impotent rage upon the scroll which Jeremiah had written. The persecution against the prophet grew hotter: the people sought his life: and on his comparing the nation to a potter's vessel dashed in pieces in his hands, Pashur, the deputy high-priest, caused him to be arrested, inflicted upon him the legal forty stripes save one, and made him pass a night in the stocks, exposed to the jeers of the scoffers, at the most public gate of the temple (Jer. xx. 1, 2). Nor was the inner trial less severe than the outward one. There came upon him as before the sense of utter failure; he would fain have withdrawn himself from

public life; "every one cursed" him (xv. 10); it had been well if he had never been born (xx. 14); he fell into the deepest gloom, "the gloom of many a lofty soul which feels itself misunderstood by men, which can hardly believe that it is not deserted by God."—*Ibid.*

(3) *Under Zedekiah extending to imprisonment, and probably to martyrdom.*

[18234] Zedekiah was not unwilling to act upon Jeremiah's advice to accept an inevitable necessity and remain true to his allegiance to Babylon, but the chief of the nation still clung to the Egyptian alliance, and sought to rid themselves of their great opponent. They seized the prophet, denounced him as a traitor, beat him, and cast him into a dungeon, and on the king having somewhat lessened the rigour of his imprisonment, the nobles demanded his immediate death. Taken to the house of one of his most bitter enemies, the prophet was cast into a subterranean cistern, the bottom of which was deep in slime; and there doubtless he would have perished either from hunger or suffocation, if the friendship of an Ethiopian eunuch and the king's regard for him had not rescued him from so horrible a fate.—*Ibid.*

[18235] In the wild confusion which followed the capture and destruction of Jerusalem, Jeremiah might have found safety and even honour in Babylon: but he preferred to remain in his own land. Not that rest was thus secured to him. The massacre of the Chaldean governor by Ishmael led to the flight of the remaining Jews into Egypt. The prophet was compelled to accompany them, and thus, after spending his life in preaching against Egypt, it was in that country that his last warnings were uttered, his last recorded counsels addressed to unwilling ears. Whether, as Christian tradition narrates, he died a martyr's death, stoned by his own countrymen at Tahapanes; or, according to Jewish tradition, made his escape to Babylon, must remain uncertain.—*Ibid.*

V. HIS PERSONAL CHARACTER.

I He was possessed of a childlike sensitiveness, gentleness, and tenderness.

[18236] He was not like Isaiah, a flame of fire; or like Hosea, a peal of thunder; or like Elijah, a rushing storm; but his ministries show him to have been gentle as a child, sensitive as a child, retiring as a child, timid as a child. It is not so much any particular passage, as the general tone of his ministry, that conveys this impression. And this notice of his physical and mental temperament, taken in connection with the history of his office, suggests three things: first, that, with this childlike gentleness, sensitive feeling, retiring habit, and timid disposition, he should have faithfully discharged, as he did, difficult tasks, in the way of bearing heavy and grievous burdens from the Lord; that he should have done so fully what was alien from his natural taste; that with a voice

naturally tremulous in the utterance of the stern and terrible, he could with calmness and boldness say things the most stern and terrible, when bidden of God to do so—shows how faithful was his allegiance to his heavenly Master, how with all his sensibility he had a resolute, because sanctified will, impelling him to walk in paths of thorny obedience. And secondly, that he, constituted as he was, should have done this so thoroughly, indicates how grace must have wrought in his soul, how the blessed Spirit of God must have influenced his heart as well as his intellect; what an element of moral strength the religious spirit, which God had filled him with, must have been in his character and life; and what a monument he was in early times of that truth—of which one in later times, still more fully taught, was so fully conscious when he said—“I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.” And yet, thirdly, the very sensibilities of his nature, so keen and deep, were calculated to make all the more touching those awful denunciations he was commissioned to utter, as every reader feels them to be. Yes, the agonies of a mental crucifixion, which are seen throbbing under the prophet’s words, as he tells the people of their ruin, while his heart is yearning with a love no speech can tell, give a pathetic power to his warnings, which coming from one of a rougher nature they could not have.—*Rev. J. Stoughton.*

[18237] A singular fact is it, that this solitary preacher, the butt of a nation’s ridicule, does not seem to have been made for such work. Usually God fits the man to his life’s work. If he is to have stern work to do, he is made of stern stuff. Luther, with much that was lovable in his nature, was, on the whole, a rough, stout man. That square face and thick neck, and those compact lips of his, indicate a man of will, who could bear rougher handling than other men. He was to contend with devils; and God gave him a nature which devils feared. Nobody ever called Luther the “weeping prophet.” If he shed tears, it was on his knees before God only. He shed no tears before the Diet of Worms. He was in no lachrymose mood when he had the pope’s bull to deal with, outside the Elster Gate of Wittenberg. The mourning prophet of Judæa does not seem to have been of stern make. He had a delicate and retiring nature. Gentle and unselfish was he, like a loving woman. When the sombre truth first dawned upon his early manhood, and he sees the work he has to do, he breaks out with the despairing cry, “Ah, Lord! I cannot speak! I am but a child!” So overwhelmed is he by the sight of his country’s shame, and the foresight of her doom, that he exclaims, “Oh that my head were waters, that I might weep day and night for the daughter of my people!” His writings show, by their chosen imagery, that he longs for solitude. He hungers to get away from the sins and sorrows of his time. Cowper’s refrain, “Oh for a lodge in some vast wilderness!” would have expressed the habit of his

mind. He “sits alone, and keeps silence, crouching under his burden.” We seem to hear him crying out in the bitterness of his spirit—

“The time is out of joint. Oh, cursed spite,
That ever I was born to set it right!”

—*Rev. A. Phelps, D.D.*

[18238] We might have thought that one called of God to such a work as Jeremiah’s would have been a man cast in heroic mould, stern, and self-reliant, one who took delight in the tumult of battle, and knew not what it was to fear the face of man. But this was not so. “Of all the prophets, Jeremiah is the most retiring, the most plaintive, the most closely compassed with ordinary human weaknesses.” He was “sensitive, timid, shy, hopeless, desponding.” He was no second Elijah. The cry which he uttered as the dark truth first broke upon his young mind was characteristic of his whole career: “Ah, Lord! I cannot speak; I am but a child.” It is this childlike tenderness which adds force to the severity of his denunciations, to the bitterness of his grief.—*Rev. Sir E. Bayley, B.D.*

2 He occasionally gave way to impatience.

[18239] The prophet’s natural temperament distinctly and painfully appears in the record he gives of his calamities, in the noting down of his sighs and tears, and in those pathetic lamentations which form a distinct portion of his writings. The flow of his grief sometimes surpassed the bounds of reason, and broke down the restraints of duty. So turbulent was the stream of his sorrow once that it washed away all resignation, and he thoughtlessly cursed the day of his birth. Poor Jeremiah! looking at his natural constitution, so ill fitted to bear the rough usage that he met with, we cannot wonder at, while we may pity and must blame, the impatience of his soul, under the load of its agonies. The good man here appears, like other good men in the Bible, as a warning to us, who, in the matter of repining under our trials, will be far more blamable than Jeremiah; seeing that the Divine meaning of afflictive providences is so much more fully revealed under the New Testament than the Old.—*Rev. J. Stoughton.*

3 He was a man of large-hearted sympathies.

[18240] It doubly affects us to see how he makes the calamities of the nation his own—how his spirit seems to throb as if it were one of the nerves of the great social body of the church and kingdom. In the Lamentations, we see the man of sorrows, the weeping prophet; but it is a man realizing the sorrows of the country, more than his own individual sorrows. It is the prophet shedding tears over a holy and beautiful temple in ruins, and God’s chosen land made desolate. As the wailings of his soul come forth, like the sighs of an Æolian harp, under the touch of tempestuous winds,

they indicate not the selfish man, but the man of large sympathies — one feeling so much because his heart was so big as to take in a nation—because his affections were so broadly spread, that they covered a kingdom.—*Ibid.*

4 He was the possessor of a firm faith and strong confidence in God.

[18241] In the season of the deepest calamity, when the besieging army was around Jerusalem, and he was shut up in the house of the guard, did he evince his confidence in the truth of God's word, relative to the return from captivity at the end of seventy years by his purchase of patrimonial property at Anathoth. It is said that when the city of Rome had an army at its gates, the land on which the enemy was encamped was put up for auction on the forum and bought by the citizens. Theirs was mere earthly patriotism, working perhaps in the way of policy with a view to check national despair. The conduct of Jeremiah manifested a faith of Divine warrant—a trust in the great God who is not a man that He should lie, or the son of man that He should repent. It was like the faith of Abraham who believed that God would give him Canaan, though at the time "he had no inheritance, no, not so much as to set his foot on."—*Ibid.*

VI. HIS TYPICAL CHARACTER.

[18242] The peculiarities of his natural disposition combined with the outward circumstances of his calling to make his life a peculiarly trying one: he was "a man of sorrows" from his youth upwards, and as such has always been regarded as a type of the suffering Saviour. This typical character of Jeremiah deserves notice. It has been thought indeed by some that he is "the servant of God" spoken of in the fifty-second and fifty-third chapters of Isaiah, and that that prophecy was fulfilled in his person. No doubt the essential features of that sublime description meet us in the sufferings of Jeremiah; we have only to read the passage to feel how striking is its application to the prophet. But why was this? Because Jeremiah was not only a prophet, but a prophecy, a signal type of Him who suffered on the cross and conquered by suffering.—*Rev. Sir E. Bayley, B.D.*

[18243] When we read in Isaiah, "He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter" (liii. 7); and when we hear Jeremiah saying, "I was like a lamb brought to the slaughter" (xi. 19); when we read in Isaiah of one who was "despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief" (liii. 3), and compare such description with the whole course of the prophet's life, we are brought to the conclusion that in his history we have a "foreshadowing of the gospel; and that in the struggles of Jeremiah standing alone against princes, prophets, priests, and people, contending as a faithful witness of the truth amid scorn, calumny, insult, injury, and violence; foretelling the fall of Jeru-

salem in his prophecies, and yet weeping over its ruins in his Lamentations; we have a vision of the agony in Gethsemane, and of the arraignment in the hall of Caiaphas, and of the precious death on Calvary of Him who shed tears of compassion over Jerusalem, and who shed His blood upon the cross to redeem her from her sins.—*Ibid.*

VII. HIS PROPHECIES.

1 Their programme.

[18244] This was simple. Their central theme was the coming supremacy of the Chaldean nation: and this at a time when nothing was feared from Babylon, and Nebuchadnezzar was unknown, when Egypt was ascendant and Pharaoh-necho the terror of Judah. He foretold the overthrow of the Jewish nation by this power from "the North;" defined the term of the Chaldean ascendancy and Judah's captivity, and predicted the emancipation of Judah and restoration of Jerusalem when the seventy years had expired.—*Anon.*

2 Their design.

[18245] The design of Jeremiah's prophecies was threefold. It was (a) To *forewarn* the Jews of impending doom on account of national pollution and apostasy. (β) To *invite* them to repentance, promising immediate Divine forgiveness and ultimate redemption from Babylon. (γ) To *assure* the godly among them by predictions of Messiah's gracious advent, and the spiritual blessings incident to His reign.—*Ibid.*

3 Their literary style.

[18246] The book is an admixture of prosaic narrative of events, and poetic utterances of prophecy. While his style in the *narrative* parts may sometimes appear unpolished ["rusticior," *Jerome*], the *poetic* portions are often distinguished by an eloquence at once vigorous and sublime. His writings throughout are characterized by a reiteration of imagery and phrase, and a ruggedness of form natural to impassioned sorrow and indignant remonstrance. Though there are marks of "negligence in diction" (*Kcil*), and while "not disregarding art altogether, he has far less polish than Isaiah" (*Lange*); yet "his thought is ever rich, and his speech incisive and clear" (*Kcil*); whilst "of all the prophets his genius is the most poetical" (*Umbriet*).—*Ibid.*

4 Their composition and compilation.

[18247] His prophetic utterances were first committed to writing at the command of Jehovah "in the fourth year of Jehoiakim" (Jer. xxxvi. 1), for the purpose of their being read in the temple by Baruch the scribe at the approaching national fast. The king, incensed by their contents, destroyed the roll. They were immediately rewritten; Jeremiah dictating them afresh to Baruch, with important additions (xxxvi. 32). Other portions, subsequent to this date (4th of Jehoiakim—

11th of Zedekiah, over eighteen years) were written at different intervals in separate parts (xxx. 2, xxix. 1, li. 60). The entire book, therefore, includes the roll written by Baruch, the various fragments penned by Jeremiah, with subsequent additions by the prophet, either while he lingered in Palestine under Gedaliah, or while in Egypt among his exiled people. The complete prophecies would speak with accumulated emphasis to the heedless captives of the steadfastness of God's word and the consequences of disregarding His voice.—*Ibid.*

5 Their order and arrangement.

[18248] (a) *Chronologically*, the book is in disorder and confusion : e.g., xxi. and xxiv. 8-10, belong to Zedekiah's time, the latest king ; while xxii. 11, 12, refer to Jehoahaz, the second king ; and xxv. deals with Jehoiakim, the third king. Distinct prophecies are mingled together regardless of date of delivery. (b) *Topically*, there is arrangement : the book divides itself into two sections according to the reference of the prophecies. Thus, i. to xlv. relate to the prophet's own country, xlvi. to li. to foreign nations, while lii. is a historic account of the captivity appended after the whole book, i.-li., was put together, and the inscription, i. 1-3, written. This might have been the latest act of Jeremiah himself.—*Anon.*

6 Their verification.

[18249] *During Jeremiah's life*, his predictions fulfilled in (a) The captivity of Jehoiakim and his queen-mother (xxii. 24-26). (b) The death of Hananiah the deceitful prophet at the time foretold (xxviii. 15-17). (c) The inglorious end and shameful burial of Jehoiakim (xxii. 18, 19, xxxvi. 30). (d) The fate of Zedekiah (xxii. 2, 3). (e) The invasion of Judah by the king of Babylon, and Jewish captivity (xx. 4, &c.). (f) The rifling of the temple by Nebuchadnezzar (xxvii. 19-22). (g) The destruction of Jerusalem by fire (xxi. 10, xxxii. 29, xxxvii. 8-10). (h) The Chaldean subjugation of Egypt (xliii. 10-12, xlv. 29, 30), and supremacy over surrounding nations (xxvii. 1-8). *After the prophet's decease* : (a) The termination of the Babylonish captivity after seventy years (xxv. 11 ; see Dan. ix. 2). (b) The return of the Jews to their own country (xxix. 10-14). (c) The downfall and desolation of Babylon, and date of the event (xxv. 12). (d) The advent of Messiah (xxiii. 3-8, xxxi. 31-34, xxxiii. 6-9).—*Ibid.*

VIII. HOMILETICAL REFLECTIONS.

1 The history of Jeremiah illustrates the truth that faithfulness to God ever provokes opposition on the part of man.

[18250] This truth is the key to all religious persecution. Let a man fall in with the opinions of the day, let him flatter men's prejudices and tolerate their vices, and then, be he priest or prophet, "all men shall speak well of him."

The false in prophecy has ever been welcome to the false in life : it lightens the yoke of God's law, it removes His fear from the conscience, it leaves man to himself ; conceit is fostered, pride flattered, lust left undisturbed ; and the sinner lives on in the illusion of contented ignorance : "The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means ; and my people love to have it so" (Jer. v. 31). But let a true prophet appear upon the scene and raise his voice on behalf of God and truth ; let him stand in the way with the flaming sword of God's outraged law, and bid men at their peril turn and repent ; the enmity of the heart is aroused, and persecution is the natural result. Jeremiah was no exception to this rule. Men did not listen to him, they smote him and put his feet into the stocks ; they did not confute his reasonings, they cast him into the dungeon and left him to perish. This has ever been man's way of dealing with God's truth : if he does not accept it, he hates and persecutes it.—*Rev. Sir E. Bayley, B.D.*

2 The history of Jeremiah illustrates the truth that true piety accepts what is inevitable, and patiently awaits the unfolding of God's providence.

[18251] The prophet Jeremiah, at least during the later years of his ministry, counselled submission to the yoke of the king of Babylon, not as a thing good in itself, but as an inevitable result from which there was no appeal. After the defeat of Necho at Carchemish in the fourth year of Jehoiakim, Judæa virtually became a Babylonish province. Such state of dependence was a judgment which could not be avoided : let the nation submit, and it might one day regain its independence : let it rise up in rebellion, and its ruin would be complete. Upon a smaller scale this history repeats itself continually in Christian experience. Very few are willing fully to accept the circumstances of their lives, as they are marked out for them by the providence of God : they blame the surroundings of their lot : they blame those who are in part responsible for them : they blame everybody and everything rather than themselves : and with a fretful impatience make spasmodic efforts to escape from a bondage which is irksome to them. And even when, as with the Jews of old, they have brought evil upon themselves, instead of repenting of the evil, they rebel against the hand which smites them.—*Ibid.*

[18252] The story of Jeremiah will not be lost upon us if it teaches us the duty of submission to the will of God. It was not the yoke of Babylon that was at fault in the days of Jeremiah, so much as the yoke of unforsaken sin : it was not by turning to Egypt for help that Judah could be saved, but by turning to the God whom they had forsaken : let them bow the neck to His law and accept His rule, and all would be well. But the old struggle continually repeats itself. Whose will is to be supreme—the will of God, or the will of man?

All spiritual conflict is practically the battle of the wills: and only in a full and unreserved acceptance of the Divine will can we find happiness and peace.—*Ibid.*

- 3 The history of Jeremiah illustrates the truth that spiritual depression is not inconsistent with true faith.

[18253] Great were the outward sufferings of Jeremiah's life. To a man of his sensitive and refined nature, the indignities to which he was exposed must have been peculiarly painful: but his chief trial evidently lay within. The failure which attended his labours, the hostility shown by his nearest relatives, his seeming desertion by God, perplexed and afflicted him. Why was he given so weighty a charge, and then left to fight the battle alone? Why did evil prevail unchecked in the land, and God's truth fail in its effect? Spiritual depression therefore is quite consistent with the existence of a true faith and of a fixed purpose of living to God: but if with advancing knowledge, and with a growing spirit of inquiry, the Christian's mental difficulties increase rather than diminish, it will always be of use to remember that the foremost of God's servants have suffered in like manner before us, and that the most exalted saintship can claim no exemption from the painful discipline of mental conflict.—*Ibid.*

- 4 The history of Jeremiah suggests that Christians of the "broken heart" are not apt to be popular with the world.

[18254] Very hard things are said of them. Very unjust judgments they have to bear in silence. The world cracks many a jest upon their long faces and their "vinegar" aspect. I have seen tears trembling in their eyes, as their only answer to the gibes of men for whose souls they went home to pray. Yet have not you heard from such jesters the fling at our common faith, "If I believed what you believe, I should move heaven and earth to save souls: it seems to me I could never laugh again"? So said an estimable woman of the world to me last summer. It is hard to please men who do not feel the inner life which many humble Christians lead. Which shall we do—hold on to, and try to act upon, the faith that gives us "long faces," or meet your charge of heartless inconsistency by living as if this were already a saved world, and our home were Eden?—*Rev. A. Phelps, D.D.*

- 5 The history of Jeremiah suggests that Christians of the "broken heart" possess a very profound style of Christian character.

[18255] Not perfect, by any means. We all have an ideal of a certain robust and rounded Christian life superior to theirs. On the whole, St. Paul was a nobler character than Jeremiah. He ought to have been. He saw at its meridian the sun which the prophet only foresaw long before the dawn. Yet it is unjust not to give the Jeremiahs of our brotherhood the credit

for ploughing deep in their sense of eternal things. They may not be as happy as their faith in Christ warrants them to be. Yet they do make a beginning in the right direction. Theirs is a struggle to be and to do of which they have no reason to be ashamed. . . . Eternity will show to us all that some of the world's great souls are among them.—*Ibid.*

- 6 The history of Jeremiah suggests that Christians of the "broken heart" are men and women of great spiritual powers.

[18256] The world does not like them, but cannot help respecting them. "I keep clear of unhappy people," said one of the impatient ones. Yet I observed that he chose for his pastor, and honoured as a great man, one whose face was long, and whose look betokened secret tears. We love realities after all. We feel the power of the man who knows the most of them, and feels them most profoundly. The man or woman who takes God's views of things, interprets human life as God interprets it, looks out on eternity as God reveals it, and whose visage bears the marks of inward struggles of soul, with the facts of human destiny, as God declares them, is a power with us all. If we come into deep waters, and the billows go over our heads, we look around gasping for the friendly word or look or hand of such to cheer us. The very men we have laughed at or shrunk from, because they were "uncou' guid men," are those whose experience we want then. Said one man of the world, whose misfortune it was to have a "gay parson" for his pastor, "Our pastor is a capital fellow, a born wit, a splendid mimic; he keeps the table in a roar; and in the pulpit he is not afraid to make us laugh." Said his friend, "Suppose that you had lost your only child, or that you were yourself about to die?"—"Well," was the reply, "to tell you the truth, he is the last man I should want to see then. Still, he is a capital fellow." Somehow the "capital fellows," in the ministry or out of it, are a little limited in their range of usefulness. They do for picnics or the croquet-ground. When we come to those passages of life or death at which eternity looks in upon us, we turn to men and women of another make.—*Ibid.*

- 7 The example of Jeremiah should be an incentive to the Christian, who has brighter light and stronger consolation to "endure unto the end."

[18257] Our troubles are lighter than the prophet's—our consolations are stronger. He carried His cross, shall not we carry ours? While not without conflict and sorrow we pass through this life, yet Christ has taught us, "If we be dead with Him, we shall also live with Him: if we suffer, we shall also reign with Him." "Every cross," it has been beautifully said, "hath its own inscription: the name that is inscribed upon it of the person for whom it was shaped. It was intended for those

shoulders upon which it is laid, and will adapt itself to them." Yes, and the Lord who makes our crosses is He who bore His own, and will give the weakest of us grace to carry ours.—*Rev. J. Stoughton.*

[18258] If Jeremiah was the prophet of judgment, he was also the prophet of hope; and St. Paul did but take up and enlarge upon his message, when he preached to Jew and Gentile "Jesus and the resurrection." And surely, if in all sorrow there is something very much akin to that of God's much-tried servant of old, there is also for every suffering believer the same animating principle of Christian hope: the truths which were as shadows to Jeremiah have become realities to us; and in that suffering but now glorified Redeemer, of whom the prophet was a type, we have One who hath "carried our sorrows," and won for us a title to an "endless life."—*Rev. Sir E. Bayley, L.D.*

HOSEA.

I. INTRODUCTION.

Character of his times.

[18259] His message was mainly to the kingdom of Israel, the ten tribes who had revolted from Judah; and this period, during which he carried God's messages to them, was the most frightful in their history. It was a period of change and confusion, of anarchy, murder, and usurpation. After Jeroboam's death there was an interregnum of ten years, and then Zechariah seized the sceptre. In six months he was slain by Shallum. In four weeks this man was murdered by Menahem: and the murderer, while his hands reeked with blood, took the reigns of government, and managed to hold them for ten years, while the chariot of the state rolled over a horrible path, enveloped in storms. Pekahiah succeeded him, and after wearing the crown two years, was put to death by Pekah; and then Pekah, twenty years after, was put to death by Hoshea. Hoshea brings up the rear of these usurpers, and with him closes the history of the Israelitish kingdom. "The Lord was very angry with Israel, and removed them out of his sight. So was Israel carried away out of their own land to Assyria unto this day." A tragical period truly. What events—not particularly recorded, but which are implied in the general narrative—must have transpired! How would the soul of the good prophet be shocked by the things which he heard! How would his old age be darkened and distressed by the troubles of his nation! How would tears trickle down his time-furrowed cheeks, because of the hurt of the daughter of his people! Hosea's lot was cast on times far different from ours; such times, indeed, as England has never seen, unless it were during the terrible wars of the Roses, in the fifteenth century.—*Rev. J. Stoughton.*

II. HIS PROPHETIC WRITINGS.

Their style is peculiar and vehement.

[18260] The words of upbraiding, of judgment, of woe, burst out, as it were, one by one, slowly, heavily, condensed, abrupt, from the prophet's heavy and shrinking soul, as God commanded and constrained him, and put His words, like fire, in the prophet's mouth. . . He delivers his message as though each sentence burst with a groan from his soul, and he had anew to take breath, before he uttered each renewed woe. Each verse forms a whole for itself, like one heavy toll in a funeral knell.—*Rev. E. Pusey, D.D.*

[18261] A critic has spoken of Hosea's style as "abrupt, unconnected, and ebullient, his rhythm hard, leaping, and violent, his language peculiar and difficult." Another says, with an overlaying of imagery, "His discourses are like a garland woven of a multiplicity of flowers; images are woven upon images, comparison wound upon comparison, metaphor strung upon metaphor. He plucks one flower, and throws it down, that he may directly break off another. Like a bee, he flies from one flower-bed to another, that he may suck his honey from the most varied pieces. It is a natural consequence that his figures sometimes form strings of pearls. Often he is prone to allegory; often he sinks down to obscurity." The style of a man's thought and expression gives the image of his mind, and in Hosea's writings we recognize a gifted thinker, ardent and impetuous, full of fancy and full of feeling, not habituated to order and arrangement, but pouring forth ideas in magnificent profusion. We do not see the refined and polished teacher, but one like Elijah, of rugged aspect, keen and fiery as the eagle, bold and dauntless as the lion; yet withal full of loving tenderness as a little child.—*Rev. J. Stoughton.*

III. HIS PROPHETIC ACTS.

I They were not imagined to have taken place in a vision, but were actually performed.

[18262] The dealings of God in reference to the apostate tribes of Israel, Hosea was commissioned to unfold and explain, and this he did in a peculiar manner, as related in the first three chapters. The style of the narrative indicates that it refers not to something which the prophet saw in vision, or imagined and described, but to something which he actually did. He was commanded to go and take one, who, on account of her infidelity, is called a wife of whoredoms: she bore a son and daughter, and afterwards another son. The prophet repudiated her, because of her breach of the marriage covenant, but afterwards he was commanded to receive her again. Such domestic transactions taking place in the family of a well-known man like Hosea were to be a sign unto Israel. Of course this appears very strange to us, since it is utterly out of keeping with the

habits and modes of instruction pertaining to present times. But it should be remembered, that before the age of Christianity there was far less of moral correctness and delicacy of feeling than there is now; and that teaching by signs, by the performance of parabolic events, was characteristic of the age of prophecy, and in accordance with the oriental genius of the Jewish nation.—*Ibid.*

2 They were strikingly significant of the relative positions of God and Israel.

[18263] The meaning conveyed in this chapter of the prophet's history is very striking, and a part of it very beautiful. The wife was a type of the whole Jewish people. The three children probably denoted three classes among them. The first, Jezreel—"the seed of God"—the son of the prophet, seems to represent the pious portion, the true Israel, those whom God had sown and made to grow. The second, Lo-ruhamah, and the third, Lo-ammi, typify those who were not of Jezreel, but who were cast aside by God. Perhaps these last two were not children of the prophet, and hence they would more strikingly symbolize the degenerate and shameful condition of the sinful portion of the Israelitish race. . . . The period of separation between the prophet and his unfaithful companion betokened the Divine rejection of the people for their gross idolatry. But the overtures of compassion, the return of previous love on the part of the prophet, very touchingly illustrate the Divine mercy towards the outcasts.—*Ibid.*

IV. HIS CHARACTER.

"The style is the man," and in his writings several virtues make themselves apparent.

(1) *Abhorrence of evil.*

[18264] We cannot read this book without feeling that the writer entered into the sentiments he records. Hosea does not speak mechanically. His lips are not mere keys on which a finger plays, evoking sound but not eliciting soul. The man's heart comes out. Spiritual sincerity and earnestness mark every page. He speaks as one who has tasted and felt what he says. It is God's revelation, but it is Hosea's cardiphonia. You see his deep detestation of moral evil. How he speaks against sin, giving it odious names, and depicting it by loathsome images. How he traces all misery up to this one source: "Samaria shall become desolate; for she hath rebelled against her God." How he identifies the punishment of sin with sin itself: "Their own doings have beset them about." How he ignores all greatness where the heart is vile.—*Ibid.*

(2) *Large-hearted sympathy.*

a. He sympathized, if we may say so, with God.

[18265] How many express words of God does he repeat! How much he speaks in the very

name of God! . . . We cannot, while going over this book, divest ourselves of the thought that the prophet enters most fully into all these pleadings and expostulations, that they come from God's heart through his heart; that in the Divine indignation against sin, he participates; that with the melting overtures of heavenly love, he pours out the tenderest feelings of his own soul. Who does not catch the sympathy of the prophet in those wonderful words, "How shall I give thee up Ephraim? How shall I deliver thee Israel?"—*Ibid.*

b. He fully sympathized with man.

[18266] He feels the woes and wants of Israel: he identifies Israel with himself. Not as a spiritual lordling, but as a poor brother like themselves, he urges and persuades. "Come," he says, "and let us return unto the Lord," as one feeling that he had need to return as well as they; as one who would take them by the hand in the path in which he felt it became himself to tread:—"Come, and let us return unto the Lord: for He hath torn, and He will heal us; He hath smitten, and He will bind us up. After two days He will revive us—in the third day He will raise us up, and we shall live in His sight." And again, "O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God; for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity. Take with you words, and turn to the Lord: say unto him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously: so will we render the calves of our lips. Asshur shall not save us; we will not ride upon horses: neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, Ye are our gods; for in thee the fatherless findeth mercy."—*Ibid.*

(3) *Fidelity in the discharge of his mission.*

[18267] Much of the duty he had to perform was painful. It must have wrung the heart of a man like him, as loving as he was courageous. It was indeed a burden from the Lord; but he carried it. With what fidelity did he probe the wounds of Israel! How honestly he laid open before the people the true cause of all their troubles! He did not lose himself in general allusions to their calamities; he set to work to show them most distinctly, and in several discriminating particulars, their sins. Then how solemnly did he reveal the judgments of the Lord against the whole circle of the ungodly. We seem to behold him in his prophet's mantle, with a sorrowful countenance, and eyes full of tears; first going to the house of sacrifice, and looking at the desecrated altar, and then to the palace, and looking at the profanation of the throne; and then through the streets of the cities, looking on the vices and crimes of the populace, and saying, "Hear ye this, O priests; and hearken, ye house of Israel; and give ye ear, O house of the king; for judgment is toward you. Blow ye the cornet in Gibeah, and the trumpet in Ramah: cry aloud at Beth-aven, after thee, O Benjamin. Ephraim shall be desolate in the day of rebuke. Among the tribes of Israel have I made known that

which surely shall be. The princes of Judah were like them that remove the bound: therefore I will pour out my wrath upon them like water."—*Ibid.*

(4) *The spirit of hope.*

[18268] His sorrowful expostulations, his terrible warnings, are illumined by hope. They terminate in hope. He has hope for his country, and hope for the Church. "The prophet's mind was intensely interested in the destinies of his own people. The nations around him are unheeded; his prophetic eye beholds the crisis approaching his country, and sees its cantons ravaged, its tribes murdered or enslaved. No wonder that his rebukes are so terrible, his menaces so "alarming that his soul poured forth its strength in an ecstasy of grief and affection. Invitations replete with tenderness and pathos, are interspersed with his warnings and expostulations. Now we are startled with a vision of the throne, at first shrouded in darkness, and sending forth lightnings, thunders, and voices: but while we gaze, it becomes encircled with a rainbow, which gradually expands till it is lost in that brilliancy which itself had originated." Yes, amidst the storm the prophet shows us the rainbow. Cloud after cloud comes, and there is thunder, but the rainbow is painted on the cloud. The prophet hopes and teaches the nation and the Church to hope.—*Ibid.*

[18269] Entering into the promises, he obtained the spirit of hope, the only source out of which a spirit of true hope can ever rise. He repeated them as one who believed in them and rejoiced in them. This spirit of hope appears when he takes the poor, torn, bleeding children of Israel by the hand, and says, "Let us return unto the Lord; He will heal us; He will bind us up." "Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord." This spirit of hope is breathed in the exhortation, "Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy: break up your fallow ground; for it is time to seek the Lord, till He come and rain righteousness upon you." And this spirit of hope blends with the prophet's final entreaty that Israel would turn to the Lord, because "in Him the fatherless findeth mercy."—*Ibid.*

V. HOMILETICAL HINTS.

1 The ministry of Hosea furnishes a bright example of fidelity to God.

[18270] Hosea comes before us as a man earnestly and sorrowfully doing his duty. He hears a voice from heaven, and he must repeat it. God commands him, and he obeys. Faithfulness to the authority of the Most High, in whatever position we are placed, whatever may be the particular mission we have to fulfil—that is the trait of character which we should seek to have, and exemplify, as the covering and crown of all our days. We have said, faithfulness to the authority of the Most High, because that is really the only form of faithfulness which meets

the claims of religion. Faithfulness to duty would hardly describe Hosea's faithfulness. It was faithfulness to God. We are in danger of talking about duty as a mere abstraction, of looking at it apart from Him who binds upon us our obligations, whose moral perfection is the foundation of all law. We are apt, amidst our declamations on the subject, to forget that personal, everlasting, righteous, blessed and adorable Being, without faith in whom, and love to His name, and worship of His majesty, and reverence for His revealed will, our homilies may only be the expression of a refined idolatrous sentiment, the putting of an abstraction in the place of God. Let us think and speak of things as the Bible teaches us, and ever regard God in Christ as our Lawgiver and King. Be this the end of our lives—as the Bible phrases it, "He served his own generation by the will of God."—*Ibid.*

2 The ministry of Hosea emphasizes the necessity and the benefits of a spirit of hope.

[18271] Hope is one of the most beautiful traits of character unfolded in the ministry of Hosea. We honour him for his faithfulness, and love him for his hope. And it was hope that made him strong, brave, patient, and loving. It was hope that fitted him to do his work as a minister, which sustained and comforted him as a man. There was hope in his patriotism, and hope in his piety, hope for himself and for his countrymen. Nor can we labour, and suffer, and endure without hope. Without hope we cannot serve God and save men. Without hope our hearts will sink, or they will become callous. Without hope for ourselves we shall give up our work; without hope for others we shall do it harshly, and no love will blend with it to give it beauty.—*Ibid.*

[18272] We thank thee, thou prophet of the living God, for this example of hope, amidst the burdens and cares of human life; amidst the sins and perils of the nation; amidst the backslidings and afflictions of the Church; amidst the troubles and sorrows of our own souls! If Judaism was a religion of hope, so is the gospel: a religion of better and brighter hope—of hope based on fuller, clearer, more explicit promises—of hope in Christ.—*Ibid.*

JOEL.

I. INTRODUCTORY.

Question as to the exact period of his ministry.

[18273] It is plain that Joel was a prophet in Judah, not in Israel; but there is difficulty in coming to any conclusion about the time when he lived. Very different opinions have been expressed on the subject. Some suppose that

he is the earliest of the prophets whose writings are preserved. They date his ministry in the reign of Joash, when Jehoiada, the high priest, had reformed the kingdom by casting down idolatry, and restoring the burnt offerings of the Lord, as it is written in the law of Moses, "with rejoicing and with singing, as it was ordained by David." This judgment is formed chiefly upon the absence of any allusion to idolatrous practices in the record of Joel's ministry; and upon his reference to the priests as ministers of the Lord, engaged in the regular temple service. Others, again, rank Joel as a contemporary with Hosea and Amos, and as engaged in the prophetic office at the close of the reign of Uzziah. The omission of reference to the worship of idols harmonizes with this period no less than the other, inasmuch as though Uzziah did evil in burning incense in the temple, thus usurping a Divine office, which God had separated from the office of king; yet, in his reign, and that of his successor, the worship of the true God was preserved in Jerusalem. In the omission, then, of all indications that idolatry was prevalent when Joel ministered as prophet, we have nothing decisive as to whether he lived in the reign of Joash, or in that of Uzziah. The only thing in the book seeming to point to one of these periods rather than the other, is the fact, which it betrays, that something at the time was grievously wrong in Judah. Such judgments could not have come if there had not been some great evil to provoke them. Joel expressly alludes to the sin of intemperance. Now at the close of the reign of Uzziah, and at the opening of that of Jotham, we are expressly informed that though the king did right in the sight of the Lord, "the people did corruptly." This would well enough agree with what is implied in the prevalence of Divine judgments noticed by Joel. We are therefore inclined to consider the prophet as discharging his functions in the city of Jerusalem about the time when Hosea was beginning his in the kingdom of Israel.—*Rev. J. Stoughton.*

II. HIS CHARACTER.

It might be described as that of a pious naturalist.

[18274] He had an eye for the beautiful in creation; he had, not without study, learned to see the true expression of the face of nature. He had become familiar as a friend with the trees of the forest; he had watched the ways of the insects, and the paths of the cattle. He had mused on the waters of the valley, and marked "the morning spread upon the mountains," and had often looked up with eyes of sympathy on the heavens, the sun, and the moon, and the stars. No one can attentively read this prophet without detecting manifest and frequent tokens of a soul that oft communed with nature, that loved to sit silent and alone in that school for thought which God has built around us in material forms, and where He educates

His intelligent creatures, bringing out thereby their richest faculties.—*Ibid.*

[18275] Joel saw God in everything; saw Him pervading all nature; saw His hand beneath the mountains, and over the heavens; saw Him drying up the vine, and making the fig to languish; and then, again, causing the rain to come down, the floors to be full of wheat, and the vats to overflow with wine and oil; saw Him marshalling the insects—the palmer-worm and the locust, those types of a great people and a strong—sending them forth to run to and fro in the city, to run upon the wall, and to climb upon the house.—*Ibid.*

III. HIS STYLE.

It is even and methodical.

[18276] Joel was accustomed to think methodically, and to gather up his thoughts in harmonious arrangement—artistically to bind the flowers he plucked, architecturally to build the stones he collected. He weighed and balanced his words, not for the sake of ornament, but for the sake of mental impression and moral effect. He did not proceed on the principle, that it does not matter how a good thing be said, if it be only said. Joel had evidently studied the use of language, feeling that language is a wonderful exponent of thought—that the syllables which make it up are mysterious things—that they carry with them beauty and power—that they are among God's rich gifts, and that their strongest, fairest, and best are to be sacred to him. Three short chapters have we of sanctified thought and expression, indicating more with regard to the mental history of the man than they expressly record; yielding the result of habits of meditation formed before these sentences were woven; unfolding the mature fruitage of a vine that had been dressed and pruned with laborious care.—*Ibid.*

[18277] Poetical as Joel's language is, he does not use much distinct imagery. For his whole picture is one image. They are God's chastenings through inanimate nature, picturing the worse chastenings through man. So much had he probably in prophetic vision, the symbol spread before his eyes, that he likens it in one place to that which it represents, the men of war of the invading army. But this, too, adds to the formidableness of the picture.—*Rev. E. Pusey, D.D.*

IV. HIS MISSION.

It was the preaching of repentance.

[18278] He felt that God was the acceptor of repentance. Perhaps, if we look for an expression to characterize Joel, we cannot find a better than the prophet of repentance. The judgments on which he dwells are motives to repentance, showing its need. The promises

which follow are also motives, showing its blessed consequences. Did not Joel understand repentance to be a *spiritual* and a *personal* duty? that though he lived under a dispensation of forms and shadows, he did not *rest* in them, but could and did tear off the garment, to get at the spirit which it clothed; that he knew God could be satisfied with nothing less than the offering of the heart; that it was vain to rend the mantle, if the breast it covered were not pierced by pungent sorrow for offences done to the Holy One; that repentance was a change of mind, a turning of the soul to God; that it was a duty which could not be performed by representation, or in the mass; but by each alone, one by one, by the children alone, and the parents alone, the bridegroom alone, and the bride alone, and the priests alone; and seeing in this the enlightened conviction of the prophet's own soul—a conviction so enlightened that it looks like an anticipation of gospel sentiments, may we not, must we not, conceive of this son of Pethuel as a man who himself was performing the duty, whose own heart was rent, while with fasting, weeping, and mourning he led the train of sorrowful suppliants to the altar of a merciful God?—*Rev. J. Stoughton.*

V. CONTRAST WITH HOSEA.

[18279] Joel, as to the order of his mind, was evidently a different man from Hosea. While, in common with him, he has a fulness and depth of thought and feeling, and a wonderful power of illustration by imagery, he has an order and regularity in his ideas such as are wanting in his Israelitish contemporary. In contrast with Hosea, we would introduce a judgment on Joel from an English commentator:—"He not only possesses a singular degree of purity, but is distinguished by his smoothness and fluency, the animated and rapid character of his rhythm, the perfect regularity of his parallelisms, and the degree of roundness which he gives to his sentences." Taking style as an inlet into the secrets of the mind, we picture Joel beside Hosea, as a calm river flowing past a stormy cataract.—*Ibid.*

VI. HOMILETICAL HINTS.

1 The prophet Joel affords an example especially needed in our own day of perceiving that God is a moral and righteous Judge.

[18280] While Joel as a pious naturalist saw God in everything, he did what even devoutly disposed naturalists will not always do—he saw that God was a moral and righteous Judge. Judgments he largely speaks of, especially a judgment of locusts that should destroy the land; and perhaps under the image of this he refers to a still more dreadful judgment in the form of an invading army: "Like the noise of chariots on the tops of mountains,—like the noise of a flame of fire that devoureth the stubble." These insects and these soldiers he

distinctly notices as servants of God. "And the Lord shall utter His voice before His army: for His camp is very great: for he is strong that executeth His word: for the day of the Lord is great and very terrible." He looked upon judgments as occasioned by sin; upon natural evil, in its working on a nation, as the fruit of moral evil. This is implied in his call to repentance, as a means of deliverance.—*Ibid.*

2 The prophet Joel presents us with a picture of true repentance.

[18281] We hear his sighs and we see his tears as we dwell on his words. He comes before us as an embodiment of the spiritual and personal duty he describes. He is an example of what he inculcates. And as he shows us how this parent duty of a sinner is to be discharged, as we see him before us pouring out his own soul by the altar of God, there comes the solemn question, Have we repented? Seeing that God is a righteous God, not simply the enacter of physical laws, but the giver of moral commandments, employing those physical laws as sanctions of those commandments; have we, who have been taught by the troubles and sorrows of life to believe ourselves sinners—have we repented yet? Have we rent our hearts?—*Ibid.*

AMOS.

I. CHIEF CHARACTERISTICS.

1 He was a lover of nature.

[18282] We are informed that his pursuits had been pastoral. He had been among the shepherds of Tekoa. Much of the imagery of his prophecies arose out of that circumstance. He alludes to the height of the cedars and the strength of the oaks, to the snaring of birds and the roaring of the lion, to the sifting of corn and the treading of grapes, to the constellations of the heavens and the changes of morning and evening—natural objects which had been familiar to him, as he tended his sheep by day, or watched over his flocks by night. We see, too, in him, as in Joel and other prophets, an intense sympathy with the beautiful and magnificent in nature, while throughout his discourses he breathes that strong faith in Jehovah, as the personal Creator and Sustainer of all things, which distinguishes the Hebrew from the Gentile sage or poet.—*Rev. J. Stoughton.*

2 He was essentially a man of faith.

[18283] Amos was a man who distinctly saw God in all the events of human history, as well as in all the scenes of the material universe, having that conviction of his personal and everlasting presence which should be cherished by us as we study the annals of the world, leading us to paint over every picture of the past and present a hand which the ungodly cannot, will not see. "Shall a trumpet be blown in the city,

and the people not be afraid? shall there be evil in the city?"—a misfortune as men call it—"and the Lord hath not done it?" Like Joel, too, he saw God as a moral Governor, employing natural agencies for the punishment of sin. With a deep sympathy in the justice of the Almighty, on whomsoever His rod might fall, he calmly follows and records the sweep of the Divine indignation, from Damascus to Gaza—from Tyre to Edom—from Ammon to Moab; noting down the three transgressions and four for which the judgment came, till the circle narrows, and the wings of retribution overshadow the very centre, where the prophet himself is standing; and for the three transgressions and four of Judah and Israel, he declares that a fire shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem; while the most courageous of the Israelites "shall flee away naked in that day, saith the Lord."—*Ibid.*

3 He was a man of moral courage.

[18284] Relating the vision of a symbolical act, how the Lord stood before him with a plumb-line in His hand, to indicate that as the builder applies the line to the perpendicular wall to secure exactitude in his work, so the Judge of Israel and the world metes out His dispensations according to rules exact and infallible; and going on to denounce the house of Jeroboam, Amos is accused of conspiracy against Jeroboam, and is advised by one of the priests of Bethel to flee into the land of Judah and eat his bread there. But with the heroism of a true servant of God, he replies, "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. Now therefore hear thou the word of the Lord;"—and then he goes on to repeat the obnoxious message, to unfold still further the secrets of the Divine displeasure, to mark the sovereign's wife and children for ruin; and, finally, to relate the vision of a basket of summer fruit, which rots and perishes as soon as it is gathered, to show the speediness of the destruction which he had announced.—*Ibid.*

[18285] Amos was called from very lowly toils to preach God's Word to the kingdom of Israel at a time when, in spite of one last gleam of delusive splendour under Jeroboam II., it was fast sinking into that condition of degradation and decrepitude which ended—as end the crimes of all impenitent nations—in its total and irremediable extinction. Poor he was, and ignorant, as were the apostles after him, and as a check to false scorn and fastidious intellectualism it is well for us to remember that such have many of God's grandest champions been. But though Amos was neither a prophet nor a prophet's son, but a rough beadsman and unlettered gatherer of sycamore leaves, his was one of those masculine indignant natures which burst like imprisoned flame through the white ashes of social hypocrisy. Prepared like Mac-

cabeus of old to die in his simplicity, he was not afraid to roll God's message of thunder over apostate nations, and hurl the flash of His threatenings against guilty kings. Like Saul before Samuel, like Elijah before Ahab, like John the Baptist before Herod, like Paul before Felix, like John Huss before Sigismund, like Luther before Charles V., like John Knox before Mary Stuart, so Amos testified undaunted before the idolatry of courts and priests.—*Anon.*

4 He was the exponent, and therefore, doubtless, the subject of the theory and practice of a true repentance.

[18286] Repentance, according to Amos, is a preparation to meet God; to stand before Him "that formeth the mountains, and createth the wind, and declareth unto man what is his thought, that maketh the morning darkness, and treadeth upon the high places of the earth;"—repentance is to leave off unrighteousness, and to "seek Him that maketh the seven stars and Orion, and turneth the shadow of death into the morning, and maketh the day dark with night: that calleth for the waters of the sea, and poureth them out upon the face of the earth;"—repentance is to forget *all but God*, to have the soul filled with thoughts of God, to feel that God can do everything, that man must be safe and happy in the arms of God,—accursed and undone apart from God. It is to turn away from the world, and from sin, and from the devil; and, full of love and sorrow—love to the God who saves, sorrow for the sin that destroys—to cleave to the arm of Omnipotence, and to rest in the embrace of redeeming mercy. That is the sentiment of this herdman of Tekoa about repentance. So we imagine he had felt, and wept, and struggled, and resolved, while keeping his sheep, and gathering his fruit, among the folds and sycamore trees of his early home, and thinking of that God who had covered the pasture and the orchard with manifold life, and had drawn over the earth the curtain of heaven, not to hide His presence, but to indicate that the throne of the Infinite was there. To repent, according to Amos' teaching, and according to what we doubt not was Amos' example, *this* is the duty, the privilege, the highest interest of man.—*Rev. J. Stoughton.*

5 He was a man of prayer.

[18287] Amos was a man of prayer. How can a true prophet be otherwise? He records two beautiful instances of the power of his intercessions. The Lord showed him grasshoppers just at the time of the shooting up of the latter crop after the king's mowings, and they ate the grass. The ravenous insects were like the destroyers described by Joel. The vision betokened a judgment impending over Israel like that which had desolated Judah. Mark the power of the prophet's prayer, "O Lord God, forgive, I beseech Thee; by whom shall Jacob arise? (or, who is Jacob that he should stand before the judgment) for he is small." And the Lord

repented of this. "It shall not be, saith the Lord God." And again there was fire, and it devoured the deep, and consumed the land. Perhaps war is meant. Again the prophet prays in the same words, touching, beautiful, heart-born words: "O Lord God, cease, I beseech Thee: by whom shall Jacob arise? for he is small." Once more the Lord repented of this: "This also shall not be, saith the Lord God."—*Ibid.*

[18288] Amos, in point of efficacious prayer, as well as earnest desire, is to be numbered with Abraham, and Jacob, and Moses, and Elijah, and all the rest who have had power with God and prevailed. Oh, wonderful proof of that law of love which dwells in the bosom of Jehovah, the ground and guide of all other law—that the helplessness of the creature has power with the omnipotent Creator—that the great God saves Israel because Israel is *small!* And (marvellous encouragement to prayer!) the confession of this, not lengthened arguments, but the simple, earnest cry of conscious feebleness, arrests the arm of Omnipotence! And what a reason to intercede for one's church, one's country, one's household, one's wife, one's child, one's friend, is this, that the Tekoan herdsman cried, the man oppressed and hated by kings and courts, the poor peasant on whom the nobles at Bethel looked down with scorn—he cried, and his cry went up to Him, and there came down, if not a reprieve, a respite for a whole guilty land!—*Ibid.*

6 He was the possessor of a deep hatred of sin.

[18289] He was wont to dwell on its intrinsic evil, to fire his soul with indignation against it. In this respect he writes like Hosea rather than Joel. Indignation with him takes the form of irony, as it did with Elijah, as it did with Solomon. "Come to Bethel, and transgress; at Gilgal multiply transgression; and bring your sacrifices every morning, and your tithes (or spoil) after three years: and offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving with leaven, and proclaim and publish the free offerings: for this liketh you." What a sting is there—"this liketh you!"—how it should pierce the conscience of every sinner—"for this *liketh* you, O ye children of Israel." Far, indeed, was everything like levity from the prophet's mind, in treating such a subject as the sinfulness of the people. It was holy sorrow that prompted the irony.—*Ibid.*

II. HOMILETICAL HINTS.

The ministry of Amos has its lesson for our own day.

[18290] As we dwell on the prophet's indignation and sorrow over Israel, there comes an echo in our own day; and from the pages of the Bible, and from the events of Providence, and from the lips of the Christian ministry, there

full appeals upon our conscience; and we are many of us led to think how God has visited us in all manner of ways, how He has sent us trouble and bereavement, and losses and disappointments, for the express purpose of teaching us to renounce a hollow world, and cleave to Him, the all-sufficient good, and yet, after all, what room there is for repeating, day after day, and year after year, "*Yet—yet—yet* ye have not returned unto Me, saith the Lord." These warnings despised too long will provoke the anger of the Lord of patience. "Therefore thus will I do unto thee, O Israel, and because I will do this unto thee, prepare to meet thy God, O Israel." Happy is it that the warning and complaint have not yet ceased in reference to us, that God has not yet in anger shut up His tender mercies; that still He sends the message of reconciliation, and waits to be gracious.—*Ibid.*

[18291] No one could feel the value of a Divine revelation and ministry more than Amos. He prized the prophetic mission as one of Israel's richest mercies; to hear God speaking to his own soul was his greatest privilege and comfort. For God no more to speak, for a cessation or a suspension to come of the condescending intercourse of the Divine teacher, for the hoarse voice of reproof as well as the gentle tones of pity to be silent, was felt by him to be the greatest of evils. Amos saw that *that* was coming. There had come mildew, and blight, and scarcity, and want, and the land had groaned; but blacker clouds of evil were in the distance, were sailing nearer and nearer. "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord God," so cries the prophet, "that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord: and they shall wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east, they shall run to and fro to seek the word of the Lord, and shall not find it." We see the value which is here set on Divine truth for the nourishment of man's soul. We see here a comment on the everlasting maxim, "Man liveth not by bread alone." We see here how in a fulness of sufficiency we may be in straits.—*Ibid.*

[18292] Blessed be God that this worst of judgments—this famine of the word of life—has befallen none of us yet. We may have lost many comforts and joys that we greatly prized; but we have the Bible left, we have the manna which falleth from heaven, the gospel and the ordinances of Christ left, we have the water of life left, sheaves upon sheaves of Divine instruction are being reaped every Sabbath. God's banquetting house is open, and the tables are spread, and servants come to us week after week, telling how the King has made a great supper, and all things are ready, and we are to come to the marriage. But if men will not come now, and eat and be satisfied, days of famine shall follow; they shall follow in eternity, they shall follow in hell; and then, though you

run to and fro to seek the word of the Lord, you shall not find it.—*Ibid.*

JONAH.

I. INTRODUCTION.

His place in sacred history.

[18293] Jonah was a native of Gath-hepher, a town of Galilee northward from Nazareth. The exact period in which he lived is uncertain. A prophecy which he had uttered regarding the restoration of the original boundaries of Israel, after the long continued devastations of the Syrians, is spoken of (2 Kings xiv. 25) as having been fulfilled in the days of Jeroboam II., who reigned B.C. 825–784. The form of the reference, however, seems to imply, that though the accomplishment took place during the reign of that monarch, the prediction itself must have preceded it. It is probable, therefore, that Jonah was born in the time of one of his immediate predecessors, though at what precise date cannot now be known.—*Rev. R. Smith.*

[18294] The contents and the texture of his book tend to confirm the conclusion, suggested by chronological data, that Jonah must be ranked as the first in order of time among the prophets whose messages were recorded in writing for the benefit of after ages. He formed the connecting link between Elijah and Elisha, with their compeers, on the one hand, and the long line of prophets who flourished during the period of the decline and fall of the Hebrew monarchy, on the other. His ministry, therefore, inaugurated a new era in the history of the chosen people.—*Ibid.*

[18295] Jonah is the earliest star in that great movement of illumination which glorified the reigns of Jeroboam II., Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah; he is the dawn of which Isaiah is the noontide. His rising is the boundary-line between two worlds—the age of sense and the age of faith; and therefore the book which bears his name is a strange blending of the historian and the preacher.—*G. Matheson.*

II. GENERAL ESTIMATE OF HIS CHARACTER.

It was strangely inconsistent and self-contradictory.

[18296] Among all the characters introduced to us in the Bible, there is not a stranger and more inconsistent one than Jonah. That he was in the main a good man we cannot doubt, but there were so many points of weakness in him, so much that was unlovely and repulsive, such painful instances of petulance and disobedience, that if we had not become well acquainted with our own defects and shortcomings, we should be disposed to have but little respect for him.—*Rev. J. Norton.*

[18297] On the whole, we hardly know what to make of Jonah. The first notice of him in the Book of Kings conveys the idea of his being a good man. He is called “a servant of God”—an honourable title. But, then, his fleeing from the face of the Lord comes out in very gloomy inconsistency with the high character which the title imparts. Again, his piety appears. His faith and hope, in the midst of his trouble, are very beautiful. His courage as a preacher in the city of Nineveh is very sublime. But, finally there comes his anger against God—his heartless indifference to the miseries involved in a people’s overthrow—his discontent, and his petulance. If we had only the verse in Kings, and his prayer, and his preaching in Nineveh, recorded, we should say he was a very good man. If we had only his fleeing from the Lord, and his conduct in reference to the gourd and Nineveh’s destruction, we should say he was a very bad man. This is clear: his character was self-contradictory. But was the good the rule and the evil the exception? Was vital piety the root of his life; and was his flight from God, and his peevish temper, only a diseased excrescence growing on the stem? Or, did unbelief and wilfulness brood, like a dark night, over his soul, relieved only for an instant or two by flashes of illumination? We should incline to the former view.—*Rev. J. Stoughton.*

III. HIS SPECIAL TRAITS OF CHARACTER.

I Faith.

[18298] In this respect we have to note, first, the exercise of faith in regard to the appointment of the visitation. Jonah was at no loss to discover the quarter from which his overwhelming troubles came upon him; it was not accident or some unknown power, but the hand of God which had ordained them: “Thou hast cast me into the deep; . . . Thy waves and Thy billows have passed over me.”—*Rev. P. Fairbairn.*

[18299] As another exercise of Jonah’s faith, and common with him to all afflicted saints, we must mark his confidence and hope in God, not extinguished, but rather roused into action, by the extremity of his distress. Viewed simply in itself, his situation was of the most desperate and forlorn description—an outcast from his fellow-men, from the habitable globe itself, as being no longer fit to have a place among the living—and that in consequence of the just judgment of heaven, re-echoed and approved by the cry of guilt in his own conscience, so that there seemed to be almost everything in his condition that might bar the possibility of confidence and hope. Nor was it by shutting his eyes on the evil that he found relief to his mind; on the contrary, he takes the full gauge of its dimensions, and pathetically laments that “he was cast into the deep,” “cast out of God’s sight;” he had turned his back on God, and now God, making his sin his punishment,

turned His back on him; nay, made “*all* His waves and billows pass over him.” For a time, indeed, he seems to have concluded that *all* *was* completely over with him, that there was no room for hope, the daughter of faith, to enter; he had felt as if the earth’s bars were about him for ever, and he was enclosed in the pit of all-devouring Sheol. But it was only for a time; “he remembered the Lord” when thus overwhelmed with perplexity; “he looked again toward God’s holy temple,” and cried in faith, and hoped for deliverance.—*Ibid.*

[18300] There is a still further manifestation of faith in the words of Jonah, and one which forms another special mark of sanctified affliction; although it lies less upon the surface than those already noticed, and may even escape the observation of a hasty reader. I refer to the use that is made of the earlier portions of the Word of God, and the recorded experiences of former times. It is but a brief prayer this of Jonah’s, the whole being comprised in eight short verses; and yet it contains no fewer than seven quotations from the Book of Psalms, which, more than any other book of Scripture, is a record of the believer’s experiences and hopes in times of trouble. In a spirit of faith Jonah identifies himself with the saints of former times, so far as to appropriate to himself the language that describes their trials and deliverances. He looks back to the footsteps of the flock as traced by the fingers of inspired men, and sees there some gleams of light to relieve the intense darkness that surrounded him. The staggering thing to him at first was, that his case was so remarkably peculiar; he was where no one had ever been before; and if he could have bethought him of any saint that had ever been as low, and yet had been delivered, it would have gone far to reassure and comfort his heart. But lo! he does find this; he finds it in the word of the living God itself, which records experiences of others, not indeed altogether identical with his own, but so nearly alike, in all their essential features so much the same, that the words spoken of them were precisely those in which he could most fitly express the things that concerned himself.—*Ibid.*

2 Moral timidity.

[18301] There is nothing to show that Jonah was constitutionally a coward. One would rather think, from his conduct at sea, that he was what the world might have called a fearless man. But he shrank from Divine duty. He was afraid of executing God’s commission in Assyria for this reason, as he afterwards explains it himself: “I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that Thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest Thee of the evil.” Strange reason, indeed! showing that he was afraid of being disgraced in Nineveh, by the denunciation he was to utter not being fulfilled; afraid lest God should change His mind, and leave His

servant, as he fancied; covered with dishonour, and stigmatized as a false prophet. He could not trust himself, and his reputation and influence, to God. He was watchful over these, and afraid of these, as many people are; fearing to pursue the clear path of duty lest their credit should suffer, lest they should sink in human estimation. They have not courage to trust in God, therefore they trust in themselves; as though they fancied they were in better keeping when self-kept, than when Divinely kept.—*Ibid.*

3 Selfishness.

[18302] His first commission was to Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrian empire, an immense city, and therefore a wicked one. His conduct on receiving the commission does appear very strange. But for the mention of his having acted as a prophet before, we should have concluded that this must be the first time, and that he was surprised and amazed, as by some alarming and calamitous visitation. But the vocation was not new to him; he felt therefore no affright as at a portentous novelty. We might have attributed terror of another kind,—the dread of attacking, singly, a great wicked city, like leaping into a gulf of destruction. Even in that case, however, was there less to be dreaded from disobeying God? We are reduced at last to accept, unwillingly, his own explanation, given in the beginning of ch. iv.: “I pray Thee, O Lord, was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that Thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest Thee of the evil;” which seems to amount to this,—he felt in danger of being disgraced as a prophet, the denunciation being to be uttered in positive, not conditional, terms. How abominably considerations of self may interfere with obedience to God! He determines to flee to Tarshish, that is, Tarsus in Cilicia, a place more than one hundred leagues to the north of Joppa, completely across the Mediterranean, where Paul was to be born, a man of another spirit. How *he* would have acted!—*Rev. J. Foster.*

[18303] The very first thing which we read of Jonah is not at all to his credit. He had received a commission from the Almighty to go to Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrian empire, and there to proclaim the righteous indignation of God against its wicked inhabitants. He offered no objection to going, but determined, in his own mind, not to obey the command. It may be asked, why he ventured to do this? Was it because he was alarmed at the idea of visiting so distant a foreign city? This could hardly have been the case, since the interpretation of the inscriptions on the ancient obelisks, by the persevering efforts of modern scholars, prove that such relations already existed between the Israelites and the Assyrians as made them well acquainted with each other. There

is also no warrant for saying that fear was the cause of the prophet's disobedience. We know that he had a cross-grained, unhappy disposition, and very likely preferred to do one thing for the simple reason that he was told to do another.—*Rev. J. Norton.*

[18304] There he sits within sight of a great city, doomed, as he confidently believed, to speedy destruction; studying his own comfort and, instead of being distressed at the thought that so many thousands of immortal beings would be swept away, actually rejoicing in the ease secured to his poor body, by the grateful shade of the luxurious gourd. Selfishness is too common a fault to make it safe for us to be very severe upon Jonah, on account of this pitiful exhibition of human weakness. It is that detestable vice which we are so unwilling to forgive in others, and which so few are free from themselves.—*Ibid.*

[18305] Personal pride had also some share in it. It is hard for a man, even when a prophet of God, to forget himself in doing God's work. There are so few of God's servants who are content to be nothing if only thereby God may be all and in all. Jonah thought about himself, perhaps, more than he thought of God. He was concerned about his own character. His reputation as a true prophet was at stake. He was afraid that by the removal of the judgment which he had predicted, the Ninevites would despise him in their hearts as a prophet of lies. This seems to be the significance of Jonah's words, "Was not this my saying when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish, for I knew that Thou art a gracious God, and merciful and slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest Thee of the evil."—*Anon.*

[18306] He had had courage to declare God's judgments; but now there came over him displeasure and anger, because those judgments were not inflicted. He treated God as though He had not been as good as His word. The fact was, he had no sympathy with the Divine Being in His great mercy. He had no pity for other nations. He did not wish for the salvation of the Gentiles. He had a narrow, bigoted, exclusive spirit, akin to the spirit of proud nationality which wrought throughout the whole body of Ninevite civilization. He would have been glad at the overthrow of Nineveh, as a city inimical to God, to him, and to his country. God meant his mission to be one of mercy and love; one that, through fear, should awaken repentance—that, through repentance, should bring salvation. That was not Jonah's meaning. He could not comprehend it. He was the instrument of doing a work that he did not intend. Through him the people were saved, without its being his purpose.—*Rev. J. Stoughton.*

[18307] Six hundred thousand persons, and among them sixty thousand little ones, not old

enough to know their right hand from their left, together with an immense number of cattle, had been saved from destruction, a great reformation had been produced in Nineveh, its king and its nobles had put on sackcloth and ashes, and many undoubtedly were brought to true repentance; but how was Jonah affected at this scene? It was one upon which angels might have looked down with joy, but Jonah, alas! was absorbed in his own petty troubles—mourning over his withered gourd and the danger his reputation as a prophet was in! The saving of so many hundred thousands gave him no pleasure, and seemingly he would rather have had all perish than that his prophecy should be proved untrue. How extremely selfish!—*Rev. W. Lewis, D.D.*

4 Ingratitude.

[18308] Seated in that desolate spot; faint, and gasping for breath from the intensity of the heat, with no tree nor shrub to which he could resort for shelter, his attention was attracted by the broad leaves of a gourd which had sprung up, as if by magic, from the earth. Inch by inch, foot by foot, it grew and spread, until the forlorn and suffering prophet was completely covered by its shadow. Doubtless Jonah was astonished at the miracle thus graciously wrought in his behalf, but we are sure he was not grateful as he should have been; indeed, he does not seem to have bestowed much thought on the subject. He enjoyed the coolness which the gourd afforded for his unprotected head, but felt little gratitude to the kind Providence which had caused it so marvelously to grow.—*Rev. J. Norton.*

IV. HIS PRAYER.

[18309] The language of this prayer is drawn almost wholly from the Book of Psalms. (Comp. ver. 2 and *Psa.* cxx. 1; ver. 3 and *Psa.* xlii. 7; ver. 4 and *Psa.* xxxi. 22; ver. 5 and *Psa.* lxix. 1; ver. 6 and *Psa.* ciii. 4; ver. 7 and *Psa.* cxlii. 3; ver. 8 and *Psa.* xxxi. 6; ver. 9 and *Psa.* iii. 8.) It indicates a mind familiar with that inspired manual of devotion, and shows especially the use that may be made of it by God's people in times of distress. The prayer, which was probably put together in its present form, after deliverance was effected, contains the substance of the thoughts and meditations of Jonah when in the belly of the fish. Never was prayer uttered by a mere man in circumstances so fitted to give intensity and depth of meaning to the language of it. It consists of three parts, though these are not marked off by sharp lines of demarcation in the verses as they lie before us. (a) The outpouring of his heart in humiliation and distress (vers. 2-6). (b) His remembrance of God and prayer for deliverance (ver. 7; see also vers. 4 and 6). (c) His thanksgiving and vows, in the anticipation of an answer, and as the fruit of it (vers. 8, 9).—*Rev. R. Smith.*

[18310] The second chapter of the book

evidently contains a reminiscence of the prayer—not the prayer itself. It is a memorial, a monument of joy. We can fancy him writing it down with a gush of holy excitement immediately after his deliverance. We can conceive with what fullness of meaning he recorded the words containing one practical lesson derivable from what had happened to him—from what he had thought, amidst darkness and the deep, a lesson for all ages, for our age, for every reader: “They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy.” And we can conceive, too, with what a sincere heart he added, as we should add after the review of Divine deliverances, “I will sacrifice unto Thee with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay that that I have vowed. Salvation is of the Lord.”—*Rev. J. Stoughton.*

[18311] The man who speaks in this holy psalm hardly seems the same person whom we have seen in flight—dark, moody, silent, despairing. Now, and all at once, he seems to leap again into life—clear, fervent, passionate life. The burial of his body is the resurrection of his soul! Some glimpses of his proper greatness and magnanimity were given to his fellow-men before he left the ship. But now, beneath the waves, the whole true man reveals himself to God.—*Rev. A. Kalkigh, D.D.*

[18312] From how many unthought of, unimaginable situations the Sovereign of the world has drawn devotional aspirations; but never, except once, from a situation like this. What is here given as the prophet’s “prayer” is doubtless the brief recollection, afterwards recorded, of the kind of thoughts which had filled his mind during his dark sojourn; with the addition of some pious and grateful sentiments caused by the review. This devotional composition gives by much the most favourable view of his character. It makes us regret that he could not be so good a man on the surface of the earth as in the depths of the ocean. In order to pray in the best manner, he must be unable to see, or move, or breathe. The final result, no doubt, of these mental exercises was a full consent of his will, that He who had sent him hither should send him anywhere else He pleased, even to Nineveh.—*Rev. J. Foster.*

[18313] The prayer of Jonah is the prayer of the penitent soul, of the returning backslider—and that prayer was heard. The imprisoned prophet might have said to himself, “Of what use is it for me to pray? Here am I shut up in this horrible, dungeon—in the grave—in the very belly of hell—under God’s wrath and displeasure—doomed, cast out, forsaken. Here I am suffering what I deserve, and from which there is no hope of deliverance. It were presumption to ask for mercy. Despair is my lot and my desert.” But he hoped, and therefore he prayed; and God justified his hope by hearing his prayer: thus teaching us that in the deepest sea of affliction, in the dreariest cavern of trouble, we are to hope in God, “for we shall

yet praise Him, who is the health of our countenance, and our God.”—*Rev. J. Stoughton.*

[18314] In Jonah’s prayer we see the revival of faith. He emerged from the shades of unbelief; he remembered God. The faith which had sunk under the burden of duty rose under the pressure of affliction. Faith to act is easier than faith to suffer. Patiently to bear is harder than actively to obey. Yet Jonah by faith endures, though he had not by faith performed the will of God. He had failed in the easier—he succeeds in the more difficult. Natural terror in his circumstances might have led him to pray, might have led him bitterly to cry in his distress; but something more than nature must there have been to inspire him with hope as he lay locked within that living dungeon, to produce in him that calm confidence which comes out in the words, “I will look again toward Thy holy temple.” It was as though he had brought to mind the intercession of King Solomon at the dedication of the temple.—*Ibid.*

[18315] Luther’s comment on the prayer is that “he did not actually utter these very words with his mouth, and arrange them in this orderly manner in the belly of the fish; but he here shows what the state of his mind was, and what thoughts he had when he was engaged in this conflict with death.”—*Anon.*

V. HIS TYPICAL CHARACTER.

[18316] It is to be noted that our Lord declares all this to have been a type of Him (Matt. xii. 40). We may trace the analogy in the being consigned to the deep, and to the grave, in order that others might be saved; the duration of time the same in the dark retirement; the coming to light and life again for the reformation of mankind. This citation in the New Testament is an authentication of the wonderful history. It may not, perhaps, be impertinent to mention a pagan authentication—Hercules was fabled to have had the same three days in a fish.—*Rev. J. Foster.*

[18317] It is to be specially noted that Jonah willingly devoted himself to death, in this foreshadowing the voluntary sacrifice of Christ. In the efforts also made by the sailors to save him we seem to see a reflection of the reluctance of Pilate to pass sentence on our Lord; and in the apprehensions with which they were agitated, when informed who Jonah was, we recognize the fear excited in the mind of Pilate when he learned that Jesus claimed to be the Son of God. Specially important likewise is the announcement that as soon as Jonah was cast forth the sea ceased from its raging.—*Rev. R. Smith.*

[18318] Not only were the nature of the death of Christ as an atonement for sin, and the length of time which He spent in the grave, typified by Jonah, but likewise the object of His

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resurrection, to proclaim salvation to the ends of the earth.—*Ibid.*

[18319] The repentance of the Ninevites displeased Jonah exceedingly—so as to move him to a murmuring and angry prayer even for death; yes, for death!—but he was not well prepared yet to mingle with those spirits among whom “there is joy over one sinner that repenteth.” And how he failed, in this point, to be a type of Him that wept at the sight of Jerusalem.—*Rev. J. Foster.*

VI. QUESTION AS TO THE CREDIBILITY OF HIS RESIDENCE WITHIN THE “WHALE.”

[18320] It has been often enough observed that the species of this fish is altogether uncertain. There even might have been at that period of time sea-monsters which exist not now, as anciently there were enormous animals on the land, of a kind now no more. The one in question came to be considered as having been a whale, just because that is the largest known fish (sometimes more than a hundred feet long). And the cavillers have been determined that it should be a whale, and no other—for a good reason, namely, that the whale’s throat is found to be very strait for an animal of such a size, and therefore the scriptural account involves a physical impossibility. Now we must not imagine we honour God by asserting a plain mathematical contradiction, and then protecting the absurdity by calling it a miracle. One has heard of a good man’s uttering so silly a thing as that if God had declared that Jonah swallowed the whale, he would believe it, for that God’s testimony must bear down all objections. The folly is in supposing it possible for God to have declared any such thing, that the less may contain the greater. The same contradiction would there be in asserting that Jonah went through the throat of the whale, *if* the whale’s throat (of three or four inches in diameter when dead) were of the consistence of a tube of iron or stone. But it has been justly observed that it is idle to assert anything as to the possible capacity of the throat of the living fish from its dimensions after death. (The boa-constrictor is capable of swallowing animals of great size; and even men have been found in large sharks.) The fish, then, might be a whale that swallowed Jonah; and nothing, neither, of miracle is supposed thus far; the miracle comes afterwards.—*Ibid.*

[18321] The fish by which Jonah was swallowed was probably a species of shark (*squalus carcharus, L.*) found in the Mediterranean, and occasionally of enormous size. Oken mentions an authenticated case of a sailor who fell overboard from a frigate (A.D. 1758), and was immediately swallowed up by a shark. On the monster being fired on from the deck, his victim was again vomited out and escaped. In

the stomach of one of these creatures a whole horse was found (see Keil, *in loco*). It is singular that the bones of such an animal were long preserved at Joppa. Pliny informs us that they were brought to Rome and exhibited, as a great curiosity, in the edileship of M. Scaurus. The ribs were higher than those of an Indian elephant, and the bones were forty feet in length (see Townsend).—*Rev. R. Smith.*

[18322] Infidels always begin by insisting that the history cannot be true because there are no whales in the Mediterranean Sea. This seems a formidable difficulty at the very outset, and yet the fact that whales have disappeared from those waters may be easily accounted for by the multiplication of ships during the latter ages, which would have a tendency to frighten them away, just as a variety of causes have driven all lions from Palestine, where they were once very numerous. “It is well known that some of the best fishing stations, even in the great oceans, have been abandoned by the whales because of the multitude of whalers that visited them. This sea would, of course, be forsaken. If you could stock it thoroughly with these monsters to-day there would be none left a year hence. Up to the time of Jonah navigation was in its infancy, ships were few and small, and they kept mostly along the shores, leaving the interior undisturbed. Whales may therefore have been common in the Mediterranean; and there are instances on record of the appearance of huge marine creatures in this sea in ancient days. Some of these may have been whales” (“Land and Book”).—*Rev. J. Norton.*

[18323] The Bible does not say that a whale was the prophet’s jailer. The infidel has said that, and then has enjoyed the easy triumph of proving the natural impossibility of it. Jonah says “a great fish” swallowed him. Our Lord uses a phrase exactly similar. He uses a generic term (*κῆτος*), which includes the whale, but is never applied to the whale particularly. The dolphin, the seal, the whale, the shark, are all included in the term that is used; and there is strong probability in the supposition that the white shark is the creature designated as the “great fish.” Sharks abounded in the Mediterranean at that time. They have been found there ever since, and are found there still. In length, some of them have attained to thirty feet and upwards, of capacity in other ways amply sufficient to incarcerate Samson of Zorah, or Goliath of Gath, as well as the probably attenuated prophet of Gath-Hepher.—*Rev. A. Raleigh, D.D.*

[18324] To meet *all* difficulties, the sacred record states that “the Lord *prepared* the fish,” and, of course, it was one adapted for this special purpose. It was the Lord’s doing—a miracle wrought by One who can do all things.—*Rev. J. Stoughton.*

VII. HOMILETICAL REFLECTIONS.

- 1 The flight of Jonah illustrates the fact that departure from duty is not departure from God's control.

[18325] Jonah believed in the Divine omnipresence (Psa. cxxxix. 7, 12), did not cast off all regard for God, but sought to relieve himself of duty by quitting the land of light and religious ordinances. He did not expect to go where God was not, but where God would let him alone. His creed was better than his conduct. He left the field of action for the place of retirement. Many are of Jonah's temper, try his experiment, and feel the presence of God too painful for them. A scholar leaves the Sabbath school to avoid the contact of truth with conscience. A young man brought up under religious influence quits home and native country. An ungodly man feels miserable, shuns godly company, and stifles impressions by fleeing into business, worldly society, and amusements. The believer knows his duty, but will not do it. Such efforts often succeed in spite of the restraints of providence and the voice of conscience. But fear gets hold of men at length, God meets them in the way, and it is impossible to escape. "Lo, they that be far from Thee shall perish."—*J. Wolfendale.*

- 2 The flight of Jonah illustrates the fact that favourable circumstances in departing from God do not always lead to the desired issue.

[18326] Circumstances favoured Jonah's design, and gave him an opportunity of escape. "He found a ship going to Tarshish." The vessel quickly sailed. Jonah thought he was leaving his trouble by leaving his native shore, but vain hope (Amos ix. 2-4; Isa. ii. 19-22; Jer. xvi. 16-21). "The ready way is not always the right way," says an old author. The greatest hurry the least speed in a path of disobedience. The worst plans may prosper for a time, but such prosperity ends in storms and darkness. Talk not of Providence in an evil course—say not when tempted that you are tempted of God. God might miraculously interfere with men's conduct, but this would change the government of the world, render our probation useless, and afford no opportunity for human action and Divine justice. If he thwart the ways of selfish men, you hear no more of Providence. Departure from God is departure from His love and protection—from Divine dignity and unbounded bliss. Follow the directions of the word, and you will enjoy the leadings of Providence. "The Lord meeteth him that rejoiceth and worketh righteousness."—*Ibid.*

- 3 The flight of Jonah illustrates the fact that departure from God is more expensive than obedience to God.

[18327] Jonah paid the fare, like many who scruple not to spend their money on selfish projects, but withhold from the cause of God.

Sin is always expensive, and draws upon our purse and time. Sinners pay their fare—1. In bitter experience. There is peace in pleasing God, but conscious opposition to Him brings an uneasy mind. Jonah could not stay at home. Everything reminded him of God and duty, and such thoughts are painful. Men seek a new country, try fresh experiments, to drown the warnings of conscience, but do not succeed. 2. In moral loss. The loss of Divine favour and a servant's dignity. The Sabbath-breaker, the pleasure-seeker, and the drunkard, pay their fare. Blasted prospects, shattered constitutions, and ruined families indicate the awful price of sin. The pleasures of sin are dearly bought, never last, and always bring disappointment.—*Ibid.*

- 4 The withering of Jonah's gourd is an illustration of the short-lived nature of earthly comforts.

[18328] The gourd came up in a night, and perished in a night. Thus frail and uncertain are those temporal blessings on which we are wont to set our hearts. We should be duly thankful for them, and take pleasure in them while they last, but always remember that, at the best, they are only withering gourds. No affliction would trouble a child of God if he only knew God's reason for sending it. Manasseh's chain was more profitable to him than his crown.—*Ibid.*

- 5 The withering of Jonah's gourd is an illustration of the trifling causes which blast and destroy a mere earthly happiness.

[18329] Instead of sending a tempest to destroy the prophet's gourd, or a wild beast of the forest to root it up, the Lord caused an insignificant worm to perform the work; and the stoutest arm and the sharpest axe could not have done it more effectually. So, also, with the troubles and calamities which come upon all of us. "Whose mind has not a word, or a look, fevered? Who has not had his rest broken, his soul thrown into a tumult, by causes which he would be unwilling for even a child to know; things that he despises himself for heeding, but the tormenting influence of which he cannot withstand? Would you see man in his weakness? Look at the contemptible trifles that amuse, and delight, and almost content him; look at much of his gladness—it comes from a gourd—and then look at the trifles that vex and disturb him, that destroy his comforts—a worm can smite them, a breath can end them; yea, he himself, as well as all on earth that grieves and gladdens him, is "crushed before the moth" (Charles Bradley).—*Ibid.*

- 6 The selfishness of Jonah was not unique.

[18330] Not more thoroughly had the worm eaten into the heart of the plant than had the canker of selfishness eaten into the heart of the prophet. The man who had no joy at the sal-

vation of a whole city was amazingly rejoiced at the luxuriance of his pet bower. The man who would have felt no sorrow at seeing Nineveh swallowed up was distracted by the blasting of this little plant. Certainly we do not see anything exactly like this in point of circumstances, but there are feelings in human hearts sometimes approaching to it. Amidst a world of miseries are there not many who get so completely absorbed in themselves as to be apathetic about public interests; apathetic about the fate of multitudes of wretched beings; apathetic about the wants and woes of both Christendom and heathendom, of both their country and the world? Are there not many among us who feel much more joy in the use of our daily comforts, in our homes, and our families, than in the spread of truth, the march of Christianity, the salvation of souls, the mercy of heaven, the glory of God? Are there not many who would weep more over the loss of some earthly treasure, some cherished gourd than over a national calamity, and the perdition of a city full of souls? Without taking any extravagant views of our duty, is it not really surprising how very much we are engrossed by ourselves, how selfishness deadens our sensibilities to the social evils, and especially the spiritual perils, of mankind?—*Rev. J. Stoughton.*

[18331] We blame Jonah, and yet how many of us are like him! How often have we read of terrible calamities which have happened to others, and have really felt very little concern about it, and when the portion of sympathy was so extremely small that it did not in the least disturb our appetite. On the other hand, if anything has arisen to interfere with our own individual comfort, or to damage our interests, although of less real consequence than Jonah's gourd, we have taken it most seriously to heart, and been so worried and grieved by it that sleep has departed from us. This is especially apt to be the case when a change of fortune or circumstances has had a tendency to lower us in the estimation of the heartless world.—*Rev. J. Norton.*

7 The history of Jonah suggests the worthlessness of a religion of mere profession as contrasted with that "hardness" (2 Tim. ii. 3) which the good soldier of Jesus Christ must endure.

[18332] As long as Jonah's prophetic office cost him no particular trouble he was willing to serve the Lord, and persuaded himself that he was serving him well. The moment, however, that the command given him was to occasion personal inconvenience, and perhaps bring him into peril, his constancy melted away. What an accurate picture of our poor, frail humanity! When our religion costs us nothing we have no serious objection to be called Christians, but when fidelity to our heavenly Master requires a struggle and a sacrifice, we may soon discover how much our professions amount to.—*Ibid.*

8 The history of Jonah suggests the duty and happiness of a perfect obedience to the will of God.

[18333] One great lesson in Jonah's story is the duty and happiness of having our will coincident with the will of God. God is the world's great Ruler. His will is law. His power is supreme: yet it is not arbitrary might, but wise and gracious omnipotence. To resist God's will is as wicked as it is foolish—as ruinous as it is wicked. "Will ye set the thorns and briars against me in battle? I would go through them, I would burn them together." First, Jonah resisted, and fled from the presence of the Lord; and trouble followed, and overtook, and overwhelmed him. Then Jonah resisted again, and in the bitter workings of his own mind, in his petulance and anger, he paid the penalty of disquietude and anguish. For what peace could there be in a mind at war with the order, the government, the Sovereign of the universe? We are taught, then, that there is only trouble without and misery within for all those who fight against their Maker. "In returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength." Not in earthly gourds shall ye long find comfort and peace, for God can blast them, and He will if you make them your portion. Whereas, in life's hottest day and coldest night, amidst the bleakest scenes and under the roughest blasts, if your will be one with His, you shall enjoy an invisible protection, and be cheered by spiritual comfort, which shall be unto you as "an hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest—as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land."—*Rev. J. Stoughton.*

[18334] The general lesson to us from the whole ought to be that of the necessity—the inexpressible urgent necessity—of a constant discipline of the Divine Spirit, to break down all our rebellious dispositions towards God—to constrain us by an almighty force of grace to an entire submission, and a cheerful obedience—a cheerful obedience, especially in the promotion of God's beneficent purposes.—*Rev. J. Foster.*

ELIJAH.

I. INTRODUCTORY.

1 His mysterious origin.

(1) *He appears on the stage of sacred history with startling suddenness as the Melchizedek of his age.*

[18335] His origin seems studiously enveloped in the most profound and mysterious obscurity. Scrupulously exact as we know the Jews were in the preservation of their genealogies, there is not a single hint given in Scripture of the parentage, or even tribe, of this most remarkable of all the prophets. Even the appellation

Tishbite, or converter, is by many supposed to indicate, not his place of birth, or even of residence, but his character and office. There is no preparation for the introduction of Elijah: except indeed it be the preparation of contrast and mystery—such preparation as is calculated to excite the attention of surprise—such preparation as midnight makes for throwing out in their full lustre its burning and shining lights.—*Rev. J. Hiffernan.*

[18336] He is presented to our view without a note of premonition—ushered at once on the stage of stirring action full panoplied—in the colossal manhood and maturity of his being. This is all our introduction to him as he confronts the guilty monarch of northern Palestine: “And Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the inhabitants of Gilead, said unto Ahab, As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand.” We have no antecedents in his history. No reference to ancestry, home, education, father, mother, companion, or friend; and this, too, throughout all the rest of his career till nigh its close. He appears before us—nursed in the wilds of nature for his great and momentous calling.—*Rev. J. Macduff, D.D.*

(2) *The brightness of his righteous life is rendered the more glorious by its surrounding shadows of mystery.*

[18337] We know nothing more of the mighty prophet who now enters upon the stage of sacred history than that he bore the name and designation of Elijah the Tishbite, and was of the inhabitants of Gilead. More glorious in his ministry than any who had arisen since the days of Moses, we are yet unable distinctly to associate his person with the family or habitation of any of God's people. But from the darkest cloud, the lightning flash gleams brightest; and the glories of Elijah's holiness shine out with a more clear and majestic lustre from the deep mystery of the surrounding shadows.—*Rev. J. Anderson.*

2 His high renown.

(1) *He occupied a unique position among the prophets.*

[18338] Elijah the Tishbite's place as the subject of prophecy (Mal. iv. 5, 6; Matt. xi. 14; Luke i. 17); as present at the Transfiguration (Matt. xvii. 1-4, &c.); and as not seeing death (2 Kings ii.), is unique among the prophets.—*Bp. of Bath and Wells.*

(2) *He was an incarnation of Divine power.*

[18339] Something awful must have been the terror inspired by the man who had the elements of nature delegated to his control; who could seal up the heavens at one time—lock up from a whole nation for years the treasures of the clouds; at another, draw fire from these clouds like a sword from its scabbard, and strew the earth with a hundred dead! Even the suddenness of his appearances and disappearances are startling and dramatic. He

towers—like one of the sons of Anak—morally as well as physically high above those around him. He reminds us of the brave heroes—though with nobler elements of grandeur in his case—who came across Jordan in high flood to join a former exiled king of Israel—“whose faces were like the faces of lions, and were as swift as the gazelles upon the mountains.” If early Greece or Rome (not Palestine) had been the theatre of his deeds he would have had his place amid the gods of Olympus. As it was, there was no name (that of Abraham and perhaps Moses excepted) more venerated in subsequent ages among his countrymen.—*Rev. J. Macduff, D.D.*

[18340] “Elijah the Tishbite,” the “Elias” of the New Testament, a character whose rare, sudden, and brief appearances, undaunted courage, and fiery zeal—the brilliancy of whose triumphs, the pathos of whose despondency, the glory of whose departure, and the calm beauty of whose reappearance on the Mount of Transfiguration, throw such a halo of brightness around him as is equalled by none of his compeers in the sacred story.—*Cyclopædia of Biblical Literature.*

[18341] Behold amongst the swords of spiritual heroes one which presents itself with peculiar effulgence to the eye; one which has wrought mightily for the glory of the kingdom of God, and was as sharp and piercing as any could be in arduous and evil times. Who once handled that noble weapon? It was Elijah the Tishbite; a man mighty in word and deed, and in miracles besides; who broke forth like a fire, and whose word burnt like a torch, and who was so eminently distinguished by Divine grace that when the Lord of glory Himself appeared upon earth the Jews said, “It is Elias!”—*Krummacher.*

3 His physical aspect.

(1) *In his outward mien there was more of the Bedouin than the son of the chosen race.*

[18342] There stands before us a muscular figure, tawny with the burning suns of Palestine, with long, shaggy raven hair hanging loose over his shoulders. A modern writer, in speaking of Samson's unshorn locks, compares him to the Merovingian kings, “whose long tresses were the sign of their royal race, which to lose was to lose royalty itself.” We cannot pronounce in the case of the prophet of Gilead of what these flowing tresses were the symbol—whether they were the badge of his Divine mission, or as, with the son of Manoah, the token of his strength—or that, like him, he had taken the vow of the Nazarite. In any case, they form a marked feature in his outward appearance. He is specially spoken of, in a subsequent period, by Ahaziah's messengers as “a hairy man” (lit., “a lord of hair.”) The children of Bethel, when they came forth and mocked Elisha as “the bald head,” did so because struck with the contrast between him and the familiar appearance of his

shaggy predecessor. Around his shoulders he had flung a loose cape or striped blanket, made either of rough sheep or camel hide, fastened at his breast with a leathern girdle.—*Rev. J. Macduff, D.D.*

4 His physical powers.

[18343] His physical strength and physical powers of endurance must not be forgotten. That must have been no ordinary man, surely, who, before the coming night storm, and after the toils of an exhausting day, could accomplish such a feat of pedestrianism as to run sixteen miles, and withal outstrip the fleet coursers in Ahab's chariot in reaching the gate of Jezreel. That must have been no average strength that could sustain the hardships and privations of Cherith, and the long forty days' fast of Horeb.—*Ibid.*

II. FORMATION OF CHARACTER.

1 The external influences of his solitary life amid wild natural surroundings tended to produce hardihood.

[18344] Elijah was "of the inhabitants of Gilead." And this, too, may have had some influence in producing that rugged strength which we discern in his character; for, surely, the scenery on which one daily looks has much to do with the formation of the man. There is a difference between the hardy Swiss and the effeminate Italian; and in the grizzly visage and patient endurance of the Scottish Highlander, we can see something of the heath-clad granite of his native hills. Now, Gilead, on the eastern side of the Jordan, was a land much like theirs. "It was," says Mr. Grove, "a country of chase and pasture, of tent-villages and mountain-castles, inhabited by a people, not settled and civilized, like those who formed the communities of Ephraim and Judah, but of wandering, irregular habits, exposed to the attacks of the nomad tribes of the desert, and gradually conforming more and more to the habits of those tribes. To an Israelite of the tribes west of the Jordan, the title of Gileadite must have conveyed a similar impression, though in a far stronger degree, to that which the title Celt does to us. What the Highlands of Scotland were a century ago to the towns of the Lowlands, that, and more than that, must Gilead have been to Samaria and Jerusalem.—*Rev. W. Taylor, D.D.*

[18345] Over the hills of Palestine, with no rest or fixed habitation—fleet as the wind, when the hand of the Lord was upon him, and he ran before the chariot of Ahab from Carmel to Jezreel—he was like the heroes of the tribe (to which he possibly belonged) of Gad, in David's life, who swam the Jordan in flood time, "whose faces were as the faces of lions, and whose feet were swift as the rocs upon the mountains;" like the Bedouins from the same region at the present day, who run with unwearied feet by the side of the traveller's camel, and whose strange forms are seen for a moment behind rock and tree, in city or field,

and then vanish again into their native wilderness. And such as they are, such was he also in his outward appearance. Long shaggy hair flowed over his back; and a large rough mantle of sheepskin, fastened around his loins by a girdle of hide, was his only covering.—*Rev. J. Macduff, D.D.*

2 The external influences of his solitary life amid wild natural surroundings tended to produce heroism.

[18346] The grand and sublime has always proved a "meet nurse" for heroic spirits. . . . Gilead, Elijah's birthplace, the cradle of his youth, and where he remained until the time of his showing unto Israel, was that wild, rugged, and in many parts picturesque country, lying east of the Jordan, the "rocky" region, as the word implies, with its deep ravines and water-courses, its sheep-folds and herds of wild cattle, in contradistinction to Bashan, "the level or fertile land." The soul of Elijah was tutored for his prophetic mission amid the rushing streams, "the pipings of flocks," the awful solitudes, and the rough freebooter life of the most distant territory of the sacred tribes. Jehovah, in the selection of the human instrument for a great revival in Israel, would magnify the sovereignty of His own grace; He chooses no Rabbi nor learned doctor of the schools, no hierarch with the prestige of hereditary office or outward form of consecration, but a lay preacher from the Highlands of Palestine, a man who had graduated in no school but nature, who had been taught, but taught only of Heaven. Forth he comes, a prophet of fire, a burning and a shining light, in one of the darkest periods of Hebrew history.—*Ibid.*

3 The external influences of his solitary life amid wild natural surroundings tended to produce sternness.

[18347] The solitary life which had been assumed, nurtured that fierceness of zeal and that directness of address which so distinguished him. It was in the wild loneliness of the hills and ravines of Gilead that the knowledge of Jehovah, the living God of Israel, had been impressed on his mind, which was to form the subject of his mission to the idolatrous court and country of Israel.—*Cyclopaedia of Biblical Literature.*

4 The external influences of his solitary life amid wild natural surroundings tended to produce independence.

[18348] We can picture to ourselves his strange solitude. Some narrow gorge, uninvaded by human footstep, fenced in by nature to form a prophet's chamber—the aving of this "pilgrim-tent" constructed of the interlacing boughs of fig, oak, and oleander; the blue vault of heaven overhead, leading him by day to consoling thoughts on the Great Universal Presence; the sun shining with tempered lustre, answering to the deeper sunshine of a quiet conscience within; the stars by night, like the wakeful eyes of min-

istering angels, keeping watch over his lonely couch as he pillowed his head on the dewless leaves—with that better pillow still for the weary—the sublime consciousness of having done his duty, and subordinated his own will to that of the Highest. What a contrast—his evening meal and chamber of repose, with those of the monarch in whose guilty ear he had recently proclaimed the judgment of God!—the ivory palace, filled with imported luxury—the retainers, gorgeous with Tyrian purple and dust of gold—the royal couch, curtained with Phœnician draperies and redolent of Phœnician perfumes. A stranger was the rough Bedouin prophet to all such dainties. His table, the greensward—his retainers, the winged fowls of heaven—his bed, the hollow of the rock—its coverlet, his rough hairy mantle—his lullaby, the music of the rippling stream, which, as it babbled by—the one tuneful brook of a silent land—sang morning and evening a hymn of God's faithfulness. But, as we picture him, with thankful, contented heart, strengthening in summer's drought the stakes of his hut; or in winter's cold, gathering, like the apostle of Melita, the scattered leaves and dry wood to kindle and feed his lonely fire—as we imagine him thus, night by night composing himself to rest, have we not a living commentary on words with which he may have filled his waking and sleeping thoughts—"A little that a just man hath is better than the riches of many wicked"?—*Rev. J. Macduff, D.D.*

- 5 The external influences of his solitary life amid wild natural surroundings tended to correct the impetuosity due to his choleric temperament.

[18349] We often think of the Tishbite as an example of a character, surcharged with elements of great power, which, if misdirected, must have been terrible for evil. Left to his own wayward, impetuous, fiery nature, his strong impulses and iron will, the bold Bedouin of Gilead might have grown up to be the scourge and destroyer, the tempter and corrupter of Israel—not its restorer, reformer, and saviour—a vessel of wrath instead of a vessel of mercy. An angel in might, he might have turned a demon in depravity—a "prophet of fire," not to illumine, but to scathe. His was a temperament in which evil impulses, had they once obtained sway, would have swept him down rapidly to ruin, and hurried thousands along with him, spreading his evil and baneful influence through a whole generation. But he had been enabled to consecrate all this latent power to the cause of righteousness. Perhaps, after many a silent soul-struggle, of which the world knows nothing, in the solitudes of his Fatherland, the devil in his nature had been expelled and exorcised. Without such a severe training Elijah-like characters cannot reach their maturity.—*Ibid.*

III. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE MAN.

1 Faith.

[18350] I cannot see that bird, but I must

needs think of Elijah, and wonder no less at the miracle of his faith than of his provision. It was a strong belief that carried him into a desolate retiredness to expect food from ravens. This fowl we know is ravenous; all is too little that he can forage for himself, and the prophet's reason must needs suggest to him that in a dry barren desert bread and flesh must be great dainties, yet he goes aside to expect victuals from that purveyance. He knew this fowl to be no less greedy than unclean; unclean as in law, so the nature of his food. What is his ordinary prey but loathsome carrion? Yet since God had appointed him His caterer, he stands not upon the nice points of a fastidious squeamishness; but confidently depends upon that uncouth provision, and, accordingly, those unlikely purveyors bring him bread and flesh in the morning, and bread and flesh in the evening. . . . Upon the sight of them, he magnified with a thankful heart the wonderful goodness and truth of his God, and was nourished more with his faith than with his food.—*Ep. Hall.*

2 Spirituality and prayerfulness.

(1) *He prayed in solitude.*

[18351] The closet is the citadel of his strength, the focus of his power. In the closet he holds the helm which guides the vessel of Providence, charged with the destinies of man; he presses there the lever which moves the hand that moves the world. The man of prayer descends from his closet into this lower world as a being of superior order, with the power, yet the humility, of a delegate from heaven. He may court obscurity; and God's providence may appoint him to tread a lowly path; but, like his Divine Master, he cannot be hid. His countenance shines with the reflected lustre of the Divine glory, which beamed upon him in his secret converse with God, and, like the "Father of lights," he is revealed by his beneficence and brightness. The odours of sanctity, fresh from heaven, breathe around him, and betray, by the sweet perfume it diffuses, the lowly and retiring plant that blooms beneath. The man of prayer is never contemplated by the world as a mere ordinary man: a spirit of wisdom and power, and of a sound mind, impregnates his every word and act, and lodges in every conscience a testimony for God. He attracts, or awes—he is loved or feared by all. Such a man was Elijah.—*Rev. J. Hiffman.*

[18352] Elijah went up to the top of Carmel. This is a beautiful mountain, ending in a promontory upon the Mediterranean Sea, with the lovely vale of Sharon at its foot, combining the richest variety of scenery, and probably chosen as a place of devotion by the prophet because favourable to those feelings which are elevated and pure. We might pray, if need be, in a damp, noisome dungeon, but we would choose rather, with our Saviour and the prophet, Tabor or Carmel, as our place of communion with God, because, in such a scene, one feels almost constrained to worship and adore. Elijah wished

also to break away from the multitude while he interceded with his Maker. There are emotions in prayer which the true worshipper would not have read upon his countenance by a scoffing world. While the sanctimonious hypocrite loves to stand at the corners of the streets, with eyes rolled up and clasped hands, the true spirit of prayer will lead us, like our Lord in the garden, to hide our faces even from those we best love, or like Elijah, to send away the servant, and turn our faces towards the earth.—*Rev. W. Lewis, D.D.*

(2) *He prayed in the spirit of lowliness.*

[18353] He kneels down, closes his eyes, bends his head forwards towards his knees, and in this posture he begins to address the Lord, and to pray for rain. Behold him! Would it be supposed that this is the man, who a short time before stood upon Carmel as a vicegerent of God, seemingly empowered with a command over the elements? Yet he now humbles himself in the dust, under the feeling of his own poverty and weakness. What does his whole demeanour express but abasement, and consciousness of his littleness and unworthiness! But it was the will of God that we should for once behold His great prophet in such a situation, and overhear him in his closet, in order to teach us where his strength really lay; to show us that it has been God's rule, from ancient times, to work with weak instruments, and to do wonders by bruised reeds, in order that we might see whence even an Elijah derived his greatness; and not be tempted to place the honour and glory upon the head of man, instead of laying it at the feet of Him to whom it belongs; and that we might feel the force of that encouraging sentence of the Apostle James, "Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are." When Elijah stood before the people, he was God's ambassador, and as such, had to speak and to act in virtue of his high commission; but when he stood before God, he was a poor sinner and a worm, who was only able to live by mercy, and had nothing to demand, but everything to beg at a throne of grace.—*Krummacher.*

(3) *He prayed with a definite object.*

[15354] Elijah's prayer was no mere form, neither was it the calm musing of a meditative spirit; but it was the earnest wrestling of one whose intellect, and heart, and will, and conscience were all vigorously exercised for the production of the result at which he aimed.—*Rev. W. Taylor, D.D.*

(4) *He prayed with importunity.*

[18355] Elijah was importunate in his prayer. Six times the servant whom he had stationed on the hill-top returned with the reply, "There is nothing;" but that did not dishearten the prophet. He kept on at his prayer; he knocked again and again, until the response was given.—*Ibid.*

[18356] The Apostle James mentions Elijah, as an instance of distinguished honour being put upon fervent and persevering prayer; at the same time reminding us, that he whose prayers were thus powerful, was a man of like passions, infirmities, and imperfections with ourselves. "Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain, and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months; and he prayed again, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit" (James v. 17, 18).—*Esther Copley.*

(5) *He prayed expecting an answer.*

[18357] Elijah expected an answer to his prayer. He sent his servant to the summit to look out for its appearance. He regarded it as a certainty that the answer would come. It never entered into his mind to doubt that his prayer would be granted. The strangest of all things to him would have been that his prayer should be unanswered. So he set a watch for the coming of the answer.—*Ibid.*

[18358] Seven times, observe, did Elijah wait for the return of his prayers. What an evidence is this of the power and perseverance of faith! What a commentary upon that merciful assurance of the prophet, "Therefore will the Lord wait, that He may be gracious unto you, and therefore will He be exalted, that He may have mercy upon you; for the Lord is a God of judgment, blessed are all they that wait for Him." This blessing was now to be inherited by Elijah. He had climbed to the heights of Carmel; and there, upon his bended knees, and with head bowed down to the ground, he cast all his care upon the Lord. "The vision was yet for an appointed time," but he felt that, "at the end, it would surely come, it would not tarry."—*Rev. J. Anderson.*

[18359] Elijah knew, what it behoves us also to remember, that the fulfilment of God's promises comes in the way of answers to prayer. He knew that to every prediction of blessing the condition is annexed, "For this will I be inquired of to do it for you;" and so he gave himself to prayer. He believed that to be a law of God's moral government, as imperative and unchanging as any of those in the physical universe, of which, in these days, so much is said; and therefore he set himself to earnest supplication.—*Rev. W. Taylor, D.D.*

(6) *He recognized the answer when it came.*

[18360] When the seventh time his servant came, saying, "Behold, there ariseth a little cloud out of the sea, like a man's hand," he saw in this the response to his prayer, and sent a message to Ahab to hasten his departure, lest the rain should hinder his return to his palace.—*Ibid.*

[18361] The prophet "despised not the day of small things:" the single cloud, appearing from the far-off horizon of the sea, was evidence

enough to him that the hour of relief was at hand.—*Rev. S. Anderson.*

3 Steadfastness.

[18362] Elijah was a man reconciled to God in Christ Jesus the promised Messiah, and clothed with His righteousness. This is implied in his words, "I stand before the Lord God of Israel;" and is further evident from his having received the honour a thousand years afterwards, to be a witness with Moses on Mount Tabor, of the transfiguration of his Lord. But the standing before the Lord expresses something more than a state of reconciliation in general. I stand before the Lord, when I desire, above all things, that the will of the Lord may be at all times plainly manifested to me, and that I may do nothing, from one moment to another, but what shall please Him, and promote His glory; when I keep my eyes waking, and place myself as it were at my post, to watch for the tokens of my King, and listen attentively with my spirit to His voice, and His commands within me and without; when I desire, according to the least of His intimations, to run the way of His commandments; I then stand before the Lord. Thus Elijah stood before the Lord. To be an instrument for the accomplishment of the Divine will, and for the glorifying of His name, was his ardent desire; he could say with Isaiah's watchman, "Lord, I stand continually upon the watch-tower in the day-time, and I am set in my ward whole nights" (Isa. xxi. 8). His life was a hearkening to God's voice; he passed his days in the presence of his eternal King, and "Lord, speak! for Thy servant heareth," was his watchword. Such was Elijah, by the grace of God, and thus did he stand before the Lord God of Israel.—*Krummacher.*

4 Humility.

[18363] Beautiful indeed is Elijah's humility. He was more truly king in the sight of Israel than Ahab. As a prince he had power with God, and had prevailed. The keys of Providence seemed to hang at his girdle; his voice had rent the heavens; at his summons the flames had descended; the fiery sword had leapt from its cloudy scabbard, flashing vengeance on his enemies. Had he sought it—a triumphal procession might have borne him laurel-crowned and garlanded to Jezreel. The chivalrous songs and minstrelsy that welcomed the illustrious sovereign of the preceding age might have been accorded to him also. But no vainglorious thought tarnished the splendour of the moral victory. Never is he greater than when—the shouts of the multitude over—he retires with his servant to a lone spot on the mountain; proclaiming that, for all his deeds of renown, he arrogates no praise, no glory to himself, but gives it all to the God whose legate he felt honoured to be. He cast himself down upon the earth, and "put his face between his knees." We scarce recognize the man; he seems for the moment to have lost his personal

identity. A few hours before, he was "the Prophet of Fire;" the lightning flashing from his eye; or, standing by the Kishon, a girded homicide, the sword gleaming in his hands. Now he is "clothed with humility." Bold and strong as a sturdy oak of Bashan in the presence of the dense human crowd, he bows his head like a bulrush in the presence of the Lord of hosts. "Lord," he seems to say, "I am but sinful dust and ashes. I am but a man of like passions with that fickle multitude below. I am but a vessel, a lump of clay in the hand of the potter. Not unto me, not unto me, but unto Thee, the living Jehovah, before whom I stand, be all the glory!"—*Rev. J. Macduff, D.D.*

5 Tenderness.

[18364] Not only was there in his character a union of weakness with greatness, but, despite of all his apparent solitariness, unworldliness, asceticism, isolation from his fellows, there were not wanting elements of tenderness. The earthquake, the whirlwind, the fire, which he saw in the Sinai desert, and after all these "the still small voice," formed the reflection of his own inner nature—a union of the terrible with the gentle.—*Ibid.*

[18365] With what loving affection he clings at the last to the friendship of the faithful Elisha. Stern characters are often misunderstood. There is frequently a union of opposites in the same nature; the stern may appear to predominate, when gentleness and goodness are there, if the world would but believe it. The official severity of the homeless prophet was tempered and softened with these latter qualities; while his every action, with the one solitary exception, was governed and pervaded by sterling principle, uncompromising rectitude, unflinching adherence to the will of God. Much as Ahab hated his truthful denunciations, he could not disguise his respect for his candour, boldness, and devotion to Him he so faithfully served.—*Ibid.*

[18366] The denouncer of Ahab, the rebuker of kingly iniquity, the slayer at the Kishon, the homicide who, in one day, with his own hands, purpled its waters with the blood of four hundred and fifty priests—yet see with what considerate tenderness he ministers to the distress of the lonely widow of Zarephath.—*Ibid.*

IV. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PROPHET AND REFORMER.

Religious earnestness.

(1) *He acted instead of speculating.*

[18367] Elijah was in a schismatic Church. Speculative minds would have dreamed of outward unity, and thought that nothing could be done till that was got—or of a millennial state. Elijah acted as he was, and where he was. The work given him was not to restore unity, but to destroy unbelief in individual hearts.—*Rev. F. Robertson.*

[18363] If I have read his character correctly, he delighted in activity, more especially when there was added to it the exciting element of danger. Hence, as the eager warrior hastens to the battle-field, Elijah was positively attracted to the conflict that was before him, the rather as he recognized in it the opportunity of his life, when, as the servant of Jehovah, he should be able to strike a decisive blow at the Baalism of the court and the indifference of the country.—*Rev. W. Taylor, D.D.*

(2) *His actions were marked by the unflinching boldness of a living faith.*

[18369] Elijah was no "dumb dog that cannot bark;" "sleeping, lying down, loving to slumber." His was not the trumpet to give forth a wavering or uncertain sound. Standing face to face with guilty Ahab, he startles him with the avowal—"My God—the God of Israel—the God of thy fathers—and he who ought to be thy God—Jehovah liveth!" "As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word." To understand aright the force of this asseveration, we must view it in the same light as the subsequent scene on Mount Carmel, viz., as a challenge made by the prophet to settle the question by a solemn appeal to the great power or powers (be they who they may) who rule the universe, and who have the elements of nature under their control. It was as if he had said to his royal master—"I shall prove that thy base idolatries cannot aid thee in the hour of need. I shall undertake to demonstrate that a plurality of gods is but a plurality of nonentities. Here is the test. In the name of my God I utter it. You have invested the Baalim you worship with lordship over the processes of outer nature—you have your pretended Baal or lord who has the clouds of heaven in his hand—who can unseat or close their watery treasures at his will. You have your pretended deity—who spangles morning by morning the pastures on the hills of Israel with dew-drops, or leaves them dry like the fleece of Gideon. I shall disprove your polytheism; I shall unmask the lie of these Phœnician priests whom you feed at the royal table; I shall solve the momentous problem, not by word, but by awful deed. I shall prove that this dew and these rain-clouds are not Baal's giving—that his priests might rend the sky from morn to even with impudent supplication, and there would be no response. But I shall demonstrate that they are in the hands of that "living God," whose servant I am, and "before whom," though unseen, "I stand." And here will be the proof. I assert, in the name and by the authority of Him whom I worship, and whose unworthy servant I am, that neither dew nor rain shall fall on the parched plains and valleys of Israel except at my bidding. From this day henceforth these skies shall be as brass, and this earth as iron. Let thy Baalim throng disprove it if they can. Let them, if they can, thwart this act of delegated omnipotence. Let

them, if they can, force open the bolted doors of heaven, and exude dew-drops from the gasping earth. Let them, if they can, bribe the miser fountains to unlock their hoarded treasures. Then, but not till then, will I listen to the tale of thy dumb idols, and renounce my belief in that Great Being who maketh the clouds His chariot.—*J. R. Macduff, D.D.*

[18370] Ahab and Jezebel might be sitting in their Jezreel palace of ivory, congratulating themselves on the skill which they had shown, when, sudden and terrible as a clap of thunder from a cloudless sky, there swept in before them a weird-looking man, with long, flowing hair, a mantle of sheep-skin round his shoulders, and a rugged staff in his hand; and before they could ask him who he was, or why he had come thither, he had flung the gage of defiance at their feet, and said, "As Jehovah the God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years but according to my word." Then, this message given, he vanished like an apparition. "It was," as Wilberforce has said, "like the flash of the lightning, sharp as a blazing sword in its sudden vividness, but not tarrying for a moment, revealing everything, and gone as it reveals it."—*Rev. W. Taylor, D.D.*

[18371] He has the air of one who has a solemn work to do. There is gravity in his deportment, firmness in his countenance, and lightning in his eye. Unabashed by the myriad throng before him, undazzled by the splendid garments of the idol-serving priests, unappalled by the haughty mien of Ahab and his courtiers, he passes on, and takes his place over against his powerful adversaries. Alone he seems in that immense multitude, and yet he is not alone, for God is with him. So, pausing for a moment to survey the scene, he lifts up his voice like a trumpet, and throws down the gage of battle in these burning words: "How long halt ye between two opinions? If Jehovah be God, follow Him: but if Baal, then follow him."—*Ibid.*

(3) *His actions were marked by self-reliance.*

[18372] Under God, this one man rallied an apostate nation—saved his country by saving its religion, and made thousands and tens of thousands in after ages, when he himself was gone, rise up and call him blessed: "He stood in the breach, and the plague was stayed!"—*J. R. Macduff, D.D.*

[18373] He was sure of the justice of his cause, and though the whole world had thought differently from himself, he had no mind to compromise, or to give place; no, not for an hour; and why? Because he was an experimental believer, whose faith was interwoven with his existence and happiness.—*Krummacher.*

[18374] "Let them choose one bullock for themselves, and cut it in pieces, and lay it on

wood, and put no fire under; and I will dress the other bullock, and lay it on wood, and put no fire under; and call ye on the name of your gods, and I will call on the name of Jehovah: and the God that answereth by fire, let Him be God. And all the people answered and said, It is well spoken." They agreed to the proposal; some from curiosity, to see what would happen; others, in the hope that Baal would gain the victory; but some few, perhaps, from a real desire to be certain whether Jehovah was the true God. What a hazardous proposal this appears on the part of Elijah! He ventured the whole credit of Jehovah's worship upon the issue of it. But he acted really at no hazard; he was assured that his gracious God would not leave nor forsake him.—*Ibid.*

[18375] Consider what might have been said. The world is against you, the wise, the court, the priesthood—this is presumption. What was Elijah's answer? Numbers are not the test of truth, but the voice within clear. The world against Elijah. Well then in the name of God and truth, Elijah against the world.—*Rev. F. Robertson.*

[18376] Let the eye once more rest with admiration on the prime actor in this magnificent drama. Mark his firmness and self-reliance—his meek spirit of dependence on Divine aid. Hating expediency, resolved to stand or fall with truth, superior to the world's censure, heedless that the majority is against him, with the consciousness of God being upon his side, he boldly confronts the floods of ungodly men, and alone he triumphs.—*Rev. J. Macduff, D.D.*

[18377] There is something impressive in the calm dignity of the prophet. We can picture him, with his sheepskin cloak, and shaggy hair, and stately figure—with no noisy clamour, or extravagant gesticulations, but rather with dignified self-reliance, standing amid the fevered multitude, and beginning with reverend hands to uprear the dismantled altar. There is always a quiet majesty about truth. How calmly stood Paul before Felix and Agrippa! With what meek, unruffled, expressive silence stood Incarnate Truth Himself before Pilate and Herod—the Lamb "dumb before His shearers:" it was the same dignified calmness of demeanour which had previously unmanned the assassin band at the gate of Gethsemane: "As soon as He had said unto them, I am He, they went backward and fell to the ground!" It was so now on Mount Carmel. Ahab was agitated with conflicting fears. The people were in a frenzy of excitement. The priests were filled with delirium and rage. Elijah alone was unmoved—confident in the righteousness of his cause. He had everything perilled on the next sunset hour. Failure!—and his own body, like that of the offered sacrifice, would be cut in pieces, and the Kishon be stained with his blood. Failure!—and the power and glory of his God would be compromised; every altar of

Israel would be profaned, and Baal would sit triumphant in his impious shrines. But "Jehovah liveth"—his first utterance—was his motto still; and he felt confident that that watchword would be caught up, ere these night-shadows fell, and be repeated from lip to lip by the congregated thousands of Israel.—*Ibid.*

(4) *His actions were marked by self-oblivion.*

[18378] Was Elijah whispering, "Now I am doing a brave thing; people's eyes are on me"? This is the finest scene in Scripture. Elijah was quite unconscious that he was making a scene. He had lost himself in his cause. Hence the people understood that it was no contest between Elijah and the priests, but between Baal and God. Hence they did not exclaim "Elijah," but the "Lord," He is God.—*Rev. F. Robertson.*

(5) *His actions were marked by inflexible decision in the rebuke of sin.*

[18379] Elijah mocked the priests of Baal. He killed them. We are not concerned to defend this. The Jewish spirit differed from the Christian. Yet observe, it marked earnestness. It is a precedent to interpret character.—*Ibid.*

[18380] With what piercing irony does Elijah put to shame their efforts! "Cry aloud," saith he, "for he is a god; either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is in a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth, and must be awaked." It is impossible to conceive a more withering rebuke than this, a more emphatic exposure of the utter wickedness and folly of those idolaters.—*Rev. J. Anderson.*

[18381] It was in silence that the prophet had thus long looked on. When he *did* speak, what would you have him to have said? a gentle dissuasion?—that would have been no fit language to the insulters of the Almighty, and the destroyers of the people! a loud denunciation of vengeance?—that was to be executed, and needed not be spoken. "It came to pass that Elijah mocked." We are not to imagine this as said in a light, bantering tone of pleasantry; as if the prophet would amuse himself with their unsuccessful impiety; but as an austere and bitter rebuke in the form of sarcasm, and it had in it a propriety and truth, without which sarcasm and ridicule have no point.—*Rev. J. Foster.*

[18382] He wore no court dress; he spoke in no polished phrase; but, like a sturdy Quaker, he refused to give any reverence, and, with his *thees* and his *thous*, his faithful warnings and his awful threatenings, he struck terror into Ahab's soul.—*Rev. W. Taylor, D.D.*

[18383] The captain with his fifty departs upon his commission, and it is not long before he meets the enemy. On the summit of a mountain—probably on Carmel—they come in sight of the prophet. There he sits solitary and silent, immersed in sacred meditations. But he sits there, like a king upon his throne, secure in

his God, and surrounded by an invisible guard. He beholds the host approaching him with glittering weapons, and easily imagines who has sent them, and what is their errand. But he is not afraid, in his invisible but impregnable fortress. He is well able to confront them under the banner of his God, and quietly suffers them to come against him. They approach nearer and nearer, to surround him as their prisoner; but something in his appearance, or in their thoughts of him, keeps them still at a respectful distance. It seems as if they had a presentiment of peril, should they venture to seize him. The captain, therefore, contents himself with imperatively declaring his master's order. "Thou man of God, the king hath said, Come down." The prophet feels a holy indignation for the honour of his God. He opens his mouth, with a faith which would have removed Mount Carmel into the midst of the sea, had it been necessary, and exclaims, "If I be a man of God, then let fire come down from heaven, and consume thee and thy fifty!" No sooner had he uttered the words, than Jehovah heard them; for to prayers which seek only His honour and glory He refuses not His Yea and Amen! The fire descends from heaven, and the captain, with his fifty, lie dead below the prophet's feet.—*Krummacher*.

V. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PATRIOT.

Practicalness.

(1) *He spent the closing years of his life in providing for the spiritual well-being of the generation to come.*

[18384] Directed, doubtless, mainly by the Spirit of God, but inspired also by his own apprehension for the decay of true religion throughout the land in this period of degeneracy, he had established three, if not more, "schools;" the universities, or, if we might be allowed the modern term, the "divinity halls" or missionary seminaries of the age. By instructing in these, the flower of the Hebrew youth, in the great principles of the theocracy and the religion of their ancestors, he ensured the existence of a seed to serve his God when he should be gathered to his fathers in the Church above. It is exceedingly rare that a man of the Elijah-like order exhibits practical qualities.—*Rev. J. Macduff, D.D.*

(2) *He may be regarded as the founder, in one sense, of ecclesiastical colleges.*

[18385] These schools in the kingdom of Israel so far compensated for the want of the temple services and Levitical priesthood, instituted in the metropolis of the kingdom of Judah. If it be a new light, therefore, it is surely an interesting one, to regard Elijah as the first head and principal of a religious university; gathering around him a band of ingenuous youth, and imbuing them with the truth set forth in his own great life motto—"The Lord liveth before whom I stand!"—*Ibid.*

[18386] There is less said of the educational

than of the controversial portion of his work by the historian. Yet, from sundry incidental allusions, we are led to the conclusion that much of the Tishbite's labours, especially in the later years of his life, were given to the superintendence of the education of the sons of the prophets throughout the land. The first mention in Scripture of "schools of the prophets" is in the history of Samuel, but during the years that intervened between Solomon and Ahab we have no reference made to them in the sacred books. And it is not unreasonable to conclude that in the widespread defection of the tribes, both in Judah and Israel, from the Lord, they had fallen into neglect. But, after the stirring controversy of his earlier ministry, Elijah seems to have set himself to the fostering, if not indeed to the refounding, of these establishments. Either he himself set up such schools at Gilgal, at Bethel, and at Jericho, or, finding them existing there in a languishing condition, he laboured to give them prosperity and permanence. In going to and fro among these schools, Elijah found the labour and the happiness of his later years.—*Rev. W. Taylor, D.D.*

VI. HIS DECLENSION AND DESPONDENCY.

I Their causes.

(1) *Physical prostration.*

[18387] The valley is as deep as the mountain is high. The ebb of the tide is proportioned to its height; and is ever greatest when the flood-tide has been at the spring. So excessive tension of our bodily system will induce as excessive relaxation, and that, in its turn, will tell upon the tone of the mind. This is the law of our human nature. We all understand it; we have all experienced it; and we must give Elijah here the full benefit of it. Think what he had gone through during these preceding few days of exciting toil. After his challenge to the priests of Baal, there was the earnestness of his prayerful preparation for the encounter; then there was the long day of actual conflict on the mountain; then his wrestling with God for the rain; and then his rapid race before Ahab's chariot all the way from Carmel to Jezreel. Now, all these coming one upon another must have worn out even so muscular a frame as Elijah's; for there was much more than mere physical toil.—*Ibid.*

[18388] Everybody knows that there is nothing so exhaustive as deep emotion. Now, the conflict on the mountain stirred the prophet's heart to its depths, and prayer like his must itself have been a labour of the most fatiguing kind. Hence, when the threat of Jezebel was repeated to him, and he saw no attempt made by the people to rally round him, we can easily understand how, in the state of prostration to which he was reduced, his faith failed him, and he turned and fled. Had he better understood the demands of his own frame upon him, he might probably have struggled more manfully against this physical reaction, and might have reasoned that

Jezebel was no more dangerous to him now than she had been before. But, in his ignorance of the cause of his depression, he magnified the peril in which he stood, while at the same time he forgot the faithfulness of that protector who before had hidden him in the valley of Cherith and the cottage of Zarephath.—*Ibid.*

[18389] On the reception of Jezebel's message, Elijah flies for his life—toils on the whole day, sits down under a juniper tree, faint, hungry, and travel-worn; the gale of an Oriental evening, damp and heavy with languid sweetness, breathing on his face. The prophet and the man give way. He longs to die. You cannot mistake the presence of causes in part purely physical.—*Rev. F. Robertson.*

(2) *Lack of occupation.*

[18390] As long as Elijah had a prophet's work to do, severe as that work was, all went on healthily; but his occupation was gone. To-morrow and the day after, what has he left on earth to do?—*Ibid.*

[18391] So long as Elijah did his God-appointed work earnestly, unflaggingly, all went well with him. When he paused, hesitated, faltered, or rather when, in an impetuous moment, he cast away the noblest opportunity ever prophet had; shut himself up in a wilderness; settled down into inaction, shedding ignoble tears under a bush in the desert; then the great soul and its magnanimous purposes is gone. He has become a fretful, petulant child, morbidly brooding over his disappointed hopes. He flings away the oars of duty and obedience; his strong, brawny arms have ceased to pull the bark in which his God had bid him struggle; and now he is at the mercy of winds and waves.—*Rev. J. Macduff, D.D.*

(3) *Lack of sympathy.*

[18392] "I, even I only, am left." Lay the stress on *only*. The loneliness of his position was shocking to Elijah. Surprising this; for Elijah wanted no sympathy in a far harder trial on Mount Carmel. It was in a tone of triumph that he proclaimed that he was the single, solitary prophet of the Lord, while Baal's prophets were 450 men. Observe, however, the difference. There was in that case an opposition which could be grappled with; here there was nothing against which mere manhood was availing. The excitement was past—the chivalrous look of the thing gone. To die as a martyr—yes, that were easy, in grand failure; but to die as a felon—to be hunted, caught, taken back to an ignominious death, flesh and blood recoiled from that. Elijah lived alone; and once only the bitterness of it found expression. But what is posthumous justice to the heart that ached then?—*Rev. F. Robertson.*

(4) *Disappointment.*

[18393] On Carmel the great object for which Elijah had lived seemed on the point of being realized. Baal's prophets were slain; Jehovah acknowledged with one voice; false worship put

down. Elijah's life aim—the transformation of Israel into a kingdom of God—was all but accomplished. In a single day all this bright picture was annihilated. When he found out his mistake, and discovered that the applause on Carmel subsided into hideous stillness, his heart well-nigh broke with disappointment.—*Ibid.*

2 Their results.

(1) *Cowardice.*

[18394] With all his moral and physical superiority, with all his mortifications, his strange ascetic life, Elijah is spoken of, for our encouragement, as "a man of like passions." With all his greatness, he had his weaknesses and failings—and failings, too, just in the points of character we should least have expected. The reprover of Ahab, the bold, bearded son of the desert, who feared God, and knew apparently no other fear; so elevated above the foibles, weaknesses, caprices of his fellows; so indifferent to human opinion, whether in the shape of commendation or censure, can become a craven and coward on hearing the threats of an intriguing woman. Champion as he was—a shaggy lion from the coverts of Gilead, who can challenge single-handed a multitude of idolatrous priests—he cowers away in moping despondency from work and duty. This Peter of the Old Testament was, like all characters of strong, fervid, vehement temperament, easily elated, easily depressed. He reminds us of the engine careering along our own highways—a very Hercules in strength—the type and impersonation of grandeur and power; but laid on its side, amid the mangled wrecks it has dragged along with it, nought is more helpless.—*Rev. J. Macduff, D.D.*

[18395] In this instance Elijah's faith appears in some measure to have failed him. The very words of the sacred narrative seem to give us a significant hint respecting his state of mind at this period. For the words are, "When he saw *that*." What did Elijah see? Not God's promises, aid, power, and faithfulness; these at least only dawned upon him in the background with broken and feeble rays. But in the foreground very different things appeared; the infuriated Jezebel threatening his life, and all the horrors of a cruel death. Instead of soaring above these as on eagles' wings, and looking down upon them with sublime composure, as on former occasions, the pressure of human terror seems to have been too strong for his mind, especially as backed by the disappointment of his hopes on Israel's account. So "he arose, and went for his life."—*Xrummacher.*

[18396] How is it that he who boldly denounced the tyrant; who stood alone upon Mount Carmel against an apostate church and nation; who stood by his sacrifice when the fire from heaven fell upon the altar, now trembles, and flies before a woman? Did he, whom the ravens and the widow fed—the one forgetting their nature, and the other her poverty—and who, when called of God to trust to these im-

probable resources, "in hope believed, even against hope," now, when he had experienced the Divine faithfulness, and proved that "man doth not live by bread alone, but by every word which proceedeth out of the mouth of God," fear that he should perish by famine in the wilderness? Did he, who, with the intrepidity of a divinely-imparted faith, boldly faced a despotic tyrant, while seeking him throughout every kingdom that he might slay him; and a hostile nation, while writhing under the scourge of that famine which he had inflicted; now that he was accredited of God, and reconciled to that king and people whom he had just rescued from the jaws of famine, fear that he should perish by the hand of one idolatrous and reprobate woman?—*Rev. J. Hiffernan.*

(2) *Irritable impatience.*

[18397] It seems to me that there was impatience, natural indeed, yet in its essence unbelieving, manifested by Elijah. He was looking for the harvest while yet the seed had but just left his hand, whereas "the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, till he receive the early and the latter rain."—*Rev. W. Taylor, D.D.*

[18398] It has been observed of the holy men of Scripture, that their most signal failures took place in those points of character for which they were remarkable in excellence. Moses was the meekest of men—but it was Moses who "spake unadvisedly with his lips." St. John was the apostle of charity; yet he is the very type to us of religious intolerance, in his desire to call down fire from heaven. St. Peter is proverbially the apostle of impetuous intrepidity; yet twice he proved a craven. If there were anything for which Elijah is remarkable, we should say it was superiority to human weakness. Like the Baptist, he dared to arraign and rebuke his sovereign; like the commander who cuts down the bridge behind him, leaving himself no alternative but death or victory, he taunted his adversaries the priests of Baal on Mount Carmel, making them gnash their teeth and cut themselves with knives, but at the same time ensuring for himself a terrible end in case of failure from his exasperated foes. And again, in his last hour, when he was on his way to a strange and unprecedented departure from this world—when the whirlwind and flame-chariot were ready, he asked for no human companionship. The bravest men are pardoned if one lingering feeling of human weakness clings to them at the last, and they desire a human eye resting on them—a human hand in theirs—a human presence with them. But Elijah would have rejected all. In harmony with the rest of his lonely, severe character, he desired to meet his Creator alone. Now it was this man—so stern, so iron, so independent, so above all human weakness—of whom it was recorded that in his trial hour he gave way to a fit of petulance and querulous despondency to which there is scarcely found a parallel.—*Rev. F. Robertson.*

[18399] Elijah's desert prayer was one of pride, presumption, irritability, impatience, peevishness—"It is enough, take away my life." Even had his success on Carmel been marred and counteracted by the evil influences at work in Ahab's court, and a new era of persecution had, in consequence, been initiated in Israel, his duty was patient submission to the Divine will, cherishing the humble confidence and assurance that light would sooner or later arise out of darkness. Instead of this, he breathes the prayer, of all others least warrantable for any creature of God to utter, "Let me die." There are circumstances, indeed, when such a prayer is permissible—when it becomes a noble expression of believing faith and hope. Such was the case when the great Apostle, in subordination to the Higher will which was ever his guiding principle, made the avowal of "a desire to depart and be with Christ, which was far better," making, however, the reservation, that so long as his Lord had work for him in the Church on earth, he would cheerfully remain. Elijah's prayer was altogether different. It was the feverish outbreak of a moment of passion. How forbearing and gracious was God in not taking him at his word! Had He done so, the prophet would have died under a cloud; his name would have been associated with cowardice; his character would have been a mournful example of greatness ending in ignominy. He would have lost the glorious closing scene of all—the chariot of fire and the deathless victory.—*Rev. J. Macduff, D.D.*

[18400] Certain it is that the spirit of Elijah was greatly changed in its frame and temper from what it appeared before Ahab and on Carmel. Disappointed of the converting energy which, in the excitement of his triumph, he anticipated as the result of his zeal for the Lord on Mount Carmel, and alarmed at the accumulating difficulties and dangers in which his destruction of the priests of Baal had involved him, in the despondency of unbelief "he went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree; and he requested for himself that he might die, and said, It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers." He who was reserved for that high destiny that he should never die; he who, with one solitary exception, was alone exempt from the common lot of mortality, the common penalty of sin—in the ignorance of unbelief, prefers a petition which, if granted, would rescind the decree that conferred upon him his peculiar privilege.—*Rev. J. Hiffernan.*

(3) *Doubt.*

[18401] He went forth into the wide world in uncertainty, distracted by doubts, and unaccompanied by the consoling consciousness that he was taking this road for God; since he went it only for himself, and for the sake of his own life; and verily this thought was not at all cal-

culated to relieve his oppressed mind.—*Krummacher*.

