THE BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATOR.

I. KINGS.

THE

BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATOR:

OR,

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

BY

REV. JOSEPH S. EXELL, M.A.

I. KINGS.

London:
FRANCIS GRIFFITHS,
34, MAIDEN LANE, STRAND, W.C.
1909.

INTRODUCTION TO I. KINGS.

THE BOOK OF KINGS AND THE PENTATEUCH.—It can hardly fail to strike the reader how, in almost every chapter of 1 Kings, the thread and tissue of the narrative is interwoven with the thoughts and phraseology of the Books of Moses. Such a chapter as that which contains Solomon's dedication prayer is largely expressed in the words of Numbers, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy. That chapter might, had it stood alone, have been ascribed to some later writer familiar with the language of the Mosaic writings, and if those books or large portions of them were of late composition, the dedicatory prayer might also be set down as of a late date. But it is not one single chapter which re-echoes the Mosaic diction, resemblances of a like kind exist throughout in considerable abundance. And we cannot think that the compiler of Kings, taking in hand documents which existed long before his day, some as far back as the time of Solomon himself, changed their whole character by introducing language, which, according to some, was not existent before the days of King Josiah. We cannot read the long address of David to Solomon (1 Kings ii. 2, 3), or Solomon's injunction concerning Joab's death, "that it should take away the innocent blood" (ii. 31), or the same king's description of his people (iii. 8), without feeling that the thoughts and language of Numbers, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy were very familiar to writers of these chapters, chapters which are due in all probability in their substance not to the compiler of the Book of Kings, but to Nathan the seer, Ahijah the Shilonite, and Iddo the seer, quoted (2 Chron. ix. 29) as the several authorities for the records of Solomon's reign. Again, in such a history as that of the trial and execution of Naboth, the whole narrative carries us back to the laws, manners, and customs which have their rise in the Books of Moses. So too do the frequent phrases which occur of such a kind as that "the eyes and heart of God shall be perpetually upon His house," that offending Israel shall be "a proverb and a byword" among all people, and the proverbial phrase occurring more than once, "him that is shut up and left in Israel." The list of such expressions can be largely increased. . . . The evidence drawn from such abundant resemblance points to a much earlier date for the books of the law than the reign of Josiah, to which time their composition has been in part assigned; and makes it difficult to ascribe the largely prevailing similarity of language to any other cause than that the prophetic writers, not only in the days of Jeremiah, but in the days of Nathan, Ahijah, and Iddo, were very familiar with the phraseology of the Pentateuch. (*J. R. Lumby, D.D.*)

RELATION OF KINGS TO CHRONICLES.—As regards the relation of the Books of Kings to those of Chronicles, it is manifest, and is universally admitted, that the former is by far the older work. The language, which is quite free from the Persicisms of the Chronicles and their late orthography, and is not at all more Aramaic than the language of Jeremiah, clearly points out its relative superiority in regard to age. Its subject also, embracing the kingdom of Israel as well as Judah, is another indication of its composition before the kingdom of Israel was forgotten, and before the Jewish enmity to Samaria, which is apparent in such passages as 2 Chronicles xx. 37, xxv., and in those chapters of Ezra (i.–vi.) which belong to Chronicles, was brought to maturity. While the Books of Chronicles, therefore, were written especially for the Jews after their return from Babylon, the Book of Kings was written for the whole of Israel, before their common national existence was hopelessly quenched. Another comparison of considerable interest between the two histories may be drawn in respect to the main design, that design being: marked relation both to the individual station of the supposed writers, and the peculiar circumstances of their country at the time of their writing.

Jeremiah was himself a prophet. He lived while the prophetic office was in full vigour, in his own person, in Ezekiel, and Daniel, and many others, both true and false. In his eyes, as in truth, the main cause of the fearful calamities of his countrymen was their rejection and contempt of the Word of God in his mouth and that of the other prophets; and their one hope of deliverance lay in their hearkening to the prophets who still continued to speak to them in the name of the Lord. Accordingly we find in the Books of Kings great prominence given to the prophetic office. Not only are some fourteen chapters devoted more or less to the history of Elijah and Elisha, the former of whom is but once named, and the latter not once in Chronicles, but besides the many passages in which the names and sayings of prophets are recorded alike in both histories, the following may be cited as instances in which the compiler of Kings has notices of the prophets which are peculiar to himself, 1 Kings xiii., xiv., xvi.; and the reference to the fulfilment of the word of God in the termination of Jehu's dynasty, in 2 Kings xv. 12; the reflexions in 2 Kings xvii. 7–23; and above all, as relating entirely to Judah, the narrative of Hezekiah's sickness and recovery in 2 Kings xx., as contrasted with that in 2 Chronicles xxxii., may be cited as instances of that prominence given to prophecy and prophets by the compiler of the Book of Kings. Ezra, on the contrary, was only a priest. In his days the prophetic office had wholly fallen into abeyance. That evidence of the Jews being the people of God, which consisted in the presence of prophets among them, was no more. But to men of his generation, the distinctive mark of the continuance of God's favour to their race was the rebuilding of the Temple at Jerusalem, the restoration of the daily sacrifice and the Levitical worship, and the wonderful and providential renewal of the Mosaic institutions. Hence we see at once that the chief care of a good and enlightened Jew of the age of Ezra, and all the more if he were himself a priest, would naturally be to enhance the value of the Levitical ritual and the dignity of the Levitical caste. And in compiling a history of the past glories of his race, he would as naturally select such passages as especially bore upon the sanctity of the priestly office. Hence the Levitical character of the Books of Chronicles. Compare 2 Chron. xxix.–xxxi. with 2 Kings xviii., also 2 Chron. xxvi. 16–21 with 2 Kings xv. 5, also 2 Chron. xi. 13–17, xiii. 9–20, xv. 1–15, xxiii. 2–8 with 2 Kings xi. 5–9. (*W. Smith, D.D.*)

SOURCES OF INFORMATION USED BY THE COMPILER.—As regards the sources of information, it may truly be said that we have the narrative of contemporary writers throughout. There was a regular series of state annals both for the kingdom of Judah and for that of Israel, which embraced the whole time comprehended in the Books of Kings, or at least to the end of the reign of Jehoiakim, 2 Kings xxiv. 5. These annals, cited by name as "the Book of the Acts of Solomon," 1 Kings xi. 41; and, after Solomon, "the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah, or Israel," *e.g.* 1 Kings xiv. 29, xv. 7, xvi. 5, 14, 20; 2 Kings x. 34, xxiv. 5, and it is manifest that the author of Kings had them both before him, while he drew up his history, in which the reigns of the two kingdoms are harmonised, and these annals constantly appealed to. But in addition to these national annals, there were also extant, at the time that the Books of the Kings were compiled, separate works of the several prophets who had lived in Judah and Israel, and which probably bore the same relation to the annals which the historical parts of Isaiah and Jeremiah bear to those portions of the annals preserved in the Books of Kings, *i.e.* were, in some instances at least, fuller and more copious accounts of the current events, by the same hands which drew up the more concise narrative of the annals, though in others perhaps mere duplicates. Thus the acts of Uzziah, written by Isaiah, were very likely identical with the history of his reign in the national chronicles, and part of the history of Hezekiah we know was identical in the Chronicles and in the prophet. The chapter in Jeremiah lii. is identical with that in 2 Kings xxiv., xxv. . . . These works, or at least many of them, must have been extant at the time when the Books of Kings were compiled, as they certainly were much later when the Books of Chronicles were put together by Ezra. But whether the author used them all, or only those duplicate portions of them which were embodied in the national chronicles, it is impossible to say, seeing he quotes none of them by name, except the acts of Solomon, and the prophecy of Jonah. On the other hand, we cannot infer from his silence that these books were unused by him, seeing that neither does he quote by name the vision of Isaiah as the Chronicler does, though he must, from its

recent date, have been familiar with it, and that as many parts of his narrative have every appearance of being extracted from these books of the prophets, and contain narratives which it is not likely would have found a place in the chronicles of the kings (see 1 Kings xiv. 4, xvi. 1; 2 Kings xvii., &c. (*W. Smith, D.D.*)

THE CONTENTS OF THE BOOKS OF KINGS.—Considering the conciseness of the narrative, and the simplicity of the style, the amount of knowledge which these books convey of the characters, conduct, and manners of kings and people during so long a period is truly wonderful. The insight they give us into the aspect of Judah and Jerusalem, both natural and artificial, into the religious, military, and civil institutions of the people, their arts and manufactures, the state of education and learning, their resources, commerce, exploits, alliances, the causes of their decadence, and finally of their ruin, is most clear, interesting, and instructive. In a few brief sentences we acquire more accurate knowledge of the affairs of Egypt, Tyre, Syria, Assyria, Babylon, and other neighbouring nations than had been preserved to us in all the other remains of antiquity up to the recent discoveries in hieroglyphical and cuneiform monuments. If we seek in them a system of scientific chronology, we may indeed be disappointed. . . . But it is for their deep religious teaching, and for the insight which they give us into God's providential and moral government of the world, that they are above all valuable. The books which describe the wisdom and the glory of Solomon, and yet record his fall; which make us acquainted with the painful ministry of Elijah, and his translation into heaven; and which tells us how the most magnificent temple ever built for God's glory, and of which He vouchsafed to take possession, was consigned to the flames, for the sins of those who worshipped in it, read us such lessons concerning both God and man, as are the best evidence of their Divine origin, and make them the richest treasure to every Christian man. (*Wm. Smith, D.D.*)

DIVISION OF THE HISTORY INTO PERIODS.—The space of time thus covered is about 410 years, and it divides itself naturally into three periods—the time of the undivided monarchy under Solomon, the time of the divided kingdom till the fall of Samaria, and the time of the surviving kingdom of Judah till the Captivity by Nebuchadnezzar. *First Period: Solomon's Reign.* This period is treated at greater length than any subsequent reign, its record occupying eleven chapters. Two of these, however, relate to the circumstances that led to Solomon's accession to the throne while his father David was alive, and the greater part of the remaining chapters is taken up with the account of the building of the Temple and of the royal palace. In this section of the book there is little evidence of a literary plan, but we are made distinctly aware of the intention of the book and the point of view of the writer. That so much space is devoted to the description of the Temple, as compared with the few particulars relating to the king's palace, is not merely owing to the author's better acquaintance with the courts and furniture of the sacred house than with the interior of the royal residence, but to the fact that he regarded the erection of the Temple as of prime importance for the history which he is writing. And that this is meant to be a sacred, and not merely a secular, history is further evinced by the fact that, along with the glowing accounts of the greatness and fame of Solomon, there are significant hints of the dangers underlying all the magnificence, and the fatal tendency of the introduction of foreign habits, with insistence on the fact that national prosperity was conditional on fidelity to the national religion. The section closes with a plain intimation that the seeds of evil sown in Solomon's reign were already germinating, and an enumeration of the "adversaries" who were already raised up to destroy the fair fabric of the empire of all Israel. *Second Period: The Two Kingdoms.* This period, of somewhat more than two centuries, from the disruption of the kingdom after the death of Solomon, about B.C. 933 to the fall of Samaria in B.C. 722, is the subject of the greater part of the book, the narrative extending from the beginning of 1 Kings xii. to the end of 2 Kings xvii. Here the treatment of the materials is more systematic, and a literary plan, simple, though somewhat artificial, is followed. It is to be observed that the writer strives to maintain a synchronism in the history; for when he returns alternately to a new reign in the Northern or Southern Kingdom, he mentions that it was in such and such a year of the reign of a king in the sister state that so and so began to reign in the other. In the laying out of the particulars of the successive reigns there is to be observed a re-

currence of set phrases which give a certain monotony to the narrative, but indicate the point of view from which the history is regarded. Notwithstanding the rigidity of framework and the stereotyped diction, this part of the book is far from being a mere state chronicle of political events. As in the former section, so in this, the writer regards the whole as a sacred history. *Third Period: The Surviving Kingdom of Judah.* In this style and in this vein the writer brings the history down to the time when the Northern Kingdom was brought to an end by the capture of Samaria in B.C. 722, devoting a whole chapter to the causes which led to the catastrophe, and the subsequent fate of that part of the country. The remainder of the book is devoted to the history of the surviving kingdom of Judah, the latest point to which the narrative is brought down being the thirty-seventh year of the captivity of Jehoiachin, viz., B.C. 562. This section, accordingly, embraces a period of sixty years, and extends to eight chapters. (*The Temple Bible.*)

DATE OF THE BOOK OF KINGS.—To the date of the compilation of the Book of Kings we are guided by the latest events that are mentioned in it. The last chapter (2 Kings xxv.) concludes with the thirty-seventh year of Jehoiachin's captivity, when Evil-Merodack released him from prison. This happened B.C. 561. But this last chapter and a few verses, 18–20 of chap. xxiv., are identical with chap. lii. of the prophecy of Jeremiah. There, however, the closing words of chap. li., "Thus far are the words of Jeremiah," plainly show that what follows was added by one who thought it no integral part of the prophecy, but added it to complete the historical notices found in other parts of that book, and added it most likely from this Book of Kings. We may therefore conclude that this book was compiled B.C. 561. But the compiler has no word, even of hope, to record concerning the final deliverance of the nation from captivity. That deliverance commenced with the decree of Cyrus, B.C. 536, though the final migrations did not take place till the days of Nehemiah, nearly a century later, B.C. 445. Had he known of any movement in the direction of a return, the writer would surely have made mention of it. He is cheered, apparently at the close of his work, by the clemency shown to Jehoiachin. He would hardly have passed over any agitation for the national redemption without a word of notice. The book was therefore finished before B.C. 536, and its date lies between that year and B.C. 561. (*J. R. Lumby, D.D.*)

THE COMPILER'S PURPOSE AND POINT OF VIEW.—That the writer had a distinct plan and purpose before him and occupied a distinct point of view, we have already seen. And what the plan and point of view were he makes quite evident, both in the brief notes introducing or summing up the various reigns, and in the longer reviews of periods and the detailed narratives of a prophetical character which are woven into the history. Standing at the close of Israel's national independence, he will describe the whole course of history from the bloom-period of Solomon to the collapse of the State under the pressure of the Babylonian Empire; and having noted the influences, human and Divine, which had been at work, he will exhibit for the instruction of his readers the causes of the varying fortunes of his people. The author himself gives us what we may call his philosophy of the history in his review of the causes that brought about the downfall of the Northern Kingdom (2 Kings xvii. 7–23). The same fundamental principles are stated in more positive terms elsewhere. Thus, at the very opening of the history, the keynote of the whole is struck in David's parting charge to Solomon (1 Kings ii. 2–4). So also, on the occasion of Solomon's first vision at Gibeon (1 Kings iii. 14), and of his second vision, after the completion of the building of Temple and palace (1 Kings ix. 1–9), the principle is stated almost in the same terms, with the addition, in the last passage, of the warning. The three great principles, therefore, on which the author proceeds are: that a special choice had been made of David and his house, that whole-hearted devotion to the national God (without swerving into heathen ways) was the condition of national prosperity, and that the worship at local shrines, the so-called "high places," was inconsistent with the pure Mosaic worship. The second may be called the underlying principle of all prophecy; and the third, though slow to be recognised, as even the examples of the "good" kings show, comes into prominence in the reforms carried out by Hezekiah, and finally triumphed, for a time at least, in the more thorough reform of Josiah's days. (*The Temple Bible.*)

THE BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATOR.

I. KINGS.

CHAPTER I.

Vers. 1–4. Now King David was old and stricken in years.—*The Winter of Life:*—I. Overtakes men in the highest rank. II. Chills the vital sources of the naturally robust. "And they covered him with clothes, and he gat no heat." III. Is but temporarily alleviated by the best considered human devices. The cherishing of Abishag was—1. Advised by the court physicians. An expedient not unusual in similar cases, when internal cordials failed, and with the limited skill of the faculty in the use of warmth-creating potions. 2. Was innocent. Suggested for no other than purely medical reasons. Sophocles lauded old age as a deliverance from the tyranny of the passions, as an escape from some furious and savage master. 3. Suspended only for a brief season the inevitable progress of decay. Medical skill is no more efficacious for the monarch than for the humblest subject. David died within the year. A moment comes in the winter of life when the warm pulse is stilled, and the once stalwart frame is locked in the icy embrace of death. (*J. Barlow.*)

Vers. 5–53. **Then Adonijah the son of Haggith exalted himself.**—*Usurpation:*—David is "old and stricken in years." Round about him there are certain proceedings which are almost always associated with the death of great men. There are persons who are wondering who will succeed to the throne. One man has made up his mind that he will be the king. Could we understand all that is going on in the minds of our friends when we ourselves are approaching the hour and article of death, we should be surprised by some revelations of character which we had little suspected. Adonijah said, "I will be king" (ver. 5). How certainly, then, he will not! "Adonijah the son of Haggith exalted himself." He did not hear the voice sounding far away in the coming time which said, "Whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased." You will find that Adonijah was a spoiled child, for "his father had not displeased him at any time in saying, Why hast thou done so?" (ver. 6). That is the explanation. Every will has to be broken, and it ought to be broken as soon as possible; it is not as if the will could go on always having its own way, marching from conquering to conquer, going on from throne to throne; it is the law of life, and it is the most solemn fact in personal history, that the will must be broken, in the sense of being subdued, chastened, made to feel that there are other wills in creation, and that peace can only come by mutual understanding and concession. How cruel, then, are parents! They think they are kind, but their kindness is the worst form of cruelty. How would it be in physical matters? You say that a man's hand is out of action, and the doctor says that hand might have been as good as the other if the infirmity or accident had been attended to when the child was young. That we call reason. A child does not see straightly; its eye is somewhat askance; and the doctor again says that eye could have been made perfectly right if it had been attended to when the child was young. When the doctor says that, everybody looks upon him as a wise man. So many things ought to have been done when we were young! Yet we ourselves will not do them to those who are young, and who depend upon us for discipline, education, and general training. When Adonijah said, "I will

be king," he carried to its logical issue the training which he had received, or lacked, at home. How will he set about this business? Exactly like a spoiled child. There is a striking consistency in all the parts of his character and action. If you ask for his programme, you may yourself write it for him; there is no need to make inquiry as to what he will do. Spoiled children can only do one thing. They are absolutely destitute of originality. What, then, does Adonijah do? He copied Absalom, whom in some degree he resembled, being also "a very goodly man." That is to say, a well-favoured man physically; good to look upon, a handsome, noble figure. What will Adonijah do? The answer is in the fifth verse: "He prepared him chariots and horsemen, and fifty men to run before him." How will Adonijah proceed? quite consistently. In the seventh verse we find him still pursuing the same level of thought and purpose: "And he conferred with Joab the son of Zeruiah, and with Abiathar the priest." What was Abiathar the priest? the priest of the tent in which the ark of God was kept? or was he but some subordinate, good and honest in his own way, but a little tempted to believe in chariots and horses and forerunners and outriders? Alas! it is possible for a priest even to be so demented. This was the bound of Adonijah's counsel; the crafty Joab and Abiathar. Not the people. The people were to be taken by a storm of music. That was Adonijah's great plan for taking the nation! But the people are wiser than they are often thought to be. Have faith in the people. You cannot easily measure them. Taken one by one, they do not seem to amount to much; but when they touch one another, and feel the contagion of sympathy and the inspiration of common interests; when they listen as one man to the voice of the declaimer or the charmer, the reasoner and the statesman, they know who is right and who is wrong. Why these signs of masonry? Why this desire to get away from the society of pure women and frank children, question-asking youth, and unsuspecting love? Why did you not call Zadok and Nathan and Solomon? Out of thine own mouth I condemn thee. The honest man would have said, Let all come; this thing shall not be done in a corner; it is right, sound, clear-hearted, through and through—come one, come all, and guide me if I am wrong. The right man need not be in any hurry. He will be sent for in due time. What became of Adonijah? He "feared because of Solomon, and arose, and went, and caught hold on the horns of the altar"—the projecting pieces of wood overlaid with gold, to which the sacrifices were fastened with bands or ropes. Laying hold of these, he thought he had the right of asylum; and he feared Solomon, "saying, Let King Solomon swear unto me to-day that he will not slay his servant with the sword" (vers. 50, 51). "Whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased." Adonijah, who began by saying, "I will be king," ended by saying, I am a servant. See the end of all vanity, foolish conceit, mistaken and selfish ambition; so Solomon, being a king in very deed, said: He shall have a conditional pardon—"If he will shew himself a worthy man, there shall not an hair of him fall to the earth: but if wickedness shall be found in him, he shall die" (vers. 52, 53). So Adonijah became a ticket-of-leave man. What a fame! but right. Do not let us mistake this: for we are all ticket-of-leave men. Let there be no boasting. We are all out of hell conditionally. *(J. Parker, D.D.)* *Adonijah:*—I. BEWARE OF AMBITION. When regulated, restrained, and guided, ambition serves a good end. It rouses to activity, and it tends to produce a generous and noble character. But when it is inspired only by selfishness, by the desire simply to attain to a certain position, so that vanity may be indulged and pride gratified—by the determination to outstrip your fellows and win certain prizes for which they too are toiling;—when, in short, there is nothing but self to be consulted and flattered and appeased, it is dangerous. It may lead you to do much that is evil, to trample on that which is sacred, to break through and cast down the barriers which God's law has erected around you, to despise the nearest and dearest relationships of human life. Under its withering influence he loses sight of the eternal in the temporal, ignores the spiritual in the carnal, and forgets God in self! There is no ban laid by God on advancement or "getting on." You are not forbidden to attain earthly honours, to acquire what are called the world's "good things." But then, recollect, you must regard them only as subordinate to higher things. "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you." II. BEWARE OF DISOBEDIENCE TO PARENTS. It may be an old, but it is a permanent command, "Honour thy father and thy mother," &c. III. BEWARE OF EVIL ASSOCIATIONS. The unholy alliance at Enrogel broke up, immediately on the arrival of adverse

tidings. Joab, Abiathar, and their confederates disappeared, and left Adonijah to his own devices. There was no deep affection, and no bond of pure love to keep them together; selfishness was at the root of the association. They fawned, and flattered, and fled. Wicked men do not care for their companions beyond the point of advantage. They have no interest in each other's welfare, and they are suspicious of each other's designs and of each other's fidelity. Accomplices and partners in guilt indulge in mutual accusations and revelations which show the slender nature of the tie which binds them together. There is no love—no true, deep, self-sacrificing love—such as dwells in the hearts of Christian brethren, united in Jesus Christ. (*A. Williamson.*) *When the play is out:*—Honour must put off the robes when the play is done, make it never so glorious a show on this world's stage; it hath but a short part to act. A great name of worldly glory is but like a peal rung on the bells, the common people are the clappers, the rope that moves them is popularity; if you once let go your hold and leave pulling, the clapper lies still, and farewell honour. (*T. Adams.*) *Ambition, destructive:*—The principal thing that excited the public hatred, and at last caused the death of Julius Cæsar was his passion for the title of king. It was the first thing that gave offence to the multitude, and it afforded his inveterate enemies a very plausible plea. (*Plutarch.*)

Ver. 8. **But Zadok the priest . . . went not with Adonijah.**—*Steadfast when others falter:*—So Cranmer and Ridley, and some few other conscientious persons, afterwards ill rewarded by Queen Mary, refused to subscribe the letters patent for Lady Jane Grey's succession to the crown, after the death of King Edward VI.; which yet were subscribed by the most of the statesmen, who were guided with respect to their particular interest, for that they were possessed of divers lands which once pertained to monasteries, chanteries, &c., which they foresaw they should lose, in case religion should change under Queen Mary. (*J. Trapp.*)

Vers. 22–27. **Nathan the prophet also came in.**—*Solomon succeeding David:*—I. THE TROUBLE ARISING FROM LACK OF HOME DISCIPLINE. Many a parent sows seeds of sorrow by over-indulgence of the children. Nothing is more prophetic of grief to come, for the parent, and calamity, for the child, than failure to insist upon obedience. There is to be a throne and something of parental sovereignty in every home. God requires of all parents, for their own sakes, the children's sake, and the sake of society, that they should govern their household. II. THE SIN OF DISREGARD FOR PARENTS. Adonijah knew that his father had designated Solomon as his successor. Finding his father feeble and at the point of death, he conspired against him, influenced all he could to join him in the conspiracy, and aid him in accomplishing his purpose. In the ambition of his heart to reign over Israel he was ready for any intrigue, any injustice. Ambition is the cause of much of this world's crime. It consumes all the better feelings of our nature; makes men regardless of tenderest relations and deepest obligations. There are no duties diviner than those we owe to our parents. In their old age, especially, parents have supreme claim on the affection and protection of their children. None but he who is lost to all sense of the claims of love, and is far gone in sin, can wilfully make sad a parent's heart. In all tenderness, and all solicitation for the joy and comfort of their parents, children should hand them down to their graves, making, if it may be, their last days the sunniest and most restful. III. THE SACREDNESS OF HUMAN PLEDGES. David had assured Bathsheba that her son Solomon should succeed to the throne. Human pledges are sacred, especially when made in the fear of God, and according to His conscious will. No difficulties should ever turn men aside from fulfilling their vows. There should be no delay when danger threatens. All men have many interests in their hands. It will cost, of time, strength, and exposure, it may be, to guard these interests; but they should be guarded, whatever the cost. David acted promptly, thus he succeeded. Delays are often fatal. Decision is demanded for emergencies. While men fear and hesitate it often becomes too late. Truth is to be done. Neither God nor man excuses falsehood. Faithlessness is full of annoyance. Our lives should be worthy of trust. There may be impossibilities in the way; these alone should prevent the keeping of our pledges. IV. THE FAITHFULNESS OF FRIENDS. Adonijah would have been crowned as king, had not the friends of David and Solomon revealed the conspiracy. But these friends were true; and their haste in acquainting the king of what was transpiring gave him time to avert the

calamity. Faithfulness to friends is one great want of the world. None is safe from attack on the part of the ambitious and designing. Neighbours are in danger of being injured in person or position without knowing it, or being able to avoid the snare. Society is full of secret schemings to rise on the ruin of others. Character is assailed; property imperilled; all sacred things put in jeopardy by the unscrupulous. Often serious and irreparable injury is done before the parties affected dream of anything evil in the air. In business, in politics, in the whole range of human plans for personal advancement, or right doing on any line, men are liable to be maligned and harmed. It is duty in all cases and at all hazard to give warning or counsel, and to interpose for the protection of others. We are not to be busybodies, but we are to be our brother's keeper. V. THE PATIENCE OF FAITH. Solomon likely knew of the conspiracy of Adonijah; but he was as a deaf man that heard not. He seems to have quietly composed himself, leaving it to God and his friends to order all. God had a will as to that succession to the throne. Solomon understood it, and he could wait. Faith is patient. There may be delays and disasters. Enemies may seem to succeed against us. Providence may seem to be opposing. It may be wholly dark and ominous. But we are to compose ourselves and wait. VI. THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD. Adonijah considered the kingdom his by birthright, after the death of Absalom. He had, however, been set aside by Divine appointment. He had been welcomed with the cry: "God save King Adonijah!" Shall that conspiracy succeed? God had planned otherwise. No plan formed against the Almighty can permanently prosper. Wickedness may prevail for a time. Wicked men may come to crowning. There may be long bafflings and delayings in the fulfilment of prophecy. But God reigns. His word shall be accomplished. Here is our hope in reference to this lost world. We have only to find our place and do our work. The day is to dawn. There are to be turnings and overturnings. Kingdoms and empires are to rise and fall—all unto the end of the setting up of the kingdom of Christ on the earth. The day of jubilee is to be ushered in. (*Monday Club Sermons.*) *Solomon's succeeding David*:—This presents before us the last of those three equal reigns, of forty years each, which seem to be typical of the three dispensations: the Hebrew Church with its apostasy; the Christian Church during its militant period; and the millennial reign with its triumphant glory. If Solomon was thus the type of the "Prince of Peace," the fact that he ascended his throne only by displacing a usurper may find its correspondence in the usurpation of authority over this world, Christ's rightful realm, by the prince of darkness. Yet how sure stands the unchanging word, "I have set my King upon my holy hill of Zion"! Adonijah, who is mentioned fourth among David's sons, as his mother, Haggith, is fourth among David's wives, was a curious compound of physical beauty and grace with boundless conceit and impudence, arrogance, and ambition. He was a spoiled child: we are quaintly told in this chapter that "his father had not displeased him at any time in saying, Why hast thou done so?" Of his mother, Haggith, we get no glimpse, except as the record reveals that at Hebron, not long after Absalom's birth, she became the mother of this her only child, Adonijah. Her name in the Hebrew tongue means "dancer," and she was probably a gay, light, unprincipled woman, lacking both intellectual force and moral depth of character. This son certainly resembled this probable portrait of his mother. He was a "goodly man"; that is, of attractive personal presence—what, in our corruption of pure English, we would call a "handsome man." Yet his youthful passions were stronger than his principles, and his impulses trampled upon his convictions. As often happens in such cases, this son, who by reason of his mother's laxity and his own waywardness, needed a father's restraint the more, was subject to no parental authority or discipline whatever, and under no sceptre of family government. His ambition was reckless. Ordinarily, however much the favourite of his father, he could not have aspired to succeed him on the throne, for Ammon, Chileab, and Absalom would each in turn prefer the claim of primogeniture; but the death of these three elder brothers left Adonijah the eldest living son, and therefore a claimant to the royal succession. The throne was, however, pledged to Solomon, his younger brother, a child of promise, "beloved of the Lord," and better qualified every way for a wise and just ruler. Adonijah's ambition was not to be so easily thwarted. He saw with secret exultation the visible and rapid decline of his father's strength, and that the time had come to seize by force a crown which he could not secure by favour or procure by merit. Let us not forget the lesson's moral, which touches both parents and children. Parental

authority and filial obedience are among God's unchanging decrees. A Divine curse for ever alienated from Eli's house the sacred privilege of the priesthood; and this is the ground of the curse: "Because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not." Yet he did inquire into their conduct and severely rebuked it, and so was a better father than David, who did not even investigate Adonijah's course. How grand is the contrast of Abraham, who commanded his children and his household after him to do justice and judgment! There may be an indulgence which is innocent. To deny to a child the gratification of a proper and natural desire whose indulgence would work no harm to the child nor injustice to others may be unjust; capricious refusal may provoke to wrath a child who is disposed to obedience, and stir up mischief, if not malice. But promiscuous indulgence leaves children to grow up selfish, sensual, and reckless. One of the laws of the Mosaic code required every builder of a house to put a battlement around the roof; and that battlement, in the building of the household, is parental law. Where that exists a child falls into ruin only as he climbs over the battlement. Without pressing this lesson to the extreme of a fanciful typical interpretation, we may lawfully find in it illustrations of some most important truths: first of all, the secret of prevailing prayer. Bathsheba went before King David with confidence, for he had given his royal word of promise: "Surely Solomon thy son shall sit on my throne." There was no presumption in her plea; she was emboldened by the king's word: it was the confidence and courage of faith. And so she got her request, and the answer was immediate as well as sure: "Even so will I certainly do this day." What is our encouragement in prayer? The promise of the immutable God. No capricious moods make Him liable to repent or change His mind; no old age and failing faculties render Him liable to forget. We have to do with the eternal, unchanging God, whose word is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. A second illustration may be gathered from this lesson as to the providence of God overruling the evil designs of men and accomplishing His purposes. Everything seemed against Solomon when Adonijah, surrounded by his fellow-conspirators, was saluted as king. His throne was at risk, and even his life was in peril. But there was an old man, not yet dead, in whose feeble hands the sceptre still rested, and who had sworn that Solomon should be heir to the kingdom. A few words spoken by him unseated the usurper, dispersed his minions, and placed the child of promise upon the throne. How often "all things" seem against us, while "all things work together for our good." The god of this world has usurped the kingdom, and a host of followers rally round his standard. The apparent successes of the god of this world in seizing the reins of empire and oppressing the saints of the Most High shall make his ultimate defeat only the more overwhelming, complete, and final. (*A. T. Pierson, D.D.*) *Solomon succeeding David*:—I. A ROYAL ADVISER. 1. Visiting the king. 2. Honouring the king. (1) In advancing a good cause a little quiet planning may accomplish excellent results, and not be dishonest. Nathan and Bathsheba had made their arrangements beforehand. (2) In advancing a good cause, a good action or good advice wins much in efficacy by being skilfully performed or given. (3) In advancing a good cause a respectful demeanour toward those in authority costs nothing, and usually accomplishes much. (4) In advancing a good cause a good name is of the first importance. David knew at once that Nathan's plea was not for anything bad. II. A ROYAL USURPER. 1. Treacherous sacrifices. 2. Treacherous treatment. 3. Treachery suspected. (1) In advancing a bad cause, it is natural to have good things to eat. (2) In advancing a bad cause, its promoters are always forward in appealing to the Divine protection, "God save King Adonijah." (3) In advancing a bad cause, its promoters are generally exclusive in their friendships. Of course, Nathan was not admitted to a share in proceedings upon which he would have frowned. (4) In combating a bad cause, it is always best to come to a clear understanding of exactly who are its friends, and who its enemies. That is what Nathan sought in questioning David. (5) In combating a bad cause, the more care that is exercised the better. Every bad cause has at least one very skilful promoter, whose mere tools Adonijah and Abiathar and all the rest of them are. The devil keeps a close watch over his own interests. III. A ROYAL RULER. 1. His mother summoned. 2. His father promising. (1) By the Lord, his Redeemer. (2) To establish Solomon. 3. His mother rejoicing. (1) In act. (2) In word. 4. His reign established. (1) When a man must go forth to leave the duties of his earthly station, it is becoming that he should carefully consider in whose hands he shall

leave them. (2) When a man has an important question to decide, he seldom loses anything by inviting his wife to assist at the conference. (3) When a man is called to the test, he ought not to be long in making good his promises, if it is in his power to do so. (4) When a man is nearing the point of death, it is folly to defer doing as he has promised until the future. "So will I certainly do, this day." (5) When a man has humbled himself to *do*, it will seldom harm his wife to humble herself to *thank* him. (6) When a man is nearing the point of death, such a cry as "Let my lord King David live for ever," has its very serious aspects. (*Sunday School Times.*)

Ver. 36. **And Benaiah . . . said Amen.**—*The "Amen" of God and of man:*—Benaiah recognises the necessity that God shall ratify and effectuate man's desires and purposes. Man's "Amen" means "May it be so." Jehovah's "Amen" alone means "It shall be so." His words are the expression of—I. HUMAN HELPLESSNESS. Man's plans only succeed when in the way of God's Providence, and when carried out in His strength. The true, broad view of His Providence shows us a government of the world's affairs, which takes in the life of the highest and humblest, their aims, their work, their wants, their very sins and opposition, and, as here, makes all contribute to the revelation of His Son and the setting up of His kingdom. At the same time He can fulfil David's narrower plan, and secure Solomon's elevation. He can secure my private wish and His own will; He can harmonise the course, and aims, and wants, of two lives, or twenty, or a hundred, even if not to converge for many years to come. If they harmonise, it is because "He says so too." Men must strive in vain against God's purposes; or for their own, without Jehovah's "Amen." Men are, and are not, "architects of their own fortune." "Except the Lord build the house" of David, or Benaiah, or any other, "they labour in vain that build it." Babel-builders leave God out of their counsel; they must have Him in their work. Napoleon's fall dates from his words at Berlin: "I propose, and I dispose." "Man proposes, God disposes." II. HOPE. Human effort is not to be paralysed: "I cannot make my plan absolutely secure, or any plan, therefore I will do nothing." This is fatalism. There is a responsibility for effort lying on every man. David and Benaiah must propose. This done prayerfully and submissively, man may hope for a blessing on his effort. The godly man proposes, and may hope that God will "say so too." III. HUMILITY. Not the sullen submission which bows, and bears, and yields, because there is no choice, if He does not "say so too." But the reverent acknowledgment of a superior will to which a man loves to bow; the glad submission of every plan to the scrutiny and revision of a wise Father. 1. Let all our plans in life be conceived in this spirit. Write "D.V." upon every record of purpose and desire. 2. All must be conceived and carried out in His strength. In our vows—

> Thou art not only to perform Thy part,
> Thou also mine: as when the league was made,
> Thou didst at once Thyself indite
> And hold my hand, while I did write.—(Herbert.)

(*H. J. Foster.*)

Ver. 48. **Blessed be the Lord God of Israel.**—*The joy of aged and dying saints:*—It is matter of great joy and thankfulness to aged Christians, when they are dying, to leave their families in prosperous and peaceful circumstances; and especially, rising up in their stead to serve God and support religion. I. TO ILLUSTRATE THIS OBSERVATION. 1. It is a pleasure to an aged, dying Christian to leave his family in prosperous circumstances. It is the character of a good man, that he is not a lover of this world, nor anxiously solicitous about future events. Nevertheless, he considers himself as obliged, by the laws of nature, reason, and the gospel, to provide for those of his own house. He is not solicitous to heap up so much wealth for them as may be likely to make them idle, proud, and luxurious; but only so much as may fix them comfortably in the world; in that middle station which may be most friendly to their piety and happiness. He rejoiceth in that declaration of Solomon, "The just man walketh in his integrity: his children are blessed after him"; and he dieth with a full persuasion that it will be confirmed to his children. 2. It is a greater pleasure to him to leave his descendants in unity and love. Contentions and quarrels, between whomsoever they happen, are grievous to all the sons of peace, dishonourable to religion and injurious to

its power; but between those of the same stock and family they are most shameful and pernicious. The aged saint, when he is going to the world of peace, is delighted to see his descendants loving as brethren, courteous and kind one to another. 3. It is his greatest joy to leave his descendants in the way of holiness, and zealous for the support of religion. "A wise son," saith Solomon, "maketh a glad father. The father of a wise child rejoiceth in him": especially when he is quitting the stage of life, and can do no more for the Church of God than pour out his prayers for its prosperity. II. WHY SUCH A PROSPECT GIVETH SO MUCH JOY TO AGED AND DYING CHRISTIANS. 1. This joy ariseth, in part, from their natural love to their descendants. God hath implanted in all creatures a strong affection to their offspring, in order that they may preserve and sustain them till they are capable of providing for themselves. This natural instinct or affection is, in good men, sanctified by religion. 2. The concern which aged Christians feel for the honour of God and Christ, and for the continuance and spread of religion, increaseth this joy. The great object of a good man's desire is, "that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ"; that His perfections may be seen and manifested in the world, especially by the spread of His glorious gospel; and that He may receive that reverence, homage, and love, which is due to Him from all His rational, especially His redeemed, creatures. 3. His prospect of meeting his pious descendants again in the heavenly world. It is a most reviving and glorious consolation which the gospel affords to dying saints, that when they part with pious friends and relatives, it is not an eternal separation; it is indeed but a short one. For when Christ shall be revealed from heaven, there shall be "a gathering together of all His saints unto Him"; and He will so range and dispose them in the heavenly mansions, that those who were united in the bonds of pious friendship here, shall be happy in the renewed acquaintance and society of each other, and shall be ever with one another and with the Lord. III. INFERENCES. 1. It should be the earnest desire, and diligent care, of all parents, that they may have this joy. 2. Aged Christians who have this joy ought to be very thankful. Bless the Lord God of Israel, as David did, that He hath given you dutiful and religious children, and spared you to be witnesses of their holy conversation. 3. It is the duty of young persons to fulfil their parents' joy. Let them be solicitous to cherish and manifest those graces and dispositions which will afford their parents much comfort, especially when they are aged and dying. "The father of the righteous," saith Solomon, "shall greatly rejoice, and he that begetteth a wise child shall have joy of him. Thy father and thy mother shall be glad, and she that bare thee shall rejoice." (*J. Orton, S.T.P.*)

Ver. 50. Adonijah feared because of Solomon.—*The best way of overcoming*:—David did not directly attack this false kingdom of Adonijah's. He did set up the true kingdom in the place of the false. So the false fell because there was no room for it in the presence of the true. Here is admirable illustration of the best way of overcoming. Deduce the principle—crown the right, the true, the trustful, and these, thus resolutely set up, will crowd out and take the place of the bad and the false. Apply the principle—1. To the overcoming of evil thoughts. They are a common trouble. From the evil nature within us, the evil world without us, from the suggestions of Satan, from the laws of association under the action of which much of our thinking emerges, it is not surprising that evil thoughts should assault. What is to be done with them? How are they to be overcome? A frequent attempt is that of the sheer set of the will against them. But this is wearying, and frequently unsuccessful. A better way is to simply enthrone the true. Crown Solomon. Summon attention to the right. And thus in the presence of the crowned right thought and pure, the evil thought will fade and fail. Here is a test for the right sort of reading—a book which suggests evil is a book which ought not to be read. Here we can see the importance of daily devotion—study of the Bible and prayer. These things suggest and crown right thoughts and pure, and the mind, being occupied with these, will have no room or care for evil thoughts. 2. Apply this principle to the overcoming of despondency. Even the bravest and most hopeful are sometimes despondent—Moses, Elijah. A simple determination not to be despondent will not much help one. But there is a way of overcoming. The opposite of despondency is action. Crown that opposite. Set yourself, however despondent you may feel, bravely at the duty next you. The doing the duty will scatter the despondency. 3. Apply this principle to the overcoming of care and worry.

Take hold of a promise Crown that. The promise is the antidote for worry. 4. Apply this principle in the direction of social reform. It is not enough simply to attack the bad. Positively set up the good. A merely negative tearer-down is a poor sort of a reformer. 5. Let us sum up the whole thing—the best way to overcome the bad is to crown the good; and the Solomon for us to crown over thought, motive, deed, is Jesus Christ. The Christ-crowned in us will vanquish Adonijah. (*Homiletic Review.*) *The triumph of truth*:—The way to preach down error is to preach up truth. Never tackle Satan unless you are sure you can lay him. A great many men by opposing error have magnified it, have glorified it, have given dignity to a hitherto unseen and comparatively unknown foe. The most that churchgoing people have learned of some forms of error, they have learned from Christian pulpits. Now, the Christian pulpit is not erected to preach evils, but to preach the glory of God. Infidelity is noisy, but it is shallow. It is a failure, an ignominious failure. A little time ago in the history of New York, Thomas Paine said, "In five years there will not be a Bible in America." How we smile to-day when we read his words! Truth is to triumph just in proportion as we preach Christ, for as we liberate truth we will oppose error. (*R. S. Storrs.*)

CHAPTER II.