[18402] Thick darkness hung over the prophet's soul. This is shown by his whole conduct. His close reserve, his desire for solitude, his planless wandering into the gloomy wilderness, all indicate a discouraged and dejected state of mind. Perplexed with regard to his vocation—nay, even with respect to God and His government—his soul lies in the midst of a thousand doubts and distressing thoughts. It seems tossed on a sea of troubles, without bottom or shore; and there appears but one step between him and utter despair.—*Ibid.*

VII. GOD'S TREATMENT OF HIS DESPONDENCY.

1 His physical powers were recruited.

[18403] God recruited His servant's exhausted strength. Miraculous meals are given—then Elijah sleeps, wakes, and eats: on the strength of that goes forty days' journey. In other words, like a wise physician, God administers food, rest, and exercise; and then, and not till then, proceeds to expostulate; for before Elijah's mind was unfit for reasoning.—*Rev. F. Robertson*.

2 His conscience was assailed.

[18404] What *doest* thou here, Elijah? Life is for doing. A prophet's life for nobler doing—and the prophet was not doing but moaning.—*Ibid.*

[18405] "Arise, go on thy way." That speaks to us: on thy way. Be up and doing—fill up every hour, leaving no crevice or craving for a remorse, or a repentance to creep through afterwards. Let not the mind brood on self: save it from speculation, from those stagnant moments in which the awful teachings of the spirit grope into the unfathomable unknown, and the heart torments itself with questions which are insoluble except to an active life.—*Ibid.*

3 His sensibility was awakened.

[18406] He commanded the hurricane to sweep the sky, and the earthquake to shake the ground. He lighted up the heavens till they were one mass of fire. All this expressed and reflected Elijah's feelings. It was his stormy self reflected in the moods of the tempest, and giving them their character. Then came a calmer hour. Elijah rose in reverence—felt tenderer sensations in his bosom. He opened his heart to gentler influences, till at last out of the manifold voices of nature there seemed to speak, not the stormy passions of the man, but the still small voice of the harmony and the peace of God.—*Rev. F. Macduff, D.D.*

[18407] After the fire there was "a still small voice;"—a "still soft whisper," as the words may be rendered, like the tremulous cadence of sweet music falling on the entranced ear. The

Lord was there! Strange contrast to the hurricane and earthquake symbols which preceded it. It is a "voice"—a "still voice"—a "small voice." The chafed, riotous elements have rocked themselves to rest. All nature is hushed; the sky is clear; the soft evening shadows fall gently on the mountain sides; and the prophet's own perturbed spirit partakes of the repose. Nature's vast volume opens to a page on which is inscribed in gleaming letters, "God is love!" It is enough. The prophet reads!—he adores!—he rejoices! Wrapping himself in his mantle, he comes forth and stands at the entrance of his cave.—*Ibid.*

[18408] All the former demonstrations of his excellency—the wind, the earthquake, and the fire, were but the harbingers of his own voice; and that came, in gentleness and stillness, to the soul of Elijah. Who shall venture to explore all the recesses of that vast and shadowy grandeur which now rested upon the mount of God? The prophet himself durst not, could not, gaze upon it; "He wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out and stood in the entering in of the cave." His was the humble, reverential spirit—his the attitude of meek obedience.—*Rev. F. Anderson*.

VIII. RESULT OF GOD'S TREATMENT.

1 Repentance.

[18409] As Elijah journeyed back through the desert, one of his feelings doubtless would be this—Deep sorrow on account of his past faithlessness, and a salutary sense of his weakness for the time to come. Every step of that backward journey must have recalled, with sorrow and shame, the remembrance of his unworthy flight and unworthy unbelief. Every weary league he retraversed; every rock, and bush, and arid wady must have read to him a bitter rebuke and reproach; ay, and reminded him that "strong" as his name imported him to be, he was strong only in God. Perhaps, in his fit of sullen, morbid despondency, he had no time before to ponder and realize the amount of his ingratitude and guilt. But now, after all he had seen and experienced in the mount, with what different feelings must he have bewailed the past—that coward retreat from the gates of Israel; that rash, passionate prayer under the desert juniper-tree; the vain, proud, self-righteous apology he had dared to utter in answer to God's remonstrance. How must all these have come home to him, as he hies him back, an altered man, to his God-appointed work. Could he ever forget the tremendous sermon on sin, preached in that great cathedral of nature—Sinai the pulpit—lightning and whirlwind and thunder the ambassadors of heaven?—*Rev. F. Macduff, D.D.*

2 Strengthened resolution.

[18410] Mourning an unworthy past—penetrated by a lively sense of Jehovah's love—he would go onward and forward, resolved more

than ever on a life of grateful love and of active and unwavering service, until God saw meet to take him up in His chariot of fire. He would go, not only mourning his besetting sins, but seeking henceforth to watch against their occurrence. And it is worthy of note that, from this time henceforward, we never again meet with the craven-hearted, petulant, impetuous prophet. We may hear indeed no more (with perhaps one exception) of any great chivalrous doings—heroic contests, or Carmel feats of superhuman strength, like the race before the chariot to Jezreel—but neither do we read any more of hesitancy, despondency, cowardice. If the torch of the Prophet of Fire has less of the brilliant blaze of former ecstatic exploits, it burns, at least, with a purer, steadier lustre. He may have less henceforward of the meteor, but he shines with more of the steady lustre of the true constellation. From this date he seems to enter on the calm, mellowed evening of life, following a troubled, tempestuous day.—*Ibid.*

[18411] He is another man since we recently met him in the Sinai desert. The frenzied queen may again vow vengeance as she pleases; he will not shrink from duty. The old visions of Horeb—the wind, and earthquake, and fire—proclaim in his ears that “Jehovah liveth.” A career of unblushing impiety, on the part of Ahab, had now culminated in the most hideous of crimes, and the herald of vengeance delivers unabashed his message. It is one of his former rapid, sudden, meteor-like appearances. Without warning or premonition, he confronts Ahab, like the ghostly shadow of the monarch’s own guilty conscience; and, with a tongue of fire, flashes upon him the accusation, “Hast thou killed, and also taken possession?” We know not a grander subject for a great picture than this—the hero-prophet standing erect before the ghastly, terror-stricken king; breaking through the barriers of court etiquette, and caring only for the glory of the God he served and the good of Israel, charging him with the murderer’s guilt, and pronouncing upon him the murderer’s awful doom.—*Ibid.*

3 Amendment.

[18412] That a great and mighty change had passed upon the spirit of Elijah in the interval between the first and repeated address, we cannot doubt. Not only the attitude of profound humiliation into which the “still small voice” had cast him, but the prompt obedience with which he enters upon the dangerous office to which he is immediately delegated—to alter dynasties, to depose and to anoint the kings of Syria and Israel—and, still more, the meek submissiveness with which he inaugurates his own successor, and without jealousy resigns his prophetic office, while yet ignorant of the high destiny for which God had reserved him, by a translation alive from earth to heaven—all this proves that he had drunk deeply from that “still small voice” into the spirit of meek, submissive obedience.

4 Reward.

[18413] When Elijah folded his mantle together to smite the waters of Jordan, he already seemed to anticipate a princely dominion over the earth and its elements. This act of his faith seems the effort of a soul aspiring to higher degrees of advancement, to full emancipation and liberty. He seems no longer to know anything of bondage to the elements of this world. He appears like one advanced to the dignity of a seat in the heavenly places with Christ; his faith would cast mountains into the sea, and pile up the sea to mountains, were it necessary. What is miraculous in the eyes of man, appears to have become almost familiar to his faith. A new region must shortly be opened to his soul, for which this earth has become too narrow and contracted. Ye heavens, unfold! Ye boundaries of earth and time, retire; for his abode is no longer below.—*Krummacher.*

[18414] The prophet has finished his work upon earth, and the stormy labours of the day are followed by a beautiful evening, tinged with the golden light of another and a blissful world. He is like the mariner, who, after a long and perilous voyage, is now in sight of his harbour, and joyfully hastens to strike his topmasts, and take in his sails. He walks for a few days longer, as if already within hearing of the music of heaven; and can now gratefully recount some of the fruits of his labours, for they begin to manifest themselves more clearly to his view.—*Ibid.*

[18415] God made a stormy life close with a glorious setting; when the cloudy, fitful, changeful moods of his own spirit had, by varied discipline, subsided into calm faith and obedience and trust, he was borne upwards to that rest for the storm-tossed, where “earthquake and whirlwind and fire” are known no more, to listen through eternal ages to the “still small voice.” Enoch-like, “he was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation, he had this testimony that he pleased God.”—*Rev. J. Macduff, D.D.*

IX. THE CHIEF MORAL ELEMENTS OF WHICH HIS CHARACTER WAS COMPOSED.

I Clearness of vision.

[18416] “The Lord liveth, before whom I stand.” How distinct and abiding must the vision of God have been, which burned before the inward eye of the man that struck out that phrase! Wherever I am, whatever I do, I am before Him. To my purged eye, there is the Apocalypse of heaven, and I behold the great throne, and the solemn ranks of ministering spirits, my fellow-servants, hearkening to the voice of His word. No excitement of work, no strain of effort, no distraction of circumstances, no glitter of gold, or dazzle of earthly brightness, dimmed

that vision for this prophet.—*Rev. A. Maclaren, D.D.*

2 Readiness to hear the Divine command.

[18417] He stands before the Lord, not only feeling in his thrilling spirit that God is ever near him, but also that His word is ever coming forth to him, with imperative authority. That is the prophet's conception of life. Wherever he is, he hears a voice saying, This is the way, walk ye in it. Every place where he stands is as the very holy place of the oracles of the Most High, the spot in the innermost shrine where the voice of the God is audible. All circumstances are the voice of God, commanding or restraining. He is evermore pursued, nay, rather upheld and guided, by an all-embracing law. That law is no mere utterance of iron impersonal duty—a thought which may make men slaves, but never makes them good. But it is the voice of the living God, loving and beloved, whose tender care for His children modulates His voice, while He commands them for their good. He speaks because He loves; His law is life. The heart that hears Him speak is filled with music.—*Ibid.*

[18418] We know not how long he continued at his adopted home after the miraculous raising of the child. But be the time long or short, he quietly waits the Divine will regarding his departure. As in his former seclusion at Cherith, so, still more on the present occasion might he have been disposed, with his ardent impulsive spirit, to fret under this long withdrawal from active public work. Three of the best years of his life spent in inaction! He who could exercise (as we shall find afterwards) an almost magic power over multitudes, why should he be pent up for this protracted period in a cottage of Gentile Phœnicia, when he might have been doing mighty deeds amid the many thousands of Israel? Why should so noble a vessel be left lazily sleeping on its shadows in the harbour, when, with all sail set, it might have been out wrestling with the storm, conveying priceless stores to needy hearts? But it was enough for Elijah, now as formerly, to feel assured that it was part of the Divine plan. He felt that he was glorifying his God—just because he was occupying his assigned and appointed place for the time—as much in that humble habitation as he did on the heights of Carmel. Elijah did not love for its own sake inglorious ease. So long as it was his Lord's will, he remained seated under this pleasant vine and fig-tree. But, like a true soldier, he was prepared at the bugle note to start from his pillow, assume his armour, and rush into the fight.—*Rev. J. Macduff, D.D.*

3 Promptness to obey.

[18419] "And the word of the Lord came to Elijah in the third year, saying, Go, shew thyself unto Ahab, and I will send rain upon the earth." He did not hesitate. With cheerful alacrity he grasps his pilgrim staff, flings the

hermit mantle once more around his shoulders, and crosses into the valleys of Samaria.—*Ibid.*

[18420] "Get thee hence, and turn thee eastward, and hide thee by the brook Cherith, that is before Jordan, and it shall be that thou shalt drink of the brook; and I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there. So he went and did according to the word of the Lord." How simply, and yet how forcibly, does this describe the implicit obedience of the prophet! "He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God." He went forth, from the presence of the king, to the lonely brook of Cherith, leaning, only, on the arm of Him, who is mightier than the mightiest, and looking, only, to that sure word of promise, which he had received from Him, "I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there."—*Rev. M. Anderson, M.A.*

[18421] "As the Lord liveth, before whom I stand"—the utterance of a man to whom his life was not only bright with the radiance of the Divine presence, and musical with the voice of a Divine command, but was also, on his part, full of conscious obedience.—*Rev. A. Maclaren, D.D.*

X. CONTRAST BETWEEN ELIJAH AND ELISHA.

1 As regards training and mental temperament.

[18422] The one was the rough child of the desert, without recorded parentage or lineage. His congenial and appropriate home the wilds of Cherith—the thunder-gloom of Carmel—the shade of the wilderness juniper—the awful cliffs of Sinai—a direct messenger of wrath from heaven—the prophet of fire! The other is trained and nurtured under the roof of a genial home—mingling daily in the interchange of domestic affection—loving and beloved. No ambitious thought had he beyond his patrimonial acres—tending his parents in their old age; ministering to their wants; and, when the time came, laying their dust in the sepulchre of his fathers. Even his physical appearance is in striking contrast with that of the other. In the glimpses we have of his outer life, we look in vain for the stately mien and shaggy raven locks and rough hairy dress of the Bedouin. If we are most familiar with the one in rocky wilds, caves—deserts—mountain solitudes; we are so, with the other, among the homesteads of Israel, or leading a city life, as a foster-father, among the schools of the prophets. If the one has been likened to the sun, the other has the softened lustre of the moon, or of the quiet evening star. If the one be like his great future successor, "laying the axe to the root of the tree"—making the thronging crowds tremble and cower under words of doom—the other is surely a faint but lovely reflection of the Baptist's greater Lord, who would not "break the bruised reed nor quench the smoking flax;"

loving ever to deal, in the case of sensitive consciences, with the utmost tenderness; as we see exemplified in his treatment of Naaman's scruples to bow with his master in the temple of Rimmon.—*Rev. J. Macduff, D.D.*

[18423] Their very names stand in emphatic contrast. The one meaning either "My God, the Lord," or else, perhaps, "The strength of God," or "The strong Lord"—*strength*, the lion-symbol, being specially associated with the deeds of Elijah. The other, Eli-sha, "God is my Saviour," or, "God my salvation." If the Tishbite's motto was "Jehovah, the strong Lord, liveth," Elisha's might appropriately be that of a lowly saint of coming days, "My soul doth magnify the Lord, my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour."—*Ibid.*

[18424] The resemblances between Elijah and Elisha are occasionally so great, that it is scarcely surprising the one prophet is confused with the other. They both lived in one country and in one age. They were both the messengers of God to kings. They both wrought miracles, and even the same class of miracles, multiplying the widow's oil, and raising from the dead a mother's only child. Last of all, the life-work of both was to withstand and witness against idolatry, and restore the worship of the true God in the land of Israel. And yet there is no contrast in the Bible more striking and complete. What John was to Peter, Mary to Martha, Melancthon to Luther, that was Elisha, the prophet of peace, to Elijah, the desert prophet—the prophet of fire. The one is John the Baptist, the other is the gentler John—the Evangelist, the disciple of love—who, leaning on his master's bosom, caught and breathed a kindred spirit.—*Rev. H. Howat.*

2 As regards personal mien and mode of life.

[18425] In place of the long shaggy locks that had marked the awful Elijah, the head of the new and youthful prophet was shorn and smooth. Instead of the sheepskin mantle, he wore the attire of the period. In his hand he carried a walking staff. His whole gait was that of the ordinary citizen. Elisha was no lonely man, dwelling in the grot of Cherith or the solitudes of the wilderness. He had his own house in Samaria. He was known in far Damascus. He was a frequent visitor to the sacred colleges in the beautiful woods that encompassed Jericho. Elijah simply drops upon the scene. There is no warning, no period of pupillage or preparation. Of his previous history nothing whatever is known. Like Melchisedek he has neither "beginning of days nor end of life."—*Ibid.*

[18426] During the whole of his public life—about twelve years at the most—Elijah to a large extent lived out of the world, or at least far above it, in stern sublimity. As he dropped upon the scene at the first, so, during the greater part of his course, he appears less like a living

man than like an apparition. He flits hither and thither. He is seen now on the top of Carmel, and now in the vineyard of Naboth; now at the rock of Horeb, and now outstripping in their flight the royal horses, as on that night of the tempest he rushed through the gate of Jezreel. Elisha, on the other hand, is intimately mixed up with all the political movements and events of his day. Three kings seek him as their counsellor. Jehu is crowned at his bidding. Ben-hadad consults him in war. Joash attends at his deathbed.—*Ibid.*

3 As regards moral and spiritual character.

[18427] In the contrast between Elijah and Elisha, it cannot be out of place to say that of Elisha, like Joshua the son of Nun, not a single infirmity or failing is recorded. This cannot be said of Elijah, for he fled into the wilderness and lay down under the juniper tree to escape a woman's vengeance, and in despair to die. No doubt Elisha was only "a man of like passions" with ourselves; but, judging by the evidence presented, he came nearer the standard of excellence than Elijah, and was morally and spiritually the greater man. In grandeur and romance of character, all must admit Elisha must stand behind Elijah, and be content to be known as the disciple and servant that "poured water on his hands." "Nations," says Dean Stanley, "churches, individuals, must all be content to feel as draws in comparison with the giants of old times, with the Reformers, the Martyrs, the heroes of their early youthful reverence. Those who follow cannot be as those who went before. A prophet like Elijah comes once and does not return. Elisha, both to his countrymen and to us, is but the successor, the faint reflection of his predecessor."—*Ibid.*

4 As regards the specific character of their respective missions, and their distinctive qualifications for their appointed tasks.

[18428] The one was a destroyer. Baal, the reputed "lord of force," or "power," had, as we have seen, usurped the place and prerogative of Jehovah. Elijah's task was to overturn this false deity of force, and show, by startling miracle and judgment, that "power belongeth unto God." Elisha was the healer—beneficence tracked his path. As his master's career was inaugurated with a miracle of drought and famine, his, on the contrary, was inaugurated by the healing of the waters at Jericho, and the warding off the curse of barrenness! In a word, the one was the "Boanerges" of his time—a "Son of Thunder!"—the other was "Barnabas," "the Son of Consolation." The one stands before us "the man of like passions," the other, the man of like sensibilities.—*Rev. J. Macduff, D.D.*

[18429] Whenever Elijah is seen in connection with kings and courts, it is always as their enemy—Ahab, Jezebel, Ahaziah. When Elisha is seen in the same connection, it is always as their friend—"My father, my father," is their

uniform and reverent mode of address.—*Rev. H. T. Howat.*

5 As regards the number and antagonistic nature of their miracles.

[18430] It is noticeable that Elisha wrought twice as many miracles as Elijah did, suggesting the inference that the parting request had been complied with to the letter: "And Elisha said, I pray thee let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me." On his introduction to work, Elijah begins with a miracle—the emblem of so much of his future career—a miracle of judgment: "There shall not be dew nor rain these years," referring to the drought, "but according to my word." Elisha begins with a miracle—the emblem also of so much of his future career—but it is a miracle of mercy: "There shall not be from thence," speaking of the bitter waters of Jericho sweetened, "any more death or barren land." The miracles of Elisha, in fact, remind us very much of the miracles of Christ—miracles of beneficence.—*Ibid.*

6 As regards the close of their earthly life.

[18431] For Elijah there came down the burning equipage, swift as the lightning, more vivid than any flash—a chariot of fire with horses of fire, and there, as the tempest weaves itself around the aged prophet, Elijah goes up "by a whirlwind into heaven." The picture of Elisha, on the other hand, is that of an old emaciated man, the earthly house of whose tabernacle has to be taken down by long and wearing sickness, before he can pass up into the heavenly places. In the case of Elijah, there is a suspension of all the ordinary laws of nature: "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye," the servant is with his Lord. Elisha, however, must suffer—his is to be the hard and weary lot that must patiently await the end.—*Ibid.*

XI. CONTRAST (IN ITS ASCETIC ISOLATION) BETWEEN THE LIFE OF ELIJAH AND THAT OF OTHER PROMINENT FIGURES ON THE ROLL OF HEBREW WRITERS.

[18432] Pilgrim and wayfarer as he was, with his movable dwellings and altar, we are familiar with Abraham as "the Father,"—the patriarchal chief or sheik, surrounded with the hum of living voices and deserted tents,—with wife and sister's son and children, slaves and herdsmen—ever ready, when occasion requires, to dispense the rites of Eastern hospitality. In the life of Moses, we come in contact at every turn with the same human relationships and sympathies. We can think of his own mother singing Hebrew lullabies by his cradle. We are allowed to picture him in his boyhood, disciplined under the strange influence of the court of Pharaoh, instructed in the sacred schools of Heliopolis "in all the wisdom of the Egyptians." Even in his wilderness exile, the loneliest period of his life, we find him associated, as a family man, with the household and flocks of Jethro.

Samuel, kindred in many respects as he was with the Tishbite in his prophetic calling, was surrounded with the sanctities of a double home and parentage. We see, on the one hand, the mother who, from his lisping infancy, "lent him to the Lord," year by year bringing him his "little coat" to the sanctuary at Shiloh. On the other, the venerated foster-father on whom he dutifully waited in that curtained tabernacle where "the lamp of God was burning," instilling into his susceptible soul his earliest lessons of heavenly wisdom. David's whole life is domestic, full of tender delineations of strong human sympathies and clinging friendships, manifested alike in the family homestead, the martial camp, and the palace of Zion. Even Elisha, as a writer has remarked, "had his yoke of oxen, parents to bid adieu to, a servant, Gehazi, in attendance on him, the sons of prophets in converse with him. But the mention of Elijah is at intervals, as one appearing in peopled neighbourhoods—no one knew from whence—in the desert, on the hill-tops—seen and recognized as by surprise, in the hairy garment of the prophet;—the solitary of God—as one without scrip or purse,—even, it may be, as He who had not 'where to lay His head'—having food to eat which man wot not of."—*Rev. J. Macduff, D.D.*

XII. SIMILARITY BETWEEN ELIJAH AND JOHN THE BAPTIST, AS REGARDS BOTH CHARACTER AND MISSION.

[18433] In the sternness and power of his reproofs he was a striking type of John the Baptist, and the latter is therefore prophesied of under his name: "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord" (Mal. iv. 5, 6). Our Saviour also declares that Elijah had already come in spirit in the person of John the Baptist. Many of the Jews in our Lord's time believed him to be Elijah, or that the soul of Elijah had passed into his body (Luke ix. 8).—*Cyclopædia of Biblical Literature.*

[18434] It was by this man's name that John the Baptist was foretold, and, when he came, was recognized. The son of Zacharias resembled Elias in his desert ministry, the severity of dress and tone. He resembled him in the solitary grandeur of his position; prophets both, but alone among prophets, doing a work for God such as others could not do, and after a fashion all their own; they held their places not by lineage or training, but in virtue of a singular anointing. John was Elias in his "spirit," the iron courage that comes of being all filled with truth and purity, and electric urgency in persuading men how solemn a thing it is that they have to do with the living God. And John was Elias in his "power," the only true spiritual power there is, that of close fellowship with God in holiness and prayer. These obvious resemblances force on us certain pathetic contrasts.

Unlike Elias, the son of Elisabeth has a genealogy, one of peculiar honour, in which an archangel took interest. John did no miracle, that his giant feats, performed with the two-edged sword of truth, might be the more conspicuous. When his mission was fulfilled, there came no chariot of fire to receive John: to him the vision of the holy mount was not granted. Even in the manner of his dying he must still be the forerunner of Jesus,—Herod for Pilate, the axe for the cross. But it was “a greater than” Elisha whose way he prepared; and when the headsman came to him in his cell, there would come also angels to remind John of his own words, “The friend of the Bridegroom, who standeth and heareth Him, rejoiceth greatly because of the Bridegroom’s voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled.”—*Rev. A. Symington, D.D.*

XIII. CHARACTER OF ELIJAH’S PROPHECIES.

They were temporal rather than evangelical.

[18435] Elijah and Elisha are two of the most distinguished of the whole line of prophets, though they have left no writings behind them, and in this part of the Books of Kings, the record of their sayings and doings, rather than the reigns of the kings, assumes the chief place in the narrative. It should be noted, however, that they were “ministers of the temporal prophecy” (Davison, on “Prophecy”), as distinguished from the evangelical prophets, *i.e.*, their prophecies related to the state of the kingdom of Israel, its corruptions and its fortunes, rather than to the kingdom of the Messiah.—*Dp. of Bath and Wells.*

XIV. TRADITIONAL VIEWS.

1 Rabbinical.

[18436] The mysterious obscurity in which the origin of Elijah is shrouded, his significant name, and the remarkable events of his history, in the greater part of which the ordinary laws of nature are suspended or reversed, as though a superior power, with disturbing force, had descended amid the elements of this lower world—these have given occasion for various conjectures among the Rabbinical writers, nearly all of them attributing to him a supernatural origin. And as some of these opinions have been favourably entertained by Christian commentators, I shall briefly allude to a few of them. The first I shall mention only for the purpose of at once rejecting it. It is, that Elijah was a manifestation of the Messiah. This has been strongly asserted by some of the Jewish rabbis, who do not, of course, receive the apostles’ account of the Transfiguration; but the fact that Elias was one of those who appeared in glory on the Mount of Transfiguration conversing with Christ, at once disproves his identity with Christ. Others suppose John the Baptist and Elijah identical, from the striking

similarity of the general features in their character and external appearance; from the extraordinary manner in which the prophecies relating to both are blended; and from the prevalent conjecture that Elias or John the Baptist had appeared when God manifested Himself in the flesh: but most of all from our Lord’s express declaration, that “this was Elias which was for to come;” and again, that “Elias has indeed come, and they did unto him as they listed,” which our Lord spake, and the disciples understood Him to speak of John the Baptist. Others suppose that Elijah was an incarnate angel. Others a manifestation of the Supreme Being, though not the Messiah. To these two last opinions it has been objected, that St. James tells us that Elias was a man subject to like passions, or rather propensities, as we are.—*Rev. J. Hiffenan.*

2 Mahommedan and Persian.

[18437] In the Mahommedan traditions, *Ilyâs* is said to have drank of the fountain of life “by virtue of which he still lives, and will live to the day of judgment.” He is by some confounded with St. George, and with the mysterious *el-Khidr*, one of the most remarkable of the Moslem saints. The Persian *Sofis* are said to trace themselves back to Elijah; and he is even held to have been the teacher of Zoroaster.—*Cyclopædia of Biblical Literature.*

XV. HOMILETICAL HINTS.

1 The despondency of Elijah affords a source of comfort in the thought that even he was a man “of like passions with ourselves.”

[18438] Overwrought by the excitement of Carmel, exhausted with his long run before the chariot of Ahab, even Elijah’s splendid physique gives way, dragging down the mind with it, and fleeing into the wilderness, he makes the spiritless request that he may die. Is it not well for our sakes that it was so? Is it not a relief, does it not help to preserve us from despair, and lead us to perseverance to know that we are not so unlike the greatest heroes of the mighty dead after all? that they, no less than we are, were exposed to nature’s weakness and temptation’s wiles?—*M. J.*

2 The despondency of Elijah illustrates the fact that the spiritual sufficiency of even the mightiest heroes of faith was not of themselves, but of God.

[18439] The moment God left Elijah to himself, though in never so slight a degree, and for never so short a time, that moment his natural weakness displayed itself, and he gave way. It is a grave warning to us, for we are no Elijahs. Let us distrust ourselves and trust only in God; let us beseech Him to leave us not an instant without the help of His grace, to lead us Himself step by step; let us pray often, “Hold Thou up my goings in Thy paths, that my footsteps slip not.”—*Ibid.*

3 The despondency of Elijah illustrates the foolishness which attends impatient wishes.

[18440] The foolishness of Elijah's despondent wish is very apparent when we recollect his strange destiny—that *to die* was the very experience which he of all men was destined not to undergo. Here he wished impatiently for that very thing which God, in His wondrous mercy, had predetermined to spare him! Why was Elijah thus foolish in his wish? Because he was shortsighted and could not see afar off. He a prophet and shortsighted! Then how foolish and how blind are we! We must hide our faces in the dust, and confess that we have often wished for that which we know now, or shall know hereafter, would have been, could we have had it, for our hurt and hindrance. Oh! how weak and poor, how foolish and shortsighted, how far below the goodness which God designs for us, are our impatient wishes!—*Ibid.*

[18441] "It is enough, O Lord; take away my life, for I am no better than my fathers." "Who," asks Dr. Kitto, "told Elijah it was 'enough'?" God did not; He knew what was enough for Elijah to do and to suffer. It was not enough. God had more to teach him, and had more work for him to do. If the Lord had taken him at his word, and had also said, "It is enough," Elijah's history would have wanted its crowning glory." Perhaps we shall be permitted to see in heaven how disastrous it would have been for us if our merciful and loving Father had sometimes taken us at our word, instead of bearing in wondrous patience with His wayward and impatient children.—*Ibid.*

[18442] As to when it is enough of work or suffering in our case, God is the best Judge, and not we. He who gave life with capacities for toil and pain must alone say when there has been enough of suffering and toil. He who has eternity in store for us can alone say when we have wrought sufficiently in time. We may be sure that His season will be the right one, whereas ours would be often the wrong. When Elijah said, "It is enough," God had still something for him to do, and a wondrously glorious departure for His servant at the end, very different from the lonely death in the wilderness which he desired.—*Ibid.*

4 The history of Elijah illustrates the fact that the element which gives true dignity to any line of life or action is conformity to the will of God.

[18443] Elijah's history tells us that no line of action is so abstractedly preferable to others, as that, in all seasons and circumstances, it is the "more excellent way." It is its conformity to the leadings of Providence and the attractions of grace, which alone can sanctify any action, however useful and excellent in its nature. And that conformity to the recognized will of God, that meek submission, that patient resignation, that self-denying, loving obedience, can dignify

the meanest actions and hallow the most secular. By its sublimating energy it can waft up before God, "from the golden altar which is before the throne, with the prayers of all saints," the humble labours of the pious "servant, obedient to his master after the flesh, in singleness of heart, as unto Christ; not with eye service, as a man-pleaser, but as the servant of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart." It can dignify as well as hallow the submissive resignation of the meek pauper, who humbly craves the often refused boon of charity, or the meanest toils of the patient husbandman, doomed of Providence

"To force a churlish soil for scanty bread."

—*Rev. J. Hiffeman.*

ELISHA.

I. HIS CALL.

It was waited for, but obeyed unhesitatingly and without reserve when it came.

[18444] Very marked was Elisha's readiness to hear the call of God. It is dangerous either to push before or to lag behind the providence or the call of God. If the Lord has work for us, He will call us to it. But we must cultivate a spirit of attentive, prayerful readiness. Not that we expect an audible call from heaven, or trust to an inward voice, but that God will so dispose of all things as to make our duty very plain. For this we must be content to wait; when it comes, we must be willing to obey and to follow. Moses was left for forty years in Midian before he was called to be the leader of Israel; Elisha followed for many years the plough; and we may have before us years of labour and of trial. Yet, when the call came, Elisha immediately recognized that for which he had long been prepared in heart.—*Rev. A. Ederstein, D.D.*

[18445] Observe, when that call came it was obeyed without a question. He asked not to what it would lead, or where he was to go. There was no bargaining with God. The response was immediate and unequivocal. It was "Here am I, send me" of one of after days. It is this ready obedience that honours God.—*Rev. F. Whitfield.*

[18446] Remember, remember, God's call involves entire separation. See it in the case of Elisha. He felt it was a farewell to all the past, home with all its affections, friends with all their sympathies and social joys—all have to be left. Like Abram, he felt he had to leave country, home, kindred, and go he knew not where. Yes, it was separation entire and complete. It was a last farewell. Never again is Abel-meholah heard of in Elisha's history. Never again is he once seen at the family

hearth. All had been left at the call of God, and left for ever.—*Ibid.*

[18447] The act of Elijah, as, in passing by, he unfastened his mantle and threw it over Elisha, was deeply significant. It meant that the one was to appear like the other—that he was to hold the same office, and to discharge the same functions. With the quickness of a ready heart, the son of Shaphat understood the meaning of this action. It was not to a position of wealth, of ease, or of influence he now felt called. On the contrary, all this had to be relinquished. He, a man of peace, was called from home, friends, and comforts, to endure hardship, to suffer persecution, to bear scorn. Yet he offered not frivolous excuses nor unbelieving objections, but arose and followed the Master. Elijah had passed on, as if unconcerned how Elisha received the call. It had been addressed to him, and it was his part voluntarily to decide for or against its acceptance. This explains what follows in the narrative. Hastening after the prophet, Elisha requested permission to bid farewell to his family and friends; or, as Matthew Henry puts it, he would “*take leave, not ask leave.*” The answer of Elijah, “*Go back, for what have I done unto thee?*” is intended not as a rebuke, but as a trial. It meant, in effect, Unless your heart fully responds, if it fondly lingers on the past, go back to your home.—*Rev. A. Ederstein, D.D.*

II. HIS REQUEST.

It was prompted by the purest and loftiest spirituality.

[18448] “*And it came to pass, when they were gone over, that Elijah said unto Elisha, Ask what I shall do for thee, before I be taken away from thee.*” What a glorious chance was here for Elisha to make his fortune! The great prophet, on the point of ascending to the throne of God, gave him leave to ask anything his heart desired, with an intimation that it should be granted. What would have been thy request, O man? How many would have said, “*My lord, give thy servant to possess that beautiful tract of country;*” or, “*Grant thy servant that post of honour?*” But what said this man of God? There was nothing on earth he so much desired as the necessary gifts and graces to serve God as His prophet in Israel. “*And Elisha said, I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me.*” That was a noble wish, Elisha, and if there is an ear in heaven that regards pious requests, thou wilt obtain the desire of thy heart.—*Rev. E. Griffin, D.D.*

[18449] This was the temper of Elisha. He had an opportunity to take his choice among all possible blessings. But standing by the side of the holy prophet as he was ascending to God, standing with his eye full of heaven, he cared not for all the lands and honours of his nation. His soul arose above them all. Nothing less

than the Holy Ghost could satisfy his desires. It was the first opportunity he ever had for such a choice; it was likely to be the last. His soul arose like a collected flood, and burst forth in this aspiration: “*I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me.*”—*Ibid.*

[18450] What was this spirit of Elijah which his follower so earnestly desired? We cannot assume that it was the power of working wonders, though there are no miracles in the Old Testament, except those of Moses, which can be compared in number and variety with the wonders that Elisha did. But I do not think that it was the power of working miracles that Elisha most desired when he made his last request. It was a double portion of his master's spirit that he asked for, not a double portion of his power. Of course, double power might come with a double portion of the spirit, but I doubt whether that was uppermost in Elisha's mind. For what was the spirit of Elijah? The angel Gabriel has described it in the New Testament, where he says of John the Baptist, “*He shall go before the Lord in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.*” Here we have the spirit and power of Elijah explained and exhibited in the character of John the Baptist. And what is that spirit and that power? It is preaching power, converting power, power to work upon the disobedient heart, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord. And when we add the words of the Jewish people who came to Jesus beyond Jordan, after John the Baptist had fulfilled his course, we are still more impressed with the same thing. “*John did no miracle, but all things whatsoever he spake of this man were true.*” No, the spirit of Elias is not the power to work miracles, it is the spirit that speaks truth about the Lord Jesus, that wins souls to Him, and makes ready a people prepared for the Lord. This was the hard thing that Elisha asked when he clung so closely to his master in his last hour on earth.—*Rev. C. Waller.*

III. ELEMENTS IN HIS CHARACTER.

I Filial affection.

[18451] “*Let me go and kiss my father, and my mother, and then I will follow thee.*” There will always be this in true religious training. “*Without natural affection*” is one of the conspicuous marks of the perilous times of the last days; and where this does not exist, we may well suspect the spiritual character of any young man or woman, however striking such a character may be to the outward eye. Natural affection, and faithfulness to God in homely callings and duties, are surely allied, and without them there will be no real excellence of character nor any permanent witness for God. The most dutiful and affectionate son or daughter,

combined with genuine love to the Saviour and faithfulness in homely duties, will make the best and truest servant of Christ, and be the best benefactor of the race. These are the men and women that will adorn society.—*Rev. F. Whitfield.*

2 Sensibility.

[18452] "Bring me a minstrel!" cries the prophet. He needed medicinal music. Art, and especially the art of music, is the handmaid of religion. This is not ritualism. Because art (like so many other of God's good gifts) is misused, misapplied, and degraded, as an eminent art-critic has not too sarcastically said, to the level of "waxworks" in certain sensuous services, that is no reason why there is to be nothing of the artistic and the æsthetic in the worship of God. "Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your cieled houses, and this house lie waste?" The power of music in particular—the concord of sweet sounds—to soothe the brain, to calm the nerves and elevate the soul, is well known. The noblest passages in "Paradise Lost" were composed as Milton's daughter played to her father on the organ. We all remember how David's harp chased away the evil spirit from Saul. The father of medicine himself—Æsculapius—appears in ancient history as healing diseases with songs. The philosopher Pythagoras quieted the troubles of his mind with the lyre.—*Rev. H. Howat.*

[18453] Elisha's spirit had been discomposed by this scene. He needed calmness. The Spirit of the Lord cannot speak till the soul has been brought into harmony. Whether we be Christians or unconverted, the "hand of the Lord" must be laid upon us before we can speak for God, or be a blessing to the needy ones around. Operating through the influence of music, the Spirit of God calmed his ruffled spirit, and now the hand of the Lord fell upon him.—*Rev. F. Whitfield.*

3 Discretion.

[18454] Encouraging as Elisha's message was, it involved great humiliation to Naaman. Elisha did not come to Naaman; Naaman had to go to Elisha, and most incongruous must have seemed the retinue at the head of which the Syrian chieftain now repaired to the humble home of the prophet. "Naaman came with his horses and his chariot, and stood at the door of the house of Elisha." At this point the conduct of the prophet almost becomes unintelligible, were it not explained by the character and bearing of Naaman himself. At any cost he must learn, what otherwise he could never have understood, the vast difference between Jehovah and the idols of Syria, and that simple faith and implicit obedience were the conditions of man's worship and of God's help. Elisha did not even go forth to meet the splendid *cortège*. He sent a messenger to direct Naaman to wash seven times in Jordan, with the promise that this application would prove effectual to his cure.

The special reason for each part of the prophet's conduct appears clearly from Naaman's indignant reply. He was disappointed at the bearing of the prophet; he was brought into contact with a religion utterly at variance with all his ideas; his pride rebelled against the distinction bestowed upon the waters of Israel over those of Damascus, and he held the latter to be as good, if not better, than any that flowed through the land of promise. But why should the prophet not have met him and explained the reason of these directions? That reason could not be explained. An explanation would have destroyed the meaning and purpose of the direction itself. We cannot understand the meaning of many trials; God does not explain them. To explain a trial would be to destroy its object, which is that of calling forth simple faith and implicit obedience. If we knew why the Lord sent us this or that trial, it would thereby cease to be a trial either of faith or of patience. Nor was Elisha uncourteous in his studied neglect of Naaman. This was Elisha's answer to the heathen mode of approaching God with horses and chariots, with talents of silver, and pieces of gold, and changes of raiment. It was to teach that the God of Israel could neither be overawed nor influenced by worldly greatness—that He was "the Most High."—*Rev. A. Eidersheim, D.D.*

4 Disinterestedness.

[18455] Though earnestly urged by Naaman, Elisha resolutely refused to receive any token of gratitude. Not from pride, for he had received the bounty of the Shunammite, and only lately the gift from Baal-shalisha, but, undoubtedly, for reasons connected with the spiritual welfare of those assembled around, both Jews and Syrians, and for the interests of the kingdom of God. For, strange as it may sound in our days, the reception of contributions is not the highest aim to be sought in Christians. There was something higher—the good of souls and the glory of God.—*Ibid.*

5 Humility.

[18456] The functions which Elisha had at first to perform were of a very humble character. He is described as pouring water on the hands of the prophet; or, in other words, as his personal attendant. There is a voluntary, and therefore false humility, when from choice men leave their proper stations, and the duties which God has assigned to them for positions and circumstances of their fanciful devising. But humility in the service of our Lord is not produced by outward means; nor is it self-sought. It consists in accepting with a ready heart whatever station God assigns to us. True service lies in setting the Master before us, wherever He may be pleased to place us, and in doing whatsoever our hand findeth to do, with our whole heart, cheerfully, and as unto the Lord. And such humility springs from grace within, not from circumstances without; such

service will find its ready opportunities of glorifying the Lord, whether at Abel-Meholah, or in attendance upon Elijah.—*Ibid.*

6 Faith.

[18457] When Elisha had smitten the waters with his mantle, a miracle far greater took place than even that which Joshua and Israel had witnessed. The waters of Jordan were divided hither and thither—not now before the ark of Jehovah, but before one who in his day and generation had holpen to bear it. If ever, here was proof offered that not the altar, but He to whom the altar is reared, imparts holiness and power, and that efficacy attaches not to any outward thing, but to the spiritual faith which clings to spiritual realities, and twines around them. But what a strong act of faith this on the part of Elisha! It seemed to show that, with age and trials, his faith had not grown weak and decrepit. As he neared the close of his pilgrimage, he would sum up all his former experience in one grand daring act of faith. He would risk all upon its issue. Such had been the faithfulness and loving-kindness of the Lord to him, such was his present trust in God, that in the most trying hour of all, as he stood by the waters of Jordan, he would stake all on this one act. With his mantle he would smite Jordan. It was as he had expected. They two went over on dry ground. And is not this true of every Christian? As he nears the close of his pilgrimage, and reaches the Jordan which has yet to be crossed, he must take the distinctive mark of his calling, his mantle and covering, the righteousness of Christ, and wrapping it up, in one grand act of faith smite with it the waters, the cold flood of death. Most assuredly they will part. The calmness, and sometimes the triumphant joy with which they who, in anticipation, had perhaps dreaded the last scene, are able to pass through those waters as on dry ground, is surely a miracle infinitely greater than even the literal dividing of the waters of Jordan.—*Ibid.*

7 Fidelity.

[18458] Elisha is brought into the presence of the three kings. Jehoram is perplexed before him. Jehoshaphat is abashed. The Viceroy of Edom being a heathen, looks on with bewilderment. Elisha has a select audience—a confederacy of three kings, in peril, imploring his succour. It was the first time the King of Israel and the Prophet of Israel had ever met. The meeting reminds us a little of that other meeting in the vineyard of Naboth, between Elijah and Jehoram's father: for the net in which Jehoram is entangled, and especially the words he uses, are substantially the position and the language of Ahab, when the cry escaped him: "Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?" Jehoram had been "found:" we have seen already, he really looked on God as his "enemy;" but like Elijah with Ahab, and Paul with Felix, Festus, and King Agrippa, the Prophet of Israel resolves on great plainness of

speech to the king. We must make this distinction. Elisha is not speaking as a subject. It is no time for idle, empty compliments, when the lives of three armies are in danger, through the infatuated rashness of one of their kings. Unsought by him, Elisha has got the opportunity, and he will signalize this first meeting by speaking the truth boldly to the first personage in the realm. "What have I to do with thee?" Elisha was not to be imposed upon. He knew well that although Jehoram had professedly put away the image of Baal, the prophets of Baal were still dear to his heart, and that probably some of them at that very moment were within the tents of his camp. "Get thee to the prophets of thy father and mother!" Men like Elisha have been the men in the world's history, that have made nations and saved nations. It is needless to quote names. They rise to all our memories: Luther with Charles V., John Knox with Mary Stuart. The language of Elisha was not defiance, it was fidelity—fidelity to the name of an outraged God.—*Rev. H. Howat.*

IV. HIS PROPHETIC MIRACLES.

[18459] During the times of Elijah and Elisha the people of Israel had been brought into a condition from which they could scarcely recover except by a resurrection. No other word would be sufficient to describe their restoration, either to prosperity or to holiness, except resurrection from the dead. It was therefore a fitting time to manifest the power of the resurrection, and this was actually done. Elijah had already begun the work. By raising the dead son of the widow of Sarepta, a thing that had not previously been seen in Israel, he proved that God can raise the dead. By his own departure in the chariot of fire, with the horses of fire, he made it manifest that the righteous has hope not only of resurrection, but of ascension to a higher and better world. Elisha continued the series of prophetic miracles. He restored the dead body of the Shunammite's son to life: doing in the land of Israel what his master had done on the borders of Zidon, and doing it under such circumstances that it reached the ears of the king. Elisha was not translated like his master; he fell sick and died, but his dead body was made the means of raising another man to life. The Jews themselves interpreted these symbols of resurrection in this way; for we read in the apocryphal book of Ecclesiasticus these words spoken of Elijah: "Blessed are they that saw thee and slept in love; for *we shall surely live.*" And of Elisha: "No word could overcome him; and after his death *his body prophesied.*" Thus we have very ancient authority for taking this miracle as a prophecy in fact, though not in word, of things that were to come to pass in the latter days.—*Rev. C. Waller.*

[18460] It is evident that all the various manifestations of resurrection-power, from the time of Elijah down to the prophet Jonah,

pointed to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, and if we ask, where was the necessity and what is the significance of so many different examples of the same thing, I think it may be answered that every several example teaches us some particular aspect of the resurrection. There are so many things to be exhibited, that no one event, however marvellous, could well foreshadow them all. For instance, the person whom Elisha raised was a Gentile; the son of the Shunammite was a Jew. The widow of Sarepta was a poor woman. The Shunammite was a noble lady, who had great possessions. But both were equal as regards death, who is the leveller of rich and poor. And in each case the resurrection was accomplished by contact with the body of the man of God. When Elisha sent Gehazi to lay his staff on the face of the child, "there was neither voice nor hearing;" "the child" was "not awaked." Mouth to mouth, and eye to eye, and hand to hand, the living prophet must lay himself on the dead body, before resurrection could take place. So it had been with Elijah before. And when the dead man "touched the bones of Elisha, he revived and stood upon his feet." How plainly do we see in all this, that personal union with the Saviour in His death and in His life is the only means of restoration for our souls.—*Ibid.*

V. HIS TYPICAL CHARACTER.

He was a striking type of Christ.

(1) *In the lengthened obscurity and comparatively brief recorded activity of his life.*

[18461] Elisha's life falls into several remarkable divisions. There is a period of domestic labour, and a period of attendance on Elijah: then twelve years of great celebrity and public activity: then nearly fifty years of comparative obscurity, but still occupied, undoubtedly, with the work of the Lord. These varied experiences remind us somewhat strangely of the domestic life and obscurity at Nazareth, protracted for thirty years, of which we have no history, and then the three years into which a whole lifetime of wondrous works and words were compressed. Many particular miracles of Elisha may be compared with particular works of Christ. He was also, in several striking instances, "a light to lighten the Gentiles," as well as "the glory of God's people Israel." And his weeping over the evils which he knew would come upon them, which he foresaw clearly, but was unable to prevent, is almost the only scene in the Old Testament that affords any parallel to the weeping over Jerusalem recorded by St. Luke.—*Ibid.*

(2) *In his close connection and intercourse with matters of this world.*

[18462] Like John the Baptist, Elijah to a large extent lived out of the world—away from and above it, in stern sublimity. Elisha, on the other hand, was a citizen of the world,

and mingled—as we would say in present-day language—in all the great national and political movements and events of his time. In like manner, one of the chief complaints against the Divine Author of Christianity was this: His publicity—"The Son of man came eating and drinking"—and His apparent insurrection against constituted authority. The first was true, for "He could not be hid," the second was false, for His kingdom was not of this world, else would His servants fight. The Elijah-like type of character—the hermit, the recluse, the solitary—was not reproduced in Jesus Christ. Such a type of character, in fact, was essentially unfitted for a religion that was to conquer the world. Christianity was to be a religion for common life. It was to meet the merchant on the Exchange, and go with the mariner on every sea.—*Rev. H. Howard.*

(3) *In the discerning of spirits and the reading of the thoughts and intents of the heart.*

[18463] "Went not mine heart with thee," said the prophet to Gehazi, "when the man turned again from his chariot to meet thee?" And Gehazi, as we saw, was unmasked on the spot. When Jehoram, at the siege of Samaria, sent the executioner to take the prophet's life, "See ye," said the man of God, "how this son of a murderer hath sent to take away mine head: shut the door and hold him fast at the door: is not the sound of his master's feet behind him?" Even in Syria the prophet's gift in this respect was known, and a courtier of Ben-hadad could say, "Elisha the prophet that is in Israel, telleth the king of Israel the words that thou speakest in thy bed-chamber." And to be convinced that such prescience, foreknowledge, "second sight"—to employ the misapplication of modern days—was a permanent endowment, and that ignorance was unusual, we have only to remember the scene at Carmel, when the Shunammite woman, driven by the urgency of a mother's love, sought out the prophet on the hill: "Her soul is vexed within her," said the prophet, "and the Lord hath hid it from me and hath not told me." Now how innumerable are the illustrations in the life of Christ of Divine prescience and discerning of spirits, as furnished in the four Gospels, I need not stay to tell. "He knew what was in man."—*Ibid.*

(4) *In his miracles.*

[18464] The miracle of the twenty barley loaves, and the multiplying of the widow's pot of oil, remind us vividly of Him who took five barley loaves and two small fishes in His hands, and with these fed five thousand men, besides women and children. The cleansing of Naaman alone contains the very sum and substance of the Gospel plan of salvation. "Then went he down, according to the saying of the man of God." A great struggle for the humbled man, but the child spirit rises to the ascendant; the better nature and the better resolve are uppermost, and so faith triumphs. That old river Jordan throughout the whole of that scene with

Naaman seems to me to be murmuring these words: "The blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanseth from all sin." That old story is still a living epistle of the power of God and the grace of salvation to every one that believeth. No previous sin, no previous erroneously religious views can ever disqualify from finding peace in Christ, if it only be sought in the right way. And thus Elisha, with his "Wash and be clean," will be a great preacher of Christianity to the end of time. The healing waters of Israel are now the healing waters for the world; alas! for those who refuse to bathe in them, and to find that all they have lost has only been the leprosy of a fallen nature, and what they have gained is a new life.—*Ibid.*

VI. CONTRAST WITH ELIJAH.

[18465] The well-known contrast between John the Baptist and the Saviour might have been marked between Elijah and Elisha before. Elijah "came neither eating bread nor drinking wine" in the company of his people. Like John the Baptist, he was in the deserts, solitary and apart from the haunts of men. But Elisha "came eating and drinking," mingling freely and fearlessly with society. "While he lived he was not moved with the presence of any prince." Kings and commanders, and elders of Israel, are found in his company. Ben-hadad, King of Syria, sent him a present "of every good thing of Damascus, forty camels' burden."—*Rev. C. Waller.*

[18466] Such was Elisha, greater yet less, less yet greater than Elijah. He is less. The man, the will, the personal grandeur of the prophet are greater than any amount of prophetic acts or any extent of prophetic success. He is greater. The work of the great ones of this earth is carried on by far inferior instruments, but on a far wider scale, and it may be in a far higher spirit. What was begun in fire and storm, in solitude and awful visions, must be carried on through winning arts, and healing acts, and gentle words of peaceful and social intercourse, not in the desert of Horeb or on the top of Carmel, but in the crowded thoroughfares of Samaria, in the gardens of Damascus, by the rushing waters of Jordan.—*Dean Stanley.*

VII. COMPARISON WITH ELIJAH AND JONAH.

[18467] Elisha, Jonah, and Elijah point us to Christ not only in what they did for others, but in what befell themselves. Elisha died and was buried. Jonah "descended into the deep," and "went down to the lower parts of the earth." He "cried out of the belly of hell," did all but descend into hell, and yet his life was brought up from corruption by the Lord. In the case of Elisha, we see death which is the source of life. In the case of Jonah, descent into the deep for three days and three nights, and then resurrection. In the case of Elijah, we see the ascension

into heaven, and the double portion of the spirit left to him who saw it, that he might do greater works than those of his master. Thus, from these three prophets, we obtain a complete sketch of the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ.—*Rev. C. Waller.*

VIII. HOMILETICAL REFLECTIONS.

- 1 The history of Elisha suggests that it is the character of good men to desire spiritual blessings more than any worldly advantage.

[18468] The great question, What is true religion? what is the Christian spirit? what is it to be a good man? may be answered correctly if we examine the Bible, and collect from its precepts, its examples, its history, all the light it sheds on this point. Bring together the different features of the Christian character which lie scattered over the sacred pages, and you will form a complete and beautiful whole, in which no feature is wanting, from which no feature can be spared, and in the whole of which such harmony prevails as shows that the different parts were intended to stand together in one glorious countenance. The particular feature now under consideration is a leading characteristic. It appeared in David; it appeared in Solomon; it has appeared in all the saints. Says David, "There be many that say, Who will show us any good?" [Who will show us any *worldly* good? is the cry of the world at large. Our concern is different.] "Lord, lift Thou up the light of Thy countenance upon us." When God appeared to Solomon and said, "Ask what I shall give thee," he chose wisdom in preference to all other things. And God said, "Because thou hast asked this thing, and hast not asked for thyself long life, neither hast asked riches for thyself, nor hast asked the life of thine enemies, but hast asked for thyself understanding to discern judgment; behold, I have done according to thy words: lo, I have given thee a wise and understanding heart, so that there was none like thee before thee, neither after thee shall any arise like unto thee. And I have also given thee that which thou hast not asked, both riches and honour; so that there shall not be any among the kings like unto thee all thy days."—*Rev. E. Griffin, D.D.*

- 2 The history of Elisha suggests the necessity of importunity in the desire for spiritual blessings.

[18469] The reason that real Christians do not receive more of the Divine Spirit is that they do not desire it with sufficient preference. One may habitually regard spiritual blessings more than the world, and yet not regard them enough. The world may still occupy too much of his mind, may engage an undue proportion of his cares and time, and appear more valuable than it really is. This is indeed the case with all Christians, and with some to a lamentable degree. If put to make their election between God and the world, they would cleave to God, and if called decisively to the trial, would suffer

martyrdom for His sake ; but this preference is not so strong and steady as always to overcome the temptations of the world. Their case is frequently that of a man who sighs for liberty but is loaded with chains. Their calculations for the time to come are in favour of God, but their present affections are after the world. Thus entangled, they advance but slowly towards heaven, and every step costs them far more toil and trouble than it does those who are more unlogged and free. Many seem to have just religion enough to make them wretched ; enough to distress their conscience in view of their sins, but not enough to give it peace ; enough to prevent them from enjoying the world as a portion, but not enough to raise them above its perplexities. Had I nothing but present happiness in view, I would give the advice in regard to religion which has been given in regard to human learning : "Drink deep, or taste not." This state of worldly incumbrance, which leaves little more than indecisive wishes, is the true reason why many Christians are limited to so small attainments. They sometimes wonder why they cannot arise to that communion with God which patriarchs and prophets enjoyed. Do you wonder still ? Do you wish to learn how to acquire the spirit of Elijah ? Let me lead you to Gilgal. Attend me as I follow the steps of those men of God to Bethel, to Jericho, to Jordan. Listen to their conversation. Mark distinctly the operations of Elisha's mind. His desires were stronger than death. None of this coldness which benumbs modern Christians ; no division of mind between God and the world. His whole soul was intent on obtaining a double portion of his master's spirit.—*Rev. E. Griffin, D.D.*

3 The history of Elisha illustrates the necessity of watchfulness to obtain spiritual blessings.

[18470] Desires, however intense, and prayers, however ardent, will not avail without watchfulness. Even the desires and prayers of Elisha could not prevail without this. After he had urged his request, the blessing was still suspended on his vigilance. "Thou hast asked a hard thing ; nevertheless if thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee ; but if not, it shall not be so." After this answer how vigilant do we conceive Elisha to have been. If I close my eyes, says he, or turn my head away, he may be gone. Every sense was awake. Methinks the groans of a dying child would not have called his eyes from his master. He watched him ; he clave to him ; he followed his steps ; he was attentive to every change in his countenance, to every appearance in the heavens. Everything was at stake. How often did he pray that nothing might dim his sight or interpose between him and the ascending prophet ! With the quickness of thought he saw the chariot and horses of fire in the air ; he saw his master taken up ; he cried, "My father, my father," and received his falling mantle. With

a more noble Master at our head, who has had a more glorious translation to heaven, we have equal need to fix our eyes on Him, and watch. We should watch every look, observe every motion, and catch from Him every word. For want of watchfulness many good desires and prayers have in a measure failed. Prayer and watchfulness comprehend the most important secrets of holy living. These were all that our Saviour thought necessary to press upon His disciples in that most perilous hour when earth and hell were let loose upon Him and upon them. "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation." The apostle repeats the injunction : "Watch unto prayer." Do you ask what we are to watch ? I answer, we are to keep our eyes attentively fixed on our Divine Master, that we may learn His will and catch His smiles. We are to watch the secret motions of His Spirit, that we may learn to cherish them. We are to watch the effects of our prayers, that we may seize the blessings as they fall. We are to watch the objects around us, that we may be guarded against those which inflame the passions, and may also gather instruction from the providence of God. We are to watch the approaches and wiles of our spiritual enemies, that we may not be surprised by their assault. We are to watch our own hearts, that we may keep them with all diligence ; our thoughts, that they do not wander.—*Ibid.*

4 The history of Elisha reminds us that "they also serve who only stand and wait."

[18471] For at least these forty-five years, from the accession of Jehu to that of Joash, the history of Elisha presents a blank. His ministry to Israel as a nation had ceased, and even his more private ministrations during that long period remain unnoticed and unknown. And if an Elisha was content for well nigh half a century to labour in obscurity, why should we despond, when outward tokens of success and visible results are denied us ? It is a good work in which we are engaged ; it is the work of the Lord. We labour in hope, we sow in faith ; the Lord will have the reaping, and safely garner it all. Paul, Apollos, and Cephas are only ministers, only servants. The kingdom is His, and to Him who is the King will we raise our hearts and hopes. So this half-century of ministry had absolutely nothing in it worth recording for the Church on earth, till the time of Elisha's sickness and death. Yet such a life could not close without some final testimony to its power and great object. If not otherwise, God may own us on our death-beds. The testimony of a life shall be sealed in death. Little do they know, who wonder at the afflictions of God's people, what precious lessons have been learned, what mighty sermons have been preached in sick-rooms and on death-beds. The letting down through the roof of the bed which bore the poor paralytic, laying him at the feet of Jesus, was itself a testimony more

powerful than many a long life.—*Rev. A. Eder-sheim, D.D.*

MAN OF GOD FROM JUDAH.

I. HIS COMMISSION.

- 1 It was of a public character, requiring great qualities for its faithful discharge.

[18472] The commission with which he was entrusted by God—nothing less than openly and publicly to rebuke Jeroboam for his idolatry—required great qualities in him who would efficiently discharge it. It was executed by the man of God fearlessly and faithfully. When we view him in his public life he commands our admiration. It is only when we examine his private affairs that we become conscious that, weighed in the balances, he is found wanting.—*M. 7.*

- 2 It involved a command affecting his private life.

[18473] He was to eat no bread and drink no water at Bethel, nor was he to return by the way by which he came. The reason of this command is not told to us. The former part of it may have been imposed that the man of God might have no fellowship with the idolaters of Bethel. But it is perhaps more likely that the design of God in this injunction was simply to try the prophet's constancy and moral strength.—*Ibid.*

II. HIS FALL.

[18474] The first temptation to disobedience came from Jeroboam. It came, indeed, from a sovereign, but from a sovereign whose practices the prophet had just faithfully denounced in the name of the Lord, and the invitation probably possessed little attraction for the man of God. It was not so, however, with the second trial to which he was exposed. The invitation of the old prophet of Bethel had, from whatever cause, a certain fascination for him of Judah. But he ought not to have yielded. God had laid a special command upon him, and God could not contradict Himself. The Lord had signified His will to the prophet by a special revelation, and the prophet allowed the word of a mere man to outweigh that revelation. There must have been some secret warp in the soul of the one which inclined him to the solicitation of the other.—*Ibid.*

[18475] The old prophet possibly regarded him as a rival prophet, of a rival tribe; perhaps was jealous of him, and thought scorn that a man of God from Judah should bring tidings to Bethel, to the house of God, of what her prophets knew not, even though they had grown old in the prophet's work. He thought not of his brother's honour, but of himself, seeking his

own glory, envious because a young stranger from Judah was preferred before him, and God had passed Israel by; and so, yielding to his own hasty impulse, he saddled his ass, and pursued his brother, and tempted him, to see what would become of his words. The man of God from Judah yielded, perhaps more easily than the old prophet had thought.—*Rev. C. Waller.*

[18476] He was deceived by a man older than himself, "a prophet as he was," who professed to have received from the lips of an angel the commission to bring him back. But he ought to have known better, and was doubtless condemned by his own conscience for accepting the invitation to return. We may plainly see a want of endurance, a want of firmness about the man. Elijah the Tishbite would not have been so deceived. He indeed would scarcely have ventured to rest under the oak so near Bethel, after the command to return secretly, and not to eat bread or drink water in the place. The prophet may have been overcome by the excitement of meeting King Jeroboam and withstanding him to his face, yet it was no mark of wisdom to repose himself until he was within reach of refreshment and nearer home. His heaviness and weariness could only increase upon him as he sat under the oak. He had no food with him; the longer he waited the less he would be disposed to press onward to his journey's end. If night had come on and found him nearer to Bethel than to the place from whence he came, the lions would have been about him, and he would have obeyed his instructions at the peril of his life. His want of endurance was fatal.—*Ibid.*

III. HIS PUNISHMENT.

- 1 It was announced by his seducer, and it followed speedily upon his fall.

[18477] The two prophets returned together to Bethel and sat down to the refreshment forbidden to the man of Judah. Then by a terrible irony he who had willingly played the false is compelled to be the true, and he who had listened only too readily to the lying voice, trembles as he hears the words of inspiration. It is often when men are at the table of wickedness that conscience cries most loudly within, and witnesses of coming judgment. Ere they have fairly swallowed the forbidden fruit, the voice of God is heard asking, "Where art thou?" Speedily came the predicted doom upon the prophet of Judah, "When he was gone a lion met him by the way and slew him."—*M. 7.*

- 2 It was necessary to the truth and faithfulness of God's word.

[18478] It is not always a mortal sin to be deceived by a false prophet, but in this case either God was made a liar or the man must die.—*Rev. C. Waller.*

[18479] If God's word failed in one instance,

why should it not fail in another? and so the word respecting Josiah and the altar and the Lord's anger against the idolatry of Jeroboam, against the transgression of the law of Moses, and the worship of the golden calf, might all be no better than an idle tale. The words spoken when the king was at the altar were notorious. Probably the occasion was a great one, the feast in the eighth month. King Jeroboam would not be at Bethel every day; his royal residence was at Shechem or Penuel. The old prophet in Bethel had heard the whole story, and it was known to many that the man of God from Judah must not eat bread or drink water in that place. Moreover, he had refused the royal reward and the invitation to the king's table, and he could not have remained unnoticed with the old prophet after that. The offence could not have been passed over, or the word of the Lord must fall to the ground.—*Ibid.*

3 It is not to be understood as involving the loss of his soul.

[18480] Not that we are to suppose the man of God from Judah to be a lost soul. God forbid! No, when the Word of God has read the burial service over "this our brother," as it commits his body to the ground, we cannot but believe that God hath taken him to Himself. Doubtless he was punished in this world that his soul might be saved in the day of the Lord. We may call it a military execution in time of war rather than the punishment of a common crime. After sentence executed, he is still *the man of God.*—*Ibid.*

4 The history of the man of God from Judah illustrates the truth that all spiritual privileges entail proportionate responsibility.

[18481] It was because the prophet of Judah had had opportunities of close communion with God, and of revelation from Him, that the responsibility of an absolutely perfect obedience rested upon him. We shall do well to bethink ourselves of the number and magnitude of the spiritual privileges which we to-day enjoy. We have the Bible translated into our mother tongue and an incomparable liturgy, both accessible to the poorest amongst us. Protestant Christianity is looked on from all sides with favouring and even fostering glances. The number of churches and chapels, too, has been multiplied again and again throughout the land. Will not these advantageous circumstances be considered when our account is made up before God? Shall we not be judged by a slightly different standard in these matters from that which will be applied, for instance, in the case of the members of the primitive Church of Christ?—*M. 7.*

5 The history of the man of God from Judah enforces the necessity of prompt and unquestioning obedience to the will of God wherever and whenever that will is plainly declared.

[18482] There was room in the prophet's mind for no sort of doubt upon the particular

point of duty regarding eating and drinking nothing at Bethel. The command was distinct and clear to the uttermost, its burthen was, "Thou shalt not." Now there do arise occasions in our lives when it is difficult to decide concerning two or more courses open to us, which of these two it is our duty to follow; let us note, in passing, the wisdom of applying in such a case for Divine guidance. But should we take wrong action, the sin is manifestly of an inferior kind, less in degree, than if, for instance, we break one of the ten commandments where the duty is clear and involved in no mist of doubt. In these last cases to sound a parley with Satan is nine times out of ten to surrender the citadel. Our only safety lies in instant obedience to the will of God. Had the prophet of Judah refused at once to listen to his brother of Bethel he would have heard no story of an angel, he would have conquered instead of being overcome.—*Ibid.*

6 The history of the man of God from Judah suggests that constitutional weakness of character should be guarded against, and is no excuse for falling into sin.

[18483] We may feel unwilling to condemn him. Should we have been more enduring in his place? Perhaps not. But this only proves our own weakness, it does not affect the justice of the judgment of God. This natural weakness is a dreadful thing, and may bring terrible consequences. It is of no use to excuse it. Let us rather confess it, and remember it and seek for the power of Christ to rest upon us, that we may not be weary in well-doing.—*Rev. C. Waller.*

HILKIAH.

I. HIS RECORDED HISTORY.

Its chief event was his discovery of the Book of the Law.

[18484] Hilkiah was the high priest in Israel during the reign of Josiah; he appears to have remained uncontaminated in the midst of the gross idolatry and immorality which prevailed in the country during his time, and was ready to co-operate with the king, who "did that which was right in the sight of the Lord." When the idols were to be removed and their altars pulled to the ground, he was ready with his counsel and help. His honest and straightforward manner won the confidence of the king, and Josiah appointed him to take an account of the money contributed by the people towards repairing the Lord's house, and to pay those engaged in the work. He was also one of those who were deputed by the king to inquire of Huldah, the prophetess, what were the decrees of God respecting the nation. But the principal event in the history of this good man was the discovery of the law of God in the temple

whilst looking after those engaged in repairing it.—*Anon.*

II. HOMILETICAL HINTS.

- 1 The finding of the Book of the Law by Hilkiah suggests that truth can be discovered by man only under certain conditions.

[18485] It is not known how this copy of the law of Moses was lost: it might have been thrown aside by those who desecrated the holy place; or it might have been hidden by some one who loved the law of his God "more than silver and gold," with the hope that it would be found at some future time. It was lost sight of for years; and in the time of Josiah the knowledge of the law had become very obscure, though other copies were probably still extant. As Hilkiah was engaged in superintending the work of repairing the temple, he came across the precious manuscript. It was in *God's house* it was found; and if the priest had deputed his work as overseer to another, he would have lost this honour. It may be that he had a presentiment that the copy was still undestroyed, and searched diligently for it whilst the repairs were being carried on. Many valuable truths have been shunted, whilst we in this fast age are being driven past, at express rate, having no time even to look at them. Not a few facts of priceless value are hid, like the roll in the temple, buried underneath heaps of prejudice, superstition, and dogmatism, which will remain so till some large soul, filled with love for truth, will appear on the scene, ready to sacrifice wealth, time, and strength, in order to remove the rubbish and bring these gems to the light of day. It is only the lovers of truth who become discoverers in the scientific world, and that not by chance, but by abiding in the temple of science, and by conforming to the conditions laid down by the goddess at whose shrine they worship. So it is in the spiritual realms of truth; it is only those who have sympathy with the true, whose eyes have been accustomed to the pure light of heaven, whose hearts are sensitive to rectitude, whose ears have been trained to catch the soul-thrilling whispers of the Eternal Father's love, who shall be crowned with the laurels of eternity as discoverers of the deep and soul-enlivening truths contained in the revealed will of God.—*Ibid.*

- 2 The discovery of the Book of the Law by Hilkiah suggests that discoverers of Divine truth cannot keep their knowledge to themselves.

[18486] When Hilkiah had satisfied himself that it was the long-lost copy of the law he had discovered, he told the news to Shaphan the scribe; who, after he had read a portion of it, communicated the fact to Josiah the king. How different this to the conduct of most persons as to material discoveries! The selfish element is so strong that the good of the individual is

consulted, rather than that of the community; thus the knowledge of valuable remedies for certain diseases is kept in the possession of individuals, and dies with them, inasmuch as they are afraid of others deriving any benefit from the knowledge of their secret. How anxious is the man who has succeeded in his invention, lest the secret mechanism be known to others before he reaps a rich harvest from his discovery! In a certain sense, he is not to be blamed. The spiritual seekers after truth, as soon as they find it, are anxious that others should have the same knowledge, "That I may publish with the voice of thanksgiving, and tell of all Thy wondrous works." Let a man possess the law of God, if the lips refuse to speak, the discovery cannot be hid, it will come to sight in the life. Even the enemies of the truth will be compelled to say of him, as it was said of Peter, "This fellow was also with Jesus of Nazareth." The "truth as it is in Jesus" becomes "a fountain of living waters" in the heart; and the society in which the man moves will perceive crystal streams flowing from him in merciful and benevolent deeds.—*Ibid.*

- 3 The discovery of the Book of the Law by Hilkiah suggests that a reformation will always follow the discovery of Divine truth.

[18487] King Josiah had given himself to the Lord when young, and had commenced to remodel the affairs of Israel before the book of the law had been found by Hilkiah. But his resolution became firmer, and his enthusiasm greater, when the law was read unto him; and this reformation was prosecuted with renewed energy (see 2 Kings xiii., xliii.). Finding the law of God, *i.e.*, having it embedded in the heart, produces the like results. This was the case with Luther, Knox, and others, who fired the people with their earnestness and sincerity. The secret of all true reformers is this, the deep truths of eternity found by them and occupying the central place in their souls. Any individual who will find "the pearl of great price" will have his heart cleansed from idols and restored to the worship of the true God. The law is read in the family and heard in the sanctuary by many without producing any apparent result; the reason of this is, the intellect alone is touched; when the seed is received into good ground—a sensitive heart—it will produce an abundant harvest.—*Ibid.*

JABEZ.

I. HIS NAME.

Given to him by his mother in commemoration of some special sorrow, its meaning was falsified by the distinguished honour to which he attained.

[18488] We do not know the particular reasons which influenced the mother of Jabez to

call him by that name, a name which means "Sorrowful." We are merely told, "His mother called his name Jabez, saying, Because I bare him with sorrow." Whether it were that she brought forth this son with more than common anguish, or whether, as it may have been, the time of his birth were the time of her widowhood, so that the child came and found no father to welcome him—the mother evidently felt but little of a mother's joy, and looked on her infant with forebodings and fears. Perhaps it could hardly have been her own bodily suffering which made her fasten on the boy a dark and gloomy appellation; for, the danger past, she would rather have given a name commemorative of deliverance, remembering "no more her anguish, for joy that a man was born into the world."—*Canon Melvill.*

[18489] With Jabez it was all gloom; the mother felt as if she could never be happy again: this boy brought nothing but an accession of care, anxiety, and grief, and if she must give him a name, let it be one which may always remind himself and others of the dark heritage to which he had been born. And yet the history of the family is gathered into the brief sentence, "Jabez was more honourable than his brethren." The child of sorrow outstripped all the others in those things which are "acceptable to God, and approved of men." Nothing is told us of his brethren, except that they were less honourable than himself; they too may have been excellent, and perhaps as much is implied; but Jabez took the lead, and whether or not the youngest in years, surpassed every other in piety and renown. Oh, if the mother lived to see the manhood of her sons, how strangely must the name Jabez, a name probably given in a moment of despondency and faithlessness, have fallen on her ear, as it was woven into message after message, each announcing that the child of sorrow was all that the most affectionate parent could wish, and more than the most aspiring could have hoped! She may then have regretted the gloomy and ominous name, feeling as though it reproached her for having yielded to her grief, and allowed herself to give way to dreary forebodings. It may have seemed to her as a standing memorial of her want of confidence in God, and of the falseness of human calculations.—*Ibid.*

[18490] To the mother of Jabez his entrance into the world was associated with some special suffering, and she named him "*sorrowful.*" Years rolled on, and God, by His prophet, knighted him and pronounced him "more honourable than his brethren." Yes, and it is even so now; according to our faith shall be the significance of our individual history. Let our vision be bounded by time and sense only, and life shall be a baptism of grief, with thorns for a crown, and "vanity" as life's "accusation written" and nailed to every sorrowful cross. But let faith widen our "coast," and expand our horizon, and all along the coast shall be hung

the lamps of "hope;" while "the evidence of things not seen" shall be to faith a substantial possession, winning "a good report"—a "more honourable" name than those who refuse to believe that "faith is the substance of things not seen, by which the elders obtained a good report."—*Anon.*

II. HIS PRAYER.

It appears to be characterized by a degree of spirituality remarkable in the prayer of an Old Testament saint.

(1) *In its first petition.*

[18491] What did Jabez pray for? For great things—great, if you suppose him to have spoken only as an heir of the temporal Canaan; greater, if you ascribe to him acquaintance with the mercies of redemption. "Oh, that Thou wouldst bless me *indeed!*" Many things pass for blessings which are not; to as many more we deny though we ought to give the character. There is a blessing in appearance which is not also a blessing in reality; and conversely, the reality may exist where the appearance is wanting. The man in prosperity appears to have, the man in adversity to be without, a blessing—yet how often does God bless by withholding and withdrawing, more frequently, it may be, than by giving and continuing! Therefore, "Oh, that Thou wouldst bless me indeed!" Let me not have what looks like blessing, and perhaps is not, but what is blessing, however unlike it may appear.—*Canon Melvill.*

(2) *In its second petition.*

[18492] "That Thou wouldst enlarge my coast." He probably speaks as one who had to win from the enemy his portion of the promised land. He knew that, as the Lord said to Joshua, "There remained yet very much land to be possessed:" it was not then necessarily as a man desirous of securing to himself a broader inheritance, it may have been as one who felt jealous that the idolater should still defile what God had set apart for His people, that he intreated the enlargement of his coast. And a Christian may use the same prayer; he, too, has to ask that his coast may be enlarged. Who amongst us has yet taken possession of one half the territory assigned him by God? . . . What districts of unpossessed territory are there in the Bible! how much of that blessed book has been comparatively unexamined by us! We have our favourite parts, and give only an occasional and cursory notice to the rest. How little practical use do we make of God's promises! how slow is our progress in that humbleness of mind, that strength of faith, and that holiness of life, which are as much a present reward as an evidence of fitness for the society of heaven! What need then for the prayer, "Oh, that Thou wouldst enlarge my coast!" I would not be circumscribed in spiritual things. I would not live always within these narrow bounds. There are bright and glorious tracts beyond. I would know more of

God, more of Christ, more of myself. I cannot be content to remain as I am, whilst there is so much to do, so much to learn, so much to enjoy. Oh for an enlargement of coast, that I may have a broader domain of Christian privilege, more eminences from which to catch glimpses of the fair rich land hereafter to be reached, and wider sphere in which to glorify God by devoting myself to His service!—*Ibid.*

(3) *In its third petition.*

[18493] "That Thou wouldest keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me." It is not an entreaty for exemption from evil—it were no pious wish, to have no evil whatsoever in our portion: "Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?" Jabez prayed not for the being kept from evil, but kept from the being grieved by evil. And there is a vast difference between the being visited by evil, and grieved by evil. He is grieved by evil, who does not receive it meekly and submissively, as the chastisement of his heavenly Father. He is grieved by evil, whom evil injures, in place of benefits—which latter is always God's purpose in its permission or appointment. He is grieved by evil, whom it drives into sin, and to whom, therefore, it furnishes cause of bitter repentance. You see, then, that Jabez showed great spiritual discernment in casting his prayer into this particular form. We too should pray, not absolutely that God would keep us from evil, but that He would so keep it from us, or us from it, that it may not grieve us.—*Ibid.*

III. HOMILETICAL HINTS.

1 The inappropriateness of the name of Jabez to his subsequent history is a caution against that despondency to which judgment from appearances often leads.

[18494] Judging only by present appearances, allowing our fears and feelings, rather than our faith, to take the estimate or fix the character of occurrences, we look with gloom on our friends, and with melancholy on our sources of good. Sickness, we call it Jabez, though it be sent to minister to our spiritual health; poverty, we call it Jabez, though coming to help us to the possession of heavenly riches; bereavement, we call it Jabez, though designed to graft us more closely into the household of God. Oh for a better judgment! or rather, oh for a simpler faith! We cannot, indeed, see the end from the beginning, and therefore cannot be sure that what rises in cloud will set in vermilion and gold; but we need not take upon ourselves to give the dark name, as though we could not be deceived in regard of the nature. The mother of him who proved "more honourable than his brethren" may have been unable to prognosticate aught but sorrow for and from this child—so much of threatening aspect may have hung round his entrance upon life—but she should have called him by a name expressive of dependence on God, rather than of despondency and soreness of heart.—*Ibid.*

[18495] Let us neither look confidently on what promises best, nor despairingly on what wears the most threatening appearance. God often wraps up the withered leaf of disappointment in the bright purple bud, and as often unfolds the golden flower of enjoyment in the nipped and blighted shoot. Experience is full of evidence that there is no depending on appearances; that things turn out widely different from what could have been anticipated: the child of most promise perhaps living to pierce as with a sword, the child of least, to apply balsam to the wound; events which have menaced ministering to happiness, and those which have come like enemies doing the office of friends. So that, if there be one duty more pressed upon us by what we might observe than another, it is that of waiting meekly upon the Lord, never cherishing a wish that we might choose for ourselves, and never allowing a doubt that He orders all for our good. Oh, be careful that you pronounce not harshly of His dealings, that you provoke Him not by speaking as though you could see through His purpose, and decide on its being one of unmixed calamity! If you are so ready with your gloomy names, He may suspend His gracious designs. If, in a spirit of repining or unbelief, you brand as Jabez what may be but a blessing in disguise, no marvel if sometimes, in just anger and judgment, He allow the title to prove correct, and suffer not this Jabez, this child born in sorrow, to become to you, as otherwise it might, more honourable, more profitable, than any of its brethren.—*Ibid.*

2 The prayer of Jabez suggests that God ought to be acknowledged by men as the source of temporal prosperity.

[18496] "Oh that Thou wouldest bless me indeed, and enlarge my coast!" The people in the days of Jabez believed with all their heart in a personal, living God; the One who had created the universe, and who sustained it with His almighty power. They had a strong faith in Him as One ever present, willing, and able to help them in time of need. They looked up to Him for the rain and the sunshine, and felt that their prosperity came from heaven. The temporal condition of the Jewish people was an index of their spiritual state. In these enlightened days great efforts are being made to shut God out of His own universe, and to attribute all things either to chance or to the mighty working of some mysterious law which no man can define or understand. To me this world would become a dreary wilderness, a dark, cold, loathsome dungeon, were God to remove Himself from it. Much of the happiness of life is obtained from the consideration that God our Father is interested in our temporal as well as spiritual prosperity. It is to Him we are indebted for the blessings of this life; and were He to withhold His hand for a moment, the children of men would become confounded. Men sometimes boast they can do without God, that their wealth is the result

of their own personal shrewdness, activity, and perseverance. What would become of their business or profession if they were thrown on a bed of affliction for nine months out of the twelve every year? Health and strength come from God; the happiest and most prosperous life in the end is the one which recognizes the Divine as the great fountain and source of all real prosperity.—*Anon.*

3 The prayer of Jabez suggests that God is the source of all true strength.

[18497] "And that Thine hand might be with me." There is something more in this petition than in the first. Jabez was not satisfied with the enlargement of his coast, unless the hand of God should be with him; he prayed for His hand to guide him, so as to secure the right use of the gifts bestowed upon him. He was conscious of his own weakness. When he meditated upon the many obstacles in his way and the formidable foes he would have to contend with, he appealed to the God of his fathers for the support he so much needed. With all man's boasting, and the confidence he seems to have in his own powers and resources, it is very little he can do morally and spiritually. The hand of God is the strength of His people; when it is stretched forth, the enemy is defeated and marvellous works are accomplished. The ivy is weak and fragile; but let it entwine itself around the powerful oak, it will smile in the face of the fiercest storm, and can withstand the force of the most terrible tempests as long as the oak remains with its roots deeply embedded in the earth. So man, though weak, can entwine his affection around the infinite heart of God, and smile in the face of all his foes. Man becomes invincible as soon as he lays hold of God's strength: "If God be for us, who can be against us!"—*Ibid.*

4 The prayer of Jabez suggests that God is the only sufficient Protector against sin.

[18498] "And that Thou wouldest keep me from evil that it may not grieve me." This man was afraid of evil lest it should hurt him. That is *one* way of looking upon sin. It can produce nothing but pain and tribulation in the end. If, under its dominion, his reputation, health, and very life are endangered, man must be grieved if he will become the servant of sin. But the right, consequently the noblest, way of looking upon sin, is as the great enemy of God; as the tyrant which aims at the dethronement of the King of Righteousness; as the poisoned arrow which is pointed towards the kindest Father in existence. When evil is viewed in that light, its terrible power comes to sight, and man will at once perceive his impotence to grapple with such an adversary in his own strength; so the cry will go up to heaven for help to keep far from the territories of sin. The life of Jabez was fashioned after this prayer. "And God granted him that which he requested." If we desire our lives to be worth anything, let us pray as this man did, and the Lord will not leave us long without a favourable reply.—*Ibid.*

OBADIAH.

I. HIS FIDELITY TO GOD.

It was of a heroic and self-sacrificing order.

[18499] Not only was he faithful to God in the midst of a people almost all of whom were idolaters, but he was faithful even in the house of a sovereign who encouraged his people in idolatry, and himself with his household bowed down to Baal. Around the chamberlain of Ahab's palace idol-altars and idol-temples were ever rising. Daily would his righteous soul be vexed with the accompaniments of the worship of the heathen god; daily, perhaps, was his fidelity attacked by those who would have had him impious as themselves; daily would he feel his post less secure as he saw idolatry taking a stronger hold upon the court and the king, and yet there is no sign of finching, he remains faithful to his God.—*M. J.*

[18500] Far from giving way, Obadiah not only has the moral courage to resist the seductions of the wicked, but, putting his life in his hand, he even succours the persecuted servants of God. "For it was so when Jezebel cut off the prophets of the Lord that Obadiah took an hundred prophets and hid them by fifty in a cave, and fed them with bread and water." Brave man! admirable character! not only not to succumb to the enemy, but, in the midst of foes, single-handed to take the field and "fight the good fight of faith." Self-denying, not self-seeking chamberlain, how few in court-places have followed in his steps! Not only did he not seek greater wealth for himself, but in a time of terrible famine, when there remained barely grass enough to keep alive the horses and mules, instead of storing up food as future provision for himself, he distributed bread to a hundred prophets.—*Ibid.*

[18501] If to be a worshipper of the true God in Ahab's household placed Obadiah in such an unpleasant and dangerous position, why did he not resign his office? Possibly because he possessed some little influence which, on opportunity, he was able to exert indirectly, if not directly, on the side of truth. At all events, he could represent the righteous in that heathen court, as ten righteous persons, had there been that number in Sodom, would have represented to God His people. Where one in a house is bold enough to stand up for God, and in spite of all surroundings and all discouragements witness faithfully to the truth, perhaps it is more often the case than we imagine, that that one averts judgments and even brings blessings upon that house. Obadiah, at any rate, was as salt amidst a mass of festering corruption, as a light amidst darkness, as "a city set on an hill."—*Ibid.*

[18502] It is good to read of him that he feared the Lord; it is better to read that he feared the Lord greatly; but it is best of all to read that his fear of the Lord was great when

almost all around him joined in dishonour and open, high-handed defiance to the God of heaven.—*Ibid.*

II. HOMILETICAL HINTS.

- 1 The history of Obadiah suggests that God has children where we should least think of looking for them.

[18503] Who would have dreamed of searching in the court of Ahab, certainly one of the most corrupt courts ever noticed in history, for one of God's people? Yet there was at least one Obadiah there. So when we feel very much appalled at the state of apparent spiritual destitution around us, and when there seem so very few, comparatively speaking, who serve God, we may reflect that there must be many a godly person, many an Obadiah fearing God greatly of whom we know not, even in the most hopeless districts. Godliness—thank God for it!—is no hot-house plant, which to exist at all must be tended and watered with education and refinement, human admonition and example, but can flourish as well in the desert waste as in the garden parterre. "God is able of the very stones to raise up children unto Abraham."—*Ibid.*

- 2 The history of Obadiah suggests that "the force of circumstances" is no just plea to urge as an excuse for not serving God.

[18504] Circumstances, of whatever kind, ought to be no bar to our devotion to God. None could be more unfavourably placed than was Obadiah, yet he "feared the Lord greatly." Whether, then, we be surrounded in our home life by influences unfriendly to the religious life; or whether our business relations are with worldly and irreligious people; or whether it be that we are compelled to spend much time, labour, and thought in providing for the wants of the body; yet none of these positions will stand as an excuse for a want of devotion to the service of God.—*Ibid.*

- 3 The history of Obadiah suggests the deep importance of early piety.

[18505] There is just one sentence which Ahab's chamberlain uttered to Elijah which helps us in a measure to understand Obadiah's constancy to the ancient religion of Israel, "I, thy servant, fear the Lord from my youth." Ahab and his fellow-idolaters had much to contend against ere Obadiah could be perverted. The earliest impressions are commonly the most lasting. Principles firmly rooted in childhood, or early youth, will be torn up by no ordinary tempest, and may even withstand the violence of an extraordinary storm.—*Ibid.*

GEHAZI.

I. HIS RULING PASSION.

[18506] The greed of gold gained a momentum which made it the ruling passion of his breast. It was through the avenue of his eager eyes that the fires of avarice had flashed on the powder magazine of his heart. Present as he had been when the restored Naaman came back with grateful heart from Jordan, the prophet's servant had beheld with longing gaze the gift which the Syrian captain spread out before his master. The sight of that foreign wealth and splendour was a spark kindling the fires of hell in his bosom.—*Rev. C. Cheney, D.D.*

[18507] It is evident that covetousness lay at the foundation of it all; that lust of gain, which, in one aspect of it, as indicating a sinful distrust of God, is spoken of in Scripture as infidelity, and in another aspect of it, as revealing an undue dependence on created things and an utter overvaluing of them, is characterized as idolatry, and, on account of the many forms of iniquity and of human wretchedness of which it is directly and indirectly the prolific cause, is strongly represented by an apostle as "the root of all evil."—*Rev. A. Thomson.*

II. HIS DOWNWARD STEPS.

[18508] Had he gone like a wretched mendicant on the retreating path of the Syrian, had he honestly told him that he longed for the money which Elisha had refused, had he begged with the whining appeal of sycophantic penury for the gifts of the grateful warrior, he might have only made himself an object of contempt. But when, to gain his purpose, he employs a deliberate lie, he graves his own name deep in the tablets of imperishable infamy.—*Rev. C. Cheney, D.D.*

[18509] Behold the foul and varied progeny of this man's reigning avarice! There was the deliberate and plausibly constructed falsehood told to Naaman, speedily invented, and leading to the conclusion that he was no novice in deception, but that long practice had given him promptitude and skill in the black art of lying. Then there was the act of theft from which his hardened heart did not shrink, even when the magnanimous gratitude of Naaman gave him double what his rapacious heart had asked, and made his own servants the bearers of his guilty booty to the secret place. Next, there was the base unfaithfulness to his kind master Elisha, whose heart had unsuspectingly confided in him for so many years. And, last of all, and in some respects also worst of all, there was the treachery to the cause of true religion which the act expressed—the readiness, for the sake of securing his own selfish ends, to "lay its honour in the dust," by taking away from Naaman's miraculous cure its character of generosity,

throwing an air of selfishness around the deed of mercy, and doing what he could to disturb, and even to obliterate, the favourable impressions which had been made upon the Syrian's mind. With what peculiar aggravations of sin does the man's conduct stand out before us when looked at in these sober lights!—*Rev. A. Thomson.*

[18510] The spider's web that glistens in the morning sun, with flashing diamonds of the dew, is not more artfully contrived for the very purpose of entrapping yonder buzzing fly, than was this falsehood of Gehazi's to deceive the Syrian. Here was no mis-statement in the heat of wild excitement. You cannot mistake this carefully woven web of falsehood for the exaggeration of a perturbed but honest mind. For such, all charity. But such was not this fictitious story which the servant of Elisha told of his master's visitors from Mount Ephraim. It was as thoroughly planned as a general plan a campaign, or a master of the art plans his moves upon a chess-board. And when love of money leads to lying, when covetousness employs falsehood as its agent, the untruths are always deliberate and cold-blooded. They have not the excuse of the angry slander, the excited exaggeration. They are inexcusable because deliberately woven to compass a selfish end.—*Rev. C. Cheney, D.D.*

III. HIS BITTER PUNISHMENT.

1 It was extensive.

[18511] It took in the whole of his family—his seed was to inherit the bitter reproach: unclean, unclean! How different his expectations! He thought, with his suddenly gained possessions, he could become master, instead of servant; be rich, instead of poor; his children would inherit those riches after him, but the only possessions he now could leave them would not be oliveyards and vineyards, but the spots of his leprosy. Behold the reward of falsehood and deceit. Their heir-loom handed down to his posterity was leprosy.—*Rev. H. Macdonald.*

2 It was intensive.

[18512] He was shut out from privilege. With a brand, deep and dark, he was shut out from the tabernacle of his childhood. His friends forsake him, and on his brow is indelibly printed the mark and stigma of his fraud.—*Ibid.*

3 It was immediate.

[18513] It did not gradually creep over him, with all the attendant symptoms, but all *at once*, his sin was punished. A miracle was necessary, to add solemnity to the judgment, and intensity to the guilt, of the act which caused it. He went out from the presence of the master he deceived, "a leper as white as snow."—*Ibid.*

IV. THE MORAL FROM THE HISTORY.

1 The history of Gehazi's covetousness affords an illustration of the fact that this sin, if committed, is the germ of others greater than itself.

[18514] This, indeed, is generally true of all sin, the different forms of which are frequently found linked together as by a chain, but covetousness is specially productive of the accursed fruit of further and greater transgression. In the case of Gehazi, covetousness led to falsehood and to theft, for Naaman gave, as he thought, to Elisha that which Gehazi took for himself. Covetousness always tends towards cruelty and injustice, at the least; so that it has been truly remarked that "we cannot covet for ourselves without being unjust to others, if not directly cruel." The covetousness of David led to adultery and murder; that of Ahab to the theft of Naboth's vineyard and his cruel death, together with falsehood and false witness by the way; and that of Judas to the crucifixion of the Lord of glory. What could better illustrate the awful nature of the sin of covetousness, or its fertility in producing other sins? It exercises, too, a fearfully hardening power, so that the heart of him who indulges covetous desires becomes at last like the nether millstone, insensible to all appeals made to it for feeling.—*M. J.*

2 The history of Gehazi's covetousness strikingly illustrates the profit and loss of a selfish policy.

[18515] Gehazi, for a time at least, unquestionably thought lying paid. It is a peculiarity of fraud and overreaching, and the whole class of sins of dishonesty, that inordinate vanity is their inseparable accompaniment. Such men regard themselves as so much sharper and shrewder than others are, that they can venture where other men turn back. To judge of this question we must follow the lie down to its ultimate issue. Did it pay in Gehazi's case? He certainly did succeed. How he must have laughed in his sleeve at this credulous Syrian who believed his ridiculous story! How he must have felt the contemptuous pity of conscious superiority over Elisha, as he came back loaded with his treasure to the home of his master! Ah, Gehazi, does it pay? Hold the quivering balance in thy hand. On the one side are the gorgeous robes of Syrian silk, the talents of silver, the coins of gold. How the scale sinks beneath their ponderous weight! And what on the other side? A lie, deliberately planned and skilfully told. A few pangs of conscience crushed. A little momentary dread of discovery and exposure. But these, outweighed by triumph and success, are but the dust of the balance. Wait, Gehazi. Thou hast not yet placed in that scale all it will bear. Go in and stand before thy master. Hear his question, "Whence comest thou, Gehazi?" There is another lie to be added—"Thy servant went no whither." In that piercing eye dost thou not read detection? Add to that scale,

that seemed at first so light, shame, terror, and confusion. And then, oh, what is all that thou hast gained? Go out from thy master's presence "a leper as white as snow."—*Rev. C. Cheney, D.D.*

V. LESSONS TAUGHT BY THE CONTRAST PRESENTED BETWEEN THE CONDUCT OF THE LITTLE MAID AND GEHAZI.

[18516] In the beginning of this chapter (2 Kings v.) we have an account of the little maid who waited on Naaman's wife; humble and modest as she was, she has a conspicuous place in a story of no common interest. At the end of this chapter we have a very different character presented to us—an unprincipled servant, a practised liar and cheat, apparently, living in the house of a prophet. So strangely do we find good and evil scattered up and down the world,—light shining amid thick darkness in one place, and fair scenes, elsewhere, defaced by dark, foul spots of crime,—trees of righteousness here and there shooting up and bearing choice fruit in soil that looks like a desert, and precious seed and hard toil all wasted on some favoured spot, hard by, where everything gave promise of a harvest. *One* shall dwell amidst idols and idolaters,—shall be the member of a household where the language of piety is never spoken,—shall have for his daily companions some who are servants of the Wicked One, and who make no secret of their servitude; and lo! he lives in the fear of God, and pursues his own Christian course undismayed by threats or taunts. *Another* shall grow up where God is honoured, and life and its duties are regarded in the light of eternity, and many helps are found for learning what the gospel teaches, and and doing all that it requires; and the task is learnt, it may be, and the burden borne, till the day of freedom comes, and then the prodigal breaks loose, and rushes on madly to his ruin.—*Rev. J. Gurney.*

VI. SPECIAL APPLICATION TO OUR OWN DAY.

[18517] When Gehazi returned to the house, and hid his treasure in some private place, he was the richer and the happier, and none were the poorer; but it was a wicked fraud, notwithstanding, and God marked it by a signal punishment. Events of this sort anticipate the judgment-day. Gehazi, white with leprosy, is as sure a proof of God's estimate of the transaction as if we had seen the man doomed to perdition. Yet, strange to say, men read these narratives in their Bibles, and hear them preached upon in church, and go home and tell lies, and plan frauds, and gather spoil, excusing themselves all the while by saying that none are harmed by their dishonesty. To such persons a tale like this is a message of warning and rebuke, of which conscience will remind them in after days, and sting them like an adder

if they go back to their sin. It is as if the finger of God wrote words like these upon your walls in characters of fire: "A lie is a lie, come of it what may; fraud is fraud, be the loser who he may; and against all who lie and steal *anyhow, anywhere, in any measure, for any purpose*, My law abideth sure, and cannot be changed or broken."—*Ibid.*

NAAMAN.

I. HIS PERSONAL QUALITIES.

[18518] The man here spoken of was every inch a soldier; energetic, vehement, fiery, yet manly, generous, and candid. His whole conduct and bearing are in keeping with the opening words of the narrative, "He was a mighty man in valour." This phrase, indeed, gives us the key-note of his life, and reveals the foundation of all his greatness. It implies far more than the possession of mere animal courage, than which few things are more common. It speaks of the possession of wisdom, forethought, ingenuity, energy, decision, versatility, and all the other high qualities which are blended in the character of a great general. Of these, courage is only one, indispensable, no doubt, and perhaps fundamental, but if alone, positively injurious. A foolhardy man is of necessity a weak man, weak for want of wisdom. His courage too often leads him blindfold to destruction; he can never be "a mighty man in valour." Naaman was of another sort; he was wise as well as brave, cautious as well as energetic, and the circumstances of his country gave him abundant opportunity for the display of his military genius. In the wars against the Assyrians and Israelites he succeeded as no other had done before him, and on a small scale might be called an earlier Cyrus. It is perhaps possible that this man may have risen from the ranks, for such advancement, though rare in these early days, was not unknown; and if such were the case, we can easily conceive how by dint of hard work and self-denial he fought his way up, step by step, till at last he reached the proud eminence on which we find him, "the captain of the host of the king of Syria." But whether or not this was the case, certain we are, that it must have been by diligence, capacity, and bravery, through many conflicts and dangers, and much opposition, that he rose to this high place. He succeeded in life because he possessed those personal qualities which deserved success.—*A. Mackay.*

II. HIS MISTAKEN VIEWS.

[18519] We must imagine Naaman hastening with eager promptitude across the Lebanon, into the land whither a new hope beckons him. He travels in his chariot in a style appropriate to one who stands nearest in authority and

dignity to the Syrian throne, with a numerous retinue of attendants, with talents of silver and pieces of gold equal in value to many thousand pounds of our money, and with many changes of those rich festal garments which formed so much of the wealth of the East; and all this with the evident design, should the attempt to cure him succeed, of bestowing upon his deliverer a princely reward. The vine-covered hills of Samaria and the beautiful valley of the Jordan, which had more than once been the scene of his military forays, open peacefully before him, and seem to invite him onward. But why do his servants direct his chariot to the cottage of the prophet? He appears to have supposed with his royal master, that while Elisha was to administer the cure, he must, like the enchanters and necromancers of his own country, be entirely under the king's authority, and that the best way, therefore, to secure his interposition, was first to obtain the king's favour. It is an instance of the stupidity with which men, untaught by Divine revelation, often conceive on religious subjects. He did not know as yet, that, in matters of a spiritual kind, Elisha acknowledged no master but God,—that this was a province into which Jehoram must not dare to pass, and that it would be easier and safer to go into the thunder-cloud and command the lightning where to strike, than to intrude within the sacred circle where the prophet of Jehovah exercised his great and awful prerogative.—*Rev. A. Thomas, D. D.*

[18520] Naaman was a great man and honourable, but he was a leper. Taught by the little captive maid, he came far to seek a cure. But when close at hand he nearly missed it. First he went to the wrong door. He brought the letter of the king of Syria to the king of Israel. But the king could give him no help. He could but rend his clothes and declare his inability to do aught that the king of Syria desired. By and by Elisha hears of it. He sends for the Syrian, and promises a cure. But now we see Naaman failing again. He goes now to the right door, but he goes in the wrong spirit. With horses and chariot, as a great captain, he stood by Elisha's door, and looked for much honour to have been shown him. He had his own ideas of the way in which the cure was to be effected.—*Rev. G. Everard.*

[18521] See Naaman as he whirls along over the plain of Damascus. Is he not bravely equipped for his errand? Surely he is far more likely to succeed in this expedition than in any other which has led him from home. Let us sum up the items on which he depends for success. He has got a letter in his hand to command the cure; money in his purse to buy the cure; and a splendid retinue around him to patronise the cure. That is to say we have here man's will, man's purse, man's pride, all working together to obtain a certain end—cure for this captain's leprosy. Or inasmuch as this cure is above all, Divine, we have here man's authority, man's resources, man's magnificence,

all employed to obtain God's salvation. These are the means man devises to attain the desired benefit. What is their character? They are utterly useless, useless each, useless all. One fatal word shows that this is the case, viz., God. These would all be useful and profitable if the cure were man's, if it were the result of his skill and wisdom and power, the expression of his goodwill. But they are all useless, if the cure is God's; if it is the gift of His wisdom and power and love. Surely this is self-evident. No creature can buy or sell, command or restrain, honour or dishonour, the gift of God.—*A. Mackay.*

[18522] Naaman comes to God's prophet as a man of great consequence, and wants to be treated as such. He thinks a great deal of himself, and wishes Elisha to do the same. He wishes to be dealt with as a great man who happened to be a leper, not as a leper who happened to be a great man. He comes as *somebody*, not as *anybody*. His greatness, dignity, riches, influence, importance, bulk most largely in his thoughts; he forgets his misery, loathsomeness, helplessness, dependence. Hence his rage, and rejection of God's plan of recovery.—*Ibid.*

[18523] The fundamental mistake of Benhadad and Naaman lay in ignorance of the nature of the disease that had to be dealt with. They knew not that it needed the hand of God Almighty, and that man, with all his skill, was unable to touch it. Even so the fundamental evil of errorists of every hue is ignorance of the nature of that disease of sin with which they are afflicted. God alone can remove it.—*Ibid.*

[18524] It is natural to suppose that Naaman would return to his chariot, and resume his journey with more of buoyant expectation than ever; for he must have noticed that the prophet's words not only contained an invitation to come to him, but seemed to hold out no uncertain promise of a cure. There was evidently, however, not a little in the state of his mind, as well as of his body, that needed to be corrected and healed. He counted much on the influence of the rewards which he brought with him, and still more perhaps on the imposing effect of his rank, and style, and retinue, and and expected that, as he came up "with his horses and with his chariot" to the humble gate of the prophet, he, the great Syrian lord, would be welcomed with no small show of deference.—*Rev. A. Thomas, D. D.*

III. HIS DISCIPLINE.

[18525] He had expected that the prophet would at once come out to him, and by a word and a movement of his hand the leprosy would be removed. But in this again he receives a rude shock. A servant, not the prophet, comes to speak with him. Nor was the message one to his taste. It was a very humbling one.

Naaman must lay aside his state and grandeur; he must leave his robes behind, and come forth from his chariot, and go and wash seven times in the Jordan.—*Rev. G. Everard.*

[18526] What a contradiction must it have been to his expectation, what a mortification to his pride, what a revulsion to everything that was heathen and even human within him, when there was no flutter or excitement whatever at his approach—no attempt to meet his “pomp and circumstance” after its own fashion—when even the prophet himself did not come forth to receive him, but, remaining within the recesses of his chamber, sent out a solitary messenger to him with this strange message, “Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean!”—*Ibid.*

[18527] Had the cure been performed in the manner in which Naaman anticipated that it would be done, by the prophet's coming out to him, and with many mystic signs and incantations, and the moving of his hands up and down over the more diseased parts of his body after the manner of the magicians of his own country, he would have been in some danger of regarding Elisha as only a more skilful and dexterous magician than they, and the simple working of the power of God, without any interposing sign or human manipulation, would not have been made to stand out in such distinct prominence.—*Ibid.*

[18528] I conceive that the ends contemplated by the prophet were further served, by the fact that Naaman was directed to “go and wash in Jordan.” For unquestionably it was true that Abana and Pharpar, those beautiful streams flowing from the northern sides of Hermon, which irrigated the orchards and gardens of Damascus, were in themselves far more pure and salubrious than the Jordan; and when its waters were turned into the sign and instrument of healing, it would induce him all the more readily to connect the cure with no particular medicinal virtue in itself, but with the power of God working in it.—*Ibid.*

[18529] Mark how Elisha deals with Naaman. The great man and honourable stands at Elisha's door. Elisha does not condescend to come out to him, but merely sends him out a message. His greatness and his “price,” and all that of which nature boasts, is completely set aside. There can be no “price” nor consideration of any kind here. “Without money, without price;” and therefore the great man must be a humble suitor at the door of mercy, and learn this thoroughly. He stands outside, and has to learn that he has no claim whatever upon Elisha or his grace beyond that of a poor leper. This is the “old old story”—the gospel of the grace of God, and here it shines forth in beautiful characters. And what is Elisha's message? “Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean.” How

simple, how plain! Then what am I to do with the £7,500 and the raiment? Has it no value? None whatever in the eyes of Elisha. None whatever before God. Take it back with thee as the dregs of the sinner's righteousness, and learn that all thou art to receive, all that is to set thee free from sin and death and make thee a new creature in Christ Jesus, is of the free sovereign grace of God.—*Rev. F. Whitfield.*

IV. HIS CLEANSING.

1 Physical.

[18530] In all likelihood he expected that his recovery would be gradual, and that he would be made gratefully conscious of its progress, as he plunged on the seven appointed times into the surging waves. But on six occasions he has already complied with the prophet's words, and each time has risen to the surface before his anxious and breathless attendants on the river's brink, sadly conscious that as yet there is no change, and with his leprosy still clinging to him like a Nessus robe. With palpitating heart, he goes down the seventh time and is covered with the waters, and now he feels the sudden passage of a new life through his whole frame. He is “changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye,” “his flesh comes again to him like the flesh of a little child,” and he leaps forth upon the greensward with more than the glad buoyancy of youth, a leper no more!—*Rev. A. Thomas, D.D.*

[18531] See the grand result. Six times the great captain plunged beneath the flowing waters, while his retainers gazed from the bank with deepest solicitude. Six times, and still no change. The dread disease still asserts its mastery and shows its loathsome signs. For the seventh time he sinks beneath the wave, he emerges, and lo! his flesh has become like that of a little child. He comes up from that dark flood with buoyant step and thankful heart, a new man, as if born again. The astonished soldiers gaze upon their master; no spot of disease remains. The Divine promise is fulfilled.—*A. Mackay.*

2 Spiritual.

[18532] His body had not alone been the subject of a blessed change; he had, almost at the same moment, parted for ever with his idolatry. It is astonishing how rapidly the mind works at certain great crises of its history. We live an age in an hour. He compared the utter impotence of the false gods with the omnipotence of the God of Israel, as it had now been so signally put forth in his behalf; he thought with glowing gratitude of the free, unbought, sovereign mercy of this God which had visited him, a stranger and an idolater, with so great a deliverance; and he returned from the river's bank to the prophet's gate the rejoicing subject of two blessed transformations, to declare his eternal and unqualified renunciation of all the “lying vanities” of heathenism, to avow his be-

lief that the God of Israel was the only living and true God who made the heavens and the earth, and to bind himself by the most solemn vows to His service and worship for ever.—*Rev. A. Thomas, D.D.*

[18533] He witnessed a good confession. He added to his faith virtue. The confession was public, clear, and outspoken. He wishes all to hear and know; not only Elisha and his household, but also his own retainers. He will have no man in doubt as to his opinions. He knows the true God, he loves Him, and therefore he must speak His praise in words that no one can mistake: "Behold now I know that there is no God in all the earth but in Israel." How strong and sweeping is the statement! What an utter overturning of all the beliefs which up to that time he had cherished! Is he not a new man in soul as well as body? Is he not bravely taking his side? What has led Naaman to this conviction, so sure that he must proclaim it from the housetop? The fact that he has experienced God's saving power.—*A. Mackay.*

[18534] Observe the fruits of the new nature here, in their order. First, Naaman stands with all his company before Elisha. It is not now the proud and haughty Naaman, but the subdued and humbled one. Here is the first-fruit of the Holy Spirit in his character. He was humble because he was washed. Secondly, he makes a goodly confession of the one and only God. He had learnt the true God through the virtue of His grace exerted on himself—through the health and salvation he had received from Him. This is the only way the soul can ever learn Him. Known in every other, apart from this, God is still "the unknown God." Thirdly, he presses his gifts upon Elisha, not now to purchase the healing, but because he has been healed. He has been forgiven much, therefore he loves much. Fourthly, he "will henceforth know no other God." To this end he seeks materials to raise an altar to the true God. He is going back to Syria, but even there this God must be his God. And fifthly, he has now a renewed conscience, quick and sensitive about any, even apparent, departure from the God who had so blessed him. He dreads the appearance of what is wrong, lest it should give the slightest colouring in any wise as a return to the worship and ways of Rimmon, his former god in Syria.—*Rev. F. Whitfield.*

V. TYPICAL CHARACTER OF HIS HISTORY.

In his disease, his demeanour, and the method of his cure, he was a striking type of the sinner, the rebellion of the natural man against God's remedy for sin, and the Divine plan of salvation.

[18535] Leprosy is God's one great disease in the Bible to represent sin. It meant exclusion from the camp and distance from our fellow-men. Hideous and revolting in itself it poisoned the springs of man's existence. It threw a pall over everything. Moses, speaking of Miriam

afflicted with this disease, says, "Let her not be as one *dead*." Historians tell us, that where it existed in early days it was customary to cast earth upon the person, and read over him prayers for the dead, as in our burial service, previous to his utter exclusion from among men. Hence it strikingly represents that sin which is in man, and, in the absence of everything else, is the terrible "but" which mars and spoils the fairest earthly picture. Like man by nature Naaman carried within him that disease which none but God could heal.—*Ibid.*

[18536] But it is impossible not to see, in all the unreasoning and resentful dislike of Naaman to the cure prescribed for him by Elisha, a vivid representation of the opposition of the natural mind to the Divine method of deliverance from the guilt and dominion of sin. And it is all the more proper that we should trace this resemblance, since leprosy under the Old Testament was avowedly typical of the disease of sin and of its consequences. How averse are men to believe in the simplicity and absolute freeness of the Divine plan for recovering sinners to God! It so humbles their pride and contradicts all their preconceived notions of what should have been. This "offence of the cross" has never ceased. Men would prefer some royal road to heaven, in which they should not be regarded and treated simply as sinners, but which should leave them somewhat still in which to glory. That rebellious and presumptuous "I thought," the very germ of all rationalism, which would always be telling God in what manner He is to save men, is the resisting power that has shut the gate of heaven against countless thousands.—*Rev. A. Thomas, D.D.*

VI. QUESTIONS RAISED.

I Was Naaman's request for some of the soil of Canaan superstitious?

[18537] The wish might merely be the expression of a sentiment which is strong in human nature, and which is quite innocent when kept within proper bounds—the desire to have some object near us that may help to keep alive hallowed recollections, and that shall be as a link to associate our thoughts with what is loved and distant. Naaman's aim was to have something always in his sight that would bring up Israel and the prophet and all the sacred memories of this blessed visit, readily before his mind. And, moreover, if the altar on which he henceforth sacrificed and worshipped was formed of this earth, it would serve as an indication to his Syrian fellow-countrymen that, while he was of the same nation with them, yet in religion he was identical with the worshippers of the God of Israel. Was the feeling unnatural or blamable, especially in one whose eyes had just opened to the light, and whose heart was glowing with all the ardour of first love? Such a sentiment might easily degenerate into superstition, but it was not necessarily superstitious.—*Ibid.*

- 2 Was Naaman's request to be allowed to bow himself in the house of Rimmon a compromise with idolatry?

[18538] In regard to the second of Naaman's requests to Elisha, we are disposed to speak with caution and diffidence; at the same time, when we do not find the prophet condemning him, it will surely be wisest and best so to understand his meaning and design as to be able to add, "Neither do I condemn thee." He had that day publicly avowed, in the presence of his Syrian servants and attendants, his unqualified renunciation of all idol-worship. And when he returned to Damascus, his daily offerings and holy services would tell his king and the whole city and kingdom that Jehovah alone was his God. But then he foresaw that, as the prime minister of Ben-hadad, he would be required to accompany him into the temple of Rimmon, and even to support his person and accommodate himself to its motions while he worshipped there, and he wished Elisha to understand that, in doing this unwelcome work, there would be no conformity to idolatry or complication with it; he would simply be discharging a civil service to his master, not offering worship to Rimmon. Still he was anxious to learn, before he passed from the prophet's presence, whether this could be permitted.—*Ibid.*

[18539] It is very evident that Naaman does not ask permission to worship Rimmon, for he had just asserted that he would henceforth offer no sacrifice to any god, but the Lord. And we may observe that our translators have marked their sense of the passage by using two different words in our text to express Naaman's act and his master's: "When my master goes to worship, and I bow myself," an interpretation of which the original is susceptible, so that he asks no permission, in their opinion, to worship Rimmon. It seems that it was Naaman's duty to attend the king of Syria when he went to pay his idol homage, and as the king leaned upon him with his arm upon his shoulder, and bowed very low, he could not well avoid bending his own body with the king. And he meant to ask whether, if he did this out of duty to his master, and not of reverence to the idol, he should commit sin. It showed great tenderness of conscience in him. If the same question were put to us, we should say that it would depend very much upon circumstances whether it would be right or wrong for Naaman to do this. If he wished to save himself from persecution by a seeming compliance with the idolatries of his country, or if any would suppose him to be still an idolater from that act, then it would undoubtedly be wrong; but if it would not be so taken, nor was done to avoid persecution, but was only an act of duty to his king, there was no harm in it. Now it is evident that Naaman meant no concealment of his new faith. He avowed before all the company of Syrians who were with him, that he would henceforth worship only Jehovah. And he pro-

bably built an altar on his return, and openly worshipped the true God, so that it would be known when he went to the house of Rimmon that he was no idolater. Therefore Elisha said unto him, "Go in peace," that is, Do as you have said, and you will not sin.—*Rev. W. Lewis, D.D.*

[18540] It is evident that Naaman has a tender conscience. The difficulties that will beset his path in the future begin to dawn upon him. It flashes upon him in the very act of declaring his determination, that this worship of Jehovah will make him an oddity in Damascus, and that it will require much care and firmness to adhere to his resolution. How quickly is the conscience quickened by the consciousness of God's love and the knowledge of His salvation! What Naaman was wont to do without the slightest scruple he begins to question. What he used to anticipate with pleasure as a peculiar honour, he now looks forward to with fear as a great trial. With his whole soul he repudiates these false gods that heretofore have deluded him. But even in the act of repudiation he remembers that great state ceremonial when it was his place, as chief favourite, to support the king Ben-hadad as he went to worship in the house of Rimmon. He remembers that there he has to bow with him before his god. Will there be anything in this outward act inconsistent with true allegiance to Jehovah? Naaman is in a difficulty, therefore he puts the case before the prophet.—*A. Mackay.*

[18541] Naaman had resolved to worship no other god, but the Lord: and as an open testimony of his faith in Him, to build him an altar in Damascus with materials carried from the land of Israel. His office, however, under the king required his attendance in the temple of Rimmon whenever his master went thither to worship; and when the king, leaning on his shoulder, should bow in the temple, he must unavoidably bow with him. Now he inquires of the prophet whether such an involuntary action after he had given public proof of his faith in the God of Israel, would be matter of offence. He seems to hope it might be dispensed with, and he need not resign his office. The prophet says, "Go in peace." Civil respect to your king is not inconsistent with the worship of God.—*Rev. J. Lathrop, D.D.*

VII. HOMILETICAL REFLECTIONS.

- 1 The history of Naaman illustrates the fact that that which men estimate as their greatest calamity proves often to be their highest blessing.

[18542] "Who sent his leprosy?" God. "Why then did He do so? why did He not allow this soldier to enjoy his honours in health and strength? Was not this a taking back with one hand what God had given with the other?" Nay, friend, nay! That leprosy, loathsome and fatal though it was, was God's best

gift to Naaman. "How so?" Just because it led him to God. But for it Naaman would, in all likelihood, have rested content with the things of time, with his fame as a warrior, with his riches and rewards as a conqueror, with that large portion of earthly prosperity which fell to his lot, and never would have come to the knowledge and possession of higher and more enduring honours. That which was Naaman's biggest sorrow turned out to be God's biggest blessing. And so it may be with every one of us. If your trials, and losses, and bereavements, and sickness, and disappointments, and sorrows lead you to the feet of Jesus, you will bless the God that sent them through all time and eternity. These things will turn out to be your great gain, and will load you with an exceeding and eternal weight of glory.—*A. Mackay.*

2 The history of Naaman illustrates the truth that unsanctified sorrow hardens rather than softens the heart.

[18543] Naaman's heavy trial had no power to subdue his haughty spirit. Sorrow of itself can never sanctify. Men may pass through God's hottest furnaces and only come out harder than ever. It is only when the Holy Spirit uses our sorrows—when we put them into His hands to use—that they will ever be made a blessing to us. Reader, you have had trials. God has sent them. Have they been sanctified? Has the haughty spirit been subdued? Has the heart been broken? Has the soul been humbled? Has Christ become more precious? Has the sourness, or moroseness, or censoriousness, or bitterness, yielded to forbearance, compassion, meekness, and sympathy? What has the rod of the Lord done for you? Has it left you as it found you? Then be sure, if the Lord loves you, there is at this moment another on the way.—*Rev. F. Whitfield.*

3 The history of Naaman suggests that the service of God consists not in some costly sacrifice, but in daily, unostentatious obedience to His will.

[18544] How common is the notion that some great thing is to be done in order to gain the favourable regard, and to bring down upon us the blessing of Almighty God! How have men laboured for the glory of the Creator by the erection of magnificent temples and costly shrines, by blazing altars and smoking sacrifices! "Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, and ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" And the question has been answered, Prepare the sacrifice and immolate the victim. Like Naaman the Syrian, do we not despise the pure waters of Israel for the sake of the mightier rivers of Damascus? To propitiate the favour of God, how much more ready has man been to do some great thing, to make some extraordinary effort, than to submit to the daily, unostentatious labour of forming just opinions, cultivating right dispositions, and promoting

the growth and establishment of virtuous habits. How many appear to think that they are never engaged in the service of God, that they are never doing anything to His glory, unless they are actually tuning their lips to praise, or lifting up their voices in supplication and prayer.—*T. Madge.*

4 The history of Naaman suggests that the sinner who feels his own helplessness and unworthiness is the man who will most eagerly welcome, and most surely obtain, the salvation of God.

[18545] O fools and blind, learn a lesson of Naaman. Why did he so readily catch at this hope held out to him? Because he was so deeply conscious of his evil case. He neither loved nor honoured Israel, he had done all in his power to destroy it, but his need was so great that he would welcome help from any quarter. Even so, sinner, if only a meagre consciousness of the misery and hopelessness of your condition filled your heart you would be all anxiety to seek the remedy. There would be no need of elaborate sermons, stirring appeals, pressing invitations; you would listen eagerly to the merest child who could speak to you of salvation. How quickly would your prejudices vanish! Christ crucified would no longer be a stumbling-block and foolishness, but the power and wisdom of God. But surely Naaman will rise up in judgment against you. He listened to the testimony of a child, you shut your ears against the perfect word of God.—*A. Mackay.*

[18546] If you come before God as a man of might, strong in your own sufficiency, puffed up with your own wisdom, you will get nothing. If you come like a worm, having no might or strength, He will tell you that Christ died for the ungodly. If you come like a rich man, He will not regard you; if you come like a beggar, He will fall on your neck and embrace you. If you come like a proud and pompous man, He will know you afar off, and hide Himself; if you come like a humble penitent, He will run to meet you, to give you the best place at His board, the warmest place in His heart. This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them. He fills the hungry with good things, the rich He sends empty away. Come then, not like proud Naaman, but rather like the humblest of God's creatures, saying—

"I'm a poor sinner and nothing at all,
But Jesus Christ is my all in all."

This do and thou shalt live.—*Ibid.*

5 The history of Naaman suggests that salvation is to be obtained only by humble submission to the plan of God in redemption.

[18547] Naaman was right. Abana's waters were clear and beautiful. Jordan's were clayey and muddy. There was nothing for sight in all this. It was only for faith. It was God choosing the base things of this world to bring to nought

the mighty. Is it not so still? "What is this blood of Christ?" the sinner says. "What! are all my prayers, my good deeds, my sacraments, all my honest efforts to do my best and to please God to go for nothing? What! when I am not conscious of breaking God's laws, and have striven to do my duty to all men, and have borne a fair character all these years, and brought up my family well and respectfully in the world—all this to go for nothing!" Ah, this is Naaman's £7,500 and ten changes of raiment again! Away with it all! It may look beautiful in thine own eyes, and in the eyes of the world, or in the eyes of the Church. It is all Naaman's "price" again. Go, take it back to Benhadad thy master. It is only fit for him, but not for a poor leper before Elisha—not for a poor lost sinner before God. It is all a contemptible price, even couldst thou multiply thy £7,500 infinitely. Thou must have a far greater price than this, even the blood of God's own Son. Thou must stand outside with all thy "price" and all thy "consideration" in the place where all beggars stand, and listen to the message sent out to thee by the true Elisha, the Lord Jesus, "Wash, and be clean; wash, and be clean."—*Rev. F. Whitfield.*

[18548] As a matter of fact, the waters of Jordan were in themselves as powerless to heal Naaman as were those of Abana and Pharpar. Everything turned on submission to the Divine will and obedience to the Divine ordinance. Is there a similar difficulty in your mind in regard to the cross of Christ? Is it a stumbling-block and foolishness in its relation to your salvation? Is it impossible for you to see any connection whatever between the blood of Jesus and the cleansing of your sins? We know that, unlike the waters of Jordan, the blood of Jesus has a necessary relation to the cleansing of sin, for "without shedding of blood there is no remission of sins." But it is not necessary, so far as your cleansing is concerned, that you should see that connection. It is sufficient if you believe what God has said and act up to His directions. If you are as utterly in the dark in regard to the relation that the blood of Christ has to your cleansing as Naaman was in regard to the relation that the washing in Jordan had to his cure, that will not prevent it if you only act as he did, according to the Divine directions. Jordan was the fountain God opened for Naaman's leprosy. This is the fountain He has opened for your uncleanness, "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin."—*A. Mackay.*

- 6 The history of Naaman suggests that the best guide in steering a middle course between moroseness and worldly conformity is a heart filled with love for God.

[18549] What Rimmon, Baal, and Belial were to ancient believers, the riches, honours, and pleasures of the world are to Christians. And we are often perplexed, as Naaman was, to

know how far we may go in our compliances with the world. If we abstain, we are accused of moroseness in condemning the innocent pleasures of life; if we comply, we are accused of loving the world as much as others. How shall we find the golden mean between moroseness and worldly conformity? It is impossible to lay down any definite rule which shall guide us. The Bible does not attempt to do this. It merely tells us not to be conformed to this world, but it does not tell us what worldly conformity is. The only safe guide in the matter is a heart filled with the love and the Spirit of God. Elisha left Naaman to this guidance, and God leaves the Christian to the same. If we love God supremely, we shall be in no danger of loving the world too much; and if we love our fellow-men, we shall not embitter them against religion by any fanatical austerity. The question is continually recurring to the Christian, Ought I to do this? Is this worldly compliance consistent with my Christian profession? The best way to answer it is to look within to our own enlightened conscience, and ask what effect compliance has upon the devotions of the closet, and communion with God. If we find that our heart condemns us, if it says that the worldly will sneer at a Christian seen in certain places or acts, then we want no further reason for abstaining. A heart filled with the love of God is the best casuist, and will always tell us very correctly how far we may go in our compliances with the world. Let us, then, fellow-Christians, adopt Naaman's resolution: "Henceforth I will offer neither burnt-offering, nor sacrifice to any God but the Lord," and we may then "go in peace," not fearing the idolatries of a sinful world.—*Rev. W. Lewis.*

HAZAEI.

I. HIS HISTORY.

[18550] The history of Hazael is soon told. He was an officer in the court of Syria whom Elijah was commanded to anoint as successor to Benhadad, and at the same time to anoint Jehu to be king of Israel. Several years afterwards Benhadad, residing at Damascus and being taken sick, instructed Hazael to take a princely present to the prophet Elisha, and consult him as to the issue of his sickness. The prophet informed Hazael that his royal master's disease would not prove mortal, but still he would not live; and he proceeded to predict the elevation of Hazael to the throne of Syria, and a series of the most horrible cruelties of which he would be guilty towards the children of Israel. Hazael expressed the utmost abhorrence of such conduct; but the very next day he stifled Benhadad to death, took the throne, and in process of time perpetrated all the barbarities that the prophet had described.

This piece of history suggests several thoughts concerning human nature.—*Anon.*

II. HOMILETICAL REFLECTIONS.

1 The case of Hazael presents an illustration of the sense of virtue innate in human nature.

[18551] When the prophet with tears told Hazael the heartless cruelties he would perpetrate on the children of Israel—that he would set their strongholds on fire, slay the young men with the sword, and dash the children to pieces—he seemed to have such a sense of virtue within him that he was shocked at the monstrosity, and said, “What! is thy servant a dog?” We need not suppose that he feigned this astonishment, but that it was real, and that it now produced a revulsion at the cruelties he was told he would soon perpetrate. Every man has a sense of right within him; indeed, this sense is an essential element in our constitution, the moral substance of our manhood, the core of our nature, our moral *ego*; it is what we call conscience.—*Ibid.*

2 The case of Hazael presents an illustration of the self-ignorance of human nature.

[18552] How ignorant of himself and his heart was Hazael when he said, “Is thy servant a dog that he should do this great thing?” Men do not know what they are. Self-ignorance is (1) the most common of all ignorance; (2) the most culpable of all ignorance; (3) the most ruinous of all ignorance.—*Ibid.*

3 The case of Hazael presents an illustration of the evil possibilities of human nature and the necessity of a change of heart.