VERS. 1, 2. **Now the days of David drew nigh that he should die.**—*Human equality*:—We have here the dying charge of an old and experienced king to a young one. I. THAT ALL MEN ARE EQUAL IN THE SIGHT OF GOD; because—1. Kings even are not exempt from human mortality. 2. Nor from human frailty (ver. 2). 3. Nor from human responsibility (ver. 3). II. THAT OBEDIENCE TO THE WILL OF GOD INEVITABLY ISSUES IN PROSPERITY, in the best sense of the word. (*Pulpit Analyst.*) *David in view of death*:—The setting of David's sun was a gradual process, as is shown by the words, "Now the days of David drew nigh that he should die" (ver. 1). A very pathetic utterance is found in the second verse, namely, "I go the way of all the earth." From his earliest days he had been a favourite and a hero, and has it come to this, that at the last he must simply take his place in the great world-crowd, and go down to the common grave? God is no respecter of persons. Let us learn that all earthly distinctions are temporary, and that many exaltations only show their corresponding abasements the more conspicuously. Although the king is about to take his journey into a far country from which there is no return, he yet takes an interest in the future of Israel and the immediate responsibilities of his own house. His words to Solomon are the words of a soldier and a patriot: "Be thou strong therefore, and show thyself a man." There is no sign of death in this high moral energy. We can hardly imagine the voice of the speaker to have fallen into a whisper: it seems rather to resound with the force and clearness of a trumpet tone. A noble motto this—"Show thyself a man." Is it possible for a man to do otherwise? All human history returns an answer which cannot be mistaken. The man is not in the gender but in the character. By a "man" David means king, hero, prince; a soul thoroughly self-controlled, fearless, above all bribery and corruption, and vitally identified with the enduring interests of the people. It must be observed that the charge delivered to Solomon by his father was intensely religious in its spirit. Not only was Solomon introduced to a throne, but the book of the law was placed in his hands, and he was simply to peruse it, understand it, and apply it. Nothing was to be invented by the king himself. He begins his monarchical life with the whole law clearly written out before him. This is the advantage with which we begin our life, namely, that we have nothing to write, invent, suggest, or test by way of perilous experiment; we have simply to consult the holy oracles, to make them the man of our counsel, and to do nothing whatever which is not confirmed by their spirit. Where, then, is originality? We must find the originality in our personal faithfulness. It will be originality enough for God if He can find us acting consistently with the knowledge we already possess, and embodying it in new and sacrificial incarnations. Now we come to official words. From this point so terrible is the charge which David delivers to Solomon that we must impress ourselves with the fact that the charge is official

rather than personal. We must imagine David seated upon the throne of judgment and delivering sentences as the messenger of God; this will save his speech from the charge of vindictiveness and cruelty. It should be noticed also, in connection with these judgments and sentences, that in every case a reason was assigned. That is a vital point. Looking at Joab's conduct to David, to the two captains of the hosts of Israel, and to Abner, and unto Amasa, and unto Absalom, we cannot but feel that the proportion between the guilt and the doom is measured by righteousness. That David was not carried away by indiscriminate retaliation is proved by the change of tone which he adopts when he comes to speak of the sons of Barzillai the Gileadite: "Let them be of those that eat at thy table"; in this case also a reason is assigned for the judgment: "for so they came to me when I fled because of Absalom thy brother." Instances of this kind show how clear was the mental vision of the king even in the near approach of death. Nothing was forgotten. Judgment was meted out with discernment. David does not forget that when Shimei came down to meet him at Jordan, he sware unto the Lord, saying that Shimei should not be put to death with the sword. In Israel all pardon ceased with the death of the king, and it was for his successor to say whether this pardon should be renewed, or whether judgment should take effect. David seems to refer to this law when, concerning Joab, he said to Solomon: "Do therefore according to thy wisdom" (ver. 6). These words would seem to open a door of possible escape. But Joab proved himself unworthy of any protection, and brought his death upon his head with his own hand. So in the case of Shimei, David said to Solomon, "Thou art a wise man, and knowest what thou oughtest to do unto him," so the judgment was not to be an act of violence or mere triumph of might over weakness; it was to be marked by that terrible calmness which adds to judgment its most awful elements of impressiveness. David was now giving judgment according to the age in which he lived: it was not a highly civilised age: the law had only reached a certain point of development: David, therefore, must not be held responsible for the law under which we ourselves live. David's Lord said—"Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you." "So David slept with his fathers, and was buried in the city of David" (ver. 10). He died as it were in the act of pronouncing judgment, and himself went to be judged by the Eternal King. How near is that bar to every one of us; the final word is not spoken by man; he can but give judgment according to his light, or to his immediate understanding of the circumstances which appeal to him; there is one Judge who will rectify all our decisions and readjust everything which we have thrown into disorder. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *The close of life not to be dreaded by the believer*:—Why should we be pensive and wistful when we think how near our end is? Is the sentry sad as the hour for relieving guard comes nigh? Is the wanderer in far-off lands sad as he turns his face homeward? And why should not we rejoice at the thought that we, strangers and foreigners here, shall soon depart to the true metropolis, the mother country of our souls? I do not know why a man should be either regretful or afraid as he watches the hungry sea eating away his "bank and shoal of time" upon which he stands, even though the tide has all but reached his feet, if he knows that God's strong arm will be stretched forth to him at the moment when the sand dissolves from under him, and will draw him out of many waters and place him on high, above the floods in that stable land where there is "no more sea." (*A. Maclaren.*)

Ver. 2. **Be thou strong therefore, and shew thyself a man.**—*Religion not unmanly*:—This is interesting in many ways, interesting as a picture, and as a specimen of counsel. It is an old man speaking to a young one, a king to his successor, an aged warrior to a youthful man of peace, a man of action to a man of knowledge, a dying man to a man on the threshold of his earthly career, one who had done with earth to one who was entering on its fulness, a father to a son, a David to a Solomon. When he advised Solomon to show himself a man, he attached no low and feeble sense to the term. David was a judge of manliness. Yet to his advice to Solomon to be manly he appends a description of character and of a course of action, which therefore was in his estimation manly, or at the least not unmanly. "Show thyself a man," he says, "and keep the charge of the Lord thy God, to walk in His ways, to keep His statutes, and His command-

ments, and His judgments, and His testimonies, as it is written in the law of Moses." Now all this is summed up in one word, and that is religion. In the opinion of King David, then, religion is manly. Religion then furnishes ample room for manly sentiments and manly courses of action. Nay, it requires them and makes them necessary. I. IT INVOLVES THE CHOICE OF A GREAT OBJECT. It sets a man upon living for a great end, the greatest end that he can live for. To see grown-up men occupying themselves in petty concerns, suffering them to engross their thoughts and their time and their powers, making them their all, concentrating upon them their energies and their efforts, following them with a zeal, an earnestness, and a pertinacity utterly disproportionate and exaggerated, it is a pitiable sight, ridiculous if it were not also melancholy. This is puerile, boyish, effeminate. The things of a child are very proper things for a child. There is fitness, there is beauty, there is use, in his devotion to them. But how unseemly, how contemptible, how offensive, is such a devotion in a man. We judge of men by the elevation and magnitude of their pursuits. We think a fop a puerile creature, who lives to look pretty and smell sweet. And the man "whose God is his belly," who lives to eat, and lays out his mind on marketing and cookery, is another great child. Such men are still busy with their playthings a little changed in form. But does any man rise to the height of himself who lives for this world? Is there not in all such living the same sort of dwarfing and disparagement of the true greatness and dignity of human nature, the same sad incongruity and disproportion? II. THERE IS MANLINESS AGAIN IN DECISION, FIRMNESS, AND CONSTANCY OF PURPOSE. It is characteristic of children that they do not know their own minds, that they are the sport of whim and caprice, unsteady, vacillating, freakish, easily diverted from their aim, easily discouraged by difficulties, deficient in persistency, resolution, and concentration. When we see a child more fixed and consistent in the choice of an end than children are wont to be, we call him precocious, a manly child; and if this quality is not so prominent as to be premature and unnatural, we say it augurs well for the boy's future. To see a grown man the victim of fugitive preferences, impressions, and impulses, "a wave of the sea, driven with the wind and tossed," is wretched. We say then that fixedness, concentration, steadfastness, are attributes of a man, are essential to the development of a truly manly character. And where are they so exhibited as in religion, if it be genuine and true? What else so tends to form and foster them? What else so draws the whole life as it were to a single focus?—so forces all its streams to run into one reservoir? What else gives life such unity, coherence, and connection of parts? III. THERE IS MANLINESS IN INDEPENDENCE; and this is emphatically a religious virtue. The Christian must be singular, and pursue a path not trodden by the multitude. And he must be content ordinarily to pursue it in the face of misconception, misconstruction, remonstrance, and derision. This is to no small extent "the offence of the cross." To be unlike others, to be looked upon with curiosity, to be thought affected or ostentatious, is trying. So, to keep a separate and isolated position, to be one by one's self, and stand an anomaly and exception, self-centred and self-sustained, without the ordinary props of human opinion and usage, requires largely independence of character. Independence is a quality of manhood. A child is a conformist and a copyist. It leans upon the parent, and holds itself up by clinging to an older person, as the ivy hangs upon the tree or wall. It goes in leading strings, and looks timidly out for examples and precedents and authorities. To think and act for himself, to mark out his own line of action and pursue it, to have the reasons and the law of his actions in himself, and not to swerve from his path at dictation or censure or contempt, is to vindicate one's maturity, to act the part of a man. Does not religion then stand vindicated from the charge of unmanliness? And is not David's counsel to Solomon his son justified and sustained—Be manly and be religious, be manly in your religion, and religious in order to be manly? Is not religion successfully rescued from one of the most effective and damaging aspersions that is ever cast upon it—that it is unmanly, that it is a suitable thing for the softer sex, and pretty in children, but not at all fit for robust, hardy, deep-thinking, bold-acting men? It is not in the slightest degree true. (*R. A. Hallam, D.D.*). *Dignity of man*:—The dignity of man appears from his bearing the image of his Maker. God has, besides, enstamped a dignity upon man by giving him not only a rational, but an immortal existence. The soul, which is properly the man, shall survive the body and live for ever. The dignity of man also appears from the great attention and regard which God hath paid to him. God indeed

takes care of all His creatures, and His tender mercies are over all His works: but man has always been the favourite child of Providence. I. MAN HATH A CAPACITY FOR CONSTANT AND PERPETUAL PROGRESSION IN KNOWLEDGE. II. MAN HATH A CAPACITY FOR HOLINESS AS WELL AS KNOWLEDGE. His rational and moral faculties both capacitate and oblige him to be holy. His perception and volition, in connection with his reason and conscience, enable him to discern and feel the right and wrong of actions, and the beauty and deformity of characters. This renders him capable of doing justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly with God. III. THAT MAN HATH A CAPACITY FOR HAPPINESS, EQUAL TO HIS CAPACITY FOR HOLINESS AND KNOWLEDGE. Knowledge and holiness are the grand pillars which support all true and substantial happiness; which invariably rises or falls, accordingly as these are either stronger or weaker. Knowledge and holiness in the Deity are the source of all his happiness. Angels rise in felicity as they rise in holiness and knowledge. And saints here below grow in happiness as they grow in grace, and in the knowledge of holy and Divine objects. IV. THAT MAN HATH A CAPACITY FOR GREAT AND NOBLE ACTIONS. 1. We may justly infer from the nature and dignity of man, that we are under indispensable obligations to religion. Our moral obligations to religion are interwoven with the first principles of our nature. And, as man is formed for religion, so religion is the ornament and perfection of his nature. The man of religion is, in every supposable situation, the man of dignity. Pain, poverty, misfortune, sickness and death, may indeed veil, but they cannot destroy his dignity, which sometimes shines with more resplendent glory under all these ills and clouds of life. 2. This subject may help us to ascertain the only proper and immutable boundaries of human knowledge: such boundaries of our knowledge as arise from the frame and constitution of our nature, and not from any particular state or stage of our existence. 3. This subject gives us reason to suppose, that men, in the present state, may carry their researches into the works of nature, much farther than they have ever yet carried them. The fields of science, though they have been long traversed by strong and inquisitive minds, are so spacious, that many parts remain yet undiscovered. 4. The observations, which have been made upon the nobler powers and capacities of the human mind, may embolden the sons of science to aim to be originals. They are strong enough to go alone, if they only have sufficient courage and resolution. They have the same capacities, and the same original sources of knowledge, that the ancients enjoyed. 5. We are under indispensable obligations to cultivate and improve our minds in all the branches of human knowledge. All our natural powers are so many talents, which, in their own nature, lay us under moral obligations to improve them to the best advantage. Being men, we are obliged to act like men, and not like the horse or the mule which have no understanding. (*N. Emmons, D.D.*) *Show thyself a man*:—On the sixth of March, in the year 1741, the brilliant statesman, William Pitt, afterwards Earl of Chatham, felt it necessary to apologise from his place in the House of Commons for what he styled "the atrocious crime of being a young man." The sneers at youth which provoked this wrathful protest are seldom heard to-day. In this more democratic age the value of young men as a factor in human affairs is better understood. The elder Disraeli has pointed out that "almost everything that is great in the story of the race has been done by youth," and Thomas Carlyle has taught us that the history of heroes is the history of young men. We remember that in war the victories of Hannibal and Alexander, of Clive and Napoleon, were the triumphs of young men; that Innocent III. and Leo X., the greatest of the Popes, had won the tiara before they were thirty-seven, and that Martin Luther at five-and-thirty had achieved the Reformation. We remember that Pascal and Sir Isaac Newton had written their greatest treatises before they were thirty; that Raphael and Correggio among painters; Byron, Shelley, and Keats among poets; Mozart, Beethoven, Mendelssohn, Schubert, and Bellini among musicians—these, and many more too numerous to quote, had won their place among the immortals and died while they were yet young men. We have come to recognise that the qualities which command success—dash, courage, hopefulness, fertility of invention and resources—are often more abundant in youth than in age; and knowing how largely young men have made the world's history in time past, we look to young men as the history-makers of time present and to come. There is little peril to-day of our despising young men on account of their youth; we rather need to be warned against despising old men on account of their age. The position which young men thus take in modern life adds a tone of deeper emphasis and keener urgency to the ancient,

familiar, and inspiring exhortation of my text. The injunction echoes the words which Moses addressed to Joshua when he entrusted him with command. A thousand years later we meet it again in Paul's appeal to Timothy: "Thou, therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus," as also in the exhortation to the Corinthians, when Timothy was coming amongst them: "Watch ye; stand fast in the faith; quit you like men; be strong!" Again and again in profane history, in the pages of Homer, Herodotus, or Xenophon, we find great chieftains charging their followers in the same strain. Modern history likewise takes up the call, Latimer in the fire exclaiming: "Be of good comfort, Master Ridley; play the man!" Nelson at Trafalgar sounding the war-cry: "England expects every man to do his duty." Every mother who sends her son into the world breathes the spirit of it. The words imply an ideal. John Trebonius, Martin Luther's schoolmaster, always took his hat off to his schoolboys. "Who can tell," he would say, "what man there may be here?" There was wisdom in the act, for among those boys was the solitary monk that shook the world. Yet it is not every man who becomes all that we mean by a man. Vanity emasculates some, and they become—not men, but the show-blocks of their hatter, the lay-figures and walking advertisements of their tailor. Indolence destroys others, and they become—not men, but manikins dependent on the charity of their relations, and parasites that live by suction. Vice is the degradation of others, until, sinking below shame, unworthy utterly of "the human form—erect, divine," they become as swine in sensuality or as wolves in brutal ferocity. But even if men escape these degradations they may still remain immeasurably below the standard implied in this great word, "a man."

> Unless above himself he can
> Erect himself, how poor a thing is man!

What, then, is this ideal? What is it that every woman puts into her love and every man into his self-respect when we sound the challenge: "Show thyself a man"? What are the marks by which a sterling manhood may be known? I. ONE MARK OF MANHOOD IS STRENGTH. "Be thou strong, therefore, and show thyself a man." In the notion of an ideal man we all include the attribute of physical strength. It is true that some have asserted their manhood in spite of bodily infirmity. The Apostle Paul carried the Gospel over two continents, notwithstanding that he was half blind and paralysed. Richard Baxter, the most voluminous writer and most successful pastor of his day, was a lifelong invalid. Dr. George Wilson was accustomed to deliver his lectures with a great blister on his chest. Bishop Butler, who wrote the *Analogy of Religion*, and James Watt, inventor of the steam engine, were both so harassed with bile and consequent melancholy as to be constantly tempted to make away with themselves. The lives of such men are notable illustrations of the triumph of mental energy over bodily infirmities, and should encourage those of us who suffer from constitutional debility; but they do not make physical weakness either natural or desirable. Young men ought to be strong, ought to take pleasure in vigorous exercises, ought to remember the ancient proverb: "The glory of young men is their strength." In this matter of physical culture I say to every young man: "Show thyself a man." More, however, than either physical or mental strength, as sunlight is more than moonlight or starlight, is moral strength. In the high firmament of ideal manhood, moral strength is the greater light that rules the day. You must put the element of conscience, you must put love for righteousness and hatred of evil-doing into your conception of manly vigour, or you never can truly say of any man what Marc Antony said of Brutus:—

> The elements were
> So mixed in him that Nature might stand up
> And say to all the world—this was a man.

II. A SECOND MARK OF MANHOOD IS SAGACITY. Milton asks: "What is strength without a double share of wisdom?" and then he adds: "Strength is not made to rule, but to subserve, where wisdom bears command." He that would show himself a man must couple sagacity with strength; for we live in a world of illusions, which are like traps at a young man's feet. You young men of this new generation are face to face with what Carlyle described as "the Everlasting No."

To every precept of heaven the devil brings a "No." "Fear God and keep His commandments." "No," says the devil; "indulge your passions." "Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him for ever." "No," says the devil; "man's chief end is to glorify himself and enjoy his own way." "He that findeth his life shall lose it, and he that loseth his life for My sake shall find it." "No," says the devil; "let every other man be damned, body and soul, and what does it matter to you?" This "Everlasting No" meets us at every call of duty, and has to be resisted and foresworn once and for ever, or we cut ourselves adrift from every possibility of achieving the ideal manhood. Thousands of men to-day are crippled and emasculated by this negative of unbelief. Their loss is incalculable. Themselves are stripped of blessing, and their influence is emptied of power. To the devil's "Everlasting No" do you oppose God's "Everlasting Yes." Be positive and practical; add sagacity to strength. III. A THIRD MARK OF MANHOOD IS SAINTLINESS. A saint is one who lives unto God, and in whom God's will is law. Here manliness completes itself. Man being created in the image of God, we can regard none as attaining the ideal of manhood who does not in thought, purpose, impulse, and deed reflect the God in whom he lives, moves, and has his being; and is not this what we mean by saintliness? Saintliness includes honesty, for it accepts the golden rule: "Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you do ye also to them"; and does not Pope affirm "an honest man's the noblest work of God"? Saintliness includes the service of others; for every saint is a follower of Him who "came not to be ministered unto, but to minister and give His life a ransom for many." And does not Lord Lytton remind us—

That man is great, and he alone
Who serves a greatness not his own
For neither praise nor pelf.
Content to know and be unknown,
Whole in himself!

Strength, sagacity, saintliness—these three, and the greatest of these is saintliness, if any one of us would show himself a man. (*W. J. Woods, B.A.*) *Manhood*:—The last words of any one, as he takes his departure for the eternal world, are always of interest to those left behind. Even the last utterances of the criminal on the scaffold will be read by thousands, who would not have listened to one word of his when he stood begging at their door. The last words of great and good men, when spoken to those near and dear to them, are therefore of especial interest. I. THE CHARGE OF THE DYING FATHER. It is that of a king to his successor, who is soon to ascend the throne of Israel. The position is so responsible, the charge will be long and weighty. But no; how short the address, how few the directions—"Show thyself a man." Be a man, that is all. Yes, but that is everything. Be a man, such as God made; not the distorted, crooked, perverted creature sin has made. II. WHAT IS IMPLIED IN THIS CHARGE. *Vir* was the word the Romans used for man, and from which our word virtue comes. Virtue, too, with them meant courage, heroism. Whatever therefore is virtuous is manly. Truthfulness is a virtue, and therefore manly. God is truth. Man is most manly when most like God, for he was made in the image of God. Honesty is paying our just debts, paying honour to whom honour is due, exercising supreme love to God, and loving our fellow-men as ourselves (Matt. xxii. 27). Hence, a true man, a real man, must be a Christian and a gentleman. Temperance, patience, kindness, gentleness, unselfishness, are all virtues, and therefore manly. The gentleman's code of honour is found in Phil. iv. 8. III. THE FOUNDATION OF MANHOOD IS STRENGTH. Strength of purpose, will-power, determination, self-control, power to resist popular customs when wrong, prevalent vices that have become aristocratic, fashions and habits of evil that have fastened on people whom you consider above you in age, experience, and profession; power to be called eccentric, odd, queer, to be sneered at. You need a courage that will not dilly-dally with evil, but at the first solicitation say "no," that will "dare to do right, dare to be true." Hence in this brief charge the very first accents are, "Be thou strong." David knew it required strength. IV. THE SOURCE OF THIS STRENGTH IS IN GOD. Moses, Joshua, Paul, Luther, Wesley, were men of mighty power, and they all found their strength in God. V. THE IMPORTANT AIM OF THIS CHARGE WAS THE RIGHT DEVELOPMENT AND FORMATION OF CHARACTER. This should be the first aim of every young man. This is the first aim of the

Gospel, now so often overlooked in this busy, bustling, noisy age. Paul's first instruction to Timothy was, "Take heed unto thyself." Deceit, falsehood, lust, &c., are all intruders. Cast them out, show thyself. Let not the animal reign, but the man. Be a man, and then you will be what every true man is—a king. (*G. H. Smyth.*) *How men are made*:—To be a man requires a trinity of qualities: a strong body, a full-orbed mind, and a spiritual nature. 1. Young men, it is your duty to cultivate your physical strength by athletic sports, gymnastics, and other exercises that will help to fortify the noble temple in which God has housed your mind and soul. It matters not how valuable the possessions that are stored in a house, if the house is insecure or the roof leaky. It is no credit to a man to be so careless about the house in which the priceless treasures of mind and spirit are placed that the building becomes worn out before its time. If you and I are going to do efficient work in this the busiest age of the world's history, if we are to hold our own in the fierce competition of this the greatest of all commercial periods, we will need sturdy muscles, stout lungs, healthy livers, and good digestion. A man handicaps himself seriously in the race of life who pays no regard to the rules of health. On the other hand, a man with a healthy body has better chances of success, because health inspires him with hope and ambition. Thomas Carlyle gave to the world a jaundiced view of many things because he had a weak stomach. What misery he caused in his own home, and in the life of that patient martyr-wife of his, has been revealed in the letters of Jane Welsh Carlyle. Many a man who most sacredly keeps the Ten Commandments breaks with impunity the laws of health. 2. The development of the body, however, is not all that makes up man. A prize-fighter has a well-developed body, but his influence does not count for much outside of the prize-ring. There is a mind to be cultivated and a soul. The man who devotes himself entirely to physical development will be apt to forget the needs of the other two parts of his nature. If all the energy in a man's nature is running to brawn, there will be nothing left to run to brain. The men who have compelled the world's attention have not been physical giants but men of mental and moral muscle. Napoleon, Wellington, and Grant were not great in body. If the ideal of a perfect man consisted only in physical qualities, we should be lower in the scale than certain animals. The ox surpasses a man in muscular strength; the antelope in speed; the hound in keenness of scent; the eagle in eyesight; the rabbit in acuteness of hearing; the honey-bee in delicacy of taste; the spider in fineness of nervous energy. So we cannot measure a man by his body, nor by his material possessions. We have advanced beyond the age in which the world counted as its greatest heroes Hercules, Ajax, Crœsus, Miltiades. The world to-day is ruled not by muscle, but by mind and heart. The bravest are the tenderest, the loving are the daring. A young man's value to the world and to himself depends largely on the cultivation of his intellect. Just as in the cultivation of the body you have to regard suitable food and proper exercise, so in the development of the mind you have to consider the kind of food. Every young man ought to mark out for himself a course of reading in history, biography, poetry, and philosophy. Another thing: As you would not knowingly take into your system diseased meat, or decayed fruit or vegetables, in like manner you will not desire to poison your mind by the reading of impure books. The quality of our thoughts determines the quality of our character. Impure thoughts are worms which eat away the tissues of moral character. The man who falls a victim to temptation is the man whose character has become worm-eaten. Guard most sacredly the door of the mind, and keep it closed against the entrance of evil thoughts. Had General Grant been a man of weak will, he never could have carried the campaigns of the Civil War through to success. Yet his memoirs reveal a man with a heart as tender as a girl's, hating war and disliking the very sound of a gun, but possessed of such self-command that to foresee a thing necessary to be done was to command, even though he had to fight it out on one line all summer. Opposition, discouragement, difficulties, never can keep a man of will power down. The party leaders at Rome thought they would get rid of the ambitious young Cæsar, so they gave him a commission which necessitated a prolonged absence from Rome and a difficult expedition into the heart of an uncivilised and unexplored region of country. They said: "Rome never again will hear of young Cæsar." But the young man conquered Gaul, and returning after a campaign of ten years seized the sceptre of imperial power. It is a sad thing to see a man in whom the will power has gone to decay. Dr. Maudsley, the English scientist, says the beginning of recovery from mental derangement is always

a revival of the power of the will. When an expert in an insane asylum finds a patient able to execute some new plan of conduct, and to hold himself in the pursuit of it for hours at a time, he is apt to say that that man will soon go out of the asylum. 3. Let me now come to the final quality that goes into the make-up of symmetrical manhood, and that is the spiritual nature. Physical strength is good, but it is only the cellar foundation of the house. No one would be content to live in the cellar, no matter how well stocked it might be with provisions and other comforts. He would at least want to have another storey to the building, and we have spoken of the intellectual development. But to stop with that would be like dwelling in a library, or art gallery, and never having any higher rooms where we might come into fellowship with the Creator, and with His Son, our Saviour. To change the figure, let me say that to neglect the spiritual nature, as some men have done, equipping the physical and mental natures with everything needful, is like building a splendid ship and leaving off the rudder. The spiritual nature in a man is the rudder which controls his thoughts and purposes. Sometimes a ship at sea is found flying the signal, "Not under control." That is a very terrible signal. The splendid athlete who can win a boat race, or in the arena knock out his opponent, may be only a baby in his moral manhood. A man with muscles strong enough to fell a horse may be weak enough to yield to some subtle temptation. The secret is spiritual character. You remember what men said of the noble Greek who governed his city by unwritten laws—"Phocion's character is more than the constitution." The power of character in Lamartine was such that during the bloodiest days in Paris he never bolted his doors, and once when he rose to speak the one who introduced him said: "Sixty years of a pure life are about to address you." Emerson says there was a certain power in Lincoln, Washington, and Burke not to be explained by their printed words. John Milton said: "A good man is the ripe fruit our earth holds up to God." If the Roman youth were elevated in spirit by standing one day each week in a room devoted to the statuary of great heroes, and making vows to their imaginary presence, how much more are we ennobled when we go into the presence of the infinite and eternal Jehovah, who is able to impart to us the transforming influence of His Holy Spirit. (*D. H. Martin, D.D.*) *Duty and privilege*:—This is the parting advice of a king to his son, whose right it was to grasp the sceptre as it fell from the pallid hand of his dying father. I. BE THOU STRONG. Not boastful or self-confident, but "strong." 1. What is this strength? It does not consist in feelings of pleasure at seeing others doing good, or in desiring to do good ourselves. A man led captive by the devil at his will may have them. Christian strength puts a man at his post, and keeps him there; holds up in the day of severest conflict, when many are fainting. 2. How is this strength obtained? From God alone, through our Lord Jesus Christ. How from Him? Repent of all sins. Resolve to break from all sins, and live a devoted Christian life. Cultivate personal trust in Christ as your Saviour, and believe that God for His sake pardons and saves you. II. SHOW THYSELF A MAN. Let it not be a mere inference, but a palpable fact; a demonstration. "Show thyself." Men put a value upon us according to how we show ourselves. Don't leave it to others to show that you are a man; do it yourself. Not an angel, but a man. There is no instrument God can use in so many ways and places, and with such wonderful success, as a devoted Christian who can show himself a man—a man who has the tear of sympathy for the sorrowing, a word of comfort for the bereaved, and a word of hope for the downcast and desponding. (*Homilist.*) *A son charged to be brave*:—The sword presented by the Emperor William to his little son, the Crown Prince, on his tenth birthday, contains an inscription on its blade, of which the following is a translation: "Trust in God. Be brave in combat to preserve honour and glory. He who fights bravely, relying on the help of God, is never overcome. All your powers of body and mind belong to your country. To my dear son William, May 6, 1892.—WILHELM R." *In what manliness consists*:—True manliness is to stick to your principles if they be good and right. When Garfield was a lad at Williams College, he climbed up Mount Greylock one day with many of his companions, and spent the night on the mountain top. Seated around a camp fire they sang college songs and told stories all the evening. At length Garfield took a Testament out of his pocket, and said: "Boys, it is my custom to read a chapter before going to bed and have a prayer. Shall we have it together?" And they all did. We admire the boy for his courage. *Learning to be brave*:—Mr. Mortimer Mempes, in his *World's Children*, gives some remark-

able specimens of the Spartan training in courage that the boys of Japan must all undergo. All kinds of games are played to test the character in this particular of the children. They are told thrilling stories of dragons and giants, and, when worked up to terror, each boy has to go into a darkened room and bring out a strand of wick which is burning in a dish of oil; and this, too, with a smiling face, absolutely unruffled. Another favourite game is to gather in a lonely graveyard, under a tree, and plant flags in a haunted spot. Then each boy is made to walk up the avenue alone, pull out a flag slowly, with dignity, and without a nervous tremor. So, having borne the yoke in his youth, his courage is believed to be equal to all demands upon it in later life. *Play the man for God*:—On one occasion when Whitfield was surrounded by a mob, and began to show symptoms of alarm as the stones flew in all directions, his wife, standing by his side, cried out, "Now, George, play the man for God." We are to play the man in the battle of life because God made us to be manly and not unmanly; because the Son of Man came upon earth to show us how to suffer and be strong; because if we fear God we shall have no other fear. (*Quiver.*)

Ver. 7. **Shew kindness unto the sons of Barzillai.**—*Gratitude for kindnesses repaid*:—An old English story tells of Frescobald, an Italian merchant who showed great kindness to Thomas Cromwell when he was in sore distress far from home. The stranger was welcomed to the merchant's dwelling, and sent back safely to England. Years passed, and reverses came to Frescobald. He lost wealth and friends, and wandered as a beggar to this country. One day he saw a great crowd moving along the streets of London. The Lord Chancellor was going in state to open the courts. To Frescobald's delight, the central figure of the procession was his old friend Thomas Cromwell. The Italian merchant soon reaped the fruit of his generous kindness in other days. Cromwell's hospitality and munificence quickly made him forget all his care and sorrow. (*J. Telford, B.A.*) *Sympathy with monarch appreciated*:—Sympathy for those who are stronger, wealthier, healthier, more influential, and higher in authority than ourselves, is not so easily rendered. It does not often occur to us to extend the sympathetic hand or word to those whom we look upon as in any way our superiors, and yet none need our sympathy more than such as these. The minister is expected to feel for and with his parishioners, but the truth is that the minister needs sympathetic encouragement from them quite as much. So, too, of the physician and his patient. One of Tennyson's biographers quotes the Queen as saying of the Laureate, "When I took leave of him I thanked him for his kindness, and said I needed it, for I had gone through much, and he said, 'You are so alone on that terrible height; it is terrible.'" The sovereign appreciated kindness, consideration, and sympathy from her subjects, and the poet had a full realisation of what it meant to be so high up as to be practically alone in the world. We easily give our pity, our sympathy, and even our helping hand, to those who seem to us in sore stress, but we are not so thoughtful about what consolation and strength we might give to those who need it because their very elevation isolates them, and cuts them off from those human relations to which we all look for sympathetic aid. (*Great Thoughts.*) *Barzillai*:—Barzillai's truly Highland courtesy, also, is abundantly conspicuous in the too-short glimpse we get of the lord of Rogelim. For, how he anticipated all David's possible wants! How he put himself into all David's distressed place! How he did to David as David would have done to him! How he came down from his high seat, with all his years on his head, in order with his own hand to conduct the king over Jordan! And, then, with what sweetness and music of manner and of speech he excused himself out of all the royal rewards and honours and promotions David had designed and decreed to put upon him!

> The service and the loyalty I owe,
> In doing, pays itself. Your Highness' part
> Is to receive our duties; and our duties
> Are to your throne and state children and servants,
> Which do but what they should, by doing everything
> Safe towards your love and honour.
> The rest is labour which is not used for you.

The humility, also, of that Old Testament hero is already our New Testament humility in its depth and sweetness and beauty. In my spare hours this winter

I have been delighting myself with Plutarch's *Lives* in Thomas North's Bible English. But how often as I read one noble name after another have I exclaimed, Oh, if some of those great men of old had only been among the Greeks who came to Philip, saying, "Sir, we would see Jesus!" Had they only seen Jesus, or even heard or read Paul! Then what ornaments would they have been in all New Testament nobleness and courtesy and humility. (*Alex. Whyte, D.D.*)

Vers. 8, 9. **And, behold, thou hast with thee Shimei, the son of Gera.**—*David and Shimei*:—David's death-bed has never been without its own difficulties to thoughtful and reverential readers. For Shimei with all his good and his bad uses comes back again to David's death-bed to tempt and to try David, and to discover what is in David's dying heart. The death-bed sayings of God's saints have a special interest and a delightful edification to us; but David's last words to Solomon about Shimei—we would pass them by if we could. Three or four several explanations of those terrible words of David have been offered to the distressed reader by able men and men of authority in such matters. I shall only mention those offered explanations, and leave you to judge for yourselves. Well, some students of the Old Testament are bold to take David's dreadful words about Shimei out of David's mouth altogether, and to put them into the mouth of the prophet who has preserved to us David's life and death. Those awful words, they say, are that righteous prophet's explanation and vindication of the too late execution of Shimei by Solomon after his "reprieve," as Matthew Henry calls it, had come to an end with the death of David. Others again, and they, too, some of our most conservative and orthodox scholars, say to us that the text should run in English in this way: "Hold him not guiltless; at the same time bring *not* his hoar head down to the grave with blood." You will blame me for my too open ear to such bold scholarship; and you will think it very wrong in me to listen to such evil men. But the heart has its reasons, as Pascal says, and my heart would stretch a considerable point in textual criticism to get Shimei's blood wiped off David's death-bed. Another interpretation is to take the text as it stands, and to hear David judicially charging Solomon about a case of too long delayed justice against a blasphemer of God and the king. And then the last explanation is the most painful one of all, and it is this, that David had never really and truly, and at the bottom of his heart, forgiven Shimei for his brutality and malignity at Bahurim, and that all David's long-suppressed revenge rushed out of his heart against his old enemy when he lay on his bed and went back on the day on which he had fled from Jerusalem. You can choose your own way of looking at David's death-bed. But, in any case, it is Bahurim that we shall all carry home, and carry for ever henceforth, in our hearts. We shall have, God helping us, David's Bahurim-mind always in us henceforth amid all those who insult and injure us, and say all manner of evil against us falsely; and amid all manner of adverse and sore circumstances, so as to see the Lord in it all, and so as to work out our salvation amid it all. And the Lord will look upon our affliction also, and will requite us good for all this evil, if only we wisely and silently and adoringly submit ourselves to it. (*Alex. Whyte, D.D.*) *The sins of godly men*:—There are three ways in which David may have been influenced in giving this dying injunction to his son—I. AS THE AGENT, UNCONSCIOUS OR OTHERWISE, OF DIVINE JUSTICE. We cannot conceive this measure as being the consummation of a Divine purpose, it had apparently so much about it of human plan. The Almighty's power, when exerted in support of justice, has always been certain and direct in its action, without any reference to contingencies. A man's punishment never precedes his crime, nor is inflicted without one. With God it is all justice or all mercy; no half measures. No sparing for a time in uncertainty or doubt as to our guilt, begetting in us a sense of false security, till suddenly the knell of doom sounds on our deafened ears. How different from man's punishment this. The very manner of Shimei's death is the greatest argument against its having been ordained by God (vers. 36–46.) David's conduct in giving this dying injunction to his son may have been influenced—II. BY A CONSCIENTIOUS DESIRE TO ADMINISTER HUMAN JUSTICE, ACCORDING TO THE WILL OF GOD. David, we are told, was a man of God, one after His own heart. How, then, with such clear perceptions of the Divine attributes, can we conceive of him as acting in this matter conscientiously and with cool judgment, in the full belief of the harmony of his decree with Almighty rectitude? To do so is to dishonour the unswerving

uprightness of God's justice, or to depreciate David's experiences and knowledge of the Divine character. We would rather be left to our final alternative in—III. REGARDING HIS INJUNCTION AS PROMPTED BY REVENGE. As a man he forgave Shimei at the time of his crime, which, then, should have been utterly effaced from his memory. Heavenly justice, if not satisfied, would have taken its own way of vindicating itself, without further action on David's part. With David as a man of God and Israel's law-giver, we must utterly disconnect this act, and attribute it entirely to a flaw in his character, which, at the last, reasserted its natural power in antagonism to Divine grace. In nothing, during life, do men differ so greatly as at death. The weakest on earth often enter the gates of heaven triumphant. While yet in the flesh, one foot is firmly planted on the threshold of the mansion prepared for them. On the other hand, the spiritual giant now is frequently then but as a timid and fearful child; often, indeed, appearing to lose his entire spiritual existence in the fearful struggle which Satan and his earthly nature keep up in endeavouring to wrest another soul from heaven to people the wilderness of hell. (*R. Lisuil, B.A.*)

Vers. 10–12. **So David slept with his fathers.**—*Views of life and death*:—The view which is presented in the Scripture of the death of saints is the exact opposite of that which is popular to-day. You nearly, without exception, find death painted as a reaper coming with his sickle. That is merely a human idea. What is God's idea in the Word? Death is not the reaper; death is the sower. That is a very different thing. It is not death that comes and gathers in the harvest: it is death that sows the seed. The agriculturist goes out with his basket of bare grain, and that is cast into the earth and it is covered up and lost to sight; but it germinates because it dies. It dies to live under the soil, and by and by there comes the rich golden harvest. Death will lose half of its gloom if you view death, not as the reaper, but as the sower. It is because we limit our idea of life to the brief period we spend in this world, that we make death the terminator of life. It is not so, but the true beginning of life. Death may take the beautiful form of your loved one, and cast it in the ground; but it is all that death can do. Death sows the seed, but God reaps the harvest in the dawn of His coming. (*R. Venting.*)

Vers. 19, 20. **Bathsheba therefore went unto King Solomon, to speak unto him for Adonijah.**—*What mothers can do for their children*:—Nearly twenty times the Book of Kings makes mention of the names of mothers as connected with the good or evil deeds of their sons. We are not always told what was the character of these mothers, nor how far it was due to their influence that their sons turned out as they did, but the introduction of their names in such close connection with the good or evil, is sufficiently significant. "His mother's name was Jecholiah; and he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord." The sacred penman adds no more, and yet we can scarce restrain the natural exclamation of the heart, "Blessed art thou among women!" so certain are we that the youth who honoured God had enjoyed the care of a good mother. In contrast, what unenviable notoriety is given to Abijah's name when the mention of it is accompanied with the painful record, "he walked in all the sins of his father" (1 Kings xv. 2). Maachah, the mother, may have been a good woman herself, in spite of her husband's evil ways; yet what volumes are expressed in that embalming of her name—and only hers—in connection with the wrong-doings of her son! Alas! the agonies of the wretched parent's heart, in this world and the next, concerning whose offspring the record must be made, "he did evil all his life; he did evil because of his mother's neglect to teach him better!" St. Augustine, and Gregory of Nazianzen, are striking examples, which cry aloud, "Christian mothers, pray on in faith!" Theodoret, and Basil the Great, and Chrysostom were instances almost as remarkable. General Harrison, not long before taking his place at the head of the Government, visited his old home in Virginia, and turned his steps at once to his "mother's room," where, as he said, he had seen her daily reading her Bible, and where she had taught him to pray. Fame and glory became dim before him as the pleasant light burst forth from the scene of his earliest and best impressions. Where is the son so wayward and so cruel, who would not promptly answer, like Israel's king, when besought by her who had nursed him in helpless infancy, "Ask on, my mother, for I will not say thee nay"? "My mother asked me never to use tobacco," remarked Senator Thomas H. Benton, "and I have

never touched it from that time to the present day. She asked me never to gamble, and I never have. She admonished me against hard drinking, and whatever usefulness I have attained in life, I owe to my compliance with her pious wishes." The Christian mother who thus loves her children may be sure of their sincerest affection in return. An old man, wasted with disease, was struggling feebly with death. His family and friends stood by, rendering every kind office which they could, but still there was one thing which he longed for, and which all their tenderest affections failed to supply. He rolled his head in agony, and faintly whispered, "I want mother!" She had been dead for fifty years! As a child, he had carried his little sorrows to his mother, and she had always proved his ready comforter, and now, after all this lapse of time, forgetful, for the moment, that wife and children and grandchildren were with him, he remembered no one but his mother! A noted infidel was once suddenly brought under religious influences, and cried aloud, in his agony, "God of my mother, have mercy on me!" When a lady once told Archbishop Sharpe that she would not trouble her children with instruction about religion until they had reached the years of discretion, the shrewd prelate answered, "If you do not teach them, the devil will!" (*J. N. Norton.*) *The power of mothers*:—The power of mothers is a fertile theme for contemplation and one most fascinating. It has been said that "the greatest moral power in the world is that exercised by a mother over her child." Can you name any force which you dare call equal to it? Is it not true, as Douglas Jerrold put it, that "she who rocks the cradle rules the world"? In the first place, note the fact that—I. THE EARLY YEARS OF A CHILD BELONG TO THE MOTHER. These are the years which give shape and colour to all the rest of life. And in these the natural guide and companion of the child is the mother. Her presence and her varied teachings are the most potent force brought to bear upon it in the fresh and dewy morning of its existence. As soon as the child begins to comprehend language and to ponder ideas it conveys, what priceless opportunities are the mother's for inspiring and leading it! It learns its words from her lips and pronounces them after her methods. A *mis*pronunciation acquired in childhood often clings to one all his days. The child thinks its mother's thoughts as well as speaks her words. Its views of things are largely derived from her. She can teach the child to be observant of what is within him and without him, upon notice of which wisdom so largely depends. She can develop in it the habit of thought, which so enhances the power of thought. She can elevate its thinking. She can teach it to be affectionate, aspiring, loyal, and brave. In short, she can mould her child well-nigh as easily as the sculptor shapes his plastic clay into the statue of faultless beauty. II. THE EXAMPLE AND THE TEACHINGS OF THE MOTHER ARE PERMANENT INFLUENCES. This from their very nature, not simply because she has the control of the years of youth. A mother's life is one of the regulating and animating forces of that of her children as long as they live. There is a sacredness in that example which time increases rather than lessens in the bosom of every right-minded child. Even those who are wayward admit its power, and it is always one of the most invincible agents in their restoration. The same is true of the precepts she has given him. Not merely do they start him in the course he takes, they remain with him as elemental factors of his being and his conduct. They were the warrant of his early actions, and he unconsciously makes appeal to them all his life. Charles Reade, the famous novelist, when near the end of his life, declared: "I owe the larger half of what I am to my mother." And John Ruskin, nobly eminent as he is, cannot be disloyal to the memory of her who gave him birth. He wrote in this strain: "My mother's influence in moulding my character was conspicuous. She forced me to learn daily long chapters of the Bible by heart. To that discipline and patient, accurate resolve I owe not only much of general power of taking pains, but the best part of my taste for literature." And this is the testimony of an author whose facile pen has traced some of the most superb and exquisite sentences to be found in our English speech. III. AFFECTION FOR MOTHERS IS ENDURING. It is this, in large measure, which lends power to their example and instruction. Still, it is a force by itself beyond these, in all the life of the child. If there is no love on earth like a mother's love, it calls forth in response an affection that many waters cannot drown. And this affection is a purifying, uplifting, gladdening element in the life of one who shares it. It spurs him to labour and self-denial. It kindles patience, zeal, hope, courage. It elevates, and quickens all his nature by its silent yet persuasive influence. When he is tempted, that love nerves him for victory. When he is despondent it clothes

him with fortitude. When he is weary he rests upon it. When he is lonely its sweet presence enlivens his soul. When he is strong he rejoices for her dear sake. When he is successful he exults because she will be happy. Said Lord Macaulay: "I am sure it is worth while being sick to be nursed by a mother." One of the most pathetic elements in the sensitive spirit of William Cowper was his affectionate regard for his mother, who died when he was in his sixth year. To a niece who sent him her picture he wrote: "Every creature that bears an affinity to my mother is dear to me. . . . The world could not have furnished you with a present so acceptable to me as the picture which you have so kindly sent me. . . . I kissed it and hung it where it is the last object that I see at night, and, of course, the first on which I open my eyes in the morning." Who can doubt the healthful charm of that beautiful portrait over the life of the son? A mother's face—what beauty in its outlines, what sweetness in its expression, what inspiration in its presence in the mind only! No wonder that Napoleon said the greatest need of France was "mothers." It does not appear strange that in the early centuries of our era Christian matrons should have been held in high esteem. The names of the mothers of not a few heroes of the Church are inseparably linked with their own. Emmelia with Basil; Nonna, who died while praying, with Gregory Nazienzen; Anthusa, whose noble character led the heathen to exclaim: "Ah, what wonderful women there are among Christians!" with Chrysostom, the golden-mouthed; Monica, who died in the arms of her son, with Augustine, the great theologian; Aletta, of whom an eloquent orator has recently said, "I cannot but feel that that saintly mother who died eight hundred years ago in Burgundy has modified the civilisation of the age in which we live—that she has left the touch of her hand immortal on your heart and mine!" with Bernard of Clairvaux. And in modern times the mother of the Wesleys is called also "the mother of Methodism," such was her impress upon her sons. John Quincey Adams doubtless gave utterance to the sober truth when he said: "All I am, or ever have been, in this world, I owe, under God, to my mother." And there is no flower in all the field that owes as much to the sun as multitudes in the lesser walks of life owe to their mothers. The glory of motherhood has been strikingly set forth by some one who said: "God could not be everywhere, and therefore He made mothers." Theirs is the post of honour in the world. They sit upon thrones most regal. Sceptres of unbounded empire are in their hands. O mothers, realise the proud eminence you have attained! Aim to meet well its immense responsibilities, its limitless possibilities. Your children are, in a large degree, at your own disposal. Charles Dickens did not err when he thought that it must be written somewhere that "the virtues of mothers should be visited, occasionally, upon their children as well as the sins of fathers." (*A. W. Hazen, D.D.*) **The king rose up to meet her, and bowed himself unto her.**—*A mother's noble recognition*:—The story is told that not long ago President Loubet paid a brief official visit to a town near his birthplace. A triumphal procession was formed through the town, and the President, seated in the magnificent four-horse state carriage, was driven between long lines of enthusiastic people towards another part of the town, where his old peasant mother patiently awaited his coming. She had a special seat, from which she could have an uninterrupted view of the passing procession. When she caught sight of the magnificent carriage approaching, surrounded by a brilliant cavalry escort, notwithstanding her eighty-six years, she rose quickly to her feet in order to get a better view of "her boy," as she always calls the President. The latter, who had been privately told where his mother was, noticed the movement. Seized by a sudden impulse, he ordered the carriage to stop, and, turning to the general in attendance, said hastily: "For the moment I cease to be President of France, and become a son." Then, springing quickly to the ground, Monsieur Loubet hastened by the garden, which he well knew, to the little stand, caught the quivering old mother in his arms, and embraced her long and silently, while copious tears streamed down her wrinkled cheeks. The large crowd that witnessed this scene of filial affection was so touched as not to be able at first to signify their approval, and it was not till the President was in his carriage again, and the procession was moving once more, that the spell was broken, and the people cheered the dutiful son as he deserved. *A ruler's regard for his mother*:—President Roosevelt, in his life of Oliver Cromwell, tells us how devoted the mother of Cromwell was to her great son, and how he loved her. When he was young, he followed her counsel. When he became Dictator of England, he placed her in the royal palace of Whitehall; and when she died, he buried her in

Westminster Abbey. This care for our mothers is one element of greatness which we may all possess.