[18553] This man, who was shocked at the idea of perpetrating such enormities at first, actually enacted them a few hours afterwards. The elements of the devil are in every man, though he may not know it. The vulture eggs of evil are in all depraved hearts; it only requires a certain heat of the outward atmosphere to hatch them into life. Men have often deprecated courses of action which afterwards they have pursued with alacrity and delight. The virtue of many men is only vice sleeping. The evil elements of the heart are like gunpowder, passive, until the spark of temptation falls on them. The greatest monsters in human history were at one time considered innocent and kind. “Many a man,” says a modern author, “could he have a glimpse in innocent youth of what he would be twenty or thirty years after, would pray in anguish that he might be taken in youth before coming to that.” What is the moral of this? The necessity of a change of heart.—*Ibid.*

4 The case of Hazael presents an illustration of the resilient velocity of human nature.

[18554] To-day this man seemed in sympathy with the just and the good, to-morrow his

whole nature is aflame with injustice and cruelty; to-day he soars up with the angels, to-morrow he revels with the torturing fiends. Souls can fall from virtue swiftly as the shooting stars. One hour they may blaze in the firmament, the next lie deep in the mud. “Examine me, O Lord, and prove me; try my reins and my heart.”—*Ibid.*

SENNACHERIB.

I. CHARACTER OF HIS LIFE.

It was one of pride and cruelty towards man, and one of daring presumption as regards God.

[18555] Two things had distinguished it towards man—excessive violence and much pride. You have seen pictures from those Assyrian palaces brought to light again of late years. A favourite subject in most is the victorious king, commanding his captives to be slain, or himself blinding them, perhaps, with his spear. . . . This Sennacherib, perhaps, of all these sovereigns, was the most successful, and so the worst. Probably it is his portrait you see most frequently on those slabs. At any rate, they help to furnish us with a true idea of his life. Take a succession of those revolting transactions, those causeless conflicts, those captured cities, those butchered prisoners, those blinded sovereigns, those streaming executions, and you have the deeds of his reign. Take the triumphant pride with which he exults over them, and you have the full criminality of those deeds. “Where is the king of Hamath, and the king of Arpad, and the king of the city of Sepharvaim, of Hena, and Ivah?” Thus it is he enumerates and boasts of the atrocities we see represented on those walls!—*Germs of Thought.*

[18556] The tide of his oppression came at last to the land of Judæa. Here he was on especially dangerous ground. He came in contact here with a “peculiar people,” the inheritance of Jehovah, the family which God was educating for the benefit of mankind. This added both to the enormity and to the importance of the crime. How to the enormity, if he did not know what he was doing? Because he knew sufficient to know more. Where ignorance is wilful or careless, it does not excuse our sins, but aggravates them. It *must* lead to many sins; it *may* lead to any sin; it is responsible, therefore, for them all. We did not know whom it was we were neglecting: such will be the defence of some at the last (Matt. xxv. 44). The reply is the same as above. So, in this case, Sennacherib was well aware that he was fighting, not against Hezekiah, but Jehovah. Notwithstanding all he had done against the gods of the nations, he knew how great was the trust of Hezekiah and his people in the Lord (Isa. xxxvi. 15, 18). This ought to have led him to

inquire. Instead of this, he says in effect, Be the Lord Jehovah who He may, I am not to be checked. Before any man went to this length, he ought to have known what he said.—*Ibid.*

[18557] We must consider the effect of his language and conduct on the Jews. How did his sin appear in their eyes? Considering their position and destiny, this was of importance to the world. And, in their eyes, it is clear, his offence involved the most direct and daring challenge to all they adored. That Assyrian flood had submerged all the neighbouring tribes. All the gods of the heathen, all the minor mountains, even, of Emmanuel's land, had been successively overwhelmed. Only the mountains of the Lord's house remained above it. Would the house be overthrown, or the waves be driven back? Would this great conqueror conquer Jehovah, or would he, instead, and at last, be subdued? "He hath sent to reproach the living God" (Isa. xxxvii. 4). All the faith of Judah stood by, and all the unborn faith of Christianity stood behind it to observe the result.—*Ibid.*

II. CHARACTER OF HIS END.

It was eminently retributive.

(1) *In regard to his pride.*

[18558] Who can stand, the king had said, before me? God answered him, not in battle, not by spoken rebuke, but, as it was prophesied, by a "blast." In the dead of night, when Jerusalem was asleep or praying, a messenger of God passed in silence through the distant Assyrian camp. No one beheld his approach, or heard his step, or observed his departure. He came in, he passed through, he was gone like a breath. But the breath of nearly two hundred thousand sleeping warriors was gone with him too. In the morning the once mighty sovereign is in a camp of dead men. Where is the terrible army he relied on? What has he left now to be proud of? What can he do now but return home, humiliated and alone?—*Ibid.*

(2) *In regard to his violence and bloodshed.*

[18559] After the king had returned to his own kingdom and city, the weapon he had so often employed was employed on himself. As the prophet had foretold, he died by the "sword." Besides which, with a horrible kind of fitness, this man of unnatural cruelty, it is to be noted, died by unnatural hands. He was slain by his sons; two of them (doubling thus the guilt of each other), brothers in hatred and cruelty, and worthy inheritors of his nature, uniting in the deed. How often do we see this! The instruments of the sinner's punishment brought into being by himself!—*Ibid.*

(3) *In regard to his profanity and blasphemy.*

[18560] The challenge had been delivered, if not within hearing, certainly within sight, of God's house, in the ears and language of the people who sat on the wall. No answer came

at the time. God, who sometimes waits to be gracious, often delays to destroy. But the answer, when it did come, was most conclusive and direct. In the king's own kingdom and city, in the temple of his own idol, while engaged in the very act of worship, the blow descended upon him. If safe anywhere, he thought it was there. There it was, on the contrary, just there, that he died. While seeking for protection, he was slain. "What God," he had boasted, "can deliver from me?" "Can thine own god protect thyself?" replied the silent stroke of God's hand.—*Ibid.*

III. REPRESENTATIVE CHARACTER OF HIS POSITION AND DEEDS.

He was a striking type of the enemies of the Christian faith.

(1) *In his boastfulness*

[18561] The Assyrian monarch evidently had no mean opinion of himself. "Know ye not," he says, "what I and my fathers have done?" "We are big men. We have great armies. We are flushed with victories. We do not know what it is to be beaten. Think twice, good people, before you presume to contend with me. Am not I the great and noble Sennacherib, successor to Nimrod the mighty, the victor in a hundred battles, who have put my foot on the neck of kings?" Such is the strain in which this Assyrian fellow swaggers at the people of the living God. Hardly could a more truthful picture be drawn of the open enemies of God in every age. One thing is always characteristic of them—they know how to brag. Self-conceit is their most obvious quality. They are rich in brass. Their claims are astounding to one who has not learned their loud policy. Voltaire predicted with brazen effrontery that Christianity would be defunct in twenty-five years. He claimed that he and the encyclopædists of France had written it to death. Yet to-day, after a century has gone by, the copies of the Christian Scriptures circulated in France alone, papal though it be, are numbered by hundreds of thousands every year, while the booksellers say that no other works lie on their shelves so long as the once-famous works of Voltaire.—*Austin Phelps, D.D.*

(2) *In his special hostility towards God's servant.*

[18562] It is noticeable that the bragging Assyrian does not address his appeal chiefly to the Judæan king and his official representatives. His attempt is to stir up revolt among the populace by appeals to their superstition and their fears. The official head of the kingdom and his subalterns are treated with contempt. They "spake yet more against the Lord God, and against His servant Hezekiah." As the head of a theocratic kingdom, Hezekiah was the chief official representative to his people of the true religion. Again and again is this hostility to the ministers of religion displayed by its open foes. The people are exhorted to revolt against

“the priests.” The popular name which infidelity gives to Christianity is “priestcraft.” In every large community in which enmity to the gospel is openly professed, is to be found a class of men who are pre-eminently minister-haters. Their ridicule and denunciation are specially aimed at the clergy. No other class of men receive at their hands such severe measure and uncandid judgment. The human frailties of ministers are the butt of their satire. The fall of a minister they never let the world hear the last of. That good nature which is extended to men of other professions is often denied to ministers.—*Ibid.*

(3) *In the plausibility of his reasoning against the destiny of God's Church.*

[18563] Sennacherib was a shrewd fellow. His speech to the Jewish populace was a very cunning specimen of demagogical oratory. His argument was a very plausible one. His facts were true. He and his fathers had been mighty men. Their arms had been crowned with success. The nations cowered before them. The gods of the nations had been as helpless before their conquering legions as so many bullocks. Reasoning upon the facts in the light of no other than the pagan theology, Sennacherib was right. His conquest of Judæa was a foregone conclusion. “Were the gods of those nations any ways able to deliver their lands out of mine hand?” “No.” “Who was there among all the gods of those nations that could deliver his people?” “Not a god.” “How much less shall your God deliver you out of my hand!—you, little petty Judah, not so large as the least of my provinces!” “True: it is a fact.” Such must have been the colloquy between them, carried on by the Jewish hearers silently and with sinking hearts. On the pagan theory of the gods, and in the light of recent history, the Assyrian monarch had the best of the argument by all odds. Specially do the confident predictions of the downfall of Christianity often seem morally certain. The philosophical proof alone of this is unanswerable. It is the great marvel of history, that such a religion as ours can hold its own at all in such a world as this. By all the laws of human evidence by which men prognosticate the future, the Christian religion ought long before this time to have disappeared from the face of the earth. Its temples ought to be now antiquarian ruins, of which curious travellers should be ferreting out the history and the meaning. The Scriptures ought now to be stored in antiquarian libraries, not read or cared for by twenty men in a generation. On purely philosophical grounds, the enemies of our religion are right in their assurances of its speedy overthrow. The balance of natural probabilities is never in its favour. The great forces of this world are its allied foes. Crises have occurred in its history, in which persecution has been backed up by wealth, by learning, by the prestige of antiquity, by civil law, by public opinion, and by bayonets,—by all the great forces which sway society and compact empires; and thus allied, it has borne down—

upon what? Upon armies bristling with steel? upon Ehrenbreitsteins and Cronstadts? No: upon a handful of poor men and friendless women and little children, who had no weapon of defence but prayer!—*Ibid.*

(4) *In the sudden, unexpected, and overwhelming nature of his disappointment.*

[18564] Somebody made very short work with Sennacherib. One night was time enough to answer his gasconade at the people of God. One verse is all that the historian thinks necessary to tell the story: “The Lord sent an angel which cut off all the mighty men of valour.” One angel of the Lord was a match for the Assyrian battalions. The mighty men were not looking for such a reinforcement to their enemy. That was the last thing they dreamed of. That destroying angel, be it a pestilence or a storm, or a miraculous apparition, was the “angel of death” to a hundred and eighty-five thousand of the Assyrian hosts before morning. The history of our religion develops often a similar phenomenon in God's dealings with its avowed and boastful enemies. They are sure to be disappointed in the result. Something keeps Christianity alive to-day, centuries after, by the logic of its foes, it ought to have been dead and buried. Something makes it grow and thrive. It never had a deeper hold upon the world's faith than now. Never before did its friends look out upon a more resplendent future. Often the local triumphs of our religion occur suddenly. A revival of religion changes the mood of a community in a month. Corrupt institutions like slavery fall suddenly, and by unlooked-for agencies. Times of apparent decline of religion are often times of preparation, in which great principles are secretly taking root; and at length they start up and grow as acknowledged powers of Christian truth. The visible progress of our religion in the world is commonly by sudden leaps and revolutionary changes. A single angel from the living God works out results at which both friends and enemies of truth stand amazed. Sometimes in private communities it is the Angel of Death. Opposers of religion are sometimes removed at a moment so critical, that men cannot but silently put the two things together. By ways of his own, God achieves His eternal purposes.

“God moves in a mysterious way,
His wonders to perform.”—*Ibid.*

IV. MORAL FROM HIS HISTORY.

“Evil shall hunt the wicked person to overthrow him.”

[18565] It is necessary to point out the importance of such a lesson to the Jews. So significant an incident was well worthy of being commemorated among them. Like those separated portions of English counties which you see on the map in the midst of other

counties, this was an important portion, though a detached one, of the life-history of God's people. How it would encourage their faith in His help, and so prepare them for the coming captivity, and bring home to them the momentous truth of *Psa. xxi. 28, lviii. 11, &c.* And, if all this to them, as much as to us, who are taught by their experience, and are the inheritors of their faith. "Evil shall hunt the wicked to overthrow him." We see, just as much as they did, the conclusion of such a "hunt" in our text—how God and the impenitent sinner must come face to face at the last—how such a man prepares his own torments, and creates his own executioners, and sends up against Heaven the very bolts which come back perforce on himself. These are truths much forgotten, and, therefore, to be often insisted on in these days. There is a way of preaching the Saviour as though there were nothing from which to be saved. This grand Old Testament history, rising up out of those distant Assyrian ruins, may help to deliver us from such a delusion. There is a Saviour. There is a need for Him, too. There is such a thing as "the wrath to come." There is a "City of Refuge;" but that is not all. The "avenger of blood" is behind us; and if we do not flee to it, we are lost.—*Gems of Thought.*

JONADAB.

POINTS OF CHARACTER.

1 Genuine faith.

It was this which prompted his famous command to his descendants.

[18566] It is clear that the first object of Jonadab in commanding his children to return to their original mode of living, was to secure them from being involved in the ruin which he knew would surely come to Israel. By adopting this line of conduct Jonadab showed his faith in God. He knew what was the real foundation of Israel's prosperity; they were the people of the Lord. If they gave Him up, He would forsake them. They had for the most part forsaken Him in the days of Ahab; and after the royal houses of both Judah and Ephraim had been corrupted by that Sidonian alliance which gave a Jezebel to Israel, and an Athaliah, a daughter of Jezebel, to the kingdom of Judah, then Jonadab, the son of Rechab, saw that a close connection with Israel would not be a blessing any more. "In those days the Lord began to cut Israel short" The waves of the Syrian invasions had already begun to break; they were soon to be followed by still greater inundations from Assyria and

from Babylon, which would sweep the whole length of the country, till both Israel and Judah were carried away; and though Jehu effected an outward reformation in some things, yet there was nothing really solid about his work. "Jehu took no heed to walk in the law of the Lord with all his heart;" and Jonadab and his family quietly cut the bond of union with the chosen people, and became as they were before.—*Rev. C. Waller.*

2 Religious zeal.

It was doubtless on account of the well-known character of Jonadab's family for this virtue that Jehu desired his help in the destruction of the worshippers of Baal.

[18567] We may be certain that no family of foreign extraction could look back to more honourable ancestors or recount more noble and meritorious services, than the family of Jonadab the son of Rechab, the Kenite, in the days of Jehu. They had given proof before this time of their zeal for the Lord. In the destruction of the house of Ahab, and the extermination of Baal worship, we find Jonadab and Jehu giving the right hand of fellowship to each other; riding in the same chariot, both zealous for Jehovah; one in heart and in purpose, and standing side by side. But we have further information than this. We know from Jonadab's descendants nearly three hundred years afterwards what his private and family life was, and what his principles were.—*Ibid.*

[18568] The precepts which he gave to his sons are simply a command to return to the ancient habits of the family, to live henceforward as strangers and pilgrims on the earth, not only in spirit, but literally in every circumstance of outward life. When we remember the occasion on which the Kenite family had joined itself to Israel, this return to ancient habits appears deeply significant. It is a silent renunciation of their share in Israel's inheritance. The land of Canaan is no longer a sure resting-place. The commands of Jonadab are according to the prophet's warning: "Arise ye and depart, for this is not your rest, because it is polluted: it shall destroy you, even with a sore destruction." The Kenites joined themselves to Israel because Jehovah was their God, and He had spoken good concerning Israel. But when the Israelites, not content with worshipping golden calves for many years, had also consented to worship Baal instead of Jehovah, then their prospects and the promises concerning them began to wear a different form. The land of Israel was to be taken from them, and the people must go into captivity. It was no longer safe for the Kenites to be one people with Israel.—*Ibid.*

PART B. (Continued.)

JEWISH ERA.

(Continued.)

NEHEMIAH.

I. HIS CALL.

[18569] He is walking in the palace courts, and sees some of his fellow-exiles approaching, to whom he hastens to inquire after the Fatherland. With saddened voices they tell him of affliction, sorrow, and distress, of the wall of the city broken down, and of the gates burned with fire. Their words drop into Nehemiah's heart; they pass onward to their homes little heeding what they have said, and as little conscious of the results which will follow from that hour's conversation. The crisis of his life has come. He feels as he has never felt before; a burden has laid itself upon his spirit. What does he do? Where does he go? With whom does he talk of all that is upon his soul? Is it to father or friend? Is it to wife or sister that he utters his complaint? No; it does not appear that to one human ear he speaks, or to one human heart he entrusts his secret. Away into the solitude he hies; alone with his God he weeps; he fasts, he prays. Hark, listening at that closet door! How the man lets us see into his heart as he agonizes there! Surely he has been here before! He knows that prayer has power with God; he knows that the Almighty cannot refuse His own word. And while he confesses his sin, and the sins of his family, and the sins of the nation, he takes hold of the promise.—*Chapters for Christian Workers.*

II. HIS MASTER PRINCIPLE.

The fear of God.

[18570] In analyzing the character of Nehemiah, we must begin by ascertaining the ruling motive of the man. Nor can we be at any loss to determine the point. The mainspring of his life manifested itself perpetually throughout his career. The whole tenor of his conversation bespoke the supremacy of the fear of God in his soul. This transcendent principle of his heart appears in bold and impressive exercise—for instance in regard to those who had returned from the captivity. Many were destitute and distressed. Their poverty made them a prey to their richer brethren, who took usurious advan-

tage of their exigencies. Neither had the governors who preceded Nehemiah treated them with consideration, but had exacted their dues to the utmost, allowing their very servants to bear rule over the people. Not, perhaps, that they had demanded more than they could legally claim, but they had failed to let mercy temper justice. The conduct of Nehemiah stood forth in glorious contrast to that of his predecessors: "for," says he, "so did not I, because of the fear of God." This gave the character of godliness to his conduct, this transmuted what would otherwise have been fair tinsel into the fine gold of the sanctuary. The flesh can exhibit the former, the spirit alone can create the latter.—*Rev. H. Stowell.*

III. HIS PROMINENT CHARACTERISTICS.

I Faith.

[18571] Taking fast hold of the Divine faithfulness and covenant, this ardent worshipper lays down at the footstool of heavenly mercy his great petition that God would maintain the cause of His now penitent people, consolidate their national strength, and restore their waste places. I admire the holy ingenuity with which the petition is urged. God had been faithful to His threatenings when His people had revolted against Him, and had scattered them abroad among the nations, and Nehemiah finds a foothold for his faith even among their ruins and desolations, making him bold to plead that He would now show Himself equally faithful to His promises. His people had now turned to Him and kept His commandments; and had He not said that if they did so, "even though they were cast out into the uttermost part of the heaven, He would gather them from thence," and cause the light of His countenance anew to shine upon them? This promise had been spoken and recorded more than a thousand years before, but it had not become efete or obsolete. The ink in which the holy and immutable God writes His engagements never becomes dim or fades.—*Rev. A. Thompson, D.D.*

[18572] Their enemies tried to dismay them by insinuating that the Jews were revolting against the king, and that they were fortifying

the city with the intention of casting off the Assyrian yoke. "Then answered I them," says Nehemiah, with noble reliance upon God—"Then answered I them"—not that the king had given me a decree to undertake the work; not that I was in reality obeying, instead of resisting him—but this heavenly hero's sublime and magnanimous answer was—"the God of heaven, He will prosper us; therefore we His servants will arise and build." And in the might of that confidence they prosecuted their task, spite of every discouragement—spite of contempt and fraud and treachery—spite of false friends and open enemies, till, in fifty-two days, this handful of feeble men brought the mighty work to a happy issue; the walls of the city were finished, and the gates were again set up, because the good hand of their God was upon them. "If God be for us, who can be against us?"—*Rev. H. Stowell.*

2 Piety.

[18573] That he was a man of piety appears from the manner in which he received the intelligence from Judah. The sad news drove him to fasting and prayer, and deepened within him the feeling of penitence on account of his own sins and the sins of his countrymen. He humbled himself before God. He recognized in the present condition of his people the chastising hand of the Most High. He calls to recollection the Divine threatenings of which he had read in the history of Moses, and he confesses that Israel had deserved the execution of those threatenings. But he also calls to recollection the promise of Jehovah that, if the Israelites would only turn unto Him, and do His commandments, He would gather them out of the nations, and bring them again to their fatherland. And so this man, who was no priest by vocation, ventures, nevertheless, in the true priestly spirit, to intercede with God on behalf of his countrymen. Identifying himself thoroughly with his people, he confesses his own sins, and the sins of his father's house, and the sins of Israel.—*T. Finlayson.*

3 Prayerfulness.

[18574] Then the king said unto me, "For what dost thou make request?" An opening was thus given him to present his suit. And, agitated and affrighted as he was, it would have been natural for him to have at once stammered forth his application. But mark his irrepressible spirit of devotion! Though not always in the act, he was always in the attitude, of supplication. He was not, therefore, thrown off his guard; he paused; he was silent; and so, says he, "I prayed to the God of heaven." Then, having first made known his request to Him in whose hand are the hearts of kings, he next presented his petition to his earthly sovereign. Is it possible to conceive of a more expressive evidence of the constancy with which this great man waited upon God than the evidence furnished in this simple incident? It speaks

volumes as to the steadiness of the sacred flame which burned within his breast.—*Rev. H. Stowell.*

[18575] If prayer may be ready and swift, it may well be mingled with all our work. Nehemiah, riding on his mule from group to group, getting the evil words repeated to him here and there as news, keeps his lips shut and speaks only with his heart to the God of heaven whom he serves, who has said, "To Me belongeth vengeance and recompense; their foot shall slide in due time" (Deut. xxxii. 35). There is a tone about the prayer which staggers some gentle hearts; a tone, it is thought, almost of vindictiveness. I am not concerned to make out a vindication of Nehemiah in the matter. My own mind is relieved from perplexity by observing that the good man's spirit is devout rather than personally vindictive, being concerned for the glory of God and the prosperity of His work—"they have provoked Thee to anger before the builders;" by reflecting that the prayer was answered; by noticing that it is in wholesome conformity, as Nehemiah's conduct was all through, to that stern justice of God's providential government which is a constant fact, to-day as yesterday; and by calling to mind such words as these of David.—*A. Symington.*

4 Patriotism.

[18576] His patriotism is as conspicuous as his piety. Although probably he had never looked upon Jerusalem, yet no sooner does he realize the actual condition of his far-distant countrymen, than his heart is filled with profound sorrow and with an earnest longing to proceed at once to their help. He had doubtless read in the sacred books concerning the earlier glories of his people, and probably he was familiar with snatches of psalm and prophecy which told of the former grandeur of Jerusalem, and the lofty destiny of Israel. And so his heart yearned towards his fatherland. Splendid as was the Susa palace, the holy city towards which he turned in his devotions was dearer to his heart; and he longed to be the means of restoring her battered walls and gates, and giving back to her some touch of her former greatness. He was willing, moreover, to make no little sacrifice in the cause of patriotism. Even in asking the king for leave of absence on such a mission, he was probably risking the royal displeasure.—*T. Finlayson.*

[18577] The devout love of Nehemiah for Jerusalem is evident from the eager inquiries with which he questioned his brother Hanani and other men of Judah who at length arrived, weary and travel-stained, at Shushan, from the distant holy city. It is likely that even their countenances revealed in part the sorrowful nature of the message which they brought; but when they entered into the detailed description of Jerusalem's misery and reproach, and proceeded to tell him of the defenceless city, with

its still ruined walls and burnt-up gates, and the consequent affliction of its people, daily embittered by the taunts of their idolatrous assailants, "Where is now your God?" the soul of the magnanimous Hebrew was for a time completely overwhelmed by the evil tidings which so far exceeded even his worst fears. In the greatness of his sorrow, his natural food became distasteful and unwelcome to him; "he wept and mourned certain days, and fasted." But when these first strong outbursts of his grief were past, he turned for relief to that quarter to which every pious heart will be sure to turn in its affliction—to the power, compassion, and faithfulness of his covenant God. "I prayed," says he, "before the God of heaven."—*Rev. A. Thompson, D.D.*

[18578] "Let the king live for ever: why should not my countenance be sad when the city, the place of my fathers' sepulchres, lieth waste, and the gates thereof are consumed with fire?" Why not? Surely the king will respect a noble sorrow such as this. You know I am a Jew, and we Jews are loyal; we have done your empire no harm; Daniel and Mordecai are honoured names in the chronicles of Persia. We are no longer a nation, we have now only graves; yet those who sat on your throne favoured the city of my fathers' sepulchres, and yourself some thirteen years ago sent Ezra the priest to restore the worship of our God there, saying, "Whatsoever is commanded by the God of heaven let it be diligently done for the house of the God of heaven; for why should there be wrath against the realm of the king and his sons?" (Ezra vii. 21-23.) Tidings have reached me that that mission has not thriven: foes have laid the city waste, and the gates are burned with fire. Why should not my countenance be sad?—*A. Symington.*

5 Sagacity.

[18579] The practical sagacity of Nehemiah is manifested by his conduct on his arrival at Jerusalem. He does not at once blurt out the purpose of his mission. Quietly he rests for three days. Before revealing his object to the nobles or to the authorities of the city, he must first see with his own eyes the actual condition of the city walls, that he may discover what is necessary and what is practicable. And so, taking only a few men with him, he goes out in secret, at dead of night, that he may survey, probably by moonlight, the walls and gates of Jerusalem. Then, having matured his plans and determined on his course of action, he at length lays the matter before the people. Nor does he speak to them words of mere authority. He does not say to them, "The king has sent me to command you to do this." He speaks words of encouragement and stimulus. He falls back, not on the royal authority, but on the royal favour. He tells them of the kindness of Artaxerxes, and traces it to the good hand of God. He calls upon them to make a grand, voluntary effort to wipe away the reproach of Jerusalem.—*T. Finlayson.*

[18580] Though he bore with him the royal authority and commission requiring the people of Jerusalem to co-operate with him in his work, he was too brave a man to proceed upon mere authority, and too wise a man not to see that men wrought better from love than from fear, and that the union of hearts as well as hands in such an enterprise as that to which he had now consecrated himself, was essential to success. And the arguments which he used with the chiefs and people when, on the next day, he summoned them together, were admirably fitted to stir into life their dormant energies, and to unite their hitherto disjointed ranks in one.—*Ibid.*

[18581] He appealed to their distressed condition as seen in their walls and gates still in ruins, and bitterly felt in the injuries and taunts not only against their nation but against their religion, to which these desolations daily exposed them from their heathen neighbours. He told them how, hearing in the far-distant palace of Shushan of their great affliction, he had been overwhelmed with grief at their depression and dishonour—how the purpose had gradually formed itself in his mind of coming to wipe away their reproach—how he had, many a day and night, asked "the God of heaven" to assist him by inclining the heart of the Persian monarch to grant him the necessary authority and help for the building of their wall, and how the king had granted him his request in such a manner as to make it evident that "the whole thing was of the Lord." And now, appearing in the midst of them with the combined authority of earth and heaven, he asked them whether they were prepared to take advantage of "the set time to favour Zion," and to arise with him to build the wall. This appeal at once to their patriotism and to their piety, to their shame, to their fears and hopes—this manifestation before them of a visible Providence working in their behalf—made them as one man, and drew from them the loud and unanimous response, "Let us rise up and build."—*Ibid.*

6 Prudence.

[18582] Thinking with the rapidity and decision which great occasions both require and create, or bringing out at length the result of many an anxious thinking which hitherto it had been necessary to keep to himself, Nehemiah proceeded to ask for written commissions and orders on the royal forests. A very exalted exercise of piety does not set aside the use of worldly prudence.—*A. Symington.*

[18583] It is particularly important, however, that we should notice that while Nehemiah was a man of prayer and of devout dependence upon God, he neglected no arrangement for prospering his enterprise which forethought or prudence could suggest. Thus he obtained a military escort, to surround his mission at once with dignity and safety. He asked for royal

letters to the governors of the various provinces beyond the river Euphrates, through which he must pass on his way to Judah, by which his undertaking might be accredited, suspicion dispelled, and an addition to his convoy obtained when danger or other circumstances might render it expedient. In order that there might be no questioning of his authority or impeding of his work after he has reached Jerusalem, he asks for a special letter to Asaph, the keeper of the royal forest on the mountains of Lebanon, requiring him to send him as much timber as might be necessary for the various departments of his enterprise; while he also states in detail before the king what those various departments are. How much was there in all this at once of wise forethought which would not throw over upon Providence difficulties which might be prevented by prudence, and of that clear and honourable explanation which is one great security against future misunderstanding and complaint! The man of prayer is also a man of business.—*Rev. A. Thompson, D.D.*

7 Perseverance.

[18584] Another admirable feature of Nehemiah's conduct was his perseverance. "And it came to pass when our enemies heard that it was known to us, and God had brought their counsel to nought, that we returned all of us to the wall, every man unto his work." The three things go well together in work for God—prayer, promptitude, and this perseverance. Had the builders ceased until they should go out and attack Sanballat or Geshem, it would have been long ere their task was finished. But no, attack was not for them, only defence; and the moment that the display of readiness to defend themselves has caused the enemy to retire, they turn eagerly to finish the wall. Every course of masonry laid was better than a hundred victories. Having arms in their hands did not tempt them to fight; success did not uplift them; they knew that it was God who had brought to nought the counsel of Sanballat, and they went on doing his work with all their might.—*A. Symington.*

8 Fidelity.

[18585] I confess that, next to my devout wondering at the providence of God which had raised Nehemiah to this elevation for future service to His Church, that which most of all impresses my mind is the fact that he had maintained his attachment to his people and his religion in the midst of all these unfavourable influences. Knowing the power of outward circumstances to mould the character, especially when these circumstances fall in with our natural tastes, we should have feared that this Hebrew, after resisting the strong current of custom and general feeling for a time, would by degrees have yielded to its power; and that, with every luxury at his command, he would at length have owned the spell of the enchantment, and become conformed in character to those around him.—*Rev. A. Thompson, D.D.*

9 Courage.

[18586] Nehemiah had gone, it would appear, for counsel or comfort into the house of one who was reputed a prophet, but who was, in reality, such a prophet as Balaam was; he had gone into the house of Shemaiah, the son of Delaiah, the son of Mehetabel, "who was shut up," as though afraid for his life—probably in pursuance of a plot into which he had been induced to enter by Sanballat and Tobiah—and this false friend said unto him, "Let us meet together in the house of God, within the temple, and let us shut the doors of the temple: for they will come to slay thee; yea, in the night will they come to slay thee." He insinuated that it would be unsafe for them to hold converse in his dwelling; but that if they sought the temple as a sanctuary, and closed the doors about them, there they would be in security. His design, however, was not to serve but to ensnare Nehemiah; to shake his strong confidence in the protection of God, and beguile him into doubtful and dastardly expedients; that so the hands of the workmen might be weakened in their work, and the enemies of Israel have occasion to reproach the leader of the people, as having been entangled like a bird in the snare of the fowler. But holy courage has always heavenly wisdom for her companion. Nehemiah, therefore, penetrating the hypocrisy of the tempter, and lending no fond ear to the whispers of a faithless expediency, answered with sublime serenity, "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."—*Rev. H. Stowell.*

10 Determination.

[18587] "The God of heaven, He will prosper us; therefore we His servants will arise and build," was the sentiment with which he girded himself to his task; and it was in this mighty confidence that he prosecuted the work, undismayed by threats, unembarrassed by plots, in nowise disheartened by difficulties or disappointments. His noble steadfastness of resolution was manifest throughout his career. He had counted the cost, he had made up his mind; his decision was unwavering, and he carried it out with unflinching energy. There is a surpassing moral grandeur in the reply which he sent to Sanballat, and Tobiah, and Geshem the Arabian, and the rest of his enemies, when they said to him, "Come, let us meet together in some one of the villages in the plain of Ono." He transmitted to them this magnanimous message, "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?" It needs only that you should study his history, to perceive how this sublime determination of spirit pervaded the whole of his course. Whatever his hand found to do, he did it with his might; whatever he resolved to win, he never ceased till he had won it; whatever he

determined to encounter, he never failed to overcome.—*Ibid.*

[18588] This element imparted to his character a peculiar dignity; it set him on high, far above such as take their complexion from circumstances, conferring with flesh and blood—the creatures, not the controllers of events. It made him resemble the sun, which “cometh forth as a bridegroom out of his chamber, and rejoiceth as a strong man to run his race,” which never pauses in the career his Maker has assigned him. Clouds and mists and storms cause him no obstruction; he still pursues his lofty pathway in the heavens, and, however shrouded from our view, shines on in unshorn splendour.—*Ibid.*

11 Disinterestedness.

[18589] He was appointed “governor” or pasha “in the land of Judah” in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes, and retained the office for twelve years. During all that time he might have drawn about £5 a day, with rations; but he had not. On the contrary, the city and the province were the better for him in various ways: he gave the labour of his servants without charge; he avoided the temptation to acquire land; he did not allow his subordinates to do so; and he practised a large-handed hospitality toward “an hundred and fifty of the Jews and rulers, beside those that came unto us from among the heathen that are about us.” All was done from the highest motives. You have no call to impoverish yourself; feather your nest while you have the chance, as the rulers did before you. Such might be the advice of shrewd men. It is not likely that Nehemiah was impoverished; but at least he knew well what he was doing. “For all this required not I the bread of the governor, because the bondage was heavy on this people;” the blessing of him that was ready to perish was worth more to him than all gain.—*A. Symington.*

[18590] Nehemiah, a beautiful model in other points of view for the man of God who is busied in the world, is especially an example for him in the single-mindedness of his character. We find that, whether in the voluptuous court of Persia, encompassed with the fascinations of pleasure; or whether at Jerusalem, in the midst of harassing difficulties and besetments; or whether as governor of Israel, surrounded by the seductions of power and position, he still demeaned himself as a citizen of heaven. Hence it came to pass that whilst many of the nobles and great men at Jerusalem were chiefly intent on aggrandizing themselves—taking advantage of their poorer brethren, and adding field to field, and house to house—he did not so much as entangle himself with any purchase of property, but devoted himself wholly to the work which God had assigned him.—*Rev. H. Stowell.*

[18591] It is a rare thing to see a man refusing to take a fairly-earned salary; but such was his habit during this first residence in Jerusalem. He had sufficient property to enable him to maintain a proper State dignity, and a well-furnished table for about two hundred people daily; and he used it for conscience' sake, rather than add to the burdens of the people. Scrupulously he had guarded himself and his servants from personal emolument by the perquisites of office, or by opportunities granted him by his superior position. He had set himself in determined opposition to those who were taking unfair advantage of their needy brothers to exact an unlawful interest upon borrowed money, and had now a warm place in the hearts of many whom he had thus befriended. His name would be associated throughout the city with every thought of justice and uprightness, and, unconsciously to himself, his example had been leavening the whole population.—*Chapters for Christian Workers.*

12 Charity.

[18592] The governor took a noble revenge on the false prophets. He might have “set a great assembly against them,” and condemned them to death as traitors; but that was not Nehemiah's way. When men broke civil laws or neglected religious duties he rebuked them and used force; but sin as such cannot be corrected by force. The public influence of She-maiah and Noadiah was sufficiently blasted by his exposure; any further measures it was not for him to take. Revenge was not trusted to his hands; and the mischief was so complicated and deeply-rooted that he would do more harm than good in trying to remove it. “My God, think Thou upon Tobiah and Sanballat according to these their works, and on the prophetess Noadiah and the rest of the prophets that would have put me in fear.” Surely they cannot be angry with Nehemiah for this, seeing he prays for them precisely what he had prayed for himself! (v. 19.) A man need not wince at God thinking on him unless his deeds are evil (John iii. 19-21); and even then God alone can so think on the sinner as to deal with him in righteousness and mercy. Let it be seen—this is what Nehemiah wished—that there is a King in Judah who is able so to punish sin as to purify and save his people.—*A. Symington.*

13 Humility.

[18593] He obtained all his desire: but he did not ascribe the happy issue to his own adroitness or address, to his influence with the king, or to the prudence with which he had conducted himself. No! he attributed all his success to Him on whom alone he had depended; he summed up his record of the whole transaction in this touching manner: “And the king granted me, according to the good hand of my God upon me.” He asked—the king granted; but all was of God. The same simple avouchment of the Divine hand shines forth on

another occasion in this very chapter. When he came to Jerusalem, and found the people utterly disheartened, and strove to stir them up to gird themselves anew to the work, how did he encourage them? What was his most powerful incentive? In the eighteenth verse he says: "Then I told them of the hand of my God which was good upon me; and they said, Let us rise up and build. So they strengthened their hands for this good work." He might have boasted of his services to the king—of his place and authority in Babylon; he might have arrogated to himself the credit of his success. But he was of another spirit; he sought not his own glory, but the glory of his Master in heaven; therefore he told them of the goodness of God. To this fountain he traced up every stream of blessing.—*Rev. H. Stowell.*

[18594] After all, and when he had done all, he trusted in nothing that he had either gained or done: but the more he was laden with the fruits of righteousness, the more he felt himself to be laden with infirmities; so that, however illustrious he was in the eyes of his fellow-men, he felt that before his God he had no plea to urge, save "the mercy that endureth for ever." This, therefore, was his lowly prayer—"Remember me, O my God, concerning this also, and spare me, according to the greatness of Thy mercy." His hope sprang not from the smallness of his guilt, but from the greatness of the mercy of his God; he relied not on what he himself had accomplished, but on what the Saviour of sinners should accomplish in the fulness of the time, when He should come in the flesh.—*Ibid.*

[18595] We should have been sorely disappointed had we not found him adorned with this crowning virtue—a grace of which Augustine said, when he was asked, "What is the first thing in religion?"—"humility." "What the second?"—"humility." "What the third?"—"humility." But we trace in the model which we are commending to you, a beautiful humbleness of mind. There are those, indeed, who find fault with some of his expressions, such as "Think upon me, O God, for good, according to that I have done for this people;" and such as the one in this very chapter—"Remember me, O my God, concerning this, and wipe not out my good deeds that I have done for the house of my God, and for the offices thereof." They think that such sentiments savour of self-righteousness—that they have more of the spirit of the Pharisee than that of the publican in them. But such persons do not understand the consistency of deep humiliation on account of the flesh, with joyful consciousness of the work of the Spirit in the Divine life. A believer may mourn over his secret corruptions, at the same time that he rejoices at what God has wrought in him.—*Ibid.*

[18596] We should have been deeply sur-

prised had Nehemiah put any confidence in the flesh, or failed to take refuge in the mercy of God. It is therefore delightful to find that spirit of humility which pervaded his whole career, shining out in the closing passage of the history with surpassing distinctness and lustre.—*Ibid.*

14 Zeal.

(1) *For the honour of God's name.*

[18597] He was not only valiant in fighting the good fight of faith—braving every foe, and weathering every hardship, in the service of his God—but he was tremblingly alive to any dishonour brought upon Him whom he served, and above all, when brought upon Him by those who bore His name, and were identified with His truth. When, therefore, with just indignation, he reprehended the usurious and oppressive conduct of the richer Jews towards their poorer brethren, he not only appealed to their sense of justice, but he still more cuttingly appealed to them on the ground of the disrepute into which they brought the holy name of the God of Israel—giving occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme. "Ought ye not," he exclaimed, "to walk in the fear of God because of the reproach of the heathen our enemies?"—*Ibid.*

(2) *For the honour of God's day.*

[18598] He was filled with just dismay, holy agitation of mind, and righteous indignation, when he witnessed what he thus describes:—"In those days saw I in Judah some treading wine-presses on the Sabbath, and bringing in sheaves, and lading asses; as also wine, grapes, and figs, and all manner of burdens, which they brought into Jerusalem on the Sabbath day:" and "I testified against them in the day wherein they sold victuals. There dwelt men of Tyre also therein, which brought fish, and all manner of ware, and sold on the Sabbath unto the children of Judah and in Jerusalem. Then I contended with the nobles," who seem to have partaken with the people in their unhallowed gains, or who at least had taken no steps to put a stop to the profanation—"I contended with the nobles of Judah, and said unto them, What evil thing is this that ye do, and profane the Sabbath day? Did not your fathers thus, and did not our God bring all this evil upon us, and upon this city? Yet ye bring more wrath upon Israel by profaning the Sabbath." Nor was he satisfied with simply protesting against their conduct. As a ruler he took steps to enforce that which he inculcated. "And it came to pass, that when the gates of Jerusalem began to be dark before the Sabbath, I commanded that the gates should be shut, and charged that they should not be opened till after the Sabbath; and some of my servants set I at the gates, that there should no burden be brought in on the Sabbath day. So the merchants and sellers of all kind of ware lodged without Jerusalem once or twice. Then I testified against them, and

said unto them, Why lodge ye about the wall? if ye do so again, I will lay hands on you. From that time forth came they no more on the Sabbath. And I commanded the Levites that they should cleanse themselves, and that they should come and keep the gates, to sanctify the Sabbath day." How noble the example which this devoted man thus bequeathed to the Church! He not only sanctified the Sabbath himself—giving a pattern to the people; but he stood in the breach to avert the displeasure of God, by vindicating the honour of the sacred day, wielding for that purpose the authority with which he was invested as a ruler.—*Ibid.*

(3) *For the honour of God's house.*

[18599] After seventy years of tribulation, God hearkened to their cries: He thought upon His people, and pitied them for His Name's sake. He caused Cyrus to issue a decree that Israel should return to their land. Multitudes hastened back to the home of their heart. They rebuilt their temple; they gradually, under the guidance of that illustrious leader whose character we are dwelling upon, raised from the dust the walls of their city; and now the work, through the good hand of their God upon them, was brought to a happy consummation. Then kept they a solemn festival, and accompanied it with deep humiliation—mingling their sorrows and confessions with their joys and thanksgivings. After that, they renewed their covenant with God; family after family, each represented by its head, subscribed and sealed the holy compact. They bound themselves to restore to God's house the tithes and sacrifices which the law ordained. Yea—and, though impoverished and oppressed, such was their rekindled love to the sanctuary, that they voluntarily undertook to give of their own freewill, over and above what the law demanded, such things as were needful for the full service of the temple. And thus it was that, chastened and taught, penitent and grateful, remembering how their fathers had deserted the habitation of the Lord, and how fearful had been the consequences—the whole assembly, in unison with their governor, protested with one mind and one mouth, "We will not forsake the house of our God."—*Ibid.*

IV. SUMMARY OF HIS CHARACTER AND CAREER.

[18600] In his early life, elevated by the providence of God to an office of high trust and distinction in the service of the king of Assyria, being appointed his cupbearer, and thus surrounded by the seductions, and in contact with the defilements of an idolatrous court; afterwards led of God to repair to Jerusalem, for the purpose of rousing and succouring the remnant of his people to restore the desolated walls of the holy city; subsequently occupied in governing and establishing those whom he had rallied and organized; at one time, harassed by insidious and insulting foes; at another, embarrassed by the misconduct of his own subjects:

now, redressing grievances; now, rectifying abuses—through all, and in all, he still demeaned himself as became a child of the Most High, and "served his own generation according to the will of God." Bearing adversity with fortitude, and prosperity with soberness, he manifested how a man may embellish with the beauty of holiness every situation in life, and pass through the vicissitudes of his career, so as to be true to his principles and faithful in his stewardship.—*Ibid.*

[18601] Animated simply by love to his God and his country, he undertook, and successfully completed, a very difficult task, manifesting throughout many noble qualities, and proving himself worthy to be counted a star of the first magnitude among the Old Testament saints. His zeal was not that of a blind rider, who knows not how to guide his steed, but was tempered with remarkable prudence, and his boldness in the path of right was coupled with wise moderation and patience.—*Rev. W. Harris.*

V. LESSON FOR OUR OWN TIMES.

[18602] Doubtless Nehemiah had his faults; it would have been strange if he had not shown somewhat of the harsh impetuosity, or somewhat of the self-consciousness that often characterize the ardent and successful reformer. Nevertheless his excellences were such that, even to this day, he stands before us as a stimulating example of earnest, prudent, and practical zeal in the cause of God and of man. His name has not been allowed to go down into oblivion. And although he lived in what some may be pleased to call a dark and narrow age, he was so faithful to the light he had, that his career is a practical rebuke to many of the enlightened Christians of the present day. Especially is he a model for men of practical business ability. Layman though he was, he did a noble work for Jerusalem, which neither priest nor prophet could have so well accomplished.—*T. Finlayson.*

[18603] He shows us what wealth can do when wealth is consecrated to the service of God. His life rebukes the men who shut themselves up in their own selfish money-getting or money-hoarding, and never manifest any public spirit on behalf either of their country or the Church of God. He shows us, too, what may be done in a community by even one man of practical sagacity and energetic zeal—how such a man can stir up others by his example and his influence, and can carry out his plans for the common good, in spite of enemies without and croakers within. Let us then take a practical lesson from this patriot and reformer of the olden time. Let us not shut ourselves up in our own individual and domestic interests. Let us extend our sympathies and efforts. Let us see what we can do according to the special needs of our own time to serve God and man in our day and generation.—*Ibid.*

VI. HOMILETICAL REFLECTIONS.

1 The history of Nehemiah illustrates the importance of securing the Divine favour by a life of practical righteousness.

[18604] Here is the beginning and end of the whole matter. God has an eye to see us, an ear to hear us, a face to shine on us, and a hand to succour us. The man who can claim God for his own, as Nehemiah could, is sure to prosper. Any one will admit that : if the favour of the God of heaven can be secured, there is no doubt about the success ; but the "if" seems a great one. How is the favour of the God of heaven to be secured? As Nehemiah secured it. Remember the long prayers of the closet, and the short, swift ejaculation in the court. "Ask and ye shall receive, seek and ye shall find ; knock and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh receiveth ; and he that seeketh findeth ; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened" (Matt. vii. 7, 8). When sin is heartily put away with shame ; when resolutions are formed to serve God, working hard and risking all for Him ; when He is thoroughly trusted for everything, blessing is sure to come. We may or may not have to transact with unbelieving rulers, and to build with stone and lime ; but we have God's will to do and a dangerous world to walk through. Praying in our secret places, we may pray also in crowded streets, in the midst of work, on encountering sudden temptation, to our Father who seeth in secret ; and He will reward us openly. But Nehemiah had much sore labour before the open reward came : so shall we have, if the reward is to be true and lasting.—*A. Symington.*

2 The history of Nehemiah affords a striking example of the power of prayer.

(1) *As regards prayer generally.*

[18605] The whole narrative constrains us to remark on the power of prayer in influencing the history of the Church and the world. It is impossible not to feel, after the study of such a passage as this, that if human history were to be truly written, written as we may conceive an angel to write it, much less influence would be ascribed to the policy of kings and the diplomacy of statesmen, and more to the prayers of holy men. Common history deals mainly with material forces ; inspired history lifts the veil, and shows us those more subtle and spiritual forces in operation, which do so much to shape the destiny alike of individuals and of communities. As this one Hebrew, for example, retired to some quiet chamber in the palace of Shushan, or to the deep shade of some tree in the gardens around the palace, to "pray his prayer day and night," what an influence was he thereby putting forth upon the counsels of Artaxerxes, upon the distant Jerusalem, and upon the future history of the kingdom of God—touching the first link in the chain on which all others depended, moving the hand that was moving the universe ! —*Rev. A. Thompson, D.D.*

(2) *As regards ejaculatory prayer in particular.*

[18606] "For what dost thou make request?" But, before he answers Artaxerxes, there is another King to whom he makes his request. "So I prayed," says he, "to the God of heaven." This is one of the most striking instances recorded in the Bible of what is commonly termed ejaculatory prayer—an example of the way in which good men, in the intercourse and business of daily life, especially when brought into circumstances of unexpected difficulty, even when there is no motion of the lips, scarcely more, indeed, than an "upward glancing of the eye," may yet send up such a quick and compacted supplication to God as shall bring down all heaven to their aid. It is not meant that such ejaculations are to be a substitute for those more lengthened seasons of supplication of which we have just seen so interesting an example on the part of Nehemiah, but that they may be profitably used by us when the other is for the time impossible. "When we are time-bound," says good Thomas Fuller in his "Good Thoughts," "place-bound, or person-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. Ejaculations take not up any room in the soul. They give liberty of callings, so that, at the same time, one may follow his proper vocation." Oh, what a blessed resource to the Christian merchant amid the fretting annoyances and the thousand perplexities of business ! And what a benefit to all, thus to fill up the intervals between their more prolonged devotions by brief ejaculatory prayers which go to make the whole life devout !

"These form the links of an electric chain That joins the orisons of morn and eve, And propagate through all its several parts, While kept continuous, the ethereal fire."

—*Ibid.*

3 The history of Nehemiah presents, in the opposition with which he met, a type of the vainglorious and scornful infidelity which opposes the progress of the Christian faith to-day.

[18607] In all this we have an example of the terms of incredulity and scorn in which men without religion often speak of Christian efforts for the highest good of the world. "It is only a fit of momentary enthusiasm," they will tell us ; or, if perseverance contradicts this, then we are assured that the work is impracticable, and that a few feeble worms might as soon attempt to level the Alps into a plain. In this way they are ever measuring spiritual forces by a mere material standard which cannot be applied to them, and constantly finding their "glory turned into shame." Hume, in his famous argument on miracles in which every new writer on the Christian evidences has discovered a new sophism, boasted that he had found an argument by which he would drive superstition—

by which he meant the Christian religion—from the earth. And there have not been wanting similar boasters in the camp of infidelity ever since. But it has been remarked, in terms which the history of centuries might be adduced to confirm, that while “infidels are always boasting that they have given the Bible its death-blow, meanwhile they somehow perish, and it lives and laughs at them.”—*Ibid.*

- 4 The history of Nehemiah presents, in the calmness with which he met the opposition offered to him, an example of the spirit in which the Christian should face mockery to-day.

[18608] There are some natures—and these by no means the most ignoble—that are peculiarly sensitive to ridicule. They are apt to become ashamed of convictions or of actions which are subjected to mockery, and then afterwards they are ashamed of their shame. They could meet a blow better than a sneer, and would rather be persecuted than despised. But if we are working in any way for Christ and His kingdom, if we are striving to promote the cause of righteousness and truth, let us learn from Nehemiah to confront mockery with calmness. If we hold certain views on political or religious questions, let us, indeed, make sure that we are holding them on good grounds; but let us not give them up, or be ashamed of them, merely because we may be sneered at as being “behind the age.” There is an intellectual self-conceit which shelters its own ignorance behind the authority of great names, and all but exhausts its own shallow powers in flippant sarcasm and clever scorn.—*Ibid.*

EZRA.

I. LEADING TRAITS OF CHARACTER.

1 Heroic faith.

[18609] The stony desert, which stretches unbroken from the Euphrates to the uplands on the East of Jordan, was infested then as now by wild bands of marauders, who might easily swoop down on the encumbered march of Ezra and his men, and make a clean sweep of all which they had. And he knew that he had but to ask and have an escort from the king that would ensure their safety till they saw Jerusalem. Artaxerxes’ surname, “the long-handed,” may have described a physical peculiarity, but it also expressed the reach of his power; his arm could reach these wandering plunderers, and if Ezra and his troop were visibly under his protection, they could march secure. So it was not a small exercise of trust in a higher hand that is told us here so simply. It took some strength of principle to abstain from asking what it would have been so natural to ask, so easy to get, so comfortable to have.

But, as he says, he remembered how confidently he had spoken of God’s defence, and he feels that he must be true to his professed creed, even if it deprives him of the king’s guards. He halts his followers for three days at the last station before the desert, and there, with fasting and prayer, they put themselves in God’s hand; and then the band, with their wives and little ones, and their substance—a heavily-loaded and feeble caravan—fling themselves into the dangers of the long, dreary, robber-haunted march. Did not the scribe’s robe cover as brave a heart as ever beat beneath a breastplate?—*Rev. A. Maclaren, D.D.*

2 Single-eyed consistency.

[18610] Note Ezra’s sensitive shrinking from anything like inconsistency between his creed and his practice. It was easy to talk about God’s protection when he was safe behind the walls of Babylon; but now the push had come. There was a real danger before him and his unwarlike followers. No doubt, too, there were plenty of people who would have been delighted to catch him tripping; and he felt that his cheeks would have tingled with shame if they had been able to say, “Ah! that is what all his fine professions come to, is it? He wants a convoy, does he? We thought as much. It is always so with these people who talk in that style. They are just like the rest of us when the pinch comes.” So, with a high and keen sense of what was required by his avowed principles, he will have no guards for the road. There was a man whose religion was, at any rate, not a fair-weather religion. It did not go off in fine speeches about trusting to the protection of God, spoken from behind the skirts of the king, or from the middle of a phalanx of his soldiers. He clearly meant what he said, and believed every word of it as a prose fact, which was solid enough to build conduct on.—*Ibid.*

[18611] I am afraid a great many of us would rather have tried to reconcile our asking for a band of horsemen with our professed trust in God’s hand; and there would have been plenty of excuses very ready about using means as well as exercising faith, and not being called upon to abandon advantages, and not pushing a good principle to Quixotic lengths, and so on, and so on. But whatever truth there is in such considerations, at any rate, we may well learn the lesson of this story—to be true to our professed principles; to beware of making our religion a matter of words; to live, when the time for putting them into practice comes, by the maxims which we have been forward to proclaim when there was no risk in applying them; and to try sometimes to look at our lives with the eyes of people who do not share our faith, that we may bring our actions up to the mark of what they expect of us. If “the Church” would oftener think of what “the world” looks for from it, it would seldomer

have cause to be ashamed of the terrible gap between its words and its deeds.—*Ibid.*

3 Methodical spirituality.

[18612] Notice Ezra's preparation for receiving the Divine help. There, by the river Ahava, he halts his company like a prudent leader, to repair omissions, and put the last touches to their organization before facing the wilderness. But he has another purpose also. "I proclaimed a fast there, to seek of God a right way for us." There was no foolhardiness in his courage; he was well aware of all the possible dangers on the road; and whilst he is confident of the Divine protection, he knows that, in his own quiet, matter-of-fact words, it is given "to all them that seek Him." So his faith not only impels him to the renunciation of the Babylonian guard, but to earnest supplication for the defence in which he is so confident. He is sure it will be given—so sure, that he will have no other shield; and yet he fasts and prays that he and his company may receive it. He prays because he is sure that he will receive it, and does receive it because he prays and is sure. So for us, the condition and preparation on and by which we are sheltered by that great hand, is the faith that asks, and the asking of faith. We must forsake the earthly props, but we must also believably desire to be upheld by the heavenly arms. We make God responsible for our safety when we abandon other defence, and commit ourselves to Him. With eyes open to our dangers, and full consciousness of our own unarmed and unwarlike weakness, let us solemnly commend ourselves to Him, rolling all our burden on His strong arms, knowing that He is able to keep that which we have committed to Him. He will accept the trust, and set His guards about us. As the song of the returning exiles, which may have been sung by the river Ahava, has it: "My help cometh from the Lord. The Lord is thy keeper. The Lord is thy shade upon thy right hand."—*Ibid.*

II. HOMILETICAL HINTS.

1 The history of Ezra illustrates the duty of a due subordination of visible means to a faithful reliance upon God.

[18613] Especially in regard to this matter of trust in an unseen hand, and reliance on visible helps, we all need to be very rigid in our self-inspection. Faith in the good hand of God upon us for good should often lead to the abandonment, and always to the subordination, of material aids. It is a question of detail, which each man must settle for himself as each occasion arises, whether in any given case abandonment or subordination is our duty. This is not the place to enter on so large and difficult a question. But, at all events, let us remember, and try to work into our own lives, that principle which the easy-going Christianity of this day has honeycombed with so many exceptions, that it scarcely has any whole sur-

face left at all; that the absolute surrender and forsaking of external helps and goods is sometimes essential to the preservation and due expression of reliance on God. There is very little fear of any of us pushing that principle to Quixotic lengths. The danger is all the other way. So it is worth while to notice that we have here an instance of a man being carried by a certain lofty enthusiasm further than the mere law of duty would take him. There would have been no harm in Ezra's asking an escort, seeing that his whole enterprise was made possible by the king's support. He would not have been "leaning on an arm of flesh" by availing himself of the royal troops, any more than when he used the royal firman. But a true man often feels that he cannot do the things which he might without sin do. "All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient."—*Ibid.*

[18614] What shall we say of people who profess that God is their portion, and are as eager in the scramble for money as anybody? What kind of a commentary will sharp-sighted, sharp-tongued observers have a right to make on us, whose creed is so unlike theirs, while our lives are identical? Do you believe that "the hand of our God is upon all them for good that seek Him"? Then, do you not think that racing after the prizes of this world, with flushed cheeks and labouring breath, or longing with a gnawing hunger of heart, for any earthly good, or lamenting over the removal of creatural defences and joys, as if heaven were empty because some one's place here is, or as if God were dead because our dear ones die, may well be a shame to us and a taunt on the lips of our enemies? Let us learn again the lesson from this old story—that if our faith in God is not the veriest sham, it demands, and will produce the abandonment sometimes, the subordination always, of external helps and material good.—*Ibid.*

2 The history of Ezra illustrates the successful issue which will always in the end attend a right-minded confidence in the Divine protection.

[18615] A flash of joyful feeling breaks through the simple narrative, as it tells how the words spoken before the king came true in the experience of the weaponless pilgrims: "The hand of our God *was* upon us, and He delivered us from the hand of the enemy, and of such as lay in wait by the way; and we came to Jerusalem." It was no rash venture that we made. He was all that we hoped and asked. Through all the weary march He led us. From the wild, desert-born robbers that watched us from afar, ready to come down on us, from ambushes and hidden perils, He kept us, because we had none other help, and all our hope was in Him.—*Ibid.*

[18616] The ventures of faith are ever rewarded. We cannot set our expectations too

high. What we dare scarcely hope now we shall one day remember. When we come to tell the completed story of our lives we shall have to record the fulfilment of all God's promises and the accomplishment of all our prayers that were built on these. Here let us cry, Be Thy hand upon us. Here let us trust, Thy hand shall be upon us. Then we shall have to say, "The hand of our God was upon us." And as we look from the watch-towers of the city on the desert that stretches to its very walls, and remember all the way by which He led us, we shall rejoice over His vindication of our poor faith, and praise Him that "not one thing hath failed of all the things which the Lord our God spoke concerning us."—*Ibid.*

EZEKIEL.

I. INTRODUCTORY.

His place among the prophets.

[18617] Ezekiel is, among the prophets, what Michael Angelo is among painters and sculptors. Vast and colossal in his imagery, majestic in his diction, copious in fancy, he nevertheless often transcends in his ideas the powers of language, and becomes obscure and difficult to be understood. This is well exemplified in the vision by which he was called to his office.—*Rev. R. Payne Smith.*

II. FORMATION OF CHARACTER.

[18618] He was a priest by descent, the son of Buzi, a circumstance which he records himself, and one with which the cast of his mental associations is in striking agreement. The ark and the cherubim forming God's visible throne, and the temple forming God's visible palace or habitation, under the typical dispensation of Judaism, seem to have been vividly present to his imagination, and to have been employed by the Spirit of prophecy as the groundwork of the astonishing visions which occur at the beginning and end of the book. We can conceive of him in youth, ere he was torn from his native land, receiving into his mind, as if burnt into his memory, the images of those sacred things, which rose as the background of the life of a Jewish priest—images with a spirit and meaning as pure and exalted as those of what he saw, in the land of his exile, were corrupt and debased.—*Rev. J. Stoughton.*

III. LEADING CHARACTERISTICS.

I Imaginativeness.

[18619] His mind was evidently of the most imaginative cast; went to dwell long upon the objects which he was taught to employ as the materials of symbolic lessons to his countrymen;

went to dwell so long on them as to bring out their minutest peculiarities in his pictorial details. He expands his images with a wonderful power of amplification, and in this respect may be compared with Isaiah, who dismisses his figures with a few bold strokes. Ezekiel enlarges his drawings, and gives free scope to his pencil, crowding with grand conceptions, and enriching with exquisite touches, his magnificent cartoons of prophecy. Yet not as a mere artist, not as a mere poet, not as a mere rhetorician, did Ezekiel employ the faculties with which God had endowed him.—*Ibid.*

2 Sense of responsibility.

This lay at the root of the perfect fidelity and obedience which his life exhibits.

[18620] The sense of responsibility in reference both to the people and himself was in the prophet's mind a cogent motive to fidelity—as it must ever be when it really exists. It formed the groundwork of that obedience of which the whole history of the prophet is an example. Though he was not responsible for success or failure, he was responsible for that, without the doing of which there could not be success, there must be failure. Though he had to do things the reason of which he could not see, he was responsible if they were not done. Though some exercises of mind which he was called to endure were terrible to flesh and blood, his responsibility as a minister and a man demanded that he should sustain them. At the very outset he had a discouraging prospect; for those to whom he was to minister were described to him as a rebellious nation—impudent children and stiff-necked. Yet he obeyed the Divine mandate, and went and ministered to them. He was bidden to take a tile and portray upon it the city of Jerusalem, and lay mimic siege to it, and build a fort, and cast up a mount; to lie down upon his left side, and then upon his right side, for many days; to make barley bread in a vessel and eat of it; to cut off his hair and weigh it in balances; to bring forth his stuff out of his house, and remove to another place in the sight of the people. Such things he was commanded to do—some trivial, and others tedious; but all, whether he saw it or not, having a Divine meaning, and being a sign and a witness to the children of Israel. He most scrupulously obeyed every injunction to the letter. More painful than all, he was to submit to the heaviest of domestic sorrows. "The word of the Lord came unto him, saying, Son of man, behold, I take away from thee the desire of thine eyes with a stroke: yet neither shalt thou mourn nor weep: neither shall thy tears run down. Forbear to cry, make no mourning for the dead, bind the hair of thine head upon thee, and put on thy shoes upon thy feet, and cover not thy lips, and eat not the bread of men." Stern though he seemed in his public character, his heart gushed with husbandly love, and the loss of the dearest companion of his life was enough to deluge his soul with grief; but even this heavy calamity he was

ready to endure at the command of God, without a murmur or a tear. "So I spake unto the people in the morning: and at even my wife died; and I did in the morning as I was commanded."—*Ibid.*

[18621] His strong sense of responsibility produced in him a spirit of obedience; a firm, unflinching, and faithful obedience to every word of the Lord, comes out as the constant habit of the prophet's life. With the simplicity of a child, and the earnestness of a man, he did what he was bidden. That which, in relation to any human master, would have been degrading, became, in submission to a Divine Master, a principle of mental and moral elevation. He is an abject slave whose will is entirely subject to that of another man's; he only is free whose will is entirely subject to that of God. The grand lesson of this portion of Ezekiel's history is obedience to the Infinitely Wise and Good,—obedience, even where it may seem fruitless; obedience in the minutest particulars, and the strangest service; obedience, though involving self-denial in our dearest affections, even to the very crucifixion of the heart.—*Ibid.*

3 Persevering energy.

[18622] The prophet is distinguished by uncommon strength and energy. We see in him an individuality naturally endowed with great intellectual strength, penetrated and sanctified by a higher power to which it is made subservient. The appearance of Ezekiel as an inspired messenger of God must have been among the most impressive of any of those who under the Old Testament dispensation spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. The glow of Divine wrath, the holy majesty of Jehovah, the mighty rushing of the Spirit of the Lord, as the seer himself had seen and heard them, were reflected in his discourse. He opposed with abruptness and firmness the corrupt spirit of the age in which he lived. When he had to contend with a people of brazen brow and stiff neck, he also on his part is of unbending nature, opposing presumption with unwavering boldness, and denouncing abominable deeds with words of consuming fire. This glow of discourse is united with a clear and constant prudence. The prophet never passes hastily from one subject to another, he occupies himself entirely with the one before him, embraces it with all his power, views it in all its aspects, and does not rest till he has completely exhausted it. Hence he often returns to the great leading thoughts that animate him. In these he lives and moves. Unceasingly he presents to the hardened ears and hearts of the people what the necessity of the case requires. And to this union of perseverance and strength the great efficacy of his eloquence is to be ascribed.—*Bibliotheca Sacra.*

4 The sacerdotal spirit.

[18623] Ezekiel is distinguished by his sacerdotal spirit. This is much stronger in him than

in Jeremiah. Even as a prophet he does not deny his Levitical origin and disposition, for he has with all his soul served the Lord in the sanctuary. Moreover, the circumstances in which he was placed, required him to maintain the character of a priest, not merely because a man of his family must of course enjoy a certain authority among the people, but because in him as priest a spiritual blessing was conferred upon them, a continual memento of the sanctuary of the Lord was given them, and his voice awakened their longings for those gracious manifestations of Jehovah which had been lost.—*Ibid.*

[18624] Numerous evidences of this sacerdotal spirit are found in the Book of Ezekiel. It appears in the manner of his calling (chap. i. cf. chap. x.). Individual features of it are frequently seen in his attachment to the law given by Moses (xx. 12, xxii. 8, 26). Some have wished to discover in this disposition of the prophet a narrowness of mind. Even Ewald says that "it was in consequence of a one-sided attachment to the ancient Judaism as described in books and made venerable by tradition, as well as a result of a despondency of spirit in view of the long banishment and present degradation of the people." But in opposition to this opinion we might say that Ezekiel, from the commencement of his life as a prophet, was devotedly attached to the law, and that so far from manifesting any despondency of mind, he possessed a noble courage, looking away from the suffering of the present time, and living with constant enthusiasm in the hopes of a new formation of the kingdom of God in the future.—*Ibid.*

IV. COMPARISON WITH JEREMIAH.

[18625] Comparing Ezekiel with Jeremiah we are struck with the method of amplifying figures through a vivid realization of them as present things, which we so plainly discover in the first of these inspired men, as compared with the less pictorial cast of mind indicated by the second. But the moral comparison of them is still more interesting. "The one presents the spectacle of the power of Divine inspiration acting on a mind naturally of the finest texture, and at once subduing to himself every element of the soul; whilst the other furnishes an example not less memorable of moral courage, sustained by the same inspiration, against the constantly opposing influence of a love of retirement and strong susceptibility to impressions of outward evil. Ezekiel views the conduct of his countrymen as opposed to righteousness and truth; Jeremiah thinks of it rather as productive of evil and misery to themselves; Ezekiel's indignation is roused at the sins of his people, Jeremiah's pity is excited by the consequences of their sins; the former takes an objective, the latter a subjective view of the evils by which both were surrounded."—*Rev. J. Stoughton.*

DANIEL.

I. INTRODUCTORY.

General view of his character and career.

[18626] We have here one of those noble witnesses who compose the cloud of which St. Paul speaks, and which surrounds the Church during her combats on earth (Heb. xii. 1). He is but a man, it is true; but he is a *faithful* man, and so placed, that he attracts our most lively attention whilst giving us the most important lessons. This Daniel is a young man, distinguished in every way, and surrounded with all the charms and allurements of the world. In blooming years, and accomplished in person, of high birth and a cultivated mind.—*Rev. C. Malan.*

[18627] Called at the beginning of the Babylonian captivity to witness for Jehovah, he was honoured to maintain a blameless record throughout the entire seventy years of the exile, and to take a principal part in the events which led to the famous edict of Cyrus, by which permission was given to the Jews to return to their own land. He lived thus through a critical era in the history of his nation. He was tried by adversity, and by the more searching test of sudden prosperity; yet he was always true to the convictions of his conscience, and faithful to the commandments of his God. Though in the world of Babylon, he was not of it; his heart was ever holding fellowship with Jehovah; and the temptations to honour and emolument were as impotent to move him as were the flames of the furnace or the lions of the den.—*Rev. W. Taylor, D.D.*

II. SPECIAL CHARACTERISTICS.

I Early piety.

[18628] He could not have been more than fourteen years of age when, with his three companions, he was sent to be educated at the college of the Chaldeans. Yet even then he had learned to love Jehovah, and to make the Divine law the rule of his life.—*Rev. F. Huntingdon, D.D.*

[18629] He was one of the young men of the higher rank (himself generally believed to be of the royal kindred) who were carried to Babylon in the great captivity; and there, with three others of them, he was selected, on account of conspicuous personal and mental qualifications, to be, after due training, introduced into the service of the court—a very hazardous thing for young men; but here, for once, the pestilent influence struck on incorruptible materials.—*Rev. J. Foster, D.D.*

[18630] Piety in youth is especially lovely and attractive. This was conspicuous in Daniel. He was still a youth when, though a captive in a foreign land, and surrounded with temptations

in a heathen and luxurious court, he resolved to deny himself the luxuries of the king's table, and to live upon beans and water, rather than do what he believed was contrary to the law of God. His amiability and sweetness of disposition were such as to gain for him the favour and attachment of the officer in the palace, under whose charge he and the other Jewish youths were placed. Daniel was still only a young man when, in a crisis of great danger to others as well as himself, he, in childlike confidence, carried the matter to the Lord, and obtained, through a Divine communication vouchsafed to him, deliverance both for himself and the wise men of Babylon. Daniel's piety in youth was the foundation of his character and greatness as a man.—*Homiletic Commentary.*

[18631] Nothing is recorded of the home influence which guarded and sanctified the earliest youth of Daniel; but we may, in the first place, be sure it existed, and in the second its general character can be clearly ascertained. Every effect must have a cause. When we find a lad of fourteen coming to an heroic moral resolve, arranging wisely for its execution, carrying it through over long years, and that in a foreign land, away from holy associations, seemingly unwatched by the eye of any human love, surrounded by the flatteries and seductions that wait on princes, we may feel perfectly sure that there had been a religious education of a very thorough character under the shadow of Jerusalem's temple and towers.—*Rev. E. Pusey, D.D.*

[18632] We are not certain as to who may have presided over his early culture. We do not know that father or mother, or both, took in it their appropriate part. For aught we know, Daniel may have been an orphan. But of this we are assured, that, before he was plunged into the overwhelming sorrow of the captivity, and was exposed to the fierce temptation that is wont to play on the heads of men in king's courts, Daniel learnt, somehow, those lessons of heavenly wisdom which were invariably imparted to Hebrew youth, and to say: "I have heard with my ears, O God, my fathers have told me, what work Thou didst in their days, in the times of old. . . . Thou art my King, O God: command deliverance for me."—*Ibid.*

[18633] No doubt the very peculiar circumstances in which he was placed at Babylon did something towards drawing out the piety whose principles lay deep within. Circumstances cannot make, but they may develop character. First principle, then opportunity. The miseries of the deportation, followed by immediate translation into the delicate living of the king's court, the moral trial which instantly supervened, the triumphant issue, and consequent elevation, are all events which, in the providence of God, and by His grace, may have contributed, doubtless did contribute, to the full development of that transcendent saintliness which we know to have

been characteristic of the prophet Daniel. Early life is probationary in relation to maturity, as is all life in relation to eternity. According as we then demean ourselves are the issues in character and destiny. Assuredly was this the case with Daniel, and well did he abide the trial. More than this we, perhaps, cannot say of those secondary causes which, under God, made Daniel the man he was, and "built" for him "an everlasting name."—*Ibid.*

[18634] His piety did not interfere with his pre-eminence. He was, shall I say, the valedictorian of his year. He held all through the very highest place in his class, and was not the less distinguished as a student because he was so prominent in the matter of religion. Nay, his elevation, as we see in the various incidents of his career, was closely connected with his piety. No doubt he had to suffer for his religion; for it was true then, as it is now, that all who will live godly in the world must suffer persecution of some sort; but still he proved it to be true that "godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come." Nor was there any element of feebleness about him. He was healthy alike in body and in mind; and in his conduct in the matter of the meat and the wine that came from the royal table, there were those characteristics of pluck and manliness which have always been so attractive and so stimulating to young men. He had the courage not only to have convictions, but also to act upon them; and that courage, so far from standing in the way of his promotion, was one of the things which contributed to it.—*Ibid.*

2 Faith.

[18635] This was the life of his life. And we notice concerning it: (1) His faith was an *early possession*. As a youth he believed in right, and in the invisible God of right. It was this principle that was the moulding force in his boyhood's character, conquering all that was adverse to him in the temptations of his masters or the example of his companions, and compelling the admiration and trust of those who could not understand the secret spring of his conduct. (2) His faith was cherished in *adverse circumstances*. Not only were there the temptations to paganism, and materialism, and animalism, which Babylonish life cast like so many meshes about the young captive, but there was the deprivation of all the ordinary outward aids to religious faith. No temple, no ceremonial, no sacrifice, came to his aid. He had solely to depend on the personal but, thank God, inalienable "means of grace," of private prayer. (3) His faith discovered to him *a glorious future*. He had visions of the colossal dynasties of men falling under the blessed dominion of the Son of God. He had foregleams of the glory of the coming of the Son of Man. And thus the future was exerting a calming, inspiriting influence on his heart as a

patriot, on his whole nature as a distressed and tried lover of his race. (4) His faith realized *the invisible present*. True faith ever does that, even though it cannot always descry the future. It sees what is now around and above and within, but which is to sense unseen. His faith saw God, duty, conscience. And so, whilst it was, in its visions of the future, "the substance of things hoped for," it was, in its perception of the present, "the evidence of things not seen."—*Urijah Thomas.*

3 Steadfastness under temptation.

As a model of youthful temperance.

[18636] What were Daniel's temptations to abandon a life of abstinence from strong drink? (1) He was tempted by his youth. He is supposed to have been from eighteen to twenty-two years of age, when the question of abstinence became a practical one to him. He was at the age when appetite is strong, health good, principle weak, and experience not at all. (2) Daniel was tempted also by the usages of his social rank. He was a noble, probably of the blood-royal. It was the usage of his order to drink wine, and the best of it, and much of it. Probably then, as now, it was the sign of a gentleman in the circle of society in which the young nobleman moved, to know good wine when he tasted it, to use it freely, and to enjoy the social hilarity of it without scruple. (3) Daniel was tempted by the courtesies of official station. He was in training for the first office in the realm. (4) Daniel was tempted also by his absence from home and native land. He was not only in a foreign land, in the Paris of the ancient world, in the court of a king, associating with corrupt young nobles and aristocratic pleasure-seekers, but he was a captive. He had no home. His own country, as an independent kingdom, was blotted from the map of Asia. Judæa was to Asia what Poland is to Europe—nationally and politically it had ceased to be. Put now all these things together—youth, social usage, official rank, professional interests, absence from home and native land, and the mortification of captivity—and where in modern life can you find a case of stronger temptation to self-indulgent and pleasure-seeking career?—*Rev. A. Phelps, D.D.*

[18637] In that brief trial of his youth (Dan. i.) he laid the foundation of a robust vigorous manhood. He laid then the train which led to a long and splendid career of courtly usefulness. The mysterious power which subsequently closed the mouths of lions for his safety began at this time to gather around his person. In this early and brief fragment of his life he settled the future of his professional career as a prophet of the living God. Those ten short days secured to him a place in the world's history, in which he is destined to live in the grateful and reverent affections of mankind for ever. Who cares now for the Chaldean monarch and his haughty court? They live to-day in the world's memory only because this young

Hebrew seer has condescended to speak of them. As one of the authors of the Word of God, and one of the great actors in the history of God's Church, he is to live while time lasts. Men of all ages will inquire for him in heaven. They will point him out, one to another, as the interpreter of the "hand-writing on the wall." Children there will seek him out as "the man of the lions' den." The redeemed of all times will revere him as one of God's great ministers and chosen friends. The foundation of this magnificent destiny, extending into two worlds, was built far back in those few days—not longer than a boy's holidays—in which the character of the young man was proved, and his principles tried, as a friend of temperance and the child of conscience.—*Ibid.*

4 Moral courage.

(1) *As evidenced by his openness.*

[18638] There was no parade, but, on the other hand, there was no concealment. He prayed with his "window open toward Jerusalem." No need of spies for him. What he did, he did openly. What he was, he was to the world.—*Urijah Thomas.*

(2) *As evidenced by his dignity.*

[18639] He always seems royal; as royal in his mien in the lions' den as in Belshazzar's hall. Courage stamps a man with nobility, crowns him with kingship. What word to the envious rivals round him, to the despot over him, or to the minions who did that despot's bidding, is recorded that is unworthy of a moral monarch?—*Ibid.*

(3) *As evidenced by his calmness.*

[18640] In Daniel's presence many a man has learned how to be calm; Roman martyr and Huguenot and Puritan statesman and school-boy have, as Dean Stanley recalls to us, learned calmness from this great, patient, gentle, brave, Hebrew prophet.—*Ibid.*

5 Humility.

[18641] He does not talk of his faith; he simply and, as in the act before us, with all the simplicity of naturalness, manifests it. Dr. Pusey strikingly calls attention to this reserve of Daniel: "Chief statesman of the first empire in the world, he has not recorded one single voluntary act of his own." Notice (1) The *signs* of his humility. He says little of himself or his exploits; his book tells much more of what befell him than of what he did. (2) The *producing cause* of this humility. It was doubtless his faith, his vision of the unseen present and the unseen future, that hushed and awed and humbled him. Just as grandeur of scenery hushes all thoughtful men, making them feel nothing amid its immensities, so the scenery of the invisible world and the sight of the invisible God abashes all pride, and quickens, in Daniel, as in Isaiah, the spirit that cries, "Woe is me: I have seen the Lord of Hosts." Unbelief may be

proud, half belief may be conceited, thorough belief is ever reverent and lowly.—*Ibid.*

[18642] The special peril of this sort of character is that it becomes conscious of its strength, proud of its independence, and, before it is aware, substitutes the human heroism of self-reliance for the holy fidelity of Christ's self-sacrifice. How many high examples of Christian courage have fallen by that cunning temptation—the humility of the cross vanished! See in Daniel the graceful freedom from that ostentation of conceited and opinionated firmness. He went not into street or palace-court, but, modestly, into his own house. There was just so much public conformity as fidelity and the sacred custom demanded—no more; the kneeling, the open windows toward Jerusalem: no noisy defiance, no boastful resistance, no aggravating proclamation of his resolve; he "prayed and gave thanks before his God" just "as he did aforetime."—*Rev. F. Huntingdon, D.D.*

[18643] Daniel is careful to let Nebuchadnezzar understand that he has not received the secret from God for any excellence about himself. He fears to stand between the king and Jehovah. He gives all the glory to the Most High. There is always a modesty about true greatness, and you may know whether or not piety is genuine by inquiring if it be characterized by humility. The good man will never seek to hide God from the view of his fellow-men. He will endeavour to make his light shine, but he will not make it shine so as to draw attention to himself. He will arrange it so that its rays will all converge in God, and men shall glorify the Father in heaven.—*Rev. W. Taylor, D.D.*

[18644] The entire absence of self-consciousness seems to us a fundamental element in the noble character of Daniel. Vanity would have marred everything. Perhaps it would not have occurred to us to note this trait, had not the very opposite been charged against him. There can be no doubt that self-obtrusion is alike unlovely, and to the subject of it fraught with great peril. The constant exhibition, in every spoken or written word, of the "I;" the evident living on the breath of popular approbation, the object being to secure a fair show of seeming good, instead of solid and permanent worth: all this tends to insure misery to the man, offence to others, and the destruction of all that might have otherwise been great and good. It is one form of that self-centredness in which, not without reason, the very essence of sin has been said to consist. Daniel was singularly free from this fundamental vice of character.—*Rev. E. Pusey, D.D.*

[18645] Conceive any mere human writer, occupying such a position as Daniel had, a chief adviser of a great monarch, and a great protector, doubtless, of his people, saying not one word of all the trials, plans, counsels of these seventy years; nothing of the good which he

furthered, or the evil which he hindered!" Could we have a more complete instance of self-abnegation? Such silence is indeed golden. To take but one illustration:—in the account of the golden image, Daniel retires from all observation. Attention is concentrated on the spectacle itself, and then on the gradual development of the tragedy connected with it. The historian is silent as to the part he played, if any; on the assumption that he had no place in those dread transactions, wonderful is his reticence as to all apology or explanation; thus teaching us to live less in ourselves, more in others, and most of all in God.—*Ibid.*

6 Conscientiousness.

[18646] The first movement for his promotion found his conscience, and found it of a firm and sound consistence. The question was, of his living on the appointed portion of the king's provisions. This might seem no such very considerable matter, to be made an insurmountable obstacle at the very entrance of a prosperous career. With an ordinary man, how many persuasive pleas and extenuations would have come in to help him over it! But conscience cannot well begin the exercise of its jurisdiction at matters too small. When comparatively small matters of conscience can easily be disposed of, in favour of inclination and worldly interest, it is a very unpromising sign for the conduct in greater ones. It is true that sometimes (indeed very commonly among the superstitious) men have made much of little things, in order to obtain a kind of licence to make little of great ones. It was notoriously so among the Jews in our Lord's time. But Daniel was not one of those who, while "straining at a gnat," can "swallow a camel." He carried his conscience throughout—as the one thing he was not to forfeit, whatever else he should forego, or incur.—*Rev. J. Foster, D.D.*

7 Consistency.

[18647] Daniel's conduct was the same throughout, always in harmony with itself. Attentive to his duty to God, he was equally so in his duty to man. Faithful to his God, he is equally faithful to his king. His morality is no less conspicuous than his religion. He is fervent in spirit, but no less diligent in business. Regular and earnest in his closet, he is equally assiduous in his office. Studious in his Bible, as a man of business he is well acquainted with his books. His enemies can find no fault in him, and no ground of accusation with the king, but in the matter of his religion. He is favoured with revelations from heaven and the visits of angels; yet no sooner are his visions withdrawn and his usual state of health recovered, than he returns to do "the king's business." He is endowed, even while yet young, with a wisdom and understanding superior to that of all the wise men of Babylon, yet disclaims all merit and wisdom of his own as being greater than those of other men. He is tender and gentle, while bold and uncompro-

missing in professing the truth and reproving sin. He is distressed as being the bearer of evil tidings to Nebuchadnezzar, yet fearlessly declares to the hardened Belshazzar both his sin and his doom.—*Homiletic Commentary.*

8 Prayerfulness.

[18648] This comes out first in connection with the recovery and interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's forgotten dream; for then not only did he engage his three friends to pray on his behalf, but he also himself poured out his heart in thanksgiving to Jehovah. But it was the habit of his life to wait at stated times on God. His custom was to observe these appointed seasons of devotion; and from the record which we have in the ninth chapter of his study of the prophecies of Jeremiah, we are warranted in concluding that, when he was in his closet, he gave himself to meditation on the sacred Scriptures, as well as to earnest supplication. This helps to explain much of his conduct. We cease to wonder at his boldness before Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar, and Darius, when we learn that he maintained such constant communion with his God. The roots of his character were "mellowed and fattened" by the dews of heavenly influence which fell upon them in the closet. He drew his strength from the heaven with which he was in such continuous communication. He was "Daniel," the judge of God, because he was first "Israel," a prince of God, who prevailed with Him in prayer. His public life was holy and incorruptible, because his hidden life was prayerful and devout. He carried his business habits with him into the closet; and so he was enabled to carry his devout spirit with him into business. His life was not divided into two portions, separated from each other like the water-tight compartments in a ship; but it was one and the same everywhere. In the closet, he was transacting business with God; in the presidential bureau, he was transacting business for God; and his sincerity in the former enabled him to maintain faithfulness in the latter.—*Rev. W. Taylor, D.D.*

9 Fidelity to God.

[18649] The great statesman of Babylon fell before duplicity and stratagem. Yet the work of his defence was not of that sort. He did not try to outwit intrigue by intrigue. His was a much more simple and safe procedure. He had simply to do right. He said his prayers "as he did aforesaid." He prayed kneeling, as he had always done. He prayed aloud, as had been his wont. Three times a day, and with windows open, he called on the God of his fathers, as his mother had taught him in his boyhood.—*Rev. Austin Phelps, D.D.*

[18650] A more adroit man would have practised casuistry upon himself. A diplomatic saint would have shut his window, drawn a curtain, prayed in a whisper, lessened the number of his devotions, had some other engagement, if haply he might thus have saved his quivering

limbs from the lions' teeth. Not so this simple child of God. Not so much as by the lowering of his voice or the closing of a shutter would he seem to fear man more than God.—*Ibid.*

[18651] The very name of Daniel has come to be a synonym for resolution and endurance. And deservedly, for his faith enabled him to be firm, (1) In spite of subtle temptation. The great ordeal of his life was much more searching than that which came to the three Hebrew youths. They were challenged to open idolatry; and they nobly refused, choosing rather the "burning fiery furnace." Daniel was invited simply to neglect prayer to the true God. He might have complied, and none but God and his own soul have known of his compliance. But he spurned the seductive temptation to dishonour his God, and chose rather "the den of lions." He would not silence his devotions even for a few days. He was constant, (2) In spite of protracted trial. There were repeated efforts on the part of the envious and the malign. There was a long-continued captivity. And yet in all, as in the first, in his old age as in his boyhood, there was the answering constancy of which faith alone is the sufficient root, the firm, broad foundation. He taught, and he worked, even as he prayed, at the end just "as he did aforetime."—*Urijah Thomas.*

[18652] He dared to stand before the throne of a capricious and cruel monarch and denounce him to his face with the awful interpretation of his dream—that he should be driven from his kingdom, and dwell with the beasts of the field, and be wet with the dew of heaven, till he should know that the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever He will—not afraid of consequences, and at last wringing from the convicted tyrant that lofty and yet lowly confession of faith, ending, "Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honour the King of Heaven, all whose works are truth, and His ways judgment: and those that walk in pride He is able to abase."—*Rev. F. Huntingdon, D.D.*

[18653] The courtly flatteries of Belshazzar could not make the candle of that clear-shining soul pale or flicker an instant: "I have even heard of thee, that the spirit of the gods is in thee, and that light and understanding and excellent wisdom is found in thee." He only answered, "Thou, O king, art weighed in the balances and art found wanting. God hath numbered thy kingdom and finished it."—*Ibid.*

[18654] A third king came, promulgating his arrogant decree that, for thirty days, if any man in the realm should ask a petition of any god or man save of him, he should be cast into the den of lions. "Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed he went into his house; and, his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime."—*Ibid.*

[18655] Over all perilous tempters we are shown here one steadfast and victorious Master—religious fidelity. It wears in this saintly prophet a peculiar charm. It is a fidelity intensified yet without boasting or pretension—incorruptible without self-confidence, fixed without obstinacy, patient without pusillanimity, invincible in front of men and princes, but humble and docile at the feet of the Lord. For a fidelity like this there is an involuntary and almost universal admiration among men that fall farthest short of it. So far the best sentiments of human nature second the requirements of our religion. Place a Daniel, an Elijah, a Gideon, or a Joshua before them, and they see, they confess, the stamp of greatness on his spirit. So far the Bible and the soul answer to each other.—*Ibid.*

[18656] The grandeur of the Book of Daniel is not only the sweep of those majestic visions which opened the mysteries of future time, but the vivid portrait it holds before us of a man who has all the springs of his actions in faithfulness to God:—a man so thoroughly forgetful of himself that the one only question which rises in him, when anything is to be done or suffered, is whether that thing is his Lord's will. If it is, no doubt remains; nothing is to be said or thought about costs or consequences. If it is not, no consequences will justify it.—*Ibid.*

[18657] Such honour as we give to martyrs must needs be accorded to the prophet Daniel. A martyr—so far as the strict etymology of the word goes—is one who witnesses, and is usually applied exclusively to one who has witnessed unto death for righteousness and truth. Those who witness to the truth without dying for it are commonly called confessors. It would be difficult to decide to which "goodly fellowship" Daniel strictly belonged. But we are not careful to decide: enough for us to know that all the essential characteristics of those who are enrolled in "the noble army of martyrs" were found in him. His was the martyr spirit, though the celestial sentry stood over him, that he might not be slain.—*Rev. E. Pusev, D.D.*

10 Fidelity to man.

As evidenced in his loyalty to the State.

[18658] Side by side with the martyr spirit which led Daniel to resist authority when it intrenched on the prerogative of God, we may set his deference to authority when it moved within its own appointed lines. This excellence is the complement of the other. The more in one direction constrained to resist, the more in the other would Daniel, with all humility, defer. Just as in the realm of gorgeous cloud each high light has its complement of harmonious shade—the gold set off with purple or blue—so was it in this character, whose radiance was not of earth but of heaven. Towards heaven there shone fidelity to God; on the other side, which looked earthward, the same principle assumed the form of loyalty to the throne.—*Ibid.*

[18659] Daniel recognized government in the abstract as an ordinance of God, its particular form as at least permitted by heaven's King, and he bent his head accordingly. But a general statement of this kind needs particular illustration. There are instances of loyal deference to every king mentioned in the history, brief as it is. This was exemplified in his conduct when, in the presence of Nebuchadnezzar, it was his duty to unveil the calamities of a darkened future. Nothing could be more reverential or affectionate. A large human heart throbs behind the prophet's words; and, although there was nothing in the sensual and impious Belshazzar to elicit either respect or love, the loyalty of this great soul finds expression in his allusions to the departed glory of the royal house. The feeling of Daniel towards Darius is manifested scarcely at all to the king himself. There is, however, an unmistakable absence of vindictiveness in what he says after the danger and deliverance of that dreadful night: "O king, live for ever. My God hath sent His angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths, and they have not hurt me: forasmuch as before Him innocency was found in me; and also before thee, O king, have I done no hurt." But his feeling towards the king is given to us, who read the history, in the way in which the tragedy is unfolded. "He dwells on all the good side of the weak king, his reluctance to execute the decree (which perhaps, with safety to his throne, he could not recall), his sorrow at it, his ineffectual desire to evade it, and his one night's repentance." Such a mode of telling a story, in which he was so deeply concerned—a story of transactions in which he had been so deeply aggrieved—reveals clearly the tone of his mind towards all involved, and more particularly towards the king.—*Ibid.*

[18660] Can we describe this persevering fidelity in terms more fit or eloquent than these? "This love (love for the city of his God) survived an unbroken political greatness of seventy years. The stripling of seventeen sat in the king's gate ('in the Porte,' as we say, retaining the Oriental term), president over all the colleges of the wise men, and of the whole province of Babylon. 'Daniel continued, even unto the first year of king Cyrus,' are the simple words; but what a volume of tried faithfulness is unrolled by them! Amid all the intrigues, indigenious at all times in dynasties of Oriental despotism, where intrigue, too, rolls round so suddenly on its author's head; amid all the envy towards a foreign captive in high office as a king's councillor; amid all the trouble incidental to the insanity of the king, or to the murder of two of his successors—in that whole critical period for his people Daniel 'continued.' We should not have had any statement of his faithfulness, but for the conspiracy against his life under the new Median dynasty, which knew not those past years. 'The president and satraps sought' in vain 'to find any occasion against him concerning the kingdom; foras-

much as he was faithful, neither was any error or fault found in him.' The picture is the greater, because the lines which mark it are so few. They are a few simple touches of truth."—*Ibid.*

II Fidelity to self.

As evidenced in the preservation of his moral identity.

[18661] In the narrative of Daniel's being committed to the den of lions one trait comes out quite incidentally, which was one of his grandest characteristics. His enemies could calculate on the certainty of the prophet's maintaining his fidelity to duty under any circumstances, and irrespective of any consequences whatsoever. There is nothing finer than this in the whole history. Could we have more emphatic testimony to the exalted piety of Daniel? It was resolved to ruin him. A certain method was deliberately adopted. One important element in the calculation was that the intended victim would do the same faithful thing, though it seemed to lead straight into the abyss. Daniel did not belie the calculation.—*Ibid.*

[18662] He saw the rise and fall of the first great empire. He lived long enough to see the last gleam of glory die away like light out of the evening sky. But Daniel through all vicissitudes preserved essentially the same self. Empires might come and go, but Daniel remained the same.—*Ibid.*

[18663] Himself, in uniform integrity, outliving envy, jealousy, dynasties; surviving in untamished, uncorrupting greatness the seventy years of the captivity; he was honoured during the forty-three years of Nebuchadnezzar's reign; "doing the king's business" under the insolent and sensual boy Belshazzar; owned by the conquering Medo-Persians; the stay, doubtless, and human protector of his people during those long years of exile; probably commissioned to write the decree of Cyrus which gave leave for that long longed-for restoration of his people, whose re-entrance into their land, like Moses of old, he was not to share. Deeds are more eloquent than words. Such undeviating integrity, beyond the ordinary life of man, in a worshipper of the one God, in the most dissolute and depraved of the merchant cities of old, first minister in the first of the world monarchies, was in itself a great fulfilment of the purpose of God in converting the chastisement of His people into the riches of the Gentiles.—*Ibid.*

12 Spirituality.

[18664] He wanted no patron; the smiles or frowns of monarchs were indifferent to him. He was in favour with the Highest Power, inasmuch that he was addressed by an angelic messenger with the unequalled appellation. "O man greatly beloved!" To a man who had heard *that*, think how any title of worldly dignity, of mortal favour, would have sounded!

We can conceive of him, more even than of many other of the prophets that the general habitual state of his mind was of an elevation, in thought and devotion, peculiarly adapted to receive the special illapses of inspiration—that (if we might express it so) heavenly visits had not to descend so entirely to the earth to reach him. These communications from on high he probably enjoyed often. Several of his prophetic visions, foreshowing a distant futurity, are related in his book, occupying indeed the larger part of it; especially some sublime representations of the Messiah and His kingdom.—*Rev. J. Foster, D.D.*

13 Decision.

[18665] When the unclean articles of diet were set before him, he did not hesitate as to the course which he would follow. Come what would, he was determined that he should not touch them. True, he very prudently made application to the prince of the eunuchs in the matter. Yet he had already purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself; and this conduct of his in his youth enables us to understand the valour of his latter life, when he braved the fury of the lions rather than give up the privilege of prayer. Of what good would longer earthly existence have been when that which gave it its charm and inspiration was no longer to be enjoyed by him? So this habit of decision grew up in him, and was fed in him, by the communion of the closet. He learned there to look at things as in the sight of God; and he carried that test with him through life. He acted “as seeing Him who is invisible.”—*Rev. W. Taylor, D.D.*

[18666] God was more to him than all else; and that made it easy for him to decide questions which to others would have been difficult, and to brave dangers which to others would have been appalling. This sense of the Divine presence and assurance of the Divine favour lifted him above the influences of the world, and kept him ever on the side of the right and the true. It made no matter what men threatened—God was on his side; and so he was not terrified. It made no matter what men promised—God was already his; and so it was impossible to bribe him. The man who had heard these words from the lips of Gabriel, “O man greatly beloved,” could not be allured by any title of worldly dignity or any token of mortal favour. He lived above all these things; so he could speak with calm faithfulness to Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar, and look with composure on the lions of Darius. He saw not the grandeur of the former by reason of the greater glory of Jehovah; and he feared not the fury of the latter by reason of his confidence in the omnipotence of God.—*Ibid.*

14 Diligence.

[18667] As a student, his industry was so great that he easily overtopped his fellows; and in the management of imperial affairs he

developed a faculty for organization, and evinced an energy and perseverance that were beyond all praise. After a time of devotion, we read that “he arose and did the king’s business;” and the principles on which he conducted the department that was entrusted to his care may be inferred from the fact that, when his enemies sought an occasion against him, they could find nothing wrong in his office, and had to endeavour to entrap him in the matter of his God. He had his ups and downs, like others, but in the main he was what even the world would call a successful man, and his prosperity was not the result of any accident, but was the consequence of the perseverance and integrity by which he was distinguished.—*Ibid.*

15 Genuine friendship.

[18668] When Daniel was exalted, he did not forget his companions. Knit to Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah by congenial tastes, as well as by the ties of country and religion, he had become to them a friend indeed; and they had shown their deep interest in and attachment to him, not only in sharing his protest against the diet of the college, but also in praying for him at his special request. It was meet, therefore, that he should remember them in his prosperity. He did no more than his duty toward them in speaking for their elevation, while, at the same time, he did a service to the king by introducing to him men of such integrity and ability. But this conduct is not common; for many are like the chief butler, and in the hour of their exaltation forget the Joseph to whom, in their time of humiliation, they had been beholden. Multitudes are moved with envy, so that they cannot think of others rising; and even if they have been formerly indebted to them, they do their best to keep them down. But there was no such feeling in the breast of Daniel. The prosperity of his friends was his, and he would have them sharers with him in the honourable position to which their prayers had contributed to raise him. “A man that hath friends must show himself friendly.”—*Ibid.*

16 Affectionateness.

[18669] An affectionate solicitude for the best interests of all about him appears several times in the course of the history, brief as it is. After interpreting the dream of the four fragile empires and of the one kingdom that should “stand for ever,” Daniel was unwilling to rise without the three sharing his elevation. On the occasion of his warning Nebuchadnezzar of perhaps the most dreadful calamity that can befall any human being, his tone would well befit that of an elder brother to the unhappy king. His words tremble with the tenderness that is in them. In the courtesy he ever manifests, in the absence of all vindictiveness, in his passionate love for his country and his people, we have the same affectionateness of disposition and tenderness of spirit.—*Rev. E. Pusey, D.D.*

17 Patriotism.

[18670] Loyalty to the Babylonian or Persian throne did not make impossible a passionate love of fatherland. Through all the long years of absence, crowded as they had been with those temptations to forgetfulness which ever assail greatness, the windows of the soul had never ceased to be open "toward Jerusalem." If any would know the habitual sentiments of Daniel's mind and heart, he has only to turn to the very words of his great confession and prayer (Dan. ix.). In him we see the loftiest patriotism consecrated by religion.—*Ibid.*

[18671] It was concern for his country that moved him to that day of solemn prayer and fasting which brought Gabriel down with an answer. To an enlightened man the cause of his country will be bound up with the cause of God and of religion, as it can be well with the former only as it is so with the latter. This was especially the case with Daniel, whose country God had made and called His own, and whose city, Jerusalem, was God's holy mountain, the city of the great King, who had chosen it for the place of His special worship. That country was now in desolation, and Jerusalem with its temple was in ruins. God's worship there had been brought to an end. Sin on the part of the people had brought the desolating foe that had put a stop to their solemn feasts. Provoked to anger by their continued rebellion and apostasy, the Lord had "caused the solemn feasts and sabbaths to be forgotten in Zion, and had despised, in the indignation of His anger, the king and the priest. The Lord had cast off His altar; He had abhorred His sanctuary; He had given up into the hand of the enemy the walls of her palaces" (Lam. ii. 6, 7). This was the burden that pressed upon the heart of the beloved prophet. The cause of his people, and with that the cause of God and of true religion, which was bound up with it, was his deep sorrow, and drove him to incessant prayer as the time of the promised deliverance drew nigh. He was concerned not only for his country's peace, but for his people's repentance, which must be at the foundation of it. It was this that led him, as a true patriot, to pour out his heart before God in fervent prayer and deep humiliation.—*Homiletic Commentary.*

III. FORCE OF PERSONAL CHARACTER AS DISPLAYED BY HIS PROPHETIC MISSION.

[18672] Reminding us though he does of John, the beloved disciple and apocalyptic seer, Daniel has an official greatness distinct even from that of the prophet of Patmos. His predictions took their character from his position in life. He was educated in earthly kingdoms, that he might tell of the higher greatness of the kingdom of Christ. We owe to him, more than to any others of his brethren in the Old Testa-

ment, our ideas of the royalty of Jesus. His "prophetic watch-tower," as Auberlen has finely said, "was erected beside the throne of Babylon; and standing there in, and yet above, the first world-monarchy, he looked out into the farthest future, and discerned, with prophetic eye, which God had opened, the changing shapes and events of coming kingdoms, and the growing glory and ultimate triumph of the kingdom of Christ. Thus his distinctive prophetic mission grew out of, or was grafted upon, his position in public life; but that, again, was the result of his personal character; and so we are led most naturally to the consideration of his individual peculiarities.—*Rev. W. Taylor, D.D.*

IV. PARALLEL BETWEEN DANIEL AND JOSEPH.

[18673] There are many points of resemblance between these two seers. Both were peculiarly dear to the heart of God. Joseph and Daniel were alike in that they were both men of incorruptible fidelity and devout humility; and they stand out in Jewish history—the one at its beginning, and the other near its close—as men in whom few, if any, defects of character or blemishes of conduct appear. As Auberlen has beautifully said, "They were both representatives of the true God and His people at heathen courts; both were exemplary in their pure walk before the Lord; both were endowed with the gift of bringing into clear light the dim presentiments of truth which express themselves among the heathen in God-sent dreams; both were gifted with marvellous wisdom and insight, and, for this reason, highly honoured by the powers of this world. They represent the calling of Israel to be a holy people, a royal priesthood among the nations, and the final end of the Old Testament theocracy to lead to one universal is clearly shown forth by their history. Thus, also, they are types of Christ, the true Israel, and types of the destiny of their nation by which it would be a light to lighten the Gentiles. . . . Daniel, in every respect more visibly blessed than Joseph, is the most prominent figure and the greatest character in the last centuries of the Old Covenant, the most excellent example of a true Israelite.—*Ibid.*

V. PARALLEL BETWEEN DANIEL AND ST. JOHN.

[18674] It was the love of God that presented him with a clearer landscape of the Gospel than any other prophet ever had: he was the beloved prophet under the Old Dispensation, as John was the beloved disciple under the New; and, both being animated by the same Divine love, there was a wonderful harmony between them; both of them had miraculous preservations—one from the lions, the other from the burning caldron: both engaged young in the service of God, and consecrated their

lives by an early piety; and both lived to a great and equal age—to about an hundred years. Both had the like intimacy with God—the like admittance into the most adorable mysteries—and the like abundance of heavenly visions. Both had the like lofty flights and ecstatic revelations.—*Bp. Ken.*

VI. TESTIMONY OF EZEKIEL.

[18675] What makes that testimony more striking is, that it was borne when Daniel was still in early manhood. When he was about twenty-nine years of age, Ezekiel uttered in the course of a prophecy these words: “The word of the Lord came again to me, saying, Son of man, when the land sinneth against Me by trespassing grievously, then will I stretch out Mine hand upon it, and will break the staff of the bread thereof, and will send famine upon it, and will cut off man and beast from it: though these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job were in it, they should deliver but their own souls by their righteousness, saith the Lord God.” Four times are these saints introduced to give point and terror to Divine threatening. A few years later, when Daniel was about thirty-five years of age, his name was introduced into a rebuke, ironical in form, of the then king of Tyre. The king had all but deified himself, and placed his human, heathen wisdom in antagonism with that of God. He had forgotten his dependence upon God; and so the prophet, with biting irony, thus addresses him: “Behold! thou art wiser than Daniel: there is no secret that they cannot hide from thee.” These references to the then living statesman and prophet are very remarkable.—*Rev. E. Pusey, D.D.*

VII. HOMILETICAL HINTS.

- 1 The history of Daniel teaches adherence to duty under all circumstances.

[18676] It is always right to do right. That may seem to be a truism, yet it is very far from being universally acted upon. Men will frequently admit that a thing in the abstract is duty, and then persuade themselves to do the opposite, with the plea that in their circumstances they could not help themselves. But no circumstances can make that right which is in its own nature wrong. It never can be necessary to sin. No doubt we may say that if we refuse to sin under certain pressure, death will be the result. But that will not alter the case; for it is better to die than to sin; and if there be no other way out of it, we ought to be willing to die rather than to sin.—*Rev. W. Taylor, D.D.*

- 2 The history of Daniel furnishes an illustration of the value of temperance and abstinence.

[18677] It is supposed by many that a luxurious diet is necessary to health, and not seldom men use intoxicating drink as a constant

beverage, under the delusion that it imparts strength. But both of these mistakes are exposed in the narrative before us. A sparing diet is conducive to health and long life, while the pampering of the appetite with many dainties tends to the production of disease. Then, as regards strong drink, we have the testimony of medical men of highest standing to the fact that it is not necessary to a healthy person, and that its habitual use is always more or less injurious. Hence, if for no other reason, we might well abstain from it as an article of diet. But when we take into account the insidious nature of alcohol, which always creates a craving for itself, and, above all, when we think of the numbers in the land who are continually falling under its power, and of the fearful amount of misery and crime which is traceable directly or indirectly to its influence, we may surely be brought to adopt the course of Daniel and his friends in regard to it, the rather as no evil consequences will follow the carrying out of such a resolution.—*Ibid.*

[18678] The royal provisions in themselves good, but in the circumstances not to be partaken of by Daniel and his friends without sin and moral defilement. So even in his old age, Daniel for a special religious purpose abstained for a time both from flesh and wine (chap. x 3). “Every creature of God is good, and to be received with thanksgiving of them that know and believe the truth.” But there are times when, for the sake of others, if not for our own, it may be our duty to abstain from the use of some. Christian wisdom and an enlightened conscience are needed to direct us in regard to such abstinence. The same apostle who counselled Timothy to “use a little wine” for his stomach’s sake and his frequent infirmities, asserts that “it is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor anything whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak;” and declares for himself, “If meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend” (Rom. xiv. 21; 1 Cor. viii. 13). The character of the wines and other intoxicating drinks used in this country, the prevalence of the drinking customs, the continued evidence before our eyes of the terrible effects of the use of these drinks, both physically, socially, and morally, slaying as they do their tens of thousands, and drawing in their train both misery, poverty, disease, and crime—these facts are believed by many to make it the duty of Christian men and women in general, in the exercise of that charity that “pleaseth not itself” and “seeketh not her own,” to abstain entirely from the use of these beverages for at least the sake of those who must, one way or other, be influenced by our example. Grace is needed most in times of difficulty and trial. That grace is now afforded to Daniel and his friends in their perplexity. To Paul’s thrice repeated prayer that the “thorn in the flesh” might depart from him, the only answer vouchsafed was, “My grace is sufficient

for thee ; my strength is made perfect in weakness." Believing this, Paul gloried in his infirmities and necessities. Neither tribulation, nor persecution, nor famine, nor nakedness, nor peril, nor sword, are able to separate the genuine believer "from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."—*Homiletic Commentary.*

3 The history of Daniel illustrates the moral worth of resolution in a character.

[18679] Resolution is both an act and a habit. As a habit, it marks the character of the man who makes a resolution and acts upon it. The habit is formed by frequent acts of resolving and acting accordingly. As a habit, resolution is a most important part of character. It gives a man moral strength, energy, backbone. It constitutes force of character. It makes a man strong. It forms the hero, the scholar, the statesman, the artist. It makes the successful merchant, the man of science, the philanthropist, and the benefactor of his kind. "I will be a hero," was the turning-point in Nelson's history. Reynolds resolves at Rome to study the works of the old masters till he has understood their excellence, and becomes a master himself. Paley at college resolves to shake off his habitual indolence and rise at four o'clock to his studies, and produces works that cannot die. Daniel's resolution in regard to his diet was one of the means of strengthening his character and fitting him for future greatness. Each resolution carried out in spite of difficulty or natural reluctance makes a man stronger. An irresolute man is a weak man. The part of weakness is either to make no resolution, or to make it and fail to keep it—"resolves and re-resolves, and dies a fool." Broken resolutions leave a man weaker. One resolution kept prepares for keeping the next. A resolution manfully carried out is often the turning-point in a man's life and the determination of a man's character.—*Ibid.*

THE THREE CHILDREN IN DAN. III.

I. THEIR CONSPICUOUS VIRTUES.

1 Fear of God.

[18680] These three men were on the ground among the other persons in high office. It had been in vain for them to absent themselves if they had been inclined to do so. But they had higher orders to be there ! orders which they dared not disobey, though we soon see what else they could, without hesitation, set at defiance. Their faith was warned of another Monarch, and also of another fire ! a proper fear of whom, and of which, will overcome all other fear. "Fear not them who can kill the body, but after that have no more that they can do ; but fear Him who is able to destroy both body and soul

in hell." They were certain to be at the place, without any force used by their enemies ; for they knew it could not be permitted by their "Master in heaven" that his servants should be in a conspicuous station, in a heathen land, without bearing on them the most explicit marks to whom they belonged. They were assured that in the present case there must not be allowed a grand triumphant day to idolatry and the impious pride of power,—undisturbed by at least a protest in the name of the Almighty. Was it for them, when their eternal Lord was to be dishonoured, to slink away into a base impunity ? And, besides, were they to give to their own people in captivity there the lesson and example of betraying, even negatively, their religion, the only true one on earth ? They knew their duty, and addressed themselves to perform it.—*Rev. J. Foster.*

2 Prompt decision.

[18681] Nebuchadnezzar had not to wait for their decision. "We are not careful to answer thee in this matter," meaning, "we have no thought or deliberation to give to the alternative ; no question or hesitation remains to us ; we seek no evasion or delay ; our decision is absolute because our duty is plain."—*Ibid.*

[18682] They, probably, did not even speak to one another. There was nothing they could need to say ; it was past the time for consulting, questioning, or mutual exhortation. They were in the wrong place if anything remained to be yet decided.—*Ibid.*

3 Invincible fortitude.

[18683] There were three men come on the ground under the fearful vocation to brave the authority, and power, and wrath of a lofty potentate,—the indignation of all his mighty lords, and the rage of a devouring fire. We admire heroic self-devotement in all other situations,—we are elated at the view, for instance, of Leonidas and his small band calmly taking their station in Thermopylae, in the face of countless legions. But here was a still nobler position taken by men who were fit to take it, because they were sure not to desert it. And it would betray a most corrupt state of our sentiments, if heroic devotement displayed for God, for truth, for religion, do not affect us as sublimer than all other heroism. We may suppose the utmost calmness—the most unostentatious manner in these three men ; that belongs to real invincible fortitude. And they had no occasion to begin with parade—to make a flourish of premature zeal ! Exhibition enough was to come erewhile ! They were "to be made a spectacle to God, and to angels, and to men." They quietly waited, looking at the monarch, the idol, and the fire.—*Ibid.*

4 Perfect trust.

[18684] "If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace ; He will deliver us out of thy

hand, O king." "But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up." Some learned critics have given, as more exactly expressive of the sense of the original, an altered construction of the two verses together, thus, "Whether our God, who is able to deliver us, shall deliver us or not, be it known unto thee," &c. ; thus taking away the apparent expression of their assurance that He would deliver them. We cannot know in what degree they did expect any extraordinary Divine interposition, but this construction of their reply exhibits them in a still higher, completer character of magnanimity and devotion. Such a magnanimity, which the emperor might know there was but one other person among all his great men capable of evincing, might have struck him with reverential admiration, might have thrown him back on his reflections and remembrance, for he could not but recollect something of the God of Daniel and his friends.—*Ibid.*

II. HOMILETICAL REFLECTIONS.

- 1 The conduct of the three children illustrates the truth that a religion of principle is founded on intelligent conviction of truth, so fixed in the heart as to be beyond the reach of argument.

[18685] Their answer to the king's command has been the watchword of martyrs from that day to this: "We are not careful to answer thee in this matter. . . . But be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods." There is a state of religious experience, possible to every Christian, of which this is a sample. It is a state in which the believer no longer needs argument to support his convictions, and is no longer open to argument against them. Certain central truths of religion are fixed in his very soul. They have been settled once for all and for ever. An oak of a hundred years' growth is not rooted so immovably. They are thus settled, because they have become matters of experience. They long ago passed out of the realm of theory into the realm which Whitefield called "soul-life." The believer no longer believes: he knows. His faith has become his life. It has passed into the same rank of truths as that of gravitation. It gives to the whole religious being of the man a certain planetary fixedness and serenity, like those of Orion and the Pleiades. Canst thou loose the bands of Orion?—*Austin Phelps, D.D.*

[18686] On such foundations a religion of principle is built. When infidelity assails it, when ridicule scoffs at it, when science disproves it, when authority forbids it, when fire and sword and gibbet would crush it, its calm reply is, "We are not careful to answer thee, but we will not." In these very words the father of the Wesleys sent back his answer to an iniquitous order from James II. of England.—*Ibid.*

[18687] When Philip II. of Spain sent "Alva the Butcher" on his crusade against the people of the Netherlands, thousands of men, women, and children sent back from the scaffold and the stake these words of calm defiance: "We are not careful to answer, but be it known that we will not obey." Children from ten to fifteen years of age used to imitate in solemn sport the scene of the *auto-da-fé*, in token of their resolve to die in the faith of their fathers. And when the sport became grim reality, and their tender limbs shrivelled and crackled in the flames, they did not flinch. That was the religion of principle, uttering itself from the depths of a "soul-life," which had outlived the need of argument to support it, and the power of argument to change it. What could those children know of the argument for Christian truth which ages of debate and of august councils had elaborated? They neither knew nor cared to know. They had received from God a profounder teaching. Theirs was an experience of truth in the soul's life. They knew it because they had lived it. They could as easily have been argued out of their faith in the sunrise as out of their faith in Christ. Just that kind of evidence and that degree of conviction are the privilege of every child of God.—*Ibid.*

- 2 The conduct of the three children presents a noble illustration of the duty of obedience to God without regard to consequences.

[18688] So far as it appears from the story of these "men in the fire," this was their reasoning, and the whole of it: "We have only to do right in the fear of God." Not a word is uttered from which we can infer that they think for one moment of what is or is not expedient. They are in a strait in which they may well be pardoned if they do ask themselves, "Can we not somehow save our lives?" Not a word of that sort appears, except a sublime assurance that God will save them, but a more sublime purpose to obey him whether he will or not. No nice points occur to them to be settled, no possible evasions, no concealment of their convictions, no hiding of their purposes.—*Ibid.*

[18689] Volumes have been written by wise men on questions relating to possible escape from martyrdom by crafty victims. "May a man lie to save his life from the flames? Has an enemy to God a right to know the truth from one to whom a disclosure of the truth is death? How much of one's faith may one hold in secret, under threat of axe and gibbet? For wife and children may not a man lie, when he would not to save his own life?" Said one, "I will not tell one falsehood to save my life, but I will tell ten to save my boy." Not a hint of any such Jesuitical strategy do these victims of pagan ferocity give us. There is a magnificent fling of self-abandonment in their sole resolve and its bold avowal, "Be it known that we will not."—*Ibid.*

[18690] The grandeur of the whole procedure is that their conscience is so eagle-eyed as to see

the right on the spur of the moment. They are not startled into a momentary equivocation. When good men deny Christ they are commonly surprised into it. Not so these three captives of the fire. They might be the three "wise men of the East," for their self-collected and clear-headed discernment of the right. With the hell of the furnace in the one scale, and beautiful young life in the other, there is not an instant of doubt which shall kick the beam. Said a Roman general, when urged to save his life at the cost of his honour, "It is necessary that my honour should live: it is not necessary that I should." So say these gentle youth, as they look into the mouth of that white furnace: "It is necessary that we be true to God: it is not necessary that we live."—*Ibid.*

3 The conduct of the three children affords a striking exemplification of the influence of a profound sense of a personal God.

[18691] "Our God whom we serve." This is the first and last and ruling thought of these youthful heroes. Duty is no abstraction to them. They are not philosophers. They are simply believers in a living God. Poor souls! they know no better. They have never heard of the "Over-Soul" and the "Soul of the world." They have not been taught the dignity of their descent from baboons, by the force of "natural selection." Advanced thinkers have not instructed them in the religion of "protoplasm." But they do the best they know, humbly hoping that things will not go hard with them for trusting in a personal God. They enter into no discussion of the Hebrew as compared with the Chaldean ethics. God, the living God, is the beginning and the end of the whole business.—*Ibid.*

[18692] A singular type of religious belief—or negation, call it which you please—has sprung up in our day, perhaps for the first time in the world's history. It proposes to build a system of Christian ethics on the intuitions of conscience alone, denying the authority of Christ and the being of a God. "Do right" is its moral law. "Obey conscience." "Care not for Jesus of Nazareth: He was a man like the rest of us. As for God, have no fear of Him: He is a bugaboo of dark ages." A healthy mind recoils from this as an absurdity. To such a mind duty and God are correlative ideas. Each is inseparable from the other. The force of each corresponds to the force of the other in the faith of the believer. Talk to a man of duty, and his instinctive query is, "Duty to whom?" Tell a man that he ought, and he rejoins, "Ought! Why?" "Ought" implies obligation; obligation to whom? The very structure of the language mirrors a person. It means that or nothing. This mysterious indweller, which we call "conscience," and which is the still guest of every man, is simply God writing His will on the walls of the soul's inner chambers. It is imperative as God is, pure as God is, deathless as God is. To hold to conscience and deny God

is to grasp the shadow and reject the substance.—*Ibid.*

4 The conduct of the three children illustrates the truth that whereas false religion is fruitless in the time of trial, true religion does then abound in fruit.

[18693] Who would have predicted that three young men, but a little above the age and rank of boys, waifs from a foreign land and a subject people, exposed at any moment to the penalty of death, should win over to a new and despised religion the respect of the haughtiest monarch of the East? Yet this was the fruit of their daring defiance of his commands. His outraged pride was awed by their fidelity to a principle. "Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego! There is no God that can deliver after this sort. His servants have yielded their bodies, that they might not worship any god but their own God." Such is the outburst of astonished conviction from the awe-struck king. Always and everywhere men fall back and give place to those who practise a religion which costs them something. Other sorts of religion there are which serve their turn in idle hours and times of ease. There is a religion of form, whose pageantries please the eye, and which does well enough for a religion of state on festive days. There is a religion of taste, in which music and architecture, and the poetry of a painted window, may charm the fancy of culture and refinement, when no great stress of real life is upon them. There is a religion of feeling, which may uplift great assemblies on great occasions, and bear them on waves of religiosity which to certain temperaments may seem for the time to mount up to the gates of heaven. But when the tug of real life comes, when temptation, bereavement, disappointment, death, bring men's religion to the proof, these religious fictions vanish into thin air. No religious plaything answers the purpose then. Men feel then the need of something real, something solid, something profound, something Godlike.—*Ibid.*

5 The conduct of the three children suggests that while we should be thankful for the quietness of our lives, we should examine ourselves as to our standing in the faith.

[18694] Let us thank God that we live in no such times as these, when the command, short and stern, was "turn or burn." "Cease to worship God as your consciences direct, or give your bodies to the stake." But at the same time let us examine ourselves. Let us inquire whether we be partakers of their faith, or whether our faith be of the kind to fail us in the hour of trial. Whether our foundation be upon the sand, leaving our house in ruins before the storm; or upon the rock, abiding sure and steadfast. Our barque may carry us gaily along, so long as there is a sunny sky and a gentle and propitious breeze, but how will it serve us when dark clouds appear, and the howling tempest is upon us? That is

the question. "Prosperity makes friends, but adversity tries them." Have we, then, that within us which shall enable us to be true to God in the cloud as in the sunshine; to follow Him through evil as well as through good report; to lead Him to say of us: "I have chosen thee from the furnace of affliction"?—*IV. Inglis.*

NEBUCHADNEZZAR.

I. A SUCCESSFUL CONQUEROR.

[18695] Nebuchadnezzar was not one of those rare examples in which the hero and the statesman were combined. He was as far from the statesman-like qualities of the prophet Daniel as he was from the military qualities of Cyrus. The little intellect that he had, and the few resources of genius that were at his command, were not even exerted in a cause for which justice and righteousness bade him put on the armour. It is in no such light that he is presented to us. He came to oppress and enslave. He took up arms against the people of God, and without cause. He basely slew the sons of Judæa's king in the presence of their royal father; then put out the father's eyes, bound him in fetters of brass, and carried him captive to his own idolatrous land. He pillaged the treasures of the palace of God's temple, and carried away its sacred vessels, and great numbers of the principal Jews to Babylon. These were not the deeds of a high-minded warrior. His single aim was conquest and gain. Yet he was a conqueror, and advanced from victory to victory with the resistless might of the tempest. His conquests secured his crown.—*Gardiner Spring, D.D.*

II. A TYRANNOUS AND DEMORALIZING MONARCH.

[18696] When we read his history with care, we find little to applaud, and almost everything to condemn. His reign was marked by no measures of reform, and no progress in improvement, either civil, or social, or religious. Once, indeed, we read of his assembling his magistrates, and rulers, and counsellors of state: but it was not to consult upon the interests of the empire, to correct abuses, and perform the varied duties of wise and wholesome legislation. He assembled them, and it was done with idle, childish pomp, to worship a golden image! He possessed many of the qualities of a tyrant. He was arbitrary and rash, and appears to have been subject to paroxysms of ungovernable fury. When under the influence of these, he committed excesses of cruelty; yet cruelty does not appear to have been a predominant ingredient in his character. Born to the throne, and nursed amid the clangour of arms, he had never been taught to cultivate that moderation, and exercise that self-control which should mark the conduct

of one to whom the guidance and welfare of a nation were entrusted. There need be no greater proof of his fitful tyranny than his command to the wise men of his kingdom to tell him his forgotten dream, and the interpretation. A monarch may impose the weightiest burden, and inflict the severest punishment; but when he commands impossibilities, it is worse than tyranny. His wise men very rationally replied, "There is not a man upon the earth that can show the king's matter; therefore there is no king, nor lord, nor ruler that asked such things." He might as well have asked them for the sun, or the moon. His conduct was that of a madman, and his cruel edict against them was in keeping with his mad command. He was a furious and wicked king.—*Ibid.*

[18697] Instead of the memorials of his virtues, we find only the sad memorials of his vices. His whole history shows him to have been luxurious and effeminate; immoral himself, and the demoralizer of his nation. It would have been a melancholy view to have stood upon the walls of Babylon, and to have marked the influence which went forth from his palace to corrupt all orders of men, instigating his subjects to deeds of sensuality and crime, and preparing that fair land for its approaching doom. The name of king Nebuchadnezzar, instead of being the pride of a loyal people, and embalmed in the affections of a grateful posterity, lives only because it is associated with the history of a nation which he consigned to their seventy years' captivity, and lives only to be thought of on the one hand with admiration of God's justice, and on the other with admiration of His Divine mercy.—*Ibid.*

III. A PRINCE AMONG IDOLATERS.

[18698] At the head of an idolatrous people stood Nebuchadnezzar, himself the idolater king, and the great patron of idolatry. He was a contemner of the true God, and taught his subjects to be contemnners. His idolatry lies at the basis of some of the imperfections, and many of the vices of his character. He was superstitious, because he was an idolater. Superstition is one of the great features of idolatrous lands. The superstition of Rome is one of the appendages of her idolatry. The most wicked of her popes were the most superstitious of men. The prophet Isaiah represents Babylon as "wearied" by the multitude of her senseless divinations, star-gazers, and prognosticators. The superstition of Nebuchadnezzar's character is obvious from his reliance upon the occult arts of divination and astrology. The professors of these arts were the great men of his kingdom; they were his privy counsellors, to whom he had resort in all seasons of embarrassment and difficulty. He appoints the prophet Daniel to his college of diviners, as though he himself were one of the fraternity. His hopes and his fears, his power and his wealth, his pride and his effeminacy, found their element in his idolatry.

His contempt of God, and his love of wickedness, were sanctioned by his idolatry. He had the boldness to enact laws against the God of heaven, and to prohibit His worship in all the provinces of Babylon. There were periods in his reign when even the captive Hebrews whom he had torn from their temple on Mount Zion were not allowed to pay their homage to the God of Israel. They were mocked as the worshippers of the true God, and were called on as princes were wont to call on their fools and jesters, to make merriment at the court festivities. The infidel and scoffing demand was rung in their ears, "Come, sing us one of the songs of Zion!"—*Ibid.*

[18699] Behold the man before whom kings prostrated themselves, who did shake kingdoms, and who had just said, "I will exalt my throne above the stars of God," himself falling down in the presence of shouting multitudes and worshipping the god his own hands had made! This is that king—Nebuchadnezzar.—*Ibid.*

IV. A BIGOTED PERSECUTOR.

[18700] It was not enough that he exercised a political despotism; he was a religious despot, and was satisfied with nothing short of absolute control over the conscience. His religious edicts were more or less rigorous, as his feelings dictated them, and as his rage and fury were excited or moderate. Sometimes the penalty of resistance was the work of the headsman; sometimes it was to be cut in pieces, and the houses of the rebellious to be made a dunghill; sometimes it was to be cast into the den of lions, and sometimes it was to be bound hand and foot and thrown into the burning fiery furnace. The three captive Hebrew youths who had the integrity and firmness to refuse their homage to his golden deity were cast into the furnace seven times heated. To worship the God of Israel was heresy; it was an encroachment upon the royal prerogative that could not be tolerated. Nebuchadnezzar himself constituted the State and the Church. He was the Emperor-Bishop; and woe betide the man who refused to worship the god of Chaldæa, or presumed to worship the God of the Hebrews. He was the great ecclesiastical ancestor of St. Dominic, as Babylon was of Rome. Babylon was the first inquisitorial court, where cord and faggot began the work of torture and death. Subsequent persecutors have surpassed this prince in the inventions of cruelty; none have surpassed him in the torrent of their fury.—*Ibid.*

V. A PROUD AND ARROGANT MAN.

[18701] There was no harm at all in being the ruler of a mighty kingdom, provided that his elevation to so high a place had been accomplished by honest means. His sin was pride. His success, in everything he undertook, called forth no gratitude to God. His constant prosperity only hardened his heart. He con-

sidered himself as the contriver of his own fortune. He gloried in the strength of his armies. He feasted his eyes with the prospect of exhaustless riches. He looked down with contempt upon prostrate foes. He drank in with greediness the fulsome flatteries with which fawning courtiers filled his ears. Walking proudly upon the roof of his palace, from which he could command an extensive view of the mighty capital of his vast empire, his mind revelled in dreams of greatness and glory. For more than fifteen miles, on either hand, the great Babylon, "the Golden City," "the Lady of Kingdoms," "the Beauty of the Chaldees' Excellency," "the Praise of the whole Earth," was spread out before him. He gazed upon its massive walls and brazen gates; its citadel and towers; its royal palaces; its idol temples; its hanging-gardens, and its varied marks of beauty and magnificence, until the feelings of pride which swelled his heart found utterance in words of self-satisfaction and vainglory:—"Is not this great Babylon, that I have built by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?"—*J. Norton, D.D.*

[18702] He had indeed not a little to be proud of—as this world estimates the occasions and incentives to pride—in his royal lineage, in the success of his arms, in the extent and wealth of his dominions, and in the adulation of his courtiers, and in his own youthful magnificence and prospects. The city of Babylon was at the zenith of its glory. . . . No city could be compared with it in dimension, strength, or beauty. Its stupendous walls, the magnificence of its streets, the beauty of its waters, the splendour of its temple, tower, and palace, and the luxury of its hanging-gardens, rendered it one of the wonders of the world. . . . It was the richest city in the world. These were sufficient incitements to the monarch's pride. They were fascinating to such a mind as Nebuchadnezzar's; he was infatuated by them, and his heart was lifted up. He was arrogant; he must have "the king's seed to serve him;" the princes of his conquered provinces must be his slaves.—*Gardiner Spring, D.D.*

[18703] It was not enough that from his lofty seat he looked upon Chaldæa as his footstool; he presumed to pass sentence even on the whole earth. And, because earth could not gratify his pride, he was not content without contesting the claim of sovereignty with his Maker. It was not enough for him, in his princely arrogance, to say, "Is not this great Babylon which I have built for the house of the kingdom, by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?" The "rod had blossomed; pride had budded." Its fruits were bold presumption and impiety. One cloud of proud thoughts after another rolls over the mind of this infatuated prince until he forgot that he was God's creature. As he looked forth from the turret of his palace upon the stars of heaven, he conceives the impious thought, "I will ascend into heaven; I will exalt my

throne above the stars of God; I will sit upon the mountain of the congregation in the sides of the North. I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the Most High!" He could not remain satisfied while there was one Being in the universe above him. He was the Antichrist of his age.—*Ibid.*

VI. A WONDER OF WEAKNESS.

[18704] If we mistake not, he was greatly wanting in decision and firmness. He was a weak man and a weak prince. As a warrior, he does not compare with Cyrus, or Alexander, or Cæsar, or Napoleon. He often leaves his work half done, where a conqueror of strong and decided character would have finished it without repeating the blow. In the progress of his conquests, he was awestruck and terrified, he knew not why. As a king he is a tyrant; but a weak and vacillating one, giving absurd orders, flying into fury when they are disobeyed, and when his victims are miraculously rescued, falling down before them and acknowledging their God, just as he would acknowledge Bel or Dagon. He is arbitrary and rash. The prevailing ingredient of his government seems to be weakness. Nature had done little for him; good fortune everything.—*Ibid.*

[18705] His acts of cruelty seem the acts of a weak mind, under the influence of sallies of frenzy that were perhaps constitutional; while his acts of clemency and profusion were the acts of a feeble, easy temper, liable to be abused. He is often weak, not only to capriciousness, but to contradiction. There was very little strength of mind in him; and in fact his whole life seems like a school to prepare him for those seven years' exile from among men, when he "did eat grass as oxen, and his hairs were grown like eagles' feathers, and his nails like birds' claws."—*Ibid.*

[18706] His intellectual faculties, naturally feeble, obviously had not received the culture which might have improved them and elevated them to the standing of mediocrity. He was essentially a man of feeble character. In everything he did he seemed to be endeavouring to bring royalty into contempt. He had wise men in his kingdom; but instead of instructing himself in their wisdom, or directing it to noble objects, he held it in estimation only as it was able to interpret his visions! . . . His dreams seem to be the principal concern of his life; and God sent him dreams that troubled him, and a prophet to interpret them, and fearless in the discharge of his duty. What weakness was it when he says to Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, "Who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands?" after he had offered oblations to Daniel, and had made the confession to him, "Of a truth it is that your God is a God of gods."—*Ibid.*

VII. A BEACON OF WARNING.

The details of his humiliation exhibit a remarkable illustration of the retributive nature of the end which the word of God declares awaits a haughty spirit.