Vers. 26, 27. **And unto Abiathar the priest said the king.**—*Friends that fail us:*—In middle life—much more in old age—we may have many acquaintances, but we have few friends. "If," said an old man quaintly, "my acquaintances would fill a church, my real friends could go in the pulpit." Socrates used to keep two chairs only in his house: "One for myself, and another for a friend—when I find him!" How well then it is that there is a Friend "who sticketh closer than a brother"—a Guide and Comforter whom we cannot fail to find if we look for Him with the eyes of faith! (*Quiver.*)

Ver. 28. **Joab had turned after Adonijah.**—*The peril of protracted temptation:*—Joab was David's nephew, the second of the three sons of his sister Zeruiah. His youngest brother, Asahel, famous for his swiftness in running, was killed by Abner at the battle of Gibeon. The oldest, Abishai, a brave, fierce, revengeful man, was always at his uncle's side, and rendered him invaluable service. But Joab, greatest in military prowess, as well as most statesmanlike, reached the place of power next the king himself. He treacherously killed Abner, partly in revenge for his brother's death and partly lest he should hold under David the same post of commander-in-chief that he had held under Saul. The king was grieved and outraged at this act, and compelled Joab to attend Abner's funeral in sackcloth and with rent robe. Still, induced, no doubt, by his pre-eminent fitness, he gave him Abner's place. Joab had fairly won this by accepting the challenge of David to scale the rock of Jebus and thus capture the fortress that was to become the national capital. So far as defence and conquest are concerned he may be called the founder of the kingdom. Joab was loyal to his sovereign through a long life. He was loyal against many temptations to be otherwise. From the time of Abner's death David feared his impetuous, passionate nephews; indeed, he said at the funeral, "I am this day weak, though anointed king; and these men the sons of Zeruiah are too hard for me" (2 Sam. iii. 39). Joab could not have been uninfluenced by this fact; it is difficult for an inferior to retain respect for a superior who he knows fears him, or whom he regards as in any essential particular a weaker man than himself. Moreover, he was in the secret of his master's great crime—guilty, indeed, as an accessary, but not so guilty as the principal, and so with another consciousness of superiority which worked against his devotion. And monarchy was new in Israel. The king reigned more by virtue of his personal power than of an established habit of obedience on the part of his people. There were the incessant intrigues against the throne that to this day mark all Oriental governments. A score of times Joab must have been solicited to join the fortunes of this or that pretender, to accept anything that he chose to ask, to escape the growing ill-will of his sovereign and avenge the repeated slights that he had suffered. Against all solicitations he had stood firm year after year. But now David is near his end—in fact, is almost comatose. It is known that he has promised the succession to a younger son, Solomon. The legitimist party, who favour the oldest son, Adonijah, determine not to wait for the king's death, but to at once seize the throne. It is particularly odious treason against a dying and presumably helpless man. And it is especially pitiful to find the aged Joab engaged in it. A few years before he had resisted the pretensions of the fascinating and popular Absalom, and at the risk of his own life had put him to death, as he deserved. But meanwhile his moral fibre has deteriorated. He lacks the robust virtue of other years. Even the thought of his dying sovereign and of the great things that they had passed through together cannot hold him to loyalty. So he "turns after Adonijah, though he had not turned after Absalom." The theory is commonly held that old men and women are safe from temptation. We talk about character being formed, settled, fixed. We speak of unassailable virtue. We devote all our skill and energy to safeguarding the young, which is right; but we neglect to throw any protection about the middle-aged, which is wrong. We treat ourselves in the same fashion, assuming that, say, after middle life we are in small peril of going astray. We accordingly subject our virtues to strain to which we would not have thought of exposing them twenty or thirty years earlier. Hence every community is frequently shocked by acts of amazing folly, vice, and even crime on the part of those who were supposed to have outlived all temptation in such directions. Hence we have the proverb, "Count no man

happy until he is dead "—until he has passed beyond the possibility of throwing away by one stupendous blunder or sin the accumulated good reputation of three or four score years. We say of such a man, "He was old enough to know better," which is in effect a confession that knowing better by no means carries with it the strength to do better. Hamlet regards it as the gravamen of his mother's offence in her criminal marriage with the king, that she had passed the age when she could plead the excuse of impetuous passions. History, literature, our own observation unite to demonstrate that, while youth is imperilled by temptation, age is not safe, and to give some countenance to the rather harsh maxim that "there is no fool like an old fool." The fact is, that the danger that lurks in temptation is not a matter of age at all. Personality is of course the main thing. We are tempted accordingly to our heredity, our appetites, our constitutional or acquired weaknesses, our individual prochivities toward this or that sin. These vary at different periods of life. Hence some temptations are strongest in youth, others in maturity, others in old age. There is a sense, too, in which youth is weaker to resist than maturity or age. The moral fibre, like the physical, is not yet toughened. Physicians tell us that the period of greatest peril to life, after infancy, is from eighteen to twenty-five or thirty years. All vital organs have developed rapidly; one looks most robust; he will quickly take high physical training in any direction, and, if he endures it, gain marvellous power. But at the same time, he lacks high efficiency to resist or throw off disease. Add to this such imprudence as must accompany the unthinking conviction that nothing can harm him—that he may cat and sleep and exercise as irregularly as he pleases —and it is not marvellous that so many young men die in their years of greatest promise and apparently highest vitality. They are carried off by disease before they have learned their own powers of endurance, or, knowing them, gained the moral courage to live well within them. It is not an irrational solicitude, therefore, that parents feel for the health of their sons and daughters even after they are old enough to be supposed to wisely care for themselves. Here the moral and spiritual nature affords a close analogy to the physical. Time brings to the soul certain qualifications to resist temptation that nothing else can bring, such as an intelligent fear of doing wrong and an accurate conception of its pernicious consequences. Especially it brings the habit of resisting the wrong and doing the right. And it is to that settled habit more than to anything else, except the immediate grace of God, that we all owe our moral safety. But, whatever the age, the real peril of temptation lies in its being long continued. It was not because Joab was old that he turned after Adonijah, while a few years before he had not turned after Absalom, but because at that time the temptation of disloyalty to his king had not been long enough at work to undermine his powers of resistance. When, however, Adonijah raised the standard of revolt and invited Joab to join him, the soliciting voice had spoken so many times, and each time more alluringly, that his ability to say no had been exhausted. He threw away reputation, honour, life itself, not because he was a weak old man—for he was not that —but because he had exposed himself through a series of years to the temptation that he had always hitherto been able to master, but that now at last mastered him. The fact is—and herein lies the reason for the young standing so grandly as they do—that few are swept away by the first attack of temptation. The fortress of our instinctive love of the right and our careful early training is not usually carried by assault, but by sapping and mining. The bravest army ever marshalled cannot for ever stand such dogged attacks from an enemy with resources sufficient to keep them up indefinitely. Nor can the strongest human nature stand such attacks of temptation. No matter how confident you and I are of the quality of our moral fibre, we will act unwisely in subjecting it to too prolonged a strain. Indeed, this law holds throughout all nature. We speak, for instance, of the life of a steel rail, meaning the period during which it can do its work. The incessant hammering on it of locomotive and car wheels finally changes the relation of its molecules until their coherence is so weakened that the strength of the metal is gone. Suddenly there is an unaccountable railway accident. It means only that rail or bridge or locomotive had been strained, not too hard, but too long. They stood through Absalom's day, but could not stand through Adonijah's. Bacteriologists say that the germs of many or most diseases exist in our bodies while we are in good health; but we are able to resist them. There comes a time, however, when such resistance is weakened by that clogging of the system that we call a cold, and we have pneumonia; or when our foes are rein-

forced by impure water, and we have typhoid fever. We can withstand for a long time—a marvellously long time—the poison of a foul atmosphere, but the most robust constitution will finally succumb to it. We are horrified by stories of plagues and pestilences, as the yellow fever, cholera, the black death. They sweep over a country with awful devastation. But they pass by, and, after all, do not kill one where bad ventilation and unsanitary drainage, with their endless persistence, kill ten. The mighty storms that sweep the Matterhorn throw down with awful crash only the rocks that the constantly trickling and freezing rills of water have through years or centuries insensibly crowded to the edge of the cliff. We may be too proud to believe that we who have withstood so long can ever yield, but this is the very "pride that goeth before destruction." "I do not allow myself to look at a bad picture," said Sir Peter Lely, the artist, "for if I do my brush is certain to take a hint from it." The only safe way to treat a temptation that has begun to meet us frequently is the way of this wise book: "Avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass on." And even this counsel, good as we at once recognise it to be, we will not heed unless we seek Divine grace. And that is ready: "God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation make also the way of escape, that ye may be able to endure it." Trust Him and you shall not turn after either Absalom or Adonijah. (*T. S. Hamlin, D.D.*) *The vitality of sin*:—We sometimes think that we have done with a sin, because it is dormant for a time. We think that it is dead, that under no circumstances can we be troubled with it any more. But it is very often only in a state of suspended animation. Circumstances are against its showing its vitality, but that vitality is there, and will show itself when circumstances are favourable. In a lump of ice delivered to a restaurant lately there was embedded a frog. After having been on exhibition for some time the ice was smashed, and the frog was like a stone. It was put near the stove, and in two hours it was as lively as possible. It had been ten months frozen up. Many a sin that we thought dead has got near some stove—some warm temptation—and we have had sad experience of its tenacity of life. (*Quiver.*) Joab fled unto the tabernacle of the Lord.—*Ineffective repentance*:—Joab had passed a proud and prosperous life, without submitting himself to the authority, or seeking the favour of God. He was a cruel, revengeful, and imperious man. He suffered his own vindictive spirit to imbrue his hands in causeless blood. In his long and prospered life, he might have been the instrument of vast blessings to others. But the man who lives without God cannot live as a blessing to his fellow-men. The blessing of God is not with any thing that he does. Joab comes to old age, and his character remains entirely unchanged. He engages with Adonijah in his unnatural rebellion against the aged king, to whose cause he had been so faithful while the power was with him, and thus prepares himself for the punishment which must in justice overtake him. David delivers him over to Solomon his son, with the injunction, "thou knowest what Joab did to me," &c. He fled to Gibeon, and concealed himself for protection in the tabernacle of the Lord, and caught hold on the horns of the altar. But there was no protection for impenitent guilt at the altar. The Divine law was, in regard to the murderer, "thou shalt take him even from Mine altar, that he may die." And Joab, the aged rebel, perishes in guilt, even while he clings to the altar for protection. No desire for God led him to the tabernacle. A fear of punishment drove him thither. He had no longing to be a doorkeeper in the house of the Lord. He would far rather dwell in the tents of ungodliness. How very important is the admonition which is here furnished! What multitudes, like Joab, attempt to compensate for a life of sin, by an ineffectual attempt to return to God in the hour of death, and encourage themselves to hope, that their wicked and persevering neglect of Him will be wholly forgotten, if they ask His forgiveness, when they can rebel no longer! Their hearts are in the world, and they will live to that. But their future, everlasting safety, can only be with God, and they will still endeavour to die in peace with Him. I. SUCH A RUNNING AT THE LAST TO THE TABERNACLE IS ENTIRELY DEFICIENT IN THE PROPER MOTIVE OF OBEDIENCE. The distinguishing motive of an acceptable return to God, is a love for His character, and a desire for His service. This must always be the principle which guides a sinner in a true return of his soul to God. A godly sorrow for sin respects the honour of God which is involved in transgression. It sees the love of Jesus, and the hatefulness of the sin which has repaid it; and turns back with mourning, for that which has crucified the Lord of Glory. II. SUCH AN APPARENT RETURN TO GOD IN OUR LAST HOURS IS INEFFECTIVE, BECAUSE IT

ALLOWS NO TIME TO ACCOMPLISH THE IMPORTANT WORK. I do not speak now of the man who has never heard the blessed tidings of a Saviour, until this late hour; but of the man whose life has been passed amidst the full privileges of the Gospel, and who has no new message to be delivered to him in the hour of his death. Such a one has professed that he had no time to perfect this return to God in his life and health, though he acknowledged it to be necessary; and he will, in fact, have no time to do it in the hours of sickness, and age, and death. It is vain to say that God may then pluck him in a moment as a brand from the burning. So He might have done at any previous time of his life. But He did not do it then; and there is not the slightest ground for hope that He will do it now. III. THIS PROJECTED REPENTANCE IS INEFFECTIVE FOR GOOD, BECAUSE IT IS ITSELF AN ACT OF REBELLION AGAINST GOD. He has, in abundant mercy, opened a way for sinful men to return to Him in peace. He gives them all the opportunities, all the means, and all the assistance, which they need in order to perfect this return to His favour, and then solemnly warns them that it must be done in a limited and appointed time. But what does the man do, who still looks for a more convenient season for his reconciliation unto God, but directly contradict and falsify these positive assertions of the God of Truth? And of what more positive act of rebellion against God can man be guilty, than is involved in this determination which says, "in defiance of all Thy warnings, I will not return unto Thee, till the hour of death, and then I know that, notwithstanding all Thy threatenings so often repeated, Thou canst not and wilt not cast me out"? Here is a direct contest between man and his Creator. And what would be the effect of God's acceptance of this wilfully postponed submission to Himself, but giving countenance to rebellion against Himself, and showing a fickleness of government, the supposition of which is impossible? IV. SUCH A PROPOSED RETURN IS INEFFECTIVE, BECAUSE ITS ALLOWED SUCCESS WOULD OVERTURN ALL THE PURPOSES OF GOD IN REGARD TO MEN, FOR WHICH THE GOSPEL HAS PROVIDED. Its acceptance by Him would altogether annihilate the design and operation of the Gospel. The great purpose of God, in the gift of His Son, is the restoration of man from sin to obedience; the cleansing of him from guilt and condemnation, that he may serve God in holiness and righteousness before him all the days of his life. The proper and designed operation of the Gospel is to annihilate the actual rebellion of the world; to reduce its living inhabitants into subjection to their Creator, and thus to restore His dominion here, in perfect and eternal peace. How foolish and false is that hope which can only stand upon the annihilation of the very purposes and power upon which itself depends! Nay, which can be indulged in fact and form only, because some others at least, are supposed to be guided by better principles to a safer course! The very expectation, therefore, which plans such a return to God, shuts up against itself the avenue of mercy, destroys the design and usefulness of the Gospel, and, like the scorpion in his circle of fire, puts an end to itself. (*S. H. Tyng, D.D.*) *Religion the last quest of the godless*:—During an epidemic of cholera, I remember being called up, at dead of night, to pray with a dying person. He had spent the Sabbath in going out upon an excursion, and at three on Monday morning I was standing by his bed. There was no Bible in the house, and he had often ridiculed the preacher; but before his senses left him he begged his servant to send for me. What could I do? He was unconscious; and there I stood, musing sadly upon the wretched condition of a man who had wickedly refused Christ, and yet superstitiously fled to his minister. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Repentance unavailing*:—Of Antiochus, the great persecutor of the Jewish people, it is told that during his last illness he vowed he would become a Jew himself, and go through all the world that was inhabited and declare the power of God, yet, continues the historian, "for all this, his pains would not cease, for the just judgment of God was upon him."

Vers. 30–34. **Nay; but I will die here.**—*A warrior's death*:—The circumstances in which Joab uttered the words, "Nay; but I will die here," were the outcome of a conspiracy which had been formed during the latter days of David to prevent Solomon, his son, reigning in his stead. I. JOAB'S CHARACTER. Joab as a man was somewhat like Esau, belligerent from his youth. As one of the sons of Zeruiah, of whom David complained that they "were too hard for him," he readily acquired the character of a reckless soldier, and a most unscrupulous disposition. However brave or successful as a warrior, he was never known to forget an insult or to forgive an injury. He always waited for his enemies, real

or supposed, as a bear robbed of her whelps, and would punish them without mercy. In some respects he was more cruel and vindictive than Nero, or any of the Roman Cæsars. It was in cold blood that he assassinated Abner, and slew Absalom with his own hand. These and similar acts of cruelty, instead of checking his career, or making him more thoughtful, only paved his way for the commission of still greater crimes. He cared as little for the king's curse, on account of Abner's assassination, as he cared for the king's grief over Absalom's death. For years he had been guilty of shedding the blood of innocents, and the king seems to have been powerless in checking him or punishing him for his enormous crimes. But on his death-bed he charged Solomon to deal with him, so that the "innocent blood which he had shed might be purged from him and from his father's house" (ver. 31). This was the character of Joab, the man who fled in terror to the tabernacle of the Lord, and laid hold upon the horns of the altar. II. JOAB'S REFUGE. Why did Joab, in his extremity, run to the tabernacle? As a drowning man is said to catch at a straw, Joab ran to the tabernacle as his only hope of safety. It was the hour of his desperation; the pressure of destiny was upon his heart, the Nemesis of retribution had laid hold upon him; and rather than die like Judas, he would lay hold upon the horns of the altar as his only means of salvation. But he had no right to do so. He was one of those expressly forbidden by the law of Moses (Deut. xix. 12) to enter the tabernacle, or to lay hold upon the horns of the altar. As a murderer—as a murderer "with guile," as a murderer with deliberate purpose—he had no right to take refuge in God's sanctuary, or to lay hold upon the altar with his defiled hands. Solomon knew the law, and honoured it when he commanded Benaiah to drag him forth from the altar and have him slain (Ex. xxi. 14). But what cares a sinner, who has lived all his days to outrage all law and order, when pressed by the shadows or pangs of despair, whether he enters in by the door or climbs up some other way? When he becomes, like Samson, a helpless creature—his eyes out, and sport for the Philistines—he will dare the most terrible things, if only he can be saved. III. JOAB'S RESOLUTION. There he would die, and nowhere else. It has been said that soldiers, as a class, are not greatly concerned for religion. It was alleged by Dean Swift that "no class of men had so little sense of religion as English soldiers." It is said that Pope Gregory the Great tried hard at one time to assure the Emperor that it was not a thing impossible to discover devout soldiers in the army. Gibbon, the historian, records the case of a Roman general who as early as the year 398 A.D. spent most of his time in praying and fasting, and singing Psalms. But he has evidently more satisfaction in telling us of the soldier who, before some terrible battle, prayed thus, "Oh God—if there be a God—save my soul—if I have a soul." Perhaps we ought to regard such men as Colonel Gardiner, Sir Henry Havelock, Captain Hedley Vicars, General Lee, General Gordon, and Gustavus Adolphus, as exceptions to what is common in military circles. But there is nothing necessarily antagonistic to a religious life in the army. It is not necessary that a soldier should be brutal in his character or a murderer in heart and action. But Joab was so. He was utterly regardless of human life, and lived far from God and righteousness. We may regard Joab's resolution as the outcome of nature, not of fear. "It is the fashion of our foolish presumption," says Bishop Hall, "to look for protection, under the pressure of necessity, when we have not cared to yield obedience. Even a Joab clings to God's altar in the hour of his extremity, which in his prosperity he regarded not. Necessity will drive the most profane and lawless men to God." When the Angel of Death comes to men in no unmistakable way, when, by age or by accident, lingering sickness or the sorrows of bereavement, they seem to hear it said, "Set thine house in order, for thou shalt die, and not live!" or when, in some significant way, their doom is forecast, as Belshazzar's doom was written upon his palace wall, they will waken up and cry out for a refuge in despair. But as there is a mirage in the spiritual as well as in the natural world, they may find that the harvest is past and the summer ended; they may find that prayers then extorted are in vain—the hour of mercy past! Those who are saved at God's altar are drawn to it, never driven. (*J. K. Campbell, D.D.*) *General Joab*:—1. Joab was a man of war. He delighted in battle, he scented it from afar, the thought of it was in his heart. He never saw the tragedy—the madness of it; or, if he did, he ignored it, as thousands of great soldiers have done. He was a man of blood and iron, a lesser Napoleon, who climbed to greatness, such as it was, over a hecatomb of corpses. He was never happy but amid tumult and bloodshed; the sweetest

music that ever greeted his ear was the bugle call to charge the enemy. Empire-making was his life-work, but, fortunately, David's ambition was limited to a small geographical area, and Joab had no standing army at his beck and call, or the peace of the world would not have been safe for a single day. 2. The havoc wrought by envy. Joab was David's sister's son, a fact he never forgot himself, and never permitted others to forget. David's brothers never quite forgave him being greater than themselves. Abner and the rest, could not forget that scene in the vale of Succoth, when David by one supreme act of faith and courage became the nation's idol. Saul's was not the only heart which felt the pang of jealousy that day. Envy, that black imp of hell, was dancing in and out amid the troops of Israel, and he wrought great havoc in Jesse's household. Only great natures can rejoice at the prosperity of others. A man had better take a nest of rattlesnakes into his bosom than envy into his heart. But among those who stood staunch and true to David was his nephew, Joab. He had his faults, but treachery was not one of them, and he was a courageous man, and could not only fight himself, but could inspire others; and he possessed that dogged perseverance that never knows when it is beaten, but rises out of the ashes of defeat to fight once more and to conquer. "The battle is lost, sire," said a messenger to Napoleon one morning. "Then," he said, pulling out his watch, "there is time to win another." And that was Joab, too, a very glutton for a hard fight, who never admitted defeat, but just kept pounding away, as Wellington said, until the enemy yielded. But Joab had the defect of his qualities: he was selfish, ambitious, with a nature of stone and iron; there was no light and shade in his character; he never suffered himself to be thwarted, but bore all down by the violence of his temper. And David grew to be afraid of this imperious, loud-voiced, combative nephew of his, and perhaps to yield to him on occasions when it would have been better if he had not. 3. David plays the fool. Joab was a great man, his own nephew, a very useful man when the kingdom was threatened, and so David made a tearful speech, and let the culprit go. And Joab from that day thought himself indispensable, and acted accordingly. And the time came when David played the fool, as he now played the coward. A beautiful woman bewitched him, and he fell so foully that we stand and gape in astonishment at the deed of wickedness David did. The saddest thing on earth is when a good man forgets himself, turns his back on God, and shakes hands with the devil. "Do not mistake me," said saintly Jacob Behmen, the mystic, so beloved by Dr. Whyte, "for my heart is as full as it can be of all malice, and all ill-will. My heart is the very dunghill of the devil, and it is no easy matter to wrestle with him on his chosen ground. But wrestle with him on this ground of his I must, and that the whole of my life to the end." "I have never read of a crime," says Goethe, "which I might not have committed." And the lust of the eyes seized David, and he wrote a disgraceful letter to Joab, who, when he read it, gave a hoarse, derisive laugh, and felt glad in his heart, for there are hard, coarse natures who delight in the moral downfall of a better man. If Joab had been the friend of David he would have torn that letter into thousands of pieces, and he would have gone forth and remonstrated with the king, for he is our best friend who cannot bear to see a stain upon our character, and who will risk giving offence rather than let us cheapen ourselves in the eyes of the world. But Joab kept the letter as a precious treasure, for use on another day. 4. Joab master of the situation. And Joab obeyed the letter, and put Uriah in the forefront of the battle, and the brave soldier fell fighting for the king who planned his death, and dreamt not that his general was the worst foe that he had that day. It was as shameful a deed as ever was committed on a battlefield. And from that hour Joab twisted the king round his little finger. David never lost his conscience, and it is the man who has a conscience who suffers. What a mental purgatory the spiritually minded man lives in who has fallen from grace. Hawthorne in *The Scarlet Letter* has shown us how a secret sin eats like a cancer at the heart until confession becomes, not only a necessity, but a relief. Joab could sleep as soundly as a child, and no vision of the slain Uriah came to haunt him. But David could not. Through many a sleepless hour he wailed out his broken-hearted penitence in psalm and prayer. This man could not go through a mire of sin and be merry over it, he could not forget, and forgetting is the sinner's only refuge. Better a thousand times be David, with his tear-smitten face turned Godward, hating himself for the wrong done, than the sneering, self-complacent old warrior who found no place for repentance. Such men as Joab make hell a necessity of the future if ever justice is to be done, and right vindicated.