[18707] No further time was allowed for repentance. The day of mercy had gone by. The same hour was the sentence carried into execution. The proud and boastful words had hardly escaped his lips, when his mind became so disordered, that he fancied himself changed into an ox, and at once assumed the habits of that animal, roaming through the fields, and eating grass. What a grievous, frightful fall! The mighty monarch of Chaldæa brought down to such a state! Had trembling princes bowed before his throne, anxious to win his favour, or turn aside his wrath? Now is he banished from the abodes of men, an object of pity or contempt: "and none so poor to do him reverence." Did a hundred provinces send in their yearly tribute, to swell the coffers of the king, and purchase dainties for his festive board? Grovelling in the dust, crushed in mind, lost to all the tastes and habits of a man, "he did eat grass like an ox." Had the carved and gilded roofs of magnificent palaces shielded him from the heat and cold? Not even a tattered tent was left. His body was wet with the dew of heaven, and the pitiless storm spent its fury upon his defenceless head. Had purple, and fine linen, and sparkling gems, adorned his royal person? Naked, and loathsome, and abhorred, "his hairs grew like eagles' feathers, and his nails like birds' claws." Well might Isaiah exclaim, in bold, poetic figures, in reference to this wretched prince: "How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How art thou cast down, which didst weaken the nations!" (Isa. xiv. 12.) Such was the punishment of pride. The degree of punishment is determined by the degree of pride. Few can be guilty to the extent that Nebuchadnezzar was. Few can fall so terribly and so low.—*J. Norton, D.D.*

[18708] God smote him, and he became an idiot—a senseless maniac—wandering in the mountains and in the open field. He lost his relationship to man, and in no small degree the human form. He was transmuted to a brute. He by whom nations had been overturned, and who had been idolized as a God, was debased below the condition of a slave; ranged the fields of Babylon with brutes, and with no protection from sun or storms; exchanged his imperial robes for the long and rough hair of the desert, and the delicacies of royalty to eat grass with oxen. His princes, and his counselors, and his wise men looked for him, and found him among cattle. Babylon looked for him, and turned with disgust from his filthiness. The army, the populace, his wives, his children looked for him only to see that the hand of the Omnipotent was upon him, and only to hope that he was a melancholy madman. "How art thou fallen, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how

art thou cut down to the ground that didst weaken the nations!"—*Gardiner Spring, D.D.*

VIII. A MONUMENT OF MERCY.

[18709] With humble and contrite heart he now confessed that God's judgments, although so terrible, had been good and just. This sincere acknowledgment received its merited reward. The glory and greatness of his kingdom was again restored. Councillors and lords sought his presence, and obeyed his will; and still more brightness shone upon his latter days than that which had adorned his youth. As if to make some atonement for his fault, by a full and frank confession, he published this declaration to the world: "I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honour the King of Heaven, all whose works are truth, and his ways judgment; and those that walk in pride He is able to abase." How kind and merciful is God! The first and faintest prayer of the returning penitent is heard in heaven. As soon as pride has been humbled, and the hardened heart made soft, He withdraws His chastening hand. He gives "beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness."—*J. Norton, D.D.*

[18710] At last he looked up, as men do when they pray; up from himself to One greater than himself; up from the earth to heaven; up from the natural things which we do see, which are temporal and born to die, to moral and spiritual things which we do not see, which are real and eternal in the heavens; up from his own lonely darkness, looking for the light and the guidance of God; for now he began to see that all the light which he had ever had, all his wisdom, and understanding, and strength of will, had come from God, however he might have misused them for his own selfish ambition; that it was because God had taken from him His light, who is the Word of God, that he had become a beast. And then his reason returned to him, and he became again a man, a rational being, made, howsoever fallen and sinful, in the likeness of God; then he blessed and praised God. It was not merely that he confessed that God was strong, and he weak; righteous, and he sinful; wise, and he foolish; but he blessed and praised God; he felt and confessed that God had done him a great benefit, and taught him a great lesson—that God had taught him what he was in himself and without God, that he might see what he was with God in its true light, and honour and obey Him from whom his reason and understanding, as well as his power and glory, came.—*Rev. C. Kingsley.*

[18711] If the sacred volume had closed his history here, who would deny that this weak, superstitious, and supercilious tyrant deserved his doom? He has trifled with opportunities. Miracle after miracle has been wrought before his eyes, but all to no purpose. He has sinned long, and committed crimes enough. But God

is longsuffering and gracious. This is not the last page of his history. There is still hope for Chaldaea's poor and outcast king. There was no hope for him upon his throne. There was no hope for him in his pride of power and station. There was no hope for him while he was at rest in his house, and flourishing in his palace. But there is hope in his deep affliction, and now that he is humbled to the dust. Of the process by which his brutish heart became again changed to man's heart, we know nothing. Whether, even in his abject abasement, there remained a glimmering of reason and consciousness sufficient to be the object of Divine grace; or whether the change was effected at the moment when his understanding returned to him, we are also ignorant. We can only say that we know enough not to be without hope for this poor pagan monarch. We see this pitiable man, with scarce a vestige of human form, or human reason, coming to the light of life, and not improbably to the hopes of immortality. We listen to him, as his brutish covering falls off, and his understanding returns, and he lifts up his face toward heaven. We listen to him as he rises from the earth—not suddenly—not to exult in his restored humanity—nor to snatch with eager grasp the power and honours of which he has been so long divested; but kneeling with outspread hands under the open heavens, his eyes directed thither, and the bands of his tongue loosened. We listen to him, and from lips sealed for seven long years, we hear the song of praise to the Most High. We listen, and the first words which burst from the heart of this repentant monarch rise like perfume from flowers just washed by the rain, like incense from an altar newly reared and crowned with the first offerings of the humble and contrite.—*Gardiner Spring, D.D.*

IX. HOMILETICAL REFLECTIONS.

I The history of Nebuchadnezzar forcibly emphasizes the inference which was drawn by that monarch, that "the Most High ruleth among the children of men."

[18712] We look at these wondrous overturnings in human affairs, and find no peace, no repose of mind, except in the thought that "the Lord God omnipotent reigneth." The loftiest monarch can no more govern this world than Xerxes could curb the impetuosity of the waves by casting iron fetters into the sea. This is God's work. "Dominion is with Him." Princes are to Him but clay in the hands of the potter, to be made vessels unto honour, or, like the king of Babylon, made to eat grass with oxen. How should we give glory to the Lord our God, before our feet stumble upon the dark mountains! It is the tyrant's fear and freedom's hope that God is on the throne. Let this land hearken to His voice, lest He "trample us in His fury, and vex us in His sore displeasure." The Most High, that ruleth among men, grant that our prosperity may not be prosperity of

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wickedness, lest in our overthrow Babylon itself should say, "Art thou also become as one of us?"—*Ibid.*

2 The history of Nebuchadnezzar forcibly emphasizes the certain abasement of human pride.

[18713] This is one of the lessons, also, which it taught Nebuchadnezzar. The last words in his memorable acknowledgment of the Divine supremacy were, "those that walk in pride He is able to abase." They were words the force of which he deeply felt, and which ought never to be lost sight of. There is nothing God will more certainly accomplish than stain the pride of all human glory. . . . Lofty airs and insolent self-sufficiency and self-exaltation ill become man who is a worm.—*Ibid.*

[18714] Nebuchadnezzar eating grass like oxen; Belshazzar slain in his palace; Herod eaten of worms; Cæsar slaughtered in the senate-house; Tiberius suffocated in his bed; Nero fleeing from the sentence of death, denounced by his own subjects; Charles of England and Louis of France executed on the scaffold; and the great Napoleon, like a portentous meteor darting across the heavens, sinking, glimmering and exhausted on a barren rock in the ocean—all these teach us that the widest dominion of pride is the surest and often the most sudden descent to abasement and shame.—*Ibid.*

3 The history of Nebuchadnezzar forcibly emphasizes the vanity and mutability of all earthly things.

[18715] God reads us this lesson from His Word. All history reads it. Our own observation reads it. And, if it is not confirmed by our own experience, we are the most favoured of mortals or the most slow to learn.

"All has its date below; the fatal hour
Was registered in heaven ere time began.
We turn to dust, and all our mightiest works
Die too. The deep foundations that we lay
Time ploughs them up, and not a trace remains.
We build with what we deem eternal rocks,
A distant age asks where the fabric stood;
And in the dust, sifted and searched in vain,
The undiscovered secret sleeps."

There is no relief from these changes of time. From such a world there is no lasting good to hope for. Nor is there any earthly refuge from its disappointments and its fears. Peradventure you see days of trouble, like the Babylonian monarch. The visions of wealth, honour, and pleasure are receding from your eager grasp. Dreams upon your bed trouble you. Thoughts in the night-watches whisper to you. And what is it that can now give you peace and tranquillity? Who and where are they that can guide and comfort you? Are they the magicians, the Chaldeans, wise the men of this world? Have they any interpretations that satisfy you? Can they quiet the conscience, and silence the

still small voice, and banish the visions that make you afraid? No; if they would be honest, they would confess, with the prognosticators of old, "There is none other can show this matter except the gods whose dwelling is not with flesh." A precious truth is this, though uttered by the diviners of Babylon. "God is our refuge and strength; a very present help in trouble."—*Ibid.*

[18716] Cease ye from man whose breath is in his nostrils. In the intimacies of friendship, in the accumulations of wealth, in the house of pride, in the festivities and walks of pleasure, you will meet with changes, disappointments, and death. Nebuchadnezzar did not live in vain, if it were only to proclaim in our ears the uncertainty of all earthly joys. Oh, how does the bright vision vanish in that dark hour when the Last Enemy approaches! What is the world good for then? Speak to a dying man of gold. Tell the grasping ambitious of their honours. Hold up to expiring princes their sparkling crowns. Tell the man of pleasure that his cup is not exhausted. Whisper to the man of science how green the laurels are that will adorn his grave. Ah, there the laurels wither, the cup of pleasure is dried, and crowns and gold become dross. "Son, remember that thou, in thy lifetime, receivest thy good things." There is no more affecting sight than to see a man who has toiled for the world convinced too late that he has had his reward. The last change makes the worldling poor. The emperor goes without his crown; the effeminate without his pleasures; the rich man without his gold, into that eternity that knows no change. No; no change. Eternity alone knows no change. Heaven knows none. Nor is there any where Babylon sunk. "What then shall it profit a man to gain the whole world and lose his own soul!"—*Ibid.*

BELSHAZZAR.

I. GENERAL VIEW OF HIS CHARACTER.

[18717] As to Belshazzar himself, all historians combine in painting his portrait in the blackest colours. He seems to have been just a mean, brainless sensualist—one of those poor, miserable fools who come into a great inheritance, and then, laying the reins on the back of their lusts, post to perdition as fast as ever they can. He was violent in his temper, and yet easily managed; soft and pliable as wax to those who understood how to manage his caprices. Humour him, flatter him, yield to him, and he was the pleasant companion—the king who would lay aside his royalty to mingle with the pleasures and pursuits of his subjects. But cross and thwart him, even by accident—offend him even in the slightest degree—and his womanish face would darken with the ferocity of a demon, and

you would find his wrath as cruel and as insatiable as the grave.—*Rev. G. Calthrop.*

II. HIS HEINOUS INIQUITY.

1 He despised all warnings until it was too late to reform.

[18718] You must not think that the last was the only warning which Belshazzar had received. If it came too late, that was because it was the warning of retribution, not the warning of mercy; it was only because all previous warnings had been neglected and despised. His father's dreams of the shattered colossus and the felled tree; the brute madness which had afflicted him; the besieging of his own city; the fact that the shouts of an enemy might have mingled with the very songs of his banquet—these were all warnings to this crowned fool, but they had all been fruitless.—*Archdeacon Farrar.*

[18719] During the time that the Jews were in captivity at Babylon, a variety of singular events concurred to prove that the sins which brought desolation to their country, and subjected them for a while to the Babylonish yoke, had not dissolved that covenant relation which, as the God of Abraham, Jehovah had entered into with them; and that any act of indignity perpetrated against this afflicted people, or any insult cast upon the service of their temple, would be regarded as an affront to the Majesty of Heaven, and not suffered to pass with impunity. The fate of Belshazzar affords a remarkable instance of this. He had had an opportunity of seeing in the case of his ancestors how hateful pride is, even in royalty itself; how instantly God can blast the dignity of the brightest crown; and, consequently, how much the prosperity of kings and the stability of their thrones depend upon acknowledging that "the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever He will." But this solemn lesson was lost upon Belshazzar.—*McClintock and Strong.*

2 He offered open insult to the Most High.

[18720] "Belshazzar the king made a great feast to a thousand of his lords, and drank wine before the thousand." So, as with a crashing overture of orchestral music, the tale begins. Imagine the following splendour for yourselves:—that vast Babylonian palace, with its kiosks and fountains, its hanging-gardens, and long arcades; every wall glowing with its weird images of pagan symbolism; every portal guarded by colossal forms of winged cherubim, half animal, half human, staring through the dusk, with calm eyes, on the little lives of men; and everywhere, sweeping through court after court and chamber after chamber, the long and gorgeous processions of Chaldean conquerors, portrayed with vermilion, exceeding in dyed attire; and gathered there the princes, the wives, the concubines—all that the satraps could display of magnificence, and all that the harems

hid of loveliness, as though in scorn of the enemy without, vainly thundering at those brazen gates. And, at last, as though sacrilege were needed to fire the mad festivity, they pledged their gods of brass and stone in those great cups of consecrated gold which Solomon had made for the Temple of the Eternal.—*Archdeacon Farrar.*

III. HIS AWFUL DOOM.

1 It was sudden and overwhelming.

[18721] Think of the awful disturbance of the feast; that ghastly apparition; that something which looked like the spectral semblance of the fingers of some gigantic hand, moving slowly along the wall where the central lamp flung its most vivid light; and those seeming letters, which, as it moved, passed from under its dark shadow into a baleful glare; and while it moved, and when it went, the king, with fixed eyes, and ashy looks, and knees that smote together, staring in the very paralysis of fear, not, as before, on the crimson annals of Chaldean conquest, but on some awful decree of an offended God recorded in hieroglyphs of undecipherable fire. The wild cry which summoned his magicians; the entrance of the queen-mother, to tell her son of the Jewish boy—an old man now—whom his father had taken captive, and in whom was the spirit of the holy gods; and how Daniel came and read those fearful letters into the four words, "Menê, Menê, Tekêl, Upharsin.—Numbered, numbered, weighed, and they shall divide;" all this you know. Short was the space for repentance. In that night was Belshazzar, king of the Chaldeans, slain. "That night," as an English poet has written it—

"That night they slew him on his father's throne,
The deed unnoticed and the hand unknown:
Crownless and sceptreless Belshazzar lay,
A robe of purple round a form of clay!"

—*Ibid.*

2 It appears to be one of the few individual cases mentioned in the Scriptures of men whose eternal condemnation is made morally certain.

[18722] Rarely, even in the case of a very wicked man, does the inspired writer lift the veil from individual destiny, and assure us that it is fatal. But in this instance there can scarcely be room for doubt. The implications of doom are overwhelming. Belshazzar had been long familiar with a knowledge of the true God. He had had miraculous evidences of it in the experience of his father. "Thou knewest all this," is the faithful reminder which the prophet gives him. Yet he had persisted in a life and reign of extreme and unblushing guilt. "O Belshazzar, thou hast not humbled thine heart, but hast lited up thyself against the Lord of heaven!" Then appeared the fearful writing on the wall, the purport of which is too plain to admit of doubt. That night the king was summoned to the bar of God.—*Austin Phelps, D.D.*

IV. HOMILETICAL REFLECTIONS.

- 1 The case of Belshazzar suggests the degree of responsibility which is incurred by the rejection or neglect of God's merciful warnings.

[18723] Do not similar warnings to those given to Belshazzar come to every sinner, long before the warning of his doom? If any of you are living a life of sin, have they not come to you? Have there been no dreams in the darkness? no voices in the silence? no hauntings of fear? no burdens of remorse? no memories of innocence? no aches of shame? no qualms of sickness? no echoing, as of ghostly footfalls in the far-off corridors of life? And later on, if these have all been neglected, are you conscious now of no deriding, deadly enemy doing siege to the golden Babylon of life?—no attempts of your own to drown in dead sloth, or hardened perversity, the hoarse murmurs of that approaching foe? And if in spite of all these the soul still sin and sin—hardened to the pain of sin—then has no history, no biography told you that there comes at last sometimes—and sometimes, alas! too late—a handwriting upon the wall, which is only the handwriting of doom?—*Archdeacon Farrar*.

[18724] But though this handwriting upon the wall was the doom of Belshazzar, it is with the earlier, less terrible warnings that I have to do; the warnings full of gentleness and mercy, which tell us of destruction which is still distant, which bid us seek refuge while there is time to fly. Those warnings are always written on the palace wall of life. But is it not literally an everyday experience that an inscription always before the eyes is little heeded? I imagine that the ancient Athenians paid little heed to the moral sentences which were carved upon the *Hermæ* in every street. I imagine that the Turks of Constantinople have taken but little notice of that *ὁ Χριστός νικά* which remains, legible and unobliterated, like a prophecy which shall still be fulfilled upon their central mosque. And just in the same way do we not, all of us alike, often thus neglect and forget the notices of God? Yes; and that is why in dealing with us He is obliged, now and then, to *make* us see them—to force their meaning into us—to interpret them again, when the dimmed wall has been painted over with other symbols, and familiarity has made them meaningless to eyes that will not see.—*Ibid.*

[18725] These reminders from God, of truths which we have forgotten, come sometimes very terribly; not whispered, but shouted—not shouted only, but cut deep—not only cut deep before the eyes, but branded in letters of fire upon the soul. When palsy sickness is the debt due from weakened manhood to sinful youth; when the loss of the last chance brings home to us the sense of the squandered opportunity; when the cold light of heaven, bursting

through the drawn curtains of the hypocrite, shows him to himself and to others, not as he wished to be thought, but as he is; above all, when sin has been punished by God's suffering us to fall into deeper and deadlier sin, and crime flings its glare of illumination on the self-deception which said of sin, "There is no harm in it"—then it is that God puts forth the fingers of a man's hand, and His inscription, once unheeded, flashes into letters of fire. And—since be sure your sins will find you out—so must it be, sooner or later, to every sinner to whom repentance calls in vain. So that what I have been trying to urge on you is to read those milder warnings, to listen to those stiller, smaller voices, which come to us, not at some terrible crisis, but at quiet moments, and ere we sleep at night, and on our knees, and when we read our Bibles, and before Holy Communions, and in every blessed means of grace. For indeed those words, written once in the palace of Belshazzar, are for us written for ever in the house of life; and each one of you, in your own hearts, may still read the *Menê, Menê, Tekel, Upharsin*, as they were left by the awful moving of the spectral hand.—*Ibid.*

- 2 The case of Belshazzar affords a warning in the example which he presents of clear and prolonged conviction of sin failing to result in the soul's salvation.

[18726] Who of us has the heart to follow the doomed monarch beyond the scenes of that awful night? Let us draw the veil over that unwritten and unutterable future, and turn to a class of men whose experience on the subject of religion is not dissimilar, so far as this—that they have long known the truth, have long felt themselves to be sinners before God, yet they stop just there, with the acknowledged sense of sin often lying as a wearisome weight on their souls, and never relieved by repentance and the consciousness of peace with God. If they were to be suddenly called into God's presence with hearts unchanged, as the Chaldaean king was, the verdict of the mysterious hand would be the same: "Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting." One young man I once knew, in whose mind these very words rested for months, as the summing up of his own character and destiny. "Weighed, and found wanting"—the words were like a live coal upon his eyeballs. Wherever he looked he saw them. They glared upon him from the walls of his chamber. All faith, all hope, was buried in them. Outwardly he lived like other men. Few knew the dull nightmare of conscious and despairing guilt in which he lived. Yet rarely was he conscious of an hour when he did not feel it, resting like a pall over the joys of this world, and foreshadowing in silent prophecy his doom in another. He represented a class of men who are not few, who suffer for years under hopeless and fruitless convictions of sin.—*Austin Phelps, D.D.*

AHASUERUS.

I. HIS INDIVIDUALITY.

It is indicated only by the extent of his material kingdom.

[18727] "This is Ahasuerus which reigned," &c. His kingdom may be measured by the land surveyor and described by the historian. It extended from India to Ethiopia. He embraced in his rule the borders of India on the one side, and Egypt on the other—an extent of country about two thousand five hundred miles in length. He possessed some of earth's loveliest lands. The fertilizing waters of the Nile left rich deposits on one portion of his territory, and another almost reached the sources of the sacred Ganges, while the Euphrates washed the walls of Babylon, and was fed by streams that flowed near the royal city of Susa. The Black Sea, famous in the history of modern conflicts, and the Caspian, were partly included in the territories over which he reigned. Lands and cities of historic fame were compelled to pay him tribute, and some of the noblest races on earth obeyed his commands.—*Anon.*

II. HIS GREATNESS.

It consisted in external display.

[18728] The throne on which the king sat was a chair made of gold, adorned with a costly carpet, upon which none might sit, on pain of death. There was also a footstool of gold. The king held a golden sceptre in his right hand. Close behind stood an eunuch bearing a fan, and with his mouth covered, for fear his breath should be offensive to the mighty monarch. Such are the pomp and circumstance with which Oriental monarchs endeavoured to separate themselves from, and raise themselves above, their fellow-creatures. This is greatness in the estimation of the children of this world. But true greatness is superior to mere gorgeous externals. The one disappears when the showy livery is removed, but the other abides through all changes. Lazarus was great in his rags; Dives was mean in his purple and fine linen. A great soul ennobles the meanest surroundings.—*Ibid.*

III. HOMILETICAL HINTS.

The proud position of Ahasuerus is by no means to be envied by the Christian believer.

[18729] There are many who would regard Ahasuerus with envy, as, amid a group of attendants, he paced those terraced heights on which the palace of Shushan was erected, as he watched the gentle gliding of the sweet waters of the Eulcæus, as he listened to the music of pipers and harpists, as he pleased himself with the natural and artistic beauties of the scene, and as he gazed upon the flat and fertile plains

that stretched at the base of the royal palace. The riches both of art and of nature seemed to combine in order to make existence pleasant. But no human lot is without its admixture of pain. From the high places of the earth we catch the echo of those wailing cries that mingle with the mocking sounds of revelry. Kings are but men, and their hearts too are touched by the painful hand of sorrow. The inscription over an imaginative palace is, "Here is the abode of everlasting pleasures and content." But no such inscription can be truthfully placed over the gates of any earthly palace, and certainly it will not describe Shushan the palace. Happy he who wisely keeps the palace of his soul, and finds there the elements of true gladness.—*Ibid.*

[18730] If God has bestowed true faith, unfeigned love, and unaffected humility, He has bestowed treasures of inestimably greater value than all the possessions of Xerxes and Nero. A man may rule over an extensive kingdom and yet be a slave; for lusts are tyrannical masters. A man may be a slave in outward condition, and yet be the noblest freeman, the grandest king of all. He is royal who is a member of that kingdom which is to extend from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth, which, in fact, is to include all nations. Other kingdoms shall fail, but Christ's kingdom of love shall ever endure.—*Ibid.*

[18731] The moral king is nobler, and has a more extensive and a more permanent kingdom. Even the material universe is the believer's possession, intended for his spiritual development. Death strips the earthly king of his royal robes, and leaves him unthroned; but death lets the moral king into a larger sphere, and the results of his earthly conquests he will enjoy in heaven. The kingliest men have owned only a few feet of land, and sometimes not enough land for a tomb, according to short-sighted views of ownership.—*Ibid.*

HAMAN.

I. FEATURES OF CHARACTER.

1 Overweening pride.

[18732] See him going forth from Shushan the palace. The gates are scarcely high enough for the proud-hearted man on that richly caparisoned horse. Mark that smile on his countenance. Haman is "exceedingly glad of heart." Some further honour has been put upon him, and he goes to his home to reveal it to his friends. Why may not a man of his calibre be proud? Can his honour ever be eclipsed? Can his glory ever be overshadowed? Can his name, handed down by his many children, ever die? Who can supplant him in the king's favour, seeing that he knows so well the arts of courtiers, and exercises his office

only with respect to the pleasure of the king? Do not all the rest of the courtiers and place-seekers look to him? Is not his favour in turn the sun that "gilds the noble troops waiting upon his smile?" "If ever man may flatter himself in the greatness and security of his glory," thinks Haman, "surely I may do so." "His weak head is turned by his cupful of honour." Ah, Haman! thy pride is dangerous; it is like high-heeled shoes, fitting thee only for a fall. Take care! the least stone may cause thee to stumble. Be not over sure of thy position. Pitfalls are around. Ambition and pride are heavy canvas, and need much ballast. Great is thy risk. Thou standest on the narrow apex of a mountain, from which one false step will set thee rolling to the very abyss. How many look with envy upon him as he rides forth! His servants hasten on before him, crying, "Bow the knee, bow the knee." Grateful to him is the reverence he receives. He cares not that it is reverence lacking respect, so long as there is outward obeisance. Such an one is sure to notice the least slight on the part of any who conforms not to the general rule. His temper will not endure to see one erect head among so many bowed backs.—*F. Hastings.*

2 Insatiable ambition.

[18733] It was to the material rewards of office that such an one as Haman would have a hungry eye. He well understood the ways of court, so as to secure the best tangible results of favouritism. Obtaining these, he then aimed at something higher. His conceptions of higher honour expand in proportion to his elevation. At length a thought enters his mind, to which if he gave utterance his immediate deposition and death would ensue. This thought will leak out by and by. It only needs a fitting opportunity. Nay, it will seize and make an opportunity out of the flimsiest pretext.—*Ibid.*

[18734] We think it was a bold thing for a man to suggest to a king that a subject and a servant should put on the royal robes, ride the king's own charger, and don the king's own crown. Did Haman desire to accustom the people of the city to a sight of himself as the actual king? Was his hope this, that the people would cry, "Long live king Haman; down with Abasuerus." a cry of which he would not have been slow to take advantage? He could not have wished to wear those royal robes for one day only, but for life. We strongly suspect that Haman had been mixed up in the conspiracy of Bigthana and Teresh. Perhaps he proved traitor to them that he might more surely attain his end another way. The remark in the sacred narrative concerning the speedy advance of Haman after their deposition leads to this surmise. His aim is not abandoned though the others missed it. He works only in a more cautious and subtle way. He intends so to get rid of the king that he shall feel it an honour to be bowed out of his palace.—*Ibid.*

3 Contemptible discontent.

[18735] After all, what a trifle it was that vexed the mind of this great prince! It was the one drop of poison in the cup of his joy. It was the hidden ulcer inflicting frightful pain to the man who was doing his best to maintain a calm countenance. It was the black cloud glooming the sunshine of his prosperity. Although he has attained an elevation that may at one time have seemed far beyond his reach, he finds that thorns bestrew his path, and even leave their sharp points on his pillow. The thorn that rankles most severely is this, that Mordecai, who sits in the king's gate, will not bend to him. How pitiable is such pride, how contemptible such miserable whining! "All this availeth me nothing," &c.—*Ibid.*

[18736] Mordecai's behaviour so affected Haman that he could not hold his tongue about it when with his friends. To them he acknowledged that it poisoned all the advantages which he enjoyed. It was in the hearing, not of strangers, but of friends, that he said—"Yet all this availeth me nothing," &c. Truth, like murder, will out. I can imagine Haman pretending, when he was in no mood to unbosom himself, that he attached no importance to Mordecai's manner towards him; but it was all a pretence. He did not hesitate to confess, when it could be safely done, that it was the bitter drop in his cup—so bitter that it imparted its bitterness to the entire contents of the cup. His wife, his sons, and more intimate friends all knew how hostile were his feelings toward Mordecai, and how glad he would be to see Mordecai's place in the king's gate empty, or filled by another.—*Ibid.*

II. QUESTION AS TO THE REASON AND PROPRIETY OF MORDECAI'S REFUSAL TO DO HOMAGE TO HAMAN.

[18737] It has been supposed that Haman carried a small enamelled picture on his breast. As a Jew, Mordecai may not bow down before anything that is the "likeness of anything in heaven above or the earth beneath." Another reason has been suggested, viz., that as the king claimed in some sense Divine honours, so in his command he intended that Haman should have some Divine honour paid to him. Knowing this, Mordecai dare not bend. Some may have called it obstinacy, but it was in reality consistency. Allurements and affrightment are tried upon him, but in vain. That he had showed them he was a Jew indicates that he pleaded his nationality as an excuse for non-obedience to the king's command. Still in that he afterwards urged that Esther should present herself before the king unbidden—a thing she could not do without rendering the accustomed obeisance as to a Divine being—we do not think that this is to be taken as the strong argument for Mordecai's refusal. Another reason has to be sought. Possibly it is to be found in that noted enmity with which the Jew

regarded all descendants of Amalek, to which nation Haman belonged. We can imagine him replying to the repeated suggestions of the servants of the king that it would be well for him to obey. "He is an old enemy of my race, and shall I bow down to him? Such as he shall be destroyed root and branch."—*F. Hastings.*

[18738] What led Mordecai to form a resolution to withhold from Haman the customary tokens of Oriental submission and respect, is a point on which no light is cast in the fascinating narrative. It may have been due to independence of spirit, although the name Mordecai means either "a little man" or "a worshipper of Mars;" but it is more probable that it was due to the fact that Haman was an Amalekite. At all events, he is represented as "the son of Hammedatha the Agagite." Now Agag was a kind of title of the kings of the Amalekites; and it is not unlikely that Haman was descended from the royal family of that nation. If we assume that he was, we can the better explain his connection with the court of Ahasuerus. It may be asked—What was there in the circumstance that Haman was an Amalekite to cause Mordecai to determine that he would neither bow to him nor reverence him, his premiership notwithstanding? I answer simply this—the Amalekites were the ancient and bitter enemies of the Jews. Of course, the knowledge that they were would indispose Mordecai the Jew to yield Haman that measure of respect which the king had ordered to be paid to him as he went in and out of the palace.—*G. Cron.*

III. HOMILETICAL REFLECTIONS.

I The history of Haman reminds us of the inability of earthly possessions to give complete and lasting satisfaction.

[18739] Who that looked upon Haman as he rode forth in all the glory of purple and gold, or as he lounged on his divan in the midst of his friends, would have supposed that he had anything to cause him so much annoyance? And yet it is not always so? There is a skeleton in every house, the worm in every rose, sorrow in every heart. Look into that stately mansion. See how richly it is furnished with finely-carved chairs, luxurious lounges, marble-topped tables, and book-cases with rows of costly books. Pictures of the choicest character deck the walls. Busts and antiques are here and there. The velvety carpets feel like a mossy bank beneath the feet. Ask the occupants of the mansion if they are content, and perhaps the owner will tell you, "All this availeth me nothing" so long as my neighbour on the hill has a house larger and better furnished. The wife will perhaps tell you that "all availeth nothing" so long as a certain family is accounted as higher in the social scale than hers; or because at a dinner party she noticed with annoyance that some one had taken precedence

of herself; or because she had not been invited to some great gathering where certain of the *élite* were expected. The absurdities and vexations of the weak-minded and exclusive are more than equal to those of the excluded. The petty social fanciful annoyances oft make all comforts and possessions to "avail nothing" in the production of real happiness. Enter the shop of that tradesman. What a large business he carries on! Yet he in his soul is not happy. He is envious. He will confess to himself, if not to you, "All this availeth me nothing" so long as a certain competitor in the same business can buy cheaper or make money more rapidly than myself. Go along a country road and note some pretty homestead nestling among the trees; surely that must be the abode of content and peace! You approach it, and meeting the occupant thereof, you congratulate him on the beauty of his dwelling-place and charm of the surrounding hills; he, haggard and worn, only replies, "All this availeth me nothing." Look at my neighbour's barn, how much larger, and his crops how much finer than mine! So the warrior or statesman, the preacher and the potentate are alike discontented. Dissatisfied, successful men. The blessings and privileges they possess are nothing; the trifling lack or annoyance is everything. Their state is as sinful as it is miserable. They are lineal descendants of Haman the Agagite. It is not in the nature of worldly possessions or position to give full satisfaction. If they could, the results would have been injurious to man's moral nature. No thoughts of higher things entering man's mind, he would soon have been degraded to the level of the brute creation.—*F. Hastings.*

[18740] Every person has his Mordecai who sits in the gate refusing to do reverence. We hear of him first in that quaint Oriental story of Esther; but it is a great mistake to suppose he was embalmed thousands of years ago. If he had a beginning, he has no end of days, and there is no station so exalted but his form haunts it, none so obscure as to deter him from paying it the compliment of his presence.—*L. Stott.*

[18741] This is a truth which cannot be too deeply impressed upon us, and in which it would be well that men had more faith. If they had, there would be more of contentment and less of envy and covetousness in the world. There would be less Communism of the Paris type. We cannot do without material things. Our bodies are parts of ourselves, and they have wants which must be supplied, otherwise we cease to live; but it is not in material things to make us happy. It is the more important to note this that we are so apt to exaggerate their power to bless us. Numbers entertain the idea that if they had them in greater abundance they would be happy; but it does not follow. There are thousands in splendid worldly circumstances who are strangers to happiness, and

who marvel what can be wrong with them that they are not truly happy. Haman had heaps on heaps of the most valued material things; but what did they avail him? He declared that they availed him nothing. He was not happy for all, and he despaired of happiness so long as Mordecai the Jew had a seat in the king's gate.—*G. Cron.*

[18742] Mordecai's want of respect was in itself a small matter; but it sadly interfered with Haman's enjoyment. It had the effect of neutralizing, and more than neutralizing, all the felicities of his office and condition; and from our own experience we can understand perfectly how all of good that he possessed availed him nothing so long as Mordecai the Jew sat at the king's gate. He may be compared to the owner of a mansion sitting at a blind window seeing nothing, and all the while there are windows in every room from which excellent views of the surrounding scenery can be obtained, if he would only place himself at them and look through them.—*Ibid.*

2 The history of Haman reminds us that religion alone can give true content.

[18743] To prefer the world to heavenly and spiritual delights, is to act according to the folly of one who, being heir to a kingdom, should yet prefer some map or model to the kingdom itself. How easily might the map be torn, or the model be broken! The possession of the kingdom of heaven in the heart can never be destroyed. Those who possess it will not make Haman's confession theirs, "All this availeth me nothing." They will say rather, "Seeking first the kingdom of heaven, and its righteousness: all other things are added thereto."—*F. Hastings.*

SANBALLAT.

A TROUBLESOME OBSTRUCTIONIST.

1 His obstruction was born of a jealous spirit.

[18744] When Sanballat heard that the city of Jerusalem was no longer to be left to the mercy of any and every foe, and that measures had already been taken to build the wall, his heart was filled with envy, and jealousy lest the renown of Nehemiah should become greater than his own. The influence and power of the Samaritans would probably decrease, whilst the safety of the Israelites would be secured; so every effort must be made to prevent the plans of Nehemiah from being executed. This jealous spirit is manifested to-day in every circle of society. In the political world, how many useful measures have been opposed, not on principle, but from the fear, if they should be adopted, that the other party's power would be increased. One nation is prosperous, and her resources are legitimately developed; the neigh-

bouring nation perceives this, becomes jealous, the sword is unsheathed, and thousands of lives are sacrificed. A man cannot succeed in his business without others envying him, and many attempts will be made to crush him. It is to be feared that this spirit has a great influence in the religious world. If any Nehemiah feels it in his heart to build the wall of Jerusalem, there will be many Sanballats ready to do more than shaking their heads to discourage him, and that simply because he does not belong to their little sect. A sad state this, nevertheless true.—*Anon.*

2 His obstruction expressed itself in a sarcastic malignity.

[18745] Sanballat in the first place tried sarcasm, thinking it would be strong enough to put a stop to the work. "But when Sanballat the Horonite, and Tobiah the servant, the Ammonite, and Geshem the Arabian, heard it, they laughed us to scorn, and despised us, and said, What is this thing that ye do? will ye rebel against the king?" "And he spake before his brethren and the army of Samaria, and said, What do these feeble Jews? will they fortify themselves? will they sacrifice? will they make an end in a day? will they revive the stones out of the heaps of the rubbish which are burned?" Sanballat and his friends are at liberty to scoff and sneer; the work, however, will not be stopped as long as Nehemiah is able to go with his fears and burdens to the Lord his God.—*Ibid.*

3 His obstruction displayed a cowardly spirit.

[18746] Sanballat threatened to lead his army against the Israelites, "and conspired all of them together to come and to fight against Jerusalem, and to hinder it." This threat, however, was never carried out; the enemies of Nehemiah were afraid to resort to arms, because they knew that the work was of God. Cowards, as a rule, are fond of indulging in strong words and of assuming grand attitudes; when their strength is tested, they soon beat a retreat. It does not require great capabilities to oppose those engaged in good works, and to destroy that which has been accomplished.—*Ibid.*

4 His obstruction revealed a murderous hatred.

[18747] Sanballat's hatred became so great that he conspired against Nehemiah's life. To carry this out, he invited him to one of the villages in the plain of Ono; to a consultation concerning the object he had in view in building the wall; and to shut himself up in the temple. These were cunning schemes to take away his life; but the prophet understood their purport. When the tribe of Sanballat find their sarcasm and threats unavailing, their hatred becomes so great that they will not hesitate to murder; if not the man himself, his reputation, which amounts to almost the same thing. The defence of the good and righteous against these foes is the Lord of hosts.—*Ibid.*

SECTION XVII.

NEW TESTAMENT SCRIPTURE CHARACTERS.

CHRISTIAN ERA.

THE SAVIOUR.

I. THE PERFECTION OF HIS CHILDHOOD AND YOUTH.

The little that is told to us suggests a gradual human development.

[18748] St. Luke alone, after describing the incidents which marked the presentation in the temple, preserves for us one inestimable anecdote of the Saviour's boyhood, and one inestimable verse descriptive of His growth till He was twelve years old. And that verse contains nothing for the gratification of our curiosity; it furnishes us with no details of life, no incidents of adventure; it tells us only how, in a sweet and holy childhood, "the child grew and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon Him." To this period of His life, too, we may apply the subsequent verse, "And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man." His development was a strictly human development. He did not come into the world endowed with infinite knowledge, but, as St. Luke tells us, "He gradually advanced in wisdom." He was not clothed with infinite power, but experienced the weaknesses and imperfections of human infancy. He grew as other children grow, only in a childhood of stainless and sinless beauty, "as the flower of roses in the spring of the year, and as lilies by the waters." Like Moses in the wilderness, like David among the sheepfolds, like Elijah among the tents of the Bedouin, like Jeremiah in his quiet home at Anathoth, like Amos in the sycamore groves of Tekoa, the boy Jesus prepared Himself, amid a hallowed obscurity, for His mighty work on earth. His outward life was the life of all those of His age, station, and place of birth. He lived as lived the other children of peasant parents in that quiet town, and in great measure as they live now. He who has seen the children of Nazareth in their red caftans, and bright tunics of silk or cloth, girded with a many-coloured sash, and sometimes covered with a loose outer jacket of white or blue—he who has watched their noisy and merry games, and heard their ringing

laughter as they wander about the hills of their native vale, or play in bands on the hillside beside their sweet and abundant fountain, may perhaps form some conception of how Jesus looked and played when He too was a child.

[18749] He stands among the Rabbis, not affrighted certainly by their dignity, with no sign of bashfulness, but also with none of forwardness. He is not eager to speak. He wishes to listen. The doctors are conversing about matters which they presume are far above the comprehension of a boy. And there is in the face of this Boy nothing which tells of assumption or precocity, rather of quietness and docility. Such a one may be allowed to hear their discourse; it may impress Him hereafter, if not at once, with reverence for their persons and their office. And what was that listening of His? In the highest sense, as in every lower one, the maxim holds good, "Everything is received according to the measure of the receiver." We can imagine how glibly the familiar texts would be repeated by one and another—how often "sins" and "repentance" would be in their mouths, how they would debate about the hope of Israel and the promise of dominion over the Gentiles—how they would speak of all God's doings with them, if they did not actually pronounce the name which signified His hidden essence. What awful, unutterable meanings lay beneath these sounds! And the meaning, not the sound, was that to which this Boy was listening. That of which the learned men had only the faintest consciousness entered into His inmost being. It was in the fullest sense listening, reverent and awful listening—the listening of a child, not the judgment of a man. It is hard for us to make that distinction, but if we believe the Incarnation we shall try to make it. We shall believe that the Child was a child, the Boy a boy; that the Child was perfect as such, and therefore did not anticipate its after-growth, which would imply imperfection; that the Boy was a perfect boy, and therefore had none of that forestalling of manhood which our consciences and reason tell us is irregular and untrue. And this is not, as some would state

it, merely in order to do justice to the humanity of Christ. We cannot in any other way see how the Divinity manifested itself through the humanity, how it addressed itself to all the conditions and needs of humanity. . . . Do you suppose that those Rabbis, after forty, say, or fifty years of reading and copying out the Law, of comparing and registering the different commentaries upon it, had ever felt such a presence of Divinity with them as when they looked into the face of that listening Boy? They could copy the letters, they could overlook the commentaries. If there was something very deep and mysterious beneath them, they could reduce it into Cabbala; they could talk of it as *their* possession, *their* distinction from the multitude. But which of them could penetrate the awe and mystery of that countenance, clear and bright as it was? What spoke to them through that could be reduced into no Cabbala. . . . Surely those listening eyes were reading their very hearts. Surely they knew better than they ever did before that God was reading them.—*Rev. F. D. Maurice.*

[18750] "He was sitting among them," it is said, "both hearing them and asking them questions." Still all is suitable to the Boy. He pronounces on nothing. He does not lay down the law on this matter or that. The time may come when He shall go up into a mountain, and open His lips, and speak as One having authority. But that time is not yet. He is not above the Scribes, but is sitting at their feet. He desires to know what *they* think about this commandment in the Law, about this sentence of David or Isaiah. At first, no doubt, the answers are all ready. They can tell that which one elder or another had written down, or expressed orally to his disciples. They begin to give out the oracles, perhaps with an air of patronage or condescension, to the earnest youth. Why do the patronage and the condescension disappear? Why is the well-trained memory at fault? Why is there that look of puzzle and perplexity, almost of terror, on the countenances of those who are used to resolve all riddles, to silence all disputes? The question has gone beneath both commentary and text. The second-hand answer does not avail.—*Ibid.*

[18751] We are told that "all who heard this Child were astonished at His understanding and answers." So that they must have asked Him questions as He asked them. No doubt He showed as much willingness to submit to their catechism as He had shown eagerness to receive whatever they had to impart; a Child, whichever task He was engaged in, taught by elder men, doing what they required. And the answers, we may be sure, like the questions, would not be new, or rare, or far-fetched. They would be startling, because they presented the words of holy men in their direct, full, original force; because they did not make veils for them, but drew away the veil which had concealed them; because the words came forth in them

as if the men were there in whose hearts they had been as a burning fire; because they were indeed shown to be not theirs, but His who had spoken to them, and had declared His own purpose through them. The answers, I repeat it, were not veils; they were a revelation, or unveiling; and that revelation or unveiling was not of a system or of a religion, but of Him who had said, "Let not the rich man glory in his riches, nor the wise man in his wisdom; but let him that glorieth, glory in this, that he knoweth Me." It was, therefore, as the Evangelist expresses it, the *understanding* (*σύνεσις*) of this Child which astonished the doctors. No word can indicate more beautifully what must have been the impression on their minds. This Boy *went along with* the words which they had read and copied and committed to memory. They had never *gone along with* them. They had drawn conclusions from the words, generalized notions from them. But their hearts had never come into contact with them. . . . What a wonder to see them quick and breathing again in the answers of this Child! What a wonder to find that He went along, not only with them, but with the very mind of Him from whom they had proceeded; that *He* spoke like One who had been brought up with Him, like a sharer of His counsels! Although, therefore, one discovers nothing in the listening, or questioning, or answering of this Boy which interferes with that growth in wisdom and stature of which St. Luke speaks—with that gradual unfolding of the human life which was necessary to the manifestation of the Divine life—there is *that* foreshadowing of after years which we generally discern in an individual man when we are acquainted with the facts of his story, and which we should confidently expect in *the* Man, the representative of the race.—*Ibid.*

[18752] He begins life with a perfect youth. His childhood is an unspotted, and withal a kind of celestial flower. The notion of a superhuman or celestial childhood, the most difficult of all things to be conceived, is yet successfully drawn by a few simple touches. He is announced beforehand as "that Holy Thing;" a beautiful and powerful stroke to raise our expectation to the level of a nature so mysterious. In His childhood, everybody loves Him. Using words of external description, He is shown growing up in favour with God and man, a child so lovely and beautiful that heaven and earth appear to smile upon Him together. So, when it is added that the child grew and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom, and, more than all, that the grace or beautifying power of God was upon Him, we look, as on the unfolding of a sacred flower, and seem to scent a fragrance wafted on us from other worlds. Then, at the age of twelve, He is found among the great learned men of the day, the doctors of the temple, hearing what they say, and asking them questions. And this without any word that indicates forwardness or pertness in the child's manner, such as some Christian Rabbi or silly and credulous

devotee would certainly have added. The doctors are not offended, as by a child too forward or wanting in modesty, they are only amazed that such a degree of understanding can dwell in one so young and simple. His mother finds Him there among them, and begins to expostulate with Him. His reply is very strange; it must, she is sure, have some deep meaning that corresponds with His mysterious birth, and the sense He has ever given her of a something strangely peculiar in His ways; and she goes home keeping His saying in her heart, and guessing vainly what His thought may be. Mysterious, holy secret, which this mother hides in her bosom, that her holy thing, her child whom she has watched during the twelve years of His celestial childhood, now begins to speak of being "about His Father's business," in words of dark enigma, which she cannot fathom.—*H. Bushnell, D.D.*

[18753] Several of the first years of our Lord's temporal life were passed in almost entire obscurity, wherein He accomplished the destiny of man, eating the bread which He gained in the sweat of His brow. Submissive to every filial obligation, it is recorded that He obeyed Joseph and Mary with perfect docility; He accomplished with them the precepts of the law, and it was thus that He grew in wisdom, in age, and in favour before God and men. As the deliverer of man condemned, the ennobler of man degraded, it was necessary that Jesus should at every step be the model of man in perfection, the source of all the graces by which we can, in following His precepts, and imitating His examples, re-establish in ourselves the image of God, which sin has defaced. No period of His progress, no incident in His life, is unworthy of our profoundest study. We should strive to penetrate the thoughts of Eternal Wisdom, and contemplate His ways in the marvellous work of our redemption.—*E. Magoon.*

[18754] Here we meet at the very threshold of the earthly history of Christ, that singular combination of humility and grandeur, of simplicity and sublimity, of the human and Divine, which characterizes it throughout, and distinguishes it from every other history. He is not represented as an unnatural prodigy, anticipating the maturity of a later age, but as a truly human child, silently lying and smiling on the bosom of His virgin mother, "growing" in body and "waxing strong in spirit," and therefore subject to the law of regular development; yet differing from all other children by His supernatural conception and perfect freedom from hereditary sin and guilt. He appears in the celestial beauty of unspotted innocence, a veritable flower of paradise.—*Prof. Schaff.*

[18755] He was a child, and a child that grew in heart, in intellect, in size, in grace, in favour with God. Not a man in child's years. No hotbed precocity marked the holiest of infancies. The Son of Man grew up in the quiet valley of

existence—in shadow, not in sunshine, not *forced*. No unnatural, stimulating culture had developed the mind or feelings: no public flattery: no sunning of His infantine perfections in the glare of the world's show, had brought the temptation of the wilderness with which His manhood grappled, too early on His soul. We know that He was childlike, as other children: for in after years His brethren thought His fame strange, and His townsmen rejected Him. They could not believe that one, who had gone in and out, ate and drank and worked among them, was He whose name is Wonderful. The proverb, true of others, was true of Him: "A prophet is not without honour, but in his own country, and among his own kin, and in his own house." You know Him in a *picture* at once, by the halo round His brow. There was no glory in His real life to mark Him. He was in the world, and the world knew Him not. Gradually and gently He woke to consciousness of life and its manifold meaning; found Himself in possession of a self; by degrees opened His eyes upon this outer world, and drank in its beauty. Early He felt the lily of the field discourse to Him of the invisible loveliness, and the ravens tell of God His Father. Gradually, and not at once, He embraced the sphere of human duties, and He woke to His earthly relationships one by one—the Son—the Brother—the Citizen—the Master.—*Rev. F. Robertson.*

[18756] The true view of Christ in His human development is—that He set before us the successive stages of human life in perfect purity and exemption from sin, and yet at the same time in a manner which was never out of keeping with the peculiar natural character of any period; which could not have been the case had Jesus, when a child, possessed perfect wisdom. He was thoroughly a child, thoroughly a youth, thoroughly a man; and thus He hallowed every step of human development. Nothing really out of character was ever seen in Him, as if His sayings as a child had been such as befitted riper years.—*Dr. Olshausen.*

[18757] One of the most striking features of Christ's education was the purity, strength, and copiousness of His affections. From the aristocracies of the age, in both Church and State, He was isolated and contradistinguished; but to His sisters, to children, and to all spirits not dwarfed by bigotry and degraded by passion. He was ever closely allied. He first breathed on the breast of a virgin, and perpetually grew in intimate contact with the great heart of humanity, throbbing in the bosom of unsophisticated life. He came to uprear love's standard upon the battlements of truth; and He won His best preparation for the task, not in the contracted and desiccative influence of polemical warfare, but amid the expanding and ennobling tendencies which prevail where "glides the calm current of domestic joy."—*E. Magoon.*

[18758] The youthful days of our Saviour

were full of toil, such as is common to mankind ; and this toil was adapted to develop His energies for the coming strife, and enlarge His sympathies for the suffering of every class. We would also remark that in those early scenes of bitter experience, His aspirations were Divine, and doubtless urged Him with profounder ardour to break the fetters of the world. The Hebrew nations expected a deliverer, and Micah had foretold that the promised king should be born in Bethlehem, the very place where the house of David had its origin. The Messiah appeared ; but the lowly circumstances of His birth and youth were in striking contrast with His inherent dignity, and the glory it was supposed He would bring. That He should make His advent in the guise of a carpenter's son, and accustom Himself to manual toil, instead of assuming at once the splendours of worldly dominion, rendered Him, to the minions of priestly and regal power, the object of loathing and contempt. We must remember that Christ was all the while conscious of this ; that, in the face of the upper and most oppressive circles, and in spite of their rage, He, from the beginning, chose to identify Himself with the lowest rank of common people, share their burdens, sympathize with their sorrows, and aspire to deliver them from all their wrongs. In the midst of the most menial pursuits, He fostered the sublimest purposes of soul ; in "clear dream and solemn vision" He contemplated the auspicious destinies of the human race, and, in view of what His own almighty hand should, at the proper time, perform, laboured on in patient thoughtfulness, lifting His young brow ever and anon toward heaven, to "hail the coming on of time."—*Ibid.*

[18759] We need not complain that we know too little of His youth and mental development. We know enough, and what we do know of this, His period of silence, is, in one word, His meekness, which is peculiarly striking in the picture which the few features of the historical narrative place before us.—*Luthardt.*

2 Homiletical remarks and applications

The Saviour's childhood and youth suggest the value which belongs to repression as an element of character.

[18760] We almost hear each consecrated votary at the shrine of Eternal Righteousness exclaim from the depths of his soul, "Poverty may humble my lot, but it shall not debase me ; temptation may shake my nature, but not the rock on which thy temple is based ; misfortune may wither all the hopes that blossomed in the dewy morning of my life, but I will offer dead leaves when the flowers are no more. Though all the loved objects of earth perish, all that I have coveted fade away, I may groan under my burden, but I will never be recreant to duty, never disloyal to thee, O my God." Such resignation, and suffering supported with so much constancy, was indeed noble, as seen, for instance, in the immolation of Socrates ; but how much more

sublime in the youthful struggles of Jesus Christ ! What is there so exalted or Divine "as a great and brave spirit working out its end through every earthly obstacle and evil ; watching through the utter darkness, and steadily defying the phantoms which crowd around it ; wrestling with the mighty allurements, and rejecting the fearful voice of that Want which is the deadliest and surest of human tempters ; nursing through all calamity the love of the species, and the warmer and closer affections of private ties ; sacrificing no duty, resisting all sin ; and amid every horror and every humiliation, feeding the still and bright light of that genius, which, like the lamp of the fabulist, though it may waste itself for years amidst the depths of solitude and the silence of the tomb, shall live and burn immortal and undimmed, when all around it is rottenness and decay?" But if it thrills every generous fibre of our nature to observe a fellow-creature thus toiling to be free and beneficent, what shall we think of that wonderful Being who deigned to assume humanity's woes, and struggle up from childhood through the most abject trials, that from the throne of heaven and the thrones of earth he might win the energies of almightiness to redeem mankind ! It is indeed strange to see a Saviour incarnate in a manger, and, from the first developments of youth, tied with base entanglements which, through all subsequent life, are destined to grow closer and closer, till death sets the enthralled divinity free. But the sight is glorious and instructive as it is strange. It tells us that effort is the condition of growth ; that He who came to be a matured and perfect Redeemer had first to perform the appropriate toils of a youthful God.—*E. Magoun.*

[18761] It is a very deep and beautiful and precious truth that the Eternal Son had a human and progressive childhood. Happy the child who is suffered to be and content to be what God meant it to be—a child while childhood lasts. Happy the parent who does not force artificial manners—precocious feeling—pre-mature religion. Our age is one of stimulus and high pressure. We live, as it were, our lives out fast. Effect is everything. We require results produced at once : something to show and something that may tell. The folio of patient years is replaced by the pamphlet that stirs men's curiosity to-day, and to-morrow is forgotten. "Plain living and high thinking are no more." The town, with its fever and its excitements, and its collision of mind with mind, has spread over the country : and there is no country, scarcely home. To men who traverse England in a few hours, and spend only a portion of the year in one place, Home is becoming a vocable of past ages.—*Rev. F. Robertson.*

[18762] I instance one single evidence of strength in the early years of Jesus : I find it in that calm, long waiting of thirty years before He began His work. And yet all the evils He

was to redress were there, provoking indignation, crying for interference—the hollowness of social life—the misinterpretations of Scripture—the forms of worship and phraseology which had hidden moral truth—the injustice—the priestcraft—the cowardice—the hypocrisies: He had long seen them all. All those years His soul burned within Him with a Divine zeal and heavenly indignation. A mere man—a weak, emotional man of spasmodic feeling—a hot enthusiast, would have spoken out at once, and at once been crushed. The Everlasting Word incarnate bided His own time: “Mine hour is not yet come”—matured His energies—condensed them by repression—and then went forth to speak and do and suffer,—His hour was come. This is strength: the power of a Divine Silence: the strong will to keep force till it is wanted: the power to wait God’s time. “He that believeth,” said the wise prophet, “shall not make haste.”—*Ibid.*

[18763] As is the case with all redeemers, His best energies were developed by the worst trials. Christ assumed our nature, bore our sorrows, fought our battles, won our triumphs. He came to this tearful and stormful earth to live out in actual experience, from the first pang to the last, the spiritual sorrows and physical deprivations of all Adam’s race. Monarch supreme in heaven, and regal on earth even by right of birth, He chose to appear in the most humble condition. For our sakes He became poor, and entered upon the conquest of the world without noticing either its honours or its emoluments. In the eye of the wealthy and powerful He was regarded only as “the carpenter’s son.” The morning of His career dawned in the lowest vale of life, where He shared the sufferings of the most destitute, the wretched abode of cattle even, for there was no room for Him and His associates at the inn. Such was the pomp in which the Deliverer of mankind appeared. The first acts of His divinity here below were struggles against want, and His destitution increased in proportion as His functions arose. The foxes had holes, and the fowls of the air had nests; but the Son of man had no reposing place for His head. Poor and toilworn to the end, He earned all with His own hands, or received from charity the bread He ate, the garments He wore, and the winding-sheet in which He was entombed. Whoever has struggled with difficulties almost to strangling at the very outset of his heroic career,—whoever has toiled all day to win a scanty sustenance, and, in mental desolateness and gloom deeper than night, has shrieked in agony to the God of heaven,—whoever has cloaked his outward wants and inward aspirations beneath the humble mechanic’s garb, and gone forth, firm, silent, and resolute, learning the “priceless wisdom from endurance drawn” among his fellow-men,—whoever has mourned for “all the oppressions which are done under the sun,” and been “mad for the sight of his eyes that he did see,”—whoever has felt all the “wanderer in his soul,” and striven through the tender years of

youth with sweating brow, blistered hands, and bleeding heart, to win the weapons of moral warfare, and cleave a way to self-emancipation and the disenthralment of all mankind,—let him come and hug to his bosom that brother of the poor, and young champion of the weak; let him receive cheering words of fellow-feeling, and strength that shall never fail, from that Boy of Nazareth, the working Son of God. And in his intercourse with such an example of overcoming courage and patient efforts for the common weal, let him never despond, but remember

“He that is born is listed; life is war—
Eternal war with woe.”

—*E. Magoon.*

[18764] He did not wait until He arrived at manhood to set a pattern of piety; He sanctified childhood too; even then He humbled Himself; even then He magnified God’s law and made it honourable, and submitted to religious ordinances, and was found in the company of those eminent for learning and piety, and did not disdain parental control: and so doing He has taught children and boys and young men how they all ought to commence that solemn business of life, which their heavenly Father has given them to do—how they must minister unto God in their youth, and devote to Him the firstfruits of their faculties, and attend to common duties, and hold their parents in honour,—and so lay the foundation of a faith which shall not be shaken, and of a life which Christ in His mercy will be pleased to recognize, as at least a faint resemblance of His own, when He comes in the fulness of His glory to judge the living and the dead.—*Bp. Goodwin.*

II. THE PERFECTION OF HIS MANHOOD.

I. Its varied manifestations.

[18765] Mankind yearned for the advent of one in whom the love of the beautiful, the pursuit of the good, and the defence of the true, would not be a mere artistic perception, but a natural and ardent passion, such as in Christ only is realized. He best served the salvation of humanity by the peculiar education of Himself as an individual. When He had once made the beautiful, the good, and the true, an harmonious unity for Himself, the Divine example of this unity became a more resistless argument to His sympathetic brethren than all the eloquence that man or angel could employ. He broke away from sectarian despotism, and aspired to become thoroughly and energetically individual in the purity and power of His own light, that He might excite kindred aspirations in all other individuals; and, for their encouragement, while His own person was yet sombre in the lowest vale, He poured the dawn of universal deliverance along every summit of the world. All that was needed to make Him a tender friend, a perfect teacher, and a mighty Redeemer, He acquired by experience on earth, and

transmitted for its hope. He had the same faith in Himself as in His doctrine; and feeling that both were Divine, He was more than willing—it was His only ambition and delight—to lay them at the feet of every man. He would transform each immortal creature of our race not only into a disciple, but a prophet, placing in his heart a sublime idea, a celestial sentiment, which he should profoundly feel was destined to redeem the world. With a modest but majestic self-reliance, He shrank from no peril, no pain, no obloquy, that He might accomplish the advocacy of mercy and truth in word and deed. He went abroad, armed with no exclusiveness and no coercion, but radiant with the energies and beatitudes of a salvation designed to bless all nations, free, purify, and exalt all mankind.—*E. Magoon.*

[18766] His public life in Galilee may be described, both externally and internally, as one of exciting and exhausting activity. If we inquire, however, what was the soul of this activity, we shall be constrained to say that it is the life of a Saviour which is here depicted—a life dedicated to the poor, the sick, the forsaken, the despised—a life of devotion to the unhappy, to deliver them from the sorrows of life, and especially from depression of soul. Publicans and sinners, the mourners and the sorrowing, this is the society He seeks. To the afflicted He brings consolation, and calls the weary and heavy-laden that He may give them rest. A spirit of compassionate love and beneficent kindness animates every act of His life. . . . If ever love appeared on earth, it appeared under the form of gentleness and meekness, in Christ. But over the form of the meek Saviour of sinners is shed abroad a glory and majesty which cause us involuntarily to bow the knee before Him. Who can contemplate Him in His silent course without feeling that there is in Him a mysterious and hidden majesty, and seeing it shine forth from His every word and deed? And most of all in His deepest humiliation.—*Luthardt.*

[18767] Gentleness never running into weakness—tenderness never losing sight of holiness—personal endurance ever combined with protective strength, and the deepest sympathy with the sinner ever set side by side with the sternest abhorrence of the sin. No painter ought to represent the countenance of Jesus—some have presumed to do so even upon the cross—as soft with a childish softness and delicate with a woman's delicacy: when we are speaking of Him as embodying perfection, we must be careful to remember that the perfection of a man contains in it not sympathy only but earnestness, not love only but (in this bad world) indignation too; and therefore we read, as one ingredient of the perfection—and read with satisfaction—of looks of anger at hypocrisy, and words of scorching fire against treachery and cruelty—terrible exposures of sleek malignity, and judicial sentences upon long pretentious

prayers by devourers of widows' houses.—*Dean Vaughan.*

[18768] The mental independence so prominent in Christ is a rare thing on earth, and most worthy of our esteem. We see many persons who are able to act with vigour, so long as they are sustained by popular opinion; but the moment this deserts them, they fall into utter imbecility, and the wonder is, how they ever have commanded the confidence and admiration of their fellows. But such are never heroes; they belong not to the goodly fellowship of those who stoop their anointed heads as low as death, in defence of ennobling and saving truth. Christ, on the contrary, was the consummate model of the noblest cast of character; one "by its own weight made steadfast and immovable." Suffering emancipated, instructed, and consolidated his mind, as it does in every hero truly great. The burdens which Isaiah, Stephen, Paul, and Luther bore, gave steadiness to their movements and energy to their limbs.

"Thus doth strength
To wisdom, courage, and long-suffering love,
Minister like a slave."

—*E. Magoon.*

[18769] He experienced every form of favour and hate, serene confidences as well as sombre despair, and in His own destiny wrought out the destinies of all our race. Truly did He carry our sorrows and experience our griefs; and it was this practical knowledge that gave Him unlimited popular power. He addressed no peculiar or limited order of feelings, but united in His discourse all the qualities and emotions which are spontaneous in every order and condition of mankind. His audience was coextensive with humanity itself, because His experience included the experiences of all, and as His heart thrilled and responded to their own, He verified in the highest sense the saying that "one touch of nature makes the whole world kin." Hence the mercifulness and wisdom of Christ's incarnation; He must assume the form, and experience the condition, of a servant, that He might bind our hearts to eternal life with the trembling fibres of His own. Even for those fledged souls who desire to soar upon the wings of devout meditation, it is well, from time to time, Antæus like, to rest upon this grosser sphere; it was infinitely more necessary that He who came to elevate us from earth to heaven should absorb into His own person, and destroy the oppressions of our present state, that we might have both space and power to rise. This He did. He became the son and companion of the common people; was born in a town proverbially depraved; of a nation pre-eminently distinguished for superstition, national pride, bigoted self-esteem, and contempt towards all other men. He chose to arise "in an age of singular corruption, when the substance of religion had faded out from the mind of its anointed ministers, and sin had spread wide among a

people turbulent, oppressed, and downtrodden ; a man ridiculed for His lack of knowledge, in this nation of forms, of hypocritical priests and corrupt people, falls back on simple morality, simple religion, unites in Himself the sublimest precepts and divinest practices ; thus more than realizing the dream of prophets and sages ; rises free from all prejudice of His age, nation or sect ; gives free range to the spirit of God in His breast ; sets aside the law, sacred and time-honoured as it was—its forms, its sacrifice, its temple, and its priests ; puts away the doctors of the law, subtle, learned, irrefragable, and pours out a doctrine beautiful as the light, sublime as heaven, and true as God. The philosophers, the poets, the prophets, the Rabbis—He rises above them all.—*Ibid.*

[18770] He is a perfectly harmless being, actuated by no destructive passions, gentle to inferiors, doing ill or injury to none. The figure of a lamb, which never was, or could be, applied to any of the great human characters, without an implication of weakness fatal to all respect, is yet, with no such effect, applied to Him. We associate weakness with innocence, and the association is so powerful, that no human writer would undertake to sketch a great character on the basis of innocence, or would even think it possible. We predicate innocence of infancy, but to be a perfectly harmless, guileless man, never doing ill even for a moment, we consider to be the same as to be a man destitute of spirit and manly force. But Christ accomplished the impossible. Appearing in all the grandeur and majesty of a superhuman manhood, He is able still to unite the impression of innocence, with no apparent diminution of His sublimity. It is, in fact, the distinctive glory of His character, that it seems to be the natural unfolding of a divine innocence, a pure celestial childhood, amplified by growth.—*H. Bushnell, D.D.*

[18771] No one ever thus loved, nor did anything so truly good and great as the Bible tells us of Him, ever enter into the heart of man. . . . A Saviour, such as the Bible depicts the Lord Jesus to have been, who went about doing good, yet had Himself no place where He might lay His head ; who spared no pains, and refused no shame ; who humbled Himself even to death upon the cross, that He might finish His work ; who came into the world to save the world ; who was therein scourged and tormented, and departed thence with a crown of thorns upon His head ! Didst thou ever hear of such a thing, and do not thy hands fall down on thy lap ? It is truly a mystery, and we do not understand it ; but it comes from God and from heaven, for it bears the stamp of heaven, and overflows with Divine mercy. . . . It is a *holy form* rising like a star in the night upon the poor pilgrim, and satisfying his inmost craving, his most secret hopes and wishes. . . . He who can be stirred to laughter or mockery must be mad. He whose heart is in the right place

lies in the dust, rejoices, and prays.—*Matthias Claudius.*

[18772] In the midst of the sufferings which overwhelm Him in His death, He is ever equal to Himself. The meek tranquillity with which He endures whatever wickedness chooses to inflict, and the forgiving love with which He encounters its malice, strikes us more powerfully than even in His life. . . . Throughout the whole scene of the crucifixion there shone such a splendour of greatness and majesty, that even from the heathen centurion broke forth the confession, "Truly this was the Son of God." . . . That union of meekness and majesty which sets so incomparable a stamp upon His whole demeanour, that silent power of love which makes His life a revelation of the heart of God—all are but the manifestations of that holiness which is the moral characteristic of His person and nature. None can avoid being most forcibly impressed by the holy purity of His nature. If all else be denied, this at least must be admitted.—*Luthardt.*

[18773] Jesus Christ, in the discipline of His early manhood, the type of all redemption, from the most sombre depths of obscurity rose before men and angels, developing the attractiveness of infinite worth, nurtured amid trials of every sort, like a sea-flower, whose roots interlace and penetrate the profoundest caverns, but whose stem mounts through unfathomed billows to the surface, and unfolds its petals to wanderers in storm and calm. His royalty began in the nakedness and gloom of the manger, was educated through a career of incessant toil, fatigues, and watchings, in which the rising Champion gathered a few palms and acclamations from the masses, between whom and Himself there was cordial love, until bigoted power interposed. But these were soon followed by the maledictions which kingcraft and priestcraft had inspired, the anguish of the garden and the tortures of the pretorium. Finally, bowed beneath the cross He bore, His brow being wreathed with a diadem of thorns, and His lips redolent of blessings on His murderers, He goes forth to expire on the mount which overlooked Tophet, that type of hell, whose powers He came to conquer and destroy.—*E. Magoon.*

2 Homiletical applications.

The Saviour's earthly manhood illustrates the nobility of fortitude as an element of human character.

[18774] The whole life of Christ on earth was tragical in the highest degree ; the portions which were most obscure, not less so than the scenes on Calvary and Olivet. Think of the desolateness of that preparatory state, wherein His own kindred discarded His claims, and oppressed Him with all the chilling weight of undisguised distrust. Nothing is sublimer in the history of mind than the lonely struggles which precede and generate success. Every

predestined hero will have to demonstrate his superior worth by encountering and overcoming the most undeserved obstructions. Long before an effective foothold is attained, he will have suffered most from unexpected quarters, and been more aroused by neglect than by timely aid. Misfortune is a fire that melts weak hearts, but renders the firm purer and stronger. How many of the best of our race can recognize their model and consolation in the unfriended youth of Nazareth! Let the young man compelled to struggle with that sorest destiny, relatives who foster not but rather congeal his warmest hopes, take heart from the experience of his Lord, homeless and brotherless among His own kindred, but yet on His way to the conquest of popular prejudice, the redemption of degraded humanity, and the possession of power the most comprehensive and supreme.—*Ibid.*

[18775] At an early day the great Deliverer began to look out from the centre of His own domestic circle through all the ramifications of the human race, and saw that injustice and oppression everywhere prevailed. His keen experience of this set in operation His superhuman energies to defend the feeble and demolish the strong. He won a mastership over injustice even while suffering it, and through the paths of distress ascended to the highest triumphs and the best repose. Hence He exclaimed to those who would tread in His footsteps and emulate His deeds, "In the world ye will be oppressed; but be of good courage, I have conquered the world." In a manner full of light and encouragement, He has taught the champions of righteousness that it is their doom and reward to endure much that is oppressive, in order that they may the better know how to appreciate the invulnerable nature within man, which may be abused but cannot be destroyed. Providence has armed the mind with a quality which lies at the foundation of many excellences, and supports them all. This is fortitude which, by throwing a spirit of graceful endurance into every mental energy, gives beauty to grandeur, and tranquillity to zeal. Much is this quality needed, since

"In this wild world the fondest and the best
Are the most tried, most troubled, and distressed."

In addition to the bestowal of fortitude as a prime element of the soul, there is a fact connected with its exercise which claims our gratitude. It is, that when the victim has endured his appointed suffering with unflinching heroism, and when vanquished fortune is compelled herself to admire, he is always the admiration of the world, as well as its greatest benefit. There is a potency in the daring heart of the resolute, to which even destiny must yield. Let us remember that, as the most beautiful roses bloom in dreary Lapland, as the richest diamonds are found on the stormiest coasts, and as porphyry

hardens the more it is exposed to the elements, so the best virtues of the soul are generally disciplined by the sternest trials.—*Ibid.*

III. THE COMPLETE HARMONY OF HIS NATURE.

[18776] If we cast a glance into the moral activities that fill up the life of Jesus, the question does not hinge on making a catalogue of virtues, and in this way proving, as by a sum in addition, His moral perfection. In this way we should not arrive at any lively idea of His moral character, nor have any guarantee for His perfection. For all virtues attain their perfection only by unity and harmonious symphony, and this exists only when they all proceed from the totality and fulness of the one principle of virtue. This unity of His virtue, by means of which all His virtues are harmoniously dovetailed, cannot, it is true, be brought into full view without the concrete and without the detail. But the main point is to view together the most distant elements which His moral character unites, and to show in the concrete that one spirit harmoniously regulates and orders all according to one great law of life.—*Dorner.*

[18777] The portrait of the Lord Jesus is one of sublimest and purest harmony, both as regards His mental and moral nature. There is disharmony in the life of every other man. Those two poles of mental life, knowledge and feeling, head and heart; those two powers of the moral life, the reason and the will—where shall we find them in unison? In the case of Jesus, on the contrary, we are vividly impressed with the feeling that perfect harmony prevails in His mental life. There is absolute peace in His inmost being. As we could not bear to conceive in Him any single mental faculty preponderating, and others consequently retiring, but are constrained to think of His intellectual parts and nature as perfectly proportioned, so is it also with His entire mental and moral life. It is a human life of perfect harmony. He is all love, all heart, all feeling; and yet, again, He is all mind, all mental enlightenment and sublimity. There is no schism between feeling and reason in His nature. There is, moreover, the greatest vitality of feeling and emotion of thought and resolve, and yet this vitality of His inner nature never passes into passionate excitement; all is quiet dignity, peaceful simplicity, sublime harmony. Such is the image which the gospel narrative presents to us, and of which we are constrained to say, Such was He, such must He have been. And in such an image is reflected the moral harmony of His nature. It is because there was in Him nothing of that moral discord which pervades the inner world of all other men that His mental and spiritual life were so harmonious, so peaceful. Jesus was in perfect harmony with Himself because He was in perfect harmony with God.—*Luthardt.*

[18778] He was free from all one-sidedness, which constitutes the weakness as well as the strength of the most eminent men. He was not a man of one idea, nor of one virtue, towering above all the rest. The moral forces were so well tempered and moderated by each other, that none was unduly prominent, none carried to excess, none alloyed by the kindred failing. Each was checked and completed by the opposite grace. His character never lost its even balance and happy equilibrium, never needed modification or readjustment. It was thoroughly sound, and uniformly consistent from the beginning to the end. We cannot properly attribute to Him any one temperament. He was neither sanguine, like Peter, nor choleric, like Paul, nor melancholic, like John, nor phlegmatic, as James is sometimes, though incorrectly, represented to have been, but He combined the vivacity without the levity of the sanguine, the vigour without the violence of the choleric, the seriousness without the austerity of the melancholic, the calmness without the apathy of the phlegmatic temperaments. He was equally far removed from the excesses of the legalist, the pietist, the ascetic, and the enthusiast. With the strictest obedience to the law, He moved in the element of freedom; with all the fervour of the enthusiast, He was always calm, sober, and self-possessed. Notwithstanding His complete and uniform elevation above the affairs of this world, He freely mingled with society, male and female, dined with publicans and sinners, sat at the wedding feast, shed tears at the sepulchre, delighted in God's nature, admired the beauties of the lilies, and used the occupations of the husbandman for the illustration of the sublimest truths of the kingdom of heaven. His zeal never degenerated into passion or rashness, nor His constancy into obstinacy, nor His benevolence into weakness, nor His tenderness into sentimentality. His unworldliness was free from indifference and unsociability, His dignity from pride and presumption, His affability from undue familiarity, His self-denial from moroseness, His temperance from austerity. He combined childlike innocence with manly strength, all-absorbing devotion to God with untiring interest in the welfare of man, tender love to the sinner with uncompromising severity against sin, commanding dignity with winning humility, fearless courage with wise caution, unyielding firmness with sweet gentleness. He is justly compared with the lion in strength, and with the lamb in meekness. He equally possessed the wisdom of the serpent and the simplicity of the dove.—*Prof. Schaff.*

[18779] The character of our Lord was such that no one virtue had undue preponderance. Take Peter, and there is a prominent feature peculiar to himself; one quality attracts you. Take John, and there is a lovely trait in his character which at once chains you, and his other graces are unobserved. But take the life of the blessed Jesus, and it shall perplex you to

discover what virtue shines with purest radiance. His character is like the lovely countenance of a classic beauty, in which every single feature is so in exact harmony with all the rest, that when you have gazed upon it, you are struck with a sense of general beauty, but you do not remark upon the flashing eye, or chiselled nose, or the coral lips: an undivided impression of harmony remains upon your mind. Such a character should each of us strive after, a mingling of perfections to make up one perfection; a combining of all the sweet spices to make up a rare perfume, such as only God's Holy Spirit itself can make, but such as God accepts wherever He discovers it.—*C. H. Spurgeon.*

[18780] Christ connects the non-resisting and gentle passivities of character with the severest grandeur and majesty. . . . Observe Him, first, in what may be called the common trials of existence. For if you will put a character to the severest of all tests, see whether it can bear, without faltering, the little, common ills and hindrances of life. Many a man will go to his martyrdom with a spirit of firmness and heroic composure, whom a little weariness or nervous exhaustion, some silly prejudice, or capricious opposition would, for the moment, throw into a fit of vexation or ill-nature. Great occasions rally great principles, and brace the mind to a lofty bearing, a bearing that is even above itself. But trials that make no occasion at all, leave it to show the goodness and beauty it has in its own disposition. And here precisely is the superhuman glory of Christ as a character, that He is just as perfect, exhibits just as great a spirit in little trials as in great ones. In all the history of His life, we are not able to detect the faintest indication that He slips or falters. And this is the more remarkable, that He is prosecuting so great a work with so great enthusiasm; counting it His meat and drink, and pouring into it all the energies of His life. For when men have great works on hand, their very enthusiasm runs to impatience. When thwarted or unreasonably hindered, their soul strikes fire against the obstacles they meet, they worry themselves at every hindrance, every disappointment, and break out in stormy and fanatical violence. But Jesus, for some reason, is just as even, just as serene, in all His petty vexations and hindrances, as if He had nothing on hand to do. A kind of sacred patience invests Him everywhere. Having no element of crude will mixed with His work, He is able, in all trial and opposition, to hold a condition of serenity above the clouds, and let them sail under Him, without ever obscuring the sun. He is poor, and hungry, and weary, and despised, insulted by His enemies, deserted by His friends, but never disheartened, never fretted or ruffled. You see, meantime, that He is no Stoic: He visibly feels every such ill as His delicate and sensitive nature must, but He has some sacred and sovereign good present to mingle with His pains, which, as it were naturally and without any self-watch-

ing, allays them. He does not seem to rule His temper, but rather to have none; for temper, in the sense of passion, is a fury that follows the will, as the lightnings follow the disturbing forces of the winds among the clouds; and accordingly where there is no self-will to roll up the clouds and hurl them through the sky, the lightnings hold their equilibrium, and are as though they were not.—*H. Bushnell, D.D.*

[18781] Men undertake to be spiritual, and they become ascetic; or, endeavouring to hold a liberal view of the comforts and pleasures of society, they are soon buried in the world, and slaves to its fashions; or, holding a scrupulous watch to keep out every particular sin, they become legal, and fall out of liberty; or, charmed with the noble and heavenly liberty, they run to negligence and irresponsible living; so the earnest become violent, the fervent fanatical and censorious, the gentle waver, the firm turn bigots, the liberal grow lax, the benevolent ostentatious. Poor human infirmity can hold nothing steady. Where the pivot of righteousness is broken, the scales must needs slide off their balance. Indeed, it is one of the most difficult things which a cultivated Christian can attempt, only to sketch a theoretic view of character, in its true justness and proportion, so that a little more study, or a little more self-experience, will not require him to modify it. And yet the character of Christ is never modified, even by a shade of rectification. It is one and the same throughout. He makes no improvements, prunes no extravagances, returns from no eccentricities. The balance of His character is never disturbed or readjusted, and the astounding assumption on which it is based is never shaken, even by a suspicion that He falters in it.—*Ibid.*

IV. THE SIMPLE BEAUTY AND STRIKING POWER OF HIS TEACHING.

[18782] Wherein does the peculiar power of His teaching consist? The secret of its influence lies in no peculiar excellence of diction. Jesus was no poet, no orator, no philosopher. It is not the charm of poetry which attracts us, not the ingenious application which surprises, not flights of eloquence which carry us away, not bold speculation which evokes our astonishment; it is none of these. No one could speak with more simplicity than Jesus speaks—whether we consider the Sermon on the Mount, or His parables on the kingdom of God, or the so-called high-priestly prayer. But this is the very reason of His influence, that He utters the greatest and most sublime truths in the very plainest words, so that, as Pascal says, one might almost think He was Himself unconscious what truths He was propounding, unless He had expressed them with such clearness, certainty, and conviction, that we see how well He knew what He was saying.—*Luthardt.*

[18783] We cannot fail to see that the world

of eternal truth is His home, and that His thoughts have constant intercourse therewith. He speaks of God and of His relation to Him, of the supermundane world of spirits of the future world, and of the future life of man; of the kingdom of God upon earth, of its nature and history; of the highest moral truths, and of the supreme obligations of man—in short, of all the greatest problems and deepest enigmas of life, as simply and plainly, with such an absence of mental excitement, without expatiating upon His peculiar knowledge, and even without that dwelling upon details so usual with those who have anything new to impart, as though all were quite natural and self-evident. We see that the sublimest truths are His nature. He is not merely a teacher of truth, but is Himself its source. Truth is a part of His very being. He can say, I am the Truth. And the feeling with which we listen to His words is, that we are listening to the voice of truth itself. Hence the power which these have at all times exercised over the minds of men.—*Ibid.*

[18784] He knew the mental habits of the people to whom His preaching was addressed. He knew that in general they were not a cultivated and an intellectual people. Their conceptions were gross, and they needed a species of instruction which should make much use of their senses in so setting truth before their minds as to do them good, and He adapted His instructions to them accordingly. When He would rebuke the pride of man, and inculcate on His disciples the need of cultivating a lowly and confiding temper of heart, He does not merely deliver to them the abstract and general, though all-important truth, that man must be converted and experience a radical transformation of character, in order to their being saved; but, to impress this sentiment more strongly, He takes a little child and sets him in the midst of them, and then tells them how salvation is to be obtained: "Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of God. Whoso receiveth not the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein." When He would teach men to confide in the all-governing providence of God, and not yield to impatience, or discouragement, or unbelieving fear, He summons to His aid the objects of Nature around Him, and makes the dependence of all her tribes, animate and inanimate, subservient to His design. "Consider the lilies of the field." "Consider the ravens." Who nourishes them? Who gives them their delicate clothing? Who protects them in the storm? Who preserves them through the changing seasons? The field, untrampled by the foot of man, and uncultivated by human care, has flowers surpassing in glory the richest and wisest of earthly kings; but "they toil not, neither do they spin." Who rears and upholds these little and delicate structures? "If God so clothe the grass of the field, which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven, shall He

not clothe you, O ye of little faith?" When our Saviour would impress upon us the duty of kindness to our poor neighbour, and tell us who is our neighbour, He relates the misfortune of a Jew, who "went down to Jericho and fell among thieves."—*E. Magoon.*

[18785] It is a remarkable and even super-human distinction of Jesus, that, while He is advancing doctrines so far transcending all deductions of philosophy, and opening mysteries that defy all human powers of explication, He is yet able to set His teachings in a form of simplicity that accommodates all classes of minds. And this, for the reason that He speaks directly to men's convictions themselves, without and apart from any learned and curious elaboration, such as the uncultivated cannot follow. No one of the great writers of antiquity had even propounded, as yet, a doctrine of virtue which the multitude could understand. It was taught as being τὸ καλὸν (the good), or τὸ πρέπον (the becoming), or something of that nature, as distant from all their apprehensions, and as destitute of motive power, as if it were a doctrine of mineralogy. Considered as a gift to the world at large, it was the gift of a stone, not of bread. But Jesus tells them directly, in a manner level to their understanding, what they want, what they must do and be, to inherit eternal life, and their inmost convictions answer to His words. Besides, His doctrine is not so much a doctrine as a biography, a personal power, a truth all motivity, a love walking the earth in the proximity of a mortal fellowship. He only speaks what goes forth as a feeling and a power in His life, breathing into all hearts. To be capable of His doctrine, only requires that the hearer be a human creature wanting to know the truth. Call Him then, who will, a man, a human teacher; what human teacher ever came down thus upon the soul of the race, as a beam of light from the skies—pure light, shining directly into the visual orb of the mind, a light for all that live, a full transparent day, in which truth bathes the spirit as an element? Others talk and speculate about truth, and those who can may follow; but Jesus is the truth, and lives it, and, if He is a mere human teacher, He is the first who was ever able to find a form for truth at all adequate to the world's uses. And yet the truths He teaches out-reach all the doctrines of all the philosophers of the world. He excels them, a hundredfold more, in the scope and grandeur of His doctrine, than He does in His simplicity itself.—*H. Bushnell, D.D.*

[18786] He realized, in the presence of the human race, an ideal of human perfection level to popular comprehension and within the reach of all. In His person, His demeanour, and His speech, the world saw the infinite brought down to our standard, so realized that we can easily understand it, and feel the majesty and beauty of that love to Christ which is nothing but the imitation of God brought near to the roused intellect and heart. We cannot wonder that

the people were spell-bound in the presence of such a teacher. The pure and joyous effulgence of truth emanating from Him must have captivated their vision, like the sun as he bathes with his beams fragrant vales and bleak mountain-tops. Christ was radiant with celestial benignity, which He transfused into the surrounding multitudes through the simplest expressions and most transparent life, fascinating the popular heart, and lifting it to a participation of immortal bliss.—*E. Magoon.*

[18787] The chief element of Christ's power lay in the fact that He thrilled the principle of perfectibility latent in every rational creature whom He addressed. By His own incarnation He glorified humanity, and came breathing into every recess of its bleeding and aspiring heart nothing but peace and love. He explained the possibility of our being one with God, and presented motives for our becoming grand as eternity. In this way He portrayed the soul as a treasure most precious, which the universal Father bends down with infinite solicitude to rescue, enoble, and for ever preserve. "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work," said He; and His incessant effort was to elevate souls by revealing to them the gospel plan of spiritual perfection. All His labours and lessons were designed to lift up the fallen race of Adam, to remove every obstruction in the way of moral improvement, and to show how man is to be loved as God's child, a creature of immortality, a temple built for the skies. Of all teachers Christ was the best, of all reformers the wisest and most beneficent; for His thoughts were the mightiest, and He strove with divinest zeal.—*Ibid.*

[18788] Christ best knew what was in man, and He was so bent on developing and ennobling his torpid powers, that gracious words and beneficent deeds were as common to Him as vital air and daily bread. If He was the wisest teacher that ever descended from heaven, it was because He habitually acted on the principle that the religious sentiment in human beings is the mightiest agent on earth. To give this a proper training, and to preserve it from a perverted use, was His constant aim. To accomplish this the more benignly, and with the widest advantage, He did not conduct His hearers through the dubious region of conflicting theories, but brought them at once into the lucid medium of absolute truth; by word and action He reached their intentions through His own deepest and most tender consciousness, without permitting any intellectual refinements or fastidious niceties of the brain to check and chill their outpouring.—*Ibid.*

[18789] He preferred solid to popular virtues: a character which is commonly despised, to a character universally extolled; He placed on our licentious vices the check in the right place, viz., upon the thoughts: He collected human duty into two well-devised rules; He repeated

these rules, and laid great stress upon them, and thereby fixed the sentiments of His followers. He excluded all regard to reputation in our devotion and alms; and, by parity of reason, in our other virtues; His instructions were delivered in a form calculated for impression; they were illustrated by parables, the choice and structure of which would have been admired in any composition whatever; He was free from the usual symptoms of heat and vehemence in devotion, austerity in institutions, and a wild particularity in the description of a future state; He was free also from the depravities of His age and country, without superstition among the most superstitious of men; yet not decrying positive distinctions or external observances, but soberly recalling them to the principle of their establishment, and to the place in the scale of human duties; there was nothing of sophistry or trifling, though amidst teachers remarkable for nothing so much as frivolous subtleties and quibbling expositions.—*Paley*.

[18790] He was candid and liberal in His judgment of the rest of mankind, although belonging to a people who affected a separate claim to Divine favour, and, in consequence of that opinion, prone to uncharitableness, particularity, and restriction; in His religion there was no scheme of building up a hierarchy, or of ministering to the views of human governments; in a word, there was everything so grand in doctrine, and delightful in manner, that the people might well exclaim, "Surely never man spake like this man!"—*Ibid*.

[18791] His object was not to compel, but persuade; to gain consent where consent was wanting; to make willing what before was reluctant; to actuate the affections and woo their force; to make man say "yes," willingly and with joy, in a matter in which he was before inclined to say "no." The power He aimed at was the persuasion of creatures endowed with reason, capable of faith, and strongly affected by passion; accordingly the course He pursued was harmonious with the end He desired. The secret of His influence consisted in the nature of the religion He taught, in its depth of meaning and warmth of love, in its perfect simplicity and universal application. He expanded into innumerable forms, and diversified by infinite varieties of illustration, the great truths of human sinfulness and the infinite fulness of Divine redemption. He humbled Himself to the condition of the most humble, and poured out the greatest treasures at the feet of the most indigent, while in each act He was never formal, but fraternal, under the guise of a servant performing the functions of a God. He knew that a delicate and close network of sensibility is diffused over the entire body of society, rendering it susceptible of being acted upon at every point; and along this He poured a tide of His own sympathy, seeking the greatest good of the greatest number, until He had drawn all segments of the great circle of

humanity to one central spot, the throbbing core of His own great and benevolent heart. It was this kind of address that aroused in the common people "all the mysterious world of eye and ear," making them to hang with delight upon the lips of the Son of God, and to lean fondly towards His swelling breast. Each new principle He announced resounded in their intelligence like echoes from beyond the grave; and while they stood enthralled by the splendour of a truth then first seen, they beheld in it a glass which showed them many more—interminable vistas of glory, joys that should never end. It was Christ who first made the pulse of true religion beat in all the arteries of the common heart, and caused the people to feel that, invested with the serene and blessed atmosphere of His presence and instruction, they indeed stood in "the presence chamber of the King of kings."—*E. Magoon*.

[18792] He made popular impressions through preaching and practice, that was replete with love, overflowing with mercy. He was not the impersonation of reason so much as affection; He dealt not so much with the moonbeam's cold dialectics, as with the brilliant sun-rays of fervid benevolence. He bent His ear to every sigh, put forth His hand to relieve every want of the distressed; and even when He had departed, it was natural that His sympathetic tones should come back upon the popular heart again, thrilling even to the eye's fountain. Christ addressed Himself to the tendencies of our nature most easily awakened, whose education is the promptest, and whose results are the most enduring; to the powers of enjoyment, and He thereby won souls to happiness and peace; to the affections, and thus captivated them by love; to conscience, and caused it to respond to the instinctive voice of the moral sense; to the religious principle, and gave it the amplest means of redemption and eternal progress. In every miracle He performed on matter or on mind it was our merciful Saviour's purpose

"To raise the human to the holy,
To wake the spirit from the clay."

—*Ibid*.

[18793] Can we wonder that the eyes of the Redeemer, "which seemed to love whatever they looked upon," as they met the popular gaze, held all spirits spell-bound? Is it strange that those tones of His which everywhere proclaimed that all rational beings have an equal right to live and enjoy elicited applause from the throbbing hearts on which they fell? The common people must have been something less or more than human to have resisted the power of wisdom so exalted, and love so impartial. He taught them to look into the everlasting mysteries of God's might, to be assimilated to infinite excellence, and thus to become Divine. He created in the common people faith, that living power which grows by the struggles it encounters, and outruns the demands made

upon it by the trials of life. As Elijah, who wore a rough garment, arose to heaven with chariot and horses of fire, so Christ would encourage the humblest of earth's children to aspire after celestial treasures of the greatest worth, through a career the most resplendent and full of beneficence. Standing in the presence of such a teacher and such a friend, the people saw God manifest in the flesh, who addressed a common nature, aroused common emotions, and imparted common blessings, and whose life, as well as doctrines, proclaimed a model worthy of being not only admired but imitated by all.—*Ibid.*

V. THE EXAMPLE OF HIS SINLESSNESS AND MERITS.

For universal imitation and perpetual guidance.

[18794] Nothing was ever more simple and open, more obvious and easy to common imitation, than the life of our blessed Saviour, in which there was nothing dark and mysterious, abstruse and intricate; it was all perfect innocence and goodness, and He carried on one plain and intelligible and uniform design, which was to do all the good He possibly could to all men. This He pursued with all His might, with the greatest vigour and industry, with an undaunted courage and resolution, with an unwearied diligence, with a constant cheerfulness and serenity of mind; this was His meat and drink, His great business and delight, His life and His happiness; He was not superciliously morose, had no affected singularities, no peculiar austerities in habit or diet, different from the common usage of men; His conversation was kind and innocent, free and familiar, open and indifferent to all sorts of persons; for He was a physician, and everybody had need of Him, all mankind were His patients. He did not place religion (as some have done since) in retirement from the world, shunning the conversation of men, and taking great care to do nobody good: not in profound mysteries and fine speculations, but in the plain and honest practice of the solid and substantial virtues of a good life; in meekness and humility, in kindness and charity, in contentedness in a low and mean condition, and a calm composure of mind under all accidents and events, in patience under the greatest reproaches and sufferings, and a perfect submission to the will of God in all His dispensations, how harsh and unpleasant soever. Now there is nothing in all this but what lies open to every man's understanding, and is easy to our practice and imitation, requiring nothing but an honest mind, and due care and diligence to do what we may easily know, to follow our guide in a plain way, and in all the actions of our lives, to tread in those steps in which the Son of God, and the best man that ever was, hath gone before us.—*Abp. Tillotson.*

[18795] The representation, as far as pos-

sible by man, of the life and character of Christ in His own nature should be the mainspring of every action and the end of all endeavour. Visible to the pilgrim follower's eye must ever be that guiding sign-post along the Divine route—"This is the way, walk ye in it."—*A. M. A. W.*

[18796] If Jesus Christ recommended active benevolence, He went about doing good; if He preached forgiveness of injuries, He prayed for His murderers; if He inculcated self-denial, He voluntarily subjected Himself to penury, crosses, persecution, and death; if He prescribed piety toward God, He passed days and nights in prayer; if He enjoined resignation to the Divine will, He freely drank the cup which His Father gave to His lips. In these respects it scarcely becomes us to observe, that our Lord presented a marked contrast to the example, often pernicious, always imperfect, of other teachers; since there is almost impiety in supposing the bare possibility that He could have infringed His own laws. But we may remark, that by thus practising and exemplifying them, He has rendered no small service to the great cause of virtue, since, in addition to His instructions, He has exhibited, and, as it were, embodied a living pattern of that new east and description of character, of those original and distinctive excellences, which He has prescribed to His followers.—*G. Chandle, LL.D.*

[18797] "Call upon Me," saith He, "in the day of trouble; so will I deliver thee, and thou shalt honour Me." Nothing so well bridles the rush of anger, allays the swelling of pride, heals the wound of jealousy, curbs the flow of sensuality, quenches the flame of lust, abates the thirst of avarice, and banishes the irritation of every unseemly feeling; since, when I name Jesus, I set before myself a man meek and lowly in heart, conspicuous by all moral dignity and holiness, and one who is at the same time God Almighty to heal me by His example, and to strengthen me by His aid.—*St. Bernard.*

[18798] In the virtues of His life, when He went up and down doing good, and suffering evil, He was an example fit to be proposed to the imitation of all His followers; He was at once an example of the active and the passive virtues; but as it is the most difficult part to suffer in a right manner, to bear everything most painful and disagreeable to human nature, and neither quit our patience nor innocence; so of this most difficult part of that righteousness which He fulfilled in the whole extent of it, He gave us the most perfect pattern in the last scene of His life, which was nothing but suffering. And to carry His example to the greatest height, He not only suffered from men, but from God; pain and shame and death from men; desertion from God: in all teaching us how to behave with humble filial resignation to the one, and charity and meekness to the other.—*H. Grove.*

[18799] 'Tis the example of our best friend and greatest benefactor, Him who laid down His life for us, and sealed His love to us with His own blood, and while we were bitter enemies to Him, did and suffered more for us than any man ever did for his dearest friend. How powerfully must such a pattern recommend goodness and kindness and compassion to us, who have had so much comfort and advantage from them! Had not the Son of God commiserated our case, and pitied and relieved us in our low and wretched condition, we had been extremely and for ever miserable, beyond all imagination, and past all remedy. All the kindness and compassion, all the mercy and forgiveness He would have us practise towards one another, He Himself first exercised upon us; and surely we have a much greater obligation upon us to the practice of these virtues than He had. For He did all this for our sakes; we do it for our own. We have a natural obligation, both in point of duty and interest. His was voluntary, and what He took upon Himself, that He might at once be a Saviour and an example to us. He that commands us to do good to others, was our great benefactor; He that requires us to forgive our enemies, shed His own blood for the forgiveness of our sins; while we were enemies to Him, laid down His life for us, making Himself the example of that goodness which He commands us to show to others.—*Abp. Tillotson.*

[18800] The character of our Lord is to be regarded as an example. "I have given you an example," said He, "that ye should do as I have done unto you. Learn of Me. A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another." Thus He seeks to augment the value of His own character, regarded as an argument for the gospel, by multiplying the copies of His excellence in the lives of all His people: He would render each of His disciples like Himself—a living demonstration for the truth. All the wealth of moral power which the wise and the good have ever possessed is summed up in Him, and infinitely augmented, and brought to bear on the hearts of His people; that by living as under the focus of all excellence, they might be transformed into the same image. Having turned all His infinite nature into grace, having dissolved into a fountain of healing mercy for the recovery of the world, He would now employ the hearts of His people as consecrated channels for the diffusion of its streams: He would have their natures, like His own, changed into tenderness and love. It is true, His example can never be equalled, for it embodies infinite goodness; but with so much the greater force does it oblige us, in our humble measure, to attempt the imitation. Having adopted our humanity, when it was only related to Him, like other natures, by creation, He is surely entitled to expect that we should love our own flesh, that we should seek the welfare of the nature which is essentially

our own, by diffusing the greatest possible happiness among those connatural with us. Having died for the good of man, the least He is authorized to expect is, that we should live for the same benevolent object.—*J. Hanna, D.D.*

[18801] The life of our blessed Saviour is an encouraging example. It cannot but give great life to all good resolutions and endeavours to see all that which God requires of us performed by one in our nature, by a man like ourselves. Our Saviour, indeed, had many advantages above us, being God as well as man; and His humanity being supported by the Divine nature to which it was united, being clear from all the ill effects of original sin, and from all kind of vicious and inordinate inclinations; but then it is a great encouragement to us to consider that God doth not require at our hands a perfect and unerring obedience, as the condition of our salvation and happiness; but only such an obedience to His laws as is sincere and continually aspiring after greater perfection, which is very possible to us by the grace of Christ, even in this imperfect state; that God considers our weakness, and how much we stand in need of His grace and assistance, and hath assured us that it shall not be wanting to us, if we heartily and earnestly beg it of Him; and that strength which we may have for asking, is as good as if it were our own. If Christ were the Son of God, so are we in a lower degree, by grace and adoption; and if we be the sons of God, the Spirit of God dwells in us, to quicken and raise us to newness of life. And He that hath left us such an example, on purpose that we might follow it, will not surely leave us destitute of power to enable us to do so. It is a good argument to us, that He will enable us to do that in some degree in our own persons which He Himself did for our example in our nature. An example more suitable to our weakness might seem to have had more of encouragement in it; but we are to consider that the Son of God assumed our nature, as compassed with infirmities, and liable to be tempted in all things as we are, only without sin; so that His example could not possibly have come nearer to us than it does, without great disadvantage to us, without wanting that perfection which is necessary to a complete and absolute pattern. In short, the Spirit of Christ dwells in us, and the same Spirit which kept and preserved Him from all sin is equally able to mortify sin in us, and to enable us to do the will of God in such manner as He will accept to our justification.—*Abp. Tillotson.*

[18802] Distinguish between a model and an example. You copy the outline of a model: you imitate the spirit of an example. Christ is our example: Christ is not our model. You might copy the life of Christ, make Him a model in every act, and yet you might be not one whit more of a Christian than before. You might wash the feet of poor fishermen as He did, live a wandering life with nowhere to lay

your head. You might go about teaching, and never use any words but His words, never express a religious truth except in Bible language: have no home, and mix with publicans and harlots. Then Christ would be your model: you would have copied His life like a picture, line for line, and shadow for shadow; and yet you might not be Christlike. On the other hand, you might imitate Christ, get His Spirit, breathe the atmosphere of thought which He breathed: do not one single act which He did, but every act in His spirit: you might be rich, whereas He was poor: never teach, whereas He was teaching always; lead a life in all outward particulars the very contrast and opposite of His: and yet the spirit of His self-devotion might have saturated your whole being, and penetrated into the life of every act and the essence of every thought. Then Christ would have become your example; for we can only imitate that of which we have caught the spirit.—*Rev. F. Robertson.*

[18803] Notwithstanding the profound mystery which belongs to our Lord's personality, and notwithstanding the difficulty we may find in the interpretation of His words and acts, there are at least two things of which we feel quite certain. First, we feel certain that eternal moral law lies at the very heart of His holy life, and of the great salvation which He accomplished by His atoning death. And, secondly, we feel certain that His obedience to law was not only constant and undeviating, but voluntary and free. He is therefore the Pattern Man, fully realizing the Divine Ideal of humanity, an unchangeable Saviour, "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever." He is the beloved Son in whom the Father is well pleased; and to Him belongs, in its fullest sense, the saying of St. John: "He that doeth the will of God abideth for ever." The perfection of His character is the manifestation of the eternal law in the human world; and its invariability forms the ground of inductive inference in our dealing with the historical facts of His earthly life.—*P. Strutt.*

[18804] The works of love that He requires of us, in words, are preceded and illustrated by real deeds of love, to which He gave up all His mighty powers from day to day. He bore the cross Himself that He commanded us to take up and bear after Him. Requiring us to hate even life for the gospel's sake, He went before us in dying for the gospel; suffering a death most bitter at the hands of enemies exasperated only by His goodness, and that when, at a word, He might have called to His aid whole legions of angels, and driven them out of the world. And then He went before us in the bursting of the grave and the resurrection from it; becoming, in His own person, the firstfruits of them that slept. And, finally, He ascended, and passed within the veil before us, as our forerunner, whom we are to follow even there.—*H. Bushnell, D.D.*

[18805] Christ's divinity does not destroy the reality of His manhood by overshadowing or absorbing it. Certainly the Divine attributes of Jesus are beyond our imitation. We can but adore a boundless intelligence or a resistless will. But the province of the imitable in the life of Jesus is not indistinctly traced: as the Friend of publicans and sinners, as the Consoler of those who suffer, and as the Helper of those who want, Jesus Christ is at home among us. We can copy Him, not merely in the outward activities of charity, but in its inward temper. We can copy the tenderness, the meekness, the patience, the courage, which shine forth from His perfect manhood. His human perfections constitute, indeed, a faultless ideal of beauty, which, as moral artists, we are bound to keep in view. What the true and highest model of a human life is, has been decided for us Christians by the appearance of Jesus Christ in the flesh. Others may endeavour to reopen that question; for us it is settled, and settled irrevocably.—*Canon Liddon.*

[18806] How many have prayed for their murderers, now that the Pattern Man has enabled our hearts to feel what, but for His example, might have been for ever hidden in the undeveloped capacities of man's nature—that revenge is less noble than forgiveness. Thus has He set forth the perfect type of manhood, and, through the example of the elder brother, the lineaments of truth may be discerned even in the corrupted nature of His brethren.—*R. J. Wilberforce.*

[18807] Imitation is an instinct in human nature, and therefore it is of the utmost importance to have a perfect model to follow. Most men who have succeeded have had some grand model before them. To be a Christlike Christian, it is most essential to be continually studying the life and character of Christ.—*Rev. G. Bowes.*

VI. EFFECTS OF THE WONDROUS LIFE OF CHRIST.

I General and universal.

It sways the world, and influences all ages.

[18808] It is like a key to all His teaching and to Himself likewise, which St. Luke has preserved for us, not in his Gospel, but in the Acts, in that precious morsel of early tradition, that else unrecorded maxim of the Master, cited at Miletus by St. Paul: "It is more blessed to give than to receive!" When this Divine axiom, illuminated by the unspeakable gift of Christ Himself for a lost race, lodged itself in primitive Christian hearts, it changed the world. In this Paul followed Christ, saying, "I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the salvation of many." In this he bade the Churches follow him: "Let no man seek his own, but every man another's." The

echoes of this great lesson in Godlike love have gone on ringing and repeating themselves all down the Christian ages, too faint, alas! yet never dying out.—*Oswald Dykes, D.D.*

[18809] The effects of the work of Christ are even to the unbeliever undisputable and historical. It expelled cruelty; it curbed passion; it branded suicide; it punished and repressed an execrable infanticide; it drove the shameless impurities of heathendom into a congenial darkness. There was hardly a class whose wrongs it did not remedy. It rescued the gladiator; it freed the slave; it protected the captive; it nursed the sick; it sheltered the orphan; it elevated the woman; it shrouded as with a halo of sacred innocence the tender years of the child. In every region of life its ameliorating influence was felt. It changed pity from a vice into a virtue. It elevated poverty from a curse into a beatitude. It ennobled labour from a vulgarity into a dignity and a duty. It sanctified marriage from little more than a burdensome convention into little less than a blessed sacrament. It revealed for the first time the angelic beauty of a Purity of which men had despaired, and of a Meekness at which they had utterly scoffed. It created the very conception of charity, and broadened the limits of its obligation from the narrow circle of a neighbourhood to the widest horizons of the race. And while it thus evolved the idea of Humanity as a common brotherhood, even where its tidings were not believed—all over the world, wherever its tidings were believed it cleansed the life and elevated the soul of each individual man. And in all lands where it has moulded the characters of its true believers, it has created hearts so pure, and lives so peaceful, and homes so sweet, that it might seem as though those angels who had heralded its advent had also whispered to every depressed and despairing sufferer among the sons of men, "Though ye have lien among the pots, yet shall ye be as the wings of a dove, that is covered with silver wings, and her feathers like gold." Others, if they can and will, may see in such a work as this no Divine Providence; they may think it philosophical enlightenment to hold that Christianity and Christendom are adequately accounted for by the idle dreams of a noble self-deceiver, and the passionate hallucinations of a recovered demoniac. We persecute them not, we denounce them not, we judge them not; but we say that, unless all life be hollow, there could have been no such miserable origin to the sole religion of the world, which holds the perfect balance between philosophy and popularity, between religion and morals, between meek submissiveness and the pride of freedom, between the ideal and the real, between the inward and the outward, between modest stillness and heroic energy, nay, between the tenderest conservatism and the boldest plans of world-wide reformation. The witness of history to Christ is a witness which has been given with irresistible cogency; and it has been so given to none but Him.—*Archdeacon Farrar.*

[18810] The impression which the life of Jesus called forth, and the expression which He gave to His own consciousness of inward purity, do not stand isolated and alone, but are borne up and attested by the world-embracing effects which He has produced. These effects have influenced the moral and religious life of humanity in the individual and in the mass; and they are of such a character as can be comprehended only by admitting the holy purity of His person; for only by an individual of sinless holiness could they have been caused. For what are these effects? They are the complete renovation of the moral life, the assured consciousness of redemption from sin, and the implantation of the element of holiness in man, which rests upon the conviction that this holiness has in truth appeared among men as perfect love and as close and unbroken fellowship with God.—*Ullman.*

[18811] Jesus of Nazareth, without money and arms, conquered more millions than Alexander, Cæsar, Mahomet, and Napoleon; without science and learning, He shed more light on things human and Divine than all philosophers and scholars combined; without the eloquence of schools, He spoke words of life as never were spoken before or since, and produced effects which lie beyond the reach of orator or poet; without writing a single line, He has set more pens in motion, and furnished themes for more sermons, orations, discussions, learned volumes, works of art, and sweet songs of praise, than the whole army of great men of ancient and modern times. Born in a manger, and crucified as a malefactor, He now controls the destinies of the civilized world, and rules a spiritual empire which embraces one-third of the inhabitants of the globe. There never was in this world a life so unpretending, modest, and lowly in its outward form and condition, and yet producing such extraordinary effects upon all ages, nations, and classes of men. The annals of history produce no other example of such complete and astounding success, in spite of the absence of those material, social, literary, and artistic powers and influences which are indispensable to success for a mere man.—*Prof. Schaff.*

2 Special and individual.

It inspires the heart of man with profound, impassioned reverence, and controls his inner life.

[18812] Some have been entirely restrained from violating the sanctuary of truth by the character of Christ, which, like the presence of a shrine, has protected it. As the house of Obededom was blessed for the sake of the residing ark, so religion has often escaped evil, and received homage from its foes, for the sake of the character of Christ. Men who have destroyed, in intention, every other part of the temple of truth, have paused when they came to this—have turned aside, and desisted for awhile from the work of demolition, to gaze and bow before it; have not merely left it stand-

ing as a column too majestic, or an altar too holy, for human sacrilege to assail, but (it was the only redeeming act in their history) have even inscribed their names on its base, and have been heard to burst forth in admiring exclamations approaching to love.—*J. Harris, B.D.*

[18813] As long as men are men, can they ever have a higher moral conception of God than that given to them through the character of a Perfect Man, and can we conceive, in centuries to come, men ever getting beyond that idea as long as they are in the human state? The conception of what the ideal Man is will change, as men grow more or less perfect, or as mankind is seen more or less as a vast organism; but as long as there is a trace of imperfection in us, this idea—that perfect humanity, that is, perfect Fatherhood, perfect love, perfect justice—all our imperfect goodnesses—realized in perfection, and impersonated in One Being, is *God to us*—can never fail to create religion and kindle worship.—*Rev. Stopford Brooke.*

[18814] The merits of Christ are the cause operating to righteousness; but faith is the pipe turning the stream of operation upon ourselves, instilling the living waters, the vivifying principle of rectitude or holiness, which may daily grow more and more predominant over our appetites and aversions, annul the law of our members, and bring us gradually under obedience to the law of our minds.—*A. Tucker.*

VII. HOMILETICAL HINTS.

I Christ is the solace of the obscure, and the fortifier of the weak.

[18815] Most persons, like Tacitus, delight to portray the corruptions of their fellow-men, without once attempting either to reform or alleviate them. Instead of making human culture as universal as heavenly light, the influence of redemption co-extensive with the disasters of the fall, the selfish would forbid the sun to shine beyond the boundaries of their own useless domain, and concentrate their intrinsic meanness to the violent enforcement only of their own bigoted creed. If pure and promising talents start up in humble shades, like rose-buds peeping out of snow, these trampers on the best hopes of mankind will stamp down their first unfoldings, or leave them to freeze beyond all power of further growth. But not so would Christ have us deal with those who are in danger of abiding in a perpetual Cimmerian sojourn; He directs each struggling plant of humanity to be brought out into a genial, salubrious air, not mutilated by tyranny nor chilled by neglect. Each congealed sensibility would the Saviour gently loosen with the soft breath of love, and each incipient faculty would He energize with power undying, that He might transform the most hidden heart into a perennial fountain, “flinging its bright, fresh

feelings up to the skies it loves and strives to reach.”—*E. Magoon.*

[18816] The labour of reflection is best facilitated by internal quietude; and hence there have been so few really great minds, because it is rare that we meet with those who are eminently pure of heart. It is only the taught and sanctified of God who can penetrate the meaning of the celebrated oracle of Delphi, “Know thyself;” and they who at the foot of the cross must feel their weakness, will be most filled with power. Thus from our feebleness, experienced and bemoaned, grace educes and confirms the greatest strength; as from the acorn, driven before the wind to root itself in genial soil, springs an oak which the mightiest storm can scarcely bend.—*Ibid.*

2 Christ is the deliverer of the oppressed, the rewarder of the sacrificed, and the patron of the aspiring.

[18817] Said Bolingbroke, “Liberty is to the collective body what health is to every individual body. Without health, no pleasure can be tasted by man; without liberty, no happiness can be enjoyed by society.” But this spirit of freedom, which is so essential to the promotion of personal worth and social progress, is often destroyed or sorely crippled by those who ungenerously strive to dim its light in the souls of their fellow-men. Were it not that, to defend and perpetuate the best interests of humanity, God raises up, in every rank and age, heroes who feel great truths and dare to tell them, and whose words seem winged with angels’ wings, purifying the air they winnow, and scattering light and strength in all their flight, we should indeed fear that tyranny at last, by some fearful combination of nefarious powers, might succeed in blotting the bannered constellations from Freedom’s skies. Of such a result, however, there is little occasion for fear, since we know—

“That there are spirit-rulers of all worlds,
Which fraternize with earth, and, though unknown,
Hold in the shining voices of the stars
Communion on high, ever and everywhere.”

We do not believe that man on earth is doomed to perpetual slavery in any form. Christianity plants in the heart a sublime idea, a celestial sentiment, potent enough to redeem every individual and bless the world. It makes its recipients not disciples merely, but prophets to teach and redeemers to rescue from bondage all their fellow-sufferers. It sends them forth completely armed with an invulnerable panoply, commissioned to avoid no peril and shrink from no pain which the advocacy in word or action may require. They encompass the earth, fortified with the energies and exhilarated with the beatitudes of heaven, that they may elevate the remotest victim of oppression, and make all nations a band of brethren joined.—*Ibid.*

[18818] Sacrifice exacted by integrity is always its own exalted reward, since he whose life is consecrated to suffering for others must necessarily be a participant of the universal felicity which the Deity diffuses, infinitely more than he whose life is a mere pursuit of sensual pleasure. The existence and deeds of such men are bright revelations of omnipotent benevolence and power. This is, in some degree, true of all disciples, but more especially does it apply to the prophets, the apostles, the martyrs, who have bravely consecrated their energies to the service of their race. Truly do they resemble God manifest in the flesh. Their example in time is the brightest, and their preparation for eternity is the best; for we hold that in the day of final reckoning, the Judge will not so much inquire, What was your belief? as, What was your conduct on earth? What hast thou done? Where are the proofs that thou hast fulfilled a beneficent mission with all thy might? It will then be seen that all who in every age boldly wore a martyr's crown of thorns, in order that truth and righteousness might acquire comprehensive, pervading, and ennobling sway, thereby won the brightest honours and were destined to the highest thrones.—*Ibid.*

[18819] The frigid multitude without forces us to be hypocrites, when we have the strongest disposition to be sincere in the best pursuit, and to assume a supineness and meagreness which ill correspond to the height, and depth, and lavish variety, of the inner man, in its spontaneous efforts to expand and soar. But Jesus most acutely experienced "the reachings of our souls," and made provision for their freest and widest flight. Impelled by divinest aspirations, He would have us mount to the starry gates of God's dwelling in the skies, and drink into our panting souls, with unutterable rapture, broad and clear beamings of His mysterious splendour, and then, in our generous warmth, He would have us hasten to distribute among our brethren the glad and sanctifying beams with which we are imbued. If they spurn our gift, depreciate its value, deny even its existence, and question our capacity to attain views so blissful, He would not have us chilled into despair by the captiousness we incur, but hold on our way in patient effort, till Omnipotence comes to crown with success our beneficent design.—*Ibid.*

[18820] Christ was the divinest of theologians, because He taught not in abstraction, but exemplification; not in dogmas merely, but deeds; in the ardour of His heart, as well as the energy of His mind; in the gentleness of His demeanour and the beneficent industry of His life. The love of the beautiful, the good, and the true, were a trinity in His soul, never mutilated, smothered, or divorced. From the earliest youth He so deepened and refined the sentiment of the beautiful, that He could not be otherwise than good; and He so deepened and

refined the sentiment of the good, that it was impossible for Him to be otherwise than true. He chose this order and condition of development here below, that He might prepare for earth that which earth most needs—men and women in whom the beautiful, the good, and the true, may be one, harmonious, and Divine principle, causing their hearts instinctively to soar toward heaven whenever they behold the flowers of the field, the stars in the firmament, and, with purer vision still, gaze on angels round the eternal throne.—*Ibid.*

[18821] The great and truly Divine idea of radically curing all the evil with which humanity is afflicted, of planting institutions which should be equally advantageous to individuals of every rank and communities of every clime, thus raising up for the Creator a better generation on the most beneficent plan, originated entirely with Jesus Christ. No mind before His ever conceived the purpose of establishing a kingdom of God, ruled only by truth, morality, and mutual joy, into which should be gathered all the nations of the earth. All this, too, was to be done without the use of any arbitrary force, merely by the gentle influence of convincing instruction, ordinances adapted to arouse the moral sensibilities, stimulate each individual to reflect upon his most important concerns, and warm his heart with fervid aspirations after the highest good. Christ would have man feel, even the humblest of our race, that he is endowed with a nature far exalted above the brutes, a soul infinitely superior to his body, and that he is capable of knowledge, goodness, and friendship of the highest order—intercourse the most delightful with Heaven. The faintest intellectual nature that gleams far down the vale of life admits of endless improvement, and he cheerfully bestows resources that will promote growth far beyond mortal existence and the decay of unnumbered worlds. Lifting an aspiring eye to the loftiest pinnacles of finite attainment, the youth who leans on Christ and follows His directions, soars rapturously in eternal approximation to the infinite excellence he was made to know. Fostered by such patronage, in view of such attainments, the obscurest and weakest aspirant bravely exclaims—

"Rouse thee, heart!
Bow of my life, thou yet art full of spring;
My quiver still hath many purposes."—*Ibid.*

[18822] All youths are dead for the present life who do not hope for the future, and aspire to shine in beneficent goodness as they soar to attain eternal rewards. They are unworthy of being the companions of the exalted, and the recipients of bliss without alloy, so long as they do not elevate themselves to a level with the objects they revere, and nourish in their bosoms feelings kindred to the purest truth and divinest good. These objects of the highest reverence, and this fountain of the noblest desires, it is the

prerogative of Christianity to create in the mind and heart of the most ignoble in the world's estimation, invigorate with the best supplies in the most exhausting race, and crown with the highest honours at the ultimate goal. Therefore, however cold and constant may be the selfishness of earth towards the youthful aspirant in his purest and most needy days, he never should yield to despondency,

“While the voice
Of truth and virtue, up the steep ascent
Of nature, calls him to his high reward,
Th' applauding smile of heaven.”—*Ibid.*

[18823] “My burden is light,” said the blessed Redeemer. A light burden, indeed, which carries him that bears it. I have looked through all nature for a resemblance to this, and I seem to find a shadow of it in the wings of a bird, which are indeed borne by the creature and yet support her flight toward heaven.—*St. Bernard.*

ZACHARIAS.

I. INTRODUCTORY.

The spiritual and social condition of the priests in his day.

[18824] Originally in all respects the standard for an officiating priest was high. This, however, owing to the varying religious condition of the people, was not always reached. Just now, many were poor, some were ignorant, and not a few were corrupt; while others were comfortable, well instructed, and faithful. In the first days of the gospel, “a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.” The duties of the priests were the most sacred. They were the moral and spiritual guides of the people; and, in gifts and sacrifices, they ministered at the altars. They had great responsibilities, but they had also great privileges. None came so near to the sensible presence of God; none could do more for the highest welfare of the people.—*Sermons by the Monday Club.*

II. HIS PERSONAL CHARACTER.

[18825] The times were corrupt, and the priests, as a class, were not superior to the times. Too many were but “blind leaders of the blind.” But Zacharias was “righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.” That is, he made the will of God his rule. He was conscientious and steadfast. He did not choose out, and keep, such requirements as seemed to himself reasonable and agreeable; but walked in *all* the commandments and ordinances of the Lord. Is not this the mark of true obedience? In humility it submits all its wisdom and will

to God's; and only asks what he has thought it fitting to appoint.—*Ibid.*

III. HIS GRACIOUS VISITATION.

[18826] His course—that of Abia—was on duty for the week, and on him fell the lot of burning incense in the Holy Place. This he was about to do. But at that most impressive moment, when the whole multitude were hushed and bowed in prayer, there appeared before him a startling apparition. It was an angel of the Lord. And, though it stood upon the right side of the altar, the side of good omen, he was “troubled, and fear fell upon him.” At this we cannot wonder. In whom would not the sudden uprising of a messenger from the unseen world excite fear? Angelic appearances had not been common. Indeed this was the first, as it was the only one, ever witnessed in the temple. But the voice which broke from the lips of the angel not only dispelled his fears, but gave him great promise. His prayers were now at length to be answered. And they were to be so answered as to fill many besides himself with joy and gladness. Deeper, no doubt, than his desire for offspring, had been the longing, he shared with the more devout of that expectant generation, for One who should come to his temple and thoroughly purge its floor, and be the Redeemer of his people. This Redeemer was about to come; and he, the faithful but trembling priest, would be honoured by close relationship to him; his child should indeed go before to prepare his way.—*Ibid.*

SIMEON.

I. HIS GENERAL CHARACTER.

[18827] Why were priest and scribe passed by, and Simeon selected as the one to whom the great disclosure should be made? Inspiration answers our queries. This man was “just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Ghost was upon him.” He was not ruttled in formalism; he was not enamoured of rationalism; he was not besotted with worldliness; he was not satisfied with himself, and so careless of the approaches of God; but he was “just”—faithful in external duty; “devout”—his soul turning toward God as flowers turn to the sun; “the Holy Ghost was upon him,” making him sensitive to the impact of the spiritual world; and he was “waiting”—listening, looking, expecting the Divine manifestation. What man of his generation better fitted than he to be honoured with a revelation of the truth! —*Sermons by the Monday Club.*

[18828] “And, behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon; and the same man was just and devout.” These are the two grand elements of religion, *rectitude* and

devoutness. He was eminent in the two great relationships of his being. Towards God he was devout; towards man he was just.—*Caleb Morris.*

II. HIS EXPECTATION.

It was the habitual attitude of his spirit, and exercised a spiritualizing influence upon his piety.

[18829] "Waiting for the consolation of Israel." He was not only a just and devout man, but he was also waiting for Him who was to be Israel's consolation and glory and the Gentiles' light. Simeon was not a man of a narrow, contracted, selfish mind. Oh, no. His thoughts, desires, solitudes, and hopes were not limited to himself, nor to his own nation; his heart burned for the public good; he was an observer and interpreter of public events. Through the Divine medium of prophecy he surveyed the far-spread scenes of futurity. From the mount of Vision he contemplated the evolutions of Providence, the source and the spread of redemption, the changes and the predestinations of the world—of the universe. He had long waited for the day of the Lord: at last it sweetly dawned upon his hopes. Faith and prayer ever wait for those eras of light and renewal, by a succession of which God has promised to draw humanity nearer and still nearer to Himself. Simeon waited for the coming of Messiah: expectation was the habitual attitude of his spirit; it was the theme of his conversation; the breath of his prayers; the bright beam that ever cheered the long path of his pilgrimage. In the teachings of the synagogue, in the sacrifices of the temple, in the changes which were passing over the institutions of his people, the devout patriarch saw the prophetic signs of the Son of man. His constant waiting for Christ kept his affections in a state of healthy excitement, spiritualized his piety, shed an unearthly lustre around his general character, and raised him far above the men of his age.—*Ibid.*

III. HIS FAITH.

[18830] Is this the promised Messiah, this babe in the arms of a poor woman of Bethlehem, her husband bearing in his basket "a pair of turtle-doves or two young pigeons," unable to bring the usual offering of a lamb, but availing himself of the alternative offering prescribed for the poor? What a sight is this! What an entrance into the world, if this be the Messiah! Does this meet and fulfil Isaiah's vision, "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace"? Is this "the desire of nations," "the Lord whom ye seek," "even the messenger of the covenant"? Is this "the King of the Jews," this "the man that is my fellow, saith the Lord of hosts"? What faith Simeon must have had, to believe the simple word of God in the face of all the dis-

paraging and contradictory circumstances of that child!—*N. Adams, D.D.*

[18831] There could not possibly be less to encourage faith than at the moment when he took that child to his arms. Had he the heart of Naaman the Syrian, who went away in a rage from the prophet's door, because he was told to go and wash in Jordan, instead of receiving a cure from the prophet with ceremonious application of his hand to the leprosy, Simeon might have turned away offended, saying, Is this root out of dry ground, my Saviour? Where did he find in that humble scene anything to gratify his fancy, anything answering to those pictures with which imagination, perhaps, had filled his mind, while expecting the Lord's Christ? And have I waited for this? is this what Abraham desired to see? is this David's Lord and David's son? is this the burden of Isaiah? There is no beauty in him that I should desire him. It must have been the purest and the strongest faith that made that aged saint feel and act as he did. Love mingled with it, and made his faith perfect; and so, faith, working by love, purified his heart from all those worldly, pompous, and merely Jewish feelings which would have made him despise the infant Messiah.—*Ibid.*

[18832] The manner in which Simeon recognized the infant Redeemer affords a striking proof of the strength of his faith. He was not offended at His lowly circumstances, or stumbled by the absence of every outward mark of His Divine royalty. If it be said that the supernatural impression under which he acted sufficiently accounts for this, it ought to be remembered that there have been men who, after receiving a Divine communication and listening to a heavenly voice, have immediately asked for an additional sign in order to confirm their faith. We therefore account in great part for Simeon's prompt and unhesitating recognition of the Christ in this lowly child, by the fact that he had long been so devout and diligent a student of the Old Testament Scriptures. There his mental "eye had been anointed with eye-salve," and he had been taught to look for a suffering Messiah,—"for the secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him." These outward signs of humiliation had accordingly no effect in disturbing his faith or damping his joy. Yea, not content with seeing the Holy Child in the arms of His mother, in the fine exuberance and almost ecstasy of his gratitude, the aged saint takes the infant into his own withered arms, embraces Him, presses Him to his heart, and sends up an ascription of praise to God which the Church for eighteen hundred years has treasured as among the richest utterances of inspired worship.—*Rev. A. Thomson, D.D.*

[18833] The outward exercise was in fact a most beautiful reflection and expression of the inward sentiment; a kind of enacted faith. For what is saving faith but a recognition of Christ as the divinely appointed and Divine Saviour,

and a grateful appropriation of Him as our Saviour? Do not love to Christ and joy in Him mingle with faith as its first-fruits? And out of the abundance of the heart does not the mouth speak in "thanks unto God for His unspeakable gift"?—*Ibid.*

IV. HIS TESTIMONY TO CHRIST.

Its force, as presenting the alternatives of a dilemma to sceptical minds.