Yes, I believe in hell, I cannot but believe in it, or there is no such thing as justice. It is awful to see the sinner when remorse has seized him. But I tell you what is far more awful, and that is to see the sinner going on cursing, laughing, unheeding to his doom, as indifferent as the fattened ox goes to the shambles. The best things in life are tenderness, sweetness, graciousness; and Joab never saw them, never knew them, but was always harsh, strident, and stern. (*S. Horton.*)

CHAPTER III.

VER. 3. **Solomon loved the Lord.**—*Love begets love* :—It is a process of induction. Put a piece of iron in the presence of an electrified body, and that piece of iron for a time becomes electrified. It is changed into a temporary magnet in the mere presence of a permanent magnet, and as long as you leave the two side by side they are both magnets alike. Remain side by side with Christ who loved us, and you, too, will become a permanent, attractive force. This is the inevitable effect of love. (*H. Drummond.*) *Love must be paid in kind* :—"As water is cast into a pump, when the springs lie low, to bring up more water, so God sheddeth abroad His love into our hearts, that our love may rise up to Him again by way of gratitude and recompense." How idle is it, then, to hope to chide ourselves into loving God! The price of love is love; the origin of it is not found in law or in a sense of duty, but in love, or a return of gratitude. When the sun of eternal love melts the glaciers of the soul, then the rivers of affection flow; but if the rocks of ice could all be broken to shivers with hammers, not a drop of affection would stream forth. Only a sense of Divine love will ever create love to God in the heart. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

Vers. 5–15. **The Lord appeared again to Solomon in a dream.**—*Dreams indicate character* :—Tell me your dreams, and I will read the riddle of your life. Tell me your prayers, and I will write the history of a soul. Tell me your askings, and I will tell you your gettings. Tell me what you seek, and I will tell you what you are. I do not wish to know your possessions—only your wants. I do not care to know what you have—only what you have not, and desire to have; not your attainments, but what you have not yet attained and follow after. That which comes to you in your victories by day and your dreams by night, the ideal you set before you, the things which you approve as excellent, what you seek after and have given your heart to, these are the measure of the man. In a truer sense than Shakespeare meant, "We are such stuff as dreams are made on." They have no price in the market, but they, and they alone, give worth and dignity to life. (*Hugh Black, M.A.*) *The duty, nature, and blessings of prayer* :—I. THE DUTY OF PRAYER. It is a fundamental law of our nature, on the mere supposition that there is a God in heaven, to ask His help. It is the plain, practical demonstration of our manifold obligations to God, of our own impotence, misery, and dependence; of Him as the source of all our hopes, and the one open, all-sufficient fountain of every blessing of peace and purity and power. II. THE NATURE OF PRAYER. 1. It must be the utterance and the feeling of earnestness and fervour, under the sense of helplessness, misery, and sin, under the persuasion that if God help us not, there is no store whence shall man help us. 2. True supplication, to which God hath linked a blessing, is patient, abiding, persevering. 3. Confidence in God is an essential element in gracious and acceptable prayer. It does no honour to Him to adopt us into His family, that we should be unwilling on the one hand, or afraid on the other, to lay our wants, our wishes, nay our sins, freely before Him. As we have a new and living way into the Holiest, by the blood of Jesus, we may be sure that our entrance thither must be acceptable unto God. III. THE BLESSINGS OF PRAYER. Answers shall be returned. When God said to Solomon, "Ask what I shall give thee," He never meant to mock the youthful monarch's petition. The words of Truth Eternal are fully and for ever pledged. "Ask, and ye shall have; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." Prayer, truly, fervently, and faithfully made, is like the bow of Jonathan, it never returns empty. (*R. P. Buddicom, M.A.*) *Lonely communion in view of great duty* :—In Mrs. Crawford's recent story of the late

Queen Victoria's life, she tells the following incident: After the stately and imposing Coronation ceremony in Westminster Abbey, Her Majesty returned to her mother the Duchess of Kent. When they were quite alone she said, "I suppose, mamma, it must be true that I am Queen of England?" "Yes, love, you see that you are." "Well, then, I have a request to make. I want to be alone and undisturbed for one hour." She was left alone. How she spent that hour has never transpired. But surely we can guess. The young Queen was surely holding fellowship with the King of Kings, seeking His help for her overwhelming responsibilities. Before our Lord chose His twelve apostles "He went into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God." How much more need have we to bring all our plans and purposes to Him? (*H. O. Mackey.*) *A prince at prayer*:—Gustavus Adolphus, King of Sweden, when in his camp before Werben, had been alone, at one time, in the cabinet of his pavilion some hours together, and none of his attendants at these seasons durst interrupt him. At length, however, a favourite of his having some important matter to tell him, came softly to the door, and, looking in, beheld the king very devoutly on his knees at prayer. Fearing to molest him in that exercise, he was about to withdraw his head, when the king espied him, and, bidding him come in, said, "Thou wonderest to see me in this posture, since I have so many thousands of subjects to pray for me; but I tell thee that no man has more need to pray for himself than he who, having to render an account of his actions to none but God, is, for that reason, more closely assaulted by the devil than all other men besides." *Effectual prayer*:—The passage before us is the record of a dream which this great man had one night at Gibeon, a place celebrated in the Old Testament but not mentioned in the New, and whose geographical position cannot be determined with any certainty now. There are two things very noteworthy in this dream. 1. The blending of the human and Divine. There is much that you can trace to Solomon's own mind in the nocturnal vision recorded here. (1) It seemed to be according to the measure of his capacity. He was a large-minded man, and the dream is on a large scale. There is nothing mean or small about it. Solomon's great soul took within the ample range of its imagination the whole Jewish nation, the Eternal Ruler of the universe, the righteous providence of Heaven, and the everlasting principles of moral obligation. (2) It seemed to be also according to the moral state of his mind. The dream is thoroughly religious. As the religious sentiment had flooded his nature in the day, it worked his imagination in the night. It is generally thus. Our dreams grow out of the waking thoughts that have most impressed us. (3) It seemed to be, moreover, according to the strongest desire of his heart. He felt that to take the place of his father David, and direct the destinies of Israel, he required that wisdom which God alone could bestow. So far, we see the human in this dream; but the Divine is manifestly here too. 2. The suggested conditions of successful prayer. The prayer of his dream was answered in his actual history. I. THAT EFFECTIVE PRAYER MUST BE DIVINELY AUTHORISED. At the beginning of the dream Solomon received an authority to pray. "And God said, Ask what I shall give thee." Such an authority is evidently a necessary condition. Unless the Eternal gave us a warrant to address Him, our appeals would be impious and fruitless. Have we, the men of this age, a Divine authority for praying? If not, our appeals to Heaven are worse than idle breath. "Ask what I shall give thee." 1. This authority to call upon God in prayer agrees with our religious instincts. Prayer in some form or other is the natural cry of the soul. The child in distress does not more naturally look to his fond parent for help, than the human soul in sore trouble and danger looks to the heavens for aid. Even men who in theory deny the existence of a God, urged by this instinct will cry to Him in danger. 2. This authority to call upon God in prayer is encouraging to our hope as sinners. II. THAT EFFECTIVE PRAYER MUST BE EARNESTLY SPIRITUAL. By this we mean that spiritual interest must reign supreme, that spiritual motives must be predominant. It was so now with Solomon in his prayer. III. THAT EFFECTIVE PRAYER MUST BE THOROUGHLY UNSELFISH. What he prayed for was "an understanding heart"; and he prayed for that, not that it might serve his own interest, but in order, as he says, "to judge Thy people, that I may discern between good and bad." (*Homilist.*) *The first thing to do*:—When into any Old Testament incident there can be pressed the whole significance of a New Testament precept, the study of both becomes a still more eager pursuit. Thus we know that God is the same in character, and the Gospel is the same in purpose, through all the ages. I. EVERY REVELA-

TION OF DIVINE GRACE IS DEFINITELY CONDITIONED UPON PRAYER AS THE INSTRUMENT OF ITS ATTAINMENT. Evidently God is purposing to do him a great favour; but all that the voice says is that he is to "ask" before anything is to be granted. God says "ask," and Jesus says "seek." Only we ought to remember that we in an age of blessedness and light, we in these latter times of clearer revelation, have one supreme advantage over those who sought their help under the teaching of that former dispensation; this is no longer a dream-voice that we hear from heaven, but the intelligible living message from the lips of God's Son. II. REMINISCENCES OF PREVIOUS HELP ARE AN EXCELLENT ADVANTAGE IN PREPARATION FOR PRESENT PETITION. When we find so young a king referring to former histories in the household and the realm, it becomes clear that he kept his eyes open and his mind thoughtful while the story of Absalom and Mephibosheth in the old times was working itself out. III. THE CONSCIOUSNESS OF REAL NEED IN CARRYING OUT THE LORD'S PURPOSES IS A FORCIBLE ARGUMENT FOR IMPORTUNITY IN SUPPLICATION. IV. A WEIGHTY RESPONSIBILITY IN DUTIES CONSTITUTES A MOTIVE FOR ASKING GOD TO INTERPOSE WITH HIS BENEDICTION OF HELP. A burden of care is His reason for seeking audience with his King. V. THE FIRST THING TO BE ASKED FOR IN GOD'S GRACE IS A NEW AND "UNDERSTANDING HEART." The idea here is a heart of discrimination, a power to discern conscientiously between right and wrong, and to pronounce unerringly for the right. VI. HE WILL QUICKLY SUCCEED IN LIFE WHO HAS THE TESTIMONY THAT HE PLEASES GOD. From these words any one could predict the future of this young king; for the Lord announced Himself his friend. VII. We may learn, once more, that A NEW HEART, WISE AND UNDERSTANDING, IS A BETTER BENEDICTION THAN ANY OTHER WHICH HUMAN WISHES COULD DESIRE. VIII. WITH THIS CHIEF BLESSING OF A NEW HEART SOUGHT AND GAINED, GOD GRANTS EVERYTHING ELSE THAT IS NEEDED. Solomon took occasion a long time afterwards to put this thought in among his Proverbs. IX. WITH PRESENT ANSWERS TO PRAYER ALWAYS COME ASSURANCES OF CONTINUED LOVE AND GRACE TO THE FAITHFUL FOR THE FUTURE. The great Augustine was right when once he exclaimed, "We must hold our empty vessel to the mouth of so large a fountain." And indeed, if God's covenant engagements have so fine an indorsement that they will circulate as petitions, it would be well to use them literally and often. It was the lamented Humphrey who was said to have had the power of weaving together the Scripture promises so appropriately into his prayers that his exercises of devotion seemed like cloth of gold. (*C. S. Robinson, D.D.*) *True aims and false aims*:—The men whose names the world will not willingly let die are those who find in others' good their chiefest, greatest joy. The names of self-gratifiers, self-seekers die out. They lay hold for a time of the memories of men, but never of what is firmer, their respect. Selfishness never has imbibed life from the principle of immortality. The men who come up to the height of a great choice—"Give me these that I may judge Thy people, that I may civilise, that I may educate, that I may evangelise, that I may bless my generation"—their names become the echo, ever sounding throughout the ages of the sacrifice they once chose to make for others. I. GOD DOES COME TO EVERY ONE SAYING, "CHOOSE WHAT I SHALL GIVE THEE." Goethe said that he admired the man who knew precisely what he aimed at in life. God wishes you at the commencement of your career to come up to the height of a great choice. You have all read Carlyle's description of the Sphinx sitting by the wayside propounding her riddles to every one that passed; and if the passer-by answered correctly it was well for him, but if he did not answer the riddle he was destroyed on the spot. I have watched young men and others, and I say that life comes to every man in this world with its riddle, and if he answers it aright it is well with him, but if he tries to go on neglecting the commandments of the Giver of life; if he tries to go on living in his own way, and not in God's way, life to him will be a thing of loss, and he will become an object to be wept over. "There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked." One of the latest discoveries I have read of is a spy-glass by means of which a man can see the sunken ships in all quiet seas. Oh that I could put a glass in the hand of every young man that would enable him to see the wrecks of the last twelve months in this great population! It would wring a prayer from your heart this minute—the very prayer of young Solomon, "Give me therefore an understanding heart, that I may discern between good and bad." It must begin with the heart. "The pure in heart alone can see God"; and if you cannot see God in the world, you cannot see anything else in its true pro-

portions. There are only two kinds of companions, and if you play and dally with the wicked companions woe be to you. One rotten apple affects the whole store, one putrid grape will spoil the sound cluster, one sinner destroyeth much good. Why should you read a bad book? You will be sorry for it, perhaps, in twenty years, as Angell James was. If you read a corrupt book, a bad book, you will hang up a picture in your mind that you can never turn to the wall, that you can never pull down. And why should you do it, with all the noble literature that is about you? It was a splendid motto for you, that saying of John Foster, "This soul of mine shall rule this body of mine, or else quit it; I will not be here a tenant unless I am a master." We are placed here naked as the giant of fable to wrestle with the rude elements of the world, to conquer in the midst of its varied probation; but remember this, no devil nor devil's child can ever cast you down without your own consent. II. If any one comes up to this choice, or chooses a right aim in life, it will be said of him, as it was here said of young Solomon. "AND THE SPEECH PLEASED THE LORD that Solomon had asked this thing." It was this thing in contrast to three other things that he had rejected. He rejected the false, and the false are here enumerated: "Because thou hast asked this thing, and hast not asked for thyself long life." Then is that a wrong desire? Well, it is a nobler thing to act well your part than to be constantly thinking of living a long life. Religion is unquestionably favourable to length of days, but it is a very low aim of life to be constantly nursing yourself, and to be thinking of yourself. Life is not measured by length of days. Old Methuselah lived to 900 years, and never said a word worth putting down in the Bible. He lived for nine centuries and never did a single act worth reporting. He vegetated like a tree that was not living. Then it pleased the Lord, "Because thou didst neither ask riches for thyself." Then is it wrong for us to desire riches? As the great absorbing passion in life it is wrong. It pleased the Lord, "Neither hast thou asked the life of thine enemies." They say that it is the sweetest thing in life to have revenge upon an enemy. Another has said, "Revenge is mine, saith the Lord." And I thank heaven for that, or else public men would not live twelve months. Christianity is the only religion that teaches all men to give over their vengeance to the Lord. It is said that Leclair, the great critic, was one day going along the streets of Paris, and he trod on the foot of a young man; the young man at once raised his hand and struck him a blow in the face. Leclair turned round quietly, and said, "Sir, you will be sorry that you have done that, when you know that I am blind." He could have cut off his hand. II. THE REASONS ARE HERE ASSIGNED WHY IT PLEASED THE LORD that Solomon rejected the false and chose the true aim in life. 1. Because he chose what enabled him to be serviceable to others. Our great poet has told us that Heaven does with us as we do with torches, not light them for themselves. We are lit in order to be the light of the world, and it can be said of every other life that "the game is not worth the candle." 2. Again, it pleased the Lord because he chose to walk in the statutes of a good father, and so to encourage him in his last days in his faith in God's covenant. 3. It pleased the Lord because he chose God Himself as his portion rather than all His gifts. "And Solomon loved the Lord." Young men, trust the Lord, there is honour in the Lord. He will give you more than you ask, abundantly more. (*H. Evans.*)

Solomon's choice:—The Gospel means, not that these old visions have vanished away, but that all that was true and substantial in them has simply been, as in a painting, made to stand out in greater vividness and nearness. The Lord Jesus Christ in the Gospel stands before us, and says, literally, "Ask what I shall give thee." The thing to notice is, that Solomon showed that, humanly speaking, he was worthy of this chance, by the way in which he did not jump forward and eagerly ask for some temporal thing. Solomon showed his wisdom, his preparation for the great largess of bounty in which God came to him, in the way in which he did not use his imperative of asking upon God's imperative of offer. He seems to take a round-about road. He started off and said, "Thou hast showed unto Thy servant David, my father, great mercy, according as he walked before Thee in truth and in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart with Thee." Strange—is it not?—that when God comes to him with this great offer, the first thing that springs before his mind is the image and memory, the life and character, of his father. Now, I want you to reflect before you make up your minds—to do what Solomon did. It was human and heavenly wisdom combined that made him look back and see what his father did. Solomon does not indulge in great praise nor in great depreciation. David was a man that you could have overpraised.

You could have talked of David as if there was never such a man. And if you were the other kind of temperament, you could have found other things in David that would lead you to run him down. Now, Solomon did neither the one nor the other. Now, we are not asked to do more than Solomon did. I neither ask you to praise your father or mother up to the skies, nor to run them down; but if you look at them fairly you can strike this average, and say what Solomon said. When I look to those who stand immediately behind me, and have been living longer than I have, I can see what Solomon saw in his father, that religion was either the best or the worst thing about them. The best thing about your father was his religion, or it was the worst. If he was a true and real follower of the Lord Jesus Christ, that was the best. You are not asked to say he was perfect, but to know and rate him according to that. It may be he was only a hedger or ditcher; he may not have been a great man at all. But what was he before God? Solomon had this great advantage, that when he looked back on his father, the light that shined from his father's record would guide him to a right decision. If it is not so, the very dimness and darkness that comes from ungodly parents should be a beacon light to put you right where they went wrong. Do not despise your father; do not despise your mother. They know what life means, and you have all that to learn yet. Solomon said, "I can see the best thing about my father was this, he rose and prospered in so far as he walked in truth and sincerity before God, and I will try to do like him there. It was religion that made him the man he was." Do not despise the religion your father had, the religion that your mother had. Depend upon it, it was the very best legacy they left you. Solomon continues: "Thou hast made me king," &c. There he looked into himself, and he passed an opinion upon himself and his powers and attainments, which is so uncommon among young people. This is where the greatness of Solomon comes out. Would God he had always remained at this point. Now, what is wrong with some of you up to this hour is the want of that humility. Be not highminded. Then Solomon looked round about him: he prospected a bit. Out in America and Canada, that great country where fortunes are made, so they say, and lost whether they say it or not, men go into certain regions prospecting. They are wanting to open a mine, and they see what a certain region is like. They tap here and there to see if they are going to make a fortune out of its rocks. So Solomon was prospecting the future. He felt life here and there, and touched its current, and he passed this verdict upon it: "I am in the midst of Thy people, which Thou hast chosen; a great people." And I think he meant, "Life as far as I can prospect it is going to mean for me hard work and plenty of it." Am I saying that you have mean ability? No, but with the best ability you will not necessarily get on. Young girl, you are sweet and fair to-day: you will grow up, marry, fall into ill-health; you will have children, maybe, and that will bring you more trouble, and by the time you are forty-five or fifty years of age you will be bent and weary to get away. Life, for a great many of us, means that. One by one the gorgeous dreams of youth disappear; the rosy hopes go out into blackness; the bright expectations illumine the horizon, and then fade into the light of common day; and even if you were kings upon a throne, life would mean what I have said already. Now, will you settle yourself for the work? Life means business, toil, trouble, sweat of body and brain. Brace yourself for it; gird yourself for it. Be sure that is what is coming. Then, after looking back to his father and summing him up, and summing himself up, and saying, "There is nothing in me"; and, after summing up life and saying it means duty, it means hard work, and plenty of it, then he looked up. You see the process: backward, inward, outward, upward. He said, "Give me a wise and an understanding heart; build me up just where I am broken down; put the plaister on the weak place; put in Thine own great almighty arm just where I need nothing less than almightiness to undergird me." "And the speech pleased the Lord, that Solomon had asked this thing." That is just another way of asking to be converted. The Old Testament phraseology and the New Testament phraseology run into one. It is just the same as saying, "O God, save me from my foolishness and wrong opinions, direct my unwary feet. O God, be Thou my sufficiency, my help." Will you choose God to-day? (*J. MacNeill.*) *The wisdom of Solomon*:—I. THE HONOUR OF THIS PRECOCIOUS WISDOM IS PERHAPS DUE MORE TO DAVID THAN TO SOLOMON HIMSELF. His understanding, his feelings, his desires are what they are; in one word, he is what he is only because he has the inestimable privilege of succeeding such a father as King David. His dominant thought, from which spontaneously

springs his prayer, is that of the immensity of his task and his incapacity to perform it. He feels his profound need of God's help. He learns to rely upon it. He has recourse to it with confidence. What a help to find in the memory of a father, as a second conscience accompanying us through life! Like the Polish King Boleslaus, who carried about with him the portrait of his father, and for whom it was enough, in cases of difficulty or peril, to cast a glance upon the revered image and say, "Boleslaus, thy father sees thee!" to recover his wisdom and courage about to forsake him. II. A PROPER DISTRUST OF HIMSELF, VERY RARE AT HIS AGE AND IN HIS CIRCUMSTANCES (vers. 7–9). It was no trifling matter to be called upon to govern so important and unmanageable a nation as Israel. Generally speaking, men see the pleasures and privileges of power before they are made aware of its duties. An exalted position is always an object of envy and ambition. But at the age when one casts on life that long look of confidence and hope, which smooths down beforehand all its difficulties, and takes in only its bright and sunny aspects; at the age when one believes and hopes all things, how many others would have become intoxicated with pride and self-confidence! III. HIS WISE APPRECIATION OF EARTHLY BLESSINGS. To this offer of the Almighty, "Ask what I shall give thee," who would not expect to hear a young man, scarcely yet seated on the throne, reply by demanding what men most desire on earth—a long and happy life, unlimited and undisputed power, a glorious reign, and unbounded wealth? Not so, however; Solomon begins life by wisely putting all these things in their proper place. There before us success, wealth, the open fountain of all earthly felicities, a choice to make from among the prizes which the world temptingly offers its elect! Who, having communed with himself, would say, "Lord, give me the wisdom and grace I need to accomplish faithfully Thy work here below! That is the limit of my desires; I would it were also the limit of Thy gifts"? I fancy I hear, bursting forth from the silence of your hearts some such prayers as these: "Lord, raise me above my fellow-men; give me, in the profession I have chosen, such facilities as will secure for me undisputed success; make me rise promptly to that fame which appears to me from afar as the sweetest of all enjoyments." That is a young man's prayer, no doubt. "Lord, give me all the outward advantages of beauty, grace, wit, all that gratifies vanity." That is the prayer of a woman who perhaps does not think herself worldly-minded. "Lord, be pleased to increase by successful undertakings the patrimony I have received of my ancestors; assure me an exalted and wealthy station; grant that I may provide for my children such positions as will enable them to move in the highest circles of society." That is perhaps the inward request of a man of deep convictions, and well known in the field of Christian activity. I dare not proceed! God is wise not to lead us into temptation by permitting us, as He did Solomon, to pray for the satisfaction of our earthly desires. (*Homiletic Quarterly.*) *The highest order of wisdom*:—Solomonic books have some incomparably splendid passages on wisdom; and if Solomon had fallen, and repented, and risen again, and begun again, till he ended in living up to his own sermons on wisdom, what a glory, both in sacred letters and in a holy life, Solomon's name would have been. "Wisdom," says Sir Henry Taylor, one of the wisest writers in the English language, "is not the same with understanding, talents, capacity, ability, sagacity, sense, or prudence—not the same with any one of these; neither will all these taken together make it up. Wisdom is that exercise of the reason into which the heart enters—a structure of the understanding rising out of the moral and spiritual nature. It is for this cause that a high order of wisdom, that is, a highly intellectual wisdom, is still more rare than a high order of genius. When they reach the very highest order they are one; for each includes the other, and intellectual greatness is matched with moral strength." And then this fine essayist goes on to point out how Solomon's great intellectual gifts, coupled as they were in him with such an appetite for enjoyment, together became his shipwreck. And Bishop Butler, though he does not, like Sir Henry Taylor, name Solomon, surely had him in his eye when he penned that memorable and alarming passage about those men who go over the theory of wisdom and virtue in their thoughts, talk well, and paint fine pictures of it, till their minds are hardened in a contrary course, and till they become more and more insensible to all moral considerations. (*Alex. Whyte, D.D.*) *On the youth of Solomon*:—It is not from the peculiar situation of Solomon that the beauty of this memorable instance of devotion arises. 1. The charm of it chiefly consists in its suitableness to the season of youth; in its correspondence to the character and dispositions which distinguish that important

age; and which no length of acquaintance with the world prevents us from wishing to find in the young. (1) It is suited, in the first place, we think, to the opening of human life—to that interesting season, when nature in all its beauty first opens on the view, and when the wisdom and goodness of the Almighty fall on the heart, unmingled and unimpaired. (2) It is suited, in the next place, to the nature of youthful imagination; to that love of excellence and perfection which nothing mortal ever can realise, and which can find only in the truths of religion the objects of which it is in search. (3) It is suited still more, perhaps, to the tenderness of young affections; to that sensibility which every instance of goodness can move; and to that warm and generous temper which meets everywhere with the objects of its gratitude or love. (4) But, most of all, it is suited to the innocence of the youthful mind, to that sacred purity which can lift its unpolluted hands to Heaven; which guilt hath not yet torn from confidence and hope in God. The feelings of piety, however, are not only natural and becoming in youth; they are still more valuable, as tending to the formation of future character; as affording the best and noblest school in which the mind may be trained to whatever is great or good in human nature. 2. The piety which is formed in youth has a different character, and leads to very different effects. It comes not, then, to terrify or to alarm, but to afford every high and pleasing prospect in which the heart can indulge,—to withdraw the veil which covers the splendours of the eternal mind,—to open that futurity which awakens all their desires to behold, and, in the sublime occupations of which they feel already, as by some secret inspiration, the home and destiny of their souls. At such a period, religion is not a service of necessity, but of joy. (1) The first advantage of youthful piety is that it tends to establish that tone and character of thought which is allied to every virtuous purpose. (2) It is a second advantage of early piety, that it presents those views of man, and of the ends of his being, which call forth the best powers of our nature. (3) It is the last advantage of early piety, that it affords those views of the providence of God which can best give support and confidence to conduct. (*A. Allison, LL.B.*) *Wisdom:*—To look through the shows of things, into things themselves. (*Carlyle.*) *Solomon's choice:*—I. EVERY NEW OPPORTUNITY DEMANDS A PECULIAR CHOICE. "Good" and "bad" are not changeable terms, yet in every new personal or public responsibility the sacred words seem to be spoken, "Ask what I shall give thee." As king, Solomon must make a new choice, differing from any he had hitherto made. In civil life this law everywhere obtains. The responsibilities of the judiciary differ widely from those of the executive, and these in turn from the legislative. The same question comes to each; but each case must call forth a peculiar answer. So, likewise, consider the different factors of society. No two persons can make the same reply. Each day's duties differ from all that have preceded, hence every day we must give answer to Him who speaks. The importance of our choice is emphasised by our power for good or evil. II. EVERY CHOICE INVOLVES CHARACTER. We are known by what we choose. A defective choice means a defective character. The choice of Solomon was good as far as it went; but it had relation merely to his kingly work, and only incidentally to himself. In some respects Israel's wisest king was the saddest of all scriptural characters. Notwithstanding his visions from God, his history is largely secular. At the beginning of the Homeric age in Greece, this greater than Homer made Palestine the centre of art and the treasury of wisdom. The mines of the known earth were delved for their riches to adorn the Temple, to whose beauty every forest contributed. He symbolised in these visible splendours the invisible God, only at last to become a worshipper of idols. The incense that floated in the clouds from the Temple in Jerusalem was mingled over Olivet with that from the altars of Phœnicia and Moab, and above all with that of Moloch—the altar of human sacrifices—and all under his reign. His dream depicts him as praying for right dealings towards and among the people; and yet his later years inflicted an unbearable tyranny on that same people. III. THE HIGHEST CHOICE IS WISDOM. His choice marked a new epoch. Before his time all kingly power was marked by standing armies, by riches and pomp. Each ruler was thought to need a long life to ensure the success of his plans; but here was a strange request. Under his reign was demonstrated for the first time the power of the brain in the conquests of nations and men. His was the golden age of Jewish literature, himself the founder. If intellectual power could save an empire, the trial was being made, but worms were eating at the roots. All nations owned his intellectual greatness—wiser than their wisest men. Phœnicia, proud mother of

letters, was dumb in his presence. Tyre spread her purple over his throne. India minted him her gold. We speak of our Linnæus; but Solomon, the first great botanist, "spake of trees, from the cedar tree that is in Lebanon to the moss that springs out of the wall." We boast of our Cuvier; yet Israel's wise king, the first great naturalist, spake "of beasts, and of fowl, and of creeping things, and of fishes." Upon his wise words Aristotle based all that was best of Grecian philosophy. The Wordsworth of Jewish poets, he laid all nature at our feet. Wisdom, however, means more than knowledge. Many a learned man is not wise. Knowledge is the apprehension of facts or relations; wisdom denotes "the use of the best means for attaining the best ends." Wisdom is never shown in choosing what is always to remain exterior to self. IV. THE HIGHEST WISDOM IS EVIDENCED IN MOST COMMON THINGS. The wisest men use the simplest speech. The smallest children speak largest words. Simplicity of construction is the secret of the best invention. God's mightiest forces are uncomplicated. The rattling shuttles of a mill are a wonder; but more wonderful still that noiseless, shuttleless weaving of the lily, whose fashioning none of us has ever seen. There is no book so full of thoughts for practical everyday life as the Book of Proverbs, yet that very simplicity is Divine. V. UNSOUGHT BLESSINGS ARE GIVEN THE TRULY WISE (*Monday Club Sermons.*) *Solomon's choice*:—I. GOD REGARDS WITH SPECIAL FAVOUR THOSE WHO HONOUR HIM. It is idle to speculate as to whether Solomon would not have received the same blessings if he had not sacrificed and prayed. The fact was, that sacrifice and prayer were the immediate antecedents of the blessings, and are represented as having direct relation to them. Such a fact is sufficient answer to all philosophical objections to prayer, and an emphatic rebuke to those who say it is nonsense to insist that God has any pleasure in our worship and formal expressions of homage. II. WITH PROPER REGARD TO GOD'S WILL WE MAY PRAY FOR SPECIAL BLESSINGS. It was not presumption for Solomon to take God at His word. It would have been unpardonable unbelief had he replied to His offer of good that he could not presume to make mention of what was uppermost in his heart. God never trifles. His offers are never to be regarded as only general evidence of a willingness to do us good, but as real invitations that we make known our requests. There is proof enough that our Father is pleased to gratify the wishes of His children, and it is no pleasure to Him that they pray only in vague and indefinite generalities. The very idea of the relationship forbids such prayer; the idea of prayer itself is opposed to such expressions of desire. III. WE MAY MAKE THE EXPERIENCE OF OTHERS A PLEA FOR GOOD TO BE GRANTED TO OURSELVES. Solomon made mention of David's life and reign as having been pleasing to God, and of God's great mercy to him, and urged this as proof that a purpose to be upright may become a ground of hope since He who does not change will grant favour always when the required conditions are fulfilled. The faithfulness of God is the real stimulus to prayer. IV. BLESSINGS INCOMPLETE IN THEIR NATURE MAY BE PRESSED AS AN ARGUMENT IN PRAYER FOR THEIR COMPLETION. In David's dying charge to his son he reminded him of God's declaration to himself: "If thy children take heed," &c. Solomon made this declaration the basis of his plea with God in this interview. A large part of Christian work is in progress, the execution of plans which require time and persistent toil. We need not fear lest God will weary of co-operation in such work. V. CONSCIOUSNESS, AND EVEN CONFESSION, OF INABILITY TO PERFORM DUTY MAY BECOME A FURTHER WARRANT FOR HELP FROM GOD WHEN THE DUTY IS CLEARLY ASSIGNED BY HIM. The same conviction oppresses many a Christian whom God has called to do work in the different departments of His service. This should not cause him to faint or despair or retire, but should rouse him to greater confidence in prayer while he resolves to stand in the place assigned him. VI. GOD DOES NOT CONTENT HIMSELF WITH GRANTING SIMPLY WHAT WE ASK WHEN WE HAVE THE SPIRIT HE APPROVES. His answer to Solomon's prayer was: "Behold, I have done according to thy words." VII. THANKSGIVING FOR ANSWER TO PRAYER SHOULD BE PROMINENT AND IN THE MOST POSITIVE FORM OF EXPRESSION. (*J. Eells, D.D.*) *The story of a right choice*:—Significant the familiar lines of Lowell—

> Once, to every man and nation, comes the moment to decide,
> In the strife of Truth with Falsehood for the good or evil side;
> Some great cause, God's new Messiah, offering each the bloom or blight,
> Parts the goats upon the left hand and the sheep upon the right.
> And the choice goes by for ever 'twixt that darkness and that light.

And not once only, but many times does such choice come. For to live is to choose. Life is but a series of choices. Though just as the current of the river, notwithstanding refluent ripples, carries with it in one main direction the multitudinous drops of water which go to make the river, so in life one main and dominating choice gives impulse and direction to the ten thousand lesser choices with which the days are filled. I am appalled at this power of choice. I do not think any one in the least thoughtful can help being. I was looking through the glass sides of a beehive. All was orderly and unclashing; none of the pain and disturbance of errant and rebellious wills; each bee doing just as each bee should, just the thing each was designed to do. And I asked myself, Why did not God make men thus? Why did God put men among the crowding dangers of the retributive results of their bad choices? There are only two answers to such questions: God has not made men thus; if God had made men thus men would not be men. No; real and shadowing is the fact of choice. Our Scripture tells the story of a right choice. I. WHAT SUCH RIGHT CHOICE INVOLVES. 1. Purpose of inward worth. Solomon prayed that he might have an "understanding heart." He wanted the real gold, not tinsel. That is a great and constant trouble, that men are so willing to seem to be rather than to be. Here is the precise reason for the defalcations which too often and so sadly startle the community. 2. Such true choice involves recognition of duty. Duty is the child of relation; is that which is due because of the relations in which one is set Godward, manward. The true choice involves recognition of the duties springing out of the relations in which one is bound. 3. Such true choice involves determination to practise along the line of duty; "that I may judge this people." As long as Solomon did this, how great and wise! But when he practised otherwise, how sad his fall! 4. Such true choice involves dependence on God. "Give, therefore, Thy servant an understanding heart." Solomon felt himself insufficient. He must have and hang on God. II. IN WHAT SUCH RIGHT CHOICE RESULTS. 1. In pleasing God (ver. 10). 2. In Divine ratification (ver. 12). 3. In external prosperity (ver. 13). 4. In internal prosperity. Solomon, conscious of pleasing God, must have had peace and joy. (*W. Hoyt.*) *Solomon's choice*:—1. The address which God made to Solomon, when He said, "Ask what I shall give thee," He does in effect make to each of us, especially to the young. By erecting a throne of grace in heaven, opening the way to it, inviting us to come to Him with our requests, and promising to grant our petitions when they are agreeable to His will, He does in effect say to each of us, "Ask what I shall give thee." 2. Though we are not, like Solomon, kings; and therefore need not, as he did, qualifications requisite for that office; yet we all need spiritual wisdom and understanding, and may therefore all imitate his example in making our choice. Every parent, also, has reason to adopt the prayer of Solomon. Professors of religion have reason to imitate the example of Solomon. 3. That God is pleased with those who make the choice and sincerely offer up the prayer of Solomon. (1) Because it is the effect of His grace. We are told that the Lord rejoices in His works, and with reason does He rejoice in them; for they are all very good. If He rejoices in them, He must, of course, be pleased with them. But to induce persons to make the choice and offer up the prayer of Solomon, is always His work, the effect of His grace. (2) He is pleased with it, because it indicates opinions and feelings similar to His own. In the opinion of Jehovah, spiritual wisdom, that wisdom of which the fear of God is the beginning, is the principal thing, the one thing needful, to creatures such as we are. Now those who make the choice which Solomon made, estimate objects according to their real value; that is, according to their value in the estimation of God. Their opinions and feelings in this respect correspond with His; and since all beings are necessarily pleased with those who resemble them, God cannot but be pleased with those who resemble Him in this respect. (3) God is pleased with those who thus pray for a wise and understanding heart, because such prayers are indicative of humility. (4) God is pleased with such characters, because their conduct evinces that they are actuated by a benevolent concern for His glory, and for the happiness of their fellow-creatures. (5) God is pleased with those who imitate the examples of Solomon, because it actually and greatly tends to promote His glory. 4. All who make his choice, and adopt his prayer, shall certainly be favoured with a wise and understanding heart. That God will gratify the desires of those who thus pray for wisdom, is evident from His express promises. If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth liberally to all men and upbraideth not; and it

shall be given him. (*E. Payson, D.D.*) *A wise choice*:—There are around the city of Chester high walls, on the top of which runs a much-frequented path which is reached by a flight of steps. It is said by the people of the place that whatever you wish for when standing on these stairs you will get it in a year's time, and so they are called the "wishing stairs." What would each of us now wish for if we were on these steps? "What is it exactly that I most desire?" we are often at a loss to know. It was not so with Solomon. He did not find it difficult to answer when asked what he most wanted. 1. Solomon prayed for an understanding heart, to discern good from evil, because he felt the responsibility of his position. He knew that without God's guiding Spirit he could not rule so great a people. If we do not feel the same need of an understanding heart, may it not be because we refuse to look our responsibilities in the face? If for nothing else, we are all responsible to God for the management of the life He has given us. Then there are always other lives that depend upon us, more or less. Poor Margaret Fuller, recording in her diary the birth of her child, expressed a feeling of responsibility with which many parents can sympathise: "I am the mother of an immortal being? God be merciful to me a sinner!" But what exactly is this understanding heart for which Solomon prayed? It is that wonderful thing which is so much spoken of in the Bible under the name of Wisdom. It is goodness or the fear of the Lord, the opposite of godless wickedness, which is "folly." 2. Again, those who ask for and receive God's Holy Spirit get also the highest kind of riches. They are content, and he who is most contented is the richest of men. Perhaps it may be said that nearly all people do desire an understanding heart, and that they need not be urged to make the choice. Yes, they desire it; but they cannot be said to choose it. They desire to be educated; but there are myriads of desires that never ripen into a choice, as there are a million blossoms and comparatively few apples. When those who desired to be educated saw that a choice would involve self-denial and drudgery, they preferred to put it off till to-morrow, or next week, or next year, and to take the consequences. A young man desires to be rich; but as soon as he finds that gaining wealth requires self-denial, painstaking, industry, and integrity, he does not choose riches. He chooses self-indulgence; he chooses pleasures. Men desire to have an honourable character and the happiness that comes from well-doing. They desire it; but whether they choose it or not, we can only tell when we see how they act. In the same way many persons desire to obey Christ, and hope that one day they shall do so. But do they choose to have in them the mind of Christ or an understanding heart to discern between good and evil? It is easy to desire, it is difficult to choose, and this is the explanation of the religious sentiment which produces little or no result in life. (*E. J. Hardy, M.A.*) I have given thee a wise and understanding heart.—*Acquisition of knowledge*:—I. THAT THE FIRST STEPS IN KNOWLEDGE AND IN HOLINESS MUST BE TAKEN BY OURSELVES. Solomon gave his heart to seek and search out all things under heaven. When a choice of gifts was afterwards placed in his power by God, he had acquired intelligence enough by his previous industry to be enabled to choose aright, and to select wisdom. Like the youth told of in American story, we must fix our eyes upward, and scale the scarped rock slowly by cutting clefts for our hands and feet in its steep side, each foothold that we cut helping us to reach onward to cut another. To gain some knowledge helps us to acquire more; to learn to distinguish between the jewel truth and all the worthless spangles of falsehood, enables us to discern that "pearl of great price" which sooner or later God offers to every man. II. THAT IF WE SEEK THE HIGHEST GOOD, GOD WILL IN HIS BOUNTY GIVE US, AS OUR NEED MAY REQUIRE, LESSER BLESSINGS ALSO. (*Homilist.*) *The heart as organ of insight*:—The emphasis of current thought lies on light rather than on heat. A bright man is listed at a higher figure than a man with fervid impulses. Brain counts for a good deal more to-day than heart does. It will win more applause, and earn a larger salary. Emotion we are a little afraid of. We caution people not to let their feelings run away with them. We want to know that a conclusion has been reached in cold blood before we are disposed to assent to it, or to submit our own judgment to it. Convictions formed heatedly we are not supposed to publish till they have been reviewed and revised at a low temperature. Exuberance is in bad odour. Appeals to the heart are not thought to quite be in good taste. People are not disposed to surrender themselves to any influence or impression that they cannot intellectually construe. The current demand is for ideas. But the fact that our thinking is keen and alert is no

indication that we reach, or have any relish for, the inward substance of the truth upon whose glittering surface our thoughts so jauntily divert themselves. This holds of religious truths exactly as much as of any other. If a preacher handles his matter with dexterity, and if in the process his own mind is quickened into any degree of activity, this activity of his will communicate itself to the machinery of his hearers' minds, just as the movement of one cog-wheel communicates revolution to the companion wheel that it gears into. This movement of their intellectual gearing amuses them. They enjoy the sensation of feeling it go. The point is, that intellectual activity upon Christian themes is not Christianity, any more than working a flying trapeze in a church is "godly exercise." An ox can devour the painting accidentally left upon the easel out in the pasture where he is grazing, but that does not help to make the ox æsthetic. The creature has dealt with the painting purely on the basis of his brutality; he has not chewed it with any reference to the spirit of beauty which the canvas incarnates. So it is the peculiar function of pure intellect to deal with the forms of truth, with the shell in which the truth is encased, without any necessary regard being had to the meat that is packed inside the shell; just as children can play with diamonds, and yet if you take away the diamonds and give them cheap beads, or even white beans, the probability is that they will go on with their play just as satisfiedly, because it is the shape and the glisten of the thing and not the quality of its interior substance that amuses them. That is the kind of thing pure intellect is; not to be trusted to prick through the cuticle of truth into its quick; brilliant as winter sunshine, but cold and surface-grazing as the frosty splendour of January; which has scintillant agility enough to whiten the hair without being competent to brush away the snow, eat through the ice, bore into the ground, unlock the fountains of fertility, fire the pulse of this ague-stricken old earth, warm it into springtime, and garnish it with summer life and loveliness. It is worth a great deal to have blood, and it is as essential to the intelligence as it is to the body. There has never been a thing said, more fundamental to the appreciation of the matter we have just now in hand, than what Solomon said three thousand years ago: "The issues of life are out of the heart." Passion is axial. Power begins in heat. In the last analysis there is scarcely a terrestrial activity in either earth, sea, or air, that does not owe itself to the great sphere of material passion that we call the Sun. The throb of the sea, the currents of the air, the very coal on the hearth, that converts winter into summer, and turns evening into daytime, is every whit of it old sunshine, cosmic fire, preserved and translated into instant effect. God means something by all that. It is a Divine satire on cold-bloodedness, and it is the way Heaven takes to rebuke the notion that results in the intellectual, artistic, moral, and spiritual world can be hammered out by cold calculation. All the best thoughts in the world, into however solid and granitic a form they may eventually have become chilled and compacted, are ingots moulded from metal once molten, mayhap a thousand, two, five thousand years ago. Man's first language is music. Prose is poetry cooled down. Geology tells us that the world began hot; so every thought that has had a history began as a passion. You can manufacture in cold weather, but all creating is done under a high temperature. What is true of thought is just as true of art. Art is enthusiasm become shape. The grand cathedrals are old, petrified pulse-beats. The master paintings—and they are all religious—are holy medieval passion flung on to canvas. Art is imitative now rather than creative, because the thermometer is down. We can make waxwork with the mercury at zero, but we cannot grow flowers there. Moses built the tabernacle, and he patterned it from what he caught, up in the Mount. A man can be an acute theologian without having any juice. It is clear, then, that we are not criticising Christian truth; our censure is only upon intellectual dexterity considered as a means of dealing with it. Intellectual dexterity cannot deal with it. Intellectual dexterity does not know how to deal with it. Truth has a heart, and only heart can find it. What we understand by dogma to-day is what is left of some old holy vision, but with all the original heavenly light died out of it. It is truth's body, but in which the warm currents of truth's blood no longer circulate. The theologian constructs his system of theology out of truths that have ceased to beat, very much as the botanist constructs his herbarium out of dead flowers. All the theology that is in the Church to-day is in the Epistles, but it is not there as theology. So all the bone-dust that is in our graveyards to-day was once in society, but it was not there as bone-dust. Intellect is not vision. The sum of the whole matter is this:

that in the sphere of truth, in the domain of life, and in the higher ranges of religious discernment and of Christian appreciation and aspiration, pure calculating intellect is being worked for a great deal more than it is worth. It is heat that makes the world a live world, and not light. It is heart that composes the core of Christianity, and not head. (*C. H. Parkhurst, D.D.*).