[18834] That Simeon spoke these words concerning the infant Christ is a fact as well proved as that Cicero wrote his orations against Catiline. The fact is phenomenal. Sceptics who deny the deity of our Lord must account for it. Only two suppositions are possible: either the aged prophet, frenzied with expectation long ungratified, made the mistake of singling out a peasant's child, and bestowing on him the honours due to the Messiah; or else that child was the appointed One for whom the ages had waited. The latter is the only reasonable conclusion. The divinity of Jesus Christ is not proved merely by stray sayings of His and His apostles. There is a vast array of circumstantial evidence crowding the whole history from the manger to the cross, that of itself is sufficient. At every stage of that wonderful life, its conditions and surroundings were only so many different tones of the one great voice of God, declaring, "This is My beloved Son; hear ye Him."—*Sermons by the Monday Club.*

V. HIS REWARD.

[18835] He was permitted to embrace the holy infant. He had been studying the predictions and types of the law; he had been long waiting for the wonderful One to whom they pointed, and now he was blest with His presence. "Then took he Him up in his arms, and blessed God." There is Joseph, there is Mary, there is the holy patriarch, and there is the mysterious babe! Who can describe the joy that was there! Oh! it was a blessed hour! the sweetest, the brightest, that had ever passed over Simeon's heart. As he took the incarnate One into his arms, the sunshine of heaven broke upon his soul; as he pressed Him to his heart, ideas, emotions, and beatitudes unutterable at once overwhelmed it like a flood; and before he uttered a word of gratulation to the blessed mother, he turned to God, and breathed his praises there; he blessed God. Oh! there are hours when the heart is too full to speak to any but its God.—*Caleb Morris.*

VI. HOMILETICAL SUGGESTIONS.

I The place selected by God for His revelation to Simeon suggests the blessedness of seeking God in His earthly house of prayer.

[18836] If indolence or indifference had kept

Simeon at home on that memorable day, he would have missed the revelation for which he had waited so long. "In the temple;" the aged prophet knew well that that was God's chosen place in which He delighted to make Himself known. The men of to-day do well to note the high honour thus put upon the place of public worship. There is a growing laxity in the matter of church attendance. Its importance is contested. What is one place more than another? is a current question. God is everywhere; why go into a church to meet Him? The reasoning is specious but inconclusive. God has chosen to put special honour upon His sanctuary—"The Lord loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob." Why? He has not told men why, but that is the fact. Somehow we cannot tell how the house of God is made the gate of heaven to the longing soul. The church is only a building of man's construction, and yet within its walls special and sacred influences are at work. The man who neglects public worship cuts himself off from a whole range of Divine forces. The Psalmist said, "A day in Thy courts is better than a thousand;" and that declaration was the utterance of an experience that counts for more than a thousand sophisms. As a rule, where are men led to see their need and guilt as sinners? In the church. Where is the proclamation of grace most fully announced? In the church. Where does the light of hope most clearly break through the cloud of conscious ill-desert, and the sombre shadows of coming doom? In the church. Infidelity may rave against the house of God as a relic of superstition, but it still remains true that the sanctuary is of Divine appointment, and that in it, as nowhere else, the glory of God is manifested.—*Sermons by the Monday Club.*

2 Simeon's prayer suggests the duty of being willing to live as long as God wills, and ready to die whenever He calls.

[18837] Simeon's is a beautiful view of the last days of an aged believer, and such are the effects of those Divine manifestations which he is often permitted to enjoy. We should be happy to remain in this world as long as God sees fit to retain us; and we should cheerfully await and welcome the hour when He calls us away. There is something unspeakably pleasant in the tranquil and joyous death of those whose privilege it has been to fulfil life's full career of toil and duty. Earth is no place of rest for them then. It is kind in God to allow them to "depart in peace." He only is able wisely to decide the place, the manner of our departure. Nor will He do it until our work is done. Our anxiety should be to know, not when we shall die, but how we shall live. Simeon did not live in vain up to a good old age, were it but for this record which is left us of his just and devout character, and the joyous anticipations with which he beheld the Lord's Christ.—*N. Adams, D.D.*

- 3 Simeon's willingness to depart suggests that a sight of Christ by faith makes death welcome.

[18838] There is, most commonly, an effort, with the dying, to be assured of the favour of Christ; and that willingness to die, which so often changes the views and feelings of those who are approaching the grave, is owing, in most cases, to an increased sense of the Saviour's presence. For such purposes, among others, He became flesh, that we, in the hour of weakness and death, might apprehend Him, as we cannot apprehend the infinite God. The presence of Christ makes death easy. He comes, and finishes His redeeming work with the believer, at death, and the sight of Him makes the Christian willing to depart; and not only willing, but frequently, he says, to depart and be with Christ is far better. Simeon, with Christ in his embrace, longing to die, is a good emblem of a believer on his dying bed, when Christ, whose friend he has been, reveals Himself as his Friend.—*Ibid.*

[18839] What a dreadful thing it is to see death before we see Christ! See death we all must—we all shall, and that soon; and, like our departed friend, perhaps unexpectedly. But have we seen Christ? Have we embraced Christ? Have we, by faith, seen the Divine grandeur of His person, the transcendent excellence of His character, and the preciousness of His cross, as the medium of pardon and the means of perfection? This is the great question. If we have seen the Saviour, then all will be well; then we shall not be alarmed when illness comes; then we shall be willing to leave the dearest friends we have, to descend the valley of death, and, with a firm step and a song of hope, we shall pass across it to the everlasting fields.—*Caleb Morris.*

[18840] That sight of the "salvation of God" more than reconciled Simeon to the thought of dying. It had been promised to him that he "should not see death until he had seen the Lord's Christ," and this blessed hour had beheld the promise fulfilled; but the very terms of the promise seemed also to indicate that the sight of Christ would mark the term of his continuance upon earth. And now that his arms at length embraced his Lord, he "could leave the world without a tear." It was enough for him to have lived to witness this spectacle of the world's light and deliverer. "Now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy word: for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation." It is not a prayer for dismissal from the world, but a thankful utterance of belief that the hour of his departure is at hand, and a tranquil confidence that when that hour arrives, it will be a peaceful passing away from service to glory, honour, and immortality.—*Rev. A. Thomson, D.D.*

[18841] Even a pagan prince, in a day of great honour to his country, could exclaim in a burst of patriotic gladness, "*Satis est vixisse*,"—"It

is sufficient for me to have lived to behold this." Old Jacob, too, when his favourite son was restored to him after an interval of many chequered and sorrowful years in which he had believed him to be dead, had said with touching paternal tenderness, "Now let me die, since I have seen thy face, because thou art yet alive." But Simeon, in what he now said, had infinitely better warrant for his words. A believing sight of Christ is that which enables us to look the king of terrors in the face without dread. With Him embraced in the arms of our faith, we have the sure pledge of heaven, for "he that hath the Son hath life."—*Ibid.*

JOHN BAPTIST.

I. GENERAL VIEW OF HIS CHARACTER.

[18842] Even if the expression of our Lord refers immediately to the office of the Baptist and to his position in close proximity to the kingdom of God which had now made its appearance in the world, yet it can nevertheless be also said of him with entire truthfulness, that he was one of the greatest of the pious worthies of the Old Testament in respect to his character and his conduct. We find, indeed, in the Old Testament not many examples of such purity of mind, of such faithfulness in the fulfilment of a calling, of such firmness in opposing the hostile spirit of the times, and of such humility and such consciousness of a subordinate rank as we have displayed in John the Baptist. We have seen that he practised from his earliest youth the greatest self-denial, and this he exhibited, in accordance with the Old Testament standpoint, in the most rigid ascetic practices. For this purpose he fled into the wilderness away from the sinful converse of the world; he renounced all that is accustomed to entice men and to lead them away into sinful indulgence; he sought to control the temptation of the flesh by the most rigid abstinence, by ascetic practices and mortifications of every kind. To live only in God and with God, and to perform His commands with the utmost diligence and faithfulness, were the objects of his earnest strivings.—*Rev. W. Duncan.*

II. HIS DISTINGUISHING CHARACTERISTICS.

I. Courage.

[18843] The courage of John was of the heroic sort; that of Elijah in his encounters with Ahab had not exceeded it. Charged to the full with the persuasion of God's righteousness, he took no heed of anything which Herod could do against him. Perhaps in the days of Herod's first seeming willingness to hear, the allurements of "soft raiment" were offered to the man of sackcloth; if so, they were spurned. "It is not lawful for thee, Herod, to have her:" the law of Moses, the law of nature, the law of God,

forbid your crime. There is only one course for you and Herodias to follow : separate at once, and then seek God's forgiveness. This, and nothing else, you must do. Till you separate, it matters not what else you do ; the wrath of God abides on you. That was the brave preaching of the man who was ordained to go before the face of the Highest.—*Rev. A. Symington, D.D.*

[18844] John the Baptist had addressed the voluptuous tyrant to his face. "For John had said unto Herod, It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother's wife." But, in any case, John would not confine himself to private speaking. The crime of the ruler was notorious and a matter of public interest among his subjects : and the messenger of God would, besides bringing it home to the tetrarch's conscience, denounce it publicly. And it was not one crime only which John spoke freely about ; Luke says he "reproved the ruler for all the evils which Herod had done." The man who had had plain words for the priests and people, for soldiers and tax-gatherers, found equally plain words for royal personages. Their station had, in his judgment, no effect except to enhance their responsibility : they were still men, soon to die, who had only the present opportunity to flee from the wrath to come ; and as such he must deal with them for God.—*Ibid.*

2 Humility.

[18845] John delivered his message with very genuine humility. It was touching to hear him say once and again, "I knew Him not." He was telling the darkling crowd, scarcely yet awake to the meaning of what he was saying, "There standeth One among you whom ye know not ;" but he will not put them at a distance from himself, and take up an attitude of proud superiority. He will rather stoop to them and say, "I was quite as ignorant as you in myself ; it was grace that made me differ ; and I am sent for the very purpose of lifting you up to hope for and to lay hold on the same grace."—*Ibid.*

[18846] You would have me boast (or grudge, which is in spirit the same) ; but how can I boast ? It is impossible. "A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from above." I am in myself a mere empty vessel : whatever good there has been in me was put in me by God ; I merely received it, and not by any right, or purchase, or power of mine, but as a gift : how then could I boast ? He anticipates Paul's appeal : "Who maketh thee to differ ? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive ? Now, if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it ?" And Paul's example : "By the grace of God, I am what I am." Their suggestion was at direct variance with all his testimony. "Ye yourselves bear me witness that I said, I am not the Christ ; but that I am sent before Him." There is One—One only—who has right to the heart-allegiance of every man ; and they could bear John

witness how often and how earnestly he had warned them not to wrong Christ and themselves by supposing that he was that One. He was His sandal-bearer, and even that was honour beyond his desert.—*Ibid.*

3 Disinterestedness.

[18847] Multitudes listened to him, trembled, and obeyed. Multitudes from far and near not only observed and heard him gladly, but in consequence (as it is written of the greatest and wickedest of his hearers) did many things. He must have been, as it is sometimes expressed, more or less than man if he had not felt it. But presently there arose One who was to eclipse him. He watched His rising ; he himself saw and worshipped. He perceived the diminution of his own hearers and followers : some of his own nearest disciples exchanged his service for the other. There were not wanting those who would call his attention insidiously to the fact, coming on purpose to say to him, as if with the sole design of awakening his jealousy, "Rabbi, He that was with thee beyond Jordan, to whom thou barest witness, behold, the same baptizeth, and all men come to Him." But their design was speedily frustrated. "John answered and said, A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven." If another is now enjoying a fame which was once mine, be quite sure that God who once gave to me has now given to another. Nor was I ever ignorant, or ever silent, as to this result. "Ye yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before Him." I told you from the first that I was only a voice crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of another ; of one preferred before me, because in the glory of an eternal existence He also was before me. And if the dignity of pre-eminence as a prophet and teacher and messenger of God be thus denied me, I have yet, as if in exchange for it, a happiness peculiarly my own. "He that hath the bride is the bridegroom : in the rejoicings of the nuptial day all eyes are upon him ; his is the position of honour and happiness : but there is joy that day for another ; "the friend of the bridegroom rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice : " he is happy because his friend is happy ; because he sympathizes in another's honour, another's hope. Even thus is it with me : "This my joy, therefore, is fulfilled. He must increase, but I must decrease." Does this offend me ? Nay, I know that he who, like me, is of the earth is earthly, and speaketh of the earth, he cannot compete with One who cometh from above, and who is therefore above all.—*Dean Vaughan.*

[18848] He said to Christ, "I have need to be baptized of Thee, and comest Thou to me ?" and could feel himself so far inferior in dignity to his great successor as to declare publicly that he was not worthy to undo the latchet of His sandals. This honest, upright sense of his unworthiness, this humility worthy of all admiration, he carried along with him throughout his

whole life; he, the Baptist, who stood so high in the estimation of the people as to be supposed by them to be the Messiah, to whom it would have been an easy matter to place himself at the head of a great party and to strive for worldly honour, or to announce himself as the theocratic king who was called to re-establish the Jewish nation in its former splendour and dominions, he who was continually urged by his own disciples to vindicate the superiority of his rank to that of Him who first received testimony in His favour from John himself, and had been accredited by him in the office which he assumed, declared nevertheless with calm firmness and confidence, "I am not the Christ: . . . I must decrease, but He must increase;" and not for a single moment do we see him varying from his proper position respecting the manner in which, in spite of all the temptations offered by his disciples and the people to the contrary, he was conscious that it behoved him to conduct himself for the correct discharge and fulfilment of his heavenly calling.—*Rev. W. Duncan.*

III. HIS TRAINING.

[18849] The boy's opening mind was first affected by godly example. In the priestly home there was nothing to pollute and degrade; but everything that dawning consciousness encountered there, tended to instil purity, truth, love, and the fear of God. This best influence, beginning earlier than any of a direct kind, would continue till Zacharias and Elisabeth fell asleep; and the contrast between their lives and the lives of others would be pondered.—*Rev. A. Symington, D.D.*

[18850] Often would there come over him the pathos of these words: "And thou, child, shalt be called the Prophet of the Highest, for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways." Not in one day or month or year would the full bearing of this commission be realized. As the apprehension of it grew fuller and fuller, clearer and clearer, possessed his whole being, each morning bringing a more vivid sense of the urgency of the crisis and of the commission laid on him and on no other, there must have come to John such concentration of thought and purpose, such entire consecration of himself to God, and such prolonged wrestling for more than a giant's strength, as we can but very imperfectly understand.—*Ibid.*

[18851] Thirty years were to pass before John should begin to preach; and the only record of these years is in two short sentences: "And the hand of the Lord was with him." "And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his showing unto Israel." We at first regret that the record is so brief and general; yet it is sufficient, when read in the light of Jewish history and of what has been already told concerning him, to enable us to think intelligently about the training through which this greatest of God's servants

passed. For there is no service without training for it; no human life starts from the point of manhood; the growth and discipline of childhood and youth were not dispensed with even in the case of the Son of man. Our self-confident impatience is rebuked by the fact that in His case and in the case of this His herald such preparation was not completed until each was thirty years old: for every year of public activity there were ten years in which the needed strength was being silently matured. In the Baptist's case how were these years spent?—*Ibid.*

[18852] John's long solitudes were a needful part of his preparation. Such withdrawing from the world has entered into the training of all great reformers. Moses, after making a rash attempt, was taken into the solitude of Midian. Elijah was kept in Cherith and Zarephath, and was afterwards guided by the Spirit into the wild desert of Horeb, to hear there the still small voice. Paul was not permitted to follow his own impulse in preaching Christ, until he had spent three years in the quiet of Arabia, receiving there the revelation of Jesus Christ. And there are many more recent examples. "Luther came forth from his temporary concealment, like a lion from his den, to roar in the teeth of all his foes. Knox meditated with his noble soul, his pious work of reformation, while he was lashed to the oar like a convict on the rivers of France, and from the place of his banishment he blew the first blast of his trumpet; after which he returned, like a flame of pure fire, to set his country in a blaze of religious ardour, and, like a pillar of fire, to guide them in their most glorious work."—*Ibid.*

[18853] In what way was John employed during his stay in the wilderness? He was engaged, no doubt, in perfecting his character, in mortifying his fleshly appetites, in the suppression of sinful desires, and in the study of the word of God. If, in general, the spending of life in solitude is not the surest means of overpowering sinful inclination, and of extinguishing sin, yet, in the case of John, one is authorized to conclude, from the serious earnestness which he exhibited in his whole life, and with which, therefore, he must have proceeded to the work of his own moral perfections, that the seductive power of all sensual enticements was lost upon him on account of his living in a manner and in a place far removed from their influence; and that, in like manner, the habit of practising a morality, confessedly only Jewish, but such as was prescribed by the law, removed far from him the temptation to many sins of practice and of thought.—*Rev. W. Duncan.*

IV. HIS MISSION.

Its nature, and connection with Christ's.

[18854] John's work, while it was essentially a preparation only, and therefore in one sense

temporary, was also a preparation absolutely required, without which the Christ could not come. On the one hand, John restored the law, and gave to it a more searching manifestation than it had ever received before; on the other hand, Christ brought grace and truth to light, gave them positive existence, fixed the eyes of mankind upon them, offered them, bestowed them; so that there is, no doubt, a strong contrast between the work of John and the work of Christ. But let us not fall into a mistake here: there is no opposition between the two; there is more of connection than of contrast.—*Rev. A. Symington, D.D.*

V. HIS MESSAGE.

[1855] We must be very careful not to divorce one part of John's teaching from the rest. The part on which we are, at first, most apt to fasten our attention,—and on which some who ought to have better apprehended the sacred narrative concerning John, too exclusively fix the minds of their readers—is the terrifying proclamation of coming wrath, the heart-piercing exposure of sin, the fiery denunciation of false refuges. But that did not stand alone, even for a time: that was not given first, and some gentler message months, or even weeks afterwards. John preached the baptism of “repentance for (*æ*=with a view to) the remission of sins.” John was not a pardoner, but he kept high and bright before the eyes of men the first and greatest blessing God has to bestow. It was no new idea; their Scriptures were full of it: but the Lord whom he heralded was to bring to light with surpassing glory both the willingness of God to pardon and the righteous ground of forgiveness.—*Ibid.*

[1856] We are likely to come far short, after all, of a profound apprehension of the Baptist's teaching; but without taking account of the deep meaning underlying his words, we might miss the scope of that teaching altogether. He called men to see, in their insensibility to Divine things, their formalism, their proud clinging by hopes of God's favour, when all the while they were indulging themselves in known sin, the decisive proofs that they were heirs of a fallen nature, in which “there dwelleth no good thing.” The repentance to which he urged them was, therefore, no barren form of sackcloth and ashes, but rather an abasing of themselves before God who searcheth all hearts, and crying, “Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me. . . . Create in me a clean heart, and renew a right spirit within me.”—*Ibid.*

VI. HIS BAPTISM.

I Its authority.

[1857] It is of some consequence to mark that John's baptism had whatever Divine sanction any rite can have. The proof of this is

abundant. The Baptist took his stand on the oracles of the Old Testament, as we have seen, and claimed the prophetic succession. “There was a man sent from God,” says the fourth Evangelist. “He that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me.” The distinctive rite had the same Divine authority as the teaching with which it was associated.—*Ibid.*

2 Its meaning.

[1858] The sign with which we have to do here, is the religious application of water. The Pharisees of John's day were familiar with this religious use of water, and had made ritualistic extensions of it far beyond the precepts of Moses. The meaning, then, of John's baptism was, in the light of his teaching, not obscure. On the one hand, it expressed by emblem that cleansing of the soul from the pollution of sin which accompanies genuine repentance: and it was a visible tangible pledge on the part of God of the truth of those things which His messenger proclaimed. Great Divine threatenings, and very great Divine promises, were the burden of John's message; and his baptism was God's pledge to the people of His willingness to give them that spiritual cleansing, the need of which was proved by the threatenings, the provision of which was secured by the promises. And, on the other hand, corresponding exactly to this, as the impression does to the seal, the baptism served as a solemn profession, on the part of the people, that they believed God's message sent through John; that they were honestly fleeing from God's wrath, and that they were anxious to receive “the remission of sins.”—*Ibid.*

[1859] His was a baptism of repentance and confession, ultimately leading to remission of sins. It was not a baptism of remission. John could not wash away sins. That cleansing from all unrighteousness for which he yearned, was to be effected by another baptism administered by other hands, not a baptism with water at all, but a baptism with fire and with the Holy Ghost. John knew that the call to repentance and to righteousness was not the same thing as the power to turn from sin: that the “generation of vipers” could not, by any baptismal rite, nor by anything short of Divine power, become the brood of doves. He might move the passions and stir the fears of the multitude, so that, as Josephus says, “they were eagerly ready to take his counsel” and accept his solemn warning. But John was not exalted to *give* them repentance or remission of sin. He could not put them right with God, nor cleanse the thoughts of their hearts.—*H. Reynolds, D.D.*

3 Its relation to Christian baptism.

[1860] John's baptism was not the baptism of Christ. That could not signify what this signifies: the righteous ground of pardon fully displayed in the blood of the cross; the sanctifying of the Holy Spirit no longer hoped for, but freely bestowed. That could not pledge

from God to man the blessings which this pledges: pardon and a new heart, freely and now given—for those who received this baptism at the first were told to look up to Jesus, “a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance and remission of sins,” even now “shedding abroad the Holy Spirit, the Father’s promise;” and it is the same to-day. That could not pledge from man to God what this pledges; the faith of the baptized in the Lord Jesus Christ as their righteousness, the actual receiving from Him of the new birth. All the indignation with which we recoil from the destructive heresy of sacramental efficacy must not make us hide the grandeur and the solemnity of what Christian baptism signifies and seals to faith.—*Rev. A. Symington, D.D.*

[18861] It was “from heaven,” and served a great purpose in pledging men to the dawning hope. As Paul put the matter so wisely to the twelve at Ephesus, it bound them “to believe on Him who should come after, that is, on Christ Jesus.” He Himself, in that early stage of His work on earth which so closely resembled the work of His forerunner, took up this preparatory baptism, and dispensed it by the hands of His disciples. It disappeared only in that great day when the Lord Jesus “made all things new.”—*Ibid.*

VII. HIS INQUIRY.

[18862] “Calling unto him two of his disciples he sent them to Jesus, saying, Art Thou He that should come? or look we for another?” This question causes undeniable perplexity. Did the man who had seen the opened heavens, who had so strenuously asserted that Jesus is the Son of God, the Lamb of God, the Baptizer with the Holy Spirit, the Bridegroom of the Church, now doubt his own testimony? Could any prison have so darkened his soul? Was he to resemble Elijah in his faint-heartedness and petulance when he cried, “It is enough: now, O Lord, take away my life, for I am not better than my fathers?” Had his heart after all been cruel, and set on a gourd now withered by the frown of Herod? There is no occasion to entertain any such thoughts concerning John. One solution, indeed, would dispose of all difficulty at a stroke—the supposition that John himself was not in doubt, but sent his disciples to get from the Master that full satisfaction which no teaching of his could give them. But one feels that this solution—although it be that in which many have rested, and still rest—is too easy. It does not well accord with the language of either narrative, in which the question is plainly given as John’s question, and the answer is sent by our Lord to John: “Go and show John; go your way, and tell John.” We must look deeper. Now, it is not said, because John became gloomy and disappointed in prison, he sent his question; but, “When John had heard in the prison the works of the Christ, he sent.” The question arose not from lack of knowledge so

much as from comparative fullness; not from any cloud darkening his soul, but from his being unable to adjust the mighty truths of which he was persuaded to the facts so far as they had already taken place. This inability brought a measure of unrest and “searching,” and he took the right means for allaying it.—*Ibid.*

[18863] There is not the least occasion to suppose that John’s question was caused by any failing of his faith. We have only to bear in mind that he was a man, short-lived and short-sighted. Perhaps he had expected that one year, one life-time at longest, was to see the accomplishment of all the promise, at least for the holy land and the holy people; whereas he saw no signs of that, but, on the contrary, saw the Lord persevering in *not* claiming His right as the Anointed One; organizing no community; cleansing the temple indeed once, but leaving it to be again polluted; doing, in fact, very much the same work which John himself had done, only with the addition of miracles, but continuing in the lowliness and poverty and weakness that seemed strangely inconsistent with what John knew Him to be. Therefore he asked—merely asked, and surely was right in asking—whether this coming was to fulfill all? or whether he should look for another incarnation? Great reformers have fallen into the natural mistake, less excusable in their case seeing we are in the full light of the New Testament, of expecting all at once when a revival has begun, instead of remembering that God accomplishes His work according to His own standard, not ours, “one day for a thousand years, a thousand years for one day,” and waiting on those hasteless processes by which He accomplishes Divine perfection. The blame of such a mistake we may, perhaps, impute to the imprisoned seer; but no more.—*Ibid.*

VIII. HOMILETICAL HINTS.

Ad clerum.

[18864] “He must increase, but I must decrease.” It is a necessity; and the more true-hearted a preacher of Christ is the less will he regard it with sorrow. If he succeeds in his work, it is in filling men’s hearts with Christ that he succeeds; and the less then will men regard any preacher as their master. The best of preachers are frail and short-lived, and unfit to rule: Christ alone endures, and inherits all things. To Him the gathering of the people,—on His head the many crowns. The names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb may be in the foundations of the New Jerusalem, but only the Lamb is the temple and the light. Never was John more “a shining light” than when he spoke these words, shining with the lustre of genuine greatness, because “burning” with the full ardour of devotion to Christ. Already he was casting his crown at the feet of the King, and crying, “Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power.”—*Ibid.*

[18865] John is another instance, among many ancient and modern, of the worthlessness of even great popularity. Crowds followed him while he lived, and after his death the popular feeling in his favour was strong enough to forbid any one pronouncing him less than a heaven-sent prophet; but comparatively few obeyed the word he was sent to preach, and public favour could not long shield him from the murderous hatred of royal transgressors.—*Ibid.*

THE TWELVE APOSTLES.

I. THEIR APPOINTMENT.

1 It was eminently significant.

[18866] The selection of twelve disciples by our Lord to be His agents and ministers in the establishment of His kingdom, was undoubtedly an event of critical import to the Church. It determined some principles of universal application, and suggests considerations of permanent interest to all who meditate upon the influences which have affected the state of humanity, and contributed most powerfully to the spiritual development of its leading and representative races.—*Rev. F. Cook.*

[18867] The appointment of the twelve apostles was in an especial sense an act which marked the inauguration of that kingdom, an act by which our Lord represented the assumption of the powers which belonged to Him as the true Sovereign of the theocracy, for which all the institutions of Judaism were understood by the people of Israel themselves to have been but preparatory.—*Ibid.*

2 It was unique in the selection exercised.

[18868] The point which has in all ages struck observers most forcibly, is undoubtedly the singular disproportion between the work imposed upon those twelve Galileans and what we must believe to have been their natural capacities and powers. And, in truth, there is a most remarkable contrast between our Lord's mode of proceeding in this transaction and that of all founders of religious or intellectual systems which have left any lasting impress upon the destinies of man. All the great leaders of thought have always sought in the first instance to attach to themselves some converts or adherents whose vigorous character or commanding position would secure for them a certain influence over the men of their time.—*Ibid.*

[18869] Here, as in all great, essential characteristics, our Master stands alone. His power, His influence, is all His own. All that His followers, His servants, His agents, were to have or to be, they were to owe to Him. His contact with every heart, with every race of humanity, was to be direct. The channels through which His influence was to be conveyed were

such as could contribute nought to its fulness; the fibres along which the electric current of His own impulsive energy was to run were to be simply passive in the transmission. He was to be all in all, at once the centre of the new life, and present in all His power wherever His name should be known.—*Ibid.*

II. THEIR SOCIAL AND INTELLECTUAL POSITION.

[18870] Look at them as they came to Jesus. What do we see in them? Poor men indeed, ignorant, uninformed, untouched by "the gracious gleam of letters," unknown to science or to art, regarded by those of their countrymen, whose intellects had been sharpened by the mental discipline of their schools, as unfit even to hear the truths, of which the Rabbis deemed themselves the exclusive possessors. Such were those disciples in truth, judged merely by a secular or intellectual standard; but that was not all: it is not the real aspect of their character to one who looks on them with a spirit divested of pharisaic or worldly prejudice. Those poor men were lovers of truth, seekers after righteousness.—*Ibid.*

III. HOMILETICAL REFLECTIONS.

1 The selection of the twelve apostles is an illustration of that sovereign love in Christ which is independent of human merit.

[18871] With all the distinctness and separateness with which Christ called Andrew, and Peter, and Philip, and Matthew, did He fix His thoughts on you, and call you. He came "to seek and to save" you. There was a time when, at your work, or in your travels, or in your home, or in your pew, or on the deep; sick, bereaved, or rejoicing in some great blessing, Christ stood, and said to you, Follow Me; and you arose and followed Him. See, in the calling of these men, how Christ has treated you; and be prepared, by adoring thoughts of His sovereign love, to cast your crowns, with the apostles, at His feet, saying, "And hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father." What humility it should excite in us; how destitute of pride, and haughtiness, and coldness, and repulsiveness, how meek, and gentle, and affable, as Christians, we ought to be, to think that, if we are Christians, it is of pure grace, mercy to the undeserving, the voluntary search of the Good Shepherd after sheep that had wandered, and had loved to wander!—*A. Adams, D.D.*

2 The selection of the twelve apostles reminds us that the kingdom of heaven belongs to the poor in spirit.

[18872] These men had no ambitious, aspiring thoughts, such as learning, and riches, and rank, and talents too often excite. Passing by, that very morning, perhaps, the place where the Sanhedrim were in session, or the scribes and

Pharisees, and all the doctors of the law, were gathering together,—neglecting, too, the whole priesthood,—Jesus goes to some obscure men, poor in spirit, and makes them rulers over all that he had. It is a great satisfaction, when God calls us to any promotion, whether of happiness or honour, to reflect that we had not been laying ambitious plans for it, but were meekly and patiently following our humble business, or our appointed work, whatever it may have been; and that He, in His own good time, called us to inherit and to serve in the place which He had chosen for us. . . . That is the best honour and happiness to which God calls a man when he is not expecting it, but is contentedly doing his duty, as unto God and not unto men, in the place which Providence had assigned him. In like manner, if we but feel our unworthiness, and that the least of God's mercies is more than we merit, and when He afflicts us, that it is far less than we deserve, we shall be sure to receive great spiritual blessings.—*Ibid.*

- 3 The promptness with which the twelve apostles forsook all and followed Christ reminds us of the way in which we should obey His call.

[18873] We have all been called by Him. He is calling some of us now. See how these men responded, when Jesus said to them, as He now says to some of us, Follow Me. Andrew and Peter left their nets and followed Him. Some of us, there is reason to fear, would have said, Lord, suffer us first to enclose this draught of fishes. We are poor. We need to labour diligently for our livelihood. James and John, had they felt like some of us, would have said to their father, What shall we do? Matthew the publican would have pleaded his pressing business. There is something—shall we call it sublime, or beautiful?—in the way in which those men obeyed Christ. Half the merit of obedience consists in promptness. A lingering, hesitating child never satisfies a parent's wishes and feelings; but, "Here am I; send me," always awakens love.—*Ibid.*

- 4 The history of the twelve apostles reminds us of the rewards which Christ gives to His faithful servants.

[18874] No one ever served Him for nothing. If He requires much of us, He gives more. "He that loveth son and daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me." "If any man come after Me, and forsake not all that he hath, he cannot be My disciple." "If any man hate not his own life also, he cannot be My disciple." Such are His requisitions. What did He give these followers to recompense them for their self-sacrifice? In the first place, the pleasure they had in doing it was reward enough. But, in the second place, they enjoyed the richest of blessings. They had the Saviour's constant instructions. They enjoyed His constant watch and care. "Those whom Thou hast given Me I have kept." "While I was in the world I kept

them in Thy name." They enjoyed His love. "Having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end." He bestowed great favours upon them.—*Ibid.*

[18875] What though the most of them suffered martyrdom? They rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer. When Peter came to be crucified, he only requested to die with his head downward, as not worthy to suffer like his Master. Their pains were sharp, but they were short; and the end was life everlasting. What must be the reflections of those men in heaven! Some of them look back to that Lake of Galilee; they think of that moment when Christ called them. Matthew recollects his seat at the customs—how Christ came by and said, "Follow Me;" and from the moment of their prompt obedience they date the beginning of their blissful eternity. Had one of us, perhaps they say—had one of us hesitated to follow Christ; had we loved the world; had we been afraid to commit our all to Christ; or had we feared that we should not hold out, and so had not set out—what should we have lost? Where in the universe is there wealth enough, honour enough, bliss enough, to make one of them willing that his emblazoned name should be raised from that foundation-stone?—*Ibid.*

THE SONS OF THUNDER.

I. THE NAME "BOANERGES."

I Question as to its significance.

[18876] What was the meaning and purpose of this name? That it was intended as a name of honour was never for an instant doubted by Christian antiquity; and indeed, since all acknowledge the title given to Simon, which immediately precedes it, to have been such an honourable superaddition, it seems wholly inconceivable that there should have been another name imposed on two other of the elect twelve in quite a different intention and spirit. Indeed, there are few interpretations of Holy Scripture more monstrous in their kind than that other supposition, namely, that the two sons of Zebedee acquired this addition, "sons of thunder," from the untimely and passionate request of theirs, that they might be allowed to call down fire from heaven on the inhabitants of that churlish Samaritan village (Luke ix. 54). Calmet was, I believe, the first who started this explanation—at least I have not seen it traced to an earlier source, but it has found much acceptance since. Thus Tholuck assumes it as certain, and affirms that the name was imposed upon them "to remind them evermore of that inner foe with whom they needed to contend." But not to urge that there is no mention of thunder, or allusion to it, in that passage, nor yet at 2 Kings i. 9–12, to the precedent of which the two apostles avowedly refer ("as Elias

did"), the deriving of their name from this fault of theirs goes counter to the whole tenor and analogy of Scripture. The new name there is evermore the expressing and fixing of the new nature; it is the record of some notable achievement, some glorious confession by word or deed, through which the servant of God, who thus wins this name, has been permanently lifted up into a higher region of being than that which he moved in before (Gen. xxxii. 28; Judg. vi. 32; Acts iv. 36, 37; Matt. xvi. 18; Rev. ii. 17). It marks some signal epoch or crisis of his spiritual life, which with its results is by aid of this new title stamped upon him for ever (Num. xiii. 16; Gen. xvii. 5, 15).—*Abp. Trench.*

2 Question as to its disuse.

[18877] Various explanations of this fact have been offered. Thus it has been ingeniously suggested that the name was, so to speak, a dual name, and belonged to the two apostles, not severally and independently one of the other, but only as a brother-pair, and in their connection one with the other, in the same way that Dioscuri belonged to Castor and Pollux, or to Zethus and Amphion; which being so, the occasions of its use must have been of rare occurrence, and with the early death of James (Acts xii. 2) must have ceased altogether, the name itself becoming, as one might say, extinct with him. And yet, ingenious as this explanation must be owned to be, it is doubly at fault. Even granting that this was such a dual name, and only proper as applied to the pair, yet of such opportunities for its use quite sufficient occur in the gospel history to prove the inadequacy of this explanation. . . . Besides, the assumption on which the explanation rests is erroneous. There may be some ambiguity in our Version, "He surnamed them Boanerges," but there can be none in the original. Any one turning to it will at once perceive that St. Mark distinctly implies that each of the twain, by himself and apart from the other, was by the Lord called "a son of thunder;" that while the Evangelist records the "*name*" Peter as given to Simon, when he tells of James and John it is no longer the name (*ὄνομα*), but the "*names*" (*ὀνόματα*), "sons of thunder," which they receive; and thus no room is left for such a solution of the difficulty. But may not this difficulty be of a much simpler solution? Of no other than this, that the surname Boanerges, being common to both apostles, would not have sufficiently designated which of them was intended; and that this inconvenience may have hindered it from ever growing into an appellation; which, indeed, there was no need that it should do, having been given with quite another object and intention.—*Ibid.*

3 Evidence of its propriety.

[18878] There can, of course, be no difficulty in regard to St. James. We have not, indeed, very much in his history accounting for and illustrating this name; but then we have not

much in any shape about him; and in what we have there is nothing which does not perfectly agree with, or even confirm, we may say, its fitness. And here, indeed, when we are gathering notices which should account for their being so called, that fiery zeal of his and of his brother, who would have burnt up the village that refused the shelter of a night to their Lord, may be fitly adduced as illustrating this title, though utterly misleading when cited as explaining and justifying it. It illustrates this title, because it shows us what in these two apostles was the natural groundwork of their character—a groundwork which Christ certainly did not dissolve; but rather, calling them these "sons of thunder," recognized; even while by the same act He pledged Himself to purify it from whatever of earthly and carnal mingled with it, and threatened to spoil it.—*Ibid.*

[18879] The very failings which the brother apostles displayed were failings of no common souls; were as luxuriant weeds, which, weeds as they were, testified for the richness of the soil from whence they sprang, and its capacity for bearing the very noblest fruits. In their sense of righteousness and judgment, in their indignation against sin—all this, indeed, displaying itself in an impatient and untimely severity, that would have consumed the sinners and the sin together, rather than the sin alone, with a saving alive of the sinners—we see the "sons of thunder" on their natural side, and as they would have been but for that grace, which, retaining and exalting all the good of the natural character, did at the same time transform it from human to Divine, separate all the drossy elements of earth, and retain only the pure gold of heaven.—*Ibid.*

[18880] The early martyrdom of James, the fact that he, first of the apostles, stained with his blood the persecutor's sword (Acts xii. 2), we may accept this as a further attestation that he indeed was all that his name implied. A "son of thunder," and, as such, arousing, startling, terrifying, he may have caused the thunders of the Divine displeasure against sin to be heard with a clearness and energy which drew on him the peculiar and early hatred of the ungodly world—the holiness of his life lending additional weight and terror to his words—for in him no doubt that saying will have found its fullest application, "Cujus vita fulgor, ejus verba tonitrua."—*Ibid.*

[18881] Much of the embarrassment which some feel, when they would make an estimate of what in St. John there is to justify this title, arises from their leaving the Apocalypse out of consideration. For it is in the Apocalypse that those which eminently may be called the thunder-voices make themselves heard. This they do with a greater loudness and distinctness than in any other book of the New Testament. It need hardly be observed that the thunder in Scripture is no mere natural phenomenon. We

do not read there that *it* thunders, but that *God* thunders ; the thunder being contemplated there as His voice (Psa. xviii. 13, xxix. 3, lxxviii. 33, lxxvii. 18, civ. 7, cxliv. 6 ; Job xxvi. 14, xxxvii. 4, 5, xl. 9 ; 1 Sam. vii. 10), as the voice above all of His displeasure against the sins of men (1 Sam. xii. 17, 18). The terror which the thunder inspires springs from the interpretation of it which every one unconsciously makes, from the sense which every one has, that it is this voice in nature, wherewith God is speaking, and speaking in anger, to a sinful world. And what book is there in Scripture so full of these voices of God as that with which the canon is sealed ? Nor certainly can it be regarded as a mere accident that, with the exception of this passage about St. John, only in his own writings is there any mention of thunder in the New Testament at all.—*Ibid.*

II. THEIR WRONG-SPIRITED REQUEST.

It was the outcome of faith and reverence for Christ, yet was perhaps felt by themselves to be unfitting.

[18882] “Lord, wilt Thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them even as Elias did?” With all of carnal and sinful which mingled with this proposal of theirs, yet what insight into the dignity of their Lord, and the greatness of the outrage directed against Him, does it reveal ; what faith in the mighty powers with which He was able to equip His servants ! How mighty a power this was in the eyes of one of these two is evidenced from the fact that, when in the Apocalypse he records the great wonders and lying signs of the false prophet, the only sign which he specially names is, that “he maketh fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men” (Rev. xiii. 13 ; cf. Lev. ix. 24 ; 1 Kings xviii. 38 ; 1 Chron. xxi. 26 ; 2 Chron. vii. 1). And yet it might almost seem as though, with all this confidence of theirs, there was a latent and lurking sense upon their part of a certain unfitness in this their proposal ; and thus, out of no desire to intrude into their Lord’s office, but only out of a feeling that this avenging act might not exactly become Him, they proffer themselves as the executors of the judgment. It will become the servants, though it might not perfectly become the Lord.—*Ibid.*

III. THEIR REBUKE.

Its precise import.

[18883] Already, as would seem, He who was the pattern of a perfect patience had turned to go, that He might seek in another village the hospitality denied Him in this. They meanwhile had lingered behind, hardly enduring that the guilty village should escape the punishment which was its due. But now on this word of theirs, “He turned, and” turning “rebuked them : Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of.” We must beware

here of extenuating these words of our Lord, as though “what manner of spirit” did but signify “what temper ;” of paraphrasing thus, as some do—“You know not that you are speaking out of your own hasty passionate temper, being hurt as much by the slight upon yourselves as that put upon Me, even while you suppose yourselves zealous for My glory and for nothing else.” But “spirit” here means not the spirit of a man, but the spirit of God ; and the saying is a far weightier one than such an extenuation of its sense would leave it. “You are missing,” Christ would say, “your true position ; which is, having been born of the spirit of forgiving love, to be ruled by that spirit, and not by the spirit of avenging righteousness. You are losing sight of the distinction between the Old Covenant and the New, missing the greater glory of the latter, and that it is the higher blessedness to belong to it.” Thus Hammond rightly remarks : “Christ tells them they know not of what spirit they are, that is, they considered not under what dispensation they were.”—*Ibid.*

[18884] It behoves us to see clearly that there is no slight cast on the spirit of Elias. I quote from a sermon of Bishop Andrewes. This truth Bishop Andrewes has well expressed in his quaint style. “Elias’ spirit, I hope, was no evil spirit. No ; but every good spirit, as good as Elias’, is not for every person, place, or time. Spirits are given by God, and men inspired with them, after several manners, upon several occasions, as the several times require. The times sometimes require one spirit, sometimes another. Elias’ time, Elias’ spirit. As his act good, done by his spirit, so his spirit good in his own time. The time changed ; the spirit, then good, now not good. But why is it out of time ? For ‘the Son’ of man is come.”—*Ibid.*

PETER.

I. GENERAL VIEW OF HIS CHARACTER.

[18885] I assume that there dwelt in him a steadfast faith in Christ ; but there were found in him also certain defects, such as impetuosity, ambition, self-will, and self-confidence, which sometimes led him into positions of peculiar temptation, and caused him to neglect those safeguards without which the strongest faith cannot but fail.—*Rev. Sir E. Bayley.*

[18886] We must not undervalue his other excellencies, his energy and zeal, his practical vigour, his warm-heartedness, his humility and magnanimity, his entire devotion to his Lord. His character was a most lovable one : we love him for his virtues : we love him for his very faults : without a tinge of meanness, or avarice, or insincerity ; perfectly guileless, frank, and open, he was a noble, honest, true-hearted man. But that which made him what he was, that

which gave unity as well as force to his character, was the simplicity and stability of his faith. He was great as an apostle, but he was above all great as a Christian: yea, his apostolic eminence was entirely owing to the depth and the reality of his faith and life in Christ.—*Ibid.*

[18887] I think there is ground for believing that the substratum of St. Peter's natural character contained in it the elements of steadfastness. In that memorable interview on the banks of the Jordan, in which Jesus first made Himself known to His future apostle, the Lord bestowed upon him a new name—a name full of significance. "And when Jesus beheld him, He said, Thou art Simon, the son of Jona: thou shalt be called Cephas," the Syriac or Aramaic word for rock: "which is by interpretation," *i.e.*, in the Greek language, "Petros." The inference surely is, that our Lord spoke with a miraculous discernment of His disciple's character, as well as with a prophetic insight into his future career; that Christ saw before Him one who was by nature firm, steadfast, rock-like; one not to be overthrown, however severely he might be tried; one fitted well to grasp the living truth, and to lay deep the foundations of the new kingdom; and that he saw, moreover, one for whom Divine grace would do much; one who, when freed from all enfeebling elements, would stand forth immovable in his convictions, a true example of Christian stability.—*Ibid.*

[18888] It is not difficult, from the frequent references to Peter occurring throughout the Gospels, to obtain some estimate of his natural temperament. It is evident that among the other apostles he was eminently the man of action—a man of quick perception and rapid execution. Combined with this practical tendency, he possessed a strong, courageous spirit. Hence, perhaps, it is that Christ surnamed him "the Rock;" for although this name in a measure arose from the prominent part he would take in founding the future Church, yet all Christ's names are indicative of character. And it is equally evident, that underneath the rough, strong courage of the man's nature, there existed profound and exquisite tenderness. We almost always find these characteristics side by side in men of the noblest boldness. And as with David, so with Peter, with all their fire, they had the pity of a little child. But the most characteristic feature of the man is this—that his strong courageous activity rose rather from impulse than from calm, thoughtful determination. He was not bold from deliberate reflection, but from the strong excitement of the moment. He seldom seems to have acted from quiet resolve, but rather from the prevailing emotion of the hour. And so every new impulse was likely to turn him aside from his path and change his whole purpose.—*Rev. E. Hull.*

II. HIS DOMINANT CHARACTERISTIC.

He was continually swayed by a vehement impulsiveness.

(1) *As exemplified in his walk upon the waters to Christ.*

[18889] "Lord, if it be Thou, bid me come unto Thee on the water." His eager faith, and impetuous love, now prompted a wish to be close beside that object of veneration. He felt that at His bidding he could attempt a deed above mortal strength. His Lord tried him, well knowing the issue. And He said—"Come." Forthwith there appeared that phase in Peter's character which we shall have again to mark. For a while, through faith in his Lord, he did this miraculous walking well; but presently he thought of the boisterous wind. He turned his eye from the object of faith to look at objects of sense; and now—what might be expected followed—he began to sink. The strong faith failed. The courageous heart, all at once, became full of cowardice. The bold demand of hopeful trust was exchanged for the almost despairing prayer—"Lord, save me." There had been presumption in his faith, and wherever there is presumption, faith does not long hold up its head. In this circumstance we see the man. It reveals his soul. Here was a dark shade of Peter's character, as well as a bright trait. We are struck with the rapid changes of his experience; how one instant he soars, and the next sinks. All this we shall find repeated as we proceed. And here, do not some of us recognize in him the image of ourselves? Of this at least be assured, that the moment faith takes her eye off Christ, and looks at the tempest, instead of Him who alone can uphold us above the dashing surge, the soul will be submerged in fear and agony. The physical law is repeated in the moral world; walking in dangerous places we must look up, not down.—*Rev. J. Stoughton.*

(2) *As exemplified in his grand confession of faith in Christ being immediately followed by an endeavour to dissuade Christ from His appointed path of suffering.*

[18890] By the momentary force of faith he, first of all the apostles, made the open confession, "Thou art the Son of God," and immediately afterwards the child's heart of pity within the man's heart of fire trembled at the prospect of his Master's suffering, and he endeavoured to turn Christ from His chosen path of sorrow. Roused into burning ardour by Christ's prophecy of his denial, he challenged all terrors of imprisonment and death to tear him from His side, and shortly after we find him denying the Lord for whom he had sworn to die.—*Rev. E. Hull.*

(3) *As exemplified in his attitude towards Christ when about to wash his feet.*

[18891] "Then cometh He to Simon Peter: and Peter said unto Him, Lord, dost Thou wash my feet?" Peter was startled at the thought of

One so great performing for him an office so lowly. The veneration he felt for his Master was shocked by the proposal. His words indicated no want of desire for an interest in His favour; indeed, anything but that. It was love blended with awe which prompted the frank expostulation. The words sprang from reverence, while they really seemed to border on irreverence. But when Jesus intimated the symbolic character of the act, showing that it was a kind of holy baptism—that it pointed to the sanctification of His followers; and when He thus declared its necessity, “If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with Me”—then what a change there was all at once in the thoughts and words of the apostle! The light let in gave a new colour to his ideas, and a new direction to his will; and he was now as eager to submit, as he was previously determined to refuse. Before he would not permit Christ to touch him at all; now he would be washed by Him all over. “Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head!” The impulsiveness of the man is again manifest; but here it does not appear, as in former cases, rushing from faith to mistrust—plunging out of light into darkness; it is now seen all along in its changeful movement under the dominion of a constant heart.—*Rev. J. Stoughton.*

V III. HIS GREAT CONFESSION.

[18892] “But whom say ye that I am?” To this question Peter immediately replied, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.” It is not “we say,” or “I say,” but “Thou art.” It is the expression of the deepest inward conviction, bringing out both the human and the Divine nature of our Lord: “The Christ,” the Son of David, the anointed King; “The Son of the living God,” the eternal Son, having in Him the Divine Sonship and nature, in a sense in which they could be in none else. This noble testimony interprets to us the character of Peter: it verifies the Lord’s discernment: it abundantly justifies the bestowment of the new name. Did the Gospel narrative close here, we should all admit the stability of the apostle’s faith.—*Rev. Sir E. Bayley.*

[18893] The excellence of this confession is, that it brings out both the human and the Divine nature of the Lord: the Messiah, the Son of David, the anointed King, and the Eternal Son, begotten of the Eternal Father, as the last word most emphatically implies; not Son of God in any inferior, figurative sense; not one of the Sons of God, of angelic nature; but “the Son of the living God,” having in Him the lordship and the Divine nature in a sense in which they could be in none else. This was a view of the Person of Christ quite distinct from the Jewish Messianic idea.—*Dean Alford.*

[18894] “The heavenly truth flashed on him,” it has been similarly remarked, “did indeed contain the meeting-place between the two

dispensations; the anointed Messiah whom prophets and kings had desired to see; the Son of Him who once again, as at the burning bush, had come with ever-living power to visit and redeem His people. . . . In that confession were wrapt up the truths which were to be the light of the future ages of Christendom.—*Dean Stanley.*

IV. HIS COMMENDATION AND COMMISSION.

[18895] “And I say also unto thee, that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” Unfortunately this passage has become mixed up with the Romish controversy. Papists have eagerly laid hold upon it, as if it countenanced the pretensions made by the bishops of the seven-hilled city to a supreme lordship over Christendom. But the fact is, that whatever these words may signify, they have no more to do with the bishops of Rome than with the bishops of Jerusalem, Antioch, or any other place—that no ecclesiastical connection whatever can be traced historically between Peter and the Roman prelates—that it is quite certain the former never was bishop of the imperial city—that between this inspired Galilean teacher of our faith, and the pontiff, Pius IX., there is no chain of episcopal succession, but a chasm as broad as the universe; and, moreover, that the passage before us does not apply to Peter as a bishop at all, but as an apostle supernaturally gifted, who in his wonderful office never had, or could have, any successors. God had directly inspired him with a knowledge of the truth concerning Christ—that truth which lies at the foundation of saving faith. Peter, through the grace and power of the Spirit, thus became identified with that truth which had been wrought into his soul.—*Rev. J. Stoughton.*

[18896] He was commissioned to be an authoritative bearer to the world of the blessed message. In no other sense could he be a rock on which to build the church than that in which all the apostles were, who, along with the prophets, were, by virtue of their inspired authority, and as connected with the chief corner stone, “foundations,” from which our belief is to rise, and on which our obedience is to rest. Did not Peter, by his preaching on the day of Pentecost, by the testimony which he then bore to Christ, prove himself a rock? Were not living stones then built up upon his ministry, by the conversions which the Spirit effected through it? Did he not also show that he had the keys, when he opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles; and did not he, and the rest of his inspired brethren, exercise a power of binding and loosing in their original enactment and administration of ecclesiastical law?—*Ibid.*

[18897] He did not say, Upon Peter; for He did not found the Church upon a man, but upon faith. What, therefore, means, "On this rock"? upon the confession contained in his words.—*Chrysostom.*

[18898] Utterly groundless is the notion that Peter had, or pretended to, any claim to dictate to the other apostles, to decide finally on all questions of faith or practice, and to bear rule over the universal Church. . . . We find him, when censured, either vindicating himself where he was right, or, where he was *not* right, modestly submitting to reproof and correcting his fault.—*Abp. Whately.*

[18899] It is not unworthy of preliminary note, that there are two words employed in the Saviour's address to His apostle—Thou art Peter, a stone (*Petros*), and upon this rock (*Petra*) I will build My church; *Petros* being simply a stone: *Petra* a bold, immovable rock. So that the Romish writers are wide of the truth who would represent Christ as asserting that Peter was the rock on which the church was to be built, seeing, if our Lord had intended to convey any such meaning, He would not have employed a mixed metaphor, but would at once have said in direct words—"Thou art *Petros*; and upon thee will I build," &c. An excellent practical expositor puts this same observation in a different form: "When our Lord says, 'Thou art Peter,' or thou art a stone, He makes use of a masculine substantive, and one usually applied by the classical writers to a fragment of a rock, or such a stone as a man can lift. When He continues the sentence, 'and upon this rock,' He changes the word into a feminine noun, which is always employed by the classical writers to express the solid rock itself, and He continues to refer to this feminine noun throughout the sentence;—a change of expression, which, to say the least, would be extremely improbable, if our Lord were speaking of the same person or the same thing throughout."—*J. Macduff, D.D.*

V. HIS FALL.

1 It was aggravated by his previous great spiritual privileges, and the warnings of his former failures.

[18900] None of the apostles had been more loved, more trusted, more honoured than he; enjoying constant and endearing intercourse with his Lord; admitted into the inner circle of fellowship; the auditor of these matchless discourses spoken on Mount Hattin; the witness of these miracles of power alike in Capernaum and Jerusalem. He had beheld the glory of the Transfiguration—an eye-witness there of his Lord's majesty; he had sat a guest at the supper-table, listening to those valedictory words of kindness which must have reminded him more of a parent speaking to his children, than a Master to disciples; he had partaken of the consecrated bread, and drank the sacramental

cup, the emblems and memorials of redeeming love, and the ratification of previous vows of allegiance. With reiterated protestations he had said, "Whatsoever others do, as for me, I will serve the Lord."—*Ibid.*

[18901] We might well have expected that if any grew apostate and renegade, it would not be he who walked fearlessly at his Master's bidding on the midnight wave, who nobly confessed His Divinity at Cæsarea Philippi, and avowed, almost in the words spoken by the young Moabite of olden time, "Where Thou goest, I will go; . . . death itself shall not separate between Thee and me." Yet at this critical moment, when his Redeemer stood companionless and alone among His foes, "a lamb dumb before His shearers," uncheered by one sympathizing look in the palace-hall of Caiaphas—nay, rather, surrounded by an infuriated throng of blasphemers, who are soon to wreak upon Him their vengeance—His tender heart is wounded most of all by the faithlessness of His own familiar friend. Peter might even have made some partial amends and compensation now for the slumber of Gethsemane. He might by his presence and looks have given the meek Sufferer the assurance that amid that surging crowd, with their rough jostling, cruel taunts, and ribald jests, there was one heart at least that beat true to Him in its unvarying and unswerving attachment. But memory and heart seemed to be strangely dormant and extinct.—*Ibid.*

2 It was occasioned, perhaps, by all hope of a temporal kingdom being at an end.

[18902] "Then said Jesus unto Peter, Put up thy sword into the sheath: the cup which My Father hath given Me, shall I not drink it?" As if He had said, "Submission to God, not resistance to man, is the law of My kingdom: by patience, not by force, are our triumphs to be won." That sentiment was a heavy blow to Peter's prejudices. Perhaps here we have the special occasion of his fall. Was it that his carnal expectations of Messiah's reign were now dissipated—that the bright clouds of his imagination now melted away—that the hope of Jesus being such a Redeemer of Israel as he had looked for was now at an end, because, instead of ascending the throne, He was going to the bar—and to the cross? At any rate there was now some tremendous revulsion in the soul of this impulsive man. He could have bravely fought, but he could not patiently submit. The faith that would have triumphed in the battle-field could not rejoice in the furnace of suffering.—*Rev. J. Stoughton.*

3 It was undoubtedly the outcome of natural temperament.

[18903] His natural temperament must, in some measure, modify our judgment of his sin. Had he been a man of cold, calculating, unexcitable nature, his sin, great as it was, would have been still greater; but being a man of

fiery, impulsive nature, we can partly understand how he fell. Because he had not yet learned utterly to distrust himself—because he was yet relying exclusively on the power of his own ardent nature, not knowing that in its rapid changes it was frail as a broken reed—it is not wonderful that he publicly denied his Lord.—*Rev. E. Hull.*

VI. HIS REPENTANCE.

1 His sorrow was not the result of knowledge that his guilty denial was suspected by his enemies.

[18904] If you survey all the circumstances of his position, you will be almost compelled to believe that he felt he was discovered. During the hour which he passed in that judgment hall, undergoing the keen glances of the servant and the soldier, and hearing it said again and again that he was a disciple, he must have been convinced that he was known. His rough Galilean accent betrayed him. His repeated protestations—protestations rising at last into oaths—only add to the proof that he was conscious of detection, and was vainly endeavouring to conceal his alarm. He knew thus that they were aware of his guilt—he felt sure that he was regarded as an apostate—but yet he exhibited no sorrow for the fact that he appeared degraded in the eyes of men.—*Ibid.*

2 His sorrow was not the evidence of remorse.

[18905] Most certain it is that Peter must have experienced the profoundest remorse during that hour. After the holy companionship of Christ, especially after the last solemn supper from which he had just gone, conscience must have been quickened into power, and must have been thundering loudly at the door of his heart. Why did he protest with cursing and swearing, “I know not the man,” if he were not striving vainly to quiet the restless voice that told him he was uttering a cruel lie? But it was not that which made him weep—it was not conscience alone,—it was the glance of Christ that melted him to tears.—*Ibid.*

3 His sorrow was caused by the sense of Christ's love.

[18906] “The Lord turned and looked upon Peter.” That look uttered what no words could speak. Must it not have implied, “Knowest thou not the Man? Hast thou forgotten Him so utterly, that within thy heart there lives no memory of what He has done for thee? He has prayed that thy faith might not finally fail, prayed for thee and thy brethren through midnights on the mountain, and hast thou forgotten Him so soon? Knowest thou not Him who has given thee all that is best in thy life, inspired thee with faith in God, patiently listened to thy doubts and lovingly cleared them away? He has long travelled His weary path for thee and thy brethren. He

is now going to die, and thou leavest Him to die unfriended and alone. This once only thy devotion has been tested, this once love has asked a small return, and this once thou hast cruelly failed!” “The Lord turned and looked upon Peter,” and thus without one spoken word of reproach—with only one calm sad glance from amid the dark throng of the soldiers, He went to His cross. Well might Peter weep, and weep bitterly! for the word was spoken, the deed was done; it was written on the eternal tablets of the past, and no tears could wash it away. “The Lord turned and looked upon Peter!” He had withstood the questions of men and the discovery of his crime unmoved. He had withstood the thundering voice of conscience within, but one glance of that eye, one mighty rushing back into memory of the boundless love it recalled, and his heart was broken, and true life began to spring through the falling tears.—*Ibid.*

4 His sorrow was characterized by such depth and sincerity as to issue in the conquest of self-trust.

[18907] Leave the judgment hall. Go to the Sea of Galilee where Peter had first been called by his Master. The same company are together again, but yet how different are they! There is a change in Christ. The weary suffering of life has passed, the last sorrow is over, the grave is conquered. And now mark the attitude of Peter, and watch the result of that grief which had arisen from the glance of Christ's love. The quick impulsiveness and fickle ardour which used to characterize him have passed away. In the old time he was ever ready to assert his loyalty, and to challenge all opposition to weaken his faith. A few days before, in front of the danger which was threatening his Master, he said, “Lord, I am ready to go with Thee to prison and to death,” and immediately afterwards he denied Him. But now, grieved that Christ should ask him the third time, “Lovest thou Me?” he can only say quietly, “Lord, Thou knowest all things, Thou knowest that I love Thee.” It has been beautifully observed that once he had trusted boldly to the power of his own love to Christ, now it is the power of Christ's love to him which had broken down all self-trust. The old fiery self-reliance had gone—he had learned that his own strength was weakness. This suggests a law which is broadly true. Repentance is the actual turning to God, away from self. Self-trust is the strength of temptation, and the man who has once seen himself in the light of Christ dare rely on himself, only, no more.—*Ibid.*

VII. HIS GROWTH IN GRACE.

[18908] See him, after the vision on the roof of the house at Joppa, with a heart expanded by a new human affection, the outgrowth of his attachment to the exalted Redeemer, and spreading forth its branches under the training hand

of that Divine husbandman of the heart, to whose culture he submits with gladness:—"God hath showed me that I should not call any man common or unclean." The narrow-minded Jew has now grown into the sublime dimensions of a Christian. See him actually following his Lord to prison, and there sleeping between two soldiers, not offended by this captivity, but knowing that "if we suffer with Him, we shall also reign with Him."—*Rev. J. Stoughton.*

[18909] The great change in Peter, as indicated in his writings, most strikingly appears in that lowly and gentle spirit of meekness under suffering which breathes throughout, in contrast with the rash resentment which impelled him to draw the sword and resist violence by force. "Pass the time of your sojourning here in fear." "As new-born babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby." "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake." "This is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully." "If, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God: for even hereunto were ye called." "If ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye." "Be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble." Thus he writes to the strangers scattered abroad, and, while he shows no abatement in earnestness and fervour, it is plain that he has put off the lion and put on the lamb; that he has changed the temper of the old Hebrew warriors—of Barak, and Samson, and Gideon—for that of Him who said, "Learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls."—*Ibid.*

[18910] We know how his fickleness passed away, and how his vehement character was calmed and consolidated into resolved persistency, and how his love of distinction and self-confidence were turned in a new direction, obeyed a Divine impulse, and became powers. We read how he started to the front; how he guided the Church in the first stage of its development; how, whenever there was danger, he was in the van, and whenever there was work his hand was first on the plough; how he bearded and braved rulers and councils; how—more difficult still for him—he lay quietly in prison sleeping like a child, between his guards, on the night before his execution; how—most difficult of all—he acquiesced in Paul's superiority; and, if he still needed to be withstood and blamed, could recognize the wisdom of the rebuke, and in his calm old age could speak well of the rebuker as his "beloved brother Paul." Nor was the cure a change in the great lines of his character. These remain the same, the characteristic excellences possible to them are brought out, the defects are curbed and cast out. The new man is the old man with a new direction, obeying a new impulse, but retaining its individuality. Weaknesses become strengths; the sanctified character is the old character

sanctified; and the law of the change is, "Every man hath his proper gift of God, one after this manner, and another after that."—*A. Maclaren, D.D.*

[18911] What a change in Simon the son of Jonas! What a difference from his former self! How grace has renewed him! How the descent of the Spirit has purified his heart, crushed his pride, destroyed his self-confidence, made him humble, checked his irregularities, and sanctified his eager impetuous soul, so that it fluctuates no longer, like a mighty wind, veering from one point of the compass to the other; but it flows like a deep and noble river toward that ocean of love and glory, where it longs to lose itself. A breath, indeed, once blows on it, which sends ripples backward. The Peter of an earlier date seems revived again. The man who had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles at Antioch, refused, because of the Jews, to eat with the Gentiles. An old habit came over him; it was a relapse. But Paul withstood him to the face. Afterwards, all came right again. They were friends, perfectly "at one" together, when the Galilean apostle so touchingly alluded to his beloved brother.—*Rev. J. Stoughton.*

[18912] As the influences of transforming, always attaching themselves to the constitutional character of an individual, purify and ennoble it; so in this instance what Peter became by the power of the Divine life was in a measure determined by his natural peculiarities. . . . A capacity for action, rapid in its movements, seizing with a firm grasp on its object, and carrying on his designs with ardour, was his leading characteristic, by which he effected so much in the service of the gospel.—*Neander.*

VIII. HIS POSITION IN THE CHURCH.

[18913] Without Peter, humanly speaking, the infant Church must have perished in its cradle; he it was who under God's blessing caught the truth which was to be the polar star of its future history—who guided it safely through the dangers of its first existence; who then, when the time came for launching it into a wider ocean, preserved it no less by his retirement from the helm which was destined for another hand. He was the rock, not the builder of the Christian society—the guardian of its gates, not the master of its innermost recesses—the founder, not the propagator, nor the finisher—the Moses of its exodus, not the David of its triumph, nor the Daniel of its latter days.—*Dean Stanley.*

[18914] With him, by the very force of the terms, the purely personal and historical part of our Lord's promise of necessity came to an end. Never again can Jewish zeal and Jewish forms so come into contact with the first beginnings of Christian faith—never again can mortal man find himself so standing on the junction of two dispensations—the Church once founded

can have no second rock—the gates once opened can never again be closed—the sins which were then condemned, the virtues which were then blessed, the liberty which was then allowed, the license which was then forbidden, whether by word or deed, of the first apostle; were once for all bound or loosed in the courts of heaven, never again to be unbound or bound by any earthly power whatever.—*Ibid.*

IX. TRADITIONS OF HIS MARTYRDOM.

[18915] At the instigation of some of the faithful, Peter was urged to flee for his life. At first the proposal was met by him with a decided negative, justly fearing reflections on his courage and constancy—that friends and foes might alike accuse him of shrinking from those sufferings for his dear Lord, to the endurance of which he had exhorted others. But the appeal of their prayers and tears as to the value of his life to them and the infant Church, fortified, too, as the recommendation was by Christ's own injunction (Matt. x. 23), for the moment overcame his scruples. With reluctance he acceded; and by night was assisted over the prison wall. He betook himself along that same Appian Way, by which probably, as in the case of Paul, he had entered the city. He succeeded in getting two miles beyond the Porta Capena, and was nigh the spot, bordering on the wide Campagna, which was soon after sacred as the place of repose for Christian dead. The same Lord, whom last he saw in the ascension-cloud, appeared to him hastening in the direction of the city. The fugitive apostle immediately recognizes the Divine Master. The same penetrating look, doubtless, was cast upon him with which he had once been confronted in the palace-court of the High Priest—a look of sadness and gentle reproach. Peter was the first to break silence with the question—"Lord, whither goest Thou?" The answer was immediately returned, "I go again to be crucified." The interrogator continued, "Lord, wast Thou not crucified once for all?" "Yes," was the reply, "but I saw thy flight from death, and I go to be crucified in thy stead." "Lord," was the immediate answer of Peter, "I go to obey Thy command." "Fear not," was the Master's farewell word, as He vanished from sight, "for I am with thee." The apostle at once retraced his steps, returned to his cell, and surrendered himself to his keepers. . . . We see nothing in the narrative itself to relegate it to the category of the purely mythical and legendary.—*J. Macduff, D.D.*

X. HOMILETICAL HINTS.

The history of Peter suggests that we should be prepared, not for one particular, but for any, form of trial which God may see fit to send us.

[18916] It is common to found on the history of Peter a warning against presumptuous self-

confidence. Such a warning is pertinent and useful.—Peter trusted to himself. We too are apt to trust to ourselves; it is one of our most common habits. We learn from Peter's fall that it is also one of our most fatal habits: But we must go deeper for the whole of the caution which his history affords. Peter was preparing himself for one kind of trial: his Master was preparing for him another. It would seem that when Peter declared he would never forsake Jesus, he did not once think that Jesus would voluntarily submit to an ignominious death. Whatever he anticipated, he had not the remotest idea of that; so, when the trial came, he was utterly unfitted for it. This may serve to account for Peter's fall; whereas his fall would be to us unaccountable, if we thought that he had exactly apprehended beforehand what he was about to pass through. And it is just on this account that we often fail in the hour of trial. The trial is not what we expected; we have been laying up a store of faith and courage for something else, and, when the real appointment of Providence arrives, we are taken unawares. We should learn from this not to pre-judge what will be the manner in which God will try us; not merely to hold ourselves in readiness for one kind of test only, but rather to prepare ourselves for all kinds of trials, by a simple trust in that Divine power and grace which will prove equal to our protection under all possible circumstances.—*Rev. J. Stoughton*

ANDREW.

I. HIS CONVERSION TO CHRIST.

1 It was effected through the instrumentality of his old master.

[18917] It was John the Baptist that, under God, turned him to Christ. John was truly a great man and a model to all teachers. When a greater teacher than he appears, he turns the attention of his disciples to Him. Religious teachers who have little souls are ever studiously anxious to keep their disciples entirely under their own influence: when greater teachers appear in their circle they rather warn their hearers against them than direct them to their instruction. Not so with John the Baptist: when the greater appeared he retired, and directed his hearers to Him "whose shoe's latchet he was not worthy to unloose." God employs men to convert men.—*Germes of Thought.*

2 It was effected through the instrumentality of a great truth.

[18918] The truth was, that Christ was "the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world." This declaration is tantamount to all that is involved in the cross, and the cross is

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the converting power. The soul craves deliverance from sin, and Christ is the only deliverer.—*Ibid.*

II. HIS SERVICE FOR CHRIST.

1 He displayed the zeal of a true missionary.

[18919] Having found the inestimable treasure (of the Messiah), he longs that it should be shared, and especially by his brother, "his own brother," as the Evangelist most impressively says. Moreover, he loses no time. He goes "the same day." This is particularly noted. And if, as appears to have been the case, the day was far spent, the promptitude is all the more marked. We could not find a better specimen of true, working, sensible Christianity. In the example which he sets there is alacrity in doing what is in hand—there is the encouragement of others—there is practical usefulness—and there is the success which comes when a man is in earnest.—*Dean Howson.*

[18920] See playing outward the holy power which has been at work in Andrew's own heart and character. It begins to take the form of active usefulness, and to testify for Christ abroad; the operation of the missionary spirit. No sooner is the awakened heart in actual fellowship with Christ, and settled on that centre, than it begins to cast about and ask what it can do for Christ, no matter in what sphere. Andrew begins at the nearest point—his own household. There is no postponement for a complete plan, or for great occasions. His heart is full, and he does what he can. How soon this spirit in all his followers would bring the world to His feet—so fearless, so self-forgetful, so hearty!—*Bp. Huntington.*

[18921] True religion is ever communicative: he who finds Christ for himself is always ready and willing to proclaim Him to others. Nor was Andrew satisfied with merely telling his brother of the great discovery. There was an introduction to be afforded as well as information given. "He brought him to Jesus." What would an introduction to the palace of the Cæsars have been, compared with this?—*Rev. James Spence, D.D.*

[18922] The first and most significant fact concerning him is that related directly upon his visit to the Saviour. His finding his brother Simon, and bringing him to Jesus. There is nothing to show positively which was the elder of the two brothers. The impression we get is that the quiet Andrew was the elder, and the impetuous Simon the younger. However that may be, Andrew introduces his brother to Jesus, and then sinks back into obscurity. To the Gospel historians he is known then and afterwards as "Andrew, Simon Peter's brother." The second separate notice of Andrew is at the

feeling of the five thousand. He it was who found out the little lad with the barley loaves and fishes, and, the boy being perhaps timid, brought him with his store to Jesus. The third time he appears is when certain Greeks came up to worship at the feast, and desired to see Jesus. They applied to Philip (attracted, perhaps, by his Greek name), Philip told Andrew, and Andrew and Philip together told Jesus. On all three occasions he is engaged in introducing others to Jesus. Never obtruding himself, or making much of his position, or glorying in his dignity; not talking, or questioning, or disputing, or taking up the Lord's time with his own affairs, but bringing those to Him who might get good or do good, and then retiring into the congenial shade. He was one of John the Baptist's disciples, and seems to have drunk deeply into his teacher's beautiful spirit.—*Anon.*

[18923] Andrew brought Simon to Jesus. It was his great work in life. We are told nothing of his eloquence, his intellect, his knowledge; nothing of his exploits, his travels, or his martyrdom. Only on two other occasions, when his ready helpfulness shows itself characteristically (John vi, 8, 9, xii. 20, 22), do we even read his name, save in apostolic lists. So far as we know, Andrew lived but to utter that one sentence, "We have found the Christ," to perform that one act, to direct his brother to the Saviour.—*S. Green, D.D.*

2 He displayed a spirit of self-effacement.

[18924] "He must increase, but I must decrease," John said, speaking of Christ, and Andrew learnt the lesson. He brought Peter to Jesus, and Peter immediately began to fill the large, prominent place. But there was no envy in the heart of the first comer. No jealousy, no wounded pride, no temptation to self-assertion. The Lord, he thought, could but be well served. It was enough for him that he was the first to tell his greater brother the good news about Christ; he had that honour, and it sufficed him. Peter was a mighty man. Jesus, even at first knowledge of him, called him a rock. And he did a grand work. But Andrew was great, too; among other things, most chiefly in this very willingness to be least. And he also did useful and abiding work.—*Ibid.*

[18925] The apostle who occupies the first place in the Church's yearly festivals proves to have been one who sought not the first place for himself, and yet found it. He is always lost in another's brightness. He never puts himself prominently forward. Only once is he related to have spoken to our Lord, and then it was in dutiful reply to the question, "How many leaves have ye?" Another person is always found standing by his side, participating in his privileges, halving his honours, sharing his joys.—*Dean Burgeon.*

III HIS RELATIVE POSITION AMONGST THE TWELVE.

1 It was in one sense eminent.

[18926] Andrew has good claims to be ranked as the first of the apostles. He was not only among the first called to be disciples of Jesus, but he was certainly the first to display the true spirit of Christianity. He is not the writer of an epistle, he is not the founder of a church, we read nothing of him in the Acts of the Apostles; yet he is the first of the apostles, the first to feel the power of the truth as it is in Christ, and the first to make that truth known, quietly and wisely, but promptly and earnestly. He is known not from his own great doings, but from his relation to one whom God enabled to do great things.—*A. Symington.*

2 It was in another sense subordinate.

[18927] "Simon Peter's brother." His position is like that of all who, as life goes on, find themselves compelled to surrender early dreams of ambition and be content to shine as satellites ancillary to a planet rather than as principal orbs. He walks through life under the eclipsing shadow of the Rockman—a lot full of temptation to mean jealousy, but full also of opportunity for the triumph of humility and generosity.—*Rev. C. Reed.*

IV. HOMILETICAL SUGGESTIONS.

1 The history of Andrew suggests that the effect of grace received in the heart is love to our fellow-man, and a desire to promote his highest welfare.

[18928] When Andrew found the "pearl of great price" he immediately said within himself, "Would that my dear brother Simon were a sharer of my joy!" It is ever thus with all who know the Lord. The love of Jesus enlarges the heart in love to all: first, to members of the same family; then, to the circle of acquaintances; next, to those of the same country, and then to the whole of mankind.—*A. Foote.*

[18929] Grace, when really received, becomes a diffusive principle. It is a leaven which spreads, a seed which multiplies. It immediately kindles desires that others may partake of it, and share in its precious benefits. And especially will this be felt, as in Andrew's case, toward those who belong to us by ties of kindred or affinity.—*Rev. J. Craig.*

[18930] "He first findeth his own brother Simon." He hastens to him who had been his companion from youth, the child of his own parents, the sharer of his own toils. He cannot rest until Simon also is partaker of his joy. Thus should it be always. The bonds of affection and sympathy are designed by God to issue in spiritual good. Especially may we hope to be the Lord's instruments for blessing those who are linked with us in closest earthly bonds.—*Bp. Lee.*

2 The history of Andrew suggests that the power of influence is independent of personal superiority.

[18931] The least may influence the greatest. It was St. Andrew that influenced St. Peter to "come and see" Jesus. One least spoken of among the apostles influenced the one who took the foremost place among them as if to show that such power is independent of personal superiority. It is not the great and gifted alone who exercise this mysterious power of influence. It is a universal law of life. These personal influences, first of Jesus on Andrew, then of Andrew on Peter, were the beginning of the conversion of the world.—*Canon Carter.*

3 The history of Andrew suggests him as the pattern "unprofitable servant."

[18932] Andrew, in the quiet, unobtrusive service he rendered, was a faithful follower of his Lord and Master. His type of character is the one that will always be most needed. There is only room in the Church for a few Peters: there is room for an unlimited number of Andrews. Yet we hear much of Peter and but little of Andrew. Is the modest man unhonoured, therefore? No. The lesson is simply this: that it does not matter whether much or little is heard of disciples, so that they do their duty and commend themselves to the notice of their Master in heaven. An easy lesson do we say? That must be scanned. Let us try and realize the thing in our own case. No mention of our name, no acknowledgment of our service, no thanks, no praise; none knowing of us or of our doings, none caring to know. We all the while labouring on, cheerful and happy and contented. Not minding that other workers are glorified while our efforts are passed by. Not thinking of ourselves at all. Is such behaviour a matter of course? Rather, I think, we may affirm that none can receive the exhortation to it save those to whom it is given.—*Anon.*

JAMES.

I. HIS CALL.

It was obeyed with the unhesitating readiness of faith.

[18933] In the midst of the humble occupations of his daily life, as a fisherman on the Sea of Galilee, engaged with his father and his brother in mending their broken nets, a voice from the shore is heard calling to him, and saying, "Follow Me." The terms in which this event is described seem rather to imply that it was the voice of a stranger; of one whom he knew not; of whose claim to his obedience he had as yet had no proof. "Going on from thence, Jesus saw two brethren, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in a ship with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and He called them." But it was the voice of one who had authority.

There was that in it which tokened divinity, and commanded the obedience of man. "They immediately left the ship, and their father, and followed Him." A power was upon them which they dared not to resist, an attraction which they could not escape. They left all, and followed Him. True, that all was but little: a fisherman's net, a boat, a hut. But it was their all—their home—their treasure: their father lived there, and their kindred: that was the life they had led from their youth up: that was to them the centre of every association. Of the wide world around they had no conception: it was to them a waste wilderness, into which they were to go forth, not knowing whither they went: and He therefore who sees not as man seeth, and estimates acts, not according to their apparent magnitude, but by the spirit which prompts them, recognized here that mind of faith in which He has pleasure, and to which in all ages He bears witness.—*Dean Vaughan.*

II. HIS SPIRITUAL DEFECTS.

They sprang from his being deeply imbued with the spirit of the Old Testament and untinged with the spirit of the New.

[18934] We are not left without proofs that he found a difficulty in rising to the height of his new standing; that he was still sometimes too little in harmony with the life to which he was called, to be able to enter into its best and highest happiness. Worldly notions of advancement, a mistaken and perhaps not quite unselfish zeal for his Master's honour, betrayed sometimes the lingering infirmities of earlier nature, and drew upon him a rebuke from Him whom he had left all to serve. "Ye know not what ye ask." "He turned and rebuked them, and said unto them, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of."—*Ibid.*

[18935] Though the two men from heaven spoke of the decease that Jesus was to accomplish at Jerusalem, James understood them not. No doubt, for some time, he looked upon this display of Christ's glory as a pledge of His future conquests as an earthly king, and did not think of His suffering. He had in him, like his brother John, the spirit of the old Jews. He was full of resentment against the enemies of the cause of truth, righteousness, and God. He breathed the spirit of some of David's psalms; he had in him some of Elijah's burning indignation. This was the case when the Samaritans would not receive his Master, and he and his brother said, "Wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did?" Whatever there might be good in this feeling of James, there was much that was wrong. It was, no doubt, honest. It was, in a certain sense, devout. It was for God's sake, for Christ's sake, that he would have the delinquents punished, not from personal revenge: but the feeling was not Christian—not Christ-like. It was the opposite of the patience, and humility, and

meekness, and forbearance which became the Lord's followers. He was evidently at present unimbued with the spirit of the gospel. This is plain from what our Lord says, "Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them."—*Rev. J. Stoughton.*

[18936] Immediately after our Lord had been most distinctly speaking of His death, the mother of Zebedee's children, with her sons, came worshipping and desiring a certain thing of Him. Mark says, James and John made the request. What they asked was in the very face of what their Master had been telling them—just as people will sometimes, after hearing a discourse, make remarks or inquiries which show they have not at all apprehended what they have heard. Christ said, "What would ye that I should do for you? They said unto Him, grant unto us that we may sit, one on Thy right hand, and the other on Thy left hand, in Thy glory." As Jesus told them before they knew not what spirit they were of, so He tells them now, they know not what they asked. They were evidently full of false notions and ambitious views. They were thinking of crowns, and thrones, and courts, and palaces, and emoluments, and honours.—*Ibid.*

III. HIS SPIRITUAL TRAINING.

1 He was permitted to witness the raising of Jairus' daughter.

[18937] We meet with him in the house of Jairus, in the company of Peter and John. It is a scene of weeping, but also a scene of wonder. Our Lord saith unto them: "Why make ye this ado, and weep? the damsel is not dead, but sleepeth;" and the people laughed Him to scorn. But when they were all put out, "He taketh the father and mother of the damsel, and them that were with him, and entereth in where the damsel was lying," and He saith: "Talitha cumi, Damsel, I say unto thee, Arise." And she did arise. Then were they astonished with a great astonishment. In that astonishment this apostle must have shared; and how must the miracle have strengthened the early faith then growing in his heart!—*Ibid.*

2 He was permitted to witness the transfiguration of Christ.

[18938] His name occurs in connection with those of Peter and John, as present at one of the most wonderful periods of our Lord's earthly life. The effect which it produced on him is not recorded, but we are compelled to believe that the impression it made must have been very great. He, and the other two apostles, went up with Christ into a mountain to pray—probably the hill Tabor—which rises in solitary grandeur in the midst of a plain, commanding from the summit a prospect of singular extent and glory. There, in some sequestered spot, upon the side of that verdant and tree-covered eminence, in some lonely grove, perhaps, which clothed its

slopes, was James favoured to see his Master, first at prayer, and then transfigured. An order of events was that which foreshadowed what perhaps, if not then, yet afterwards, the apostle discerned—that in the attitude of prayer we are best prepared for celestial honours and enjoyments. Was it not taught him? is it not taught us, by this circumstance that he who sinks into the dust in prayer is taking the first step toward soaring to heaven in praise?—*Ibid.*

[18939] They who represented the bygone economies of the law and the prophets, now came to do honour to Him who was to introduce the reign of truth, and righteousness, and love, for which those economies prepared by sacrifice and prophecy, and by the long training of moral commands and ceremonial precepts. Did Peter say: "It is good for us to be here"? Did not James think so too, though, with less impetuosity of speech, he did not venture to utter all his thoughts? In after life, did he not feel it good to be with Jesus amidst persecution and sorrow, in prison and at the moment of death—and, sympathizing with Peter, and James, and John, true believers have ever felt how good it is to have Jesus near—to have Him when they are on the sick and dying bed—to have Him in the chamber of mourning—to have Him by the side of the sepulchre—to have Him in the dungeon—to have Him at the stake.—*Ibid.*

3 He was permitted to witness the agony of Christ.

[18940] In one of these gardens is the Son of man, watching and at prayer—sorrowful watching, intense prayer. The season is night. The air is still. Silence is broken only by the distant murmur of the city. Lights twinkle over the grey walls. Brighter lights are twinkling in the heavens. The moon is up. How touching and softening are all things round! How agonizing the Saviour's agony! Peter, and James, and John, are sore amazed and very heavy. They sleep, but it is not the slumber of indifference: it is the slumber of those who, wearied by sorrow, can no longer be kept awake by it. Yet after all—at that time—James did not comprehend his Master's character and mission; carnal notions were still cleaving to him, and they awakened doubts respecting the very Master whom he had seen on the mount in His glory.—*Ibid.*

4 He was able to glorify God by a martyr's death.

[18941] Herod "killed James the brother of John with the sword." So James did now drink of the cup his Lord drank of. There was truth, after all, in his words, "We can." But he could not have done it when he said it. A change had come over him now. He had given up all thoughts of carnal empire and could rejoice in his Lord's spiritual reign. He had become a patient disciple of the Lamb of God. The Boanerges, the ardent, passionate, boisterous man, had

softened down into the calm, quiet Christian, the cheerful worker, the hopeful sufferer.—*Ibid.*

IV. HOMILETICAL SUGGESTIONS.

The readiness of St. James to obey the call of Christ is an example to all to whom that call comes to-day.

[18942] May we not say that, if it would have been an awful thing to refuse Him that spake on earth; to refuse to follow Him who stood before us clothed in all the infirmities of man's nature; much less can we escape if we turn away from Him who speaks to us from heaven, and with all that weight of evidence as to His Divine authority, which His resurrection first adduced, and which has been growing in force and clearness with every year from that time to this? And yet how few are there who do feel that God is speaking to them; who recognize in Christ's gospel a call to them, and heartily set themselves to hear and to answer it!—*Dean Vaughan.*

[18943] We need a spirit of readiness to follow God's commandments; and that only God can give us. A readiness to follow. Because it is quite possible to miss hearing the call. It is addressed to all men; but thousands live and die without its ever being really audible to them. Worldly and carnal affections, as they are here called, engross their whole minds, and they have no time to attend to the commandments of Christ. Or again, we may hear the call—we may wish that we could obey it—but there is an indisposition in our hearts to its demand, which makes it still ineffectual. Worldly and carnal affections have taken hold upon us, and we can scarcely even pray to have the chain broken. Some evil lust, some overmastering passion, some inordinate affection, or, it may be, a mere lightness and unimpressiveness of mind, thwarts and counteracts the first risings of faith in Christ. We are not ready to obey His commandments. Or, once more, even when the general call has been heard and listened to; when we have, as we trust, given ourselves up to follow Christ; still the work is not wholly done: the daily call to continue following Him, to be faithful in His service, comes suddenly, abruptly, without notice, in a form we looked not for; and he who is not ready, he who is not constantly watching, constantly praying for light and guidance from God, is surprised, taken off his guard, and falls, before he perceives it, into a state of disobedience and estrangement from Christ.—*Ibid.*

JOHN.

I. FORMATION OF CHARACTER.

[18944] The circumstances of his young life supplied most of the conditions of a noble character. He inherited, no doubt, a good bodily organization. His parents were not

doomed to breathe the impure air of a pent-up city. Their home was out in open nature; the fresh breezes of the hills and the sea breathed around their dwelling. Their habits were not those of self-indulgence and indolence which generate disease, nor, on the other hand, of hard brain-work which tends to enervate the system. The work of the muscles and the limbs out upon the shore, the sea, and the field was their invigorating occupation. The child thus inheriting what is almost essential to mental and moral greatness—a healthful frame—grew up amidst the same healthful and invigorating conditions. He breathed the same air, he sailed with his father in the skiff, and toiled with his father at the net. His early impressions from nature would be large and deep. Our greatness is determined by our ideas, and our ideas by our impressions. Small ideas can never make a great man, nor can great ideas grow out of small impressions. Large plants must have a deep soil. Superficial impressions can never grow great thoughts. Hence some philosophers, not as I think without reason, maintain that, as a rule, a man must be brought up amidst grand scenery to have a grand soul. Be this as it may. To John's young eye nature towered in some of her most lovely and majestic aspects, and spoke, in the rustle of lofty trees, the howl of winds, and the roar of billows, strange and stirring poetry to his heart. His religious training, too, was undoubtedly favourable to future greatness. Whether his father was religious or not, it is clear that his mother was, notwithstanding the gust of ambition that once swept through her soul. Her services to Jesus, especially her following Him to the cross, show that she was a woman of noble type, generous, loving, self-sacrificing, heroic. The mother, more than any other finite force, shapes the mind, moulds the character, and rules the destiny of the boy. Her sons are as clay in the plastic hands of her influence. John was trained religiously, and no doubt before he knew Jesus he had attended the ministry of the Great Forerunner. The fulminations of that Reformer would prepare his young heart for the serene and sanctifying ministry of Jesus of Nazareth.—*Anon.*

II. GENERAL VIEW OF CHARACTER.

[18945] We apprehend, that in those incidents which are narrated by Matthew, Mark, and Luke, we find the key to John's natural character; that he was a man of vigorous feeling, strong prejudice, and impassioned mien. That was the ground which the religion of Christ had to work upon in the case of John. In the Gospel which bears his name, and in the Epistles and Revelation, we see what, through his Master's teaching and grace, he became. The rough projections, the sharp angles of his character, were worn down. The stormy sky of his earlier history, whence the sun looks out angrily from amidst tempestuous clouds, was

changed, towards the close of the day of life, for a serene and transparent atmosphere, revealing a sunset intensely bright and burning, but calm and still. The man of revengeful and ambitious excitement was transformed into the apostle of love. The mild and gentle traits of John, we apprehend, were not the cause, but the effect of the Saviour's friendship. He brought not to his Master's bosom a lamb-like meekness, but he found it there. Communion with his Lord transformed him. Three years of discipleship, many years afterwards of conflict, toil, and suffering, through Divine grace, made him another man. After his conversion to Christ we mark the progress of the change in this respect.—*Rev. J. Stoughton.*

[18946] The character of St. John has been often mistaken. Filled as he was with a most Divine tenderness—realizing as he did to a greater extent than any of the apostles the full depth and significance of our Lord's new commandment—rich as his Epistles and his Gospel are with a meditative and absorbing reverence—dear as he has ever been in consequence to the heart of the mystic and the saint—yet he was something indefinitely far removed from that effeminate pietist that has furnished the usual type under which he has been represented. The name Boanerges, or “Sons of Thunder,” which he shared with his brother James, their joint petition for precedence in the kingdom of God, their passionate request to call down fire from heaven on the unoffending village of the Samaritans, the burning energy of the *patois*, in which the Apocalypse is written, the impetuous honour with which, according to tradition, St. John recoiled from the presence of the heretic Cerinthus, all show that in him was the spirit of the eagle, which, rather than the dove, has been his immemorial symbol. And since zeal and enthusiasm, dead as they are, and scorned in these days by an effete and comfortable religionism, yet have even been indispensable instruments in spreading the kingdom of heaven, doubtless it was the existence of these elements in his character, side by side with tenderness and devotion, which endeared him so greatly to his Master, and made him “the disciple whom Jesus loved.”—*Archdeacon Farrar.*

[18947] Whatever we can conceive of devoted tenderness, of deep affection, of intense admiration for goodness, we must conceive of him who, even in the palace of the high priest, and at the foot of the cross, was the inseparable companion of his Lord; whatever we can conceive of a gentleness and holiness ever increasing in depth and purity, that we must conceive of the heart and mind which produced the Gospel and Epistles of St. John. . . . It is in accordance with what has been said, that in such a character the more outward and superficial traits should have attracted attention before the complete perfection of that more inward and silent growth which was alone essential to it; and, alien in

some respects as the bursts of fiery passion may be from the usual tenor of St. John's later character, they fully agree with the severity, almost unparalleled in the New Testament, which marks the well-known anathema in his Second Epistle, and the story, which there seems no reason to doubt, of Cerinthus and the bath. It is not surprising that the deep stillness of such a character as this should, like the oriental sky, break out from time to time into tempests of impassioned vehemence; still less that the character which was to excel all others in its devoted love of good should give indications—in its earlier stages even in excess—of that intense hatred of evil, without which love of good can hardly be said to exist.—*Dean Stanley.*

III. PARTICULARS OF CHARACTER.

1 Intensity.

[18948] The central characteristic of his nature is intensity—intensity of thought, word, insight, life. He regards everything on its Divine side. For him the eternal is already; all is complete from the beginning, though wrought out, step by step, upon the stage of human action. All is absolute in itself, though marred by the weakness of believers. He sees the past and the future gathered up in the manifestation of the Son of God. This was the one fact in which the hope of the world lay. Of this he had himself been assured by evidence of sense and thought. This he was constrained to proclaim: "We have seen and do testify." He had no laboured process to go through; he saw. He had no constructive proof to develop; he bore witness. His sources of knowledge were direct, and his mode of bringing conviction was to affirm.—*Canon Westcott.*

[18949] Let us guard against the mistake of supposing that St. John was wanting in manly vigour, courage, and zeal: that he was the apostolic type of that meditative quietude, that effeminate softness and pietism, which has always found favour in some sections of the Christian Church. It is perhaps more correct to say that the notices of the apostle recorded in the Gospels reveal to us a fiery zeal, a vehement enthusiasm, which, like the thunder to which his character was compared, burst forth from time to time with unexpected force and violence. The name Boanerges, or "Sons of Thunder," which he shared with his brother James, his request for precedence in the kingdom of God, his desire to call down fire from heaven upon the offending village of the Samaritans, proved that the Elijah spirit burned within him; whilst the story, probably a true one, of the horror with which he recoiled from the heretic Cerinthus in the bath, and the unquestioned vigour with which he forbade all intercourse with "him that abode not in the doctrine of Christ" (2 John 9, 10), gave proof that beneath the deep stillness of his heavenly cha-

acter there lay the elements of vehement passion, and that in him the intense love of good was combined with an equally intense and most uncompromising hatred of evil.—*Rev. Sir E. Bayley.*

2 Spirituality.

[18950] John is the apostle of spirituality. He goes, for evidence, proof, satisfaction, within, into the breast; not like Paul, with dialectics and metaphysics, but with simple love. His wisdom is of the heart; his faith is less of belief than trust; less by argument than by intuition. His view of Christianity was introspective and subjective, in the terms of philosophy; but he was no rationalist, for with all his soul he loved a supernatural Christ, and his doctrine was as simple as a child's thanksgiving. No apostle seems to have clung with such reverential affection to the person of Jesus. His faith is all bound up in that personal attachment. For him there was not, as for any of us there cannot be, any Christianity without the Jesus of Nazareth, any institutional, or philosophical, or intellectual gospel, without the Son of Mary, crucified and ascended, gone from the Bethlehem stable to the right hand of His Father.—*Bp. Huntington.*

3 Love.

[18951] John it was who leaned his head on Jesus' bosom at the Supper; he who received from the lips quivering on the cross that dying charge, "Behold thy mother," and thenceforth took Mary to his own home; he that first believed, out of the fulness of his trusting heart, after the stone was rolled from the sepulchre; he that, with Peter, wrought the merciful miracle and healed the lame man at the gate of the temple named Beautiful, and made it more worthy the name by that beautiful compassion; he that in the infirmity of extreme age, when his voice could utter no more, stretched out his hands every sabbath morning over the assembly, and said that simple precept—the rich substance of many long sermons—"Little children, love one another."—*Ibid.*

[18952] All seem to agree that John's mind had in it much of the woman's nature—retiring rather than demonstrative, receptive rather than originative, intuitive rather than logical, gentle and loving. One thing is certain, that love was the atmosphere of his soul after he became the disciple of Jesus Christ. The fact that his head rested on the Saviour's bosom, that Jesus is said to have loved him and committed His mother to his charge, shows that he was pre-eminently the disciple of love. Besides, his writings are full of love. All his thoughts were generated in the region of love; every sentence he wrote was with a pen dipped in love. Tradition says that, when he had reached his extremest old age, he became too feeble to walk to the meetings, and was carried to them by young

men. He could no longer say much, but he constantly repeated the words, "Little children, love one another." When he was asked why he constantly repeated these words, his answer was, "Because this is the command of the Lord, and because enough is done if but this one thing is done."—*Anon.*

[18953] It is as the apostle who proclaimed that the essential attribute of God is love that we chiefly honour him ; it is as the apostle, the characteristic feature of whose life was love, that his example is so precious to us. . . . The same strong personal affection shows itself in what is the chief characteristic of his Gospel, the prominence given to the dialogues and conversations of the Lord. He alone records the interviews with Nicodemus and the woman of Samaria ; to him we owe the preservation of our Lord's teaching concerning Himself as the Bread of life, the Light of the world, the source of resurrection life present and to come : his alone are the narratives of the raising of Lazarus, and the feet-washing ; his the great consolatory discourses in the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth chapters ; the high-priestly prayer ; and the final words by the Sea of Galilee. It were as though his whole nature were absorbed in the contemplation of the Light and the Life and the Truth ; as though his special work had been to meditate on " what he had heard and looked upon and handled of the Word of Life" (1 John i. 1). In full harmony with this view of his character is the teaching of his Epistles. Whilst in the apocalyptic vision we are conducted into the Divine presence ; and he, who was the first to recognize Jesus as the Lamb of God, there reveals Him to us, as the "Lamb that had been slain," the object of adoring worship to the hosts of heaven. In the Apocalypse the central figure is everywhere the Lamb of God : His the blood that cleanseth : His the hand which leads His ransomed people to the living fountains of waters : His the song of the redeemed. In St. John perfect love had cast out fear. Love dwelt certainly in that apostle who could say, "Lord, Thou knowest all things, Thou knowest that I love Thee : " love dwelt most assuredly in that other apostle who wrote the psalm of love contained in the thirteenth chapter of the First Epistle to the Corinthians ; but with St. John it was an absorbing passion ; and who can guess the rapture which awaited him, when he exchanged the barren isolation of Patmos for the near presence of the Lord he loved?—*Rev. Sir E. Bayley.*

4 Practicalness.

[18954] We see, in the mind of the beloved disciple, one which penetrates through the outward historical form of Christianity into its spiritual and most glorious truths. He was indeed no mythical enthusiast ; no mere sentimental visionary. He states, because he believed, the plain history of his adorable Master.

No one can rise from the perusal of his Gospel without feeling that the author regarded his religion as a strictly historical one. But then he is not content with bare facts. His inspired narrative, doubtless, is indicative of his own cast of mind. The natural and sanctified peculiarities of the writer were not borne away by the afflatus of the Spirit. He shows a love for doctrine as well as history—for principles as well as facts.—*Rev. J. Stoughton.*

[18955] John, the Christian master of spiritual philosophy, evidently regarded the atonement as something more than a poem or parable even a real transaction, having an actual bearing on the government of God.—*Ibid.*

[18956] We see in the beloved disciple the example of one who combined with the most spiritual perceptions of Christianity a due regard to its practical bearings. Some people are only dreamers about the sublimities of religion : the poetry or philosophy of the Gospel alone they care for. Now John, though so different in his cast of mind, was not less practical than the Apostle James. He enjoins the duties of the Gospel—only in another method—as forcibly as his apostolic brother. In the Epistles of John you see the abstract thinker intent on inculcating a living active piety.—*Ibid.*

IV. CHARACTER OF HIS WRITINGS.

[18957] St. John . . . is always a contemplative, mystical theologian. The eye of his soul is fixed on God and on the Word Incarnate. St. John simply describes his intuitions. He does not argue ; he asserts. He looks up to heaven, and as he gazes he tells us what he sees. He continually takes an intuition, as it were, to pieces, and recombines it ; he resists forms of thought which contradict it, but he does not engage in long arguments, as if he were a dialectician, defending or attacking a theological thesis. Nor is St. John's temper any mere love of speculation divorced from practice. Each truth which the apostle beholds, however unearthly and sublime, has a directly practical and transforming power. St. John knows nothing of realms of thought which leave the heart and conscience altogether untouched.—*Canon Liddon.*

V. COMPARISON WITH ST. PAUL.

[18958] It is delightful to think that the beloved apostle was born a Plato. To him was left the almost oracular utterance of the mysteries of the Christian religion, whilst to St. Paul was committed the task of explanation, defence, and assertion of all the doctrines, and especially of those metaphysical ones touching the will and the grace ; for which purpose his active mind, his learned education, and his Greek logic made him pre-eminently fit.—*S. T. Coleridge.*

PHILIP.

I. HIS CALL.

It was responded to by an instant obedience.

[18959] He lived at Bethsaida, and was a fellow-citizen of Andrew and Peter. Our Lord met him, and said, "Follow Me." Obedience instantly followed. Nor was it blind obedience, but intelligent. Philip was convinced of the Messiahship of Jesus: "We have found Him of whom Moses in the law and the prophets did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." No miracle had yet been done *by* Jesus, but a miracle had been done *upon* Him stamping His mission with a Divine signature: "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove" (that is, after the fluttering manner of a dove's descent), and it abode upon Him." A voice was heard from heaven, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." All this probably would be known to Philip. He would be convinced that Jesus was a messenger of the Most High. Something also was said and done by Him in His new relationship to Philip not recorded. Only the result is given: only the conviction of the Messiahship of Jesus wrought in the mind of the new disciple is related. . . . Philip saw manifest evidence that Jesus was the Christ.—*Rev. J. Stoughton.*

II. HIS CHARACTER.

He seems to have been practically-minded rather than deeply spiritual.

(1) *This was exemplified in our Lord's question to him, "Whence shall we buy bread that these may eat?"*

[18960] Minds of the plain and practical order, to which that of Philip belonged, are often deficient in spiritual apprehension. Conversant with outward things, they are apt to take up with superficial views. They are not wont to penetrate into the depths of a subject, and to arrive at the more wonderful facts which are underlying the upper and visible ones. Probably our Lord had noticed this defect in Philip. He had seen that while Philip took Him for the Messiah, Philip had very low conceptions of who the Messiah was—of what the Messiah could do. He had not such views of his Master as Peter had—as some others had. He was like persons in the present day, who are very plain, practical Christians, who believe the gospel is Divine, and who perform its duties, but their souls have penetrated only a little way into the regions of spiritual truth. Our Lord was about to display somewhat of His Divine creative power by multiplying the loaves and fishes. What might be obtained in the towns and villages around mattered not. Christ had resources far exceeding any actually existing stores of food. Without growing corn, and crushing it, without making loaves after the

common fashion, He could, by His word, call into existence a banquet that would more than suffice for the supply of the hungry thousands present. Jesus had already wrought wonderful miracles—had already given glimpses of His Divine power. Did Philip yet apprehend that He would perform a miracle like this? Did he apprehend that there was in Him a Divine power like this? We can conceive of a well-instructed spiritual mind, full of faith in the wonderful resources of the Lord, saying to him in reply to his question, "There is no need at all to buy bread; put forth Thy power, and all that we want shall be supplied." He who said, "Speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed," approximated to the state we are now supposing. But Philip was not in that state of mind. He did not see into the depths of his Master's power. He did not apprehend the sweep of His miraculous agency. He did not connect the testing question with our Lord at all, but looked at it simply in itself, as if it had been asked by any common person. Hence he said, "Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may take a little." It is a hard, dark, calculating, statistic reply. It shows the faultiness of Philip's views.—*Ibid.*

(2) *This was exemplified in his request to our Lord, "Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us."*

[18961] Moses had once said, "I beseech Thee, show me Thy glory." In him the request was pardonable. God had not then revealed Himself as He afterwards did. Yet Moses was reproved: "There shall no man see Me, and live." Philip now wished for a visible display of the Divine Being. If he meant by it what Moses did, he ought to have known better, because he had been taught more than Moses had. Whatever he meant by it, the state of mind from which it sprang was wrong. It proceeded from ignorance of the most important of all Christ's lessons—the lessons which related to His own wonderful nature, and the chief design of His mission. Our Lord's reply to Philip was different from Jehovah's reply to Moses. "Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known Me, Philip? He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father, and how sayest thou then, Show us the Father? Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me?" Our Lord had very expressly taught this truth, as we find in the earlier chapters of this Gospel. He had dwelt at large upon His own person, and His mysterious union with the Father. Probably He had talked on the subject oftener than is recorded. Philip had heard it all, and was a very sincere and practical disciple, yet he had not entered into the higher parts of Christ's teaching. He knew very little of the doctrines of Jesus, after more than three years' tuition.—*Ibid.*

[18962] Philip wanted to gaze, so far as a

creature might gaze, on the uncreated splendours of the great First Cause. He thought that if he had but once beheld the Being who "dwelleth in the light which no man can approach unto," he should no longer have doubts, but be ready to face any trial, yea, even that of separation from Christ. "Show us the Father, and it sufficeth us." Indeed there was great ignorance in this saying of Philip. He thought that he should be satisfied if he could but see the Father, if he might but look upon God as He discovers Himself, it may be, to higher orders of beings, to angels "who have kept their first estate," and are still privileged to stand in His presence. Whereas, in place of "sufficing" the sinner, there is nothing which would be more sure to confound and perplex him than the being thus shown the Father. The thing wanted, in order to our being practically persuaded of our need of a Mediator, is our being made thoroughly aware of the greatness and the gloriousness of the Father; and it is only because we have low and clouded apprehensions of God as He is in Himself, of His essential attributes, of His immutable perfections, that we ever think of being able, whether in whole or in part, to plead our own cause, or to save our own souls. "Show us the Father;" show us the Almighty enthroned in His glories—"of purer eyes than to look upon iniquity," of purer justice than to let pass the least transgression of His law; and "it sufficeth"—for what? To drive us to despair, to fill us with conviction of the utter and irremediable ruin in which our many sins have involved us. It will not suffice, as Philip seemed to think, for our encouragement and our comfort; for the most awful of all sights to a guilty creature must be that of a righteous and immutable Creator. For though, my brethren, it may seem as if a truer estimate of sin were what is especially needed in order that the careless may be alarmed, and led to the inquiring from the heart what they must do to be saved, very little thought will be needed to make you see that sin can be felt to be heinous only in proportion as God is felt to be holy.—*Canon Melville.*

III. COMPARISON BETWEEN NATHANAEAL AND PHILIP.

[18963] Nathanael had preconceived opinions, which interfered with his apprehension of facts. He had pre-judgments, which prevented him from looking impartially at accounts of things actually done. There was a prejudice against Nazareth. . . . Nathanael took up the common saying with all honesty. He really believed that the proscribed town in Galilee could produce no characters of excellence. Is he not one of an order of minds full of foregone conclusions honestly but mistakenly entertained? Philip is evidently a very different man. He looks at facts. He is open to the force of evidence appealing to common sense. He has no general notions, no *à priori* maxims reigning in his mind, to the prejudice of valuable knowledge

flowing from a genuine and authoritative source. "Come and see." Such is his appeal. If a thing can be proved to be actually as represented, there is nothing in his mind to prevent his believing it. His faith comes forth, with perfect simplicity, in dutiful response to the demands of sufficient proof. He is a plain man, of good sense, without prejudice, a type of a class unshackled by cherished theories and maxims. We see something here of the order of his mind, and of the kind of use he made of the faculties God had given him. He was the sort of person we now often meet with among Christians; one who takes the Gospels as a history, and the whole of the Bible as a revelation—who is satisfied with plain and familiar evidences—who tries Christianity for himself—who finds it to be all it professes, and then makes his appeal to facts: "Come and see." He is a specimen of the common-sense believer.—*Rev. J. Stoughton.*

IV. HOMILETICAL REFLECTIONS.

- 1 Philip, in his method of dealing with an objector, is an instructive example to the Christian believer.

[18964] Let us deal, as he did, with people who are full of abstract objections to Christianity. Here is one who says: "Is it possible that the laws of nature can ever be suspended, and a miracle, in the Christian sense, performed?" We say, after the manner of Philip, "Come and see." Look at the proofs. Here is another who asks, "Is it possible that God should become flesh, that a Divine person should be a substitute for sinners, and die in their place, and secure their salvation? Is all this accordant with philosophical principles of religion?" We simply say, "Come and see." We appeal from the abstract to the practical, from your theories to our facts. Miracles have been wrought. The weight of historical evidence in their favour is overwhelming. Believe them, or reject all that historians have ever written. *God has become manifest in the flesh. Christ did die for our sins, and rise again for our justification.* Whatever mysteries may be involved in the arrangement, the fact is proclaimed on authority which common sense, looking at the proofs of Christianity, must admit to be Divine. The doctrines are every day brought to the test of experience and practice. People live and die by them, and thence derive peace and purity, holiness and hope. Theories about the impossibility of this and the other weigh not a feather against facts well ascertained. "Come and see" what Christianity is, what it has done, what it is doing.—*Ibid.*

- 2 Philip, in his defective spirituality after lengthened companionship with Christ, is a warning to the Christian believer.

[18965] Do not many of us sit on the same form in Christ's school with Philip? Are we not, like him, unapt pupils—needing line upon

line, and precept upon precept, and after all not getting on much? Is not the Master saying to us, "Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known Me?" Is not Paul's rebuke applicable, "When for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat"? We feel the force of the evidences of Christianity. We say to disputers, "Come and see," which is wise and well so far; but we do not steadily and devoutly apply the higher faculties of the mind to the study of the more spiritual and glorious aspects of the gospel of Christ. Some are defective in one respect, some in another. Is not the number large of those who, like Philip, fail to see in Christ the image of the Father?—*Ibid.*

NATHANAEL.

I. HIS PERSONAL IDENTIFICATION.

He appears to have been identical with Bartholomew.

[18966] Bartholomew, we may safely conclude, is the Nathanael spoken of in the first chapter of the Gospel of John. Philip and Nathanael are mentioned together in John as friends, and as being called at the same time to follow Jesus. John also speaks of Nathanael as being with Peter and Thomas and the sons of Zebedee (all apostles) after the resurrection. John never names Bartholomew—the other three evangelists never name Nathanael. John puts Philip and Nathanael together—Matthew and the others put Philip and Bartholomew together, placing them always fifth and sixth on the list of apostles. There is no difficulty about the names. Nathanael is a proper name, Bartholomew is simply son of Tholmai, as Bar-Jona is son of Jona, and Bartimeus son of Timeus. Peter was Simon Bar-Jona—this disciple, we may take it, was Nathanael Bartholomew. His father being probably a man of note, his own proper name dropped out of use, and he came to be spoken of as Bartholomew.—*Rev. J. Foster.*

II. HIS RULING CHARACTERISTIC.

It was, upon the word of the Saviour, guilelessness.

[18967] "Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile." It is as if He had said, Behold a man of faith and of frank sincerity. Christ does not pronounce Nathanael to be absolutely sinless. And if Nathanael had so pretended, he would not have been guileless; for if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. Nathanael was an honest Israelite, a man of faith, a man of prayer,

and above all a man above shams and false pretences. Even when Jesus pronounced him "without guile," he did not begin to stammer out any self-depreciating cant: "Lord, you give me too much credit; I don't deserve to be called an honest man. I am only a miserable sinner." Nathanael left all such lying cant to those Pharisees of modern prayer-meetings who pretend to be worse than they are, in order to get credit for humility. I believe that there are as many lies told in self-depreciation as there are in self-exaggeration. When a Christian *knows* whom he has believed, and knows that he is sincerely striving to follow Jesus, even in an imperfect fashion, he has no moral right to apply to himself, in penitential prayer, the same words which describe a sceptic, a felon, or hypocrite. Some people have a very sneaking way of feeding their self-conceit on phrases of profound humility. Other people—and really sincere Christians—introduce many phrases of self-abasement out of mere form; just as I have overheard giddy, frivolous girls and careless men of pleasure mumble that solemn litany, "Lord, have mercy upon us, *miserable sinners!*" Had I told them the same thing to their faces, they would have grown red with wrath and resented it as an insult.—*T. Cuyler.*

[18968] The absence of guile here imputed to Nathanael must not be pressed too far. This guileless nature is as the kindly soil in which all excellent graces will flourish (Luke viii. 15, x. 6), but does not do away with the necessity of the Divine seed, out of which alone they can spring. He who is "without guile" is not therefore without sin; this, at least, could only be asserted of One (1 Peter ii. 22), but rather he is one who seeks no cloak for his sin; does not excuse, palliate, hide, diminish, or deny it (Gen. iii. 12). Being a sinner, he confesses it, and thus finds pardon for the sin which he confesses. So David had declared long ago (Psa. xxxii. 1, 2), to whose words Christ is probably here distinctly referring.—*Abp. Trench.*

III. HIS TESTIMONY.

[18969] "Rabbi, Thou art the Son of God, Thou art the King of Israel," breaks forth from his lips. A word or two upon each of these ascriptions, being as they are, the first an acknowledgment of the dignity of Christ's person, the second of the greatness of His office. And first, "Thou art the Son of God." We do not here suppose for an instant that Nathanael, giving this title to the Lord, intended by it all which the Nicene Fathers intended, and which we intend, by the same; and yet nothing less was wrapped up in that title, to be unfolded from it in due time. And it meant much, even on Nathanael's lips, and was no mere language of honour uttered at random. How much it implied we may clearly perceive from the active opposition, the earnest hostility, which this title awoke on the part of the Scribes and Pharisees, as often as the Lord implicitly or explicitly

claimed it as His own (John v. 18, x. 30-39, xix. 7). But however these may have denied the superhuman character of Messiah, there were enough glimpses of this in the Old Testament to explain how as many as had searched more deeply into it, or whose vision was less obscured and distorted by preconceived prejudices, should have recognized in Him a partaker of the Divine nature, and therefore "the Son of God." It is sufficient to refer to Psa. ii. 7, 12; Isa. ix. 6. We are then justified in ascribing nothing short of such a recognition to Nathanael. And the words which follow, "Thou art the King of Israel," words in which the "Israelite" accepts, owns, and does homage to Israel's King, avouching himself a subject of his, amounts very nearly to the same thing. He who said in that second Psalm, "Kiss the son lest He be angry" (ver. 12), said also of the same: "Yet have I set *My King* upon My holy hill of Zion" (ver. 6).—*Ibid.*

IV. HIS REWARD.

[18970] To him that hath shall be given. He who hears and believes may walk now by faith, but shall hereafter walk by sight. Jesus answered and said unto him: "Because I said unto thee, I saw thee under the fig-tree, believest thou? Thou shalt see greater things than these." Faith like his shall have its reward. "And He saith unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man." Assuredly the Lord would indicate by these wondrous words that He should henceforward be the middle point of a free intercourse, yea, of an uninterrupted communion, between God and men; that in Him should be the meeting place of heaven and of earth (Eph. i. 10; Col. i. 20); which should be no longer two, as sin had made them, separated and estranged from one another, but henceforward one, now that righteousness had looked down from heaven, and truth had flourished out of the earth. And this the glory of Christ they, His disciples, should behold; and should understand that they too, children of men, were by Him, the Son of man, made citizens of a kingdom which, not excluding earth, embraced also heaven. From earth there should go up evermore supplications, aspirations, prayers—and these by the ministration of angels (Rev. viii. 3, 4), if some still want a certain literal fulfilment of the promise; from heaven there should evermore come down graces, blessings, gifts, aid to the faithful, and plagues for them that would hurt them (Rev. viii. 5; Acts xii. 7, 23). Heaven and earth should henceforward be in continual interchange of these blessed angels—

"And earth be changed to heaven, and heaven to earth;

One kingdom, joy and union without end:"

the Son of man, Jesus of Nazareth, being the

central point in which these two kingdoms met, the golden clasp which bound them indissolubly together.—*Ibid.*

THOMAS.

I. INTRODUCTORY.

Significance of his surname Didymus.

[18971] The name Thomas is connected, especially by St. John, with the other name he bore, either synonym or surname of it, "Didymus"—Didymus, the twin. He had a brother or sister (sister says one account, called Lysia), the same age as himself. Therefore he was called Didymus, the twin, or Thomas, which has the same meaning. This is the origin of the name. But, strangely enough, it became spiritually significant in the history and character of the man. No less than three times does the Evangelist name him in this way, "Thomas, who is called Didymus." St. John has been described as a writer who measures every word. Evidently, therefore, he means to convey more than the mere school-class information that the one name is in meaning as the other. He means to hint, at least—Look at him, and consider the man and the name. He is indeed a twin. In his spiritual nature he is two men in one, and they are not agreed. There is a strife between the one and the other. Now this Thomas, and now that, stands foremost. They cannot be so eternally, or even for long. One must die that the other may live. Which shall have the upper hand at length? We know how the matter turned out. We know how it always ends in such cases, when the struggle is sincere. Nature holds the right of primogeniture, but grace always comes into the inheritance.—*Alex. Kalvigh, D.D.*

[18972] It is very possible that Thomas may have received this as a new name from his Lord. . . . It was a name which told him all he had to fear, and all he had to hope. In him the twins, unbelief and faith, were contending with one another for mastery, as Esau and Jacob, the old man and the new, wrestled once in Rebecca's womb (Gen. xxv. 23, 24). He was, as indeed all are by nature, the double or twin-minded man.—*Abp. Trench.*

II. FEATURES OF CHARACTER.

1 Earnestness.

[18973] First of all, he is an earnest man. We see this general characteristic in him from the very first. Indeed, we might almost conclude that he would be so, from the fact that he is among the elect twelve. The Saviour does not lay His hand at random on one here and there, in the frivolous and thoughtless crowd. He does not call those on whom by chance

His eye may first light. If some of them are ignorant they are all earnest men. Some of them quiet and simple, some of them contemplative and susceptible, some of them strong and passionate, but all earnest; all living in the perpetual consciousness that man has a soul, and that life has a meaning, and great and awful issues, and that God has a kingdom among men. Take all the verses that relate to Thomas in the Gospels. They are diverse in outward form, they bring before us very different mental states—states quite opposite to each other, deep depression, rejoicing confidence; but they all presuppose a full measure of manly earnestness, a spiritual concernedness, about himself, and his duty, and his Lord.—*Alex. Raleigh, D.D.*

2 Despondency.

[18974] He seems to have this melancholy naturally. It is one of what we call his characteristics. As a certain vein runs through a geological formation, so a certain disposition runs through a human mind. It is there, and you cannot expel it. It must be recognized and dealt with. It may be assuaged. It may be exalted. It may be turned to high and useful ends, but it cannot be extinguished. This despondent melancholy comes out most remarkably in the case of Thomas when (John xi. 16), hearing from the Master's own lips that He was going up to Jerusalem—as Thomas and all of them knew full well—in the face of great peril, he threw himself on to the dark conclusion that all was over, and that nothing now was left to them but to die.—*Ibid.*

[18975] The melancholy of Thomas, his disposition to despondency, his unreadiness to accept consolation or to cherish hope, come out very strongly in his answer to the Lord at the Last Supper. "In My Father's house are many mansions," Jesus had said—mansions for *them* as well as for *Him*. "I go to prepare a place for you; . . . and whither I go ye know, and the way ye know." The reply of Thomas is not that of ignorance, but of doubt, bordering on despair. Jesus is going to die, to pass into the dark unknown, the silent land from whence no message comes, whose inhabitants make no sign, give no token of existence—yet He speaks of their knowing "the way" to that mysterious abode. It seems to Thomas like hollow mockery—to him place and way are alike unknown. There is no light shining from beyond the tomb; all about it is dreadful; he cannot be comforted in the thought of his beloved Master's departure there.—*Rev. J. Foster.*

3 Unbelief.

[18976] Jesus had appeared to the disciples as they were assembled together on the evening of the day of His resurrection. Thomas was not with them. Was his absence accidental or of purpose? I should think *not* accidental. As to his incredulity, it did not in itself separate him from his fellow-disciples, for in that he was not very different from them. Jesus upbraided

them *all* with their "unbelief and hardness of heart, because they believed not them which had seen Him after He was risen." But his unbelief was probably of a more defined character than theirs, more built upon reasons, more clearly explained to his own mind. And so it was a more miserable thing, disposing him to brood in solitude rather than, like the others, to talk with brethren "of all those things which had happened." There was on their part the absence of any lively hope; there was on his part the presence of a settled and systematic despair. So he was not with the rest "when Jesus came."—*Ibid.*

[18977] Think not that this happened by chance, that a chosen disciple should have been absent, being absent should have doubted, should doubting have handled, should handling have believed. All this occurred by a Divine ordering, whereby the mercy of God brought it about by wonderful means that that doubtful disciple should feel the wounds in his Lord's flesh, and so heal the wounds of our unbelief. For the incredulity of Thomas hath done more for our faith than the belief of the disciples.—*Gregory.*

[18978] Thomas was indeed guilty of unbelief, and for such unbelief he had no reasonable or lawful ground. He had heard the prediction of his Lord, he had the testimony of his fellow-disciples, whose words he had no reason to doubt, and of whose earlier misgivings he must have seen quite enough. They had not only said to him, "We have seen the Lord," but had actually related to him the peculiar circumstances of that vision—how that the Lord had appeared to them, had opened unto them the Scriptures, and had shown them how He had suffered and risen again, and how He must still ascend to His glory. In all this the penetrating mind of Thomas ought at once to have perceived the decided connection of events, and that in the most convincing manner.—*Rev. R. Rothe, D.D.*

[18979] Thomas asked of Christ a sign; he must put his own hands into the prints. His Master gave him that sign or proof. He said, "Reach hither thy hand." He gave it, it is true, with a gentle and delicate reproof—but He did give it. Now, from that condescension we are reminded of the darkness that hangs round the question of a resurrection, and how excusable it is for a man to question earnestly until he has got proof to stand on. For if it were not excusable to crave a proof, our Master never would have granted one.—*Rev. F. Robertson.*

[18980] Let a man be as frivolous as he will at heart, it is a question too solemn to be put aside—Whether he is going down into extinction and the blank of everlasting silence or not. Whether in those far ages, when the very oak which is to form his coffin shall have become

fibres of black mould, and the churchyard in which he is to lie shall have become perhaps unconsecrated ground, and the spades of a generation yet unborn shall have exposed his bones, those bones will be the last relic in the world to bear record that he once trod this green earth, and that life was once dear to him, Thomas, or James, or Paul. Or whether that thrilling, loving, thinking something, that he calls himself, has indeed within it an indestructible existence which shall still be conscious, when everything else shall have rushed into endless wreck. Oh, in the awful earnestness of a question such as that, a speculation and a peradventure will not do: we must have proof. The honest doubt of Thomas craves a sign as much as the cold doubt of the Sadducee. And a sign shall be mercifully given to the doubt of love which is refused to the doubt of indifference.—*Ibid.*

4 Devotion to Christ.

[18981] One point is certain, and we must take care to bear it in mind while considering the grave defects of his character, St. Thomas was affectionately and devotedly attached to the person of our Lord. When Jesus declared His intention to go to Bethany, that is, into the immediate neighbourhood of Jerusalem, where He had previously told them He was to suffer, it was Thomas who said at once to his fellow-disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with Him." There was no lack of love there, no selfishness, no cowardly shrinking from danger. There may, indeed, have been somewhat of a desponding spirit, a disposition to dwell on the gloomy aspect of things; less of confidence in his Lord's power, and of faith in the triumph which He had promised, than of affectionate sympathy with the sufferings which He was to undergo; but we cannot help loving Thomas for those words, we must look on him with reverence, as a brave, faithful adherent of the Lord Jesus, ready and willing to shed his heart's blood in His cause.—*Rev. F. Cook.*

[18982] The first notice of him shows him to have been a true disciple, a man with a large, loving, devoted heart. Jesus had gone beyond the Jordan to be out of reach of the Jews, whose enmity had now risen to the murderous point, and who had twice attempted His life. His proposal to go again into the neighbourhood of Jerusalem naturally confounded the disciples; they did not know how to take it, what to say about it. There seems to have been something like a pause when He gave the command to start upon the journey. Thomas comes to the front; he assumes the place generally filled by Peter, and practically solves the difficulty. Whatever happens they must not desert their Master. If He will go into Judæa again they must go too; they must be with Him in the hour of peril, they must be ready, when necessary, to share His doom. A brave determination, one revealing the deep affection this disciple bore his Master. Realizing the facts of the case, the

imminence of the danger, the apparent impossibility of escape, the almost absolute certainty of his being taken at his word, we cannot fail to see that Thomas is of the heroic mould. "Let us also go, that we may die with Him," whichever way we consider it, is a grand sentence.—*Rev. J. Foster.*

III. HOMILETICAL SUGGESTIONS.

1 The absence of Thomas when our Lord first appeared to the other apostles suggests that many blessings are missed by those who "forsake the assembling of themselves together."

[18983] The lesson that has been so often drawn from this incident as to the loss those may suffer who forsake the assemblies of the saints is in the main a sound one. Whatever happens disciples should keep together—isolation will hinder good and make bad worse. Thomas was punished for withdrawing from the society of his brethren by having to drag on a weary week of uncertainty after the others had had their suspense ended by a happy meeting with their Lord. The truant disciple had not been far off, his companions soon found him, and told him the joyful news, "We have seen the Lord." But they cannot impart their joy to him, because they cannot communicate the sensible experience upon which it is built. They may *think* they have seen the Lord (I do not suppose he intends to accuse them of wilful falsehood), he feels sure they are mistaken.—*Ibid.*

2 The manner in which Thomas's doubts were removed suggests the amazing condescension of God to those who desire to believe if they can.

[18984] The first thought which struck all the early commentators on holy writ, on which Chrysostom, for instance, dwells almost exclusively, refers to the gracious condescension of the Lord in thus adapting the evidence to the wants and capacities of His disciples. Provided that there be in any man the previous conditions, a desire to know the truth, to do the will of God, to be saved from sin, if there be in him a love and a craving for the holiness which Thomas had ever adored in the person of Jesus, evidence will be given, is daily given, sufficient to satisfy the longing, the contrite, the unreluctant heart. Every believer knows that it is so. He knows that his Saviour has not left him to be tossed about to and fro by the surging waves of the restless intellect, that He has not abandoned him to the suggestions of a corrupt and darkened nature, that Christ has addressed Himself just to that feeling in his heart, to that faculty in his mind, to that craving in his spiritual nature, by which he could be most surely and directly guided to the knowledge of the Father, and of the Father's revelation in and by the Son. In fact, Christ manifests Himself.—*Rev. F. Cook.*

[18985] We may well pause and adore the

condescending love of our blessed Saviour which stoops even to meet our self-will half way. This often occurs in the life of the faithful, and when it does so occur, we are amazed that the Lord had divined our self-will, and still more that He allowed it. One thing we must not overlook, and it is this, that our blessed Lord will only so condescend to those who have really begun to try to break down their pride, and cast their self-will away; for by no other means can they be brought to a full and decisive surrender of themselves to Him. It is especially so in all things pertaining to our faith in Christ. That is essentially a belief in the power of God, not in our own; but such a belief is not attainable without our own free grasp of the hand which God holds out to us, without our striving to possess ourselves of the power of believing offered to us by a merciful Father. Let us set ourselves diligently, and with all sincerity, to clear away from our path every hindrance to our faith; and if we do earnestly so strive, our God will immediately help on our work with His almighty hand, and we shall find that our stumbling-blocks are suddenly rolled away, beyond our most sanguine expectation. But this cannot be attained by any other means. If Thomas had persisted in absenting himself from the other disciples, his Lord would never have appeared to him, and he would never have been convinced.—*Rev. R. Rothe, D.D.*

3 The doubts of Thomas, subsequently removed, are a witness to the truth of the resurrection of Christ.

[18986] There was one man who dreaded the possibility of delusion, however credulous the others might be. He resolved beforehand that only one proof should be decisive. He would not be contented with seeing Christ: that might be a dream: it might be the vision of a disordered fancy. He would not be satisfied with the assurance of others. The evidence of testimony which he did reject was very strong. Ten of his most familiar friends, and certain women, gave in their separate and their united testimony; but against all that St. Thomas held out sceptically firm. They might have been deceived themselves: they might have been trifling with him. The possibilities of mistake were innumerable: the delusions of the best men about what they see are incredible. He would trust a thing so infinitely important to nothing but his own scrutinizing hand. It might be some one personating his Master. He would put his hands into real wounds, or else hold it unproved. The allegiance which was given in so enthusiastically, "My Lord, and my God," was given in after, and not before scrutiny. It was the cautious verdict of an enlightened, suspicious, most earnest, and most honest sceptic.—*Rev. F. Robertson.*

4 The doubts of Thomas, and their removal, suggest that saving faith rests rather upon internal than upon external grounds.

[18987] We are led to deduce from Christ's

words to Thomas a deep principle, even this—that faith, in its highest action, in its spiritual and saving operations, rests rather upon internal than upon external grounds. The demand for "signs and wonders" may be met, as in the case of the Jews, without the production of the faith which brings salvation. That faith does not rest so much on "signs and wonders," as on the apprehension of spiritual blessings, adapted to the conscious necessities of the soul. Even the faith of Thomas himself, now, at last, in the Godhead of Christ, did not, as we apprehend, spring so much out of the visible miracle, then before him, of the raised body of his Master, as out of the workings of his own soul, under the light and grace of the Holy Ghost. A spiritual revelation of Christ as a Divine Saviour was made to his soul. The eye of that soul, purged from every blinding film, like the eyes of men's bodies which our Lord had touched, saw the revelation. It met the needs of his spiritual nature—needs which his recent conflicts had made him deeply feel; and now he adoringly expresses his faith in Christ, as "God manifest in the flesh" for man's deliverance.—*Rev. J. Stoughton.*

MATTHEW.

I. HIS CONVERSION.

1 It was apparently sudden, yet it may well have been prepared for beforehand.

[18988] You generally find "publicans" and "sinners" spoken of together, as though the publicans were amongst the most depraved and abandoned of the Jewish population, as justly infamous by their vices as unjustly by their office. One of this class it was, whom our Lord found sitting at his post as a receiver of the taxes. He was plying that hateful occupation; perhaps counting over the money he received, or wrangling with some Jew who had come with his tribute, and endeavouring to deceive or overreach him. You can hardly imagine a less promising subject or time for one of the sermons or summonses of the Redeemer; yet Christ does nothing but simply bid Matthew follow Him. He uses no persuasion; He makes no promise; He offers no inducement; but, nevertheless, there is no hesitation on the part of the publican. He instantly rises, forsakes his business, and goes after Christ. We do not suppose that Matthew was unacquainted with the character and pretensions of the Being who thus suddenly summoned him from his trade. The probability is that he had heard much of Christ; that he had seen Him work miracles, and had hearkened to His discourses, though he may not have had any formal intercourse with Him prior to this memorable occasion. If you examine the account, you will find that our Lord was at this time in His own city, where, if anywhere, He

must have been well known by common report. He had, moreover, just performed a very signal miracle on a man sick of the palsy, and it would appear to have been as He passed from the house in which the cure had been wrought, that He spake the word which had so much power over Matthew. It is not unlikely that the news of this miracle had reached the publican before the Saviour appeared at the receipt of custom, and that he was therefore prepared to admit the authority and obey the injunctions of Christ. He passed as in a moment from a tax-gatherer to a disciple: but we may well believe that God had been working in him a preparedness of heart; so that he may be said to have stood ready for the call, though, so far as bystanders could judge, the call took him by surprise, and transformed him at the instant.—*Canon Melvill.*

[18989] We know not what may have been the precise process of conversion in the instance of Matthew, nor how far there may have been an extraordinary interposition, making his case different from those of common occurrence; but we can tell you what the process may be supposed to have been—what it probably may be with any one of you, whose circumstances are at all analogous to those of the publican Matthew. Matthew may have heard of a preacher of righteousness who was passing through the land, working miracles, to which he appealed as credentials, and delivering doctrines which condemned every form and degree of iniquity; and Matthew, we may believe, did not, peremptorily and without inquiry, reject the pretensions of this preacher, but rather endeavoured to put away prejudice, that he might weigh well the evidence to which the preacher appealed. Neither did he despise the doctrines; they chimed in with the dictates of conscience; and feeling with how much justice, fraud, and violence were broadly denounced, he may be believed to have set himself to the correcting what was openly wrong in his conduct. He would not feel himself called upon to forsake his occupation as a publican, for the occupation though odious was in no sense unlawful; but he would feel himself required to follow the occupation in the most honourable manner, with none of the trick and extortion of which others were guilty, and with which, perhaps, he had been too chargeable himself. We do not know, as we have already said, that there was this preparatory process in the case of the publican Matthew; the miracle may have been without any preliminary; and the tax-gatherer, up to the very moment at which Jesus approached the receipt of custom, may have been utterly ignorant and utterly dissolute. But if we are to take the case as one of which we may hope to find the repetition amongst ourselves, now that God works through instituted means, we must be quite justified in laying down the above series of steps, as having conducted Matthew to conversion.—*Ibid.*

2 Its sincerity was evinced by the farewell feast which he gave to his friends before attaching himself to Christ.

[18990] You find it recorded by the other evangelists, as well as by himself, that immediately after his conversion, he entertained Jesus at a great feast, to which he invited not only his new companions, the disciples of Christ, but "many publicans and sinners," his former associates. And it is worthy of remark that this circumstance proves that Matthew's calling of a tax-gatherer had been lucrative; he had the means of entertaining a large company; so that in abandoning the receipt of custom we may suppose him to have abandoned no inconsiderable emolument, proving his own sincerity, and the power of the word by which he had been summoned. This is, however, not the only nor the chief inference to be drawn from the incident of which we are now speaking. We may justly suppose that the motive of Matthew in bringing his old companions into association with Christ, was the hope that they might be benefited by the conversation of the Saviour, and induced, as himself had been, to become His disciples. And on this supposition there are one or two things which we think very observable in the proceedings of Matthew. As with Andrew and Philip, who had no sooner found Jesus for themselves than they sought to bring others to Him, so also with Matthew. His immediate endeavour, on being converted, is to convert others. So will it also be with you. Knowing Christ yourselves as "the way, the truth, and the life," you will long, you will labour to bring those around you to a similar acquaintance. Yes, your first solicitude will be for those with whom you are more immediately connected—your kinsmen, your neighbours, your countrymen. Matthew was called to take part in a splendid enterprise. He was to be one of those through whose instrumentality should be effected the greatest revolution yet known on the earth—the substitution of the religion of Christ for idolatry throughout the broad sweep of the Roman domain. But ere he went forth on this crusade against the superstitions of a world, his thoughts were occupied by those amongst whom he lived; he began with providing for his own, though he ended (if tradition be true) by publishing the gospel, and dying in its defence, in a far distant land. And it will be the same with ourselves. We shall long that the whole world may be converted; we shall begin with attempting conversion in our own households, or our own parishes; yea more—it will be upon our own companions in sin that we shall be most anxious in bringing to bear the engines of the gospel. Those who have sat with us "at the receipt of custom," we shall first endeavour to lead to sit with us at the feet of Jesus. We know more of their peril, of the obstacles in the way of their conversion; and we feel that having practically encouraged them in evil, by joining them in its commission, we are bound to do our utmost to repair the injury by urging them unto repentance. Hence,

if converted ourselves, our first care, like that of Matthew, will be for the conversion of the parties with whom we were associated whilst yet unconverted.—*Ibid.*

- 3 Its sincerity was evinced by the term of depreciation with regard to himself which he uses when speaking of it.

[18991] In relating his conversion he calls himself by the name by which he was known in the church, that there might be no room for disputing the identity; and when he has to give the list of the twelve apostles, he expressly calls himself, "Matthew the publican." He makes no reference to the profession or the calling of any other of the twelve; he does not, for example, speak of Peter, the fisherman; but, in his own case, as though anxious to commemorate the might of God's grace, he subjoins a definition, and registers himself as "Matthew the publican." Ah! these words, "Matthew the publican," placed in the midst of the Gospel written by St. Matthew, are the picture of the cottage hung up in the splendid palace of the man who has sprung from meanness to nobility. Think of the honour to which Matthew attained—the honour of being the historian of Christ; of composing, under the immediate guidance of God's Spirit, a narrative which was to find its way into every land, and be perused by multitudes of every generation. What poet, what philosopher, what biographer, ever built himself such a monument? What author was to be more useful, or to write what would gain a more extended circulation? And yet the vast honour to which the evangelist had soared, produced no unwillingness to the avowing his former degradation; on the contrary, he was far less tender, so to speak, of his reputation, than those associated with him as the historians of Christ, and seemed to take delight in recording his own infamy.—*Ibid.*

II. HOMILETICAL REFLECTIONS.

- 1 The call of Matthew reminds us of the necessity of the new birth for even the most moral of men.

[18992] Matthew may have been very exemplary in his profession—a perfect model of fair dealing and unimpeachable integrity, just as any one of you, by setting himself to the correcting his conduct, might become everything that is praiseworthy in the eye of the world, in place, perhaps, of presenting much that is reprehensible; nevertheless, had not Matthew gone further than this, or (to speak more truly) had not God gone further with Matthew, the publican would not have entered the kingdom of heaven, though he might have been nearer to it than whilst he lived in extortion. It is the same with yourselves. There is a high point of morality or of outward improvement, to which you may go without trenching upon vital Christianity; ay, and it is the business of every man who would not throw away his soul, to press

on to that point; but to remain at this point is as fatal as never to have reached it.—*Ibid.*

- 2 The call of Matthew reminds us of the duty of putting ourselves in the way of good influences, even though we cannot convert ourselves.

[18993] We have spoken of his call as an instance of what may be termed sudden conversion; and it will be well that we examine it in order that we may see what it teaches as to conversion in general. We cannot convert ourselves, the changing the heart is beyond all power but the Divine—these are among the first truths which the Bible inculcates, and on which it may be said to base the scheme which it reveals for our restoration to God's favour. But, nevertheless, there is no encouragement in Scripture, to the continuing morally idle, because we are thus confessedly incapable of converting ourselves. Our path of duty, if we wish to be converted, is as clearly set before us as our natural inability of changing the heart. There is to be prayer for the renewing influence of the Spirit; there is to be the diligent avoiding and forsaking of practices and associates against whom we are warned by conscience and the Bible; there is to be the careful endeavour to cultivate every right disposition, to remove hindrances to the operations of the Holy Ghost, to submit ourselves to the suggestions and impulses which proclaim their origin by their tendency. And, though all this will not renew the heart, in doing this we are taught to expect that the heart will be renewed; in neglecting this, that the heart will be left in its natural estate.—*Ibid.*

- 3 The humility of Matthew reminds us that sincere depreciation of a previous unconverted condition is an evidence of true conversion.

[18994] If you have indeed been translated "out of darkness into marvellous light"—if from having been children of wrath you have become children of God—if there have passed on you that great moral change through which a man is raised from ruin and corruption, restored to dignity, consigned to everlasting blessedness—be ye well assured that ye will be the first to declare your utter unworthiness and vileness; you will not make light of your former evil practices; neither will you strive to spread over them a veil, that they may be hidden from others; you will be so overwhelmed by the greatness of God's mercy, so desirous to praise that mercy, and to encourage the yet impenitent to appeal to it for themselves, that, like Matthew, you will be virtually the historians of your own shame, and you will record that shame in order that you may be kept humble, that the sinful may be assured of the power of Divine grace; yea, others may speak gently, like St. Mark and St. Luke, of early degradation and dissolute habits, but yourself, like St. Matthew, will never think of being the disciple without thinking of having been the publican, and never mention your conversion without mentioning the receipt

of custom from which you were called. You will not mention the faults of others; you will give their names without adding any depreciating description; but your own—oh, the catalogue will run as it does in our text—"Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas, and Matthew the publican."—*Ibid.*

JUDE, LEBBEUS OR THADDEUS.

I. HIS PERSONAL IDENTIFICATION.

[1895] Jude intimates his relationship to James. Our translators have identified the relationship as that of brother. A Judas is mentioned by Matthew (xiii. 55) as brother of James. That James we conclude to have been the person mentioned as one of our Lord's apostles; the son, not of Zebedee, but of Alphaeus. We apprehend that the Jude who wrote this Epistle is identical with him named Lebbeus or Thaddeus, in the list of the apostles, by Matthew and Mark.—*Rev. J. Stoughton.*

[1896] The apostle who stands the tenth on Matthew's list, and is there called "Lebbeus, whose surname was Thaddeus," is called in Mark's catalogue "Thaddeus," and in Luke's, "Judas the brother of James." We cannot fail to remark how carefully he is always distinguished from the other Judas. Matthew and Mark avoid naming him by the name which he held in common with the traitor, and Luke takes care to distinguish him by adding to that ill-omened appellation that he was the brother of James. Jude, Judas, and Judah are one and the same name. Jude is merely an English abbreviation of Judas, and Judas is only a Greek pronunciation of the old Hebrew name of Judah. It means *the praise of the Lord*. Thaddeus is derived from the same root, and has a similar signification. Lebbeus appears to mean *a man of heart, or courage*, being derived from a word signifying *the heart*. These two last names were probably adopted to distinguish him from Judas Iscariot.—*F. Greenwood.*

II. HIS SOLITARY QUESTION.

[1897] All that is said of Jude in the sacred histories is, that at the Last Supper he asked Jesus why He was to manifest Himself to His disciples, and not to the world (John xiv. 22). He was moved to put this question by the views which, in common with the other disciples, he entertained of the coming of the Messiah; who, as he thought, was to declare Himself at last, with great pomp and eternal power. It was a mystery to him, therefore, how this victorious display was to be made to the small number of His disciples alone, and not to the whole admiring world. The answer of Jesus was not then, in all probability, understood. The meaning and substance of it was, that He and His Father

would manifest themselves to those alone, and dwell in those alone, who loved Him with that holy love, the fruits of which were righteousness and peace. This is a strong and beautiful declaration of the spirituality of the Messiah's kingdom.—*Ibid.*

[1898] The question of St. Jude as to the reason of our Lord's manifestation of Himself to His own people only, was the outcome of that lack of spirituality which was common to all the apostles in a greater or less degree before their illumination by the Holy Ghost. The question proved on what different lines moved the thoughts of the twelve from those traversed by the thoughts of their Lord. Indeed, the answer shows this as plainly—so evidently, that at first sight it scarcely seems an answer to the question at all. An answer, no doubt, it was, and perhaps of the following kind: "The manifestation of Myself is a manifestation not to the bodily eye, but to the soul. Hence it is that I cannot manifest Myself to the world, but to Him alone who loves Me, and hides My words within His heart."—*M. J.*

JUDAS ISCARIOT.

I. HIS RULING PASSION.

[1899] He talks of the poor. The three hundred pence, which the ointment would have brought, he says, had better have been given to them. "For how many of the peasants of Bethany might it have obtained food and clothing! How many cottages might it have brightened with comforts! How many fathers, and mothers, and children, it might have filled with joy!" This looks specious. But the truth comes out. Perhaps it did not come out then; but afterwards it did, and John, with holy abhorrence, notes it down as he tells the story—which is, by the way, a remarkable departure from the usual style of the sacred narrative, for hardly ever does a remark on conduct, or a revelation of motives, by the historian, occur. "This he said,"—one can fancy how John felt as he recorded it, how a peal of indignation thundered through his soul,— "this he said, not that he cared for the poor; but because he was a thief, and had the bag, and bare what was put therein." The veil is off, and we see the man—his covetousness—his hypocrisy—his thefts. He would have liked the handling of the three hundred pence. Professedly, it might have been devoted to the poor, but he would have taken care to appropriate as much as possible to his own use. He was too avaricious to be honest. He could not be faithful to his trust, because selfishness mastered and crushed his honour. A light is thrown back upon his former life. Above three years he had been a disciple; and, supposing he was sincere and honest in his profession at first, we see how, during that

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space, his sincerity and honesty had been declining, for he had come to make a gain of godliness: his ecclesiastical office had been turned into a stimulant of hungry avarice; and, by constant petty peculations, he was filling a purse for himself out of the common bag.—*Rev. J. Stoughton.*

[19000] What was the cause of this man's fall? Love of money—a love so fervent and so intense that it could overcome all the counsels and all the warnings of the Incarnate God. In vain did the Lord cry in the ears of His disciple, "Take heed and beware of covetousness, for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth." He began, no doubt, by boasting of his worldly wisdom—by pluming himself on the gift he had of providing for the worldly necessities of his Master more skilfully than his more simple-minded associates could do. He prided himself on his tact and management; on the way in which he contrived to lay out the money to better advantage—make it go further—than others could. And so he manoeuvred to get the funds of the little community into his hands, with a view of appropriating to himself the miserable trifle which his "management" enabled him to save—for nothing less than this is implied by the words of St. John, that he was a thief and had the bag, and *bare*—some people think St. John means stole—what was put therein.—*Rev. J. Lias.*

[19001] The chief ingredient in his character was a sordid and besotted love of money, combined with that dogged duplicity which is far removed from intelligence and shrewdness. He was entrusted with the office in the apostleship which required a man of inviolable integrity; but which, at the same time, was adapted to his sordid and worldly character. He was the treasurer and steward of that little community, and all the receipts and disbursements of the household passed through his hands. The first distinct notice of him, as well as the first outbreak of his avaricious spirit, was when Jesus was sitting at meat with His disciples, and Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus, brings a pound of very precious and expensive ointment, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped them with the hair of her head. Judas looks on impatiently; he can scarcely refrain from interrupting this affecting office, this tribute of pious love. When it is completed, and the house is filled with the odour of the ointment, he can no longer contain himself. "Why," he exclaims, "was not this ointment sold and given to the poor?" And then, for the first time, and in a single sentence, the Scriptures give us a complete and striking description of his character. "This he said, not because he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief and had the bag, and bare that which was therein."—*Rev. G. Spring, D.D.*

[19002] His decision is formed to do a deed which should for ever make his peace with the

world and the prince of this world. After this rebuke of the Saviour he immediately goes out—from whom? from the family of Christ. And where? to his chamber? to his former associates in the world? To wander in solitude? No; he goes to the chief priests and elders of the Jews, whose minds were infuriated with rage against his Master, and who were watching the first safe opportunity to put Him to death. They express no surprise at his sudden appearance among them. Perhaps they had known him before, and were prepared to welcome him. And what his errand before the assembled bench of chief priests and elders? Listen, and you will hear it. "Then one of the twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went unto the chief priests and said unto them, *What will ye give me, and I will deliver Him unto you?*" Here was the traitor's heart. What will ye *give*? What will ye *give*? not for Barabbas the murderer—not for some fugitive from justice, who has carried fire and sword to their peaceful dwellings, but for the spotless, harmless One; for Him who "went about doing good;" for the "Son of Man who came to seek and to save that which is lost." "And they covenanted with him for thirty pieces of silver. And from that time he sought opportunity to betray Him."—*Ibid.*

[19003] "Whomsoever I shall kiss, that same is He; hold Him fast!" He was eager lest his victim should escape him. It was not enough that he betrays his Master; he stimulates the mob to seize and hold Him. Well might he utter these words. He had often seen Him pass unharmed from amid His enemies. His thirty pieces of silver were in danger. He had seen Him walk upon the waves; and well might say, "Hold Him fast!" He had seen evil spirits flee at His rebuke. He had heard Him speak of legions of angels—therefore "hold Him fast;" make sure of Him! And that cry is re-echoed in the world of darkness. The Old Serpent, swelling with venom, remembers his bruised head, and cries, Hold Him fast! The King of Terrors brandishes his deadly spear, and cries, Hold Him fast! The monster, sin, gorged with the blood of millions, cries, Hold Him fast!—*Ibid.*

[19004] The motive consummated the guilt. What was it? It was avarice. It was the love of gold. It was all comprised in that one question, "What will ye give me?" For the paltry sum of thirty pieces of silver he delivers the Lord of life, the sinner's Friend, into the hands of men to be stretched on the accursed tree! There was disappointment; there was previous detection of his character; there was deep mortification and hatred; but, more than all, there was the love of gold. We do not learn that there was any other tempter, except that "the devil entered into him." No human being solicited him to this work of blood; he went unsolicited. The Jewish rulers did not seek him; *he* sought *them*. The proposal was his own: "What will ye give me?" It was

gold for blood that was priceless, and that bought a world. Oh, this was the frenzy of wickedness, and the paroxysm of its frenzy. His wild heart caught at the golden cup, and his parched lips drank its wickedness to the dregs. It was a deed born in the world of darkness. Exulting fiends looked on in triumph. It was hell's jubilee when the treacherous salutation was heard, "Hail, Master!"—*Ibid.*

[19005] The narratives of the synoptists point distinctly to avarice as the cause of his ruin. They place his first overtures to the Sanhedrin in close and pointed connection with the qualm of disgust he felt at being unable to secure any pilferings from the "three hundred pence," of which, since they might have come into his possession, he regarded himself as having been robbed; and St. John, who can never speak of him without a shudder of disgust, says in so many words that he was an habitual thief. How little insight can *they* have into the fatal bondage and diffusiveness of a besetting sin, into the dense spiritual blindness and awful infatuation with which it confounds the guilty, who cannot believe in so apparently inadequate a motive! Yet the commonest observance of daily facts, which come before our notice in the moral world, might serve to show that the commission of crime results as frequently from a motive that seems miserably inadequate, as from some vast temptation. . . . The sudden crisis of temptation might seem frightful, but the issue was decided by the entire tenour of his previous life; the sudden blaze of lurid light was but the outcome of that which had long burnt and smouldered deep within his heart.—*Archdeacon Farrar.*

II. HIS HEINOUS SIN.

1 Its general character.

[19006] This sin admitted of no reparation, no restitution. It was against mercies, against convictions of conscience, against frequent and recent admonitions, against his ordination vows, against his own preaching, against all the rules of friendship, against all the bonds of discipleship. It was committed deliberately, wilfully, knowingly, presumptuously, impudently, maliciously. It was perpetrated just after the most solemn and tender interview on record, just after being engaged in the most solemn rites of religion. It was of a scarlet dye and of a crimson hue.—*Rev. W. Plumer, D.D.*

[19007] The best construction which we can put upon his conduct is, that from the miraculous power of Christ he was disposed to believe he would eventually attain great worldly power, and that he himself would partake largely in the honours and profits of the kingdom he was about to establish. The worst is that he originally entered into Christ's family for the secret purpose of watching the conduct of this remarkable Personage, and plotting His overthrow, and that to this effect there was a secret

understanding between him and the Jewish rulers. The most charitable is, that he was fascinated by the power of working miracles, and that, as a lover of money and eager for distinction, he threw himself upon this novel enterprise, believing that the chances were in his favour, and with heart vile enough for anything that should secure his advancement, and at the same time gratify his hatred of the truth.—*Rev. G. Spring, D.D.*

2 Question as to its peculiarity.

[19008] The transaction recorded of the traitor is generally regarded as one of unprecedented enormity. Judas, by common consent, is put in the front of the greatest sinners of the race. A worldly Church is horror-stricken at the memory of his deeds, and a sleepy pulpit wakes into eloquent strains of indignation whenever it approaches his character. For the crime of Judas we have no word of apology—no palliating sentence to offer, but the question which forces itself on our mind is, Are we really justified in regarding this man as standing alone in the history of crimes—as being a sinner more than all the rest? May it not be that, instead of being an isolated exception, he is the type of a large, if not the largest, class of men? Such a question as this is easily determined by ascertaining in what does the peculiarity of this man's crime consist. Is it in the originating principle or the accidental manifestation?—in the form, or in the spirit? If it be in the latter—if the principles that prompted him were perfectly unique in their turpitude—then let him be taken from all classes, and exposed as a singular phenomenon, to draw forth the supreme execration of the race; but if the peculiarity be merely in form, such conduct in relation to him is unwarrantable; for reason and the Bible show that "as a man thinketh in his heart, so is he." In the light of Divine ethics there is many a robber who has never deprived another of a fraction of property; many a murderer who has never inflicted the slightest injury upon the person of any one; many a heinous sinner who is clothed in all the sanctity of conventional morality and religion. It is not the working of my hand, not the utterance of my tongue, not the movements of my body, that constitute my character, but the controlling volitions and habits of my soul. The question, therefore, returns: Is the peculiarity of the crime of Judas in form or spirit, or both? It is a fact that the form was unique. There was but one Christ to betray, and that one Christ was betrayed but once, and Judas did that one act. The outward act, therefore, was peculiar. He did that which no other man ever did before, which very few in his own day had the opportunity of doing, and which none, from that day to this, has had the chance of repeating. The singularity of the act may be traced to the singularity of the opportunity, and not to the singularity of the disposition that prompted.—*Homilist.*

[19009] It has often been a subject of inquiry whether this sin of Judas in betraying the Lord of life is a sin peculiar to itself, both in kind and in heinousness and greatness, and therefore no guide or beacon to warn us; or whether it is the same in kind as what we see constantly going on in, and around, and about us, only in a greater degree. I think the latter is the more probable of the two, only the degree of Judas' sin was greater than that of many amongst us. I think so for this reason: an apostle has plainly said with regard to the sin of the Jews in crucifying Jesus Christ, that we ourselves do just the same now; when we wilfully commit sin "we crucify the Son of God afresh." These are his words. Therefore it seems to follow that such may be the case also with respect to His betrayal; if we may "crucify Him afresh;" we may surely "betray Him afresh:" if we repeat the *greater*, we may also the *lesser* crime; for to crucify Him were a still worse crime than to betray Him!—*Rev. C. Fowler.*

III. HIS REPENTANCE.

It consisted of that "sorrow of the world which worketh death," and was remorse rather than repentance strictly so called.

[19010] Observe that this remorse was caused by looking at the *consequences* of his sin rather than at the sin itself. It was "when he saw that Jesus *was condemned*" that he flung down the money before the elders, and gave vent to his despair. The consequences of his treachery were more formidable than he had anticipated. He saw his former Master and Leader and Friend sentenced to ignominy, torture, and death; and when he counted the thirty paltry coins for which he had done this crime, the sluices of his soul gave way, and the waves of self-accusation rushed unbridled in, while wrathful conscience brandished a trident over the storm to work it to a wilder rage. Had he looked even then to the unreproachful Friend he had betrayed, He would have spoken to those surges and said, "Peace, be still!" and, in the "great calm" of felt forgiveness, Judas would have turned from harsh remorse to softened penitence; but crimson shame and pallid fear combined to bar out hope, and the betrayer's cry was not the outburst of contrition, but the hapless wail of maniac despair.—*Rev. A. Mursell.*

[19011] This remorse was felt from looking at the consequences of the guilt. Sin always has two aspects—distinct and contrasting aspects: the one is that which she assumes before her end is gained and the deed done; and the other, that which she puts on after she has ensnared her dupe, and hung her fetters on his soul. How musical in the ear of Judas was the jingle of the thirty pieces of silver, while the bribe was dangling in the purse of the treasurer of the chief priests and elders! Yet how dull and tinsel was its ring as he dashed them down upon the table in his agony, after their lustre

had been tarnished by the tinge of harmless blood!—*Ibid.*

[19012] If fraud was the sin of Judas, what shall we say was the full value of his repentance? Plainly this, that he hesitated to follow up his sin to those extreme lengths to which it was hurrying him: but for the sin itself he felt neither remorse nor conviction. He shrunk from the murder into which his other sins had forced him, as an unintentional and unwilling accomplice; but for those other sins which he had calculated upon—for that covetousness, which was the root of all his sins; for the meditated fraud upon the chief priests, which was his actual sin—he felt no remorse, no conviction. And therefore his repentance, like every imperfect repentance, serves but as an index to mark the precise degree on the graduated scale of crime to which he had sunk. He was willing to be covetous, to be a hypocrite, a traitor, a thief—but, not yet, a murderer.—*Rev. J. Hiffman.*

[19013] He *repented himself*, just as the murderer repents when he comes in sight of the gallows; not with ingenuous grief for the crime, but with horror at its hideousness and its consequences. It was the bitterness of regret, "the sorrow of the world which worketh death." It was such repentance as the devils have, and the violated law executes, when the never-dying worm begins its gnawings. It was all-absorbing, and relaxed even his grasp of gold. "He threw down the silver in the temple," and rushed upon his doom. The universe frowned upon him, the frenzy of remorse seized him, and a scorpion conscience drove him to despair. He could not endure the conflict. With all his obduracy, it embittered his existence, and rendered it a burden. Maddened, overwhelmed with a sense of unutterable woe, and goaded by despair, he became the avenger of his own crime, cast his burden from him, and "departed, and went and hanged himself."—*Rev. G. Spring, D.D.*

[19014] It is written, indeed, that Judas *repented himself* (Matt. xxvii. 3). But unlike the repentance of Peter, this was a repentance without tears. It was the repentance of fear, not of contrition; the repentance which dreads punishment, not the repentance which would willingly suffer every punishment, if it could but retrieve the deed.—*Dr. Tholuck.*

IV. HIS DOOM.

The terms in which our Lord refers to it are opposed to the tenets of universalism and the annihilation of the wicked.

[19015] How few are they of whom and for whom surviving friends may not have some faint and lingering hope that they have found mercy at the eleventh hour! It is not so with Judas. We have no faint and lingering hope for the betrayer of his Lord. He is an inhabitant of that world where "the worm does not die, and

the fire is not quenched." God has told us that "he went to *his own place*." It is his own place, because he was fitted for it; because he procured it by his wickedness; because he deserved it; because it was prepared for him by eternal justice; and because he had no other, and no other world could receive him. Earth disowned him, and he could not remain upon it; he was an outcast, and his only place was hell. God has told us also, that "it had been good for him if he had never been born." There would be no truth in this declaration if Judas was a pardoned sinner, and an inheritor of the kingdom of God; nor if, in the revolution of ages, he were ever hereafter to become a reformed and pardoned man, and an heir of God and heaven.—*Rev. G. Spring, D.D.*

[19016] The doctrine of universal salvation has no countenance in Scripture. It is disproven by many express declarations, and by many fair and necessary inferences. It is disproven by the case of Judas. If, after many thousand years of suffering, he shall rise to everlasting happiness in the skies, it will be good for him that he was born. Eternal happiness far outweighs all temporal suffering, however protracted. Any existence which terminates in eternal glory will prove a blessing beyond all computation. All temporal suffering can be gauged. But who can fathom the sea of love, the ocean of bliss, made sure to all believers? And eternal misery is as dreadful as eternal glory is desirable. Oh! how fearful must be the doom of the incorrigibly wicked, when in their case existence itself ceases to be desirable, or even tolerable! It is true of every one who dies without repentance toward God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, that it had been good for that man if he had not been born.—*Rev. W. Plumer, D.D.*

[19017] In that solemn and awful declaration (Matt. xxvi. 24), two alternative conditions were present to the mind of our blessed Redeemer—a condition of continual existence after death in torment, and a condition of non-existence before the life of the traitor Judas began. Here our Lord pointedly and positively contrasts the terrors and the torments that await Judas in a future state of suffering, with the "better" lot that would have been his had he never been born—that is, to put it briefly, our Lord contrasts the existence of the wicked in a future state with their non-existence before their birth, and thus, *totidem verbis*, not only asserts what Mr. Minton denies, the continual existence of the wicked in a future state, but shows it forth in the strongest of all terms, by contrasting it expressly with its opposite—non-existence. If a painter (who is presumed to be the best judge of colours) tells us to use white as a colour, and points to it expressly as the very opposite of black, by way of contrast, what are we to think of the amateur who persists in advising us to use black because white is a colour he cannot reconcile to his reason and notion of art? Equally absurd, we contend, is Mr. Minton's

theory in the case of Judas, if he will persist in interpreting future punishment as non-existence, which punishment our Lord Himself not only asserts to be existence, but actually contrasts with non-existence.—*The Rock.*

V. QUESTION AS TO THE REASON OF HIS SELECTION AS AN APOSTLE BY CHRIST.

[19018] Why Christ selected him, with the foresight of his apostasy, is a question we are unable to answer. "Have I not chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil?" are words which state a fact teeming with mystery, one which makes our poor reason stagger, just as we are staggered at seeing the serpent let into Paradise—or at beholding Satan among the sons of God—or at the thought of an intelligent spirit being created when it was known he would turn out, not only a devil, but the father of all other devils—or, in a word, at the admission of evil at all into the universe of a perfect Creator. Adopting, however, our humble method of analogical reasoning in the matter before us, we may say that perhaps Christ called Judas in order that, by an example of such fearful apostasy, he might guard his people, in all ages, against the like evil. It might be that He chose him an apostle, and left him to his own carnal heart, to show that no office, not even the apostolic—that no gifts, not even the miraculous—will suffice to correct and purify any carnal heart.—*Rev. J. Stoughton.*

[19019] It may seem strange to us that Christ should ever have admitted Judas to that number. The only reasonable account of it which we can form is this, that our Lord acted by Judas as He did by all the rest. He accepted him on the ground of a profession which was consistent as far as human eye could see. Christ Himself received members into His Church as He intended that we should receive them; for, had He used His Divine omniscience in His judgments, the whole structure of His life would have been out of our reach as an example. Judas accordingly entered among the apostles, because, in all outward things, and even in some inward convictions, he was like them. He came under the same influences, listened to the same invitations and warnings,—and they were meant as truly for Judas as for the rest. It would have gladdened the heart of Christ had Judas yielded to the voice of mercy.—*Ibid.*

VI. CONTRAST BETWEEN JUDAS ISCARIOT AND PETER.

1 In regard to their sin.

[19020] It does not seem to me that the deed of Judas Iscariot, in betraying Jesus, was much deeper in its turpitude and treachery than that of Peter in denying Him. But the chief difference lay in the fact that Peter's transgression was a kind of fatal impulse, whilst that of Judas was a deliberate design. It is sad enough to think that Peter should for a moment have for-

gotten the endearments of his precious intimacy with the Saviour; but it is a darker thought to dwell on Judas wearing the simulative mask year after year, and muffling the black heart of a conspirator amongst the holy folds of an apostle's garb. That must indeed have been a miserable nature which could sit, as it were, for years beneath that holy ministry, and spend month after month in daily contact with that hallowed presence, not only unsoftened by the converse and the conduct of the sinner's Friend, but actually nursing enmity and hate against the Leader whose loyal follower he professed to be. A hypocrite amongst hierarchs, a seceder amongst standard-bearers, a plotter amongst priests, a devil amongst disciples, is verily an illustrious culprit; yet such was Judas Iscariot; and his name must ever be the synonym of treachery, while he holds the head appointment under the exiled archangel who hatched revolt in heaven, as a leader and commander among the black-mailed legion of the recreant army of traitors.—*Rev. A. Mursell.*

[19021] Were we to distinguish between the sin of Judas and of Peter, we might say that the latter was betrayed into his sinful act by a natural infirmity, in its own nature innocent, although it may, unless subordinated to religious principle, and actually did in the case of Peter, plunge its subject into the most heinous and aggravated sin. Peter's sin was the result of the fear of man—of that instinctive dread of suffering and death which belongs to man's nature, and can be expelled, or rather controlled, but by that antagonist fear which our Lord prescribed as its proper remedy: "Fear not them which kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do; but fear Him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell: yea, I say unto you, fear Him." But the sin of Judas was not a natural infirmity: it was an unnatural and sinful passion superinduced upon man's original nature, and cherished in the soul. Judas's sin was the fruit of covetousness in its most debasing form, the love of filthy lucre—a passion not less foolish than sinful; which sets up a senseless idol upon that throne which God alone should occupy in the temple of the human heart.—*Rev. H. Hifferman.*

2 In regard to their repentance.

[19022] When Judas saw the snare in which sin had entangled him, and looked round for some means of extrication, he could find none. The love of sin, unmortified in his heart, causes him to feel his distant alienation from a holy God, and thus poisons every means of grace. The very meekness and gentleness of Christ, upon which sincere penitence casts itself with humble confidence, as upon the bosom of a friend, justly seem to his guilty conscience and alien heart but to enhance his guilt. The many warnings he had neglected, the vengeance denounced against him, now rankled like barbed and poisoned arrows in his bosom. His own

base and ungenerous nature tells him that Christ can never pardon so vile ingratitude, so deep treachery, so fatal an injury. Practically unacquainted, as he thus is, with the character of Christ, he can fly but to the creature for relief and consolation; and when this resource fails, he gives up all as hopeless. While Peter, who often hung upon the Saviour's gracious words—who saw His glory, full of grace as of truth—who remembered the merciful declaration, that He had "come, not to destroy men's lives, but to save them;" "to seek and to save the lost;" "to call sinners to repentance"—and His pledge of love to himself, "I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not"—Peter was melted by His look of mingled reproach and commiseration into tears of penitential sorrow, of rekindled, humble, ardent love. Both started, as it were, together from the post of sin; but they started on different courses, in directions widely separate as east is from the west. The one repented, believed, and was saved: the other repented, despaired, and perished!—*Ibid.*

VII. HOMILETICAL REFLECTIONS.

1 The history of Judas is the great Biblical beacon warning against the sin of covetousness.

[19023] Judas is a warning to all who have to do with the handling of money—to men of trust and men of trade—to men of every class and every occupation. Nor forget, that, as a very little stimulated his rapacity, as petty thefts were all he could practise, so small resources and tiny gains may nurse and nourish the spirit of a fatal worldliness. Avarice is the disease of the poor as well as the rich; and heaven may be lost, not only by grasping at thousands of gold, but by striving to clutch a few pieces of silver. If there ever was a time when the example of Judas ought to be set up as a warning, when the lessons of his history appeared specially suitable, and most called for, it is the present time. A mad and unprincipled pursuit of gain is the evil genius—the demon of the age. You find it in all our towns and cities and villages, haunting every market and manufactory, every counting-house and shop. You find it flying about everywhere—penetrating into secret places, entering the parlour and the closet, whispering into the ears of men and women, tempting them to sacrifice honour and principle, and their own souls, for the sake of gratifying the love of acquisition. Could we command the statistics of spiritual crime, and classify the numbers that perish, and put them down under the head of the besetting sin to which their everlasting ruin was primarily attributable, we apprehend that a longer catalogue would be found in the column appropriated to the unbridled lust of gain, than in those distinguished by the names either of intemperance or of lust.—*Rev. J. Stoughton.*

[19024] The character of Judas sets in affecting light the sin of avarice. This, combined

with the love of distinction, was the ruin of this wretched man. He did not attempt to reconcile the claims of God and Mammon. Mammon was his god. He sold his Master and lost his soul. His name stands out before the world as the mark of God's reprobation upon the idolatrous love of money. The great question which determines the habitual, if not the uniform, conduct of the great mass of men, is not what is right, what will God and conscience approve; but will it be for my interest? It is Judas' question, What shall I gain by it? what will ye give? This question goes round the world. Rectitude, truth, and honour, are put up for sale to the highest bidder. From the slave-market on the land, and the freebooter on the ocean—from the theatre and the gaming-table—from the licentious press and the grog-shop—from the office of the swindler, and from corrupt tribunals of justice—from the Corporation Hall, the altar of the hypocrite, and the pulpit of the sycophant preacher—the sign is hung out, Consciences sold here; what will ye give? And how often is the question answered by the loss of the soul?—*Rev. G. Spring, D.D.*

[19025] The only instance of a despairing sinner left upon record in the New Testament is that of a treacherous and greedy Judas. Nor let us vainly suppose ourselves above the reach of this lust: for who shall presume to be secure, when a friend, a disciple, an apostle, a preacher of righteousness, a worker of miracles, was yet seduced to sell his Master and his soul upon so sordid a consideration as thirty shekels of silver? This ought to put us all upon our guard; and the fate of Judas stands as a monument and eternal admonition to all that "make gold their god," and the "fine gold their confidence:" a warning not only of their proneness to do wickedly, but of the bitter fruits of doing so.—*H. Southgate.*

2 The history of Judas illustrates the secret malignancy and ruinous tendencies of sin.

[19026] "As righteousness tendeth to life, so he that pursueth evil pursueth it to his own death." The natural tendency of sin is to move only in one direction, and that is downward. Judas little thought of being driven to hang himself, when he first united with the family of Christ. The more and longer a man sins, the faster and the stronger does he sin. When his history is published at the last day, it will be seen that he has never taken a step backward. He does not stop in his progress, until he leaps the precipice, and is plunged in despair. Let him alone, and he is lost. His habits of sinning become fixed, his moral sensibilities hardened, and he is fitted only for perdition. He cuts himself off from all the sources of happiness, because he is the enemy of God. The state of his own mind indicates that he is going to a miserable existence as fast as time can carry him. Let him dwell in whatever part of the universe he may, he has the elements of misery in his own bosom.

"He eats the fruit of his own way, and is filled with his own devices."—*Rev. G. Spring, D.D.*

[19027] Excepting the murmuring against the woman who anointed the Saviour—a murmur which, but for the light thrown upon it by the observation of the Evangelist, we should in all probability have attributed to a well-intended but ignorant zeal for the poor—there is nought to distinguish him from the rest of the apostles. He hung as attentively upon the lips of the Redeemer; he wrought miracles in His name; he bore with Him hunger and thirst and cold and nakedness; his first recorded act of transgression was the greatest sin ever looked upon. Yet all the while, in the dark places of his spirit, there was going on a fearful work. It declared not itself in the outward action, it evidenced not itself to the world. Still carrying with him a good appearance, still endowed with superhuman power, the son of perdition was ripening for his everlasting doom. Oh, incomprehensible power of hell! walking with God, yet communing with Satan: drinking in with the outward ear the accents of the Almighty, yet "giving heed to doctrines of devils." Strange that the fallen angel should have dared to single out one whom Christ had chosen as his object of attack! stranger that one chosen, and taught and strengthened, should have been fitted only for destruction! The same process, beyond question, went on in the heart of Judas as takes place in all who are exposed to temptation. Though to those who regarded the outward appearance, he stood still, apparently no more culpable one month than the former, he was nevertheless training all the while for the garden of Gethsemane.—*Dp. Woodford.*

3 The history of Judas illustrates the hardening power of grace resisted.

[19028] He had had the very closest intimacy with Christ in the days of his public ministry; he was so trusted by the Saviour that he kept the little treasury in which Christ put, when there were any, the excesses, the excessive gifts of charity; he was the treasurer of the little company, you know him—Judas. He had been with Jesus almost everywhere; he had been His familiar friend and acquaintance, and when he dipped the bread with Him in the sop, it was but an indication of the close association which had been preserved between the Divine Master and a creature unworthy of such privilege. Yet there was never such a child of perdition as Judas, the friend and acquaintance of Christ; never one sinks lower in the depths of Divine wrath, with so huge a millstone about his neck, as this man with whom Christ took such sweet counsel, and went to the house of God in company. The same sun ripens the corn and the poppies. This man was ripened in guilt by the same external process that ripens others in holiness.—*C. H. Spurgeon.*

[19029] Nothing prepares a man for destruc-

tion faster than hypocrisy or formality in actions of a religious nature. The three years which Judas spent in the family of our Lord probably exceeded all the rest of his life in ripening him for destruction. So many, so solemn, so impressive truths were presented to his mind, that he must have become very rapidly hardened. "I have peace-offerings with me; this day have I paid my vows" (Prov. vii. 14), said one who was now ready for the worst deeds. The reason why, other things being equal, apostates are so much more wicked than others, is that they have learned how to resist all good influences. They have tried the remedy, but first learned to render it ineffectual.—*Rev. W. Plumv., D.D.*

4 The history of Judas illustrates the undying power of conscience.

[19030] So insupportable was the load of innocent blood which he had brought upon his head, that life itself became unbearable, and he went out and hanged himself. Whatever we may say about the natural depravity of man, there is a capacity in the soul for suffering through sin, which sometimes makes the thought of a past evil absolutely maddening. Conscience sometimes *insists* on being heard; and, though the sinner presses his hands upon his ears to shut out its voice, it will one day smite them down, and shout its accusations forth with such a thunder tone, that the startled soul shall reel in its alarm, and writhe under the bite of its remorse. How can we wonder that Iscariot hanged himself? He was confronted face to face with all his treachery. He saw the visage of his mighty Victim, unreproachful, rise before him; he heard the utterance of the gentle voice again, as it preached before the people on the temple pavement, on the sea-shore, in the wilderness, or by the mountain-side; he listened to Him while He chatted in the cottages, and spoke familiar wisdom as they sauntered through the fields and plucked the corn; it all came back upon him in one vivid glimpse, as the whole life will flit at once, in all its realness, before the vision of a drowning man. But, in every sight which printed itself upon his fancy, he read the shameful letters from which he spelt out—"traitor;" in every sound he heard the hiss of stern contempt proclaim him—"traitor;" and as they set the trial-court in order, as Golgotha prepared its scourge, and Calvary its cross; as the infuriate Pharisee clenched his relentless hand to buffet the "Man of sorrows," and the envious Jew took up the stone, and the hater twined the crown of thorns, and soaked the sponge with vinegar, and the Roman soldier barbed his gleaming spear;—in the prophetic echo of the knocking of the nails, and the yelling of the crowd, and in each hollow blow, and in each rabid scream, he heard the damning sound denounce him—"traitor." What could he do but strangle out a life so haunted and so cursed? what Lethe or oblivion so welcome as a speedy death?—*Rev. A. Mursell.*

JAMES THE LORD'S BROTHER.

I. HIS POSITION IN THE CHURCH.

He was emphatically an apostle to the circumcision.

[19031] We identify him with James, the son of Alphaeus. There are no incidents related of him in the Gospel. Nothing that throws light on his character. To gain such light we must turn to the Acts of the Apostles. Here, of course, we see him in his best days—not as we have seen Thomas, and Philip, and Peter, and the other James, struggling with fatal doubts, confused and darkened by the most false ideas. We see him in the midst of apostolic light. He was eminently an apostle to the Jews. He was dwelling at Jerusalem. He welcomed Paul there. When he saw the grace given to the new convert he extended to him and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that they should go to the heathen, that is, Gentiles; and he to the circumcision. He took a part in the conference reported in the fifteenth of Acts. James answered saying, "Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for His name. And to this degree the words of the prophets—Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God." So he would not impose circumcision upon Gentiles. He had got beyond that Jewish prejudice, but it would appear that he had not shaken off all his Jewish prejudices. Paul, referring to his own interview with Peter, at Antioch, observes, "Before that certain came from James, he (Peter) did eat with the Gentiles; but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision." From this it may be inferred that James, though he would admit Gentiles to the church, and would not impose circumcision upon them, yet was for keeping up a line of distinction between the ancient house of Israel and the other families of the earth.

II. TRADITIONAL VIEWS.

[19032] If we turn to the later traditions of the Jewish Christians themselves, as preserved in the fragments of Hegesippus, or in the Clementine Recognitions and Homilies—James appears before us as the one mysterious bulwark of the chosen people—invested with a priestly sanctity, before which the pontificate of Aaron fades into insignificance—as the one universal bishop of the Christian Church, in whose dignity the loftiest claims of the ecclesiastical domination of latest times find their earliest prototype. If we look to the impression produced on the mind of the Jewish people itself, we find that he alone, of all the apostles, has obtained a place in their national records, whether in the simple narrative of his death by Josephus, or in the wilder version of the

miracles of Jacob of Secamah, preserved to us in the legends of the Talmud.—*Dean Stanley.*

[19033] He was emphatically "the just;" his own personal name was superseded by it. The predictions of the Just One were regarded as fulfilled in his person; the people, we are told, vied with each other to touch even the hem of his garment: after the manner of Elijah, he was reported in the droughts of Palestine to have stretched forth his hands to heaven and called down rain, and like the ancient prophets, even in outward aspect, with the austere features, the linen ephod, the bare feet, the long locks, and the unshorn beard of the Nazarite, he gathered round the admiring populace to ask, as once before, of one who had appeared in like manner on the banks of the Jordan, "What is the gate of salvation?" And in that striking scene, when, at the close of his long life, he is described as standing on the front of the temple, and bearing witness to the coming judgment of the Son of Man, in the presence of the assembled multitudes, who had come up to worship at the passover, it was with a feeling of bitter disappointment that the Scribes and Pharisees are represented as rushing upon him with the cry, "Woe! woe! the Just One also is deceived!" and in his cruel death, the Jewish historian, no less than the Christian martyrologist, saw the filling up of the cup of guilt which was to hasten on the final catastrophe of the apostate nation.—*Ibid.*

III. CHARACTER OF HIS EPISTLE.

1 It is more practical than contemplative, and is eminently Jewish.

[19034] While it is evident that its author was more practical than contemplative, that he had not the reflection of John, or the logical habit of Paul, but was in mental constitution more like Peter—that he was ardent and imaginative, employing all his power in the service of holiness—one cannot help seeing much of the Jew in every chapter. Some consider it the earliest of the Epistles. In that position it stands in the oldest arrangements. If that be its proper place, its character certainly agrees with it. "It is to them what, in the Gospel narrative, the teaching of the Baptist is to the teaching of Christ. Its voice, indeed, is the voice of the new dispensation, but its outward form and figure belong rather to the old."—*Ibid.*

2 It is only a warped or superficial view of the Epistle which sees in it any contradictions to the writings of St. Paul.

[19035] It is strange that so good and great a man as Martin Luther should have spoken disparagingly of James's Epistle, and questioned its inspiration from its supposed discordance with the writings of Paul. . . . The single doctrine of justification by faith seemed to Luther, at the time referred to, to be the whole

of Christianity. Happily he lived to take larger views of the gospel, and then he learned to value this practical Epistle which once he had lightly esteemed. The writings of James are by no means inconsistent with those of his brother apostle. They have been satisfactorily harmonized by a number of expositors, and perhaps few in the present day are perplexed by difficulties arising out of a comparison between them. Divine truth has more sides than one. It is a beautiful prism shining with varied hues according to the light in which it is looked at. Paul was directed to look principally at one side—James at another. Paul investigated the principles of Christianity—James developed its practical relations. Paul treats of the justification of our persons by faith, James of the justification of our faith by consistency. Paul traced Christian life to its fountain head in Christ, while James mapped out the stream, which he was also prepared to attribute to that one Divine mainspring.—*Ibid.*

JOSEPH OF ARIMATHEA.

I. HIS CHARACTER PREVIOUS TO THE CRUCIFIXION.

His faith in Christ was of the Nicodemus type.

[19036] Joseph of Arimathea was a disciple, a believer in and learner of Christ, but he kept it a secret until Christ was dead. He seems not to have attempted to defend Christ before the Sanhedrim. Had he, in conjunction with Gamaliel and Nicodemus, lifted up a protest against the proceedings of the chief priests, they would not have been so bold. We are told that he "did not consent to the counsel and deed of them" (Luke xxiii. 51). He may have been absent from the council which condemned Christ. The rest of the council, suspecting the leanings of Joseph towards the Nazarene, may not have apprised him of their sudden gathering and subtle intentions. Anyhow, we hear nothing of his devotion to Christ until it is too late to be of any service, and that which we are told in John xix. 38 is not to be understood as spoken in his praise.—*F. Hastings.*

II. HIS CHARACTER SUBSEQUENT TO THE CRUCIFIXION.

1 His faith was not lessened but increased by the shame and suffering connected with Christ's death.

[19037] The sight of his Saviour blindfolded, spit upon, arrayed in mock royalty, holding a reed for a sceptre, and finally bearing the accursed cross, then nailed to the tree, and more than all crying, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" did not shake the

faith of this man. We wonder not that any disbelieved, but the wonder is that any maintained their confidence. Such was the confidence of Joseph in the Saviour that he went to Pilate and begged the body of Jesus for interment, which of course he would not have done had he supposed that Christ was not all which He professed to be. It seems as though his faith had rather increased than lessened, amid the terrible events of that day; for it inspired him with a desire to manifest his attachment to his Lord and Master by honouring His body.—*N. Adams.*

2 His growth in moral courage was remarkable.

[19038] We read of Joseph, "This man went in boldly unto Pilate, and begged the body of Jesus." It was the body of one whom that governor had delivered to the accursed death of the cross, and the request of Joseph was an implied reflection on the governor. At the next meeting of the Sanhedrim, what might Joseph expect would be his reception by them? There is the man, they might say, who took the body of the impostor from the cross, and buried it in his own tomb. Every epithet which scorn and hatred could heap upon him, he might expect would be in requisition against him. What a sight must that have been when this honourable man went boldly to the cross with his servants, and took from it the body of Jesus! Overhead remained the inscription designed for insult and triumph: "This is Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." Beneath the cross, the rapacious soldiers were parting the garments of the Saviour, and for His vesture casting lots. Passing by, the infidel Jew was repeating aloud the assurance which he strove to maintain, notwithstanding the miraculous darkness and the earthquake: "He saved others, Himself He cannot save." But still, in this bold and public manner, this friend of Jesus conveys away that form on which earth and hell had poured their contempt; and he bestows upon it an honourable and costly burial. Who does not entertain for such a man a feeling of the deepest respect and reverence?—*Ibid.*

3 His interest in Christ culminated in an ardent love for Him.

[19039] Here was the secret of his courage, the hiding of its power. He loved Christ; the Saviour's rejection and sufferings had raised the affections of this friend to their highest pitch; and he bestowed upon the dead body of his Redeemer the utmost proofs of love. He had prepared for himself a family tomb. No member of his family had yet occupied it. As he prepared that sepulchre, no doubt he sometimes thought of the first interment which should be made there, and he asked himself, unwillingly, which member of his household would be the first occupant of that sacred place. Had any applied to him for leave to bury an entire stranger there, perhaps his feelings would have revolted at the request. He might

have said to himself, It is my family tomb; far distant be the day when we shall follow one of our number to the spot; yet, until the place is hallowed in this mournful manner, I would keep it sealed. But now, behold, the first occupant of that tomb is taken from what we should call the scaffold, the gibbet; from between two thieves; amid the execrations of a great city; and in the face of contempt and scorn without measure.—*Ibid.*

[19040] There, in the new tomb, where he had expected first of all to be laid himself, or to lay some object of his love, Joseph places the body of his Lord, who was crucified in weakness, and in whom none but an eye of faith and a heart which had felt the power of a Saviour's love could see, amid all His humiliation and ignominious wounds, the Son of God and Saviour of the world. Herein is love. Joseph has bestowed on his deceased Master the greatest proof of sincere affection. John took the Saviour's mother to his own family and home; Joseph took the Saviour's body to his own family tomb. What price would have purchased an interment for that body in the high priest's tomb, or in the tomb of any other member of the Sanhedrim except Joseph? What makes the difference? Love. Love can do miracles; love regards not human opinion, numbers, influence; intent on its object, it sees no difficulties, feels no burden. It was such love for us that brought the Saviour from heaven, and carried Him to the cross. It was love for his and our Saviour, by which Joseph prepared a place in his own new tomb for Him whom we by our sins had crucified.—*Ibid.*

III. HOMILETICAL HINTS.

1 The history of Joseph of Arimathea exemplifies the fact that the grace of God can prevail over hindrances to faith and Christian zeal, presented by the characters and circumstances of men.

[19041] "And after this Joseph of Arimathea, being a disciple of Jesus (but secretly for fear of the Jews), besought Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus. . . . And there came also Nicodemus (which at the first came to Jesus by night), and brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds weight." It is certainly remarkable that the two men who performed this courageous act were men who once were exceedingly cautious, reserved, prudent, and, it may be, timid. . . . God can place us in circumstances where our faith, though now like a bruised reed, shall suddenly acquire the strength of years, and as Joseph and Nicodemus, no doubt, wondered at themselves, and may have said, Can it be that we, once so reserved, are the only men in Jerusalem that dare to bury Jesus? so we, if we walk according to the light already given, may be permitted to perform acts of love for the Saviour which will fill us with wonder and joy.—*Ibid.*

2 The reward with which Joseph met, is an illustration of the blessedness of those who love and serve Christ.

[19042] In two days Joseph's tomb became the scene of an event second to the scene on Calvary only in the order of time. There, in that tomb, life and immortality were brought to light. Never had man a house or palace so honoured as Joseph's tomb. It was occupied, first, by the lifeless form of the Son of God. Who may fully imagine what transpired there, as that form came to life again; what angelic ministrations were there; and what presence of glorified souls, to witness in the Saviour's resurrection the type and earnest of their own. "And behold, there was a great earthquake; for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it. His countenance was like lightning, and His raiment white as snow; and for fear of Him the keepers did shake, and became as dead men."—*Ibid.*

[19043] To Joseph and his household, what associations must have been connected with that family tomb; and with what peace must he and they have buried their dead, to sleep in the Saviour's own bed of death! All the Church of God thank and love thee, Joseph, for thy love and services to their Lord. They who give burial to a friend of ours that dies on a foreign shore, receive our thanks. He who took our Saviour from His cross, and laid Him in his own new tomb, is a benefactor to the Church of God. For ever, in the history of redemption, Joseph will be remembered in connection with his Saviour's death. As he bows in heaven at those sacred feet, he remembers that he once composed those bleeding feet, those bleeding hands, that bleeding head, for burial. At the last day, when, Judge of the world, Jesus shall sit with the nations at His bar, Joseph will remember, I laid Him once in my own new tomb.—*Ibid.*

LUKE.

I. HIS PERSONAL IDENTIFICATION.

[19044] Christian writers of a very early age assure us of the fact that the Evangelist Luke was the well-known physician and companion of Paul; and some of them add that he wrote his history under Paul's direction. But if he was the writer of the third Gospel, he was also the writer of the Acts of the Apostles; since the one book refers so pointedly to the other as a "former treatise" from the same hand. This, too, those primitive authorities confirm. And now there comes further light upon the man's identity in a rather curious manner. Up to a particular point in the Book of the Acts the narrator uses the third person in his descriptions, after the ordinary method of historians.

Suddenly the third person is changed to the first: "*we* endeavoured to go into Macedonia;" "*we* came with a straight course to Samothracia." But the form of speech is dropped after a few verses in favour of the former one; and again, after an interval of three chapters, it is resumed, and is continued to the end of the book. The inference is a tolerably secure one that the writer of the history was to this extent an eye-witness of its events: that Luke must have so far accompanied Paul in his travels, shared his labours, and enjoyed his confidence. We can trace him in fact to Rome; and at Rome we are met by the allusions in the Epistles.—*W. Brock.*

[19045] Whether Luke was Jew or Gentile, or to what country he belonged, cannot be decided, though tradition has fixed his birthplace at the Syrian Antioch, and criticism has judged that he was a native of Philippi. Under whose ministry he became a Christian is equally uncertain; for his own statement merely shows that he was not among the immediate disciples of our Lord. Nor can we fix distinctly the scene and scope of his missionary labour.—*Ibid.*

II. HIS FIDELITY.

It was remarkably exhibited in his friendship with St. Paul.

[19046] Even in his earlier imprisonment the apostle had with him a faithful few whose names are united with his own in the salutations of his Epistles. But at last the group is scattered. Some have proved untrue, others have been sent on distant errands, and in his most urgent need Paul is left with one solitary comrade in the Roman prison. "Only Luke is with me," he writes to Timothy; and there is a touch of pathos, if not of sadness, in the words.—*Ibid.*

[19047] Luke is believed to have shared much of the two years' confinement at Cæsarea. Certainly he shared the perils of the stormy voyage to Italy, and seems to have kept a regular journal of its stirring incidents. He was there, when at last they approached the Eternal City itself, and saw the joyful meeting between Paul and the Roman brethren, who came out forty miles along the Appian Way to give him welcome. He entered Rome beside his master, remained with him during that first imprisonment, and, as we have seen, returned to cheer him in the second.—*Ibid.*

[19048] He was a beloved friend; but so were many others whose presence was far less constant and regular than his. He was a physician as well as a friend, and therein lay his special recommendation. For we know that even during his most active years Paul was a great and frequent sufferer. The thorn in the flesh, whatever was its nature, buffeted him so sorely that again and again he cried out for deliverance

from it. How aggravated would it become with increasing years, with the exposure, the hardship, the continual confinement! The cold of the Roman winters tried him terribly. And while Titus is despatched in one direction, and Crescens in another, Luke stays with Paul because he can do him most good.—*Ibid.*

III. HIS WRITINGS.

1 These had marked characteristics.

[19049] In both books we recognize the hand of a man of education, exact in his information and picturesque in his description, delighting to communicate details of place or time, and to make his history live before his reader's eye. But the special interest lies in the spirit which they breathe. The man shines through the writer, and seems to grow familiar as a friend. There is not the abundance of Old Testament reference which distinguishes the pages of Matthew, nor the depth of spiritual discernment which is manifest in those of John: but there is an element of feeling peculiar to Luke; a mingled breadth and warmth which remind us continually of the Christian teaching and temper of the last and greatest of the apostles.—*Ibid.*

2 These seem to bear the impress of St. Paul's mind upon them.

[19050] Salvation by grace is confessedly the leading theme of Paul's preaching and of Paul's Epistles. He was the Apostle of the Gentiles, commissioned to present the message of the kingdom in its freest form, clear of all limitations. Now if we had to choose out of the four Gospels the one most suited to the heathen, as distinguished from the Jews, and therefore most adapted for general circulation, should we hesitate to name the Gospel of Luke? Christ appears in its pages as emphatically the Saviour—the Saviour of the world, and especially the Saviour of the lost. The famous fifteenth chapter is really the key to the whole book. Seeking the lost is its burden from beginning to end. The outcasts of society become the objects of Christ's care and cure. The characters we meet are the beggar Lazarus, the poor widow with her two mites, the despised Samaritan, the publican pushed into the outskirts of the temple court, the prodigal son. To the Saviour's feet creeps the fallen woman of the city; the sinner Zaccheus runs to see Him; on the very cross the penitent robber craves His mercy. All own Him, and all are by Him accepted. Let the contrite and troubled heart turn hither! For here we meet the fulness of redeeming mercy which, comprehending the vilest, cannot exclude us; and here we see in exercise that simple principle of humble confidence which justifies the ungodly: "Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace." It is Paul's great doctrine of justification by faith, illustrated in the action, and impressed in the words, of Christ.—*Ibid.*

[19051] No less prominent in Luke is that other leading element of Paul's teaching which he calls "joy in the Lord." The third Gospel is, above all, the gospel of gladness. The angels' song is echoed from one page to another: "Behold, we bring you good tidings of great joy." A happy Christian heart, one feels, has been concerned in the choice and composition of its materials. For the people "rejoice at all the wonderful works" of Christ; and the seventy "return with joy" from their missionary travels; and the sinner whose house the Lord enters "receives Him joyfully;" and "there is great joy in the city" where the preachers of the Word have come. The curtain falls upon the company of disciples "returning with great joy;" even from the parting with their ascended King, and "continually praising and blessing God." Nay, our evangelist is suffered to unveil thus the hallowed delights of the heavenly sanctuary; and from the rejoicings of angels over repenting sinners, we are taught that "it is meet for us to make merry and be glad."—*Ibid.*

MARK.

I. FORMATION OF CHARACTER.

[19052] That was a fine moral atmosphere for a youth to breathe: a godly mother, praying friends, missionaries and martyrs and apostles coming and going there; and a bracing one withal, with frequent winds of fierce opposition raging around. Something it must have been to be a son in the house to which Peter came that night, with the mark of the chains fresh upon his wrists, and the light of the angel's presence still reflected from his face: something to have been in the company when cousin Barnabas brought in a stranger, insignificant in appearance and awkward in address, and introduced him as the dreaded Saul of Tarsus changed to a beloved brother, and a fervent fellow-labourer!—*W. Brock.*

II. HIS EARLY SERVICE.

[19053] A flourishing and energetic church is gathered at Antioch, the great commercial capital of Syria. Barnabas and Paul are among its foremost teachers; and Mark, wearied, we may suppose, of the monotonous life at Jerusalem, and eager for adventure, has come to join them. He must already have been recognized as a converted man. And when those two friends have been solemnly set apart for mission work, it is settled that Mark shall accompany them. He is styled their "minister," or servant. It was the excellent custom of the older evangelists to associate the younger with them; just as Moses chose Joshua for his assistant, and Elisha "poured water on the hands of Elijah." The design was to inure them to the

discipline of the missionary life, and to instruct them in its duties. It was the squire learning to win his spurs in the Christian chivalry by attendance on the knight who had won them already. And what could be more suitable, or full of promise, than that Mark should serve his first campaign under Barnabas, his elder kinsman and friend, a man of such a noble, enterprising spirit, and yet so full of all gentleness and grace?—*Ibid.*

III. HIS DEFECTION.

[19054] What sudden change is this, occurring when that missionary journey has been but a little while begun? "John, departing from them, returned to Jerusalem." Short words, but how significant, and how disappointing! Can he be already weary in well-doing? Has he had only time to visit Cyprus, to sail across to Asia Minor, and will he so soon repent and return? After witnessing the awful judgment on Elymas, and the glorious conversion of Sergius Paulus; after seeing how Paul could smite, and how Barnabas could heal; after feeling some thrill of holy emulation in his own bosom, does he now give up the Christian work? What motive can have turned him back? Matthew Henry gives the answer in his own quaint fashion: "Either he did not like the work, or he wanted to go see his mother." A fit of homesickness, in fact! A shrinking from the distance and the danger: once up among yonder rugged highlands of Pisidia with their perils of waters and perils of robbers, what prospect would there be of ever seeing Jerusalem and Mary's house again? Perhaps also Paul, himself so hardy and self-sacrificing, was a little impatient with the young man, and treated him with an outspoken severity not pleasant to endure.—*Ibid.*

IV. HIS RETURN.

[19055] Five years must be supposed to pass. Barnabas and Paul have accomplished their journey, and returned. The great conflict with the Pharisaic party at Jerusalem has been fought out. The two missionaries are panting to be at work again. And of all men, who should appear, applying to accompany them, but the deserter Mark? Paul has never seen him since that unhappy parting at Perga; and he does not mean to be deceived a second time. Barnabas must do as he thinks right, but Paul will rather break their own old companionship, and go by himself. Then Barnabas will break it too. Barnabas takes the milder, more hopeful, more indulgent view; he has probably heard better things of his young cousin during the recent visit to Jerusalem, and sees some new fire and fervour in the man, which he, at least, will not quench. The decision of the "son of consolation" is to give him another chance. "And so Barnabas took Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus."—*Ibid.*

[19056] Marcus, in the letters of St. Paul, is clearly identified with our own Mark by his relationship to Barnabas. But can it be the same man? Where is the useless, untrustworthy character of whom we were obliged to get rid? Another stamp is set now upon his name by the very hand that was once ready to brand "deserter" there. "My fellow-prisoner," says St. Paul. He has the courage then, at least, to brave hardship for the Gospel's sake. "A comfort unto me," a strong support, as Barnabas himself was wont to be. . . . Surely our stranded ship floats again! Our fallen brother has lifted himself up, with heaven's help, and is on his own feet, pressing forward with as stout a heart as the bravest. Barnabas was right; there was a true heart in the man after all.—*Ibid.*

V. HIS GROWTH IN GRACE.

[19057] We turn to the first Epistle of Peter. Here also Mark's name is recorded, and where is Mark now? At Babylon, in the distant East; what an indefatigable traveller he has grown, and what a heart has he for labour! With whom is he found? With aged Peter, the friend of his early youth, the instrument of his conversion, his father in the faith. And what impressions does he leave behind him? The best; all the warm confidence of Simon Peter's heart is in that one phrase, "Marcus, my son." Ay, a Christian worthy of apostolic approval; born to God under his mother's roof in far Jerusalem twenty years ago, and now a man in Christ Jesus, grown to a full stature and a masculine strength!—*Ibid.*

[19058] Presently Paul is writing again; it is the last of all his letters, the second to Timothy, despatched during that second term of his imprisonment at Rome, which was so much closer and sharper than the first. His friends have left him; he is cold, and he is ill, and, with all his steadfast faith in the Divine support, he craves for a little human sympathy. Therefore let Timothy, if it may be, come quickly from Ephesus, where he is, bringing cloak and parchments, and his own filial care; and let him bring also some other tried and trusty brother, as a second source of consolation. Who, then, shall the chosen one be? "Take Mark, and bring him with thee;" a useful man, a "profitable" man, the very man for a minister, a servant, a friend! Mark, the runaway? Mark, rather than have whom in my company, I forfeited my dear companionship with Barnabas? Even him; for years have passed since then, and the timid stripling has become the resolute and energetic veteran; none better now, none worthier, and few indeed so good. Yes, let me have him to tend my hard confinement, to go out with me on the day when I must die, to witness my end, and to lay my body in its resting-place!—*Ibid.*

[19059] One further reference remains, a large and a long one; for it is a whole book of Scripture, "the Gospel according to Mark."

. . . All the early traditions agree in attributing to Mark, as the scribe and interpreter of Peter, that shortest life of Jesus, with its peculiar charm of graphic, pithy, picturesque representation, which the Church would not willingly let die. And thus the image which remains is not that of the fugitive youth, but of the missionary, the faithful companion of the chief apostles, and one among the four evangelists.—*Ibid.*

VI. HIS STYLE AS A WRITER.

[19050] It is exceedingly unclassical, strongly provincial, and destitute of every species of "the wisdom of words." It is homely, humble, unadorned, and altogether devoid of literary artifice or art. . . . He deals very largely—after the fashion of the true Hebrew—with the conjunction "and"; has a partiality for fixing the attention on *beginnings*; and has a very great liking for the expression *immediately*.—*James J. Morrison.*

VII. HOMILETICAL SUGGESTIONS.

The spiritual recovery of Mark affords strong encouragement to the desponding and disheartened.

[19061] On the northern coast of Devon there spreads a bay, along which the sea comes tide after tide, washing a broad beach of tiny shells. Shells are there innumerable; but you may search the shore for hours, and find no perfect specimen: the shells are broken. I can conceive many a disheartened traveller in life's hard journey sitting down on that beach, and saying, "Behold the image of my own experience, of my broken resolutions, unaccomplished purposes, and perpetual failures!" Even in the Christian Church there are not a few who feel that they have failed of the high aims, the noble impulses, which warmed and quickened them at first! To any such disheartened souls this story of Mark's recovery should come like a trumpet call of hope. Too late, say you, to join the ranks once more, to become men of high attainment, heavenly character, and fervent spirit; too late to win the brighter crown, and the more abundant entrance? Never too late while life lasts.—*Ibid.*

[19062] Stronger than the oldest habit of evil is the Spirit of God poured into the willing human heart. You, too, though now like Saul you hide trembling among the stuff, have a royal part that you may play, and a heavenly prize that you may win. Once more to the front! If Paul does not trust you, Barnabas will. If Paul does not care for you now, he may come to lean on you with all his strength. And One of whom you know, clearer-sighted by far than the shrewd apostle, tenderer of heart than that "son of consolation," marks your struggles, and prays for your success; and He, as you arise, will breathe into your ear those words of unutterable hope and encouragement, "Neither do I condemn thee: go and sin no more."—*Ibid.*

NICODEMUS.

I. INTRODUCTORY.

His personal history.

[19063] Nicodemus, we are told, was a ruler of the Jews, a member of the Sanhedrim, or great council of the nation. And as he was a man of rank, so was he a man of learning. He was a master in Israel, or, as some will have it, *the Master*, that distinctive title having been given him because of his pre-eminence over the teachers of his day. Beyond this we only know of him, that on a certain occasion when the chief priests and rulers were assuming the guilt of the Saviour, before they had any proof of it, he ventured to reprove his colleagues for indulging in a spirit so contrary to the law; and that, after our Lord's death, he showed his respect for His remains by bringing a large quantity of myrrh and aloes for the embalming. This is the man whose memorable interview with the Saviour is recorded in the third chapter of St. John.—*W. Sparrow.*

II. HIS GENERAL CHARACTER.

[19064] We may suppose that as one of the Pharisees he would be a moral man, a learned man, in a sense a religious man. Like Saul of Tarsus, he would be zealous for the law, and blameless in all its ordinances. For instruction he comes to Christ, being persuaded by the miracles that had been wrought that Christ could be none other than a messenger sent of God. He comes, however, fearful of the reproach that he might incur. That he came by night was not merely because there might then be a better opportunity for converse, but because he dreaded at that time being known as a follower of Jesus. "The same that came to Jesus by night," is the remark that the evangelist always attaches to his name.—*Rev. G. Everard.*

[19065] The person, and office, and attainments, and external history of Nicodemus, as of every other man, are comparatively of small account. The great consideration is, what were the motives by which he was actuated, and what were the objects at which he aimed? His motives were manifestly of a mixed character, partly commendable and partly not. He was undoubtedly a serious person. He was not living like the beasts that perish, careless of the future. He had not let folly dissipate his mind, or business harden it into indifference to an hereafter. He believed religion to be the chief concern of man. He had some light; he was anxious for more. He felt that he lived in eventful times, and he was looking out for such further disclosures of the Divine purposes as God might choose to make. He was satisfied of the prophetic mission of Christ. "Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher from God," were his words; and he was not willing to let such an opportunity of religious knowledge, as the pre-

sence of a prophet afforded, pass unimproved. Casting off the reserve which his rank and reputation would naturally impose, he comes to Jesus, with a virtual, if not a verbal acknowledgment of his ignorance, and of his desire to have it remedied.—*W. Sparrow.*

[19066] Behold this man coming to Christ by night! Thoughtful, but cautious, revolving how much he should admit, and how much hold in reserve; yet a teacher himself, and bent on searching the matter from his rationalistic position. This quality of rationalism—his desire and purpose to know and judge of everything according to his own understanding—is the characteristic of Nicodemus, and so the key to the entire conversation. He believes more than he is willing to avow. He begins his salutation with an admission, and closes it with a most "cautious inconsistency." He is very far from being the miserable "time-server" which some have supposed; yet before the conversation closes, he is reproached by our Lord for not giving fuller expression to his honest convictions. He is quite in earnest, and honest in his way; but it is just such a combination of rationalism and materialism as we might suppose would characterize a thoughtful Pharisee, which describes the man who, in the darkness of night, now seeks out our Lord. He was already a believer, but not a believer of the right sort. The miracles of Christ had carried the outposts of the citadel, but the whole man had not assented. Everything which is said by our Lord throughout the whole interview is adapted to meet this semi-persuaded rationalistic condition of mind, by the presentation of truths which were designed to test the counter-quality of faith. "How?" "how?" is the interrogatory of the ruler. "Believe," "believe," is the response of Christ. By his own admission of being convinced by miracles, Nicodemus put himself in a position where it was right and wise that he should be pressed with this duty of faith as a logical necessity. If he confessed, as he did, that the person with whom he talked acted with Divine sanction and power in His indisputable miracles, then nothing could be more consistent or appropriate to this confession than that he should believe the testimony of the Being whose words were corroborated by such preternatural wonders.—*W. Adams, D.D.*

III. HIS SPIRITUAL ENLIGHTENMENT.

1 It was the result of earnest inquiry.

[19067] We cannot but wonder at the candour and honesty of this man's mind. Most men are carried away by the opinions of the day, and of those with whom they associate: but here we have Nicodemus thinking for himself, and arriving at the conclusion that Jesus was a teacher come from God, when all his fellow-councillors were prejudiced against Him, hated Him, and were striving to kill Him.—*Townsend Fox.*

[19068] Nicodemus' soul was awakened; his understanding was at least so far enlightened as to make him sensible of his ignorance. There was a felt want in his mind—the want, namely, of light, of truth. Conscience was ill at ease, and urged him to seek something more satisfactory in his religious state. Looked at from the subjective side, we have an instance of a person putting forth an effort to find the truth, and turning to the only quarter where it could be found.—*A. L. Foote.*

2 It advanced by a gradual growth in grace.

[19069] Two years have passed away since that eventful night; and it is clear that the seed has been taking root, and is now appearing: first the blade, and in its due time will appear the ear and the full corn in the ear. The officers sent by the chief priests refuse to lay hands on Christ, so greatly had His words taken hold upon them. Then the Pharisees say to them, "Are ye also deceived? Have any of the rulers or Pharisees believed on Him? But this people who knoweth not the law are cursed." No longer Nicodemus can be silent. He ventures a remark. True, it was not a very strong one, yet it required no small amount of courage to make it. He showed them that there was at least one ruler, one Pharisee who would not condemn Christ. He was not afraid to bring down suspicion and envy upon himself. "Nicodemus saith unto them (he that came to Jesus before being one of them), Doth our law judge any man before it hear him and know what he doeth? They answered and said unto him, Art thou also of Galilee? Search and look: for out of Galilee ariseth no prophet."—*Rev. G. Everard.*

[19070] Another year passes by. Again Nicodemus is brought before us. And now very marked is the advance that he has made. He is no more the timid inquirer, no more the one who ventures with trembling a word on behalf of the Master, but the bold and devoted disciple. It was at the time when all looked the darkest. The enemy has triumphed: Christ is crucified: the disciples have fled: Judas has betrayed Him, and Peter denied Him; yet even then Nicodemus proves his faith and love. He unites with Joseph of Arimathea in going in boldly and begging the body of Jesus. He brings a costly gift, a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds weight. He assists Joseph in carrying the precious body of our Lord, and laying it in the new sepulchre. What a glorious triumph of faith! How truly in him were the words fulfilled that "the last should be first"!—*Ibid.*

[19071] Nicodemus was an unwonted visitant to Christ—for few indeed were they among the scribes and Pharisees sitting in Moses' seat, who would have sought, by night or by day, the despised Prophet of Nazareth of Galilee. An ambiguous visitant, as to the probability of his turning back or going forward—for many have advanced thus far, and walked no more with

Jesus ; but in this case there shall be a steady and a growing light, shining more and more unto a perfect day ; this voice shall one day be improving in the adverse Sanhedrim a precipitate condemnation of Jesus ; these hands shall one day be busy about that sacred corpse from which friends and disciples shall have slunk away trembling.—*Dean Vaughan.*

IV. VARYING VIEWS AS TO HIS MORAL COWARDICE.

[19072] A constitutional timidity is observable in all which the Gospels tell us about Nicodemus ; a timidity which could not be wholly overcome even by his honest desire to befriend and acknowledge one whom he knew to be a Prophet, even if he did not at once recognize in Him the promised Messiah. Thus the few words which he interposed to check the rash injustice of his colleagues are cautiously rested on a general principle, and betray no indication of his personal faith in the Galilean whom his sect despised. And even when the power of Christ's love, manifested on the cross, had made the most timid disciples bold, Nicodemus does not come forward with his splendid gifts of affection, until the example had been set by one of his own wealth, rank, and station in society.—*Archdeacon Farrar.*

[19073] Nicodemus was an earnest man. We find an evidence of this in his coming to Christ by night. It has been usually thought that he was a timid man—that he came by night for fear of the Jews—but no such statement is anywhere made. The interview he sought could only be obtained at night. He himself might have been occupied with his official duties during the day ; and Christ was taken up from morn till eve with His works of mercy, with teaching and healing. It was no easy thing to force a way through the crowd, and to gain access to Him ; and what this man needed was a private interview, that he might be able to place before Christ his own difficulties, and obtain answers to his questionings. If he had not been an earnest man he would not have gone by night, treading those lone dark streets, meeting only some guest from the board of the Roman governor returning home, or the soldiers who were going to relieve the guard. He must see Christ, and talk with Him, and spend the night in His company.—*H. J. Bevis.*

[19074] It was to his praise that he voluntarily came to Jesus, not for any official inquiry, not for the sake of criminating Him by His own words, but seeking on his own account, as an individual, for that instruction which he is desirous to hear. That he came by night, is rather a token of deep desire, than a blamable evidence of human fear.—*Rudolf Stier, D.D.*

[19075] The fact that Nicodemus came to Jesus by night has often been interpreted as

proof of his moral cowardice. But the work of conviction in him cannot be supposed to have proceeded by this time so far as to justify this view. The evangelist does not either expressly or by implication attribute fear to Nicodemus. As a member of the Sanhedrim, the business of that body would be greatly increased at the time of the Passover, and the night might have been the only opportunity for such an interview as he desired. Moreover, as Jesus would be surrounded by crowds during the day, night was the only season when he could hope for a private interview.—*J. Macdonald, D.D.*

V. HOMILETICAL HINTS.

The spiritual history of Nicodemus affords encouragement to the Christian novice and the faint-hearted believer.

[19076] Nicodemus affords a bright example to those that are setting their face Zionward. Nothing is impossible with God. Grace can uphold the weakest and give boldness to the most fearful. Thus the righteous holds on his way, and he that hath clean hands becomes stronger and stronger. Doubtless Nicodemus must have been much in prayer, he must have hidden the word of Christ deep within his heart ; thus the Spirit was given, and from a little child in the Divine life he grew into the fulness of the stature of Christ.—*Rev. G. Everard.*

THE PENITENT MALEFACTOR.

I. PROBABLE NATURE OF HIS CRIME.

[19077] "Malefactors" is the name by which St. Luke calls them ; "thieves" (according to our Version) the two earlier Evangelists ; from whom, and from the blending of whose record with his, we have learned to speak of "the penitent thief." Our translators would have done much better to maintain the distinction which the Scripture maintains between him, the "robber," or violent spoiler (see Matt. xxi. 13, xxvi. 55 ; Luke x. 30 ; John xviii. 40 ; 2 Cor. xi. 26), and the "thief," or secret purloiner (Matt. vi. 19 ; John xii. 6 ; 1 Thess. v. 2 ; Rev. iii. 3, xvi. 15). Many passages have suffered in our Version from the neglect of this distinction, but none so seriously as that with which we now have to do.—*Abp. Trench.*

[19078] These two were not "thieves," as we have learned to call them, but robbers. Having vindicated this title for them, we may further inquire what at this time the name probably implied, and whether more than lies on the surface of the word. It will help us to answer this question aright, if we put side by side the application of the title of "robber" to Barabbas (John xviii. 40), and the other notices of him which the Gospels supply ; and then seek to

read all in the light which contemporary history affords. Barabbas, this "robber" according to St. John, was, we are told, "a notable prisoner" (Matt. xxvii. 16); "which lay bound with them that had made insurrection with him, who had committed murder in the insurrection" (Mark xv. 7); "who for a certain sedition made in the city, and for murder, was cast into prison" (Luke xxiii. 19); plainly a ringleader in one of those fierce and fanatic outbreaks against the Roman domination, which on a large scale or a small so fast succeeded one another in the latter days of the Jewish commonwealth. . . . There is every likelihood that the two malefactors crucified with Jesus belonged to the band of Barabbas.—*Ibid.*

[19079] Those whom the Romans with a certain amount of truth called "robbers," were oftentimes wild and stormy zealots, maintaining in arms a last and hopeless protest against that yoke of the stranger which God had imposed on His people for the chastisement of their sins, and which, therefore, it behoved them meekly to accept. This may have been one of these, seeking at the outset of his career to work by the wrath of man what he counted the righteousness of God. Presently a fugitive from Roman justice, compelled to take to the mountains, and to live there by rapine, he may have gradually learned less and less to discriminate between friend and foe, may have earned only too well the title under which he was at last to expiate his offences on a Roman cross. His own confession implies as much.—*Ibid.*

II. HIS CONVERSION.

I Conviction and confession of sin.

[19080] Few as are the words which this penitent utters in his brief address to his fellow-sinner, and then in his still briefer to his Saviour, they yet are sufficient to reveal to us a most authentic work of grace going forward within him. He is, in the first place, deeply convinced of his sin. There is no more certain sign of an effectual work of the Holy Spirit of God than a readiness on the sinner's part to accept and acquiesce in his punishment, whatever that punishment may be, to put his mouth in the dust, and to say, "Thou art righteous, O God, that doest this;" "Wherefore doth a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sin?" (Lam. iii. 39; cf. Ezra ix. 6, 7; Luke xv. 18, 19); while, on the other hand, there can be no surer token of an impenitent and obdurate heart than the refusal of the sinner to receive correction, to humble himself under the mighty hand of God (Isa. i. 5, ix. 10; Jer. ii. 30, v. 3; Luke xv. 14, 15; Rev. ix. 21, xvi. 21). And this man, even in that bitter cross, saw nothing more than he had earned, "the due reward of his deeds." How profound the conviction, how unreserved on his part is the confession of sin! —*Ibid.*

2 Faith in Christ.

[19081] If other graces signally manifest themselves in him, yet, more than all other, what a wondrous faith utters itself in these words of his! To believe that He, whose only token of royalty was the crown of thorns that still clung to His bleeding brows, was a King, and had a kingdom; that He, on whose own eyes the mists of death were already hanging, was indeed the Prince of life, wielding in those pierced hands, nailed so helplessly to the cross, the keys of death and of hell; that He could shut and none could open, could open and none could shut; that it would profit something in that mysterious world whither they both were hastening to be remembered by this crucified Man—that was a faith indeed. What was the faith of any other to his faith? Everything seemed to give the lie to Christ's pretensions. Disciples and apostles themselves had fallen away and fled. They had trusted once "that it had been He which should have redeemed Israel" (Luke xxiv. 21); but they had now renounced that hope; and, indeed, every other hope; and then, in the midst of this universal unbelief, one, all whose anterior life might seem to have unfitted him for this heroic act of faith, does homage, not indeed in outward act, for his limbs are nailed to the tree, but in heart and word, to Jesus as the King of Israel, as the Lord of the spirits of all flesh. Truly we may say of his faith that it was itself one of the miracles of the crucifixion.—*Ibid.*

3 Love to man.

[19082] Ignorant he may very well have been of that special precept in Moses' law, "Thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him" (Lev. xix. 17); but love is the fulfilling of the law, and love will not suffer him to keep silence now. They two may in times past have been frequent partners in guilt, associated in many a deed of violence and wrong, strengthening one another in wickedness; but now, himself a penitent, he would fain lead his fellow-sinner by the same blessed path of contrition, repentance, and faith, which he himself is treading.—*Ibid.*

III. HIS PETITION.

[19083] "Lord" need not in itself be more than a general term of respectful address; it is oftentimes this, and nothing further; thus Matt. xxv. 20, 24; John iv. 11, xii. 21, xx. 15, and elsewhere. But it may have a much deeper, and a theological meaning; and such no doubt it has here. For without assuming, which would indeed be absurd, that this untaught man meant by his "Lord" all which the Church now understands by Jehovah or Lord, yet was there on his part the recognition of a Divine character in Christ. His "Lord" of itself would not be sufficient to prove this, but only as it is read in the light of what follows, "Remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom." For that

"Remember me" is no mere counterpart of Joseph's petition to the chief butler of Pharaoh (Gen. xl. 14; cf. Eccclus. xxxvii. 6), but is itself a prayer, even as the prayers of the Jews constantly clothed themselves in this same form (Nehem. xiii. 14, 22, 31, and often in the Psalms; for another kind of remembrance, see Rev. xvi. 19). But seeing that it was now at length abundantly evident that Christ's kingdom was not here, nor on this side of the grave, it must have been plainly in the glory of some kingdom to be revealed hereafter that he desired, through Christ's remembrance of him, a part. The words themselves of his prayer should not stand exactly as in the English Version they do. It is not "when Thou comest into Thy kingdom," as though Christ's kingdom could even in thought be contemplated as apart from Himself; but "when Thou comest in Thy kingdom."—*Ibid.*

[19084] There are two remarkable expressions in the brief prayer which he addressed to Christ, both of them exhibiting wonderful faith. One is, "Thy kingdom." Thy kingdom!—as though the suffering, dying Jesus had a kingdom. This idea was a subject of sport and ridicule below, while on the cross it was an object of faith. Above the cross, even Pilate writes a caricature: "This is Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." To let every man of every tongue in that motley crowd have his chance to understand the criminal pretensions of Jesus, this accusation was written in Hebrew, and Greek, and Latin. But let the Hebrews, and the Greeks, and the Romans, with Pilate at their head—let the whole priesthood, and all the scribes—insult at the idea of that crucified victim having a kingdom; nevertheless, this poor thief speaks to the Saviour of His "kingdom."—*N. Adams, D.D.*

[19085] The other expression in the penitent thief's prayer, which expresses his faith, is this: "Lord, remember me." The other words, "Thy kingdom," expressed a general belief in Christ. These words, "Remember me," were the triumph of faith. Grant that Christ has a kingdom, and is on His way to His throne; it would have been natural for the thief to have been overawed by the thought of that dying Potentate, and to have feared to make any request of Him. Yet he prefers this request: "Lord, remember me." He was not, in his own esteem, too wicked, and too far below the notice of Christ; though he had the worst possible thoughts of himself as a malefactor, who received the due reward of his deeds in being crucified. What boldness, and "confidence of access, by the faith of Him," did this poor creature have, in thus appealing to Christ! See in it a perfect illustration of faith, which cannot be explained, or made any more forcible, by words. It is hung up by the side of the very cross of Christ, that if any wish to know what faith in Christ is, and whether they can be forgiven, and whether they are not too wicked,

and too unworthy to hope for the favour of God, they have the answer, recorded in the most conspicuous place of all the earth; not in St. Peter's Cathedral, nor at the side of the highways, but by the cross of Jesus. It stands, the most perfect illustration of the way to believe in Christ, and a refutation of the error that believing and not believing depend on the amount of evidence, and a rebuke of the pride which keeps many a sinner, conscious of guilt, from asking for mercy.—*Ibid.*

IV. THE ANSWER GIVEN TO HIS PETITION.

I. The way in which it is to be interpreted.

[19086] We must not dismiss without further notice a word on which so much has been written, a promise the form of which in times past has perplexed not a few. As many, indeed, as assume "Paradise" to be equivalent to heaven, and, in fact, identical with the kingdom of glory, cannot fail to find a difficulty here, inasmuch as Christ Himself was not on that day in heaven, but in Hades; and these suggest various ways of escaping from this perplexity; which, however, is of their own creating. A not unfrequent one is the separation of "to-day" from the words which follow, with the joining of it to those which precede: "Verily, I say unto thee, To-day thou shalt be with Me in Paradise." Theophylact says of those who offer this explanation, that they "do violence to the words;" a judgment in which most will concur. By others, who in like manner make Paradise equivalent to heaven, or at least fail to see its identity with Hades, or rather with the more blessed half of Hades, it is said that however His human soul was that day in this latter place, yet, according to His Divine nature everywhere present, He was in Paradise—that is, as they understand it, in heaven (cf. John iii. 13).—*Ibid.*

[19087] Our blessed Saviour told the converted thief that he should "that day be with Him in Paradise." Now without peradventure He spake so as He was to be understood, meaning by "Paradise" that which the schools and pulpits of the Rabbis did usually speak of it. By "Paradise" till the time of Esdras it is certain the Jews only meant that blessed garden in which God once placed Adam and Eve; but in the time of Esdras, and so downward, when they spake distinctly of things to happen after this life, and began to signify their new discoveries and modern philosophy by names they called the state of souls, expecting the resurrection of their bodies by the name of Gan Eden, the garden of Eden. . . . It is therefore more than probable that when the converted thief heard our blessed Saviour speak of Paradise, or Gan Eden, he who was a Jew, and heard that on that day he should be there, understood the meaning to be that he should be there where all the good Jews did believe the souls of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to be placed.—*Bp. Taylor.*

2 The expectations which it was calculated to raise.

[19088] The reply of our Lord is a glorious example of what we may not unfitly call the prodigalities of the kingdom of heaven, of the answers to prayer, infinitely larger and more liberal than the suppliant in the boldest ventures of faith had dared to suggest. In two points the granting of this suppliant's petition immeasurably transcends the petition itself. All which he had been bold to ask was that he might be remembered of the Lord. But one may remember the absent, may do them good at a distance, and keeping them at distance still. This to have done would have fulfilled the measure of all which he had desired. But for him, the first-fruits of the cross, the first who should set his seal to that word of the prophecy, "I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto Me," for him Christ has better than remembrance in store; far better than this—"thou shalt be with Me." And not this only; he shall be with Him on that very day. Christ's "to-day," besides containing an announcement of His own departure out of this world within the limits of that day, contains also a pledge and promise for this poor pardoned sinner, that he too should find speedy release from all his agonies—a release, indeed, far speedier than according to common probabilities he might have looked for.—*Abp. Trench.*

[19089] For him, within a few brief hours, before that day had ended, it should be well. He should be at rest—and more than this—in Paradise and joy. The coming of Christ in His kingdom might very well be a remote contingency, as we know, in fact, that it was. In all likelihood this petitioner more or less looked onward to it as such. But it is no boon in some far-off future which the Lord will bestow upon him: that very day he shall taste the sweetness of it: "To-day shalt thou be with Me in Paradise."—*Ibid.*

V. PRACTICAL REFLECTIONS.

1 The repentance of the penitent malefactor at the eleventh hour furnishes a warning against the postponement of this duty.

[19090] If we should see a man who went over the falls of Niagara in a boat, and was saved, should it encourage us to venture into the rapids? What a risk this thief ran! how near he came to losing that heaven which he has now secured! Here is the only case in the Bible of repentance at the close of life. One instance is given, that none may despair; and only one, that none may presume. Some think that sickness and suffering will arouse them. But stupidity in religion is voluntary. It is not like being frozen or stunned. Stupidity in religion is voluntary. No one need be stupid; no one is stupid who does his known duty. As to the effect of suffering to arouse and persuade, look on the other side of Christ upon the cross. Suffering hardens as frequently as it softens. The probability is extremely small

that a man who has all his lifetime known his duty and neglected religion, will come to his senses in death. Men generally die as they live. . . . A sick man is afraid to prepare to die, because that is an admission to his own mind, that he may not or will not recover; so he puts it off till it is too late.—*N. Adams, D.D.*

2 The salvation of the penitent malefactor is an illustration of the operation of free grace.

[19091] We sometimes hear it said, that as that moment when the Son of God hung upon the cross was a moment unlike every other in the moral and spiritual history of the world, so there were graces vouchsafed then, unlike those of any other moment, larger, freer, more marvellous; such as were proper to that time and no other; the gates of mercy being, so to speak, thrown open more widely than at other times; and that therefore no conclusions can be drawn from what then found place in regard of what will find place when events have returned to their more ordinary course. This is sometimes urged, and chiefly out of a desire to withdraw the temptation to a deferred and late repentance, which the acceptance of this penitent at the closing moment of his life might else seem to hold out to others. I confess that even the desire to avert such an abuse cannot persuade me to accept this explanation of the grace which he obtained. The laws of God's kingdom, the conditions under which grace may be obtained, are unchangeable. This man was forgiven and accepted exactly on the same grounds which would secure pardon and acceptance for any other man, that is, because he repented, and believed, and obeyed. Time does not exist for God; and if only this repentance, faith, and obedience of his were genuine, whether they were spread over the forty or fifty years to which his life in the natural course of things might have been prolonged, or concentrated into the few hours upon the cross which he actually did survive, this made and could make no difference in God's sight.—*Abp. Trench.*

[19092] This is characteristic of Christ and of Divine grace. Here was a dying malefactor. . . . We are glad that it was not an emperor, nor a disciple; it is so beautiful an illustration of grace. Every one of us—strange as some may think it—every one of us, if saved, will be saved in the same way; every one of us who are saved will vie with that penitent thief to show that we owe as much to Christ as he. We shall, perhaps, contest his claims to pre-eminence as a subject of wonderful grace; for many of us will say to him, You were forgiven and saved without ever having heard of and rejected Christ. We lived till we were ten or twelve years old, or twenty, or forty, or sixty, rejecting that Saviour on whom you believed the first time that you heard Him. Did you, O penitent thief, ever turn your back on the body and blood of Christ offered to you? We did, for years.

Did you live in known sin, for years, rejecting the offer of redeeming love? Were you ever at the point of death, by accident or sickness; and, being snatched from death, did you go on rejecting Christ? Did you have a seat in a Christian temple, pious parents, meetings for religious inquiry, Bibles, the Holy Spirit striving with you, all in vain—for years in vain? Take away that crown, O penitent thief, which you have cast at Jesus' feet as the crown of one who owes most to the grace of God; to mine, as much as to yours, belongs that great distinction, and let it have, at least, an equal place there. Here, Saviour, is the crown of a redeemed sinner, from a Christian land, in the nineteenth century—a sinner against light and love unparalleled, spared and forgiven, and saved from a hell which would have been more tolerable for thieves, and for Sodom, than for me.—*N. Adams, D.D.*

3 The promise of Christ to the penitent malefactor affords a proof of instantaneous retribution after death.

[19093] There is no reason to suppose that departed souls are in a state of happiness inferior to that which they will enjoy after the resurrection, except that the addition of the body will contribute greatly to their happiness, and make, perhaps, the difference of gazing for a time, in full health and strength, at the starry heavens, enjoying the sight in the company of intelligent friends, and afterward possessing the advantages of a telescope. The telescope is an addition to your means of enjoyment, but not to your character or consciousness. The Westminster Assembly's Shorter Catechism expresses the scriptural truth: "The souls of believers are, at their death, made perfect in holiness, and do immediately pass into glory; their bodies, being still united to Christ, do rest in their graves until the resurrection." If so, how near the Christian is, continually, to his home in heaven! A sudden accident, a sharp, short sickness may dismiss his spirit, and immediately it takes "its mansion near the throne." Suppose that there were, in a certain room of your house, a company of angels who were waiting to convey you to heaven, and you knew it. What manner of persons would you be in all holy conversation and godliness? We ought to live, continually, seeing that we look for these things, in such a manner, that we may, at any time, "be found of Him in peace, without spot, and blameless."—*Ibid.*

VI. HOMILETICAL HINTS.

[19094] We have in this instance evidences of genuine repentance and faith. He is concerned for the salvation of his fellow-sinner. He frankly makes confession of his own guilt. He nobly testifies to the innocence of Jesus. He turns to the Saviour to save him. He prays, "Remember me when Thou comest," &c. He humbly begs for mercy, asking only to be remembered.—*W. H. Van Doren.*

THE SEVENTY.

I. THEIR APPOINTMENT.

Suppositions as to the reason for the precise number selected.

[19095] He "appointed *Seventy*," a number, like that of *twelve*, derived probably from the original Israel; *Twelve*, from the twelve sons of the patriarch Jacob, and *Seventy* from the threescore and ten souls, the united family of Jacob, who went into Egypt, and there so marvellously multiplied. Or this seventy—a round number for seventy-two—may be derived from the seventy elders appointed by Moses at the instance of his father-in-law, Jethro, to aid him in his judicial functions; or rather, perhaps, from the seventy elected at the command of God, and ordained as an assistant council to ease that patriarch of the burden of government. "I will take," said the Lord, "of the spirit which is upon thee, and will put it upon them; and they shall bear the burden of the people with thee, that thou bear it not thyself alone;" and "when the Spirit rested upon them, they prophesied, and did not cease." This council is the prototype of the later Sanhedrin. Others again trace the origin of the *Seventy*, like that of the *Twelve*, to the twelve wells of water and seventy palm-trees at Elim, where the Israelites encamped in their journeyings through the wilderness, and obtained, for the satisfying of their great needs, water and refreshment and repose, typical of the living water and spiritual refreshment and comfort supplied by the *twelve* apostles and *seventy* disciples of our Lord.—*Rev. W. Pinnock, LL.D.*

[19096] The more generally accepted elucidation of this question is, that the heathen races were considered by the Jews as *seventy* in number, and their welfare consequently had been customarily impetrated during the Feast of Tabernacles by the sacrifice of seventy bullocks, corresponding to the seventy nations supposed to have been segregated at the Babel dispersion. Thirteen bullocks were sacrificed on the first day, and the number was reduced by one every day to the seventh, when seven were sacrificed, and the number seventy was thus completed.—*Ibid.*

II. THEIR COMMISSION.

[19097] The route of these new missionaries is not defined, but it was probably through Samaria and Galilee of the Gentiles, for their mission was not limited to Judæa, like that of the *Twelve*. Their equipment was also prescribed and their maintenance assured, while the only miraculous power conferred upon the *Seventy* was the healing of the sick. Their teaching was to be similar to that of John the Baptist, of the Christ Himself, and of the *Twelve*: "The kingdom of heaven is come nigh unto you." Still continuing the design of gathering

a people—the creation of a society—which indeed seemed to be the desideratum for accomplishing the salvation of the race of man, the Seventy started on their mission with instructions to “salute no man by the way,” lest they might be retarded—etiquette must give place to duty, and in whatever house they found a welcome they were to remain, and gather there a church, as a centre of their teaching and of Divine worship. He also denounced “woe!” upon the city which should not receive them; at the same time, casting a melancholy thought upon His Galilean failure, He pronounced fearful anathemas against the favoured cities Bethsaida, Chorazin, and Capernaum, which had now rejected Him.—*Ibid.*

III. THEIR JOYFUL RETURN.

1 Their elation was caused by unexpected spiritual successes.

[1908] These ambassadors of Christ “returned again with joy, saying, Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through Thy name” (cf. Mark xvi. 17). In His charge to the Seventy (vers. 2–16) our Lord had given them no distinct commission to cast out devils, as He had to the Twelve (Matt. x. 8; Luke ix. 1); but some tentative efforts of theirs, some ventures of faith in this direction, even without distinct authority, had been crowned with success. An acknowledgment that this surpassed at once their commission and their hopes seems to lie in that utterance of theirs, “Lord, even the devils are subject unto us; not diseases only, over which Thou gavest us power (ver 9), but the devils as well. The work, in which a little while ago apostles themselves were foiled (ix. 40), has not lain beyond the limits of our powers, has not baffled us.”—*Abp. Trench.*

2 Their elation was natural, but perilous on account of its tendency in the direction of spiritual pride.

[1909] Such exultation was most natural; yet was there in it something of peril for those who entertained it, and for their own spiritual life. One need not exactly affirm that “through Thy name” comes in only as a formal and a saving clause at the end, and that the entire emphasis of the passage lay really on what preceded—“are subject unto us;” still there may have been something of this. It could scarcely have been otherwise; for, indeed, there is no more perilous moment for any man than that when he first discovers that he too can wield powers of the world to come; that these wait upon his beck; lest he should find in this a motive to self-elation instead of giving all the glory to God. The disciples at the present moment were exposed to this temptation, as we might conjecture even if we had only these words of theirs, but as is certain when we read these words in the light of that earnest warning which the Lord presently addresses to them, suggesting to them a safer and a truer joy than that

which they were now too incautiously entertaining.—*Ibid.*

IV. QUESTION AS TO THE MEANING OF OUR LORD'S REPLY TO THEM.

[1910] “And He said unto them, I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven.” Here, some urge, is a warning to the disciples against that sin of pride which their Lord detected in them; as though He had said, “Be not lifted up; beware of the first beginnings of a sin, which may end in so fearful a catastrophe as that which I once beheld”—beheld, that is, in His pre-existent glory and before the world was—the fall, namely, of one through pride even from the height of heaven itself. “Swift and sudden as the descent of the lightning was that fall, from the highest to the lowest, from a throne of light even to the blackness of darkness for ever. And even such a casting down may be yours, if you forget your humility, and are lifted up in heart.” I cannot so take the words. The warning I believe to be reserved for ver. 20, the Lord for the present freely sharing in their joy, even as His own presently breaks forth at these tidings of the mighty works which they had wrought (vers. 21, 22). Any interpretation of this passage seems to me altogether at fault, which makes it say other than what the Saviour on another occasion said, “Now is the judgment of this world, now shall the prince of this world be cast out” (John xii. 31), or, “cast down,” as some read, which would bring that passage into yet closer verbal connection with this. Others, who agree with these interpreters in taking the Lord to allude here to that great original fall of the “son of the morning,” anterior to the fall of man, yet do not accept the words in the same sense. They too find in them a check to the undue elation of the disciples, but from another point of view: “Think not so much of these petty exorcisms which you have been permitted to achieve. I have seen another sight; the very prince of the whole kingdom of wickedness, and him in whose defeat the defeat of each one of his subordinate ministers was involved, cast out from heaven itself”—with, of course, the under-thought of having been Himself the victorious author of his defeat.—*Ibid.*

[1910] The supporters of these expositions commonly urge that no other satisfies the words “from heaven;” Satan, they say, may at a later moment have fallen into a deeper depth than before, but how fallen “from heaven” in the days of Christ's flesh? how could He speak in this language of any fall of Satan which He was only now beholding, seeing that long since, at the instant of his first sin, he had been cast out from his first habitation (Jude 6), from his place among the “sons of God” (Job xxxviii. 7), in the heavenly places? It is sufficient to reply to these, that their difficulty arises from giving an emphasis to the word “heaven,” which it was not intended to bear, and which, in this very chapter, there is plain evidence that it need not

have; for see ver. 15. For the right understanding either of that passage or of this, we must dismiss the more solemn use of "heaven," in which it signifies the holy place, the more immediate seat and habitation of God, . . . and only associate with the word the notion of elevation and pre-eminence—so that in fact Christ would be saying here, "I beheld Satan fall from the high places of his pride and power; while you were warring with the servants, I beheld the fall of the master."—*Ibid.*

[19102] He employs the imperfect tense (*ἰδεω-ποιῶν*) to make clear that He had foreseen the glorious issue even when He sent them forth. This which they now announce to Him is even as He had surely expected, "I saw, as I sent you forth, Satan fall like lightning from heaven."—*Ibid.*

[19103] If Christ be not here speaking of that original fall of Satan, in which he left his first habitation, but rather, as I am persuaded, of some fall within the fall, some present dejection of Satan from those seats of his power and his pride, which during the four thousand years of his domination he had reared and constructed anew, and from which he was now being thrust out again—what reason, it may be asked, had the Lord for in spirit beholding this at the present moment? These few and petty exorcisms, were they not far too slight and insignificant a matter to justify so magnificent a saying? Assuredly, if contemplated as the *efficient* cause of that fall; but not, if seen as its evidences and accompaniments. As Christ drew proofs of a victory over Satan, which must have been accomplished by Himself, from His own expelling of devils (Matt. xii. 28, 29), so He found proofs of the same victory in like works done by His disciples. The power of the strong man could not but indeed be broken, when not merely the stronger Himself could spoil his goods at His pleasure, but the very weaklings among His servants could go in and out of His domain, and do there at their will.—*Ibid.*

V. THEIR ENLARGED COMMISSION.

It was of the nature of a reward.

[19104] "Behold I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you." The reading, "I have given you," arose from a misunderstanding of the passage. Hitherto He had not given them this power; they had in faith anticipated some portion of it; and He, finding they were the men to make the right use of it, now imparts it to them in all its fulness, according to that law of His kingdom, "To him that hath shall be given." In the form of the promise there is manifest allusion to Psal. xci. 13; perhaps also to Isa. ix. 8; and, whether directly so intended or not, we may certainly recognize here a very gracious reading backward and reversing of a threatening

made under the elder covenant (Jer. viii. 17).—*Ibid.*

VI. THEIR CORRECTION.

[19105] With the enlarged commission, for it is "all the power of the enemy" which it is now given them to prevail against, comes also, and as I believe comes for the first time in this discourse, the word of warning, "Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven." They were not forbidden altogether to rejoice in these mighty powers as exercised by them, forbidden only to make them the chiefest matter of their joy. The reason is obvious. These a man might possess, and yet remain un sanctified still (Matt. vii. 22, 23; 1 Cor. xiii. 2); for was there not a Judas among the Twelve? these at best were the privilege only of a few, they could not therefore contain the essence of a Christian's joy. There was that wherein they might rejoice with a joy which should not separate them from any, the least of their brethren, a joy which they had in common with all.—*Ibid.*

TWO DISCIPLES ON THE WAY TO EMMAUS.

I. QUESTION AS TO THEIR IDENTIFICATION.

[19106] The name of one of these favoured wayfarers we learn in the Gospels. It was Cleopas (Luke xxiv. 18), who must not be identified with the Cleopas of John xix. 25. Who the other might be we are not told. Apostle he certainly was not; and those who suggest Bartholomew or James cannot reconcile this with the fact that the two report the mysterious interview to the Eleven (Luke xxiv. 23), could not therefore themselves belong to the Eleven. Neither is it at all likely that the unnamed disciple was St. Luke himself; for this, again, seems scarcely reconcilable with the announcement of the Evangelist that the account which he gives in his Gospel was delivered to him by those who were "eyewitnesses" as well as "ministers of the word" (i. 2); herein implicitly affirming that such "eyewitness" he had not himself been, that he had not himself beheld, as these two beheld, the risen Lord. Jerome and others suppose that they may both have been of the Seventy, which is probable enough; but we cannot affirm it with any certainty.—*Abp. Trench.*

II. THEIR SPIRITUAL DARKNESS.

Christ is unknown and unexpected by a faith which is obscured.

[19107] The resurrection had taken place already; but the disciples had refused to credit it. The Sun of Righteousness, which seemed to have set for ever, had again risen with healing

in His wings ; but the disciples, not without grave fault of their own, are walking on in darkness still, in a darkness which in some sort they have made for themselves. So it fares with these two disciples, who, as I think we may gather from their reply, were not perfectly pleased to be accosted, and interrupted in their confidential discourse with one another, by one who seemed to have no right to meddle with the sacredness of their sorrow. They cannot forbear expressing their surprise that such a question should have been put to them.—*Ibid.*

[19108] "And they said unto Him, Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, which was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people" (cf. Acts vii. 22). From this answer of theirs it is evident that the mystery of Christ's Divine nature was hidden from them as yet ; or if at any time they had caught glimpses of it, these now were completely obscured by the thick shadows which during the last days had closed around their Lord. Jesus was to them "a prophet," and, as we presently see, *the* prophet, He that "should have redeemed Israel," the Messiah therefore ; but the Jewish anticipations of a Messiah (and they had not lifted themselves above these) did not involve more than glorious human prerogatives. That Messiah should come, and that God should come, they expected both ; but that both promises should be fulfilled in one and the same person, that these two stars of hope, which had lighted Israel through long ages of gloom, should in the actual fulfilment blend and become a single star, this was a mystery hidden, we may say, or almost hidden, from prophets and kings, from those who most waited for the consolation of Israel.—*Ibid.*

[19109] They go on : "And beside all this," in addition to that cruel death inflicted on Him by our rulers, and sufficiently explaining the sadness which thou hast noted in us, "to-day is the third day since these things were done. We might have had some glimpses of hope up to this present time, seeing that while He was alive, He more than once uttered mysterious words not merely about His own death, words which we have found only too true, but also about a triumphant reversal of that doom of death, mysterious words about what should happen on the third day after His death ; but this day has arrived, and is unmarked by any change." How much unbelief is there here ! The third day has come, but it has not gone ; and how could they be sure that He had not already made good His words ? indeed, there was much to render it likely that He had. Their own words which follow imply as much : "Yea, and certain women also of our company made us astonished, which were early at the sepulchre. And when they found not His body, they came, saying, that they had also seen a vision of angels, which said that He was alive" (vers. 1-10 ; John xx. 1, 2). The hesitating, doubting disciples will not confidently affirm of this that it was a mere subjective imagination of these women ; as little pledge

themselves to its objective reality. They speak of it, therefore, as "a vision of angels," leaving this matter undecided. They go on to tell of the visit of Peter and John to the sepulchre ; "and certain of them which were with us went to the sepulchre, and found it even so as the women had said." But, having thus stated all which gave them warrant for hope, they yet leave off with the mournful, desponding words, "but Him they saw not" (cf. ver. 12 ; John xx. 3-10).—*Ibid.*

III. THEIR SPIRITUAL ENLIGHTENMENT.

I The Scriptures are opened and understood.

[19110] "And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, He expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself" (cf. ver. 44 ; John i. 45 ; Acts xxvi. 22, 23 ; 1 Pet. i. 11). What, we may reverently inquire, were the passages to which the great Prophet of the New Covenant mainly referred as having in Himself been fulfilled ? And first, what prophecies of a suffering Messiah did He recognize and allow, claiming in the books of Moses for His own ? He began, as we can hardly doubt, with the *prot-evangelium*. The seed of the woman, who should bruise the serpent's head, or, in other words, inflict on him a wound which should be deadly, was not Himself to escape unscathed altogether ; this same serpent should bruise His heel (Gen. iii. 15). And then there were the types, claimed by the Lord in the days of His flesh, or by those who wrote concerning Him, as fulfilled in Him ; the brazen serpent (Num. xxi. 9 ; John iii. 14 ; Wisd. xvi. 6) ; the Paschal Lamb (Exod. xii. 46 ; John xix. 36) ; and as the types, so also the typical persons ; Joseph, who from the lowest humiliation of the pit and the dungeon passed to the highest place of dignity and honour, even to the right hand of the throne ; David, who suffered so much and so long from the persecutions of Saul—these, with many more. And when the august Interpreter of the things in Scripture concerning Himself reached the prophets, it can be little doubtful that the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah was the central prophecy which He expounded. Around this there would be grouped the great prophetic Psalms of the Crucifixion—the Psalms are not specially referred to here, but at ver. 44—as eminently the twenty-second, claimed by the Lord upon His cross (Matt. xxvii. 46 ; cf. Mark xv. 24), and the fortieth, claimed in like manner for Him by His apostle (Heb. x. 5) ; then further, Daniel ix. 26 ; and the book of the Prophet Jonah ; while Zechariah would prove eminently rich in prophetic glimpses of all which had just on Calvary been fulfilled (xii. 10, xiii. 7). These disciples had assumed that Jesus of Nazareth could not be the Christ, because He had suffered these things ; the Lord shows them from all Scripture that He could not be the Christ unless He had suffered these things.—*Ibid.*

2 Further spiritual instruction is desired.

[1911] While He was still engaged in opening to them the Scriptures, "they drew nigh unto the village whither they went; and He made as though He would have gone further," not, that is, pretended, but actually would have gone further, unless they had detained Him; by thus offering to proceed, proving them whether His words had taken any mighty hold upon them or not, and whether there was any desire upon their part for further communion with Him (cf. Mark vi. 48). It was seen that there was so. Much they had heard, yet they evidently desired to hear still more. "But they constrained Him, saying, Abide with us; for it is towards evening, and the day is far spent. And He went in to tarry with them," to be their guest now, as two of their number at the outset of His ministry had been His (John i. 39).—*Ibid.*

3 Christ is recognized.

[1912] "And it came to pass, as He sat at meat with them, He took bread and blessed it, and brake it, and gave to them." He, in some sort, the guest, assumes at once the place of the host, and, as on other occasions (Matt. xiv. 19, xv. 36, xxvi. 26), the prerogatives of the householder or goodman of the house, to whom this blessing and giving thanks belonged. "And their eyes were opened, and they knew Him; and He vanished out of their sight." He was known to them, as they themselves report to the Eleven, "in breaking of bread." This might seem to imply that there was something in the act of breaking the bread by which they recognized at least with whom they had to do. Perhaps, as has been suggested, and as may be seen in some old pictures, the stigmata, the marks of the wounds in the hands through this action of His became visible. At the same time, the words, "their eyes were opened," going before "they knew Him," and put evidently as the condition of their knowing, imply that it was not a mere natural conclusion which they drew from something which they saw Him do, but a supernatural enlightenment, a ceasing of the condition indicated at ver. 16, where it is said, "their eyes were holden."—*Ibid.*

4 Joy is experienced.

[1913] With such tidings to tell, they do not tarry any longer at Emmaus. "And they rose up the same hour, and returned to Jerusalem, and found the eleven gathered together, and them that were with them." Yet, if they imagined that they were the first to bring the glad tidings, in this they were disappointed—if disappointment it could be called; they did but contribute another stream to swell the great flood-tide of joy, which every moment was rising higher and higher. They found the Eleven, and them that were with them, able to answer good tidings with good; nay, as it would seem, preventing their good tidings with those which they had themselves to tell, with evidence coming in from one quarter and another, and

now from the very chief among themselves, that the barriers of the grave had indeed been broken, that their Lord was in truth that Conqueror of death, that Prince of life, which in their unbelieving ears He had proclaimed Himself to be: "The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon" (cf. 1 Cor. xv. 5). And yet, anticipated though their tidings had been, every confirmation of a fact so marvellous, so far transcending all experience and all hope, must have been welcome; welcome, therefore, their confirmation of it, as they threw their symbol into the common stock of hope ripening now into glorious certainty, as "they told what things were done in the way, and how He was known of them in breaking of bread."—*Ibid.*

ZACCHÆUS.

I. GENERAL VIEW OF THE PUBLICAN'S POSITION AND CHARACTER.

[1914] In the suburbs of Jericho there resided a man by the name of Zacchæus, of Jewish extraction, as the name indicates. He was a publican, an officer of the revenue; and as the place was quite notorious for the extent of its trade in dates and balsam, by the management of the imposts he had found his position lucrative, and had become very rich. It is hardly necessary to remind the reader of the social condition and the general estimate of the class of men to which Zacchæus belonged. While the farmers of the revenue, of the first class, were Roman knights of considerable rank and dignity, their agents, the common collectors of tribute, were regarded by the Jews with the utmost contempt and odium. This was owing not only to the fact that the Jews thought it unlawful to pay tribute to a heathen power, but more especially to the fact that the publicans, having a certain share in the tribute which they collected, were generally noted for imposition, rapine, and extortion. The Jew who accepted the offices of publicans, was execrated by his own countrymen. He was not allowed to enter the synagogues, and his presents for the temple were not accepted, being regarded as wicked and offensive. "Let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican," is only one of the many expressions in the New Testament which indicate the general detestation in which all belonging to the order were held. It is nowhere affirmed that every man attached to the profession partook of the character usually associated with the order. Matthew, one of the apostles of Christ, and the first in order of the Evangelists, was a publican at the port of Capernaum, or on the high road to Damascus, at the time when he was called to follow the Master. Neither is it affirmed that Zacchæus was particularly notorious for his dishonesty and exactions. Still, he was not altogether clear of the imputations which

belonged to his class. He was by no means immaculate, as his own confession betrays before this interview with Christ is closed. There were other things upon him besides the social ban which distinguished his profession. "For the Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." These are the words which last fell from the lips of Christ—terminating the conversation, and explanatory of the whole transaction. Zacchæus, therefore, was one of the lost sheep of the house of Israel. He occupies the opposite pole to that where stood the young ruler, in the halo of his spotless morality. Not only did he belong to another class socially, but in point of character also. The one was scrupulously honest and upright, defrauding not and stealing not; the other, we are forced to admit, by the purpose of restitution which he afterwards avowed, had defrauded, perhaps often. Instead of being classified with Pharisaic legalists, with ornate moralists, with scrupulous religionists, we must assign him a place in the general category of publicans and sinners; one who would have been found wanting if weighed in the balances of common honesty. We shall lose the point of the whole conversation if we mistake at the beginning the character of this man. We need not impute to him anything extraordinary in the way of crime; but from these several expressions—the judgment of his neighbours—"He was gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner;" and his own admission, "Wherein I have taken anything from any man by false accusation;" and Christ's final explanation, "For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost"—we are forced to conclude that this rich publican of Jericho was open to the charge of dishonesty and immorality.—*H. Adams, D.D.*

II. HIS RELIGIOUS AWAKENING.

1 "He sought to see Jesus."

[19115] Rich as he was, he had not, as the sequel shows, incurred the woe of those rich who are full, and who have so received their consolation here, that all longings for a higher consolation are extinct in them (Luke vi. 24). We may take, as an evidence of this, the fact that "he sought to see Jesus—who He was;" not "who He was" in the sense of "what manner of person;" but "which He was" of that confused multitude, to distinguish Him from His company. And he sought this, as the issue proves, out of mere curiosity, such as Herod's (Luke xxiii. 8); but much more nearly in the temper of those Greeks who at the feast desired to see Jesus (John xii. 21). He may not have known or given any account to himself, out of what motives this anxiety to see the Lord had its rise; yet assuredly there were yearnings here, unconscious they may have been, of the sick man towards his Healer, of the sinner towards his Saviour.—*Abp. Trench.*

2 He persisted and persevered in the object of his desire.

[19116] It was not easy for him to accomplish his desire. See Him he "could not for the press, because he was little of stature." So earnest, however, is he in the matter, that, rather than be defeated of his longing, he devises a way for the satisfying of it, which will involve, indeed, a certain compromise of his dignity, but from which he does not therefore shrink. "He ran before, and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see Him." Many, no doubt, would wonder that he, a rich man, and of some official position in the city, should climb up, like one of the populace, into a tree, the better to gaze upon a spectacle below. But there is that in him which will not allow such respects as these to have any weight at the present. He has not, or, if he has, he overcomes, that false pride, through which so many precious opportunities, and oftentimes in the highest things of all, are lost.—*Ibid.*

III. HIS SPIRITUAL CONVERSION.

1 It was the direct effect of the Lord's conduct towards him.

[19117] It seems that the immediate effect upon Zacchæus of the Saviour's conduct toward him was, conviction of sin, unfeigned repentance, confession, and restitution. "And Zacchæus stood and said, Behold, 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." It was as though he said, "Thy kindness to me, a sinner, has broken and subdued my heart. I adore and love that goodness which treated me so infinitely above my deserts. I expected, for a moment in the tree, to be exposed before the people, to have my sins set in order before my eyes. It would have been just and right. But, instead of this, I am selected from all the people in Jericho, and Thou hast come into my house to be my guest. I cannot withstand Thy wondrous mercy. Truly Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. Is this the manner of man, O Lord? Thy mercy is above the heavens, and behold I am vile! Here I repent of my past wickedness, and shall make restitution. One half of all my property I now divide among the poor. I shall make it known that to every one whose property I have rated unjustly, and so have extorted money from him by wrongful assessment, I will pay back not only his proper demand, but fourfold."—*Anon.*

2 It gave evidence of its sincerity by its practical results of a genuine repentance and a generous restitution.

[19118] Assuming, as we must, that this language of Zacchæus, followed by such a benediction from Christ, is the expression of a penitential purpose, the fruit and evidence of the greatest of changes in his character, we linger for an instant upon the two things by which the sincerity of his repentance was demonstrated. Christian penitence is something more than a

thought, or an emotion, or a tear ; it is action : "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor." This is not the boast of self-commendation, but the purpose of a new life. Conversing with the moralist who prided himself on his perfection, our Lord, to convince him of his imperfection, even that his love did not reach the standard of the law, bade him sell all that he had and give to the poor. That direction was given as a means of conviction, and not as a ladder by which to climb to a higher morality. Here, in this picture of the publican—the pendant of the picture of the moralist—no such direction is given by our Lord ; but there is a spontaneous expression of Christian feeling on the part of the true convert which proves the genuineness of the change wrought in his heart. Instead of a wish to enrich himself as before, at the expense of others, there is now the new emotion and purpose of charity. He does not make this avowal in the spirit of a self-righteous Pharisee ; it is the free act of a grateful and penitent sinner ; it is the evidence of a new affection. It is no act of a moralist, setting himself a task ; it is the cheerful resolution of a man who has come to see how much he owes to that mercy by which he is forgiven and saved ; and who, in the expression of his novel Christian disposition, would evince his love for his fellow-men. The legalist confessed with sorrow that his love, even that of which he boasted, was not equal to the sacrifice of his idolized wealth ; the penitent, converted publican, of his own accord, proposes to distribute largely of his goods to the poor, in proof of that new love to God and man which the grace of Christ has just enkindled. This is always the way in which the reality of Christian conversion evidences itself. It makes the selfish man charitable ; the churlish, liberal ; and implants in the soul, which hitherto has cared only for the things belonging to himself, a disposition to seek also the things of others. The law of God, requiring us to love our neighbour as ourselves, is not repealed or modified ; while we cannot look to it for hope, or for the proof of our perfection, strange would it be if, forgiven and saved as those that were lost, we should show no sign of a wish or a purpose to conform to that celestial statute.—*W. Adams, D.D.*

[19119] The other proof of genuine conversion evinced by Zacchæus was, in his purpose to make ample restitution unto those whom he had wronged. The Jewish law prescribed several things in regard to the restitution of property obtained fraudulently. In case of voluntary confession, without detection and without trial, the person implicated was required only to return what had been stolen, with the addition of one-fifth of its value. In case of judicial conviction, a much larger sum was enjoined. In all cases the implication was, that there could be no genuine repentance unaccompanied by restitution. To be sorry for having extorted property from another, and still retain that property in possession, would be more incongruous than for sweet water and bitter to flow

from the same fountain. Zacchæus seems to throw his constitutional earnestness into the purpose of making restitution unto all whom he had wronged. There is nothing half-way in his resolution. Of his own accord, without any detection, or trial, or conviction, or compulsion, he determines to restore fourfold—far, far beyond all which law ever prescribed ; more than principal, more than interest, largely in advance of all legal claims. He is determined to make thorough work of his penitence and his reform. Allowing that only a small fraction of his property had been acquired by dishonest means ; if he gave half of all he possessed to the poor, and then restored fourfold upon all he had purloined, it is evident that very little was retained for himself, and that he was determined that his new Christian honesty should go to the very root of the matter.—*Ibid.*

[19120] In the presence of them all (Luke xix. 11) "Zacchæus," who had so long, like another Levi, sat at the receipt of custom, "stood," or stood forth, "and said unto the Lord : Behold, 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." The present, "I give," expresses the fixedness of his resolve ; for however this distribution of his goods is still in the future, that future to him is as though actually present. To make it stand for a past, and to accept this "I give," and "I restore," as the expression of his past conduct in the stewardship of this worldly mammon, as though Zacchæus had been another Cornelius, "a devout man, which gave much alms to the people" (Acts x. 2), is a curious missing and marring of the whole point of this incident, in fact a most notable piece of Pharisaic exegesis. Zacchæus might, and would even then, have needed the higher righteousness of Christ, but he would scarcely have been until this day one of the "lost." Salvation would not on that day have first come to his house. But it is not thus. All which he now announces of a giving of his own, and a restoring of that which is another's, is to be taken as the blessed results of Christ's visit, as the outward utterance of the mighty inward change that had passed upon him. Now is he a righteous man according to that rule of the prophet (Ezek. xviii. 21, 22, xxxiii. 15), and his name and he are agreed.—*Abp. Treuch.*

[19121] He parted at once with half of all that he had, to "give to the poor." Out of the other half he promised to pay each one whom he had injured, fourfold. We see him passing along the street. What confidence, what love, what kindness mark the varying expression of his face ! He has a different air and manner ; it almost seems that he has added to his stature since yesterday. Instead of skulking about, afraid or ashamed to meet men, he goes to some who he knows fear or hate him, and bids them behold in him a new man. What scenes of confession on his part, of weeping on the part of those whom he grasps by the hand ! The joy

of heaven over him is not so rich as his. Not waiting to be called upon, he goes to one and another—the widow, the orphan, to all whom he has wronged—receives forgiveness, has peace with his own conscience and with God.—*Anon.*

IV. CONTRAST WITH NICODEMUS AND SIMON THE PHARISEE.

[19122] He has none of that caution which the rationalist Nicodemus showed when coming by night to converse with Jesus. Whatever the motives which impel him, whatever the emotions which struggle in his soul, Zacchæus, the rich man of Jericho, is not ashamed to put himself, in broad daylight, in a most conspicuous place, before all the people, where concealment was impossible. During his second general ministry in Galilee, our Lord was invited by a certain Pharisee to dine at his house. That Pharisee thought that he was conferring a great honour upon Christ by this invitation; and though Christ accepted it for the purpose of administering the lessons which He did to the Pharisaic guests, yet He pronounced no blessing upon that house, for it was the abode of pride and arrogance. How different was the temper of Zacchæus! He did not presume to invite Christ to his house; but when Christ Himself proposed to be his guest, Zacchæus shows, by every expression, that he regarded it as the greatest honour. He must have had a poor opinion of himself, which is the best definition of true humility. There was nothing like pride, or arrogance, or superciliousness about the man, but a most hearty sense of his own unworthiness; for the alacrity he displays in accepting the visit which Christ proposes is a proof that he considers it as an honour and a blessing. Nor do I see anything to forbid the belief that his heart had often been touched by the sense of his misery and guilt, and that this may have been one among other reasons why he did not obtrude himself through the crowd with his own voluntary invitations to the Son of Man.—*W. Adams, D.D.*

V. HOMILETICAL REFLECTIONS.

1 The conversion of Zacchæus furnishes a notable instance of the operation of Divine wisdom.

[19123] "He that winneth souls is wise." When Jesus entered and passed through Jericho, on purpose, as there is reason to believe, to convert this sinner, there were many ways in which He could have done it; but the way which He took to accomplish His object was singularly beautiful for its adaptedness to the end in view. The Spirit of God moved Zacchæus to ascend that tree, and so prepared the way for the call which was to be made to him. Approaching the tree, Christ did not first of all turn the attention of the people toward him in a way to cause embarrassment; nor did He for one moment mortify him; nor did He make the most distant allusion to his past life; and, indeed, it does not appear that in all His con-

versation with him, in the tree, by the way, or in the house, He said one word to him in the form of reproach, or even reproof, but made His kindness and love the almighty instrument of breaking his heart. It is the highest wisdom, in governing men and children, to make them govern themselves. We can imagine that kind, gracious voice, as the Saviour paused and looked up into the tree: "Come, Zacchæus, I will go home with you as your guest." Exquisitely beautiful was this stroke of Divine skill; not adroitness, for this savours too much of human artifice;—not tact, for this is too common and low a term by which to designate it; rather it was an instance of heavenly wisdom inspired by heavenly love.—*Anon.*

2 The conversion of Zacchæus reminds us of the benefit which is likely to accrue from an endeavour to meet with Jesus Christ.

[19124] It is well to bring others with us to public worship, and to the places where prayer is wont to be made, even when they have no interest in the subject of religion; for such persons are sometimes most likely to be awakened. If any have a desire to know what spiritual religion is, while they are conscious of no special religious impressions or proper feelings, let them, nevertheless, be encouraged to visit the house of God and the places where Christians meet to pray. Zacchæus had no other feeling in climbing the tree to see Christ than bare curiosity; but every ordinary thought or feeling with regard to Christ which will prompt us to put ourselves in His way is to be cherished, nor must we suspect or despise it though it be not all that it should be. If we would obtain religion, there are appropriate means to be used, as in every other pursuit. Riding, or sailing, or sleeping on the Sabbath, or strolling with idle company, has no tendency to make us acquainted with Christ. Put yourself under religious influences, be in earnest to gain heavenly wisdom; wait at her gates, show zeal in seeking Christian knowledge, run before the multitude, climb the tree, obtain direction in your doubts and difficulties; for if Zacchæus, from a mere motive of curiosity to see Christ, found eternal life, and if men who had confidence in Him to venture and ask for cures received forgiveness of sins, let us be persuaded that He will notice and cherish every desire, however poor and feeble, which is directed toward Him.—*Ibid.*

3 The conversion of Zacchæus reminds us that every "coming to Christ" is but the result of a previous coming of Christ to the soul.

[19125] Say what we will of Zacchæus seeking Jesus, the truth is Jesus was seeking Zacchæus. For what other reason but the will of God had Jesus come to Jericho, to seek Zacchæus and such as he? Long years Zacchæus had been living in only a dim consciousness of being a servant of God and goodness. At last the Saviour is born into the world—appears in Judæa—comes to Jericho, Zacchæus' town—

passes down Zacchæus' street, and by Zacchæus' house, and up to Zacchæus' person. What is all this but seeking? what the Bible calls election? Now there is a specimen in this of the ways of God with men in this world. We do not seek God—God seeks us. There is a Spirit pervading Time and Space who seeks the souls of men. At last the seeking becomes reciprocal—the Divine Presence is felt afar, and the soul begins to turn towards it. Then when we begin to seek God, we become conscious that God is seeking us. It is at that period that we distinguish the voice of personal invitation—"Zacchæus!" It is then that the Eternal Presence makes its abode with us, and the hour of unutterable joy begins, when the banquet of Divine Love is spread within the soul, and the Son of God abides there as at a feast, "Behold I stand at the door and knock: If any man hear My voice, I will come in and sup with him, and he with Me."—*Rev. F. Robertson.*

THE INNOCENTS.

I. PROBABLE REASONS FOR THE PERMISSION OF THEIR MASSACRE.

[19126] Let us look into the case. Let us see whether there be really anything in the facts now commemorated at variance with the known mercy of God. If, indeed, we were unable to discover that the slaughter of the innocents was a means to ensure wise ends, we shall be confident, from the known attributes of God, that there was such an end, though not to be ascertained by our limited faculties. This, however, is not the case. And they who think at all carefully will find enough to remove all surprise that Herod was not withheld from the slaughter. Let it be first observed, that prophecy had fixed Bethlehem as the birthplace of the Christ, and had determined, with considerable precision, the time of the nativity. It were easy, therefore, to prove, that no one could be the Messiah who had not been born at Bethlehem, and about the period when the Virgin became a mother. How wonderfully, then, did the slaughter of the innocents corroborate the pretensions of Jesus! If no one could be Messiah unless born at Bethlehem, and at a certain time, why, the sword of Herod did almost demonstrate that Jesus was the Christ; for removing, perhaps, every other who could have answered to the test of time and place of birth, there seems only Jesus remaining in whom the prophecy could be fulfilled. We regard this as a very striking reason why the slaughter may have been permitted. God was providing for the conviction of those who should search into the pretensions of Jesus, and of leaving all inexcusable who should reject these pretensions. There was so universal an agreement that Christ was to be born at Bethlehem, and about the time of the slaughter; and what then did the slaughter do,

if only Jesus survived, but prove distinctly that Jesus was the Christ?—*Canon Melvill.*

[19127] It should be carefully marked, that Jesus was to live in comparative obscurity until thirty years of age; He was then to burst suddenly upon the world, and to amaze it by displays of omnipotence. But, brought up as He had been at Nazareth (Bethlehem, though His birthplace, not being the residence of His parents), it was very natural that when He emerged from long seclusion, He should have been regarded as a Nazarene. Accordingly we find so completely had His birthplace been forgotten, that many objected His being of Nazareth, against the possibility of His being the Messiah. There was a general persuasion of His being the Christ. "Others said, This is the Christ. But some said, Shall Christ come out of Galilee? Hath not the Scripture said, that Christ cometh of the seed of David, and out of the town of Bethlehem, where David was?" They argued rightly, you observe, that no one could be the Christ who had not been born at Bethlehem; but then they rashly concluded, that Jesus wanted this sign of Messiahship, because they knew Him to have been brought up in Galilee. And what made them inexcusable? Why, the slaughter of the innocents. They could not have been uninformed of this event; bereaved parents were still living, who would be sure to tell the story of their wrongs; and this event marked as with a line of blood the period at which the Christ was supposed to have been born. How easy, then, to ask whether the parents of Jesus had been then at Bethlehem; how easy to determine it, seeing the period was that at which the Roman Emperor required every Jew to repair to his own city. So that there was not needed any laborious investigation, any searching into genealogies and records, in order to the deciding where Jesus was born: the massacre of the innocents was a proof, known to the most illiterate, that thirty years before there had been born at Bethlehem, one whose nativity had been attended by such signs as disturbed the king on the throne. A moment's inquiry would have proved to them that Jesus was this child, and removed the doubt which attached to Him as a supposed Galilean.—*Ibid.*

[19128] We may believe that God was leaving Herod to fill up the measure of his guilt, that he might exhibit in this instance a great display of retributive justice. Designing at the outset of Christianity to give a fearful proof that even in this world wickedness shall not always go unpunished, God allowed the tyrant to become notorious by his endeavour to destroy the Christ, that his fall might be a warning to persecutors of the Church.—*Ibid.*

[19129] God was unquestionably disciplining the parents by the slaughter of the children. "Indeed," you may say, "could so painful a visitation have been more required by the

families of Bethlehem than by those of other towns?" . . . The sword only took the place of fever; and as we readily believe that when massacre and not sickness was His engine, He consulted best for the parents of Bethlehem by smiting, and for those of Jerusalem by sparing.—*Ibid.*

[19130] It is instructive to consider the consequences of the massacre, so far as the innocents themselves were concerned. There is much here to require and repay your careful examination. We have an unhesitating belief in respect of all children, admitted into God's church, and dying before they know evil from good, that they are saved by the virtues of Christ's propitiation. An adult person has in him the guilt both of original sin and of actual, but the infant only of original. The infant has, indeed, this guilt of original sin; else why does it die whilst yet at its mother's breast, and thus share in the penalty which only sin has provoked? We know not how any one can question original sin who has marked the sufferings of a babe, or seen its little coffin borne to the churchyard. But if the guilt of original sin be on the infant, that of actual cannot be. There can be no actual transgression where there is no knowledge of law; and the faculties must be opened ere the knowledge can be gained. But, whatever the other virtues of baptism, it seems most reasonable to believe that it removes from its every object the guilt of original sin. . . . There is one great sense in which baptism is the laver of regeneration; the child that was born an alien is received into God's family, and it is only by committing actual sin that it can again be brought under condemnation: and if, therefore, the child, thus renewed, and accepted in Christ, die ere old enough for moral accountableness, it seems impossible to question the salvation of this child. Original guilt is removed, and actual guilt there is none; and what then shall prevent the entrance of the immortal spirit into heaven? Who, then, shall say that Herod was permitted to do a real injury to those innocents, and that thus their death is an impeachment either of the justice or the mercy of God? We may be assured that they escaped many cares, difficulties, and troubles, with which a long life must have been charged; for, had the sword of Herod not hewn them down, they might have remained on earth till Judah's desolation began, and have shared in the worst woes which ever fell on a land.—*Ibid.*

II. LESSONS TO BE DRAWN FROM THEIR MASSACRE.

[19131] Do we not see in the shedding of this innocent blood a reflection of that law of vicarious sacrifice which runs through the whole of creation, and of which Jesus Himself was to be the perfect fulfilment? The children of Bethlehem laid down their lives that He might go free. He is not ashamed to owe His life to them—why should we be ashamed to owe our lives to Him?—*Rev. V. W. Hutton.*

THE CHILDREN IN THE TEMPLE.

I. THEIR HOSANNAS.

They were grateful, and probably helpful to Christ.

[19132] This sudden impulse upon the minds of the children, in praising Christ, must have had a grateful effect upon His feelings, considering the near approach of His sufferings and death; and their love, at such a time, is, perhaps, a fulfilment of another prophecy concerning Him: "He shall drink of the brook by the way; therefore shall He lift up the head;" that is, as He goes to suffer and die, His spirits shall be cheered by manifestations of love, which are like unexpected brooks to a weary traveller. The alabaster box of ointment was another brook; the angel in Gethsemane was another; and the great company of women, following Him to Calvary, and lamenting Him, was another.—*N. Adams, D.D.*

[19133] Some may say, "This act of the children in the temple was a mere childish and thoughtless thing. Children are great imitators. No account is to be made of their hosanna." Christ did not think so. He considered it as an offering made to Him, and quoted Scripture to explain and justify it. Is it the spirit of the scribes and Pharisees within us that leads us to think lightly of the children's hosanna?—*Ibid.*

II. HOMILETICAL HINTS.

Reason why children should be moved with interest in the triumph of Christ, and should join in the love and worship offered to Him.

On account of the vast numbers of children who receive salvation through the Atonement.

[19134] It is probable that Christ has saved the souls of more young children than of grown persons. It is estimated that more than two-thirds of all who are born, die in infancy and early childhood. We have reason to hope and believe that they who are incapable of repentance and faith, though partakers of a corrupt nature through Adam, share in the benefits of redemption by Christ; so that where sin abounded, grace doth much more abound.—*Ibid.*

[19135] While the Bible is silent on the subject, there is reason to hope and to believe that God has glorified Himself by saving the myriads of children who have perished by disease, war, famine, infanticide. Salvation being, in every case, an act of grace, grace is especially honoured in rescuing the poor, wretched heirs of sin, who die in early years, and making them the subjects of Christ's redeeming work,—they being renewed by the Holy Ghost, and thus made the fruits of the Saviour's death. Unless they are saved in this way, there will be a majority in heaven who

will not sing the song of heaven, "Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood." That vast multitude would then say, "We owe it to the justice of God,—it is something which God was obliged in justice to bestow on us, that we are here." John saw and heard nothing like this in heaven. Now, if young children are saved by Christ, if they owe heaven to His death, of course they needed redemption, on account of their being involved in the fall. If it would have been unjust to punish them for Adam's sin, it does not follow that their being saved is not an act of grace. Their rescue from all liability to perish, by actual transgression, had they lived, is enough to lay them under infinite obligations to Christ. An old epitaph reads thus :—

"Bold Infidelity, turn pale and die :
Beneath this stone four infants' ashes lie.
Say, are they lost or saved ?
If death's by sin, they sinned,—for they lie
here ;
If heaven's by works, in heaven they can't
appear.
Reason, ah, how depraved ! revere the sacred
page ;
They died, for Adam sinned ; they live, for
Jesus died."—*Ibid.*

THE INTELLIGENT LAWYER.

I. HIS QUESTION.

The spirit which dictated it was probably not insincere.

[19136] There does not appear to have been aught amiss either in the spirit of the question or in the form in which it was put. It is said, indeed, that the lawyer *tempted* Him, but to *tempt* is simply to *try*. We have no reason to suppose that there was any malice in the lawyer, but rather an honest and honourable earnestness. He had, perhaps, no great confidence in the wisdom of Jesus ; but he was desirous of gaining what instruction he could. He may have heard the previous declaration concerning the superior blessedness of the disciples of Jesus to the prophets and kings of old, and he may have wished to try whether the teaching of Jesus was indeed more complete than that of the Old Testament. At any rate we are certainly to regard the superiority of Christian privileges to those of the old prophets and kings as consisting mainly in this, that we are now more completely and effectually put into the way to eternal life.—*Anon.*

[19137] This lawyer had probably some secret misgiving that, with all his learning, he was not on the right road, and he would have been glad to receive satisfaction from the new prophet. Such appears to be the *spirit* of his question.

And we must notice that it is not rebuked, but earnestly dealt with by Jesus.—*Ibid.*

II. HOMILETICAL SUGGESTIONS.

1 The attitude of the lawyer suggests that self-conceit hinders Christian progress.

[19138] This lawyer was thoroughly satisfied with his own condition, and fully convinced that it lay altogether in his power to work out his own salvation without any help from God. He inquired what he must do, what special feat he must accomplish, in order to win for himself eternal life. He came to ask this important question, not as the jailer at Philippi came to ask it, namely, trembling and abased ; he came with guileful tongue, hard heart, and arrogant manner. He was clothed, not with humility, but with vanity and self-righteousness. Many men in various ages of the world's history have striven to take heaven as it were by storm, but have only come to great discomfiture. They have rejected God's way of salvation as too simple, too easy, and have endeavoured to work out for themselves some harder course of life that would at the same time win for them eternal life, and afford scope for the display of their own peculiar merits. By severe asceticism, by self-inflicted bodily tortures, and by the abnegation of all earthly ways, men strive in vain, laboriously to earn by their own works what was offered as a free gift from God's bounty, and what needs only a thankful heart and a lowly spirit in the recipient to be for ever owned. The words of Naaman's servants to their master are eternally applicable to all mankind : "If the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it ? how much more, then, when he said unto thee, Wash, and be clean ?"—*Rev. R. Young.*

2 The attitude of the lawyer suggests that head-knowledge without heart-knowledge is of very little practical value in religion.

[19139] This lawyer was doubtless well acquainted with the letter of the Mosaic law, of which he was a professed expounder, but he had imbibed little of its spirit. He was familiar enough with the term neighbour as used in the Decalogue, but he was more anxious to raise subtle questions as to the extent of his obligation to the individual or individuals thus described than to heartily endeavour to do the duty that was enforced upon him. There is at the present day a craze for education. Everybody is to be stored with knowledge, and to be tested by examination. . . . A millennium of peace and plenty, of civilization and culture, is to prevail throughout the world. So these optimists dream ; but their dream, it is to be feared, is an Utopian one. Can any intelligent and unprejudiced observer believe that the world is to be reformed by such means and such measures as are now predominant in educational matters ?—*Ibid.*

- 3 The attitude of the lawyer suggests that the marks of true charity are impartiality and self-sacrifice.

[19140] The lawyer inquired who was to be considered his neighbour, hoping doubtless that our Lord would confine the term to such a degree as to enable him to be able to say truly that he had discharged his duty towards such a neighbour according to the bare requirements of the letter of the law. Our Lord, however, shows that our neighbour does not mean merely one who is contiguous to us by blood, residence, or nationality, one who is in agreement with us in political opinions or religious doctrines, but includes the alien, the foreigner, the heretic, the schismatic. He declares, too, that to do our duty to our neighbour does not mean to give him of that which costs us nothing, but to make some actual sacrifice on his behalf. The good Samaritan does not shut up his bowels of compassion from the afflicted stranger when he discovers that he belongs to a hostile people; he does not give him only trifling aid.—*Ibid.*

THE INTELLIGENT SCRIBE.

I. PURPOSE OF HIS INQUIRY.

It was probably a sincere desire to gauge, and, if possible, to profit by the knowledge of the law possessed by the Lord.

[19141] His purpose, we must believe, was honest; his disposition good. Matthew, indeed, says that the lawyer asked the question, "tempting him." But a very slight acquaintance with the language of the New Testament satisfies one that the word thus rendered is used in a good sense as well as a bad. If in some instances it obviously imports a malignant design, such as solicitation to evil, or ensnaring one in mischief; in others it is used just as obviously in the general sense of proving one for the purpose of ascertaining his opinions and character. Beyond all question this was the intention of the individual now before us. There was no malign purpose in his heart; for had there been, our Lord never would have said that he was near to the kingdom of God. Convinced that the person who in his hearing had just before refuted the Herodians and the Sadducees so cleverly must have still further knowledge of the Scriptures, and wishing himself to obtain information pertinent to his own profession, he also asked a question which was intended to develop the character of the man in whose presence he stood. The question proposed was this: "Master, which is the first commandment of all?" To redeem this inquiry from the appearance of frivolity, it should be borne in mind that this was a point long mooted by the Jewish teachers, whether the law of sacrifice, or the law of circumcision, or the law of the Sabbath, or the law of the phylacteries should have the precedence. Our Lord answered the question thus proposed by reciting sentences which were

written in the phylacteries themselves—the compendium of the moral law. Taking no notice whatever of those disputed questions concerning the ceremonial law, He rehearsed at once the substance of the Divine statute which epitomizes all morals: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength. This is the first commandment."—*W. Adams, D.D.*

II. SIGNIFICANCE OF HIS COMMENT AND COMMENDATION.

[19142] And the scribe exclaimed: "Master, thou hast answered well." Our English word "well" does not exhaust the meaning of the Greek *καλως*—beautifully, excellently—conveying the high satisfaction which was felt with that reply. It was an answer which corresponded to his own judgment. What are forms and ritualisms, burnt-offerings and sacrifices, in comparison with the temper of the heart, the right quality of the affections? When our Lord perceived the heartiness, intelligence, and discretion with which the scribe responded to His own saying, He said unto him, "Thou art not far from the kingdom of God." He affirmed not that this man was in the kingdom, but that he was near to it—far nearer than if his manner, his disposition, his opinions had been other than they were. Few words need be expended in proving that the expression, "kingdom of God," signifies, in this connection, that state of blessed security which is revealed and proffered to us in the gospel. It indicates that condition of things which is by Jesus Christ, insuring man's highest welfare for this life and for the life which is to come. Whether the person here conversing with Christ actually entered within the kingdom, receiving the gospel and the salvation of his soul, we are not informed. No further mention is made of his case; he is not introduced again in the sacred annals; the curtain drops just at this time and place, so that we cannot even conjecture whether, improving his advantages, he passed on yet farther, even within the precincts of safety, or, withdrawing his foot, retreated to a greater distance from the kingdom of God. The point of greatest interest to us is, that which is disclosed in this one interview and conversation. If this individual evinced a condition of character which brought him into a critical nearness to the kingdom of heaven, it is of great concern to each and all to know what that condition was, that we may measure our own relations to the redemption of the Son of God.—*Ibid.*

III. HOMILETICAL HINTS.

The inquiry of the intelligent scribe, and the answer which was accorded to it, suggest the value of an honest and earnest inquiry after truth.

[19143] The first thing which the truth of God

demands is a mind open and attentive to receive it. The greatest censure which Scripture and observation compel us to pass upon multitudes of men is, that though the light shines, they will not receive it. The doors and the windows are barred closely against it. The mind has no interest in the truth—is profoundly insensible to its existence. A disposition to ask for the truth, to inquire for instruction, is the first sign of spiritual vitality. Inasmuch as the truth of God is nigh to us, flowing around us like the air, shining about us like the sun, the opening of the mind to receive it advances one immediately into the most auspicious proximity to its blessings. This thoughtful teacher of the law was favoured with the opportunity of a personal conversation with Christ. That is denied to us; but we possess what is better and greater. The kingdom of God has had a fuller disclosure since that day when the Son of man held these memorable conversations in Jerusalem. The redemption which is by Jesus Christ is amply revealed; and that revelation is given to us in a written form. Remote from all the benefits of the gospel are all they who feel not interest enough therein to consult the pages of inspiration with a candid and earnest spirit. Their faces are actually averted from the light; their backs are turned upon the kingdom of God.—*Ibid.*

THE RICH YOUNG RULER.

I. HIS QUESTION.

It was distinct from that of the Philippian jailer.

[19144] It seems generally, but most erroneously, to be assumed that the question of the ruler is of the same import with that proposed to St. Paul by the jailer at Philippi; and, consequently, that our Lord's answer seems at least to imply a different doctrine on the charter principle of Christianity from that taught by St. Paul—justification by faith alone. But let us observe that the questions by the jailer and the young ruler materially differ. That proposed by the jailer is, "What must I do to be saved?"—a question which implies a deep conviction of sin, and guilt, and misery, and danger; and an earnest desire after deliverance. Had the ruler asked this question, no doubt our Lord would have replied to him, as St. Paul did to that trembling penitent, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." No doubt our Lord would have opened to him, as He did to Nicodemus, the gospel plan of redemption; would have taught him that the love of God was the freely moving spirit which animated the whole—"that God so loved the world that He spared not His own Son, but freely gave Him up for us all." . . . But his question was, "What good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?"—a question which implies no sense of

sin, of guilt, of misery, of danger; and, consequently, no desire after deliverance: a question addressed as from the high vantage-ground of blameless and unsullied righteousness, and demanding, with a full confidence in native and inherent strength, "What lack I yet?" show me the way, that I may walk in it.—*Rev. J. Hifferman.*

II. HIS ANSWER.

It asserted the guilt and corruption of man.

[19145] Our Lord well knew that to meet such a spirit as that of the young ruler by a statement of doctrines, however important, were but to turn aside into the fields of jangling controversy, or to minister fuel to the flame of pride and self-righteousness. He therefore indirectly enters his protest against the doctrinal error, as to the state of man, which his question implied; and, waiving all discussion of it, hurries on to assail him with the weapons of practical appeal, which he saw would alone be available: "There is none good but one, that is, God. But, if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments." Here our Lord distinctly asserts that great truth, in which the whole scheme of redemption is wrapped up—the guilt and corruption of man. For unless man can be holier than God requires him, which it were blasphemy to assert, it is impossible for him, when he has once sinned, to be saved without the atonement of Christ: since, if he were to keep the whole law in future, he would be but an unprofitable servant, who had but done that which was his duty to do; and therefore could not himself, nor could any created being for him, lay up a treasure of superabounding righteousness, with which to atone for the past.—*Ibid.*

III. HOMILETICAL REFLECTIONS.

- 1 The particular duty enjoined upon the rich young ruler is not to be understood by all Christians literally, but spiritually.

[19146] With respect to the particular duty here prescribed—"sell that thou hast, and give to the poor"—though it was not a counsel of perfection, but a duty indispensably necessary to this individual, whose besetting sin was the love of his earthly possessions, and who was then at that crisis of the soul when it is vibrating between God and the world, under the opposite impulses of conscience and of covetousness—and this, too, at an era of the Church's history when Christians were to be trained upon the cross; when those who would live godly in Christ Jesus must be ready to suffer persecution, and to take joyfully the spoiling of their goods;—yet to do this literally is not a duty incumbent upon every individual, and in every age, both reason and Scripture prove. Reason tells us that the level to which this system would bring society would be a level, not of common enjoyment, but of common wretched-

ness and apathy ; that it would level the idle and industrious, the prudent and the profligate ; that it would not only deprive all of the common comforts, indeed the common necessities, of life—for who would labour to produce them?—but also of the honest independence which provided them. . . . But, undoubtedly, if every individual is not called to practise this literally, each and all are called to do so spiritually : to cease to be proprietors of anything ; to resign themselves, all they have, and all they are, to God ; to use all they possess as His stewards ; in all they do, and all they enjoy, as well as all they suffer, to say, “Not my will, but Thine be done ;” in fact, to live henceforth, not unto themselves, but unto God.—*Ibid.*

- 2 The particular duty enjoined upon the rich young ruler, and its unwelcome nature, together with his virtuous life, suggest the height to which we may attain and yet fall short of heaven.

[19147] The individual before us is not a dissipated profligate, or a reckless and hardened reprobate, sinning without remorse of conscience ; violating without scruple every law of God and man ; serving divers lusts and passions ; embruting his higher nature by sensuality, and thus levelling himself with the beasts that perish : a man of whom even the wise and prudent of this world would pronounce that he was destroying his soul, as well as his temporal interests, and rushing headlong to perdition. He is not a specious, formal hypocrite, imposing upon man ; and, in the fatuity of unbelief, content if he can but deceive man ; while the eye of a heart-seeing and holy God is upon all his ways, and is reading all the secrets of his treacherous heart, thus drawing down upon himself those denunciations of peculiar woe with which our Lord continually addressed the hypocrite, “Woe unto you, hypocrites ! how can ye escape the damnation of hell ?” He is not a gay and thoughtless lover of pleasure, unstained, indeed, by darker crimes and grosser vices, but occupied alone with the fashions of the day and the frivolities of the world ; thus effectually preventing the development of his higher nature, and famishing his soul. He is not even a temperate, regular, exemplary moral character ; amiable in all his domestic relations, and a useful and respectable member of society ; but yet, as we but too often see such, totally careless about religion ; wholly dead to the concerns of his immortal soul ; without an ear to hear, or a heart to feel one glow of sympathy at the recital of a Divine Saviour’s humiliations, sufferings, and love. But what renders this a peculiarly awakening and alarming case is this—that it is the case of one not only high in moral attainment, but sincerely anxious about his eternal interests ; one who could testify, as did St. Paul of himself before his conversion, that as touching the righteousness of the law he was blameless. “All these things,” he says, “have I kept from my youth up ;” and, as to the letter and act, our Lord does not deny his assertion : A person so

amiable as to his natural character ; so young, and yet so docile ; so noble, and yet so meek, and humble, and respectful, that “Jesus, beholding him, loved him ;” and who, until our Lord probed his heart to discover its besetting sin, and then touched this cancer of his soul, heard Christ gladly, and doubtless was prepared to do many things ; yet all these hopeful buds of religious promise are utterly blighted by the upas shade and blasting breath of a worldly spirit : all these moral excellencies of his natural character are poisoned by the contaminating influence of one cherished and indulged sin.—*Ibid.*

THE THREE ASPIRANTS.

I. A SECRET, PERHAPS UNCONSCIOUS, TIME-SERVER AND PLACE-SEEKER.

[19148] First there offers himself a scribe—“one scribe,” as St. Matthew says, with, perhaps, an emphasis on the “one,” to mark how unfrequent offers of service from such a quarter were. And his words sound fairly, “Master, I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou goest.” They almost remind one of the great-hearted words of Ittai to David : “Surely in what place my lord the king shall be, whether in death or life, even there also will thy servant be” (2 Sam. xv. 21). Nor is there any reason to suppose that this aspirant to discipleship meant at the time otherwise than he spoke. Yet there is not in him that true devotedness to Christ which shall lead him so to follow that Lord in this world that in the world to come he shall follow Him whithersoever He goeth (Rev. xiv. 4). These words have more in them of Peter’s confident asseveration, “Lord, I am ready to go with Thee both unto prison and to death” (Luke xxii. 33). At all events, they inspire Him who, knowing all things (John xvi. 17), “knew what was in man,” with no greater confidence than those other words of Peter hereafter should do ; for not compelling this volunteer, but rather repelling, He answers, “The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests ; but the Son of man hath not where to lay His head.” In other words, “Lookest thou for worldly commodities through the following of Me ? In this thou must needs be disappointed. These cannot be My follower’s portion since they are not Mine. Beasts have dens, and birds have shelters, which they may call their own, but the Son of man is homeless and houseless upon earth ; He who made the world has not in the world where to lay His head. It fares with Him as with Jacob at his poorest estate, when, fleeing from his brother’s wrath, he tarried all night at Haran, and took of the stores of that place, and put them for his pillows.” (Gen. xxviii. 11). Nor does this answer of Christ our Lord come out to us in all its depth of meaning till we realize that hour when upon His cross He bowed His head, not having where to lay it,

and, having bowed it, thus gave up the ghost (John xix. 30).—*Abb. Trench.*

II. A HALF-HEARTED FOLLOWER.

[19149] The Lord, who has checked one, incites another; for He knew there was more truth in the backwardness of him to whom He addresses Himself now than in the forwardness of that other who had just addressed Him. He has for him that significant "Follow Me" which He had for a Philip, a Matthew, an Andrew, a Peter (John i. 43; Matt. ix. 9; Mark i. 17). It is in answer to such a summons, as St. Luke has told us, that this one replies, "Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father." In the early Church this was oftenest, if not always, understood, "My father now lies dead; suffer me, before I attach myself to Thee, to render the last offices of piety to him." Christ's rejoinder is, "Let the dead bury their dead;" let the spiritually dead bury the naturally dead—which naturally dead He, designating as "their dead," implies to belong, and to have belonged, to the same sphere of death as those who shall now perform the last offices for them. At the same time by this former "dead" we must rather understand those in whom the spiritual life is as yet unawakened, than urge with any emphasis their death in trespasses and sins; that must of necessity be implied, yet rather on its negative than its positive side. "The spiritually dead, those who are not quickened as thou art with the spirit of a new life, are yet sufficient for the fulfilling of this office which would now call thee away from Me." . . . "Go thou and preach the kingdom of God;" as though He had said, "Another task is thine; namely, to spread far and wide (*διαγγέλλειν*) the glad tidings of life, which as many as hear shall live."—*Ibid.*

III. AN UNSERVICEABLE WORKMAN.

[19150] A third, of whom only St. Luke makes report, offers himself for discipleship: "Lord, I will follow Thee;" yet this with conditions, and craving time for farewells which he fain would interpose; "but let me first go bid them farewell which are at home at my house"—this rendering of our English Version being preferable to that which some would substitute, "but let me first set in order the things in my house." He too must learn that there is no dallying with a heavenly vocation; that when this has reached a man, no room is left him for conferring with flesh and blood (Gal. i. 16); to him, too, as to the king's daughter of old, the word of that precept has come, "Forget also thine own people, and thy father's house" (Psa. xlv. 10); while, as it may only too easily prove, his worst foes, those who will most effectually keep him back from God, may be those of his own household (Matt. x. 36, 37). The Lord, therefore, will give no allowance to his request, shuts out at once all dangerous delays and interludes between the offer of service and the actual undertaking of it:

"And Jesus said unto him, No man having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God." He who holds the plough must not look behind him; if he does, he spoils the furrow, and mars the work which he has undertaken. Remarkably enough this careless marring of the furrow has lent a word to the Latin, and through the Latin to our own language; "delirare," originally to deviate from the "lira," which is strictly the little ridge of earth thrown up by the share between the two furrows, and then the furrow itself. The discipleship of Christ is such a putting of the hand to the plough, for the breaking up of the hard soil of our own hearts, for the breaking up of the hard soil of the hearts of others.—*Ibid.*

[19151] He who, having put his hand to the plough, and thus begun well, shall afterwards Christ does not say *turn* back, but even so much as *look* back, in token that his heart is otherwise than in the task before him (Gen. xix. 26; Luke xvii. 32; 2 Tim. ii. 4; Phil. iii. 13, 14), he may still have his hand on the plough; but, having fallen away in heart and affection from his work, he makes no straight furrows, he breaks not up aright any fallow ground; he "is not fit," or rather, is of no service and profit "for the kingdom of God." Indeed, unless kept to his work as an hireling, it is likely that he will presently leave his plough in the half-drawn furrow, and be found to have exchanged toil and exposure abroad for the comforts and ease of his own hearth (Acts xiii. 13, xv. 38).—*Ibid.*

IV. POSSIBLE IDENTIFICATIONS.

[19152] What if these three were, as one has suggested, Judas Iscariot, Thomas, and Matthew? In the second and third instances the summons is so plainly to a high work in the kingdom of God (that "Follow Me" of Christ ever implying as much, Matt. iv. 19, ix. 9, xix. 21; John i. 43, xxi. 19); and there is altogether so marked an emphasis about these calls, that it is difficult to suppose them calls merely to discipleship. Far more probably these were aspirants and candidates in their own eyes or in their Lord's, to a higher grade, to the apostolate itself. Indeed one of the three was a disciple already (Matt. viii. 21), whom the Lord here draws into a closer circle of service; and the same is true of another, who, as is clearly implied, had already set his hand to the plough.—*Ibid.*

[19153] The first who offered himself was one whom evidently the Lord welcomed with no pleasure, whom He would willingly have put back from Him, whose large professions inspired Him with no confidence whatever. And how significant is the Lord's reply to these professions! He to whom all hearts were open, saw, as with a glance, in the heart of this offerer what perhaps at the moment was altogether concealed from himself. There is nothing to be gotten, He tells him, no worldly advantage to

be gained through a following of Him—as though He already beheld in spirit the unhappy disciple, who, defeated in his hope of a kingdom of this world, and of a place there among the chief, should seek to redress a little the wrong which he had suffered, by purloining from the common stock (John xii. 6), and should end with making merchandize of the Lord of glory Himself.—*Ibid.*

[19154] While the first proffering himself is rather repelled than welcomed, the other two have, as we have seen, summonses and invitations more or less direct to attach themselves even more closely to their Lord; and if they be the two who have been suggested, there is addressed to each the exact encouragement and reproof which he probably would have needed. "Suffer me first to go and bury my father." How characteristic of the melancholy Thomas is the excuse and the hindrance which are pleaded here—of him who, at a later day, in the very presence of the Lord and Prince of life, could only express his affection to Him by those words, "Let us also go, that we may die with Him" (John xi. 16); who, even after the empty tomb, and the testimony of the women and of his fellow apostles, could not disengage himself from thoughts of death and the grave, nor be persuaded to believe that the Lord had risen indeed (John xx. 24, 25). How characteristic was it of him in whose mind death was thus uppermost, that on the present occasion also the duties to the dead should seem to him to overbear those to the living. And Christ's answer and reproof exactly meets the disease and infirmity of his soul: "Thou belongest to the new creation; not to the old world of death, but to the new world of life. 'Go thou, and preach the kingdom of God.' Disperse to others the words of that life with which thou thyself hast been quickened."—*Ibid.*

[19155] The third, who cannot obey the calling till he has bade a solemn farewell to all in his house, might very well be St. Matthew; who, being refused this, did not therefore at this time accompany the Lord; but to whom that Lord a little later so spake that he obeyed; and whose farewell feast, *after* he had thrown in his lot with Christ, so that there was no longer any indecision in his asking to be permitted to make it, the Lord allowed, and adorned with His own presence (Matt. ix. 9, 10; Luke v. 27, 29); and that, although He had disallowed it, so long as it was made the condition of obedience.—*Ibid.*

HEROD THE GREAT.

I. HIS CHARACTER.

[19156] It is perhaps difficult to see in the character of Herod any of the true elements of greatness. Some have even supposed that the

title—the Great—is a mistranslation for the elder; and yet, on the other hand, he seems to have possessed the good qualities of our own Henry VIII. with his vices. He maintained peace at home during a long reign by the vigour and timely generosity of his administration. Abroad he conciliated the good-will of the Romans under circumstances of unusual difficulty. His ostentatious display, and even his arbitrary tyranny, was calculated to inspire Orientals with awe. Bold and yet prudent, oppressive and yet profuse, he had many of the characteristics which make a popular hero; and the title, which may have been first given in admiration of successful despotism now serves to bring out in clearer contrast the terrible price at which the success was purchased.—*Canon Westcott.*

II. HIS END.

[19157] It must have been very shortly after the murder of the innocents that Herod died. Only five days before his death he had made a frantic attempt at suicide, and had ordered the execution of his eldest son, Antipater. His deathbed, which . . . reminds us of Henry VIII., was accompanied by circumstances of peculiar horror, and it has been noticed that the terrible disease of which he died is hardly mentioned in history, except in the case of men who have been rendered infamous by an atrocity of persecuting zeal. On his bed of intolerable anguish, in that splendid and luxurious palace which he had built for himself under the palms of Jericho, swollen with disease and scorched by thirst; ulcerated externally, and glowing inwardly with "a soft, slow fire;" surrounded by plotting sons and plundering slaves, detesting all and detested by all; longing for death as a release from his tortures, yet dreading it as the beginning of worse terrors; stung by remorse, yet still unslaked with murder; a horror to all around him, yet in his guilty conscience a worse terror to himself; devoured by the premature corruption of an anticipated grave; eaten of worms, as though visibly smitten by the finger of God's wrath after seventy years of successful villany—the wretched old man, whom men had called the Great, lay, in savage frenzy, awaiting his last hour. As he knew that none would shed one tear for him, he determined that they should shed many for themselves, and issued an order that, under pain of death, the principal families in the kingdom, and the chiefs of the tribes, should come to Jericho. They came; and then, shutting them in the hippodrome, he secretly commanded his sister, Salome, that at the moment of his death they should all be massacred. And so, choking as it were with blood, devising massacres in his very delirium, the soul of Herod passed forth into the night.—*Archdeacon Farrar.*

[19158] The disease of which Herod the Great died, and the misery which he suffered under it, plainly showed that the hand of God

was then in a signal manner upon him; for not long after the murders at Bethlehem, his distemper, as Josephus informs us, daily increased in an unheard-of manner. He had a lingering and wasting fever, and grievous ulcers in his entrails and bowels, a violent colic, and insatiable appetite; a venomous swelling in his feet; convulsions in his nerves; a perpetual asthma, and offensive breath; rottenness in his joints and other members; accompanied with prodigious itchings, crawling worms, and intolerable smell; so that he was a perfect hospital of incurable distempers.—*Cyclopædia of Moral and Religious Anecdotes.*

HEROD THE TETRARCH.

I. HIS CHARACTER.

Weakness rather than violence was his chief characteristic.

This was exemplified in his treatment of John Baptist and of the Saviour.

[19159] This man was not by nature blood-thirsty. Weakness, rather than violence, was very much the characteristic of his mind. He was not prepared to adopt extreme measures; on the contrary, he was prone to try temporizing expedients, and to seek the accomplishment of his ends by craft and compromise, rather than by force. Besides the account which the Scriptures give us, other historians give him this character. They do not charge him with a deliberate and systematic love of cruelty, but rather with being sly and subtle, cool, crafty, and designing. He was ambitious, but he had not learned to lay aside all restraints. He was not one of those who could "wade through slaughter to a throne;" on the contrary, he contrived to maintain a decent character for just clemency and moderation. Violence, cruelty, and bloodshed were therefore, on the whole, against his natural temper; and hence we may well suppose, that, when he was betrayed into the temptation of committing crime, he might show much indecision and reluctance. We may give him credit for a struggle in his own mind, and for pain and sorrow in yielding. Such is the representation given of this prince in the uninspired histories of the times.—*Rev. R. Candlish, D.D.*

[19160] In the Bible, the little that is told agrees with the view of his character elsewhere given, and exhibits him as a man, in some respects well disposed, yet too selfish and too timid to be consistent; with some good principles, yet too much the slave of passion and the world to give them fair play and scope; not firm enough to do right, yet not bold and bad enough unscrupulously to do wrong; neither decidedly good nor decidedly wicked; neither resolutely honest nor a reckless ruffian; but hampered and entangled between good feelings, desires, and resolutions, on the one hand, and evil inclinations

and evil counsellors on the other. If he could have got rid of the last, he might have been a better man. If he could even have got rid of the first, he would have been a happier, or at least an easier, man. As it was, he was perpetually miserable—tossed and banded to and fro between his sins and his scruples, doing things by halves, and settling the controversy of conscience with temptation by a sort of evasive underhand compromise, which left as much room as ever for a new struggle, a new assault, and a new defeat. Ever as he was disposed to do right, some supposed necessity of doing wrong interfered. And yet, whenever the wrong was done, there was reluctance at the time, and regret and remorse afterwards. He was always stopping short too soon either way, having not enough of principle to keep him steady in duty, and yet too much to let him go on contentedly in crime. Hence that appearance of cunning which procured for him from our Lord the name of "fox." And hence, too, that wavering and vacillating inconsistency which marked his treatment both of the Baptist and of the Saviour.—*Ibid.*

[19161] Touch his secret sore too boldly, and the peace is broken, the friendship gone. Let temptation kindle again his favourite lust—his cherished desire; let the world make its demand openly, and religion as openly interpose her authority; let the controversy be brought to a single point, and the call be made upon him in a single definite particular to deny himself and mortify the flesh—then comes the struggle; and then is seen the weakness of merely natural impressions of religion. The prince, who appeared to have started so well, in an unlucky hour was tempted to sin. The Baptist fearlessly remonstrated and reproved:—"It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother's wife" (Mark vi. 18). Then was the king distracted between the flatteries of the world's easy morals on the one hand, and the unaccommodating and uncompromising claims of religion on the other.—*Ibid.*

[19162] It is quite clear that, in spite of his promise, Herod had no right to behead John the Baptist. He had no right to make such a promise, to begin with; and when he had made it, he was for that reason bound to break it. It would be monstrous indeed that a man should be bound to commit murder because he had promised to do so; and there can be no doubt at all that the execution of John the Baptist was murder, neither more nor less. Nor is it difficult to define the principle which governs all these cases. If a man has no right to do a thing, his promising to do it does not give him the right. Such a promise is void, to begin with. A man who has promised to steal, a man who has promised to commit perjury, a man who has promised to do an injustice, has no right to keep the promise which he has made. There is a third party concerned in such a bargain, and he has no right to sacrifice the

right of this third party because he has promised to do so. He may sacrifice himself, and, if he has promised, he must sacrifice himself; but not another. A good man who had been betrayed into such a promise would instantly say, "I never meant my promise to extend to doing a distinctly wrong thing." There is one case which shows this in a moment. Suppose a man promises to tell a lie. Shall he keep his promise? That is, shall he tell a lie in order to keep his word? Clearly enough that would be absurd. And as a good man who was trapped into such a promise ought not to feel his conscience bound by it, so even if he has not been trapped into it, but has done it with his eyes open, his repentance will assuredly require him not to keep his promise, but to treat it as void, on the ground that it was a promise that he had no right to make. Yet I suppose there can be no doubt that such a man as Herod would be seriously perplexed, and would have some sort of scruple of conscience in the matter. The duty of keeping his word might well seem to such a conscience as his prior to the right of John the Baptist to his own life. Very likely he would feel that, while it was wrong, still it was a duty to do so.—*Bp. Temple.*

[19163] The king yielded to his unlawful passion; but not without many apologies to himself, and many prudent resolutions. He was sorry, "exceeding sorry," not, perhaps, "for his sin against God's law, but yet for the severity of God's law against his sin." He was sorry that the temptation was so strong, and his friend so strict; but then he felt as if he could not resist the temptation, as if indeed he could scarcely be fairly expected or required to do so. And though, in this one instance, he could not go along with those high and stern principles—which might suit an austere and solitary recluse, but could not well be acted upon in the world, and amid the trials of a court—still this single, almost unavoidable deviation from such counsels, would not hinder him from paying all respect in general to the teaching of his friend.—*Rev. R. Candlish, D.D.*

[19164] He would fain have silenced their too faithful witness against his sin at once and effectually, and for ever. But he feared John. The prophet had still too great a hold on his mind, and he had too many religious feelings and scruples to venture on so bold an act of violence; and so he hesitated between his dislike of the reproof and his reverence for the reprover. And this perplexing indecision in his own mind was increased by opposing applications from without. His offended and indignant partner instigated him to direct outrage. His people, again, acknowledged John to be a prophet. Weak, therefore, and irresolute, he had recourse to the usual expedient of weakness. He adopted a middle course; he did John no personal violence, but kept him in prison.—*Ibid.*

[19165] The Pharisees, in their usual enmity against Christ, had applied to Herod to procure his interference against Him. Herod, on the other hand, had scruples. He was willing enough to oblige the Pharisees, so as to be on good terms with these convenient apologists and absolvers of his worldly frailties. He would gladly have rid himself and them of another troublesome and officious reprover. But then he felt too much about his former violence to the Baptist, for this was after the Baptist's death, the memory of which crime lay so heavy on his conscience, as to make him dread in the Lord Jesus, his injured friend risen to reproach him—a striking instance this, as we may note in passing, of the power of conscience; the guilty man has rid himself of one accuser, only to be startled by the rising up of another. Herod, then, would not again be so rash; and besides, he still feared the people, who honoured Jesus even more than they had honoured John. So, once more, he was in a dilemma, and once more he tried a middle course, authorizing the Pharisees to convey to this new teacher of righteousness an indirect hint, which might have the effect of banishing him from his territories. This seems to have been his cunning device and stratagem, in allusion to which Jesus denounces him as "that fox." And thus, sinners still think slyly to get the better of their God. Without committing themselves by open hostility, they would contrive, by a sort of by-play or side-wind, to put away His word of warning and reproof.—*Ibid.*

[19166] The second occasion of Herod's having to deal with Jesus, was when Pilate sent Jesus to him to be tried. And now Herod hopes, at last, to gratify his vain curiosity, and see some specimen of the miracles of which he has heard so much:—"And when Herod saw Jesus, he was exceeding glad: for he was desirous to see Him of a long season, because he had heard many things of Him; and he hoped to have seen some miracle done by Him. Then he questioned with Him in many words; but He answered him nothing" (Luke xxiii. 8, 9). Herod is provoked by the Saviour's silence, and feels it as a reproof of his former crime. The Jewish authorities, meanwhile, loudly and clamorously reiterate their accusations—"The chief priests and scribes stood and vehemently accused Him" (Luke xxiii. 10). What is now the judge's course? Plainly either to condemn or to acquit the prisoner—to declare Him guilty, and worthy of death, or innocent, and therefore free. But mark the weakness of the man! Either of these measures would be too decided for him. He dares not condemn, neither will he at once absolve. So he gratifies the Pharisees, and vents his own impotent resentment by an act of wanton, gratuitous, and unjustifiable barbarity; exposes his victim, still uncondemned, to the insults of the soldiery, and then sends him again to Pilate—thus losing all the calm uprightness of the judge in the petty and jealous insolence of the tyrant. "And Herod

with his men of war set Him at nought, and mocked Him, and arrayed Him in a gorgeous robe, and sent Him again to Pilate" (Luke xxiii. 10, 11).—*Ibid.*

II. HOMILETICAL SUGGESTIONS.

- 1 The history of Herod suggests that a guilty conscience will not be silenced by the luxuries of external surroundings.

[19167] Herod was a wealthy man; he fared sumptuously every day; a man of high birth and exalted station. He had hosts of servants; and troops of soldiers delighted to do his bidding, and his command was absolute law. But, in the midst of all his wealth and means of happiness, conscience is able to make him miserable. When he had heard of the fame of Jesus, he said, "It is John the Baptist, he is risen from the dead." . . . Many months had elapsed since John was beheaded, but memory was still busy with the bloody deed. . . . Men may think they succeed in burying their guilt, but memory has a resurrection power that will not leave the awful things in their graves. Strange things may transpire, new facts may be brought to light, and, in the meantime, memory will hold its torchlight over the graves of the past, and their buried Johns will start into life. Seek to be at peace with your conscience, while the blood of Christ avails.—*T. Kelly.*

- 2 The history of Herod suggests that a guilty conscience draws its terrors not only from real, but also from imaginary sources.

[19168] "The wicked flee when no man pursueth." How imaginary and untrue was his belief that John had risen, and how groundless his fears! A little investigation and inquiry would have convinced him that this wonderful Jesus of Nazareth was not John the Baptist. But he was so guilty in the matter of John's death that he was afraid to inquire, lest his interest in the matter might cause people to suspect that his conscience was troubling him, or lest John might come the more speedily and scathe him with merited vengeance. Not only real, but imaginary fears haunt the wicked. Wickedness is self-love in a mistake. How unsafe and wretched it makes its votaries! There are thousands of men and women among us, who have Herod's fears and torturous musings. From certain things that have come to their ears they at once conclude that some buried sin has risen. Their fears may be only imaginary, but they are afraid to ask a question lest their very anxiety should arouse suspicion. How unsafe and wretched must that man be who has his reputation poised on the still tongue of a woman, or of an accomplice in guilt. Like Herod, such a man is often startled by strange appearances and statements, and made to tremble lest the awful John be risen. There are men and women, even in the Church of God, who are standing in just such slippery

places as this to-day. A silent tongue holds them up. Never hazard your character in the hands of any person, male or female. Never give any person the power to blight or ruin your character by telling the truth.—*Ibid.*

[19169] How baseless yet how baneful the fear of Herod, that John the Baptist had "risen from the dead"! If he had sent his servants to open John's grave, he would have found the body of the sainted martyr where the disciples had reverentially placed it; the most cursory inquiry would have convinced him that the famous man, of whose "mighty works" he had heard, could not be the pious prophet, whom, at the instigation of his abandoned and ferocious paramour, he had so basely put to death. But it is the fate of a guilty man to be haunted not only by real spectres, but by demons of his own devising. He starts at his own shadow.

"The thief doth fear each bush an officer."

"The wicked flee when no man pursueth." In what a perturbed and wretched state must Herod, with all his luxuries and power, have been, when every report concerning Christ caused him to tremble like a culprit at the foot of the gallows, or like a traitor on the brink of the Tarpeian precipice! Some men talk of religion as if it were a gloomy thing; what then must the commission of sin be, which causes a man's conscience so to torment him, that he fancies spectres surround him, that devils are waiting for him, and that he is tottering upon the brink of the infernal pit! How true the words of Scripture, "There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked; they are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt"!—*Germs of Thought.*

- 3 The history of Herod suggests that a guilty conscience can make itself heard through the interposing barrier of avowed scepticism.

[19170] Herod was a Sadducee; and it would seem he was a strong advocate and protector of the sect to which he belonged. The Sadducees were the Jewish sceptics; they believed neither in the existence of spirits, angels, devils, hell, nor the resurrection. But no sooner does Herod hear of the fame of Jesus, and His wonderful works, than he is filled with apprehension, and exclaims, "John the Baptist is risen." What! "Risen!" Why, such a word is not to be found in your creed, Herod. "Well, perhaps not, but I have heard of his doings, and I have been thinking it over, and I tell you it is John the Baptist, and he is risen from the dead." Learn from this, that a man's logic may guide him to conclusions which do not satisfy his conscience, and from which his better nature revolts. A guilty conscience will cut its way right through a man's sceptical notions. Herod ridiculed the doctrine of spirits and the resurrection, but in the whirlwind of his guilty apprehensions he is compelled to overleap the narrow boundary of

his creed and declare the truth of both, in the assertion, "John is risen." He despised the idea of hell, and yet in his own bosom were burning the fires of horror and remorse, which were a telling preface or instalment of the terrible exposition about to follow. My brother, you may pull up the old landmarks of the faith, and make broad space for revelry and sensuality; you may boast that the old dogmas, which used to grip your conscience, are laid aside, and that you are now at rest in the possession of broader views. But you are under a terrible delusion. You have all the elements of unrest and apprehension in your own bosom, and with all your sceptical notions you feel them.—*T. Kelly.*

PILATE.

I. FACTORS IN THE FORMATION OF CHARACTER.

[19171] He was a Roman, probably of good family; a soldier and senator of considerable rank, and accustomed to move in the best society. The tone of such society was not favourable to serious thought. It was abundantly frivolous and dissipated. The showy accomplishments and refinements of a luxurious age accorded well with the light spirit of the liberal and sceptical philosophy which was then in vogue. The ancient sternness and simplicity of the republican manners had been relaxed; the ancient depth and devout earnestness of character had given place to a shallow and flippant way of evading all grave consideration and decision of choice, and making light equally of all things. Trained in such a school, in the camp and at the court, a noble Roman might enter life, whether as a man of ambition or as a man of pleasure, with little fixed principle of any kind—with little habit and little capacity of grave reflection—with a sort of gay and easy indifference of temper, likely enough to waft him buoyant over the waves of fortune, but giving him no hold of the element through which a more solid mind could pursue a steadier and more commanding course.—*Rev. R. Candlish, D.D.*

[19172] Living in a remote province in dignified ease, and invested with every absolute and discretionary power—living, too, never as if he were at home, but always as an exile expecting to be recalled—he has every inducement to abandon himself to his own pleasure or his own profit, giving himself scarcely any real concern about what may be passing around him. Thus, if not tyrannical, he is very apt to prove like Gallio, governor of Achaia, who, when the whole city of Corinth was excited and convulsed by the agitation of religious controversy, took the matter very easily, and cared for none of these things.—*Ibid.*

II. GENERAL VIEW OF CHARACTER.

[19173] In the Gospel by Luke (xiii. 1), allusion is made to his having perpetrated an act of cruelty on some Galileans, who, it is probable, having come up to Jerusalem to worship at one of the festivals, were slain by his orders in the very midst of the solemnity, so that their blood was mingled with their sacrifices. This severity may have been inflicted on some pretence of tumult or of political disaffection. It is said that on other occasions, both in Judea and in Samaria, Pilate committed great cruelties; and it is certain that he was a man who, in enforcing his authority and prosecuting his ends, held human life very cheap, and made no scruple of recklessly causing blood on a large scale to be shed. Still there is no appearance of his having been wantonly cruel, either as a man or as a governor; nor even of his having been particularly oppressive or unjust. . . . The fact of its having fallen to him to judge our Lord, and of his having actually caused Him to be crucified, is apt to leave on our minds an impression that he was worse than the ordinary class of Roman governors of the day. Strongly condemning this treatment of the Saviour, we form exaggerated notions of the injustice and blood-thirstiness of his character, and conclude that he must have been a very monster so to deal with the Holy One. In this way the lesson which his conduct is fitted to teach, is rendered far less pointed and profitable than it might be. It is not unlikely, that in the very trying predicament in which he found himself placed, Pilate acted better, and evinced more sensibility of heart and conscience, than the great majority of his compeers would have done, and moreover it is not unlikely, that in his circumstances some of us would have acted worse.—*Ibid.*

[19174] He was a type of the rich and corrupt Romans of his age; a worldly-minded statesman, conscious of no higher wants than those of this life, yet by no means unmoved by feelings of justice and mercy. His conduct to the Jews, . . . though severe, was not thoughtlessly cruel or tyrannical, considering the general practice of Roman governors, and the difficulties of dealing with a nation so arrogant and perverse. Certainly there is nothing in the facts recorded by profane authors inconsistent with his desire, obvious from the gospel narrative, to save our Lord. But all his better feelings were overpowered by a selfish regard for his own security. He would not encounter the least hazard of personal annoyance in behalf of innocence and justice; the unrighteous condemnation of a good man was a trifle in comparison with the tear of the Emperor's frown, and the loss of place and power. . . . His history furnishes a proof that worldliness and want of principle are sources of crimes no less awful than those which spring from deliberate and reckless wickedness.—*Bp. Cotton.*

III. SPECIAL CHARACTERISTICS.

1 Scepticism.

[19175] He first hears what the people have to say; then asks the opinion of the priests—then comes back to Jesus—goes again to the priests and people—lends his ear—listens to the ferocity on the one hand, and feels the beauty on the other, balancing between them; and then he becomes bewildered, as a man of the world is apt to do who has had no groundwork of religious education, and hears superficial discussions on religious matters, and superficial charges, and superficial slanders, till he knows not what to think. What *could* come out of such procedure? Nothing but that cheerlessness of soul to which certainty respecting anything and everything here on earth seems unattainable. This is the exact mental state which we call scepticism. Out of that mood, when he heard the enthusiast before him speak of a kingdom of the truth, there broke a sad, bitter, sarcastic sigh, "What is truth?" Who knows anything about it? Another discoverer of the undiscoverable! *Jesting* Pilate! with Pilate the matter was beyond a jest. It was not a question put for the sake of information: for he went immediately out, and did not stay for information. It was not put for the sake of ridicule, for he went out to say, "I find no fault in Him." Sarcasm there was perhaps: but it was that mournful, bitter sarcasm which hides inward unrest in sneering words: that sad irony whose very laugh rings of inward wretchedness.—*Rev. F. Robertson.*

[19176] Pilate was false to his conscience. His conviction was that Jesus was innocent. It was not a matter of speculation or probability at all, nor a matter in which fresh evidence was even expected, but a case sifted and examined thoroughly. The Pharisees are persecuting a guiltless man. His claims to royalty are not the civil crime which they would make out. Every charge has fallen to the ground. The clear mind of the Roman Procurator saw that, as in sunlight, and he did not try to invalidate that judicial conviction. He tried to get rid of the clear duty which resulted from it. Now it is a habit such as this which creates the temper of scepticism. There is boundless danger in all inquiry which is merely curious. When a man brings a clear and practised intellect to try questions, by the answer to which he does not mean to rule his conduct, let him not marvel if he feels, as life goes on, a sense of desolation; existence a burden, and all uncertain. It is the law of his human nature which binds him; for truth is for the heart rather than the intellect. If it is not done it becomes unreal—as gloomily unreal and as dreamily impalpable as it was to Pilate.—*Ibid.*

[19177] Pilate had been a public man. He knew life: had mixed much with the world's business, and the world's politics: had come across a multiplicity of opinions, and gained a

smattering of them all. He knew how many philosophies and religions pretended to an exclusive possession of truth; and how the pretensions of each were overthrown by another. And his incredulity was but a specimen of the scepticism fashionable in his day. The polished scepticism of a polished, educated Roman, a sagacious man of the world, too much behind the scenes of public life to trust professions of goodness or disinterestedness, or to believe in enthusiasm and a sublime life. And his merciful language, and his desire to save Jesus, was precisely the liberalism current in our day as in his—an utter disbelief in the truths of a world unseen, but at the same time an easy, careless toleration, a half-benevolent, half-indolent unwillingness to molest the poor dreamers who chose to believe in such superstitions.—*Ibid.*

[19178] He lived in an age when the old faiths of the world were breaking up, and when the great mass of the educated men of his nation had sunk into utter scepticism. They ridiculed philosophy, sneered at virtue, and laughed at devotion. To this class Pilate undoubtedly belonged, for when Jesus said to him, "Every one that is of the truth, heareth My voice," he asked, partly in pity and partly in scorn, "What is truth?" and, turning on his heel, went out again to the Scribes and Pharisees. There was no high-souled integrity within him. The rule of life for him was to take the most of selfish gratification out of it. He "minded earthly things" alone. If he had been even such a one as Cato, he might, perhaps, have said: "It is before all things necessary that I must do right. I may be recalled and banished; but it will be better for me to suffer anything than to put an innocent man to death." But he was anchored to his Procuratorship; and having no just notions of rectitude, he kept it and let Christ go.—*W. Taylor, D.D.*

[19179] He evidently belonged to a class of men who had no interest in anything but the present,—no faith in anything beyond the maxims of human policy and of mere worldly wisdom, and to whom nothing was real but what was earthly and tangible. The immortal world, and all that it contained, was mere cloudland to him, more unsubstantial than the air he breathed.—*Rev. A. Thompson, D.D.*

[19180] His other question, "Am I a Jew?" was intended to express the same sceptical and contemptuous feeling in reference to all subjects that belonged to the sphere of the invisible and the spiritual. For it was as if he had said, "It may be well enough for a superstitious populace, such as that now standing in front of my prætorium, to occupy and amuse themselves with matters of this sort; but do not expect a Roman governor to stoop from his lofty path of ambition and pre-eminence, in order to grasp at objects which are unsubstantial as dreams. I can become rich and powerful without being

religious; and this comprehends all my world and all my wishes."—*Ibid.*

2 Moral weakness and indecision.

[19181] He was shrewd enough to penetrate the motives of our Lord's accusers. He "knew that it was for envy the Jews had delivered Him;" read in the front of all their varying charges the marks of malicious invention and perversion; and on every new occasion on which he came forth to the priests and the multitude after conversing with Jesus, repeated his conviction of His innocence with louder emphasis than before, "Why, what evil hath He done? I can find no fault in Him." Surely then, thou wavering judge, thy course is plain. Thou art not called to decide any difficult question of jurisprudence, or to adjust the delicate balances in some fine point of casuistry. If thy prisoner be without fault, loose Him, and hasten to discharge one of the highest and noblest functions of those who sit in judgment, by throwing the shield of thy protection around the head of innocence.—*Ibid.*

[19182] First, he made his appeal to their sense of justice,—in effect asking them whether they would have him to sanction the death of one in whom he could find no fault. But while *his* conscience was weak, theirs was dead; and his words only quickened into greater fierceness the resentment with which their voices rent the air, clamouring for vengeance. After an interval of indecision, he tried another shift which he imagined must succeed. Taking advantage of a custom which appears to have been introduced by the Roman governors at the great annual festivals of the Jews, of allowing them to select from the midst of those who were then accused of capital offences one prisoner for pardon and release, he offered to permit them to make their choice between Jesus and Barabbas. This Barabbas was an offender triple-dyed in crime, stained with sedition, rapine, and murder, the blood-stained, lawless leader of a robber-band; and doubtless Pilate expected that, for very shame, they could not profess their preference of this man to Jesus.—*Ibid.*

[19183] Pilate's subsequent refusal, at the demand of the priests and elders, to alter the inscription which he had caused to be affixed to the Saviour's cross, "This is Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews," and his apparently firm and dignified answer, "What I have written, I have written," were in no respect inconsistent with the estimate of his character which we have indicated. For it often happens in men of his stamp, that acts of moral indecision are followed by seasons of sullen and petulant obstinacy, in part the expression of resentment against those by whom they are secretly conscious of having been overreached or overpowered, and in part an impotent show of supremacy over those who, in the critical and testing moment, have proved themselves to be their masters.—*Ibid.*

[19184] We may account for Pilate's weakness from the low views of responsibility which he held. Was there ever such a display of silliness as this washing of his hands before the people? and where shall we look for such another attempt as was made here to cast blame upon others? What was he a judge for, if he was not to feel that the issuing of each case brought before him rested solely with himself? He was invested with the power of life and death for the very purpose of seeing that the malignity of the Jews did not defeat the ends of justice; and yet with one breath he declares Jesus to be innocent, and with the next he gives Him over to crucifixion; and with the next he seeks to absolve himself from all blame. Very clearly he had no right notion of his accountability for his actions; he had no thought of God at all. Remembering these things we cannot wonder that he could not stand before the clamour of the mob. Indeed, our marvel is that he held out so long as he did. Certainly the Jews did not expect that they would have had any difficulty with him, and we can only explain the degree of resistance which he did exert from the probability that his intercourse with Jesus had touched some part of his nature which had long lain dormant, and stirred into life some expiring ember of principle within him, which, alas! only glimmered for a moment, and went out into unmitigated darkness. Poor Pilate! Who does not pity him as he beholds him thus, eagerly attempting to transfer from himself a guilt which would not go from him, and to wash out a stain which all the waters of the ocean could not obliterate?—*W. Taylor, D.D.*

[19185] Pilate was weak—morally weak. He was not a man delighting in sin for its own sake—it may be doubted whether such men are anywhere to be found—but one of a class of persons to be seen every day and on every hand—men who sin in spite of their better selves. His weakness appears in his condemning Jesus against his inclination, and when he believed Him innocent.—*Canon Liddon.*

3 Ambition.

[19186] Perhaps he might have ventured something in the cause of righteousness and truth; but an accusation at Rome, and to Tiberius, the most suspicious of all tyrants, this he could not brave; and it is with this that the Jewish chief priests threaten him now. They have kept this weapon in their armoury to the last, only to bring it forth in case of uttermost need, and when every other has failed. But this need has arrived, and they do not scruple to employ it: "If thou let this man go, thou art not Cæsar's friend. Whosoever maketh himself a king, speaketh against Cæsar." They will charge him at Rome with this his unseasonable lenity to a rebel and a pretender to Cæsar's throne. This they make Pilate clearly to understand, and this is enough. They have thrown a weight into the scale of unrighteousness and

wrong, which causes that of righteousness and truth at once to kick the beam.—*Abp. Trench.*

[19187] Pilate was not blinded nor infuriated. His zeal was not goaded on by his prejudices. He was calm; he was clear-headed; he was calculating; he did the whole thing in cold blood. Judas, it is believed by many, betrayed his Master expecting that Jesus would elude His enemies and escape, while he should make a profit by it. The priests were rabid with hatred. Pilate was the only calm man among them. He was cool. He saw things just as they were. He said deliberately in himself, "Although this man is just and right, and all these men are His enemies, and are infamous, yet it will not do for me to lose favour at Rome;" and so he sold Christ rather than lose his own political prestige. It was an act of deliberation, calm and cold; and even if it was keen and sharp, it was more detestable than the brutality of Judas or the wickedness of the priests. He was placed where he was bound to maintain justice, and he violated his own clear convictions of justice. He went against his better feelings. He put off upon others the deed which could not have been achieved without his permission. He was cowardly, hypocritical, and venal. He was bribed. Some men are bribed in the palm, and some men are bribed in the head; but he was bribed by political ambition.—*Ward Beecher.*

[19188] While Pilate's utter indifference to everything religious made him treat the charge of blasphemy lightly, his selfish ambition rendered him sensitively awake to the least insinuation of coldness to Cæsar's interests; and the threat of being charged with this, and of thereby incurring the Emperor's frown, made him willing to give forth the awful command that the innocent Lord should die upon a cross.—*Rev. A. Thompson, D.D.*

IV. ESTIMATE OF HIS GUILT.

[19189] He was guilty of the whole transaction. He was the guiltiest of all that acted in it. There be many that would say that he strove to find a way of escape for the Master. He showed very many kind feelings, it is true; but these things are the measure of his transgression. If he had not seen a better way; if he had not been assured of the innocence of the Master; if he had had nothing to overcome, we should have ranked him with the whole horde of transgressors: but the strength of conviction, the activity of conscience, and the abundance of kind feeling which he overcame in giving way to the cry of the mob, measure the guilt of Pilate. It needed only that he should attempt to put a good face upon what he had done to consummate the enormity of that guilt; and this he did by washing his hands, and endeavouring to leave the impression upon the minds of the people that, whatever came of this, he had cleared himself. It was a testimony rather against than for his acquittal.—*Ward Beecher.*

V. CHARACTER OF HIS PUNISHMENT.

It was eminently retributive.

[19190] The very evil came upon Pilate, which he had sinned with so high a hand to prevent. For, soon after, the Jews complained of him to the Emperor Caligula, and he was recalled from his proconsulate to answer to their charges. Subsequent years reveal him to us wandering an exile over many lands, sinking into disgrace and want,—his earthly course terminating, in awful keeping with that of the gloomy traitor, by his perishing with his own hands. And were we daring to lift the veil that conceals from us the dark world, might we not almost expect to see those words of the poet accomplished in the venal judge, and in the yet guiltier betrayer:

"The common damned shun their society,
And look upon themselves as fiends less foul?"
—*Rev. A. Thompson, D.D.*

VI. CONTRAST BETWEEN PILATE AND JUDAS.

[19191] I confess that when you contrast such a man as Judas with Pilate, the first impulse is to say that Judas was far the more wicked; but if you stop to think, you will perceive that Judas acted a low-lived, vulgar part. Because he bribed himself by avarice, and because he was treacherous to his Master, his crime seemed more culpable than Pilate's; but Judas had an ignoble nature. It is not probable that he strove within himself at all to resist his transgression. He acted from very low motives because he was himself very low. He was abundantly and vulgarly criminal. But here was a man of a much higher organization, of a far larger education, of clearer and moral perceptions. While Judas allowed himself to be gnawed by avarice, Pilate saw that this man was just and uncondemnable on the principles of equity. Pilate sinned from a higher point, and with more deliberation, than Judas, and he had better means of getting at the right, and going right.—*Ward Beecher.*

VII. HOMILETICAL REFLECTIONS.

- I The history of Pilate exemplifies the perils which wait upon weakness.

[19192] A bad man, Pontius Pilate, but very far from the worst; with a guilt which reaches not at all to the guilt of high priests; which stands far below that of Judas; and therefore the more awful example of the crimes in which men may be entangled merely through a lack of moral stamina; for who can attest to us with such a terrible clearness as he does, how little feeble motions towards good will profit, nay, how they will serve only to deepen the damnation of those who refuse to yield obedience to them; who, seeing what is the better part, do yet for by-ends of worldly policy and convenience, and to make things safe and pleasant to themselves,

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shrink from the painfulness of duty, and, leaving that better part, choose the worst?—*Abp. Trench.*

2 The history of Pilate exemplifies the impossibility of a neutral position with respect to the demands of Christ and the demands of the world.

[19193] If the question be once fairly and seriously raised between Christ and His enemies, or between the claims of vital Christianity and the demands of the world, neutrality becomes impossible—neither party will suffer it. Christ, on His part, cannot endure it: the authority with which He speaks—the truth of which He is the witness—the relation in which He stands to God as His Son, and to men as their Saviour, Sovereign, and Lord, are all of such a kind as to forbid His being satisfied with anything short of a full and unreserved acknowledgment of His claims. But the point of the moral lies rather in the consideration, that the world on its side is as intolerant of neutrality as is the gospel of Christ itself. Let the question come to a trial before you, and the world will never let you off until it extorts from you a sentence against the Lord. Your inclinations, your convictions, your good feelings of every sort, may be all in favour of some middle course. But it is all in vain. You cannot long escape. You are at the mercy of evil principles and evil men with whom you are not prepared to break; and, as you will not give them up for Christ, the issue is too plain and certain on the other side,—you cannot but in the end sacrifice Christ to them. There is, therefore, no safety in a neutral position—neither the prince of this world nor the Prince of Life will let you rest in it. There must be a decision for or against the Lord. “He that is not with Me is against Me.” Let the inevitable alternative be pondered well.—*Rev. R. Candlish, D.D.*

3 The history of Pilate exemplifies the evil of fettering oneself for the future by the conduct of the present.

[19194] Observe how, in the case which has been before us, his consciousness of maladministration in his province hung like a millstone round Pilate's neck, and prevented him from rising to obey the promptings of his better nature. In the history of every man there are critical times, which correspond to that in which Pilate was when Jesus was placed at his bar, and it will be found that we give up the Lord to dishonour, or glorify Him by our loving allegiance just according as we have prepared ourselves by our previous conduct for the emergency. When one is attacked with a dangerous malady, it is commonly the case that he weathers the crisis or not according as his constitution is sound or the reverse, and if he have been addicted to intemperance or excess, it will stand hard with him in his hour of peril. It is not different in spiritual experience when the crisis of some great temptation comes upon a man. For it is a mistake to suppose that our actions are independent of the character which in the past we have been forming within us. Pilate, no doubt,

never dreamed that the crimes of his Procuratorship were in the least degree hampering him for the future, still less did he reflect upon the effect which the commission of them was having in his own spiritual constitution; but when this great testing hour of his life came, he felt he had already committed himself, and when most he wished to summon up strength to break away from the entanglements of the past, he found that he had no strength to summon. Depend upon it, if you give yourself to a course of vicious indulgence, you are thereby incapacitating yourself for a life of honour and integrity hereafter, and rendering yourself unable to weather the storms of temptation that are sure to beat upon you yet.—*W. Taylor, D.D.*

4 The history of Pilate exemplifies the truth that there is a higher rule of life than mere selfish expediency.

[19195] Pilate was a heathen, and we hardly wonder that he considered his own pleasure, prosperity, and safety as the great end of his life. But, alas! how many are there in these days among ourselves, who, in spite of the light of revelation shining round them, act precisely as he did! They have no thought beyond the present life, no aim above their earthly enjoyment, and no scruple as to the means through which they seek that end. Be on your guard against allowing yourself to take any such ground. It is a quicksand, and if you step upon it, it will suck you down to destruction. Its light is but a flickering marsh-fire, and if you follow it you will find yourself at length in some deep moss-bog, from which, with all your efforts, you will never be able to extricate yourself. Look at Pilate. In spite of all his anxiety to retain his Procuratorship, that which he feared so much did ultimately come upon him, for he in seven years was recalled, he was banished, and unable to bear up under all his troubles, he had recourse to suicide. Thus you see he incurred the guilt of being a partaker in the Saviour's murder, and after all lost everything which he hoped to save by consenting to His death. But it is always thus.—*Ibid.*

5 The history of Pilate exemplifies the truth that sin is a voluntary thing.

[19196] Pilate, even when he was washing his hands, felt that he might have refused to give up Jesus if he had chosen. He was under no necessity to sin. The same is true of us all. We can never sin against our will, and so when we do sin, the responsibility is all our own. All such make-shifts as this of Pilate to roll the guilt from himself are vain subterfuges. Sin is a personal matter, and when character dies it is always through suicide, never by murder.—*Ibid.*

6 The history of Pilate suggests that evil actions are not less wicked because they are done for reasons of state or party.

[19197] This man, Pilate, condemned, or suffered to be condemned, the Saviour. He sacri-

ficed the whole spirit of the Roman law, and of universal humanity; and the reason was what seemed to him to be the exigencies of the government. He did it from political considerations. That same tendency lives yet. Parties will do things which no honourable man in that party will ever do alone. Men will consent to do, or to have done, in party relations, that which, if they stood alone in the community, they would scorn ineffably. Men will still maintain their connection with parties and with men in them that do monstrous iniquities; and the sophistry is this: that it is done from public considerations; as if that changed the essential nature of right and wrong! as if that changed the responsibility of the individual actors in a party! Pilate could not say that he was less culpable because he acted as he did from political considerations.—*Ward Beecher.*

- 7 The history of Pilate suggests that wickedness which a man can prevent, and which he does not prevent, inculpates him.

[19198] We are not morally responsible simply for the wickedness which we do, but for the wickedness which we can prevent as well. Of course you cannot judge this by the same rules by which you can judge many other departments in ethics; nevertheless it is an important truth to bear in mind that men are responsible for the mischief which they could hinder. If you put the torch to your neighbour's house, you are guilty in one way; but if another puts the torch to that house, and you go by, and see the flames, and say, "It is not my business; I did not kindle that fire; and besides, he is an enemy of mine," you are as culpable as if you had set fire to the house yourself. I am waked up in the night. I hear the cry of my children. I hear my venerable parent shriek for help. There is blood in the house! But I gather the bed-clothes over my head, and lie, saying, "No danger can come to me; my door is locked and tightly bolted." And in the morning the father is gone, and the mother is gone, and the children are gone! And I get up stained with blood. I that heard the outcry, I that should have given the alarm and summoned help, I that should have died with them rather than suffered them to die—shall I stand up and say, "Their blood is not on me"? Their blood is on me.—*Ibid.*

CAIAPHAS.

I. HIS INIQUITOUS POLICY.

- 1 It was apparently adapted to the end in view.

[19199] Christ was alienating the people from the institutions of the country, and shaking their faith in its authorities, and the most effective plan for terminating the mischief seemed

to be to put Him to death. This would appear to strike the evil at the root. When this was done, public excitement would soon subside, and the feeling of the people soon flow back to its old level and roll on monotonously in its old channel as heretofore. It was, anyhow, plausible.—*Anon.*

- 2 Though seemingly adapted to its end, it was radically wrong in principle.

[19200] What right had Caiaphas to propose the death of any man, however criminal that man might be? And even assuming his right, as a governor, to put a criminal to death—a prerogative, however, which we deny to all but God—certainly there was no show of right in proposing the death of one who, like Christ, had never violated any law; who had wronged no one, but blessed all. The apparent fitness of a measure to an end does not make it right. The only standard of right is the will of God.—*Ibid.*

[19201] Some one said the Accused is innocent. The reply was—Better that one should die than many. "It is expedient for us that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not." It was simply with Caiaphas a question of numbers: the unjust expediency of wresting the law a little to do much apparent good. The reply to that was plain. Expediency cannot obliterate right and wrong. Expediency may choose the best possible when the conceivable best is not attainable; but in right and wrong there is no better and best. Thou *shalt* not do wrong. Thou *must* not: you may not tell a lie to save life. Better that the whole Jewish nation should perish than that a Jewish legislature should steep its hand in the blood of one innocent. It is *not* expedient to do injustice.—*Rev. F. Robertson.*

- 3 Being radically wrong, it was ultimately ruinous.

[19202] Did the putting to death of Christ avert the dreaded calamity? Did it secure Judæa from the invasion of the Romans? Did it serve in any way even the temporal interests of the country? No, no; it hastened the flight of the Roman eagle; it brought upon the Jews judgments which speedily broke up their commonwealth, and beneath which the Jewish people have been groaning to this hour. Ah! what seems expedient to-day may prove in the future to have been most disastrous. Eternal principle is the only pillar to guide short-sighted creatures in their endless path. Let governments study the policy of Caiaphas.—*Anon.*

II. HIS UNCONSCIOUS PROPHECY AND STATEMENT OF DOCTRINE.

[19203] The very words in which he propounds his own sinful policy, unconsciously predict a great fact in God's administration—namely, that the death of Christ was necessary to the salva-

tion of others. Wicked men often express great truths, and truths not the less important because uttered by the lips of folly and crime.—*Ibid.*

[19204] We need not cite passages in proof of the fact here predicted—namely, that the death of Christ is essential to the salvation of others. The Bible is full of it. It is the central truth of the Bible. What does the death of Christ do towards man's salvation? First, it does not change the mind of God in relation to man. It is sometimes represented as appeasing the anger, and awaking the compassion of God. This is a fearful blasphemy. The death of Christ is not the effect of God's love, but the expression, proof, and medium. Secondly, it does not relax the claims of law. There are some who represent the death of Christ as freeing man from the claims of law. This is absurd. Nothing can remove a moral being from the claims of law but annihilation. Thirdly, it does not mitigate the enormity of sin. It increases the enormity of sin in a Christian. Fourthly, it does not change the necessary conditions of spiritual improvement; it does not make men good and great in any miraculous or mystical way. The necessary conditions of spiritual improvement for all intelligences are, the intellectual study of Divine truth, the heart-application of Divine truth, and the devotional practice of Divine truth. Angels advance in this way. Had man never sinned, he must have advanced in this way. The death of Christ does not alter these conditions. What, then, does the death of Christ do towards our salvation? First, it gives a new revelation of God. What is the new revelation? His love for sinners. This idea you can read nowhere else. Secondly, it gives new motives to obedience. "Ye are not your own: ye are bought with a price," &c. Thirdly, it gives a new medium of approach to God. In innocence, man had access to God on the ground of his own excellence, but now only on the ground of Christ's merits. He is "the new and living way." Fourthly, it supplies new helps to spiritual culture. It gives the highest ideal of excellence, the highest incentives to excellence, and the highest helps to excellence—God's Spirit.—*Ibid.*

BARABBAS.

I. HIS CHARACTER.

[19205] His name is said (by Origen) to have been Jesus Barabbas. This is equivalent to being the son of a distinguished father, or of a Rabbi. He seems to have been associated with others, and to have been the ringleader in an insurrection. In this insurrection murder had been committed. Barabbas was taken and condemned. He may have been a fierce desperado, able to play the assassin, as well as to rifle the girdles of those who fell into his power. If his efforts had been against the Roman power, he

was a sort of desperate revolutionary. He may, indeed, have been only one of a gang of banditti infesting the gloomy gorge leading to Jericho, ready to strip or leave half dead, or altogether dead, any poor wayfarer. Emboldened with success, he may have carried his operations into the very city. He thinks to enrich himself and his followers, if only he can foment disorder and anarchy among the many who go up to the Pass-over. He was one of a set, perhaps as bad or worse than himself. It is said of him that he was "of those" who had made insurrection in the city. His plans were, however, frustrated. He was found in the strong grip of the law he had evaded so long. This was the man whose release the Jews demand before that of Christ.—*Anon.*

II. HOMILETICAL HINTS.

Barabbas cared not for Christ, yet Jesus died for him.

[19206] Perhaps he would have despised Him as a Nazarene, yet Jesus saved him. He asked not for deliverance, yet it was given through another. And we may not have asked to be saved through Christ, yet by His stripes we are healed, by His death set free from the law. How did he think of Jesus afterwards? Did he see the one who took his place? There is no tradition that he became a convert, but we can suppose that he did go and look on the one who had taken his place. Look at him, a few paces from the cross. The soldiers have gone away to a distance, and Joseph and Nicodemus have not yet come to take Jesus down. Barabbas might gaze in quiet on that dead Christ. What would his thoughts be? "That cross was intended for me. Those cords were to have cut my wrists and limbs. Those nails were to have pierced my hands and feet. Instead of standing here, conscious of life, I might have hung there drooping in death. Or I might have still lingered in thirst and torture, praying for death. He has died for me." We can imagine Barabbas, when the body of Christ was borne to the tomb, following at a distance, with soul awed by the earthquake, the strange darkness, and the dread events of that day. As he looks into that tomb he may have thought, "He lies there for me." He may have seen that Christ died for his sin, oh, did he learn that Jesus rose again for his justification, for his eternal salvation?—*Ibid.*

[19207] How did Barabbas die? Where? No account remains. But what if the very man who was set free by Christ's bondage, who was spared the cross by Christ's suffering, should never have learnt the deeper truth of spiritual freedom and eternal salvation! Anyhow, if he knew it not before, we believe he would learn that after death. Sooner or later we must learn what Christ has done for us. He hung on that cross as certainly for each of us as for Barabbas. What have been our thoughts of our debt to Christ? What have we done to show our grati-

tude? Have we gone away content that we have a great many privileges and joys through the influence of Christianity, but altogether indifferent as to the personal devotion which should be evoked to Him who died for us? If Barabbas went away to enjoy himself and carouse with his companions over his escape, while Christ went to death, how terrible the thought! How different were the two paths each trod that day! Barabbas congratulated himself that he was not going to the cross, Jesus went there in sorrow: the one, however, went into oblivion; the other to a throne of triumph in the cross of shame. Of which would we be followers?—*Ibid.*

THE MAGI.

I. THEIR INTELLECTUAL POSITION.

[19208] They were the learned class among the people of the East, employed chiefly with the study of religion, medicine, and astronomy, including the superstitious observance and worship of the heavenly bodies, to which were assigned special influences over the destinies of men. The evening sky was to these Magi their book of revelation. Each orb and constellation had a certain character and certain influences ascribed to it; and in advising kings, in going forth with them to battle, and in directing the movements of armies, the Magi noted carefully what constellations and planets were in the ascendant. The nearness of one of the planets to the earth at the birth of a royal personage was used to foretell his character, and that of his reign.—*N. Adams, D.D.*

[19209] The Magi were the priests and scholars of the East. They were wise in all science and philosophy, but especially learned in astronomy. Their religious belief is said to have been derived from Abraham, which may help to account for their remarkable knowledge of the Messiah. It is certain they had been long looking towards Judæa as the cradle of an expected king. This expectation led them to scan the heavens with increasing desire and hope. In the alphabet of the stars they sought to spell out the deep designs of God. Simple as the astrologer's faith appears to us, there is something pure and sublime in his reverence for the heavenly bodies. Every nightfall was the drawing back of curtains, unveiling the secrets of the Infinite Mind. A cloudy evening sky drove him to repentance and made him mourn the anger of Heaven. We call this superstition, and even idolatry. But for a people on whom the day-star of higher heavens had not yet risen, it was more and better; it was next akin to the worship of God. And who can doubt that the Creator accepted it as an honest though blind struggle of His creatures after clearer light? Who can doubt that He often made their simple faith the medium of communion with their spirits? It is certain

that, through their imperfect worship, they were among the first to know of the infant Messiah. A peculiar and brilliant meteor appeared in their sky. At once the books and charts of astrology were opened. The secret of the new sign was sought out, and with an instinct that reminds one of inspiration, they welcome the bright comer as herald of the great and expected King.—*Rev. Joseph Clark.*

II. QUESTION AS TO THE NATURAL OR SUPERNATURAL CHARACTER OF THE GUIDANCE VOUCHSAFED TO THEM.

[19210] Had this star been one of the regular heavenly bodies, it is plain that no such unusual impression would have been made by it as was made by this new sign in the heavens. The evening star had always been seen in the west without exciting any special attention: the special brightness of a fixed star, for several nights in succession, would not have roused the Magi in so extraordinary a manner. It is well known that the celebrated mathematician, Kepler, regarded the star of the wise men as the result of a conjunction between three heavenly bodies, such as occurred in the year of our Lord 1604, when Jupiter, Saturn, and Mars blended their rays, as he supposed; those planets being, at that time, in the sign of the Fishes, and a heavenly body then shedding forth a strange and wonderful light in that quarter. Kepler calculated the conjunction of these planets as having taken place, with two of them, in the year of Rome 747, and with the three, in 748; in one of which years it is generally agreed that Christ was born. Some, who wish to reduce the number of miracles in the Bible, and the corresponding tax upon their faith, as low as possible, account in this manner for the star which the wise men saw. But even if the star had an orbit among the regular stars, its sudden appearance makes no great demand upon credulity, for He who "maketh peace in His high places" has, from the beginning, led forth, and has also taken away heavenly bodies from the eyes of men.—*N. Adams, D.D.*

[19211] Behold, that kind friend, that faithful lighthouse, shines forth again, and, instead of tracking a way for them into far distant regions, it comes and rests very low, no higher, perhaps, than the smoke which curls from our chimneys, over the place where the young child was. They need not go from street to street, and from house to house, nor tax their patience, nor exercise their faith, any more. It was as though "Immanuel" were emblazoned on the door, or "King of kings and Lord of lords" were written on the wall. The question whether this star were an orb of heaven, or a special sign created for this purpose, it would seem, must be removed, when we consider its position over the dwelling where the child was. It is plain that one of the regular heavenly bodies could not point to one dwelling more than to another.—*Ibid.*

[19212] Why should it be thought strange that God should cause a fresh point of light to appear in the heavens, whose silver light should silently proclaim the advent of Him who made them all? Was it a greater miracle than the *fact*, which its rays alike proclaimed to both the earth and the heavens, that He who was the Light of lights, the Star of stars, the wonder of earth and the glory of heaven, the perfection of humanity, and the very image and brightness of God, should now veil His glory, and appear in our midst clothed in the garb of human frailty and hidden beneath the swaddling bands of our flesh? Let but our faith grasp this mystery of mysteries, and all others become plain. Surely it is not surprising that while so many stars through the long ages of darkness had reflected His power, whose word bade them to shine, one should be selected to proclaim His love, and point the wandering pilgrim's feet through the gloom of night to Him, who, although He called them all by their names, stoops from the height of His glory to bind up the broken-hearted and to heal their wounds.—*Rev. P. Balfern.*

III. THEIR FAITH.

It was undaunted and persistent, and met with its reward.

[19213] The star shone at a great distance, but in the direction of Judæa; and these wise men arose and followed it. But when they had entered on their way, the star, for a large part of the time, if not entirely, must have disappeared. In the daytime, of course, they could not see it; in stormy and dark nights it was veiled; and thus, through their long and wearisome journey, they must, to a great degree, have walked by faith. Not supposing that a king could be born out of the metropolis, they bent their way toward Jerusalem, inquiring for Christ. Instead of finding the great city moved with joy at His birth, it would seem as though the city had the first information of it from these Persians. The story of the shepherds, perhaps, had been treated with ridicule, and was forgotten; and the arrival of the Magi, with such an inquiry, only had the effect to trouble the king, and the whole city with him. Nothing daunted by this, nothing chilled in their faith and zeal, they literally followed on to know the Lord, seeking Him with all the heart; and, pursuing their way to humble Bethlehem, behold, the star which they saw in the east came and stood over the place where the young child was. If we were half as zealous to know the truth respecting Christ, and the way of salvation by Him, as these heathen were to find Him, all our wishes would be crowned with complete success. We are strongly disposed to hope and to believe that they were not moved to perform such a journey, and such an act of love and worship, to die, after all, without a saving knowledge of the Redeemer. Supposing them to have become acquainted with the

gospel, they must have reflected with great satisfaction on the pains they took to find the Saviour, the faith they exercised, their perseverance, and finally their not being offended at the lowly condition in which they found Him.—*N. Adams, D.D.*

[19214] Their difficulties did but stimulate them to fresh attempts; and, though they had lost their star, they still kept their way, carrying their treasures with them as a gift for the King. And thus it will ever be with those in whom the true spirit of Christian earnestness dwells. Though the path may be difficult, and often dark, still the language of their hearts to Christ will be that of the Hebrew maid of old: "Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee; for whither thou goest I will go: and where thou lodgest I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God; where thou diest will I die, and there will I be buried: the Lord do so to me, and more also, if aught but death part thee and me." And, although many who are actuated by this spirit may be poor in the possession of this world's goods, yet will they give to Christ the most costly treasures of a human soul, and pour forth as a libation before Him the myrrh and frankincense of their most ardent love. But oh, how different is this spirit to that which is manifested by many who profess to follow Christ! What a small thing will often turn them aside, even from the public observance of the means of grace! their feet stumble over straws, and they faint at the appearance of every ghost which their fear creates.—*Rev. P. Balfern.*

IV. THEIR JOY.

[19215] The joy of the Magi claims our notice. They had seen the star in the east. They followed it—it seemed to go out in dim obscurity. They went about inquiring: asked Herod, who could tell them nothing: asked the scribes, who only gave them a vague direction. At last the star shone out once more, clear before them in their path. "When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy." Perhaps the hearts of some of us can interpret that. There are some who have seen the star that shone in earlier days go out; quench itself in black vapours or sour smoke. There are some who have followed many a star that turned out to be but an *ignis fatuus*, one of those bright exhalations which hover over marshes and churchyards, and only lead to the chambers of the dead, or the cold damp pits of disappointment: and oh the blessing of "exceeding joy," after following in vain—after inquiring of the great men and learning nothing—of the religious men and finding little—to see the star at last resting over "the place where the young Child lies"—after groping the way alone, to see the star stand still—to find that religion is a thing far simpler than we thought—that God is near us—that to kneel and adore is the noblest

posture of the soul. For, whoever will follow with fidelity his *own* star, God will guide him aright. He spoke to the Magi by the star; to the shepherds by the melody of the heavenly host; to Joseph by a dream; to Simeon by an inward revelation. "Gold, and frankincense, and myrrh,"—these, and ten times these, were poor and cheap to give for that blessed certainty that the star of God is on before us.—*Rev. F. Robertson.*

V. THEIR ADORATION.

Its import.

[19216] That young child whom we see in His mother's arms, while Persian wise men fall before Him on the humble floor, who is He? whom do we believe Him to be? It is He of whom we read, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." It is the great "mystery of godliness, God manifest in the flesh." It is He who afterward stilled the tempest, opened the eyes of the blind, raised the dead. It is He who came to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself; "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." It is He before whom the heavenly hosts were afterwards seen prostrate, crying, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing." That scene between the wise men and the child Jesus is more than a mere act of respect to a remarkable infant. In their imperfect state of knowledge, these wise men probably did not know the full extent and meaning of their worship. We, to whom Christ is more fully revealed, can see in that prostration of the wise men an act of religious devotion intended by the Divine Spirit, though the wise men may not fully have comprehended the meaning of their own act.—*N. Adams, D.D.*

VI. TRADITIONAL VIEWS.

[19217] From the three kinds of gifts which they presented, many have supposed that the number of the Magi was three. The Nestorian church generally taught that it was twelve. Three was the number ascribed to them in the prevailing traditions; names also being given to them, as, among others, Melchior, Gaspar, and Balthazar. They were held to be kings, representing the grand divisions of men—Melchior being put for Shem, Gaspar for Ham, and Balthazar for Japhet. This explains the Ethiopian complexion given to one of them in the pictures of the "Adoration." The passages which are so uniformly regarded as being fulfilled by them, "And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising" (Isa. lx. 3), and "The kings of Tarshish and of the isles shall bring presents, the kings of Sheba and Seba shall offer gifts" (Psa. lxxii. 10), have given rise to the belief that they were kings, and accordingly the Feast of Epiphany

was, in the Middle Ages, most commonly called the Feast of the Three Kings. The literature which has been connected with this brief account by Matthew, of the wise men, is hardly exceeded in variety by that of any other part of the New Testament. Cologne, upon the Rhine, the "City of the Three Kings," claims to possess their relics, and has given them a splendid shrine. But it is needless to say that all this lore is probably the fruit of the imagination.—*Ibid.*

VII. HOMILETICAL HINTS.

- 1 The leading of the Magi to Christ illustrates the fact that an increase of light is granted to those who use the light which they have.

[19218] No distant, silent star beckons us, like them, to seek Christ. We have a more sure word of prophecy—a Bible, in which prophets and apostles conspire to bring us to the Saviour; His history is finished; we have not only His manger, but His cross, His tomb. Judæa, Samaria, Galilee are imprinted with His familiar footsteps; His resurrection and ascension, the gift of the Holy Ghost, the testimony and blood of martyrs, the conversion of souls already without number, all perform that office for us which that solitary star rendered to these wise men. But faith is not in proportion to the amount of evidence. "Prophets teach the Jews in vain; a silent star beckons the Gentiles; they arise and follow." Still, the same promise assures us of success, if we follow after the small portion of light which our unbelieving eyes take in; still, he that seeketh findeth, if he seeks, like these wise men, with all the heart.—*Ibid.*

- 2 The leading of the Magi to Christ illustrates the fact that God condescends to the varying capacities of different men.

[19219] It is deeply significant that astrologers are drawn to Christ by a star. Yet it only marks the universal method of our God, His condescending adaptation to the capacity of man. That method was exemplified in another scene at our Saviour's birth. The great event was announced to shepherds as they watched their flocks near Bethlehem—but not by a star; a song of angels told the good news to the music-loving shepherds. Go a little further for other examples. A boat-load of fishermen are dragging their empty nets. Christ stands on the shore, and by a word of power fills them till they are ready to break. That act secured Him apostles and martyrs; but it was no star, it was no song, that bound fishermen to Christ: it was a draught of fishes. The sick were drawn by neither star, nor song, nor fishes, but by a tender hand laid upon the wasting sore. He reasoned with the learned rabbi, and convinced him. He made a mother His friend by blessing her child; and in simply loving children He bound them by the strongest tie that childhood knows. And this is God's method;

whether raising to life a dead son, or hanging a new star in the sky, He bends to enter the heart by that door which stands widest open.—*Rev. Joseph Clark.*

- 3 The leading of the Magi to Christ illustrates the fact that frequently least spiritual enlightenment is found where we should expect most.

[19220] They who are nearest to Christ are not always the first to find Him. The holy metropolis was all unconscious that the Messiah of Daniel, and David, and Isaiah had been born. A band of heathen living five months' journey away have to be heralds of the infant King at the door of His own temple. As every morning's sun glanced first on the mountains round about Jerusalem before it fell glittering among the pinnacles of the temple, so the light of the coming Saviour reflected a ray from distant Persia before it broke in full splendour upon Judæa. Jesus comes first where He is most awaited. A city full of satisfied worshippers there may be, resting indolently in the assurance of a coming Redeemer; but the eyes that watch for Him as they that watch for the morning shall be the first to see His star in the East.—*Ibid.*

- 4 The finding of Christ by the Magi illustrates the rewards which await a persevering and persistent faith.

[19221] The success of these men is not explained by their extensive knowledge of Christ, nor by their favourable opportunities. If any seekers were ever embarrassed by ignorance and straitened by peculiar difficulties, it was this Persian band. Yet how courageously they set forth, how hopefully they follow on, how directly they are led to Bethlehem! To mark their progress, one might suppose they had received secret intelligence of the nativity, with a chart of the route and a minute description of the holy Child. But no! They had only their faith for a guide. They were travelling, without sight, into the West, in search of a king of whom they knew nothing. But the earnest use of what dim light they had, brought them to the manger with exceeding joy. Even so it always was, and, we are assured, always will be. "Ye shall seek Me and find Me, when ye search for Me with all your heart."—*Ibid.*

SIMON THE CYRENIAN.

I. QUESTION AS TO HIS NATIONALITY AND FAITH.

[19222] In regard to the question as to his country, the inspired narratives leave us in no manner of doubt, for we are expressly informed that he was "a man of Cyrene." This was a chief town in the province of Libya, in the north of Africa, where, as we may certainly gather from other parts of Scripture, there were at this time

many Jews. Thus we read, in the Acts of the Apostles, of many strangers being in Jerusalem at the feast of Pentecost "from the parts of Libya about Cyrene;" of "certain Cyrenians disputing with Stephen" in the various synagogues; of some "men of Cyrene preaching the Lord Jesus at Antioch;" and particularly of "Lucius of Cyrene," as one of "the prophets and teachers of the Church" in that second great centre of early evangelism. These statements may probably appear to some to anticipate and answer our second question, as to whether Simon was a Jew or a Gentile? It may scarcely seem to admit of a doubt that he was a foreign Jew from that remote Libyan colony, where so many worshipped the God of their fathers. But is there not quite as much likelihood in the supposition that he was a native African, who, through the presence of a large synagogue in his native Cyrene, had been converted from idolatry to the knowledge and worship of the true God, to the faith of the Old Testament Scriptures, and to the expectation of the Messiah, who was the great subject of its revelations? It is quite true that his name Simon was a Jewish name; but it should be remembered that when a Gentile was proselyted to Judaism, in token of his proselytism he cast off his old heathen name, and assumed a Jewish appellation. Some have even affirmed that the phrase, "a man of Cyrene," favours the conjecture of his African lineage and birth; and although mere sentiment should not be allowed to decide such a question, yet we confess to a sympathy with those who have felt something pleasing, and even fascinating, in the thought that a member of the Gentile race, a dark-hued African, should have been called in so remarkable a manner to relieve, in some degree, the last sufferings of the Saviour of the world.—*Rev. A. Thompson, D.D.*

II. PROBABLE REASONS FOR HIS BEARING THE CROSS.

[19223] It is generally supposed that this Simon was suspected, or known to be a friend, or a disciple, of Christ. Commentators agree in this impression. The reason seems to be, that only one who was odious ever had such ignominy put upon him as to bear a cross in public. Mark says, that "this man was the father of Alexander and Rufus," who are thus named familiarly, as though they were two disciples of Christ, well known. Two of the three evangelists who mention him, however, use the word "compel," in speaking of the act of the people in laying the cross upon him. Still, this may be intended merely to describe the act as it would appear generally to spectators, without intending to intimate the feelings of Simon at the force which the people would naturally use, whether he were, or were not, a friend. He was on his way from the country into the city, when the crowd met him as they went to the execution. For some reason he was a marked man; perhaps of such ill repute that the people

felt at liberty to lay hold on him and compel him to perform this most degrading and revolting service of carrying a cross to the place of punishment. It may have been that he was a fugitive from justice.—*N. Adams, D.D.*

[19224] After Christ had carried the cross a certain distance, the soldiers, for one reason or another, took it from Him, and placed it on a Cyrenian whom they happened to meet; and this Simon bore it to Calvary. We have no certain information as to who Simon was, whether or not a disciple of Christ. He is mentioned by St. Mark as “the father of Alexander and Rufus;” but though this would seem to indicate that he and his family were well known at the time, it does not help us to determine particulars. The probability would seem to be, that he was at least disposed to favour Christ, and that this his disposition was matter of notoriety—nothing is more likely than that it was on account of his attachment to Jesus, and for the sake, therefore, of exposing him to public ridicule, that the soldiers compelled him to carry the cross.—*Canon McEvill.*

[19225] We have already supposed that Simon the Cyrenian was laid hold of, on account of his being known to favour Christ's cause, and partly, therefore, with the design of exposing him to ridicule. But it is not to be imagined that this was the only, nor even the chief, reason. Had not the condition of Christ been such as to suggest, in some sense, the necessity of relieving Him of the load, we can hardly think that the cross would have been removed. It may have been that even the soldiers were moved to something like pity, as they saw the Redeemer tottering beneath the weight. It may have been that they feared that, if they now goaded on the innocent sufferer, death would ensue before they reached the place of execution, and rob them of their victim. Or it may have been that those who were eager to crucify the Saviour were impatient of delay; His feeble steps were too slow for their malice; and they urged the removal of the cross, that they might accelerate the time of His being fastened to it with the nails. But in any case, it must have been the exhausted condition of our Lord which gave occasion to the removal of the cross: it was transferred to Simon, because, to all appearance, Christ was unable to bear it to Calvary. And this is just that incidental notice which supplies the place of lengthened narrative, and lets us in, as it were, to the greatness of the Mediator's endurance.—*Ibid.*

[19226] We could not spare this incident: it would leave a gap in the evangelical histories, which it would be quite beyond our power to fill. We have, indeed, evidence that Christ could hunger, and thirst, and be weary; and all such evidence is most precious, as testifying to the real humanity of the Saviour. But

nevertheless, the evidence is far from being considerable: and if you set it against the account of a crucifixion, in which there is not the least proof that any pain was felt, you might find it hard to furnish a convincing demonstration that Christ suffered in the body like one of ourselves. What we want is a clear witness, that He was no more incapable of bodily pain than any other of our race: but just where you would most naturally look for this witness, in the record of those endurances through which He presented Himself in sacrifice to God, you cannot find it in the very lowest degree, if you remove the account of the bearing the cross.—*Ibid.*

III. PROBABLE EFFECT UPON HIMSELF OF BEARING THE CROSS.

[19227] As Simon moved onward up the ascent to Calvary, bearing the cross after the fainting Saviour, may we not believe that, from growing love and sympathy for the great Sufferer, and deepening convictions, amid all those outward signs of humiliation, of His Messiahship, he became more than reconciled to his dreadful and ignominious burden? The words which he heard Jesus address to the weeping daughters of Jerusalem—words instinct with a sublime self-forgetfulness, and which seemed to write in gloom on the opposite sky the preparing retributions for that darkest deed of national crime—were well fitted to impress his opening mind with the true character and dignity of the Being whose sufferings he had been thus strangely brought in for a little moment to alleviate, and in some sense to share. Other circumstances, which are not recorded, may have occurred, during that awful and mysterious journey, to strengthen his impressions; and altogether, there is surely something much more unlikely beforehand in the fact that a sinner should have been converted by what he saw of Jesus on the cross, than that a secret disciple should have been confirmed by what he witnessed and experienced on the way to it.—*Rev. A. Thompson, D.D.*

[19228] That this wonderful passage in the outward life of Simon, when he became the cross-bearer of the Son of God, was the turning-point of his inner and spiritual life, strikes my mind as greatly probable. The future comes in to afford its support to this opinion. For, in regard to the general fact of the Cyrenian's ultimate Christian discipleship, there is surely very strong presumptive evidence in the circumstance that his two sons, Alexander and Rufus, are spoken of in terms which make it scarcely possible to doubt that they became noteworthy among the early disciples of Christ. Was this, then, the day, and this remarkable occurrence the occasion, of the birth of Simon the Cyrenian to God? And, in the course of years, did the event influence not only his own spiritual condition, but also the immortal destiny of his sons?—*Ibid.*

[19229] Simon would rejoice afterwards when he came to understand for whom he was carrying it. At first Christ was nothing more to him than one of the malefactors, but when he found out that He was the Messiah, the Saviour of the world, the Son of God, he would greatly rejoice.—*F. Hastings.*

[19230] There was another thing that counterbalanced any pain in bearing the cross, viz., that it became a channel of grace to Simon. It was like a wire along which flashed the electric current of love. Seeing how Jesus bore with patience all His sufferings, and only pitied and prayed for His persecutors, Simon could only wonder, admire, love, and adore. That he became a Christian seems probable from the way in which he is spoken of as the father of Alexander and Rufus, evidently well-known men in the Christian Church. It is not unlikely that the reference to the mother of Rufus in Rom. xvi. 13—"Salute Rufus chosen in the Lord, his mother, and mine," is a reference to the wife of the Cyrenian. And Lucius of Cyrene (Acts xiii. 1) may have been not only a fellow-countryman, but a friend influenced by Simon. To be the means of leading one's family or a friend to Christ would certainly be a great result from bearing the cross after Jesus.—*Ibid.*

IV. SPIRITUAL SIGNIFICANCE OF HIS BEARING THE CROSS.

[19231] It is one of Christ's last and most impressive sermons. He would not leave the world without furnishing a standing memorial, that His disciples must bear the same cross as Himself, inasmuch as, like Himself, they must endure the world's hatred as champions and examples of truth. And together with this memorial He would show, by a powerful instance, that, in religion, a temporizing policy is sure to defeat itself, so that to fly from the cross is commonly to meet it, dilated in size, and heavier in material. But He had one more truth to represent at the same time—the beautiful, comforting truth, that He has borne what His followers have to bear, and thereby so lightened it, that, as with death, which He made sleep to the believer, the burden but quickens the step towards the "exceeding and eternal weight of glory." And that He might effect and convey all this through one great significant action, it was ordered, we may believe, that, as they led away Jesus, carrying like Isaac the wood for the burnt-offering, the soldiers laid hold on one Simon, a Cyrenian, coming out of the country, and him they compelled to bear His cross.—*Canon Melvill.*

V. POSSIBLE TYPICAL CHARACTER OF HIS BEARING THE CROSS.

[19232] Who is it that, in the ordering of Providence, has been appointed to carry His cross? A Cyrenian, an African. I read the

prophecy, I apprehend the type. Land, that hath long been accursed, whose children have verily been the servants of servants, over which hath hung so ponderous a gloom, that those most hopeful of improvement in human condition have almost turned from thee in despair—bright times await thee. Thou art not in bondage for ever: thy chains shall yet be dashed away: the star of Bethlehem, the sun of righteousness, shall yet break upon thy provinces and gleam in thy waters: the anthem which ascribes praise, and glory, and honour to the Lamb that was slain, shall float through thy forests, and be echoed by thy mountains. Not without a meaning was one of thy sons selected to bear the cross after Christ, and thus to fill a post to which the martyrs and confessors of every age of Christianity have counted it their highest honour to succeed. Simon the Cyrenian is raised into the light of history; perhaps to teach us that there is no nobler honour for the Christian to reflect, "I have been called to bear the cross." And for some to reflect, "I was forced into carrying the cross I would have refused, or left on the ground."—*Ibid.*

VI. HOMILETICAL REFLECTIONS.

- i The bearing of the cross by Simon suggests (if he remained an unconverted man) the folly and misery of a divided service.

[19233] Some are like Simon, if he were an unconverted man, when compelled to bear the cross. Suppose, then, that he was not a good man; or, at least, suppose that he was indifferent to Christ, and had taken no part, for Him or against Him, and was too much engrossed in his own affairs to be interested in the controversy respecting Jesus. He was coming out of the country, and was going into the city, and accidentally passed along the way to Calvary at the time that the crowd was moving to the place of execution. They laid hold on him and thrust the cross upon his shoulder. We see the angry, furious fellow, with the heavy cross laid on his unwilling neck. With oaths and curses he staggers along, restrained only by fear of the mob from resistance and flight. He deplores his bad luck that led him that way just at that moment. Had he been a few minutes earlier or later, he might have escaped this great disgrace. Now he feels that he has had a reproach put upon him which he can never wipe off. His family, his friends, or his acquaintances, will hear of this. . . . But this man, with these supposed feelings, represents many who would not suspect that they could be compared to him. Yet the resemblance is striking, and far from being uncommon. Here is a heartless professor of religion. He wishes that he had never taken upon himself the vows of God and joined the Church of Christ, for he feels no interest in religion. He does not love prayer, nor the word of God, nor spiritual truths, nor spiritual pleasures. It is a trial to him to have the Lord's Supper recur. He doubts

whether he ought to go to the Lord's table, feeling so indifferent to Christ and to religious duties and pleasures. . . . Such a man envies those who are out of the Church ; as Simon, probably, would have been willing to change places with the poorest and lowest of the wretches who were exulting about him in their freedom from that accursed cross, which he was compelled to bear. . . . How sad this is—to have no comfort in the pleasures of sin for a season ; to be deprived of sinful gratifications in this life, with nothing to compensate for the deprivation here ; and then to lie down in sorrow with the name and the recollections of one who once professedly bore the cross after Jesus.—*N. Adams, D.D.*

- 2 The bearing of the cross by Simon suggests (if he was unwilling to bear it) the future shameful retribution which awaits a present declining to accept the shame of the cross.

[19234] Where had Simon the Cyrenian been, whilst Christ was enduring shame and indignity? Not in Jerusalem : he was met, as St. Mark states, "coming out of the country." Supposing him a disciple, he ought to have remained with Christ in His hour of danger ; but he had probably gone out of the way, wishing to let the storm blow over before he showed himself in the city ; and now he may have been returning, calculating that the worst was past, and that no harm could happen to him from his reputed adherence to Christ. This was declining the cross ; and the short-sighted policy met a full retribution. He is compelled to bear the cross. The soldiers seize him, the multitude scoff him ; and he has perhaps a thousandfold more to sustain than had he not thought to ward off, by a cowardly absence, what in one form or another a Christian must bear, or be a Christian in nothing but name. Be ye certain, then, not only that, if Christians, you must carry Christ's cross, but that you make it all the heavier by avoiding it when it lies in the clear path of duty. There is no such way of incurring shame as the being ashamed of Christ. For if you be not left, in just judgment on your cowardice and desertion, to harden into mere nominal disciples, of whom Christ will be ashamed when He cometh with His angels, you may be sure that you shall be punished with an aggravated measure of the very contempt which you have thought to avoid.—*Canon Melvill.*

- 3 The bearing of the cross by Simon suggests (if he were a friend of Christ's) the honour and delight of taking up and bearing our cross after Him.

[19235] Let us now suppose that Simon was a friend of Christ, and that his sons were disciples, and that the knowledge of these things led the Jews to lay the Saviour's cross upon him. This being so, it is not impossible that Simon was on his way into the city to show his love and attachment to his Saviour and Friend. Perhaps he had heard in the country the report

of the Saviour's betrayal by one of His disciples, His apprehension, His mock trial, and the cruel treatment He had received from the populace. It may be that he, or some of his family, had been healed by Christ, or that Christ had forgiven his sins, and that he had become an heir of everlasting life. We can then imagine his feelings as he saw Christ in the hands of the mob, bleeding from the crown of thorns and from the scourging, bearing His cross without the gate to Calvary, and fainting under the load. His feeling may have been, Oh that I might die for Him ; oh that they would take me, and release Him, as they did Barabbas ; oh that I might be assisted to do something to show my love to Jesus ! Perhaps these feelings were so evident that the people took advantage of them and said, If you are such a friend and devotee of Christ, you surely will make no objection to carry His cross for Him ; and so, without further ceremony, "on him they laid the cross, that he might bear it after Jesus." Here, then, we have this man again with the cross upon his shoulder ; but a far different man is he from that which we have before supposed, and with far different feelings does he bear his load. What may we suppose his feelings to have been? Probably he was at that hour the happiest, and, in truth, the only happy, man in that crowd.—*N. Adams, D.D.*

[19236] What would Simon, in heaven, take in exchange for the honour and privilege of having borne that cross after Jesus? You could not purchase it of him with an earthly throne ; you could not make him feel that any disciple of Christ on the earth, or any martyr since his time, has more to make him happy than he has in his recollections of the hour when he bore the cross after Jesus. What happiness will that man enjoy for ever ! As the redeemed, of all ages and nations, think over and rehearse to one another the history of the cross, they will remember the man, however humble and obscure he may have been, that man of Cyrene, that African, who was so highly honoured as to be a co-partner with Emmanuel in the labour of carrying the cross to the mount of sacrifice.—*Ibid.*

SIMON THE PHARISEE.

I. HIS SPIRITUAL BLINDNESS.

1 As regards the law.

He could not see beyond its mere letter.

[19237] The law was to him very like a human statute-book that takes note of the external conduct, and its transgressors were to be treated like outlaws and criminals. The view of the law as a deep, spiritual, all-embracing element had scarcely dawned upon him—a view which gives an unspeakably more profound idea of the evil of sin, but, at the same time, a more tender

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sympathy with those who are infected with it.—
Rev. J. Ker.

2 As regards Christ.

He could not see that the nature of the Lord was Infinite Love.

[19238] He imagined that Christ's accessibility to this woman arose from want of knowledge, when it came from the greatness of His compassion. The Pharisee, from his narrow circle of view, was pitying the ignorance of Christ that He could be so deceived, while Christ was looking into the Pharisee's thoughts, and about to give a striking view of His knowledge of them. He saw into the woman's heart and life deeper than the Pharisee did. He judged them by a law far higher, and loathed sin as no man ever will do while he dwells in clay. But He did not gather up His garments from the touch of the sinner, because in His heart there was an infinite fountain of mercy. What a difference this was from the conception of the Pharisee! The forbearance of Christ had its source not in ignorance, but in the deep, far-reaching vision of Infinite Love, which wills not the death of any sinner, but that he should turn and live; and which made Him ready not only to receive the lost and wipe away their tears, but to pour out His own soul unto the death to save them. But every man reads another by the heart in his own bosom; and the hard, self-righteous Pharisee is utterly unable to comprehend Him who does not break the bruised reed, and who has a joy greater than all the angels of heaven over one sinner that repenteth.—*Ibid.*

[19239] If it entered into the Pharisee's thought at all to rescue from sin, it would be by keeping the sinner back from him, thanking God, and even feeling a selfish kind of thankfulness that he was not like him. The sinner must be made fully sensible of his exclusion from the sympathy of all good men, and no door of access can be opened till purity is restored. Any other way would seem encouragement to transgression. Christ's way is the very reverse of this. It is the grand discovery of the gospel, the spiritual law of attraction. His way was to come from an infinite height into this world, that He might be near sinners, able to touch them, and ready to be touched.—*Ibid.*

3 As regards "the woman that was a sinner."

(1) *He could not see anything attractive in her soul's capacity for better things.*

[19240] He saw only what was repulsive in her, and, had he confined his view to the sin, his feeling had right with it. But he included the sinner. It was a look of pride without any pity; and pride, above all, spiritual pride, without pity, is as cold and blind as the polar ice. Such pride could not see a human soul with infinite destinies, though degraded, a precious gem incrustured with miry clay, yet capable of reflecting the brightest rays of the Divine glory. For there that soul was, great in its origin and nature, and ready to be saved in the Lord with an everlasting

salvation. He saw it who knew the soul's capacity, for He made it, and did not over-estimate its value when He gave His life for it. He had said, "What shall it profit a man though he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" and, measuring in His compassion the infinite loss, He paid for it the infinite price.—*Ibid.*

(2) *He could not see anything profitatory in her attitude and behaviour.*

[19241] A man who is so blind as not to perceive the deep capacity of the old nature will not discover the dawning tokens of the new. Was it nothing to find her pressing close to Christ, clinging to His feet, bathing them with weeping? The outward signs were before him, if he had known how to read them, of the greatest change that can befall a human soul. These sobs and tears, and this irrepressible emotion, are the cries of the new creature in Christ Jesus, which must find its way to Him who is its life and joy. Penitence was there, too deep for words, the broken and contrite heart which God will not despise, a loathing of sin which this Pharisee cannot understand, and a glowing love that made his frown forgotten in the irresistible attraction to a Saviour's feet. What worlds of emotion may be passing within, where man cannot look, a bitterness of grief which the heart alone knows, and a joy with which no stranger can intermeddle! He knows it who is its author and its end. He sees the birth of an immortal spirit, the glow and grandeur of a second creation better than the first, and welcomed with gladder songs. But all the while the poor Pharisee, in presence of its tokens, can understand it no more than he can hear the angels who rejoice over it, and he complacently charges with ignorance Him who searches the heart, and proudly condemns her who is being acquitted by the Judge of all!—*Ibid.*

4 As regards himself.

(1) *He could not see the state of his own heart.*

[19242] Had he been better acquainted with it, he would have found sufficient there for dissatisfaction. If not committing the sins which he condemned, he might have known that he had the seeds of them in his nature. If he was keeping them down by inward struggle, this should have made him lenient, and if, cherishing the love of them, he was a publican wearing a cloak. Every unrenewed heart has the fire of corruption smouldering though it may not show the flame. The grace of God alone can extinguish the fire of any one sin, and even then the man is a brand plucked from the burning, ready to be rekindled, and therefore bound to humility.—*Ibid.*

(2) *He could not see that, in condemning the woman, he was condemning himself.*

[19243] If he could have established his point that it was unworthy of the Saviour to hold intercourse with sinners, what hope would there have been for him? Shutting the door of his house upon this woman who sought Christ, he

would have shut the door upon Christ Himself. Publican and Pharisee, open transgressor and moral formalist, can only enter heaven by the same gate of free unconditional mercy. Nay, had the Pharisee seen it, he was further from the kingdom of God than she with all her sins about her; and it was not so wonderful that Christ should permit this poor woman to touch His feet, as that He should sit down as a guest at the Pharisee's table. This, too, was in the way of His work to bring in a contrite sinner with Him, and touch, if it might be, the hard, self-righteous heart.—*Ibid.*

II. HOMILETICAL REFLECTIONS.

- 1 The purblind consciousness of Simon the Pharisee suggests that those who profess religion should be careful how they give a false view of it, by uncharitable judgments and by assumptions of superiority.

[19244] It matters little whether this is done under the guise of zeal for orthodoxy of doctrine or morality of life. If it want the spirit of meekness and sympathy, it has not the spirit of the gospel. The greatest proof of the Divine is, that it is deeply and tenderly human. God became man to show this. Those who have struggled nearest to the centre of truth and life in Christ are those who will have most sympathy with men striving amid waves of doubt to plant their feet on some spiritual certainty; and they who have risen highest in purity of heart will be most ready to stretch out their hand to help a sinner to retrieval. The reason is plain. It is these men who are acquainted with the misery of the conflict and the blessedness of the calm. We know of no greater enemies to Christianity than a hard orthodoxy destitute of the insight of charity, and a cold, self-satisfied morality which seeks its own comfort in being saved, and gathers up its skirts from the touch of what it calls the sinful world. What that world wants at all times, and in our time more than ever, is sympathy; and it would be a good thing for Christian men to look less to the Pharisee as their model, and more to Christ.—*Ibid.*

- 2 The purblind consciousness of Simon the Pharisee suggests that those who profess to be seeking religion should be careful to form their judgment of it, not from its professors, but from its author.

[19245] Many say they have been repelled from Christianity by the coldness and inconsistency of its professors, and they reckon this a sufficient excuse. It might be so if we had to plead our case at last before these professors. But the answer must be given in before Him with whom we have to do. Nothing will avail then, unless we can make it clear that we honestly and earnestly appealed to Himself, and were repelled. It will be very hard to show this. Honest, earnest men should feel bound to take their estimate of Christianity only from Christ. It is surely a case of sufficient importance to justify this, when the interests of the

soul and eternity are involved in the issue. To indulge in childish recriminations when these are at stake is not reasoning, but trifling. We are all on our way to the Judge, and He will settle the question of mutual blame; but the question of sin must be settled between Him and each one of us alone. If men have felt the pressure of guilt and want, and their need of a Saviour, they will find their way to Him through all the cold looks of professed disciples and proud formalists. That there are Pharisees who misrepresent Him is only a stronger reason why we should take His name and bear it in truth.—*Ibid.*

MATTHIAS.

I. THE MANNER OF HIS ELECTION TO SUPPLY THE PLACE OF JUDAS.

[19246] What qualification must be possessed by the new apostle as by the eleven who remained? He must be one of those who had accompanied Jesus on earth through the days of His ministry. From first to last he must have been a witness of His Divine life below. But for this he would lack the characteristic mark of the apostle, as a witness, in the highest degree competent, of His resurrection. They who had been with Him throughout His earthly ministry could best tell whether the Risen and the Crucified were one. Three years and a half of intimate knowledge, of constant companionship, would suffice, as a shorter acquaintance would not, to make it impossible that there should be any mistake or error as to the identity of the dead man and the living.—*Dean Vaughan.*

[19247] The apostles, it will be remembered, had not yet received the gift of the Holy Ghost, and this solemn mode of casting lots, in accordance with a practice enjoined in the Levitical law (Lev. xvi. 8), is to be regarded as a way of referring the decision to God (comp. Prov. xv. 33). Chrysostom remarks that it was never repeated after the descent of the Holy Spirit.—*McClintock and Strong's Cyclopaedia.*

[19248] This was the apostle's last conformity to a usage of the old dispensation, for they were to have henceforth a better guide to the will of God.—*J. B. Butler, D.D.*

II. HIS QUALIFICATION FOR THE APOSTOLIC OFFICE.

[19249] Different opinions have prevailed as to the manner of the election of Matthias. The most natural construction of the words of Scripture seems to be this:—After the address of Peter, the whole assembled body of the brethren, amounting in number about one hundred and twenty (Acts i. 15), proceeded to nominate two,

namely, Joseph, surnamed Barsabas, and Matthias, who answered the requirements of an apostle; the subsequent selection between the two was referred in prayer to Him who, knowing the hearts of men, knew which of them was the fitter to be His witness and apostle. The brethren then, under the heavenly guidance which they had invoked, proceeded to give forth their lots, probably by each writing the name of one of the candidates on a tablet, and casting it into the urn. The urn was then shaken, and the name that first came out decided the election.—*Lightfoot.*

III. LESSONS TO BE LEARNT FROM THE SILENCE OF SCRIPTURE RESPECTING HIS PREVIOUS OR SUBSEQUENT CAREER.

[19250] So Matthias became an apostle, and we read of him no more. How eloquent is the silence of Scripture! How vast the unrecorded labours of God's saints! What comfort to labourers in humble or obscure positions! No monument here; enough if they are written in the Book of Life! According to tradition, St. Matthias preached the gospel in Africa, and was martyred A.D. 51.—*Rev. E. Bray, M.A.*

[19251] Concerning him, as concerning several other apostles, we have no further definite information. This we know, they all fulfilled the ministry appointed them. Each had a history, and performed a life-work whose record of fruitfulness and blessing shall be gratefully traced in the studies of the redeemed.—*J. B. Butler, D.D.*

PAUL.

I. GENERAL VIEW OF HIS CHARACTER.

[19252] Paul's original nature had three dominant faculties—pride, conscience, love; and they stood in that order, pride giving the keynote, conscience supplying the motive power, and love, where it was in consistence with these, accompanying them. After he became a subject of renewing grace, these were still the three dominant faculties, but they stood exactly in the reverse order—love first, conscience next, and pride last. By pride I do not mean the offensive kind of pride, but self-esteem—that sense of one's own personality which God gives as the inspiration of dignity and character.—*Harold Beecher.*

[19253] Acting upon one fixed principle, he was candid, kindly, and conciliating; steadfast as the martyr at the stake, steadfast as the inquisitor crushing all natural instincts; a rock-like man, massive, compact, and firm, and yet retaining all the susceptibilities of the most genial and sensitive temperament, which ever

throbbled with sympathy for human hopes or human fears.—*Rev. F. Cook.*

[19254] Amongst recent authors Dean Howson, in his Hulsean Lectures on the character of St. Paul, points out with admirable clearness his tact and presence of mind, his tenderness and sympathy, his conscientiousness and integrity, his thanksgiving and prayer, his courage and perseverance; and Mr. Llewellyn Davies, in his article on St. Paul in the "Dictionary of the Bible," thus sums up the apostle's character: "We perceive the warmth and ardour of his nature, his deeply affectionate disposition, the tenderness of his sense of honour, the courtesy and personal dignity of his bearing, his perfect fearlessness, his heroic endurance; we perceive the rare combination of subtlety, tenacity, and versatility in his intellect; we perceive also a practical wisdom which we should have associated with a cooler temperament, and a tolerance which is seldom united with such impetuous convictions." Professor Jowett, in a fragment on the character of St. Paul, quotes with approval the quaint notion "that St. Paul was the finest gentleman that ever lived;" adding that no man had nobler forms of courtesy or a deeper regard for the feelings of others.—*Rev. Sir E. Bayley.*

[19255] We can all perceive the active habit, the fervent spirit, the strong will, the warm affections, the tender sensibility, the exercised intellect, the subjective tendencies of thought, the vivid consciousness of his own inward history, the combination of Greek and Hebrew training, the thorough grounding of the mind in the Law and the Prophets, the profound experience of the false theory of Judaism, in its effects on his own heart, and in the practical consequences to which it once carried him.—*Canon Bernard.*

[19256] It has perhaps been the unbiassed, concurrent testimony of the Christian ages, that, in all the essentials of a strong, educated, upright, disinterested, and heroic manhood, Paul stands without a peer. His intellectual powers were of the highest order; his mind was disciplined in the best of schools and under the most accomplished teachers; and he was well versed in Jewish, if not also in Gentile lore. By nature, he was endowed with a lofty imagination and a lyric fire that could rise to the grandest poetic conceptions and to the sublimest eloquence, and with a power of logical thought and a skill of argumentation, by which he could reach down to the very depths of mightiest problems. Said Coleridge, "I think St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans the most profound work in existence." Great in ability and eminent in learning, he was equally remarkable for his moral qualities, having an unusual measure of candour, charity, unselfishness, purity, courage, and rectitude.—*Christian Examiner.*

[19257] He exhibits the astonishing endurance, which no trials could exhaust, and which enabled

the most physically weak of the apostles to become the most ceaselessly active; the high conviction that God had called him to a special apostolate "to make the Gentiles obedient by word and deed;" the "enthusiasm of humanity," which made him ready to associate, for their souls' sakes, whether with men who had once been thieves and drunkards, or with sweet, innocent, and gentle women; the courtesy which made him equally at home among slaves and among kings; the power of style which rose or fell with the occasion, sometimes condescending to the humblest colloquialism, sometimes rising to the most impassioned eloquence; the clearness of insight which always kept one end in view, and sacrificed all minor points to attain it; the total emancipation from that slavery to trifles which is the characteristic of small minds, and is ever petrifying religion into formulæ, or frittering it away into ceremonial; the spirit of concession; the tact of management; the willingness to bear and forbear, descend and condescend; the tolerance of men's prejudices; the contented acceptance of less than was his due. And there were in the soul of Paul qualities far more precious for his life's work than even these. There was the tenderness for his converts which makes his words ever sound as though he were ready to break into sobs as he thinks, on the one hand, of their affection, on the other, of their ingratitude; there was the conviction which makes him anticipate the very fiat of the throne of judgment, and vehemently to exclaim that if an angel were to preach a different gospel it would be false; there was the missionary restlessness, so often found in the great pioneers of salvation, which drives him from city to city and continent to continent in the cause of God; there was the ardent and imaginative impulse which made it the very poetry of his life to found a church among the Gentiles as the first messenger of the gospel of peace; and last, but perhaps the most important of all, there was the perfect faith, the absolute self-sacrifice, self-obliteration, self-annihilation, which rendered him willing, nay glad, to pour out his whole life as a libation; to be led in triumph from city to city as a slave and a captive at the chariot-wheels of Christ.—*Archdeacon Farrar.*

II. HIS SEVERAL MENTAL AND MORAL QUALIFICATIONS.

I Intensity.

[19258] The same earnestness of conviction, strength of will, and vitality of allegiance, went into his Judaism and his Christianity; for after the strictest sect he lived a Pharisee, and yet was not disobedient to the heavenly vision of the light above the brightness of the sun. He was a man to look on with cool consent at Stephen's martyrdom, before he heard the voice from heaven; and after the Word, like a two-edged sword, had pierced the joints and marrow of his spirit, to accuse himself as the chief of sinners, and cry, "O wretched man that I am!

what I would not, that I do; who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" His strong passions made all his religious experience vivid as the lightning, and his comprehensive intellect made his eloquence reverberate like the thunder. His moods were various, but all intense. He could with equal skill sport satire with the Corinthians, or foil such dignitaries as Agrippa and Felix with his polished rhetoric, or smite Elymas the sorcerer and the backsliders at Galatia with the battle-axe of his indignation. Too rapid in his style to balance an antithesis, or limit a parenthesis, or modulate his sentences, he forgets all the rules of composition in the thing to be said. He was resolute enough to withstand Barnabas, his associate, to the face, in a question of principle, yet tender enough to restore Eutychus and comfort afflicted women; a man to confound equally the Jews who required a sign, and the idolaters that sought after worldly wisdom; a man to spend three years in Arabia to prove whether the inspiration was genuine, and its pulse healthy; a man to sing praises at midnight in a jail, and, when an earthquake opened the walls, calmly to tell the jailer to do himself no harm, for he had not availed himself of his liberty; and then to preach Christ there to the frightened keepers, and the next day, when the magistrates were troubled at their illegal arrest, to stand upon his dignity, and refuse to go out till he had humiliated them by compelling them to come and beseech him to go; a man that could tell, and tell without complaining, but with a light heart and in a cheerful tone, of stripes and stonings, shipwrecks and perils by the wilderness, of robbers and false brethren, of watchings and nakedness, of escaping by a basket from a window, of hunger and thirst and weariness daily, glorying in his tribulations,—could tell also of visions and revelations in the third heavens, of joy unspeakable, and the peace that passeth understanding.—*Bp. Huntington.*

2 Manliness.

[19259] Paul was a noble example of that manliness which Emerson says "stands first among the physical qualifications of oratory." It matters not where he speaks, in the presence of the cultured and sceptical Athenians, facing the infuriated rabble at Jerusalem, or standing before kings and governors, we look upon the same brave and dauntless man, and admire the presence of mind which holds in perfect control every faculty, and absorbs the mind in the truth he has to speak.—*Christian Globe.*

3 Eloquence.

[19260] We perceive in the Apostle of the Gentiles those mental qualifications which give that force or power of statement that is the leading characteristic of eloquence. The same simplicity and purity of thought which mark the immortal passages of Demosthenes is found in the addresses of Paul. Every word was a spark from the fires that burned in his soul, and in this, red heat proof and statement were welded

together. Even the hardened Felix trembled before the irresistible force of the apostle's thought and feeling, and Agrippa, entrenched as he was by Jewish prejudices, not in irony, as it appears to us, but in earnestness, says, "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian."—*Ibid.*

4 Didactic skill.

[19261] St. Paul's first object is always to find what truth is held by those whom he would convert; to draw that truth out distinctly; to separate it from the falsehoods by which it may have been disguised or obscured; to raise his hearers to a higher sphere of thought from which they may discern the full significance of the truth itself, and the great spiritual realities with which every truth is essentially connected. In addressing the rude idolaters of Lystra (who were ready to worship him and Barnabas as beneficent deities) he appeals to the first simple principles of natural religion, and teaches them to recognize in the power which had "given them rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons filling their hearts with joy and gladness," the one Maker and Lord of heaven and earth. Thus, too, at Athens: we do not, indeed, find that the beauty, grace, and dignity of the forms, with which idolatry was there invested, blinded him to the abominations with which it was invariably associated; he had no such false liberality, no tolerance for deadly sin; but in reasoning with the subtle and ingenious disputants whom he there encountered, he accepts all the truth which they too really held; he shows himself conversant with the thought which occupied their minds; he appeals to their unwitting acknowledgment of ignorance touching the nature of God; he uses the most inoffensive epithets to designate their religious feelings; he quotes their own poet to show the inconsistency of idol-worship in those who felt themselves to be the creatures, nay, the children of God: no point is omitted by which he can possibly find access to their understanding and hearts; but all this, be it again noted, without keeping back the truth which he well knew would be repugnant to their prejudices, and excite their scorn.—*Rev. F. Cook.*

5 Sincerity.

[19262] If St. Paul had not been an entire character, he would not have spoken so ingenuously of himself as he does in Romans vii. He would have acted as many others have done: he would have put the best aspect on things. He would not have opened the chambers of imagery, and have showed, while all the Church was admiring him, what was passing within. Here were real simplicity and humility—nothing of that Pharisee which he once was. The Pharisee has become a publican; the reality is coming forward; and he seems to say, "Is any man groaning under a body of sin and death? or, searching his heart, does he find that therein dwelleth no good thing? This is my case also; and if I have anything wherein to glory, it is in

Christ, and not in myself."—*Remains of Rev. R. Cecil.*

6 Disinterestedness.

[19263] Had Paul been less pure and disinterested in character, he would infallibly have been made the head of a party; but when he heard of the attempt at Corinth to set him in this position, and to organize a sect to be called by his name, he repelled the project with indignation. It was a kind of man-worship, and a dishonour to Christ, from which his whole nature recoiled. "Who, then," he said, "is Paul? Who is Paul? Was Paul crucified for you? Paul and Apollos are but ministers; and shall the servant usurp the place of his Lord?"—*Rev. Prof. Fisher.*

7 Generous sympathy.

[19264] What strikes us above all in his character, then, even as compared with the great saints who had been formed under the personal influence of our Lord during His sojourn among us in the flesh, is the largeness and liberality of his views, his generous and comprehensive sympathies; the will and the power to enter into the feelings of other men, to make allowance for their failings or their prejudices, to discern whatever of good there may be in them, obscured or damaged as it may be by infirmity or even by sin. It is this union of force and tenderness, of unity of purpose and absolute unselfishness, which gives St. Paul that peculiar and unparalleled influence over men's hearts, which attracts us most especially in his writings, which marks him as the man in whom the Christian sees reflected for his edification the attributes of the righteous and loving Saviour: a model which we are bound to imitate, and which we can only hope to imitate, if we apply ourselves earnestly to the work.—*Rev. F. Cook.*

8 The loftiest philanthropy.

[19265] Not indifferent to the temporal good of man, as he showed by setting an example of mechanical industry as a tent-maker; anxious to relieve the distress of the needy, as he showed by his diligent collection for the poor saints at Jerusalem; friendly to intellectual improvement, as he showed by his sanction of both Jewish and Gentile studies: he yet mainly looked to the spiritual and eternal welfare of souls, sensible of their transcendent value; feeling that a benevolence which did not go the depth of man's spiritual need, which did not rise to the height of man's spiritual salvation, is a benevolence dimmed in its vision, and feeble in its wing. In all his self-denial and labours, in all his wise adaptation to men and circumstances, the salvation of souls was the polar star of his course. "Unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law; to them that are without law, as without law, that I might gain them that are without law. To the weak became I as weak, that I

might gain the weak : I am made all things to all men"—and why, for what end would he gain them?—"that I might by all means save some."—*Rev. J. Stoughton.*

[19266] He felt a burning desire for the salvation of his brethren according to the flesh. He had been himself as they were, in a state of separation from Christ ; like one anathematized—accursed. He felt for those who were still so circumstanced ; he had great heaviness and continual sorrow of heart on their account, and with a gushing earnestness exclaimed, "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved."—*Ibid.*

[19267] He was a lover of mankind at large. Whatever there had been in him of the bigotry of the Jew was expelled. An expansive and universal affection reigned in his heart. The lines of distinction between tribe and tribe, country and country, melted away before the march of his sublime philanthropy. We see him traversing Asia Minor and Greece again and again—thus ceasing to be as a Jew, and becoming as a Gentile ; thus merging the Oriental and putting on the European ; thus losing the patriot in the man ; thus fusing all in the Christian.—*Ibid.*

9 Prudent zeal.

[19268] Among the qualifications of Paul for his peculiar work as a propagator of the gospel and a founder of churches, the singular blending of enthusiasm with prudence in his nature deserves attention. There was a fire which no difficulties that stood in his path could quench ; but along with it there was a moderation, the temperance or sobriety, which kept him back from all extravagance. He unites a zeal, which one would think could brook no restraint, with a wonderful tact and shrewdness. A certain sagacity, or good sense, presides over his conduct. His burning earnestness never runs into fanaticism. At the right time, he knows how to consult expediency. When we find these apparently incongruous qualities combined in the champion of any cause, we may look out for great results. These traits mingle in the character of a statesman like Cromwell, and in the founders of some of the great religious orders in the Catholic Church. The history of Paul contains many examples of the opportune exercise of this prudence and tact. He would not yield an inch to the demand of the Judaizers when the principle was at stake, even though Peter was seduced to give them his tacit support ; but he rebuked this leading apostle in pointed terms. Yet he would go very far in making concessions to remove the misunderstanding and prejudice of the Jews, and to pacify Jewish feeling that was offended by his apparently radical proceedings.—*Rev. Prof. Fisher, D.D.*

10 Loyalty to Christ.

[19269] "I am ready, not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the

Lord Jesus." Call it by what name you like ; you see a man of the highest intelligence, and with the fairest worldly prospects, possessed of more than ordinary wisdom and prudence, forsaking all that men usually hold dear, and in the prosecution of his purpose enduring every species of hardship, encountering every extremity of danger ; scourged, beaten, stoned, left for dead ; persisting in this course through a long series of years, unchanged by the experience of malice, ingratitude, desertion ; unsubdued by anxiety and want ; unwearied by prolonged imprisonment ; undismayed by the prospect of death : and can you doubt the reality and the strength of the principle which dwelt within him?—*Rev. Sir E. Bayley.*

11 Holiness.

(1) *As illustrated by his heavenly-mindedness.*

[19270] In the Epistle to the Philippians the apostle exhorts the Christians to vie with each other in imitating him, and to observe (for imitation) those who so walked as they had an example in him and his companions (chap. iii. 17). In the following words he assigns as his reason for thus counselling them, that many professing Christians walked very differently : their lives were sensual, self-indulgent, and worldly ; they professed the apostle's doctrine, but they walked not in his steps. Such he affirms, in pointed contrast, is not *our* life : our home is in heaven, and as citizens of that better country we eagerly await the coming of the Lord of glory to perfect our redemption. Thus the apostle sets the heavenly-mindedness of himself and his fellow-labourers against the earthliness of the false livers, and bids the Philippian Christians unite in cultivating the same spirit. In this respect St. Paul's life was a close copy of that of His Divine Master. If the mind of the Lord Jesus was indeed set upon heavenly things, the doing of His Father's will, the honouring of His Father's name, the delighting in His Father's presence ; in a subordinate but most true sense was the mind of St. Paul set upon the same objects. "We have," he says, "the mind of Christ." Such is the very essence of Christian holiness. To have fellowship with Christ in His characteristic feelings and principles, to love what He loves, to hate what He hates, to desire what He promises, to rejoice in His will at all times and under all circumstances : this is to be holy ; this is to have the mind of Christ.—*Ibid.*

[19271] He dwelt in communion with the Eternal Spirit, kept his eyes steadfastly fixed upon his risen and adorable Master, and held in firm and adamantine grasp the unseen and eternal realities. So exalted at times he appeared in thought and contemplation, so borne aloft by the power of love, and on the wings of faith, above the grovelling and transitory things of this lower sphere ; so lost in his supreme transcendent devotion to the word and to the will of God, that he might well feel that he was

ready to be offered before his hour of departure came, and so to be translated evermore to be with Christ. Paul's was the pure and practical wisdom of the best of the ancient sages, Confucius, Socrates, Epictetus. But he had also that which they had not, the rich and sanctifying grace of God, which fills the soul with holy love and anchors it securely in the spiritual and everlasting.—*Christian Examiner*.

(2) *As illustrated by his missionary spirit.*

[19272] The missionary spirit, which inspired the entire ministry of Him who "came to seek and save that which was lost," was, as his whole apostolic career bears witness, the animating spirit of St. Paul. Thus in his behaviour with reference to the many questions of casuistry which agitated the early Church, he says, "I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved." All was matter of indifference to him, except as it bore upon the salvation of men, and then he adds, "Be ye imitators of me." In this again he would have his own accurate copy of Christ's character reproduced in the lives of his converts: he would have them long as he did for the salvation of others; he would establish in their hearts a true apostolic succession, even a succession of missionary labour and zeal.—*Rev. Sir E. Buxley*.

(3) *As illustrated by his spirit of self-sacrifice.*

[19273] It showed itself in great things, in his abandonment of all worldly prospects, in his abundant labours, in his indifference to persecution, imprisonment, and death; but it showed itself also in things small, or in things which by comparison are small, though in reality of great importance. . . . Thus the apostle came down, as it were, from the soarings of a heavenly mind, and the far-reaching aims of missionary zeal, and engaged in the homely task of earning his daily bread by the work of his hands.—*Ibid.*

III. HIS CONVERSION.

1 Its great premonitory and preparatory event.

It can scarcely be doubted that the martyrdom of Stephen led up to the conversion of Paul.

[19274] A Spanish painter who tried his skill in portraying the martyrdom, represents Saul as walking by St. Stephen's side, towards the fatal spot, with a melancholy calmness, which is in marked contrast with the fiendish rage depicted on the faces of the crowd. "The picture, though historically incorrect, is poetically true. The painter has worked according to the true idea of his art, in throwing upon the persecutor's countenance the shadow of his coming repentance. We cannot well separate the martyrdom of Stephen from the conversion of Paul. The spectacle of so much constancy, so much faith, so much love, could not be lost. It is hardly too much to say with Augustine, that 'the Church owes Paul to the prayer of Stephen'" (*Conybeare*).—*Rev. J. Norton*.

2 Its bearing on St. Paul's life and teaching.

(1) *It involved, in a temporal sense, a total personal and national loss.*

[19275] As to Paul himself, he had everything to lose and nothing to gain by the change. The Jews were wealthy, the Christians poor; the Jews numerous, the Christians comparatively few; the Jews powerful, the Christians persecuted. He cut himself off at once from all his connections and friends; he frustrated all the hopes which his countrymen might have entertained from his character and acquirements. He drew upon himself the bitter hatred of all his Pharisaic brethren; he exasperated his powerful patrons, the high priests. For he added to his crime of apostasy that which would be construed into treachery to his employers.—*Dean Milman*.

(2) *It lay at the root of his clear view of the nature of sin, and the far-reaching character of his own repentance.*

[19276] He had been brought face to face with God. In the light of that terrible hour he saw himself as he was, a bloody blasphemer, wholly offensive to God, a self-righteous, bigoted, cruel, injurious wretch, his heart a very hell of bitterness and pride on one hand, and the holy, merciful, patient God on the other—what a view of sin it must have given him, and of himself as a sinner! If the prophet Isaiah, in the sensible presence of Jehovah, was forced to exclaim, "Woe is me, for I am undone!" how must such a man as Saul have felt! And all after meditation, in remembrance of that vision, served only to deepen the impression. Sin was in his sight "exceeding sinful," and the sinner exceedingly offensive to God. And the same may be said of Saul's repentance. It was deep and sweeping. The clearer the view of God the clearer is the view of sin, and the deeper is repentance. When Saul saw himself in the light of God's presence, like Job in similar circumstances, "he abhorred himself, and repented in dust and ashes." The abandonment of his former life was complete. The things he had loved and pursued were now hateful, and he repudiated them absolutely and for ever. He "sorrowed after a godly sort." And all along through his writings we detect the minor strains of grief over the wicked work of his early days.—*Sermons by the Monday Club*.

(3) *It led him to dwell much upon the resurrection of Christ.*

[19277] There is none of the sacred writers who makes so much of the resurrection of Christ, or who dwells so exultingly on His essential and Divine glory, as St. Paul. He has no words to express the joy of his heart in the thought that he has a living and a glorious Saviour. And both these commanding facts were impressed on his mind by the energy of a Divine testimony at the time of his conversion. There stood Jesus, the Jew of Nazareth, radiant with the light and glory of infinite majesty. Jesus is

alive; Jesus is God: these two facts are to him clear as his own existence. These he ever asserts. Of them he can brook neither denial nor doubt. Jesus a living, ever-living, and ever-present Saviour. Jesus a Divine and Almighty Saviour—these were the basis of his own hopes, and of the whole redemptive scheme.—*Ibid.*

(4) *It led him to lay stress upon the election of grace.*

[19278] Paul makes much of the election of grace, and this was one of those things burned into his consciousness at the time of his change. In his view, every man is dependent on the purpose of God for salvation. Every one is, by nature, a child of wrath, under condemnation, and on the way to death. None enter the path of life self-moved, but only those who are chosen, called, and divinely persuaded thereto. Salvation originates wholly in the electing mercy and grace of God. This was to him clear as an axiom. He felt it in his own case. He knew that he was violently set against God. He was becoming harder and more fixed in sin every day. Left to himself, he never would have turned. But God, of His own will and for His own ends, had planned otherwise, and in good time He called him by His grace, and made him His child.—*Ibid.*

3 Its evidential value.

[19279] Next to the resurrection of Christ and the descent of the Holy Ghost, the Gospel had no such powerful witness to its Divine origin as that supplied by the conversion of Saul of Tarsus.—*Rev. Sir E. Bayley.*

[19280] In the calling of Paul out of time there appear certain indications of providential interference almost tantamount to miraculous. Had he been among the original apostles, the infidel might with some plausibility have attributed the origination and early conduct of the design to a man of his vigorous mind and distinguished attainments. But the design is far advanced by humbler agents before his assistance is required. No sect is so far prosperous as to have spread beyond the limits of Judæa; it is of sufficient importance to excite a violent persecution, and so firmly established in the minds of its followers as to induce them to undergo voluntary martyrdom in its defence.—*Dean Milman.*

[19281] Upon what hypothesis can the infidel explain that conversion? There is an idle story, said to have been current in certain circles in primitive times, namely, that Paul was anxious to marry the high priest's daughter, and then opposed Judaism because the high priest deceived him. Unbelievers must have been driven to desperate shifts to invent such a fable. Modern Jews say that he changed rapidly from one extreme to another, being a man who could do nothing by halves: but that by no means accounts for the change. Paul's conversion is an insoluble enigma, except we take the account

of it given in the Acts of the Apostles. Infidels must believe that Paul was an impostor or an enthusiast, or both. But, to admit that he was an impostor in the face of his history, which shows him to have been sincere, if man ever was—to admit that he was an enthusiast in the face of his letters, which show him to have had a clear, strong, humble mind, if man ever had—is to raise up difficulties around the infidel theory far more formidable than ever accompanied the Christian doctrine. Where, on the infidel supposition, were the means and motives for the conversion of Paul? How is it to be explained that he always insisted upon the miraculous story, and was never contradicted by any of his companions who went with him to Damascus? Where are the motives of his self-denial, benevolence, and holiness? Here are effects without a cause.—*Rev. J. Stoughton.*

[19282] As Lord Littleton shows in his admirable book on Paul's conversion, the fact duly considered is a demonstration that the gospel comes from God.—*Ibid.*

[19283] If the conversion of Paul is a reality his testimony must be true. (1) His conversion shows that he had the necessary intelligence to bear a credible testimony. It is necessary to give credibility to the statement of the testimony, that the witness should be thoroughly acquainted with the circumstances he affirms. If Paul was ignorant of Christ, if the statements he made were the reckless utterances of a blind fanatic, his testimony is worth nothing; but the history of his conversion shows that he became thoroughly acquainted with Christ. He saw Him, he felt Him, he heard Him. Christ became more real to him than any being in the universe; Christ was revealed in him, he said. (2) His conversion shows that he had the necessary candour to bear a credible testimony. If a witness is strongly prejudiced in favour of the things he declares, his testimony is, to say the least, but questionable. The conversion of Saul shows that his prejudices were all against Jesus. No name was so odious to him as the name of Jesus; no cause so abhorrent to his nature as His cause. Malignity to Him bore him now to Damascus, the scene of his conversion. When he, therefore, states that Jesus is the Son of God, the Saviour of the world, he states what runs directly opposed to his prejudices, and thus shows a candour which gives a credibility to his word. (3) This conversion shows that he had the necessary disinterestedness to bear a credible testimony. When a witness has a deep interest in proving what he wishes to establish, his word is justly looked upon with suspicion. The history of Paul's conversion shows that self-interest had nothing to do in prompting him to adopt the new faith. In truth he made enormous sacrifices to do so. His position as a member, which he probably was, of the great council of the nation, his high prospects in Church and State as a young man of genius, culture, and a Hebrew of the He-

brews; his dearest friendships, his worldly wealth and comforts, all were sacrificed on his adhesion to the cause of Christ. and obloquy, insult, want, persecution, and martyrdom, he knew would follow his decision. If disinterestedness, therefore, is an element of credibility in a witness, Paul's testimony concerning Christ must be taken.—*The Homilist*.

4 Its typical character.

[19284] The receiving one to mercy who had been so great an enemy to the name and religion of Christ, and not merely receiving him, but going out of the ordinary method of providence to meet him, and then to dignify him so far, as to put him into the high and honourable trust of planting the gospel in the heathen world, for which he was qualified by such an abundant measure of spiritual gifts—this would be a demonstration to the whole world of the kindness and gentleness of Jesus Christ, of the nature of His doctrine, designed to encourage men everywhere to repent and turn unto God, and His readiness to forgive those which we may call personal offences against Him, being intended directly in dishonour and contempt of Him as an impostor: according to what He Himself had told the Jews, that whosoever spoke a word against the Son of man, how reproachful soever, it should be forgiven him.—*H. Grove*.

[19285] The conversion of St. Paul is the great typical conversion of the New Testament. In this typical conversion we find the leading characteristics of every true conversion—what it is, whence it cometh, whither it leadeth; its nature, its origin, and its end. This thought was evidently present to the apostle's mind when he wrote, "For this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on Him to life everlasting." . . . They are not to contemplate him so much as the mercy of God in him; that was the subject of the sketch, or sub-tracery, the filling up of which would take place in the experience of every one who should hereafter believe.—*Rev. Sir E. Bayley*.

[19286] St. Paul's conversion was a signal example of Divine grace. "I obtained mercy," is his own account of the transaction. It is the ruling thought of the passage. "The grace of our Lord superabounded," as a river full to overflowing: *q. d.* "My sins obstructed the course of grace; but the stream of God's mercy brimmed over, overlapped, and carried with it the mounds and dams of my sinfulness. There was thus exhibited in me a sublime pattern of Divine long-suffering, an encouraging example to all future believers." None, as it seemed to St. Paul, had sinned as he had sinned; but from the dark background of his unbelief the mercy of God shone brightly forth, and ever afterwards the thought of mercy was present to his mind: "By the grace of God I am what I am."—*Ibid.*

IV. HIS WRITINGS.

1 Their style.

[19287] St. Paul's fiery and impetuous style is in keeping with his general relation, throughout his Epistles, to Christian dogma. The calm enunciation of an enchained series of consequences flowing from some central or supreme truth is perpetually interrupted, in St. Paul, by the exclamations, the questions, the parentheses, the anacolutha, the quotations from liturgies, the solemn ascriptions of glory to the Source of all blessings, the outbursts by which argument suddenly melts into stern denunciation, or into versatile expostulations, or into irresistible appeals to sympathy, or into the highest strains of lyrical poetry. Thus it is that in St. Paul primary dogma appears, as it were, rather in flashes of light streaming into rapid coruscations across his pages than in highly elaborated statements such as might abound throughout a professed doctrinal treatise of some later age; and yet doctrine, although it might seem to be introduced incidentally to some general or special purpose, nevertheless is inextricably bound up with the apostle's whole drift of practical thought.—*Canon Liddon*.

2 Their vitalizing force as regards religion.

[19288] He, more than any other, is the apostle who made clear to the religious consciousness of mankind the "justification by faith" which springs from the mystic union of the soul with Christ—the apostle who has brought home to numberless Christians in all ages the sense of their own helplessness, and pointed them most convincingly to the blessedness and universality of that redemption which their Saviour wrought. And hence, whenever the faith of Christ has been most dimmed in the hearts of men, whenever its pure fires have seemed in greatest danger of being stifled, as in the fifteenth century, under the dead ashes of sensuality, or quenched, as in the eighteenth century, by the chilling blasts of scepticism, it is mostly by the influence of his writings that religious life has been revived.—*Archdeacon Farrar*.

[19289] How every word he wrote has been scanned and sifted, as if men were sure it must contain something that would repay the toil! Show us the philosopher whose words of wisdom have sunk so deep, and been remembered so well. Show us one man who can say he is seeking to practise in his daily life the precepts and advices of Plato, for every thousand that are praying to live mindful of the words of St. Paul. Show us the beloved friend whose letters have been read and re-read by those dearest to him, half so often and half so earnestly as St. Paul's have been by multitudes beyond number. From his tent-maker's shed; from his Roman prison; from his unknown grave;—he exercises a sway over the minds of men, the best minds of the race, to which the empire of Alexander was narrow indeed. Not a day shines on the

world, but his name is in the thoughts, and his words on the lips of millions. Yet so lightly did he hold such renown as this, that he seems to have thought it wrong to waste one care upon it: and duty and inclination speak together in the memorable text, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ!"—*Boyd*.

V. HOMILETICAL REFLECTIONS.

1 St. Paul's faith and patience under suffering convey an evident lesson to our own times.

[19290] It is easy to see how sharply this feature of the entire submission of the will to Christ, the patient bearing of His cross in St. Paul's character cuts into much of the easy-going, self-indulgent Christianity of the day. If stability in the faith is an unwelcome doctrine to many, the daily crucifixion of the flesh is still more unpopular. The common aim would seem to be, not to bear, but to escape the cross; and the effort of many Christians is to maintain their Christian fidelity, without being made conformable to the death of Christ. I know not by what special pleading the professed followers of Christ reconcile a life of luxurious worldliness and ease with the precepts and examples of the New Testament; but sure I am, that if their Christianity be real, they will find that the cross cannot thus be shunned, that the chastisement of unfaithfulness will sooner or later search them out, and they will be taught through the bitterness of trial that lesson which they would not learn through the gentle drawings of grace. God "doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men." But all His children must be "taught of God;" and if love alone does not wean them from self and the world, sterner methods must be employed. "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous, therefore, and repent."—*Rev. Sir E. Bayley*.

2 St. Paul's history illustrates the necessity of the new birth for all.

[19291] It was the inward revelation, not the outward light, which changed his soul. We are not to expect that the miraculous part of Saul's conversion will be repeated; but the spiritual part of it must, in the case of all of us, or we cannot be saved. He who spoke to Saul by the way, speaks to us in His word, saying, "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." "Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again." Every man in his natural state carries within him a heart wholly alienated from his Maker. "The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." That enmity must be displaced, and its room occupied by faith and love, purity and devotion. The gospel demands it; the laws of the universe demand it; the society of heaven, the character of angels, the nature of God, demand it. It is an ordinance

which can no more be changed than He who proclaims it can change. And this conversion can result only from regeneration. Men will not turn to God till they are renewed by Christ. The light of His gracious eye, and the sound of His loving voice, must check the sinner and bring him to a stand, or he will never ask, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" but will rush on in his course of spiritual obstinacy till he reaches the gates of the city of the dead, and finds himself shut up in God's everlasting prison-house of righteous judgment.—*Rev. J. Stoughton*.

[19292] Divine grace is essentially the same in all its actings. The circumstances of the change may, and often do, vary exceedingly; in one case it is sudden, in another gradual; in one it is marked by deep convictions and desponding fears, in another these signs are wholly wanting; in the one case the vessel of the soul is well-nigh wrecked, and reaches the place of safety as by a miracle, in the other the passage from the old life to the new is calmly made, and the prompting motive is not so much the dread of danger as a sense of duty and the attractive power of good. But whilst we allow for variation in the attendant circumstances, let us not lose sight of the unity of spiritual change. There may be no "great light" from heaven, no audible voice, no visible manifestation of the Saviour; but the work may be, yea, the work must ever be, as truly Divine as it was with St. Paul. If saved, we must be saved by grace; if born anew, we must be born from above: conversion has its human side, it has also its Divine; and no one felt this more strongly or taught it more earnestly than St. Paul did. "Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me, the chief of sinners, Christ Jesus might show forth the fulness of His long-suffering, as a pattern to those who should believe on Him to life everlasting."—*Rev. Sir E. Bayley*.

3 St. Paul's history emphasizes the wisdom of yielding a willing submission to the supremacy of conscience.

[19293] Difficulties undoubtedly beset the religious inquirer in this as in other days. But it may well be questioned whether they are greater now than were those which an educated Jew of the first century had to encounter. In consequence of the advance made in critical and scientific knowledge, religious difficulties have perhaps increased in number, but they have hardly increased in force or volume. The cords, for example, which modern science would weave around the steps of a thoughtful inquirer, and by means of which she would hold him fast to the negation of God and the rejection of the Christian scheme, are thin as air compared with those opposing forces by which Paul was surrounded, and which, having chosen his party and his sect, rendered his change of front well-nigh an impossibility. There was, however, this one point of hope in him, that he was an honest man. If he once saw the truth, whatever

the consequences, he would at once act upon it. Let us attach the highest value, then, to the supremacy of conscience. Whatever else may be wanting, let there be no failure here. We do not say that conscience alone and unaided is a safe guide to truth; but we do affirm that if its voice be hushed, its promptings resisted and disobeyed, you erect a barrier against truth which no known human forces shall be able to remove. You cover the pupil of the spiritual eye with a thick film of deceit, and "If the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!"—*Ibid.*

4 St. Paul's example, and the eminent reward which he cannot but have obtained, should be unfailing incentives to all Christians to follow in his steps.

[19294] Certainly there is no soul in eternity now more satisfied and joyful than this man of self-sacrifice, universal charity, holy obedience and faith in Christ. Myriads of souls are there in the silent realms of eternity dwelling upon the memories of the past. Kings and conquerors, statesmen and philosophers, poets and artists, men of science and men of literature—classes more numerous than we can describe—are now feeding on the recollections of days gone by. That early portion of their existence was to them a seed-plot, whence they are reaping now sheaves of joy or heaps of sorrow. Among the richly clothed and the brightly crowned in the upper world of spirits, Paul shines pre-eminent. Had he, instead of devoting all the energies of his great soul to Christ, employed them—we will not say in a course of reckless ambition, dishonest avarice, or loathsome sensuality, but—in a career of power, gain, or fame decreed honourable among men, apart from the sanctifying influence of the gospel—had he been only a warrior, a statesman, or a rabbi, how bitter now would be his regrets; and, though shining as a star in the hemisphere of human glory, how deep would be his shame, as the disappointment of eternity told him, that such a gorgeous-looking life was, after all, a failure! From the heaven where he sits with Christ upon His throne, reaping the fruits of self-denial and holy love, he looks on us, saying, "Be ye followers of Me."—*Rev. J. Stoughton.*

BARNABAS.

I. SIGNIFICANCE OF HIS NAME.

[19295] "Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas," is from that time known as Barnabas alone. For Joses was one of the commonest Jewish names, and Barnabas had a meaning peculiarly characteristic of the man. Our English translation interprets it as "the son of consolation." Take "consolation" in a strong sense, and that is right. The word employed is elsewhere rendered "exhortation." It answers

to the old English use of "comfort," in the sense of strengthening, as well as soothing, as we have it in the phrase, "the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost."—*W. Brock.*

[19296] Whenever a new name is made conspicuous in Holy Scripture, we are almost always conscious that it possesses considerable depth of meaning. So, in the case of Barnabas, this new name might seem to mark the first outgrowth of that charitable help and service in which consists so large a part of the internal life of the Church. A doubt may arise as to whether the phrase "son of consolation" should not rather be "son of exhortation." The difference is not of practical moment. If the latter rendering be more correct, we may remark with truth that no exhortation is more effectual, as nothing is more consoling in times of trial and difficulty than an example of generous self-denial.—*Dean Howson.*

II. TRAITS OF HIS CHARACTER.

1 Modesty.

[19297] We find in his history no trace of any jealousy, but rather tokens of a noble modesty, akin to that of the Baptist when he drew back into the shade before the perfect light of Christ. This man, who, when others shunned Paul, had become his patron and protector, laying him under no common obligation, is now content to yield the precedence, and to walk loyally and lovingly at his side. There was no backwardness on the part of Barnabas in the perils and enterprises which he shared with Paul. He too lifted up his voice at Paphos, in the synagogue at Antioch, in the towns of Lycaonia. He ran his risks at the hands of the unbelieving Jews. He stood steadfast at his comrade's side in the face of the fierce opposition from the bigoted Pharisees at Jerusalem. When at length they differed—if we have to choose between the two—surely it was Barnabas who erred upon the generous side; for what he did was to take a faint-hearted brother whom Paul was too impatient to endure, and to give him that fresh chance of honourable service which made Mark "profitable" ever afterwards to Christ and to His Church.—*W. Brock.*

2 Superiority to prejudice.

[19298] The first purely heathen converts had been brought into the Church by the nameless men of Cyprus and Cyrene, private persons with no office or commission to preach, who, in simple obedience to the instincts of a Christian heart, leaped the barrier which seemed impassable to the Church in Jerusalem, and solved the problem over which apostles were hesitating. Barnabas is sent down to see into this surprising new phenomenon, and his mission, though probably not hostile, was, at all events, one of inquiry and doubt. But, like a true man, he yielded to fact, and widened his theory to suit them. He saw the token of Christian life in

these Gentile converts, and that compelled him to admit that the Church was wider than some of his friends in Jerusalem thought. A pregnant lesson for modern theorists who, on one ground or another of doctrine or of orders, narrow the great conception of Christ's Church! Can you see "the grace of God in the people"? Then they are in the Church, whatever becomes of your theories, and the sooner you let them out so as to fit the facts, the better for you and for them.—*A. Maclaren, D.D.*

[19299] Barnabas is the man who, when Saul came down from Jerusalem to Damascus, when all others in the church there eyed him with suspicion, had faith in him, introduced him to the apostles, and told them that he had indeed seen the Lord. Paul could never forget Barnabas, the first friend he had found in Jerusalem when he came back there to undo the dreadful work of his former life.—*A. Mitchell, D.D.*

3 Catholicity of spirit.

[19300] The goodness and faith of Barnabas led him to be wide in his sympathies and charitable in his dealings with others. He was unselfish and devoted. His catholicity may have been fostered by various circumstances. He was a native of Cyprus, had property, was a man of some culture, and may have had the advantages of a good training. The qualities he loved and cultivated he was most ready to recognize in another.—*F. Hastings.*

[19301] The catholicity of Barnabas may have been fostered by various circumstances. Being a native of Cyprus, although a Jew, and having been brought up away from his own land, he did not so strongly imbibe their national exclusiveness. He had property likewise, and money doubtless enabled him to travel, and come more into contact with his fellow-men. This would broaden his mind. He was evidently also a man of some culture. He was a Levite, a professed teacher. Like Paul, he may have had the advantages of a good training. Indeed, it is possible that they both sat together at the feet of that great and renowned professor in Jewish theology and philosophy, Gamaliel. There they may have met and learned to respect each other. This may possibly explain how it was that Barnabas knew Paul and took him by the hand, when all the disciples were afraid of him, testifying to his sincerity and purity. The qualities he loved and cultivated he was most ready to recognize in another. That he should have so acted in that case indicated how fitted he was to be sent down to inquire concerning the strange spread of the doctrine of Christ at Antioch. His gentleness and catholicity at this time, and that of Paul afterwards, probably saved the Gentiles from forming a sect, distinct from, and hostile to, the Christian Church at Jerusalem.—*Ibid.*

4 Disinterestedness.

[19302] Barnabas was a good man; not one

of those stern, rigid, unloving men, who think their work done when they have just borne a testimony; but a kindly, benevolent, and beneficent man; one who had first given up all for his brethren, and then, as the best of gifts, as that without which the other would have been valueless, gave himself. It is a beautiful trait in his character that he was ever helping forward those whose position in the Church of Christ was less clear or less established than his own.—*Dean Vaughan.*

5 Generosity.

[19303] His first appearance has more of action in it than of speech. It was at the moment when, under the fresh impulses of their awakening, the disciples who had "houses or lands" were parting with their property for the relief of their poorer brethren, suddenly cut off from the ordinary means of maintenance. Conspicuous among these was Barnabas. He is the only man mentioned by name among the generous givers. Was it because what he did he did with such heartiness and genuine humility as to serve for an example to the whole Church? It was a good beginning for a Christian ministry.—*W. Brock.*

6 Tenderness.

[19304] In some respects Barnabas was different from all the rest of the leaders of the early Church. In him there was a tenderness which does not appear in the others. He is called in one place "a son of consolation." He enjoyed, almost beyond any other, the confidence of the early Church. We find him sent on almost every difficult and delicate mission.—*J. Morgan, D.D.*

7 "Goodness."

[19305] From the statements of the inspired historian, it appears that Barnabas was full of the Holy Ghost, that he was full of faith, that he was not a lover of this world, that he found in religion the great business and the great enjoyment of his life, that he was the object of the dislike and persecution of wicked and worldly men, that he zealously endeavoured to make other men religious, that he sought to relieve the bodily as well as the spiritual necessities of his fellow-men, and that, notwithstanding all his excellencies, though a good, a very good, he was not a perfect man.—*J. Brown, D.D.*

[19306] His character is sketched as a pattern whereby to guide the Church in the choice of agents to fill positions of trust and responsibility. "He was a good man," &c. Remark that as to gifts and endowments which the world values, the Evangelist is expressively silent. He was a "good man," good in all the relationships of social and domestic life, good in his influence and fulfilment of public duties, good in the diffusive benevolence of his spirit and social bearing—he was "a good man."—*W. Mackenzie.*

III. LESSON FOR OUR OWN TIMES.

[19307] Surely it is not below the ambition of the strongest to play the part of Barnabas among the churches of to-day. He must be content in that case to be comparatively unnoticed, and to leave a fainter impression on the general world. He will not appear among the heroes, like Elijah; but will be rather like Elisha, the homely and holy man of God, passing by on his daily errands of duty. But as long as so many timid, undecided souls remain, needing the tenderest touch and a patience almost motherlike to bring them to decision; as long as there are little children to be drawn into the Saviour's arms; as long as the Church has her backsliders to reclaim, and her doubters to direct and encourage: so long there will be ample occupation for such a man, and abundant reward. Nor will he live in vain, but rather to the highest purpose, if he be made instrumental, like Barnabas, in dissipating suspicions, and confirming friendships, between Christian brethren.—*W. Brock.*

IV. HOMILETICAL SUGGESTIONS.

The contention between Barnabas and Paul reminds us that we must not expect to find even the best men free from imperfections.

[19308] Who could have supposed that Barnabas, peculiarly mentioned as "a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith," would have acted as he did with regard to Paul? With respect to the latter, not a word is needed; he evidently stood at the highest point of Christian excellence. Yet these two men, men of gigantic piety, failed in this manner. It was not a mere difference of opinion; it was a "sharp contention," a paroxysm, for this is the word in the original, so that they could not act in concert. Hence we should learn, not to be surprised, or discouraged, when we discover faults in excellent men; since there were faults in those who formed the brightest ornaments of the primitive Church. We are apt to exaggerate the practical virtues of the first Christians: in love to God, and zeal for His glory, they might greatly excel modern believers; but in correctness of conduct they were probably not superior: so faulty were many of the Corinthians, who had embraced the faith, that they made the Holy Communion an occasion of intemperance. As we think of two such men thus falling out with each other, it is difficult to say whether we are more sorry or surprised. We mourn that these good and great men should have been thus easily provoked. We are surprised that Paul should have for the moment forgotten the kindness of Barnabas to him when he introduced him to the apostles at Jerusalem, and his brotherly appreciation of his ability, when, at a later day, he went to Tarsus to secure his services as a helper in the gospel. Nor are we less astonished that Barnabas should have been here so violent. Surely we have seen "an end of all perfection" when such men thus sinfully dispute.—*Robert Hall.*

TIMOTHY.

I. HIS GENERAL CHARACTER.

[19309] With little beyond allusions to guide us, it is difficult to decide on the precise qualities of character which distinguished Timothy from other men. His bodily health was feeble, and required stimulants; his natural disposition appears to have been as sensitive as Paul's, and perhaps deficient in forwardness and courage. Some have urged that he must have been of a cowardly and time-serving spirit, adducing, as a proof, the repeated exhortations in the Epistles addressed to him to be strong and steadfast. These exhortations, however, must not be unduly pressed. The situation of affairs at Ephesus was at the time extremely difficult and even dangerous. Heathenism was as fierce and as vigilant as when Demetrius led the rioters against Paul. Heresy, in its most pernicious forms, was noisily asserting itself. The bravest might easily have lost heart in such an atmosphere, and would have needed to sustain him every motive which an apostle could supply.—*W. Brock.*

[19310] More dazzling names than his are to be seen in the firmament of the early Church: Apollos flames across the sky, leaving behind the brilliant sparks of his Alexandrian rhetoric; but the star of Timotheus beams on with a gentle, gracious, and unfading lustre, holding forth the word of life. His was one of those attractive Christian characters which, with little outward show or sound, shine by the very necessity of their inner light. "Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."—*Ibid.*

[19311] In letters of the period he is styled Paul's "beloved son," and one truly "faithful in the Lord;" while, in another place, there is a noteworthy passage, which gives us some insight into his defects of character. "Now if Timotheus come, see that he may be with you without fear." There are other passages in the pastoral Epistles which depict a similar weakness of resolution. "Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity." "Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for thy stomach's sake and thine often infirmities." "Wherefore I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God which is in thee." "Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner." "Continue thou in the things which thou hast learned." There are some who see in the angel of the Ephesian Church the somewhat timid Timothy. "Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love: remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works." I think we may infer from such notices as these that, mortal-like, the much-loved

Timothy showed signs of backwardness and timidity. They were chiefly displayed in his ministerial work, amid the difficulties which so often arose. But how boldly that utmost earnestness and that Christian self-denial stand out, which prompted him gladly to leave the paternal roof, to submit to circumcision at the Apostle's desire, and to partake of no stronger drink than water when even his bodily ailments were of no ordinary kind. Such eminent qualifications as Timothy possessed may well conceal from our too curious gaze failings, though serious in themselves.—*Cust Num.*

II. ST. PAUL'S TESTIMONY TO HIS WORTH.

[19312] Paul did not think meanly of his follower. On the contrary, he speaks of his unfeigned faith, his unwearied service, his strict fidelity, "the proof of him" as a man weighed in the balance and found to be of sterling weight. He calls him by the dearest names, "my brother," "my son," "my dearly beloved son," and entreats the special kindness of the Churches on his behalf. He declares, in one place, that in all the chosen band of his fellow-labourers there is none so disinterested as Timothy, none so full of sympathy, none so much after his own heart. High praise from such a pen as Paul's! For it marks out this man at the age, we may suppose, of thirty or thirty-five, as the leader among all his comrades in the faith. And he led, be it observed, not because of his natural forwardness, for he had none; nor yet, apparently, from any great intellectual mastery, for he seems to have shrunk from controversy, but by dint of his sheer goodness, unselfishness, and trust in God.—*W. Brock.*

III. HOMILETICAL HINTS.

- 1 The happy result of the youthful training of Timothy illustrates the influence of the early study of the Scriptures in the formation of character, and their sufficiency for salvation.

[19313] One powerful element in his education was the Bible. "From a child" it had been his great lesson-book; its milk had nourished his spiritual infancy, and its meat sustained his spiritual manhood. And now, in this great age of making books, where, by common confession, is there a book that will do for character what the Bible does? "Men cannot do without it," writes Matthew Arnold; "for they want happiness, and happiness is the result of righteousness, and righteousness is to be found in the Bible." "I have put a New Testament among your books," said Charles Dickens to his son, "because it teaches you the best lessons by which any human creature can possibly be guided." Dr. Chalmers has left it on record, "If I were asked to specify the likeliest prescription for the well-being of the soul, I should say it was a prayerful reading of the Bible." A Bible Christian is a strong Christian. He

escapes the perpetual religious childhood in which too many are content to live and die. The breezes of scepticism do not break his cable. The shocks of life do not destroy his faith. By daily reading and weighing of the Scriptures he waxes riper and stronger, deeper and yet broader; at once a scholar and a soldier, a "man of God, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." Yes, if we would grow, there is no better secret than the old-fashioned plan of a regular, orderly, prayerful study of the Bible.—*Ibid.*

[19314] Sufficient as the Scriptures are for our salvation, who is not ashamed of his neglect of them? We cannot plead, as some do for turning away from the sacraments, that we are not worthy to use this means of grace; nor object our want of time, for who cannot take in at least a verse in each day? nor want of learning, for the wayfaring man, though a fool, need not err in this path; nor want of Bibles, for they are in every room of our dwellings. It is only want of relish for them that causes them to remain there unheeded. It is this that leads us to read the newspapers or the light publications of the day with eagerness, while the Word of God lies neglected, or is taken up reluctantly, like nauseous medicine, because it must be done. It is of no use to attempt to disguise the fact, that the best of us have not always a hearty relish for God's Word. Oh that we had, for the sake of our usefulness, our comfort, and our growth in grace! It was the rule of Henry Martyn never to allow any other book to be read with more delight than the Bible, so that if he could not immediately lay aside whatever he was reading, and peruse the Bible with greater pleasure, he concluded that he was in a wrong frame of mind, and persevered in seeking to bring himself back, until God's law was loved above everything else. He was like Timothy, eminent in piety, and from a like cause. Let such a rule as Martyn's be made our own, and it would supersede the need of all other rules, for such a love for the Scriptures would put us upon reading them diligently, habitually, and profitably.—*Rev. W. Lewis, D.D.*

- 2 The happy result of the youthful training of Timothy illustrates the influence of the character of a child's instructors in the formation of the child's own character.

[19315] The earliest Scripture lessons of Timothy's youth were mingled with the happy associations of hours spent at the feet of his grandmother Lois, and his mother Eunice. Then explanations had made the sacred stories delightful, and had sweetened as well as simplified the sacred truths. When they and he were parted, the same good work was carried on by apostolic hands. Paul became his instructor, as he was already his father, in the Gospel. In those hallowed hours of private intercourse which the intervals of labour must often have afforded, Paul had led the young disciple forward from fact to fact, and from doctrine to

doctrine, till he stood rooted and grounded in the truth. How much the scholar owed, in this instance, to the inspiration which he caught from the teacher! How much may still be done, even by the uninspired, to impart interest and impressiveness to the Word of God! The desire to see her child become another Timothy lives in many a Christian mother's heart: does not the power to make him so, under the Divine blessing, lie largely in her hands?—*W. Brock.*

STEPHEN.

I. HIS DEFENCE.

[19316] The title given to his speech before the high court of the Jews is by far too narrow, as it passes from defence into attack. There is a double movement through the whole,—one traces the providence of God, the other notes man's resistance of that providence at many critical points; both at the close are combined and concentrated into a blinding and overwhelming accusation of the guiltiness of the judges themselves. The prisoner at the bar did not mention himself once. The question of what should be thought of him, or done with him, was forgotten in the presence of truth. No defence of Stephen was made, but a defence of truth. He was as dumb as his Master regarding himself. He was eloquent as an angel concerning his Lord. In his respect paid to "this holy place" and "the law," he incidentally only cleared himself from the charge of irreverence.—*Sermons by the Monday Club.*

[19317] His argument had been constructed from what the Jews deemed the most sacred portion of their history and the most authoritative of their Scriptures. As he reasoned, his judges had not been able to resist the wisdom and skill with which he spake, so that, when the lightnings, which they had anxiously watched gathering, were fearlessly discharged upon them, the effect was correspondingly terrible. No quick-tempered and unsustained invective had been thrown at them. Their fellow-man and contemporary, Stephen, was not holding them in condemnation; but the long line of prophets, their mighty lawgiver, Moses, and the great patriarchs, yea, even the Lord of the covenant, were represented as frowning upon them, and accusing them of treason and murder. "When they heard these things they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth." But Stephen was not looking at them, nor even thinking of them. Being full of the Holy Ghost, the things of Christ had been taken and shown unto him, and by them he had vindicated the grace of his Lord. Now he is to be blessed by the supernatural and ecstatic vision. God's glory is uncovered, and Jesus is disclosed standing at the right hand of God. He tells what he sees. The Son of man, re-

jected by earth, is enthroned in heaven. The Son of man, crucified by them, is crowned by Jehovah. They can bear no more. The measure of insult and blasphemy is full.—*Ibid.*

II. THE POINT OF HIS TESTIMONY.

[19318] St. Stephen is the acknowledged forerunner of the Apostle of the Gentiles. He was the first to "look steadfastly to the end of that which is abolished," to sound the death knell of the Mosaic ordinance and the temple-worship, and to claim for the gospel unfettered liberty and universal rights. "This man," said his accusers, "ceaseth not to speak words against the holy place and the law; for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us" (Acts vi. 13, 14). The charge was only false as misrepresenting the spirit which animated his teaching. The accused attempts no denial, but pleads justification. To seal this testimony the first blood of the noble army of martyrs is shed.—*Ep. Lightfoot.*

III. HIS RESEMBLANCE TO CHRIST.

It was to be seen in the spirit which animated his life, and was especially evident in the manner of his death.

[19319] In his complete abandonment of self, and hearty devotion to his Lord; in his quick understanding, and reception of a world-wide salvation and a spiritual worship; in his getting at the spirit of prophecy and ceremonial, behind letter and form; in the irresistible matter and manner of his speaking; in the lack of prejudice and bigotry, he appears to have understood better the scope of the gospel, and to have received more of the spirit of Christ, than had any of his contemporaries up to that time. Stephen was a full-souled man. His hand was strong, and his heart was tender. When widows and children, helpless and innocent ones, are in trouble, Stephen is the first whom every one chooses as fittest to soothe and help them. When disputation is the fiercest and opposition is the strongest, who but Stephen is foremost in confronting and repelling the assault? When hatred and rage, malice and perjury, combine to kill, whom do they murder but Stephen? "If they have persecuted Me," said the Lord, "they will also persecute you." Perhaps Stephen was first slain because most like his Lord. At any rate he resembled Him closely in dying, and is made sharer with Him of immortal glory.—*Ibid.*

[19320] The close resemblance of Stephen's death to our Lord's has been often noticed. The Saviour prays for Himself, "Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit." This confident assurance is more than prayer. Stephen calls upon the Lord Jesus to receive his spirit. The Son commits His soul to His Father. The

saint yields his to his Saviour. The prayers for their foes breathe the same desire of forgiveness. Our Saviour's "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do," finds quick and tender echo in Stephen's "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." Here is a beautiful and close following of the Master by the disciple in dying. If we knew more about Stephen, I think that we should find the living resemblances as striking.—*Ibid.*

[19321] He left us the earliest example how a true Christian may and ought to die. Considering the small number of the Lord's disciples, we may believe that Stephen was not only the first of the Christian martyrs, but actually the first after the crucifixion who fell asleep in Jesus. Can we doubt that in dying the last words of Jesus were in Stephen's memory? There had been too many points of resemblance between his own and his Master's trial and condemnation for Stephen not to have the close of the Redeemer's life before his mind. His dying prayer is an echo of that which came from his Master's lips; the same, yet changed. It might do for the sinless one to say, "Father, into Thy hands I commit My spirit." It is not for the sinful to take up at once and appropriate such words; so, turning to Jesus, the dying martyr says, "Lord Jesus, receive My spirit," in that simple, fervent, confiding petition, leaving behind him, for all ages, the pattern of a sinner's dying prayer, modelled upon the last words of the dying Saviour.—*Rev. W. Hanna, LL.D.*

IV. HOMILETICAL HINTS.

The calm assurance visible in Stephen's death was procured by the bitter agony of the Saviour's, in His bearing of the world's sins upon the cross.

[19322] Calm, prepared, and in peace, he fell asleep, we are told, and entered into his heavenly rest. There is something peculiarly striking and deserving of notice in this calm death of Stephen, especially when viewed in contrast with the recent death of our Lord Jesus Christ. Here we find the servant meeting death calmly; we find him meeting its worst terrors without any kind of alarm; but when we look back to the death of the Master, we find all agony, all terror, and, as it were, the shrinking back from this conflict with the last enemy. Stephen departed in peace, praying for his murderers. "He fell asleep in Jesus. Our Lord and Master departed in the agonies of His soul." It was because upon that blessed Saviour's head was poured the volleys of indignation and wrath, which our sins deserved; it was because He was engaged in the weighty undertaking of reconciling God and man who were at enmity, and of opening those gates for us, which our offences had barred, and by which we had excluded ourselves from the kingdom of heaven. Stephen died under the supporting hand of his adorable Redeemer, by the promises with which that Redeemer has cheered and encouraged His

servants. Our Saviour died under the load of our sin, which must have sunk us into eternal ruin, bearing it, blessed be His name, that "the kingdom of heaven might be opened to all believers." That is the ground of difference; the one died as an individual, supported by his Saviour; the other died as the representative, the substitute, the Redeemer of sinners, bearing our curse and agony in His own body on the cross.—*Dr. Thorpe.*

PHILIP.

SECRETS OF HIS SUCCESS AS AN EVANGELIST.

1 His personal character and Divine gifts.

[19323] One secret of Philip's success unquestionably lay in what he was. On turning to the sixth chapter, we find that the seven there named were all to be men "of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost, and of wisdom." Philip, then, was of "honest report." Having a house at Cæsarea, it is plain that he bought and sold as other men did. But none ever charged him with meanness, falsehood, or fraud. His yea was yea; and his nay, nay. You could trust him in daylight and in the dark. One of the great burdens the religion of the Saviour has always had to carry has been the forwardness of too many who are not of "honest report." The man who has to be watched in the market-place is not the man to lift up his voice in the prayer-meeting. Even where the loss of one's good name is by no fault of his own, the best service he can render to Christ's cause is ordinarily that of silence. Then, Philip was "full of the Holy Ghost." It is characteristic of every believer that, in some measure, the Spirit dwells in him. But not all are "filled with the Spirit." The larger measures are for those who open their hearts wide, and bid Him possess the whole. Such have power with God and with men. They pray, and God hears them. They speak, and somehow their words go straight to the conscience and heart. Philip was full of the Spirit. The Spirit said "go," and he went. When his mission was accomplished, by the Spirit he was "caught away." The one other distinction which Philip shared with all the seven, was that of "wisdom." Not a little well-meant Christian effort fails apparently for no better reason than that it lacks in timeliness, courtesy, consideration of differences of inner state, definiteness of purpose, patience, in many things, indeed, which Christian wisdom is quick to perceive and practise.—*Sermons by the Monday Club.*

2 His whole-hearted service.

[19324] There is no mention of him save in some connection which indicated fidelity in Christian work. But the most convincing proof of his entire subjection to a higher master ap-

pears in his prompt obedience, however irksome the duty imposed. "Arise," said the heavenly messenger, "and go towards the south." To Gaza there were more roads than one. He was to take that which was desert. And why that one? Why should he go at all? Was he not doing a great and good work in Samaria? Had he not tastes, tact, and talents suited to reach the masses? Why should he leave the highways of Samaria for a by-way down in the desert towards Philistia? There are modern preachers to whom a call, from outside some populous town or city, could hardly be made sufficiently loud to be heard. There are modern laymen who can be kept at work only by keeping them in some conspicuous church office. The angel said to Philip, "Arise, and go towards the way which is desert." The Master had spoken; it only remained for the servant to obey. "He arose and went."—*Ibid.*

3 His "guile in taking" men.

[19325] The one other secret of his success lay in the means he used to bring men into the fold. There is a disposition, in sundry quarters, to disparage preaching. Whether in Samaria or in the desert, Philip "preached." It will be observed that this term is not limited to formal discourse in a public place, and by one who has been specially set apart thereto. Preaching is the proclamation of a message. And, in those early days, whoever had learned the story of salvation, was understood to have a commission to go out and tell it. He might do this in a consecrated desk or by the wayside, to a great throng or a single hearer, on the river's bank or in a traveller's waggon. Think how much might be wrought by the feeblest flock, hedged about by the greatest difficulties, were this spirit now to animate the hearts of all!—*Ibid.*

[19326] Observe the manner of Philip's approach to the Ethiopian. He began, not rudely, not afar from the subject on his heart, much less with a trifling question, as of the weather, the roads, or the news from Jerusalem, but with an implied offer of help. "Understandest thou what thou readest?" To have learned and acquired the habit of using this art is one of the foremost qualifications for successful Christian work.—*Ibid.*

EPAPHRODITUS.

I. INTRODUCTORY.

Question as to his identification with Epaphras.

[19327] Some expositors have sought to identify him with Epaphras, a man like-minded, to whose fervent spirit the apostle bears willing witness in his Epistle to the Colossians. But Epaphras is expressly stated to be himself a Colossian, and his special anxieties were for

the churches of Asia. Epaphroditus, it seems scarcely less clear, was a Philippian, and his connection lay with the churches of Macedonia.—*W. Brock.*

II. DISTINGUISHING CHARACTERISTICS.

1 Sympathetic energy.

[19328] Epaphroditus soon proved himself to be a worthy representative of the church from which he came. He was much more than a bearer of their gifts. He laid himself out to be of use to Paul. He ministered, with a ready will, to his every want. He went swiftly on his every message. He threw his energies into the work of Christ in the city, and laboured with self-sacrificing zeal. The portrait which we have of him presents him as one of those invaluable helpers, alike tender and true, "brother and fellow-soldier," to whom you can confide your most secret anxieties, and whom you can trust to stand by you in your sorest perils. A confidence of no ordinary kind sprang quickly up between him and the aged apostle whom he sought to serve. Perhaps he was fast becoming indispensable to Paul, as such friends are apt to become to ourselves.—*Ibid.*

2 Lovableness.

[19329] The lovable character of the man appears upon the surface. He carried with him everywhere that friendly spirit which opens other hearts as if by magic, and binds them to itself. Paul had been won in an instant by the frank offer of personal service; and as the service was ungrudgingly maintained, the attachment grew stronger and surer. The very rumour of the illness of Epaphroditus occasioned a burst of agitated feeling among his friends; the news of his recovery created a corresponding delight. It is evident that any man must be worth loving, if people, separated from him by hundreds of miles, still bear him in affectionate remembrance, and long for his return. And such characters, in whatever class they appear, are one main element in the strength of the Christian Church.—*Ibid.*

3 Serviceableness.

[19330] Epaphroditus was what we may call a serviceable man. There are a number of excellent people in the present day who insist on doing good in their own way, aside from the channels of our ordinary benevolence. To a certain extent, this is a symptom not to be regretted. It is extremely desirable that the Church should constantly find new openings for her energies; and her devout thanks are due to those more original and enterprising spirits who explore the untrodden fields, and invent the appropriate appliances of action. Were all her members, however, to aspire to be discoverers, it would go hardly with the cultivation of the soil already in possession. No less, therefore, is the good cause indebted to those who humbly accept the work which lies ready to their hands,

and heartily discharge it. These are the special comfort of the Christian minister. These are the mainstay of our Sunday schools, our missionary societies, our ordinary agencies among the poor, the ignorant, and the afflicted. And they may fairly claim Epaphroditus as one of their own order.—*Ibid.*

4 Unassuming fidelity.

[19331] It is written of Epaphroditus: "For the work of Christ he was nigh unto death, not regarding his life." He did not seek death; but when, in his steady course of obedience, death faced him, he did not flee from it. He would not throw away his life; but if the choice came between losing life and shrinking from service, he was ready to let it go. Fanaticism he would have abjured: fidelity and self-sacrifice he held to be simple duty. Are there not thousands in the ranks of our own Israel, leading humble, holy, and self-denying lives, who would be equally willing to die for Christ?—*Ibid.*

THE PHILIPPIAN JAILER.

I. HIS CONVICTION.

Its terrors paralleled the throes of the accompanying earthquake.

[19332] There was as great an earthquake shaking the very foundations of his moral and spiritual life as any which had just before shaken the foundations of that prison; everywhere terror, terrors within him, and terrors without; God speaking in that strange commotion; the attested servants of God, whom he had despised, whom he had misused, standing before him; his conscience waking in an instant from its life-long sleep of death and sin; the fiery flashes of God's judgment searching the deepest and darkest recesses of his heart, revealing to him in an instant all his guilt and all his sin; and out of all this that cry proceeded, "What must I do to be saved?"—*Abp. Trench.*

II. HIS INQUIRY.

Its anxiety had not respect to temporal safety only.

[19333] And think you that this question of his, "What must I do to be saved?" meant only "How shall I escape the punishment of my sin?" Oh, no. It was from sin, and not merely from the punishment of sin, that he yearned to be delivered; from his whole guilty self, from the accusing past no less than the threatening future; from the bondage, the guilt, the stain, the pollution, no less than from the punishment and penalty of sin. The selfish cry after mere safety never finds such an answer as he found. And if his question, so interpreted, was indeed the question of all questions, surely we have in St. Paul's reply the answer of all

answers, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house."—*Ibid.*

III. HIS CONVERSION.

In its practical results we behold "faith working by love," accompanied by spiritual joy.

[19334] The man did not receive the grace of God in vain. Hard and harsh and unfeeling before, without pity and without love, he had, as we have seen, thrust his prisoners into the inner dungeon, made their feet fast in the stocks, left them hungering and thirsting there, their backs torn and bleeding, to pass the long night in darkness and in fever-pain. But now he is a new creature; the new man has been born in him; the heart of stone has been taken from him, and a heart of flesh given him. His faith is a "faith working by love"; not a dead faith, the miserable counterfeit of a living, but such as approves itself a living, and therefore a justifying, faith by the blessed fruit that it bears. "He took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes," and, as we presently read, "brought them into his house, and set meat before them." A novice in Christ's school, he has already learned one lesson there: to be pitiful, compassionate, tender-hearted. Mark, too, what a blessed traffic and exchange of benefits there is between him and those whom he thus tends. He that washes their stripes is in return washed by them of his sins; being "baptized, he and all his, straightway," Paul having first spoken to them the word of the Lord. And then, it is significantly added, "he rejoiced, believing in God with all his house." "He rejoiced," and was there not a cause? had he not ample reason for rejoicing? The hard rock of his heart had been smitten, so that the waters gushed freely out; he had found the pearl of great price.—*Ibid.*

IV. CONTRAST BETWEEN THE CONVERSION OF THE PHILIPPIAN JAILER AND THAT OF LYDIA.

[19335] What a "manifold wisdom" is the wisdom of God; how infinitely various are His ways in the work of the conversion of souls and the bringing of sinners to Himself! One is never more struck with this than comparing the two records of conversion which the same chapter contains, and which befell in the same city—the conversion of Lydia, and the conversion of this Philippian jailer. The first, what a quiet work; the evening dews do not light more gently, more imperceptibly on the earth than did the doctrine of the Lord light and distil upon her heart. He "that hath the key of David," with a touch of that key caused the chambers of her heart to fly open, so that "she attended unto the things spoken of Paul," and almost without an effort, for so it would appear, was born into the kingdom of God. Contrast this with the mighty though brief birth-pangs with which he

was born into the same kingdom, the earthquake of fear which shook his soul, the agony of terror out of which he cried, "What must I do to be saved?"—*Ibid.*

[19336] What is the lesson which we may draw from this comparison and contrast? It is this. Let none of us make rules for conversion, either in our own case or that of others; how it should come about, and what exactly are the successive stages of the process through which one who is brought to God must pass; so that if any has not passed exactly through these, we will not believe that the work has been wrought in him at all. No man is in this matter in all things a pattern for others. God is greater than our rules; He refuses to be shut in by them. There is a boundless, inexhaustible originality in His methods of dealing with souls. Some, like the jailer, are brought into deepest depths of anguish and despair for their sins, and only after they have had thus the sentence of death in themselves, do they lay hold on the message of life. Others, like Lydia, glide silently into the kingdom of God's love with no such terrible struggles; and their deepest convictions of sin do not so much precede their conversion as follow. Some are born in an hour, in a minute; at one stride comes the day, and the darkness for them is past, and the true light shineth. For others this same transition from darkness to light extends over a far larger period of their lives; there is a long twilight dividing their light from their darkness.—*Ibid.*

ANTIPAS.

I. HIS NAME.

[19337] It has been thought by some that the name Antipas is mystical, like "Jezebel," "Balaam," "Egypt," "Sodom," and "Babylon," when they are mentioned in the Apocalypse. It is probably the well-known name of some elder or pastor in the Church at Pergamos, and means, "against all"; or "one against many." There is an independent ring about the name. It may have been given to him after death, even as Chrysostom—golden mouth—was given to John, the eloquent preacher of Constantinople.—*F. Hastings.*

II. HIS RESOLUTE FIDELITY.

He formed a rallying-point for the Church in Pergamos, and an object of affectionate approval to Christ in heaven.

[19338] In Pergamos, a city of Asia Minor, vice, sensuality, and godlessness reigned supreme. It was a very citadel of the prince of darkness, and is called in the chapter from which the text is taken, "Satan's seat." Still Christ had, in such a place, a church, and a band of faithful soldiers who unfurled His

banner and battled for His truth. When persecution raged some grew nervous and were frightened into retraction; others held fast to their principles. Among those who were faithful was Antipas. He was a centre of influence, an example of faithfulness, and an inspiration to the fearful. He was a very tower of strength. He acted as the standard-bearer to a small but resolute band of Christians. Against him the efforts of the enemies of the cross were persistently directed. So far from shaking his principles, they were as unsuccessful as are the waves in breaking to pieces some huge boulder over which they dash. They might submerge, but could not shatter. Antipas stood amid the perilous attacks firmly attached to Christ, and when, as a martyr, he died, Christ pronounced over him words of strongest approval, calling him "My faithful martyr." Not only is there Divine approval expressed in the words, but also much of affection.—*F. Hastings.*

III. HOMILETICAL HINTS.

I Every sincere Christian is of necessity in one direction or another an Antipas.

[19339] Antichrist is the name of the one who is opposed to Christ; Antipas, here, of him who is for Christ and opposed to evil. All who have principles, and act up to them, will find that they might in a sense claim the name of Antipas.—*Ibid.*

[19340] When the principles of Christianity are embraced, they make a man a very Antipas with respect to the world. He will find, oftentimes, things that will clash with conscience, and circumstances such as will demand much casuistical reasoning in the effort to reconcile the claims of God and mammon. Perhaps a man finds that in business he is obliged to look at the worldly saying, "Business is business, and religion is religion." He finds that the phrase means that business is a law unto itself, and that religion is not to intrude into its mysteries, or meddle with its maxims. The man wishes to be a true Christian, but he sees that others prosper by following out this maxim, and perhaps he is tempted to imitate them. He may know how to palm off the inferior for the good, to make an article possess an attractive appearance when it is almost valueless. Whatever may be his business, he may know the special "mysteries" thereof, but he knows that some are such as no man of principle could with a good conscience practise. Being above casuistry, and wishing to live and die with clean hands and a pure heart, he finds that, in respect to business, he has often to follow the example and imbibe much of the spirit of an Antipas.—*Ibid.*

[19341] It might be the duty of one employed to act as an Antipas, and rather lose a situation than do that which might be required against conscience. In associating with others also, a man, and especially a young man, may find that he has to be as an Antipas. The con-

versation of others may be, at times, irreverent and sensual; their habits may be loose; they may seek to allure to drink, dice, or cards; they may draw him into extravagant outlay, and he has to learn to withstand all. He is compelled to associate with them in the factory, shop, or counting-house, but he will not be like them. There are families also where, perhaps, there is only one having any spiritual tastes, and the life of that one is a constant rebuke to the worldliness of the rest. That one has there to be a sort of Antipas.—*Ibid.*

[19342] In respect to social questions there have been those who have had to act as Antipas. The privileged, easy-going, comfortable people, who wish all things to be right, but never lift a finger to bring about that state, are not those who would appreciate his character. Such people would tolerate slavery, injustice, oppression, and wrong, rather than be disturbed themselves or disturb others. The world owes little to such beings; but it owes much to those who seek to remedy evils, and remove wrongs. And yet it will sometimes speak of those who do the most for its benefit as "dangerous persons." The true Antipas, however, will never be troubled at being so regarded by his fellows, but will be prepared for any amount of misrepresentation and opposition. Sometimes in the Church itself there is need for a man to act as an Antipas. If he finds non-essentials made the pretext for useless divisions, and cumbersome creeds the means for lading men's shoulders with burdens grievous to be borne, he must speak out. If he finds out some truth long overlooked, and which it would be for the welfare of the whole Church to accept, he may not keep the truth to himself. He may find himself the subject of much detraction; he may be condemned as heretical; but he has to remember that of others, who have sometimes been the means of advancing the interests of truth, many have thus been spoken. The heresy of one age sometimes becomes the orthodoxy of the next. Hence truth should be adhered to, whether it be regarded as heretical or orthodox.—*Ibid.*

2 The true Antipas may always reckon upon the approval and support of Christ.

[19343] In all his struggles, anxieties, and sufferings, the true Antipas may always be sure of the support of Christ. When the trial comes he finds a strength given such as he little expected. His support is that "hidden manna" of conscious fellowship with the Saviour. He is brought also to understand what Christ had done, and how He had loved, when, single-handed, He struggled in Gethsemane, in the judgment-hall, and on Calvary with unnumbered foes. Suffering for Christ, he is permitted to enter more into the "fellowship of the mystery." But Christ also utters His approval. He speaks of Antipas tenderly as "My faithful martyr." What praise! What an honour to have such mention, by such lips,

before men and angels! The sufferings of Antipas must have been terrible, when, by the order of Domitian, he was shut up in the brazen hell, heated red-hot by a large furnace. What, however, was all the pain when Christ was with him and gave such reward? Has Antipas regretted his fealty to principle? Could he speak he would say, "No; a thousand times, no!"—*Ibid.*

CORNELIUS.

I. A GOD-FEARING HEAD OF A HOUSEHOLD.

[19344] He "feared God, with all his house." Dim was the light by which he walked, few were the opportunities of a knowledge of God and holy things that he enjoyed, yet it was not sufficient in his estimation that he himself should fear God; it must be "with all his house." Though the light may be dim, though the knowledge may be limited, yet shall others partake of what he possesses; he will be liberal with his spiritual possessions no less than with his material substance; he will speak to all his house of the true God as he knows Him.—*Rev. Marcus E. W. Johnson.*

II. A CHARITABLE FRIEND.

[19345] The sympathies of Cornelius were not confined to the limits of his home circle, happy as that circle—being a religious one—no doubt was. No, they extended far beyond those narrow bounds. He was eminently a charitable man. "He gave," we read, "much alms to the people." His heart doubtless felt for the poor in their hardships and sorrows even more than for those of his own station in life. The sick and the needy, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, found the house door of the good Cornelius open to them in their hour of distress, nor went away without their wants relieved.—*Ibid.*

III. A MAN OF PRAYER.

[19346] In helping to supply the lack of others, Cornelius did not forget his own soul's needs. The mechanism of his life found its mainspring in a spirit of constant prayer. He "prayed to God always." His were no morning or evening orisons hurried over in a few minutes, as though the least important part of the whole day's work, and accompanied by no desire for heartfelt communion with God. Little though he knew of God, he desired to know more. He opened his mouth wide that God might fill it; he prayed for knowledge of the Most High; he prayed to be guided in all the truth.—*Ibid.*

[19347] That he was pre-eminently a man of prayer, may be inferred from the way in which

the account of him is set down. He is said to have been devout and God-fearing, but how can a man be this and not be also a man of prayer? Yet St. Luke concludes the character which he gives us of the centurion (as though pointing to that which was his chief characteristic) with the words, "he prayed to God alway."—*Ibid.*

IV. AN OBJECT OF GOD'S FAVOUR.

[19348] We might well have considered (and Cornelius himself certainly would have thought) that a visit from one of heaven's inhabitants, bringing with him the assurance that God had heard the centurion's prayers, and noted his charitable deeds, was a sufficient condescension and reward. But the Lord is a King, and therefore distributes His gifts with royal liberality. For this man who, in spite of difficulties and hindrances, has faithfully called upon Him, God will now do something—nay, the utmost that He can. And what is this greatest of all blessings which God will bestow? Is it a colossal fortune? is it perfect health? is it a great reputation in his profession? is it absolute freedom from care? No; it is none of these things, nor yet all of them together, but still something far better than each or all. It is "knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." Though neither a Jew nor a Christian, he lived the *life* of a good Christian. He practically obeyed the restraints of religion, for he feared God; and this latter part of the description is extended to all his family or household. Such piety, obedience, faith, and charity prepared him for superior attainments and benefits, and enabled him to fully enjoy their bestowment.—*Ibid.*

V. HOMILETICAL SUGGESTIONS.

The visit of the angel to Cornelius exalts the value of Christ to the soul by showing that if we have not Christ we are nothing.

[19349] Cornelius was a devout man; he feared God; he exercised a religious influence upon those about him; his generous disposition was well known, and his whole life was consecrated and rendered really spiritual by constant prayer, but all this was in comparison of a knowledge of Christ as nothing. We are sure that his upright life possessed a value in the eyes of God; it was because of this value that God sent His angel to guide the feet of His servant into the way of peace; but we are sure also that however leniently God might have dealt with the soul of a man who had had no opportunity of knowing Christ, yet Cornelius knew nothing of remission of sins and everlasting life until he heard St. Peter preach the gospel. The lesson for us, at any rate, is plain. Something more is needed for salvation than even a God-fearing frame of mind, a charitable disposition, and a certain amount of prayers. Salvation—knowledge of Christ alone can bring, as Christ alone can give this to the soul.—*Ibid.*

THE ETHIOPIAN EUNUCH.

I. HIS CHARACTER.

He possessed the "honest and good heart."

[19350] This chamberlain of the queen, who held the post of first lord of her treasury, had come across the Jews and their Scriptures. What passed between him and St. Philip shows conclusively that, though high in station, he had a docile, simple spirit, eager for instruction, and willing to follow what approved itself as right to his conscience. He had been struck by the Jews' religion, and believed it to be from God. His belief involved a periodical pilgrimage to Jerusalem, at the time of the great festivals. These journeys must have been inconvenient to one in his position; and, at a heathen court, where the ram-headed Ammon was the great object of worship, may have entailed some risk of obloquy and suspicion; but he did not on this account decline them. He was returning, when Philip met him, from the devotions which he had been paying in the temple. And he was careful (as too many who profess and call themselves Christians are not) to nourish those sentiments which he had received in public worship, and not to let them evaporate too speedily in the atmosphere of the world.—*Dean Goulburn.*

[19351] "Spices" (to use Bengel's exquisite simile) "transmit their fragrance through the wrapper which enfolds and conceals them." The missionary whom he encountered in the desert unfolded for him the wrapper, explained the mystery which had baffled him, and, in doing so, led him on to a higher faith in God than he had hitherto known. And thus was fulfilled in his case the promise, "To him that hath shall be given." He had been faithful hitherto to the Divine guidance, and now it is vouchsafed to him in larger measure. He had diligently used the lower means of grace exhibited by the old covenant; he is now admitted, as his reward, to the first sacrament of the new.—*Ibid.*

[19352] He is an eager, thirsting inquirer. He is not ashamed to be reading his Bible as he rides in his chariot. Who knows that it was not an awakened sense of personal sin and need that made him so intent upon the page before him; so eager to make it out; so ready to receive the stranger, whose question was an offer of help? He was clearly a sincere and earnest seeker after the true good; just one of those whom God is always pleased to meet with the light and grace which bring salvation. But not yet had the blessedness of such salvation entered his heart. Devout, diligent, downright earnest in searching the Scriptures, willing to confess his ignorance, and glad to follow on to know the Lord, the peace that passeth understanding had not yet entered his breast. It was when Philip "preached unto him Jesus," and he gave trusting heed to that message, that this dawned upon him. Behold the foundation of his new

hope; the one true foundation of hope for any and every otherwise perplexed and despairing sinner! In the victim of the cross he had discovered the fulfilment of prophecy, that "other man," who was brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and on whom it pleased the Lord to lay the iniquity of us all. And so implicitly, and from the heart, did he receive the testimony concerning Him, that he was ready that very hour to confess His name, and pledge himself to His service. This he did. And to him it was according to the promise, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." For, while Philip, his mission being accomplished, vanished out of sight, in the full assurance of hope he went on his way rejoicing.—*Sermons by the Monday Club.*

II. HIS BAPTISM.

It was immediately followed by that "fruit of the Spirit" which is "joy."

[19353] The subject of it went on his way rejoicing, apparently so transported with holy and spiritual joy, that he noticed not the removal of the missionary. In order to connect this joy with the operation of the Holy Ghost, we have only to remember that joy is named by St. Paul as one of the firstfruits of the Spirit: "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace."—*Rev. J. Stoughton.*

III. COMPARISON WITH CORNELIUS.

[19354] Both the eunuch and Cornelius appear to have belonged to that class of men, which the providence of God had prepared as a sort of bridge, whereby the Gospel might pass over from the Jewish to the Gentile mind. Both were proselytes, that is to say heathens by extraction, who had been converted to Judaism by the manifest traces of divinity which distinguished the religion of Moses, and by the correspondence of the law of Sinai with the law written upon the human heart. These proselytes adhered to Judaism, according to their convictions, with more or less strictness. Some appropriated only the monotheism of the Jews, their doctrine of the Divine government of the world, their hope of Messiah, and the chief points of their morality; others went so far as to receive circumcision, and submit themselves to the ceremonial law. Of Cornelius it is strongly implied, if not actually asserted, that he was a proselyte of the less strict kind, one who did not belong sacramentally to the Jewish communion. For when the Jewish party at Jerusalem allege against St. Peter his intercourse with Cornelius, they do it in these terms: "Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them." The Ethiopian may have been a proselyte of the stricter class, in which case there would be a method observable in the admission of Gentiles to the Christian covenant; first, circumcised heathen, of which the Ethiopian would be the first recorded instance; second,

uncircumcised heathen, of which Cornelius would be the first specimen.—*Dean Goulburn.*

IV. COMPARISON WITH THE PROPHET DANIEL.

[19355] Daniel in the Old Testament, and this Ethiopian in the New, shine with peculiar lustre. There is something analogous in their fortunes, which, though the materials in the case of the Ethiopian are so scanty, enable us to draw a parallel between them. Both rose to wealth and eminence at heathen courts, and held high trusts from heathen sovereigns. Both, though placed in these difficult circumstances, fulfilled their religious duties with a brave and admirable fidelity. Both were students of prophecy, for the eunuch was found reading the prophet Isaiah, and Daniel tells us of himself: "I, Daniel, understood by books the number of the years whereof the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah the prophet, that He would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem." And we may add that to both was sent a messenger of God for the elucidation of prophecy—to Daniel the angel Gabriel, who both gave and interpreted the prophecy of the seventy weeks, to the eunuch St. Philip the Evangelist, an inspired human ambassador. And the lesson is in both cases the same—that, whatever be the circumstances in the midst of which Divine Providence has thrown our lot, however adverse to piety, however apparently blighting to the spiritual life, grace can enable us to walk in the midst of them unharmed, as the three holy children walked in the midst of Nebuchadnezzar's furnace.—*Ibid.*

V. HOMILETICAL REFLECTIONS.

1 The history of the Ethiopian eunuch illustrates the value of reading the Scriptures.

[19356] Learn a lesson from the eunuch's employment when St. Philip met him. He was reading the Scriptures with an inquiring and a candid mind. No opportunity could have been more favourable for the arrival of God's message of mercy and peace through Jesus Christ. "Behold, he readeth the Scriptures," is nearly as hopeful a symptom for the soul as, "Behold, he prayeth." When God sees any one studying the Holy Volume with simplicity and earnestness, He throws Himself across that man's path, whether by a human messenger, or by some dispensation of Providence, or by the inward teaching of His Spirit, until the scales fall from the eyes of the reader, and the study which was begun in darkness and perplexity is concluded in light and joy.—*Ibid.*

2 The history of the Ethiopian eunuch illustrates the nature and importance of spiritual joy.

[19357] When the eunuch had found the pearl of great price, he went on his way rejoicing.

When the jailer of Philippi had been baptized by his prisoners, he brought them into his house, "and set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house." Can we, then, give this evidence of sincere adhesion to Christ? Let us not deceive ourselves in giving the answer. In days when health is high, animal spirits in full flow, circumstances good, friends many and kind, relations sympathizing—in a word, in the sunshine of life, it is quite possible to mistake for spiritual joy that sense of God's goodness, and that general contentment with persons and things around us, which is simply the natural expansion of the heart under the warmth of prosperity. This is the experience of happiness, not the experience of joy. Happiness is fed by external circumstances, not from an internal spring. . . . It is no unpractical question which I am asking, for it is in no other power than that of holy joy that we can surmount the temptations and difficulties which beset our path. It is in no other spirit than that of joy that we can render an acceptable homage to God. "Be ye not sorry," says Nehemiah (and perhaps no word of deeper spiritual significance is to be found in either Testament), "for the joy of the Lord is your strength." A joyless religion is a nerveless one. —*Ibid.*

THE LAME MAN AT THE GATE OF THE TEMPLE.

I. HIS NEED.

[19358] We are told that he was "lame from his mother's womb." Many become lame through accident or sickness; but this man was born a cripple. Luke, who was a physician, gives us to understand the cause of his decrepitude. His description of the healing process—or rather of the healing act, for there was no process—is very expressive: "Immediately his feet and ankle-bones received strength." His lameness was owing to a weakness in, and perhaps malformation of, the ankle-bones. The man had never walked—he was born a cripple. But that hardly suffices to describe his helpless condition. The context shows that there was not the least strength in his feet, not enough to allow even of the use of crutches. You know many lame men, but most of them are able to move about with the help of artificial supports. But this man was so utterly helpless that he could not even avail himself of the aid of a crutch—he was obliged to be carried, like a new-born babe, from one place to another. Not that there was any weakness in his arms or shoulders, all the weakness was in the ankles; he could not put an ounce of weight upon his feet—they bent under him like a bruised reed. Raphael, in his cartoon illustrating this portion of sacred story, seems to have seized this feature. He has drawn at a little distance from him

another deformed man; but that man is able to hobble along by the help of a crutch. But he has drawn this man without a crutch near him. But I think Raphael was mistaken in drawing his legs in a stiff, rigid form; it was not rigidity in the ankles he was suffering from, but extreme weakness. "Immediately his feet and ankles became firm." Before there was no firmness in them; his feet were quite loose in their sockets, twisting about like whipcord. I suppose he was about the most helpless man on his legs that ever breathed. And not only was he lame—that of itself was a sore misfortune, and hard enough to bear; but in addition to utter impotence he was in downright poverty. He was a cripple and he was a beggar too. It is difficult to conceive a more pitiable condition. "A certain man lame from his mother's womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms of them that entered into the temple."—*Rev. J. Jones.*

II. HIS REQUEST.

[19359] "He asked an alms of them." He had long ceased hoping for anything else. However lofty his aspirations might have been in early youth, they were now all dead and "buried, without hope of a better resurrection." He did not now expect to be anything other than a life-long cripple, or anything better than an abject beggar. Forty years of helplessness and beggary will kill ambition in the most sanguine heart. We have known people who had been lying on a bed of suffering for ten years; at the close of the ten they had no ambition to rise. If you spoke to them at the close of the first year, you would discover a shade of discontent—they had a strong desire to get up and walk. But at the end of ten years the most fiery spirit is quite tamed—ten years' close confinement makes the lark forget the way to fly. "He asked an alms of them." —*Ibid.*

III. HIS CURE.

[19360] "And Peter, fastening his eyes on him with John, said, Look on us." They fastened their eyes on him. Why? Perhaps there was an unusual earnestness about his entreaty, or, which is more likely, the apostles felt an inward movement of soul, a sudden stirring of the Divine life, a powerful operation of the Holy Spirit, a vivid consciousness that they were richly endowed with supernatural powers. "They fastened their eyes on him"—there was terrible earnestness in their gaze, unspeakable compassion in their looks. "They fastened their eyes on him." Is not this a characteristic feature of Christianity—that it fastens its eyes on the destitute and the sick? Science fastens its eyes on inanimate matter; Art fastens its eyes on beauty. Art going up to the temple to pray—which, by the by, it seldom does in

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CHRISTIAN ERA.

our day and generation—would fix its gaze on the “Gate called Beautiful,” and would turn away in disgust from the loathsome object that was craving alms of the passers-by. But Christianity going up to the temple fastened its eyes on the poor cripple; and ever since her eyes have reverted in the direction of the helpless and forlorn. Science seeks out the secrets of the world; Art seeks out the beauties of the world; Christianity seeks out its ills, and strives hard to remove them. “They fastened their eyes on him.” There is a great deal in a look. The words of the Bible are brimful of meaning. There is often more philosophy in one of its sentences than in a score of large, pretentious octavo volumes. “Draw out thy soul to the hungry.” Is it not enough to draw out the purse to him? No—“draw out thy soul.” Is it not enough to draw out food and raiment? No—“draw out thy soul to the hungry;” let thy spirit flow out in tenderest sympathy and deepest compassion. “They fastened their eyes on him, and said unto him, Look on us;” and thereupon the sympathizing eyes of Peter caught the wondering eyes of the beggar, and the latter felt a strange sensation, like a stream of electricity thrilling his entire system. “And Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk. And he took him by the right hand and lifted him up, and immediately his feet and ankles received strength.”—*Ibid.*

IV. HOMILETICAL HINTS.

The healing of the lame man, viewed from a spiritual standpoint, illustrates the Divine method of saving the world.

[19361] The man sought alms; but the apostles gave him what was better—they gave him health. Health without money is infinitely better than money without health. Moreover, by endowing him with health they were conferring on him the ability to earn money; by imparting the greater they were also giving the lesser. In this the miracle was a “sign,” and typifies to us the Divine method of saving the world. The Gospel does not directly aim at improving men’s circumstances; it aims at improving men. But no sooner does the Gospel bring about a moral improvement in the men than the men bring about a noticeable improvement in their surroundings. The Gospel converts the man; the man converts the house. The Gospel does not directly aim at increasing the material riches of a nation; it aims at increasing its fund of spiritual health; but no sooner does the nation feel new blood palpitating in every limb and member than it shakes off the lethargy of centuries, and marches fearlessly forward in the upward path of discovery and enterprise, and, as a natural consequence, riches flow in plentifully to its exchequer.—*Ibid.*

[19362] The Gospel came to a world crippled in all its powers and fettered in all its faculties.

It said unto it, “In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.” “And immediately the world’s feet and ankle-bones received strength.” It forthwith began a career upward and forward, and Christianity has indirectly added enormously to its material riches. Which are the richest and most flourishing nations in our day? England, America, and Germany, the countries that have received most abundantly of the life and health that are lodged in the name of Jesus of Nazareth. There is a philosophy, and an admirable philosophy it is in many respects, whose direct object is the improvement of men’s circumstances. Its language is, Give men better houses, higher wages, purer air, more wholesome water, and by improving their circumstances you will improve their constitutions. That is the philosophy which boasts of the name of Utilitarianism. But what says Christianity? I have in my possession the elixir of life, and I will endeavour first to improve the constitutions of men. I will give feet to the lame, and eyes to the blind, and health to the sick, and hope to the desponding; I will strive to improve men, for I know that no sooner will men feel beating within them new and potent energies than they will set about to improve their external condition. Men need better houses, and purer air, and more wholesome water; but the great want of men is life—more life; and I have come that they might have life, and have it more abundantly. “In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up, rise up, and walk.” Utilitarianism *does* men good, Christianity *makes* men good. Which, think you, is the superior, doing men good or making them good?—*Ibid.*

ANANIAS AND SAPPHIRA.

I. THEIR TEMPTATION.

[19363] In what form is it probable that the temptation first presented itself to Ananias and his wife? We may believe that they were carried away by the general enthusiasm of the time. When many possessors of lands and houses sold them, and laid the price at the apostles’ feet, when the beautiful idea of a brotherhood, in which all alike should partake freely of the Creator’s gifts, seemed to be realized, cold indeed must have been the hearts which could remain indifferent. It is most unlikely that, when the thought first suggested itself to them that they too would be counted among the benefactors of Christ’s people, it was accompanied with any intention of deceit or fraud. Satan does not show himself at once without disguise; he does not attack the citadel until he has cleared the approaches, and effected a breach in the fortifications. But, on the other hand, there can be no doubt that there was from the beginning something radically unsound in their minds. The motive which actuated

them must have been throughout either entirely or in great part a selfish one. Emulation or ambition, the desire of applause, it may be the hope of high distinction in the Church, and in the kingdom of Christ, which, excepting by the most spiritual of the disciples, was expected to be speedily established, with all the pomp and majesty of external dominion, such may have been, and most probably were, the predominating and effective inducements for their determination.—*Rev. F. Cook.*

[19364] The thought soon occurred, Why make an unnecessary sacrifice? Will not a part suffice? Why bring ourselves to a level with the recipients of charitable doles? They knew, what St. Peter reminds them of afterwards, that after all it was entirely a voluntary act; they could keep all their property without incurring blame, provided that they contributed in a reasonable proportion to the wants of the brethren. Had they sold the land and given even a small portion openly and humbly, it would have been accepted; for each man who gave not grudgingly or of necessity the apostles had words of commendation. We can conceive that, even up to this point, husband and wife may have talked over the matter without any consciousness of sin, without any apprehension of spiritual danger. But what, then, became of the glory, the distinction, the reward? What of their hope of being numbered with the chosen few? After giving up so much, should they still remain among the common herd? Then, as we may believe, came the thought, just then, when pride and selfishness and covetousness occupied all their mind, why not make one little step? by one easy and single act secure all that had presented itself in such attractive colours? They had but to declare that they had really done what they really had purposed; they had but to make a declaration, which no one was likely to doubt, that the gift was their all, to lay it at the apostles' feet, and all which they had contemplated and desired would be accomplished.—*Ibid.*

II. THEIR SIN.

[19365] There was the sin—full-grown, developed, carefully prepared and weighed. They looked at it. It did not after all seem so very ugly. It was but a white lie. There was no malice in it. It hurt no one, in body or estate. It lowered no man's reputation. Doubtless, on looking back, they could remember thousands of instances in which they had acted just in the same manner for very trifling objects, and had been undetected; they could think of those acts without pain or much shame, and if either of them felt any scruple, the other—a worthy helpmeet—was doubtless prompt, ingenious, and plausible in removing it. The whole thing became quite clear and simple; and so, having fully settled what each was to say, should any question possibly be raised, the husband went

forth. He stood before the apostles surrounded by the brethren. The eye of Peter was upon him. . . . Wholly absorbed by one thought, blinded by that spirit which had then entire possession of his mind, he may not have cared or dared to raise his eye and meet the glance of Peter, or, if he looked, was unable to discern the warning which its very graciousness implied. There he stood—the thought was realized, the sin was acted; he offered what may or may not have been in itself a munificent gift, but, offered with a lie in his heart and in his mouth, a thing abominable and accursed, an insult to the God of truth.—*Ibid.*

[19366] The peculiar sin of this pair lay here, that, being tempted by two evil things, the love of money and the love of applause, they suffered both these unchristian passions to enter and occupy their souls, to fill them up bit by bit, driving out the love of men and the fear of God, till, grown blind and hard and reckless through sin, they plotted in cold blood to cheat the Church and lie to the face of God. Had they been covetous only, they would have kept their property; vain only, they would have given it all. In either case the motive had been a bad one, but in neither case would the offence have grown into a scandal. It was the effort to reconcile two conflicting passions, to be close and seem generous, to keep their gold yet win the credit of giving it, which betrayed these Christians into the first open and shameful breach of Christian morality. Out of the confluence of covetousness with vanity came forth a lie.—*Oswald Dykes, D.D.*

III. THEIR PUNISHMENT.

[19367] St. Peter does not pronounce a sentence. He does not excommunicate; he pronounces no curse; much less does he condemn the offender to whatever punishment he may have deserved. What he does is simply this. He gives the sin its true name; he declares its exact character; he lays bare the sinner's heart. In the presence of the assembled Church he opens that heart. He shows the Christians there standing, amazed and bewildered, that in that heart, from which the Holy Ghost had been expelled, Satan dwelt in the fulness of his power. He revealed to Ananias his true condition in the eye of God. So, indeed, he anticipated for him that day in which the imaginations of all hearts will be disclosed; so, indeed, he gave us some intimation of what will take place when we stand bare to our innermost thoughts before our Judge. St. Peter did no more than this. Whatever might be the effect of his words, he acted but as a minister of the Lord God, to whom vengeance belongeth; to that God, the God of holiness and love, must be attributed the result: "Ananias, hearing these words, fell down, and gave up the ghost."—*Rev. F. Cook.*

[19368] Supernatural, beyond all doubt, was that death; yet, like all true miracles—distin-

guishable, as I believe, therein from legendary marvels—the supernatural acted in accordance with the laws of our spiritual nature. The direct agency of the Spirit accelerated and intensified the natural action of the despairing heart. A soul like that of Ananias, covetous of applause, living on the breath of man, would be smitten with a deadly blow when exposed to open and hopeless shame. How many suicides have rushed to death from no other motive! A heart in which hope and faith were dead, in which the springs of life had been poisoned, in which the human love which should have been a sustaining influence for good had become the minister of sin, could find no place for rest or strength. There was nothing to break the sudden fall, nothing to cling to when the black abyss was opened beneath the convicted sinner's feet.—*Ibid.*

[19369] We are prepared to hear that Ananias' wretched wife, sustaining, in addition to all that had crushed him, the load of his death—the consequence of their mutual sin—should have followed him. We listen with awe, but scarcely with surprise, to St. Peter's words—no sentence, but a sad prophecy, uttered under a controlling inspiration—that she was at once to share that unhonoured grave; at once to meet her husband in that other world, where the spirits of disobedience await the last coming of the Judge of the quick and of the dead.—*Ibid.*

[19370] From the Lord Jesus Christ, the Head of His insulted Church, came, as I take it, the blows which stretched these two confederates upon the ground. It was awfully severe: it was meant to be awful in its severity. As an exercise of earthly discipline it was entirely exceptional, a warning not to be repeated. Church discipline, administered in its normal form through ministerial human hands, is a discipline by words, not blows. It employs spiritual deprivation, not corporeal chastisement. But since it pleased the offended Lord to step down for once into the earthly congregation of His saints, and execute before men's eyes the supreme sentence of law on the two first profaners of His house, no man can say that instant loss of life was a judgment too heavy for the greatness of their sin. The lives of all men are in His hand. Daily He is cutting off men in a moment—even hot with lust or red-handed from crime. His doom now and then antedates the slower processes of human law. The time and fashion of all our deaths is with Him. The life which we are daily forfeiting by transgression is daily spared through mercy. If one day then His mercy turn to judgment, and He take from the earth two forfeited lives, and if such sudden taking off be for the warning and the bettering of many, who shall say that the lesson was dearly bought or the penalty undeserved? It was well that men should be taught once for all, by sudden death treading swiftly on the heels of detected sin, that the gospel, which discovers God's boundless mercy, has not wiped

out the sterner attributes of the Judge. "He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses. Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought who . . . hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?"—*Oswald Dykes, D.D.*

IV. HOMILETICAL REFLECTIONS.

The sin of Ananias and Sapphira warns against the evil of a divided service.

[19371] Do none of us try to gain the world and save our soul at the same time? Who never renders to God a divided worship? Is it so rare to seem better than we are? to cultivate a cheap repute for piety? to give that we may be seen of men, while we grudge what we give and love dearly what we keep? Are our prayers at no time false, as though we sought to deceive God? or do modern Christians never show themselves devout before fellow-worshippers with a pretence of devotion? Is there no Holy Ghost now to be lied to? Or is He grown indifferent to insults through long endurance of them? Because judgment against our evil works and evil worship is not executed so speedily as on Ananias, shall we dream that God the Spirit has ceased to care, or God the Son ceased to rule? Two tombs only outside Jerusalem, rifled perchance long since, and clean forgotten now: but over how many Ananiases and Sapphiras hangs the unexecuted sentence? God grant us repentance to the acknowledging of our sins, and fill our hearts with the Spirit of reverence, truthfulness, and godly fear, lest another spirit fill us with lies, with greed, with vain-glory, and with presumptuous impiety!

DEMAS.

I. HIS APOSTASY.

1 It was peculiarly heinous from his previous high spiritual position.

[19372] Once he was not only a church member, but he was accounted as no ordinary man among his brethren. Twice in the friendly salutations with which St. Paul usually closes his Epistles he mentions Demas with honour. In one of these he calls him a "fellow-labourer in the gospel" (Philemon v. 24); and in the other, having spoken of Demas in the same kindly terms as he did of St. Luke (Col. iv. 14), he gives to another minister a solemn warning on account of his slackness in duty; leaving the conclusion a very natural one, that the apostle saw no occasion for such an admonition in the case of Demas. Two years later St. Paul wrote, in sorrow of heart, to St. Timothy, the youthful bishop of Ephesus: "Do thy diligence to come shortly unto me; for Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world."—*J. Norton.*

[19373] Had the apostle's mournful tidings been only these, that Demas was not as zealous and devoted as he had been, or that he had grievously erred in some points of duty, there would have been no special occasion for surprise. How many pages in the lives of the best of men are blotted and blurred, with the mortifying evidences of their failings and infirmities! The case of Demas was far worse than this. He had actually forsaken St. Paul in his utmost extremity; forsaken him when shut up in a dungeon and awaiting the hour of his martyrdom, he most needed sympathy and succour. Nor was this all. In forsaking this devoted servant of God Demas had also forsaken his Lord and Master.—*Ibid.*

[19374] Happy for Demas had his sun gone down at noon! Over one who had been his friend, companion, fellow-labourer, with whom he had often taken sweet counsel, Paul lived to weep; and to write this epitaph for his unhonoured grave, Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world; a sentence that, like the scorpion, carries its sting in its tail,—“having loved this present world.” Look at him! Ovid has fancied no metamorphosis more strange or horrible. The opposite of Paul, who fell a persecutor and rose an apostle, Demas, once an apostle, has changed into an apostate; once a martyr, now a renegade; a brave soldier once, now a base deserter; a traitor now; his arms raised to pull down the pillars of a church they had helped to build. May we not cry with the prophet, “How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning!” Scripture is silent on this man's future course; the curtain falls where we see him as a dishonoured knight, with the spurs he had won hacked from his heels—as a deserter, with the facings plucked from his dress, and drummed out of the regiment. But if ancient tradition speaks truth, Demas, as might be expected, went from bad to worse, sank lower and lower, from one depth of wickedness to another, till he closed his infamous career as the priest of a heathen temple—offering sacrifices to dead stocks and stones.—*Rev. T. Guthrie, D.D.*

2 It was caused by love of the world.

[19375] He loved the world; and what has it brought him to? what is that world to him now, for which he denied his Saviour and forsook his servants? what now profits him a world, for which he bartered his immortal soul? He was a preacher; nor the last who has turned back in the day of battle, and abandoned his principles when they had to be suffered for. He had been a preacher, perhaps an eloquent one; but he never preached a sermon such as he preaches now—himself the sermon, and these words his text, “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.”—*Ibid.*

II. AN HISTORICAL PARALLEL TO DEMAS.

[19376] It is recorded of the king of Navarre, then claiming to be a good Protestant, that being urged by Beza to behave himself in a more manly way for the cause of God, he made answer, that he was “really the friend of the reformers, but that he was resolved to put out no further to sea than he might get safely back to shore in case a storm should unexpectedly arise.” In other words, he would not hazard his hopes of the crown of France for the sake of his religion. You know the sequel of his story. Like Demas, he loved “this present world” better than he loved God. He proved a traitor to his religion, and bartered his heavenly crown for a fading one of earth. The world promises comforts, and pays its votaries in sorrows. No one can serve two masters. Demas made the experiment, and failed.—*J. Norton.*

III. HOMILETICAL SUGGESTIONS.

The apostasy of Demas suggests the necessity of keeping the heart with all diligence against the persecutions and fascinations of the world.

[19377] Do you feel at ease, considering yourselves in small danger of suffering such persecutions as led to the fall of Demas? It may be so; but let me warn you that the world has trials more testing and severe than these. Its smiles are to be dreaded, perhaps, more than its frowns, its subtle sophistries more than its sharpest sword. Let its love but once get into a man's heart, and it has a tongue to persuade him that vice is virtue, and virtue vice. Look at the sentiments of such as make a profession of religion, and yet love the world—fearing the Lord, and serving their own gods. According to them, a stern regard to duty, integrity, purity, is preciseness, and the holy observance of God's day is Pharisaism; on the other hand, conformity to the fashions and practices and gaieties of the world is not being “righteous overmuch;” a godless indifference to religious matters is charity and catholicity; looseness of principle is liberality, and freedom from the trammels of sectarianism; flattery and fawning are politeness, or, to profane the Scripture expression, are to be courteous; low cunning is caution; cowardice in the cause of God and truth is prudence; treachery to public principle is a wise regard to our own interests; dishonesty and fraud are cleverness in business; murder is an affair of honour, and seduction one of gallantry; hoarding money is carefulness; and the avarice that eats like a cancer into the heart, destroying alike the love of God and the love of man, is such frugality as Christ commended, and, indeed, commanded, when He said, “Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost.” And then, when the love of the world has entered our hearts, the devil, clothed like an angel of light, walks in at its back.—*Rev. T. Guthrie, D.D.*

[19378] There is no shadow of reason to suppose that Demas had not devoted himself at the outset in downright sincerity and earnestness to God's service; but his weakness was such as might prove the ruin of any one who does not keep every avenue to his heart diligently guarded, lest an inordinate love of temporal things force an entrance there.—*J. Norton.*

SIMON MAGUS.

I. HIS SIN.

[19379] After a time two of the apostles came to Samaria, and, laying their hands on Philip's converts, imparted to them larger influences of the Holy Spirit, and to some of them the power of working miracles. This brought Simon's excitement to its height. He had looked on Philip's works with wonder, and probably wished to buy the secret of performing them from him, but perhaps was deterred by the sanctity of the man. But when he saw that the apostles could give to others, by a mere touch, the power of healing the sick and of speaking in other languages, he could refrain himself no longer. Oh, if he had but that power, and could travel through the earth with it, what honours he would receive, what wealth he would gather! Money could draw anything from himself, and he doubted not its power with others. True, these strange beings the apostles did not seem so much in love with it as ordinary men, but he doubted not that they loved it in heart; at least he would try them. He did so, and met with such a rebuke as must have deeply mortified him. "Thy money perish with thee!" was Peter's indignant reply; which, however, is not to be understood as a wish that Simon might perish, because Peter immediately after exhorted him to pray and repent, that he might be forgiven.—*Rev. W. Lewis, D.D.*

II. TRADITIONAL ACCOUNT OF HIS AFTER HISTORY.

[19380] The sorcerer was not very deeply affected by the rebuke. He dreaded only the indignation of the apostles, and lest they should turn upon him their miraculous powers, for he prays to be delivered from judgment, not from sin. His indignation at this repulse probably led him on to that deadly hostility against Christianity which he afterwards manifested. He travelled into many provinces, pretending to work miracles, and everywhere opposing the gospel, into which he had been baptized. At length he came to Rome, where he was honoured as a god, inasmuch that the Roman senate decreed a statue to him in the Isle of Tiber, with the inscription, "To Simon, the Holy God." His teachings are said to have given origin to, or greatly supported the Gnostic philosophy,

which long opposed and afterwards corrupted Christianity.—*Ibid.*

III. HOMILETICAL REFLECTIONS.

1 The history of Simon Magus illustrates the impossibility of excluding unworthy members from the visible Church of Christ.

[19381] Philip admitted Simon to baptism when he probably had as little of true religion in his heart as any one who ever received that sacrament. Peter and John probably confirmed him, by the laying on of hands, and that, too, when this was a case demanding great circumspection; for if one who had been a notorious evil-doer, like Simon, should ask admission now to the Church, all would say that his sincerity ought to be well proved before he was taken in. Yet the apostles admitted him into the Christian fold. He professed to be a convert; they saw nothing to disprove his profession, and therefore they gave him the sacrament of baptism. We may conclude, therefore, from this scriptural example, that unless we set up a higher standard than the apostles, we are bound to lean largely to the side of charity, in our admissions to sacraments, to take men upon their own profession of faith, when not contradicted by an open evil life, and that, if we gain thereby many unworthy members, it is an evil utterly unavoidable.—*Ibid.*

2 The history of Simon Magus suggests the duty of one who ascertains that he has been mistaken in supposing himself a Christian.

[19382] Simon was deeply convinced for a time of the truth of the gospel. But his heart was unchanged. There was the same love of applause, the same eager desire for riches, as before his baptism. He soon showed that he was the old sorcerer still, and returned with tenfold zeal to his former evil ways; baptized, yet an unbeliever—confirmed, yet an opposer. Now we have reason to fear, nay, we know, from confessions of individuals, that this is too true a pattern of some cases in our own days. Under solemn preaching, or the trials of life, some good feelings have been excited, and under their impression men have gone forward and made a public profession of religion, but afterward came to the conclusion that they had no true piety. This is a most painful position. Some, when they reach it, withdraw at once from all participation in sacraments; others pursue a different course. They regret that they have ever made the profession, yet they are ashamed to draw back, for that would be avowing that all their pretensions to piety were a delusion. I pity most heartily the person, who, after a public avowal of Christ, is compelled to think himself mistaken in his hopes, or even to fear that he is no Christian. What, they may ask, would we advise such to do? What, we reply, would they do, if, in escaping from shipwreck, they fancied they had reached a rock which the tide or waves would not cover, and yet soon saw their mistake?

Would they turn to the broad ocean again? would they stand still and be drowned? or would they make for a higher rock, where not a drop of the ocean's spray could touch them? If you are not in Christ, oh, professing Christian, stand not there, and turn not back, but pray with David, "Lead me to the rock that is higher than I," and rest not till you do rest on Christ. Such was Peter's counsel to Simon. He did not advise him to withdraw from the company of Christians, though he perceived that he was in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity, but to repent and pray to be forgiven. There is but one safe course, and that is to go forward. It is doubtful whether you ought to stay away from a single sacramental season, unless you have fallen into some gross outward sin; but you should rather do as Tertullus did, when he discovered that he was in error, learn the way of God more perfectly, make your fears groundless by attaining true piety. If your public profession was premature, do not feel that you have committed an unpardonable sin, for even Simon's might have been forgiven, but seek to make your confession of Christ henceforth sincere and faithful.—*Ibid.*

FELIX.

I. HIS CHARACTER.

[19383] The character of this governor, as drawn by Tacitus, Suetonius, and Josephus, as well as by Luke in the Acts of the Apostles (for they all coincide in the description) was this:—He was a man of great energy, ambition, and power. He was admirable in some respects as a civil ruler, for he did much to put down disorder and anarchy in Judæa, and to maintain authority and law. But he was a man unprincipled in the manner in which he accomplished his objects; ready alike for his personal ambition, and in his civil rule, to employ any agents, and to make use of any means to secure his end—bribery, corruption, falsehood, assassination, or any form of cruelty. He was a sensualist, a profligate, a libertine. He was venal and mean;—a man willing to be bribed, and coveting a bribe. He was timid and fearful, knowing that he was living in guilt, and that he had reason to apprehend the Divine vengeance. He was not insensible to the rebukes of conscience. He trembled at the preaching of Paul, yet was unwilling to repent. He was regardless of justice, for though evidently satisfied of the innocence of Paul, he unjustly retained him in prison. He had no love for religion, no respect for Christianity, no purpose to abandon his sins; yet, though he despised Christianity, and though he was alarmed at the prospect of the judgment to come, so superior to all these considerations was his love of gold, that he was willing to hear Paul, and to send for him often, with the hope

that ultimately a bribe would be offered by him to secure his release.—*Albert Barnes.*

II. HIS CONVICTIONS.

They never resulted in conversion.

[19384] He was conscious that he was guilty, that his life had been stained by knavery and blood, by cruelty and profligacy, by practices, at some of which humanity blushes, and others of which it scorns and reprobates. He felt that he would be loathed and execrated if men knew all of him, and what then should he answer before God? The prospect of being judged—inspected by an Omniscient eye from which no veil could screen, and judged by an impartial Arbiter whom no pretext could deceive—filled him with alarm. The scene impressed him, he partially realized it, felt himself in the presence and under the glance of the Searcher of hearts, and he trembled—becoming afraid or seized with a panic; and he replied, "Go thy way for this time." If he was anxious to hear him begin, he was as anxious that he should close. He could not bear this dissection of his character and motives—this allusion to a coming judgment. He was wholly unprepared for such an appeal, for he was but an illiterate and sceptical libertine, and his shallow nature vibrated with the impulse of the moment. Like many men of sensual depravity, he was far from being pleased with himself. Amidst all his success and splendour, twinges of uneasiness may have often shaken his conscience—the fate of many dashing profligates—

"As a beam o'er the face of the waters may glow,
While the tide runs in darkness and coldness below,
So the cheek may be tinged with a warm sunny smile,
Though the cold heart to ruin runs darkly the while."

But the impression made upon Felix was soon charmed away. Depart, said he to the prisoner, but in courtesy he added—"When I have a convenient season, I will call for thee"—literally, when I have got time or opportunity. That opportunity came often, and he and Paul had many a colloquy. But there was a sordid motive mixed up with his conduct. At the very time he was so solemnized as to make this reply, he formed the resolution of securing a bribe if possible—"He hoped also that money should have been given him of Paul, that he might loose him: wherefore he sent for him the oftener, and communed with him." Avarice put on the guise of an anxious inquirer, took an interest in the prisoner to make money out of him, and hoped to be well paid for all the communing which it held with him. Felix would risk another discourse on righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, and even submit to the alarm produced by it, if he might win compen-

sation in a few shekels and talents.—*Dr. Eadie.*

[19385] He succeeded in driving away his convictions. He so disciplined himself, probably, as to hear what the apostle said without trembling; and he continued to live in sin, even when subject to the rebukes of conscience, and with the apprehension of judgment before him. He loved gold more than he feared the compunctions of guilt and the wrath of God. He was a man who sought to postpone present attention to religion, not with an intention of attending to it afterwards, but to make a professed interest in it an occasion for serving his own covetousness.—*Albert Barnes.*

III. CONTRAST BETWEEN FELIX AND THE JAILER OF PHILIPPI.

[19386] The conduct of Felix will be our guide in illustrating this point. He “trembled,” but he did not yield. The jailer at Philippi “trembled,” and yielded; fell down before Paul and Silas, his prisoners, and brought them out, and said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” (Acts xvi. 29, 30.) He acted as God meant that men should act; and he was true, in this respect, to the nature with which God had endowed him. But Felix “trembled,” and then said, “Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.” He resisted his nature; he violated a great law of his being, and perilled his everlasting welfare. The jailer, in humbler life—perhaps not living in any known form of sin—and having nothing as derived from rank, position, and associations, to prevent his acting out the inward promptings of his nature, yielded to his convictions, and was saved; Felix, living in known sin, bound and fettered by a guilty tie—in a position in which a confession of guilt might have exposed him to the ridicule of those in elevated life, or to a loss of place and position—refused to yield to the suggestions of conscience, and sought relief from present alarm by deferring all to a future time. He banished his serious impressions; he calmed down the apprehensions of guilt; he put himself on his guard against any danger of being overcome in the future by such sudden and unexpected emotions; and, as far as we know, gained the victory over the finer feelings of his nature,—and lost his soul.—*Ibid.*

IV. HOMILETICAL REFLECTIONS.

The attitude of Felix with regard to the matter of Paul's preaching suggests that the “convenient season” once deferred may never recur.

[19387] I do not say that time is never found to attend to religion, or that the purpose to attend to it is never carried out. Felix found time to consider the subject, for he “sent for Paul often”—the oftener because he hoped that

a bribe would be offered—“and communed with him.” It is not for us to say that a man who has neglected a present opportunity of salvation, and postponed it when his mind had been awakened to the subject, will never have another serious thought, and that he certainly seals his own condemnation for ever. I do not say that a man, thus disregarding the present, never is, or can be saved. Not thus do I understand the arrangements of God in regard to the salvation of men. But that it may be the last opportunity, no one can doubt; for death may be near. That a man will be less likely to be aroused and awakened at another time, as the result of having refused to yield, no one can doubt; for this is in accordance with a great law of our nature. That it does not, in all respects, depend on our own will when the mind shall be serious—when it shall be disposed to attend to the subject—when it shall find leisure—is equally clear. That it may not be as easy to attend to the subject on a bed of sickness, or on the approach of death, as in health, and when the mind is calm, is no less plain. That when a man who has been convinced of his sin, has secured such a triumph as to say to the heavenly Messenger, “Go thy way for this time,” the heavenly Messenger may not take a final departure, and that such a man may not by that act determine the destiny of his soul for ever, no man can deny. This hour—this very moment—you may so resolve to reject the invitation of mercy, as to settle the question of your salvation for ever and ever. To-morrow—nay, the next moment of your life—you may be beyond hope!—*Ibid.*

FESTUS.

I. HIS GENERAL CHARACTER.

It was marked by justice and a firm impartiality.

[19388] That character was strongly marked. When Felix, his predecessor, had been removed from office on charges of maladministration, Festus had been appointed to succeed him for two reasons: because he was a more just, honourable, pure, and incorruptible man; and because he would be more likely to be popular among the Jews. His general character, as honourable and upright, was evinced, in accordance with his general reputation, in the transactions which came so early under his notice in the case of the Apostle Paul.—*Albert Barnes.*

[19389] He was firm in his purpose not to grant the request of the Jews in regard to the removal of Paul to Jerusalem. It was a simple request, and it seemed to involve nothing improper or wrong. But his answer was every way becoming one who represented the majesty of the Roman law. Paul, he said, was in safe custody, and would not be suffered to

escape. He himself would shortly return to Cæsarea, when the utmost fairness should be allowed to the trial. He stated to them at that time, as he afterwards informed Agrippa (ver. 16), that it was a great principle of Roman law, that no man should be condemned to death before he had his "accusers face to face;" but any persons among the Jews who were "able" to manage the cause, should (he said) have ample opportunity to substantiate the charges against the prisoner (ver. 5).—*Ibid.*

[19390] His promptness in bringing the case of Paul to a trial, with no unnecessary delay, was an indication of his justness of character, and was remarkably in contrast with the conduct of his predecessor. Felix had, with most manifest injustice, kept Paul as a prisoner for two whole years, with the hope that he might secure from him a bribe; Festus promised to try the cause himself, and to make it his first business after his return to Cæsarea. In the course of eight or ten days (Acts xxv. 6, *margin*), he went thither, and the very day after his return he took his seat on the bench of justice, and commanded that Paul should be brought before him. Nothing could be more fair and honourable than this disposition to render speedy justice to one who had been so long kept in custody.—*Ibid.*

[19391] The noble sentiment which Festus uttered in stating a great principle of Roman law showed what was the character of the man. That principle was, as we have already seen, that no man should be condemned to death "before that he which is accused should have the accusers face to face, and have licence to answer for himself concerning the crime laid against him." No principle is more essential in the administration of justice than this; none has gone more deeply into the defence of the rights of man. The trials in the Inquisition and in the Star-chamber derived their enormity mainly from a violation of this principle; and the chief progress which society has made in the administration of justice has consisted in little more than in securing, by proper sanctions and provisions, the law here enunciated by Festus.—*Ibid.*

[19392] In him we have the example of a man upright and honourable; just, true, firm, faithful to the obligations of his office; prompt to do what was his duty, and not to be turned, by any personal considerations, from a purpose to do right.—*Ibid.*

II. HIS ATTITUDE WITH REGARD TO CHRISTIANITY.

It was that of personal indifference.

[19393] It is here that we meet him in his contact with Christianity, and it is in this respect that his views and feelings become so important to us. We find these expressed in the account which he gave of the matter to Agrippa: "They

brought none accusation of such things as I supposed; but had certain questions against him of their own superstition, and of one Jesus, which was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive." The feelings of Festus are indicated rather by the expression that it was "their own"—*πρὸς τῆς ἑαυτοῦ* :—that is, that it pertained to them, to their nation;—not to him, not to his nation. The dispute was about their own religion. It was to be settled by themselves. It was a matter in which he had no concern. It did not pertain to him either as a man or as a magistrate. He regarded all the controversies which they had started among themselves about the death and the resurrection of Jesus, as he would have regarded the controversies of the Greeks, the Persians, the Babylonians, or the Egyptians, about the religion of their own country. Those subjects of controversy might seem important to them; they were none of his.—*Ibid.*

III. HOMILETICAL HINTS.

Festus is the representative of religious indifference.

[19394] Festus is a representative of a very large and a very respectable portion of mankind. They are men who would not revile religion, or speak of it with contempt. If they have no personal interest in it, they are willing that others should discuss its questions freely among themselves. They would not disturb others in the quiet enjoyment of their own opinions, or of their rights in religion; and, in numerous cases, their disposition to show respect for religion is increased by the fact that it is the religion of a friend, a father, a wife, a sister. Yet they regard the subject as not pertaining to themselves. They do not intermeddle with it, nor would they interfere with it. The questions which are raised among Christians, and which are discussed with so much warmth, or it may be with so much acerbity, they do not regard themselves as required to solve. Their own purpose is to lead an upright, an honest, a moral life; to do justice to all; to settle questions which do pertain to themselves as magistrates, as business men, as patriots, and as philanthropists. Our difficulty in dealing with such is in persuading them at all to regard the subjects connected with religion as having any personal claim on them, and in inducing them to change their position so far, as, instead of "questions of *their own*," to say "questions of *our own*."—*Ibid.*

AGRIPPA.

I. INTRODUCTORY.

His descent and personal character.

[19395] "King Agrippa," as St. Luke calls him, is known as Herod Agrippa the Second in profane history. It was no good stock of

which he came. He was son of another Herod Agrippa, who is branded in the history of the Acts as the murderer of James the Apostle, and who was only defeated by the interposition of an angel in his purpose of killing Peter also; of that Herod Agrippa who perished so miserably, being smitten of God in the hour of his blasphemous pride. Nor was this all. He was descended from a mightier criminal yet; he was great-grandson of that first Herod who slew all the young children at Bethlehem, trusting to include in that slaughter the royal Child, to whom the throne which he occupied as an intruder and usurper rightfully belonged. There was blood enough of God's saints and servants on that wicked Herodian race; and, to do this Herod justice, there is no desire upon his part to shed more of this precious blood, or to curry favour with the Jewish people, by delivering Paul, as his father would fain have delivered Peter, to their will. Had he been such a cruel persecutor, breathing out rage and threatenings against the followers of Christ, his story would not have contained half, no, nor a hundredth part of the warning for us which it does contain. It might hardly have touched us at all.—*Abb. Trench.*

II. HIS HESITATING ADMISSION.

Probable reasons for its want of decision.

[19396] Agrippa, as we know from the facts of history, although he possessed excellent qualities, such as gentleness, a peaceful character, and a beneficent spirit, was influenced by the opinion of men to such an extent that, rather than offend the Emperor of Rome, whose creature he was, he suffered himself to take up arms against his compatriots; and he feared, without doubt, that if he should become a Christian, he would lose the favour of a man whom he hated. Agrippa loved the world, and the vanities of the world, for the Jews report of him that he wept bitterly at a time when he believed himself excluded from the crown; and we see by that which is said to us by St. Luke, of his entrance into the judgment-hall at Cæsarea, that pomp and magnificence had great attractions for him. Doubtless, therefore, the powerful discourse of the confessor of Christ made him foresee that, in becoming a disciple of Jesus, he would be obliged to renounce, if not his throne, at least the love of vainglory to which he was attached. In short, Agrippa, to whom no one can deny, as we have said, certain good qualities, was the slave of his passions, and had entered into an illicit connection with Berenice, his sister; and, to embrace the Christian faith, it would be necessary for him to break off these criminal ties, and to crucify the flesh with its lusts. Thus, the fear of ridicule or the yoke of the opinion of men, and the love of the world and its vanities, and the slavery of the passions, are the three great causes which keep back from Christianity many persons who are persuaded, up to a certain point, of its divinity,

and who might be supposed on the threshold of the edifice of faith, but who have for it in the depths of their heart only repugnance and enmity.—*Dr. Grandpierre.*

III. HIS CONSEQUENT GAINS AND LOSSES.

[19397] His gains, what were they? For a few years more he kept the glories to which he clung, he played his part of king on the world's stage, and men bowed to him the crooked hinges of the knee, and paid him lip-homage, and he sat in the chief place of honour at wearisome feasts, and was the principal figure in hollow court ceremonials and empty pageants of state; and then the play was over, and his little day was done, and darkness and night swallowed up all, and he carried nothing away with him when he died (except, indeed, his sins), neither did his pomp follow him. His gains then, they were not after all so very large, and, such as they were, they did not tarry with him long. But his losses, or rather his loss? It may not seem so much, seeing that it can be summed up in a single word, and yet that word a word of awful significance. What did he lose? He lost *himself*. Christ has demanded, "What shall a man profit if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" Agrippa had not gained the whole world—only a miserable little fragment of it; and this but for a moment, for a little inch of time; but in the grasping and gaining of this he had made that terrible loss and shipwreck of which Christ speaks, *had lost himself*; in other words, had lost all.—*Abb. Trench.*

IV. HOMILETICAL HINTS.

[19398] Perhaps, like him, thou art holden by the cords of some sinful passion. Thou canst not bring thyself to forego the sweetness of it. It seems to thee that if that were taken out of thy life, the life which remained would not be worth the living, that all the wine would be drawn, and nothing but the lees remain. Or the sin may not be sweet, the sweetness of it, if it ever had any, may have departed long ago; but though not sweet, it may be strong, binding thee with bands which thou hast no courage to break, which thou knowest thou couldst not break without a far mightier effort than any which thou art prepared to make.—*Ibid.*

[19399] A few years hence, and it will be with every one of us, as it was with King Agrippa not very long after these memorable words were uttered; and then how utterly insignificant, not merely to others, but to ourselves, it will be, whether we were here in high place or in low, rich or poor, talked about or obscure, whether we trod lonely paths, or were grouped in joyful households of love; whether our faces were oftener soiled with tears or drest in smiles. But for us, gathered as we then shall be within the veil, and waiting for the judgment of the great day, one thing shall have attained an

awful significance, shall stand out alone, as the final question, the only surviving question of our lives, Were we *almost* Christ's or *altogether*, in other words, were we Christ's, or were we not?—*Ibid.*

GALLIO.

I. HIS CHARACTER.

In its degree of amiability it appears unique amongst the characters of heathendom.

[19400] Very different was the estimate of Gallio by his contemporaries from the mistaken one which has made his name proverbial for indifference in the Christian world. To the friends among whom he habitually moved he was the most genial, the most lovable of men. The brother of Seneca, and the uncle of Lucan, he was the most universally popular member of that distinguished family. He was pre-eminently endowed with that light and sweetness which are signs of the utmost refinement, and "the sweet Gallio" is the epithet by which he alone of the ancients is constantly designated. "No mortal man is so sweet to any single person as he is to all mankind," wrote Seneca of him, "even those who love my brother Gallio to the very utmost of their power, yet do not love enough," he says in another place. He was the very flower of pagan courtesy and pagan culture—a Roman with all a Roman's dignity and seriousness, and yet with all the grace and versatility of a polished Greek.—*Archdeacon Farrar.*

II. HIS VIEW OF CHRISTIANITY.

It was that of supreme indifference.

[19401] Gallio dismissed the whole scene from his mind as supremely unimportant. Had he ever thought it worth alluding to, in any letter to his brother Seneca, it would have been in some such terms as these:—"I had scarcely arrived when the Jews tried to play on my inexperience by dragging before me one Paulus, who seems to be an adherent of Christus, or Chrætus, of whom we heard something at Rome. I was not going to be troubled with their malefic superstitions, and ordered them to be turned out. The Greeks, accordingly, who were favourable to Paulus, beat one of the Jews in revenge for their malice. You would have smiled, if you had been present, at these follies of the *turba forensis*. *Sed hæc hæc hactenus.*"—*Ibid.*

III. HOMILETICAL HINTS.

1. The case of Gallio illustrates the dangers of a too compliant disposition.

[19402] Gallio was a man of remarkable sweetness of disposition and great popularity.

These gifts, attractive as they are, have often been serious snares; and they were so in this instance. An amiable person is often weak in principle; he cannot stand alone: he awakens the hopes of the wicked, even where he does not gratify them.—*Dean Vaughan.*

[19403] That easy, good-tempered, compliant person, surely, men say, we can make a tool of him; he has not the resolution to resist us; and then he invites wrong-doing, and multiplies around himself those circumstances of difficulty to which he is most unequal. The character of Gallio tempted the Jews of Corinth to drag St. Paul before his judgment-seat.—*Ibid.*

2. The posthumous fame of Gallio, in comparison of that of St. Paul, illustrates the retribution which frequently awaits a hasty and superficial decision on matters of the gravest moment.

[19404] The superficiality which judges only by externals, always brings its own retribution. It adores the mortal, and scorns the divinity; it welcomes the impostor, and turns the angel from its door. It forms its judgment on trivial accidents, and ignores eternal realities. The haughty, distinguished, and cultivated Gallio, brother of Seneca, Proconsul of Achaia, the most popular man and the most eminent *littérateur* of his day, would have been to the last degree amazed, had any one told him that so paltry an occurrence would be for ever recorded in history; that it would be the only scene in his life in which posterity would feel a moment's interest; that he would for all time be mainly judged of by the glimpse we get of him on that particular morning; that he had flung away the greatest opportunity of his life when he closed the lips of the haggard Jewish prisoner, whom his decision rescued from the clutches of his countrymen; that a correspondence between that Jew Shaül, or Paulus, and his great brother Seneca, would be forged and would go down to posterity; that it would be believed for centuries that that wretched prisoner had converted the splendid philosopher to his own "execrable superstition," and that Seneca had borrowed from him the finest sentiments of his writings; that for all future ages that ophthalmic, nervous, unknown Jew, against whom all other Jews seemed for some inconceivably foolish reason to be so infuriated, would be regarded as transcendently more important than his deified Emperors and immortal Stoics; that the "parcel of questions" about a mere opinion, and names, and a matter of Jewish law, which he had so disdainfully refused to hear, should hereafter become the most prominent of all questions to the whole civilized world.—*Archdeacon Farrar.*

NEW TESTAMENT SCRIPTURE CHARACTERS (MALE).

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