Ver. 14. **I will lengthen thy days.**—*Long life* :—I get a good deal of comfort out of that promise, "with long life will I satisfy thee." I don't think that means a short life down here—seventy years, eighty years, ninety years, or one hundred years. Do you think that any man living would be satisfied if he could live to be one hundred years old, and then have to die? Not by a good deal. Suppose Adam had lived until to-day, and had to die to-night; would he be satisfied? Not a bit of it! Not if he had lived a million years, and then had to die. You know we are all the time coming to the end of things here—the end of the week, the end of the month, the end of the year, the end of schooldays. It is the end, end, end all the time. But, thank God, He is going to satisfy us with long life; no end to it, an endless life. Life is very sweet. It would be a pretty dark world if death were eternal, and when our loved ones die we were to be eternally separated from them. Thank God, it is not so; we shall be reunited. It is just moving out of this house into a better one; stepping up higher and living on and on for ever. (*D. L. Moody.*)

Vers. 16–28. **Then came there two women.**—*The true mother* :—I. THAT SIN PRODUCES SUFFERING. The two women who came for judgment to Solomon were harlots; and the offsprings of their impurity were the means by which they were afflicted. The sin of unchastity is one of the most grievous of offences, because it is the one whose results are the most debasing and the most far-reaching. Of this sin, as of all others, it is eternally true, that the wages of sin is death. II. THAT IN THE MOST DEGRADED NATURES SOME NOBLE TRAIT REMAINS. Some relic of a vanished Eden lingers in the worst of us, although the slime of the serpent may be over it still. These women, though sinners, loved their children. There is hope then for the worst of offenders, inasmuch as in every human soul there are dormant spiritual symphonies, which, when the dark night of sin is over, shall, at the dawning of a brighter day, be wakened by the touch of sympathy, like Memnon's statue, into music and into life. III. THAT WHERE THE IGNORANT CAN SEE ONLY CRUELTY AND DISORDER, THE WISE AND FAITHFUL CAN RECOGNISE BENEFICENCE AND ORDER. The king, calling for a sword, ordered the living child to be divided. A cruel decree, superficial thinkers would say; but it was only a test after all, devised by true wisdom, in order the more readily to reveal the true mother. When men are so hasty in impugning the action of the Deity, and in imputing cruelty or unconcern to God at any period of public or private calamity, it would be well for them to bethink them of their own ignorance. So to us, who see but here in part through a glass darkly, the operations of God in grace and in nature must present many difficulties and apparent anomalies. IV. THAT NOT BY OUTWARD PROFESSIONS, BUT BY THE SENTIMENTS OF THE HEART, MUST EACH OF US BE JUDGED. Both these women professed equally to love the living child; but it was seen speedily in the hour of trial as to which of the two had real feelings of maternal affection in her heart. It is what we are, and not what we have pretended to be, that will avail us "in the hour of death and in the day of judgment." V. THAT OFTEN, WHEN GOD GIVES TO US A LIVING TALENT, AS A LIVING CHILD WAS GIVEN TO EACH OF THESE WOMEN, WE, LAZILY SLUMBERING AWAY OUR TIME, FAIL TO BE THANKFUL FOR IT, OR TO UTILISE IT AS WE OUGHT. By negligence on our own part,—as in the case of the woman who overlaid her child,—or by the craftiness of other agencies, be it those of world, flesh, or devil, taking advantage of our own supineness,—as in the case of the woman whose child was stolen while she slept,—we lose our gift from God, our living grace, and find, when we awake from our slumbers, only a dead image of a departed spiritual beauty, which no shedding of our heart's best blood can again quicken into life. (*R. Young, M.A.*) *The mother* :—Musicians strike a key or note which they call a "natural," sometimes. It was for this note that Solomon was listening—the note of nature. The soldier's naked sword gleamed close to the baby's naked flesh, and, like a tuning-fork, it struck its note before it struck its blow. Its note was differently read by two different auditors. Two women's hearts took up the key. The one followed it with a murmur of contentment, willing that its work

of blood should be accomplished. The other caught it with a cry of horror, as if it struck a discord in her soul. The sword was the baton of harmony to jealousy, but of horror to motherhood and love. There was nothing unnatural to the vixen heart in the decree to cut the babe in half. But the voice of motherhood found vent in a shriek which preferred anything to that, and accepted bereavement and injustice rather than that innocence be harmed. 1. And this is the first instinct on which the relationship reposes. Instinct is a shorter and surer way to right conclusion than reason. It reaches it by a passionate leap, rather than by a patient process. Inference, sequence, deduction, calculation, hypothesis; these are the cumbersome machinery of what calls itself philosophy; and they almost always lead to a separate result in each separate mind which uses them, when they lead to any result at all; so that the only certain issue of their use is confusion worse confounded. With instinct it is all postulate, and all that complicates the logic of love, or encumbers the swift process of its flight, must be conceded, or it will be taken for granted. With the love that springs out of any relationship this will be more or less the rule; but with maternal love it is pre-eminently so. 2. If the mother-instinct pervaded all humanity, there would be no intricate question created out of the vivisection stir, on which science, "falsely so called," is condescending to dispute. It would be taken for granted that it was base and brutal; and that higher reason, to whose platform instinct often vaults by its own innate buoyancy, would declare that true science has resources too vast to be compelled to criminality to reach discovery; that the intelligence that would grope its way through cruelty to daylight misses its path, and takes a false name; and that men who pretend to find instruction in the infliction of agony on what is dumb and defenceless, instead of being a little lower than the angels, are a great deal lower than the beasts they butcher. But if the very principle of motherhood is instinctive and unreasoning, its developments are not unfrequently capricious and unreasonable. Maternal love is often diluted by maternal cares. Necessities increase with each renewal of the relationship; but the means of meeting them too often diminish. The natural selection of the mother's heart is towards the weakest and most helpless; and the survival of the fittest in the breast which is maternal, is asserted by feebleness rather than by strength. The mother loves that best to which she can give most. 3. It comes within the mother's province to lead the child into the fragrant orbit of religious influence, and to guide its feet when young amidst those scenes which shall colour its whole life, giving ballast to its youth, strength to its prime, and light at eventide to illumine its old age. Then if you would not burlesque that religion and repel the child, gild it with the sunshine with which its Author fills it. Let it be a garden of flowers, not an Egyptian brickfield of toil. The patience and the ingenuity of motherhood are boundless, and in no sweeter mission can they be embarked than in leading the children to the Saviour. Show them His sweet example. The wisest and the truest mothers are the Hannahs who give their children to the Lord. (*A. Mursell.*) *Evil of divisions:*—Now, by the same law that it would have been wicked in Solomon to have divided the child, is it wicked in us to divide our affections. Divisions at all times are bad. Whether they harass a church, which should be of one mind and one body; or a family, which should be united and strong in fellowship and love; we may rest assured, that evil consequences must arise, most injurious to individual members. And as for a house, we are told, if it be divided against itself it cannot stand. The Jew and the Gentile were two distinct persons, but Christianity made them one people. By the universality of the Gospel, all nations were united; by embracing the same faith they became one; a distinct people, having an appointed priesthood, with the great Author of our religion as their Head. They became indeed a church—one body, with one spirit—"a congregation of faithful men, in the which the pure Word of God is preached, and the sacraments are duly ministered, according to Christ's ordinance, in all those things that of necessity are requisite to the same." (*E. Thompson, D.D.*) *Administration of justice difficult:*—James the First is said to have tried his hand as a judge, but to have been so much perplexed when he had heard both sides that he abandoned the trade in despair, saying, "I could get on very well hearing one side only, but when both sides have to be heard, by my soul, I know not which is right." *Judgment obtained by appeal to the principle of affection:*—Among the heathens we read of similar decisions. We read of an emperor having discovered a woman to be the mother of a certain young man, whom she refused to acknowledge as her son, by commanding her to marry him; but rather than this, she

confessed the truth. Another instance we read, is that of the King of Thrace, being appointed to decide between three young men, who each professed to be the son of a deceased king, and claimed the crown in consequence: but Ariopharnes found out the real son, by commanding each to shoot an arrow into the body of the dead king; two of them did this without any hesitation; the third refused, and was therefore judged to be the real son. In both cases an appeal was made to the principle of affection; and the truth was discovered, as in the case of the mother of the living child. (*E. Thompson, D.D.*)

CHAPTER IV.

VERS. 1-28. **So King Solomon was king over all Israel.**—*A kingdom unified*:—Charles Albert, we are told, went to help the Milanese. The Austrians, vastly outnumbering, drove him back toward Turin, defeated him at Novara, swayed renewed sceptre over the revolted provinces. The king abdicated in favour of his son, Victor Emanuel. When the young king accepted the crown he pointed his sword toward the Austrian camp and said, "By the grace of God there shall be a united Italy." It seemed then but an empty boast. Yet his prophecy turned to fact. Marshal Radetjsky proposed to him the abolishment of the constitutional charter granted to the people by his father, and advised him to follow the Austrian policy of unbridled oppression. But the young king declared that, sooner than subscribe to such conditions, he was ready to renounce, not one crown, but a thousand. "The house of Savoy," he said, "knows the path of exile, but not the path of dishonour." Right noble answer! Better anything than disloyalty to a high ancestry, than falseness to the laws of the kingdom of which he had been made the leader. *The Church triumphant*:—Make these words bear their very highest meaning, and we begin to approach a true conception of the position of Jesus Christ as He sits enthroned above the riches of the universe, ruling an obedient creation, receiving the acclaims of the nations He has redeemed. Even this is prophesied. The prophets were bold men. They followed their logic to its conclusions; yea, even until it became poetry, and surprised themselves with unexpected music. We must not regard millennial glory and millennial music as representing only imagination, fancy, a vivid or overwrought dreaming faculty; all that is brightest, sweetest, most melodious, expresses an underlying solidity of fact, history, reality. The prophets said, Right shall reign; the day must come when men will see that right is better than wrong, justice better than injustice, and peace to be preferred above battle; and all this will be wrought out in connection with the name of Immanuel—God with us—whose name is the Prince of Peace. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

Vers. 22, 23, and 27, 28. **Solomon's provisions for one day.**—*Solomon's feast*:—This would seem to be part of the Parable of the Prodigal Son before its time. This typical feast of Solomon's has no reference to gluttony. We have read of Caligula, who would never eat bread unless it was gilded—had a coating of gold over the crust; but we are not commending such men in representing Solomon's feast as the feast of fat things and wine upon the lees well refined, as being part of the viands and provision of the table of God, which is so abundantly—yea, lavishly—spread. When did God give just enough? When was there less at the end than there was at the beginning? When He had five loaves and fed five thousand, how many basketfuls of fragments took ye up? Let God be judged by the fragments, whoever found the loaves: let God be judged by the harvest, whoever lent the seed out of which it sprang. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

Ver. 25. **Judah and Israel dwelt safely.**—*Prosperity under the reign of wisdom*:—The text presents to us a perfect picture of a peaceful and prosperous commonwealth. It is painted with few touches, but they are all full of expression. We have before our eyes a fruitful land. Cities, of different but united tribes, shine at a distance. Quiet fields repose between. Families are grouped here and there under the shadow of the leaves and the wealth of the fruit. And over all spreads the rule of the prince, whose name has been but another name for wisdom

over the eastern and western world. The text invites us to draw a parallel between the Hebrew commonwealth, at this highest point it ever reached of growth and refinement, and our own country. 1. First, then, it enjoyed the most perfect political independence. It was in itself an empire; compact at home, respected abroad. Its commerce spread its sail to all the winds, and extended its traffic as far as the Spanish coast and the pillars of Hercules. It was independent of the customs of others, as well as of their dictation; for it was a peculiar people. It was independent of the teaching of others; for it was Divinely instructed. 2. Though one, it was composed of several well-defined parts. It was a confederacy of states, owning a common chief. 3. The third particular that calls for our notice in this pleasant scene is the safety, the content, the enjoyment, of each individual citizen—protected in his rights, and surrounded with the bounties which his industry had gathered, or which fortune, without any effort of his own, had bequeathed to him. "Every man under his vine and fig-tree." Here, after all, is the test of a truly flourishing state: what is done for the private person, and what his opportunities are, in point of civilisation and enjoyment. For such persons is the state appointed, and not they for the state. The improvement and happiness of its members must be its leading aim. Such was the happy position of Jacob's united states during the reign of the third of their kings. Though hardly even the third who could be truly called so, he was the last that ruled over their associated people. Irreligion first made its inroads. The service of the Lord was neglected or defiled. The customs of the heathen were adopted. The nations that could not withstand their arms inflicted upon them their superstitions, and so were avenged for their overthrow. Then came the insolence of despotic sway. Oppression provoked resistance. Ten tribes revolted, and two adhered. The bond of political brotherhood was cut through by the sword, and Judah and Israel, so prosperous together, fell wretchedly apart, and became rivals and foes. Where was now their independence? They were intriguing at foreign courts, and seeking disastrous alliances—so unli e their own—with the North and the South. Where was their peace? It was sacrificed in civil strife—that most monstrous of iniquities, and mother of sorrows. Where was their glory? It was all extinguished, except that which burnt in the lamps of the sanctuary, and glowed upon the lips of prophets and holy men. Where was their abundance? It flowed away among their divisions and their sins. The fig ripened for the invader. The wine-press was dabbled with blood. (*N. L. Frothingham.*) *National prosperity*:—I. THAT IT IS GOD WHO BESTOWS NATIONAL PEACE. This, God claims as His peculiar prerogative. "I form the light and create darkness: I make peace and create evil. I the Lord do all these things." The voice of Scripture here concurs with the voice of reason. National peace is one of the links in the great chain of providence, and of consequence comes under the Divine direction. It belongs to God to determine when and where national peace shall be enjoyed. And it is easy to see how God can give this blessing to different nations, notwithstanding their native pride and selfishness. 1. God can make it the mutual interest of native and foreign nations to be at peace with each other. This was the case in the days of Solomon. Just so God is able to unite the hearts of other nations, by uniting their interests. It has long been a maxim in politics, that national interest is the first principle of national policy. It is only for God, therefore, to make it the mutual interest of different nations to be at peace with each other, and they themselves will naturally seek and promote this agreeable object. 2. God is able to govern the hearts of nations, and in that way dispose them to mutual peace and harmony. It was a proverb in Israel, "The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water: He turneth it whithersoever He will." There is a supreme power in every nation; and the men who possess that power, have the right of making war or peace. II. THAT NATIONAL PEACE IS A GREAT NATIONAL BLESSING. So long as Solomon had peace on all sides round about him, it diffused universal happiness through his widely extended kingdom. National peace is naturally productive of the greatest national prosperity. 1. National peace naturally tends to increase the numbers of a people. It is almost incredible how fast a people will increase in numbers, while they are free from public and wasting calamities. And the increase of numbers not only adds to the happiness of a people, but to the glory of their government. So Solomon thought, and so he said: "In the multitude of people is the king's honour: but in the want of people is the destruction of the prince." 2. National peace directly tends to promote national wealth. Wealth is a temporal favour

to nations, as well as to individuals, though it be often perverted and abused by both. Solomon says, "The blessing of the Lord it maketh rich, and He addeth no sorrow with it." Peace is the parent of wealth. For peace promotes industry, industry promotes commerce, and commerce promotes the wealth of any nation. 3. National peace has a happy influence upon every branch of human knowledge. Leisure and learning go together. 4. National peace affords a favourable opportunity for forming public designs and performing public works. Every rising nation finds that, in order to be happy as well as respectable, it must build cities, erect churches, endow colleges, open canals, make bridges, repair highways, remove public nuisances, and perform many other expensive works of general utility. To promote such national objects was highly reputable among the Romans in the zenith of their prosperity. Pliny congratulates one of his friends upon being appointed a surveyor of the highways; an office to which he, and even Cæsar himself, had been promoted. It is only when nations are settled in peace that they can form and execute public designs. 5. It is the direct tendency of national peace to promote personal as well as public prosperity. There is no other national blessing so extensive in its kindly influence. 6. National peace is very friendly to the interests of religion. During the peaceful reign of Solomon, religion greatly flourished. III. IMPROVEMENT. 1. If peace be the greatest national blessing, then war is the greatest national calamity. War and peace are diametrically opposite to each other in their nature and tendency. War tends to destroy all that prosperity which peace tends to produce. 2. If peace be the greatest of national blessings, then it is the wisdom of those who possess the supreme power in any nation, to promote and maintain this desirable and important object. 3. If it be the natural tendency of national peace to promote national prosperity, then it is the wisdom of a people to do all in their power to retain this invaluable blessing. A prosperous people are very prone to forget the source of their prosperity, and to become extremely stupid, avaricious, and revengeful. 4. We learn, from what has been said, that we are under peculiar obligations to God for the bestowment and continuance of our national peace. (*N. Emmons, D.D.*)

Ver. 29. **Largeness of heart, even as the sand that is on the seashore.**—*Grains of sand*:—The image is very expressive. On the coast both of Palestine and Egypt—the regions with which the Bible writers were most familiar—the sand is unusually abundant. All the way from the delta of the Nile to the most northern point of Syria, a vast sandy tract, penetrating inland here and there from the shore-line, fringes the Mediterranean, and separates between the green cultivated fields and the blue waters of the sea. The floor of the desert, which encompasses the Holy Land on the south and east, although usually composed of other materials, has nevertheless in a few places large belts of deep sand-drifts, like those which may be seen on the western bank of the Nile. Let the traveller stand on the seashore near Gaza, where, far as the eye can reach north and south, the tawny sand-hills swell and shoal as if imitating the rolling of the waves. Let him take up a handful of the sand and try to count its grains as they trickle through his fingers, and he will give up the task in despair ere he has counted a twentieth part. Let him try to imagine how many handfuls there are in even one heap beside him, and his imagination will be speedily overpowered. And if he endeavours further to form some conception of the quantity that makes up the shore of a single bay, or the floor of a single desert, the mind utterly collapses under the unequal burden. In analysing it more closely, the image indicates not only the vast but also the varied range of Solomon's wisdom; not only the quantity but also the quality of the largeness of his heart. Nothing, at first sight, looks more uniform and monotonous than a heap of sand. It seems barren and uninteresting to the last degree; and yet examine carefully a small portion of the sand, and you will be struck with the immense variety which it contains. No two particles are the same in size, shape, colour, or mineral character. No two grains have perhaps the same origin or the same history. A handful of sand is, in fact, a geological museum, composed of the remains of different rocks worn off or ground down by different agencies and at different periods. One grain has come from the granite rocks that almost throttle the Nile at the first cataract, out of which the earliest monuments of Egypt were carved—perhaps has itself formed part of some statue or obelisk that was old before history began. Another grain has been ground down from the marble hills of Greece that have yielded the precious material in which, by the sculptor's skill, the gods have come down to the earth in the

likeness of men. A third has been disintegrated from the volcanic stone which the earliest builders of Italy have piled into their gigantic walls and massive tombs. Some of the particles have been washed down by streams from the precipices of the Alps or Apennines; others have been carried by the wind from the eruptions of Vesuvius and Etna; and others still have been ground from the dark northern headlands, those Sphinxes of the ocean against which the waves of the Atlantic—fugitives, all white and reeking, flying from some monster of the deep—hurl themselves with frantic fear. Frost and fire, glacier on mountain crest, and iceberg on Arctic shore, all these have been at work for untold ages to produce the individual grains of the handful of sand. We read in these sand-dunes, as distinctly as we see the tracks of ancient animals on the surface of sandstone slabs taken from the quarry, the evidence of many of the changes through which our earth has passed. We see in them the relics of old continents that have vanished completely—the sole memorials of ancient seas that seem mythical to all but the geologist. The earth is but a gigantic sand-glass for the computation of geological time, in which the sands are falling unremittingly; and which after long ages is turned upside down to expend what it has gained, and to gain what it has expended. Like this sand on the seashore, in its wonderful variety, was the largeness of heart which God bestowed upon Solomon; as a heap of sand, abundance of interest and enjoyment; a largeness of heart which would invest with its own charm the most desert place and the most familiar object—to which nothing that God had made would be common or unclean. Throughout the life of Solomon we see how richly he possessed this Divine gift; how wide was his culture—how deep was his interest in the world around him. God is willing to grant to every human being, in a degree proportioned to his nature and circumstances, what He bestowed upon Solomon. He has placed us in a large and wealthy place. He has given to us the whole creation for our inheritance, and made us the heirs of all the ages. The whole universe tends towards man as its centre and highest point. It finds in him its end and interpreter. Nature is translated in his mind into thought. All the sciences are only the humanising of the things of earth. We name and classify and study plants, and animals, and stones, and thus give our own life to them, and raise them by this association into fit companions for ourselves. The uses of the objects of nature are only their human relations. And all this is because God made the earth to be co-ordinate with man, and in its own degree humane. And just as He feeds our bodies with the treasures of every land and every sea, that we may have a wide and vigorous life, participant of all variety; so He wishes to feed our souls with intellectual food derived from all the objects which He has made, that we may interpret the mute symbolism of earth and sea and sky, and offer in rational conscious form, as the priests of creation, the silent, unconscious worship of nature. As the sand is formed on the seashore, so is the enlargement of heart, which is said to resemble it, acquired. Not in the quiet sheltered waters of the bay, by gentle process, is the sand deposited. It speaks of storm, of waste, and change. Its gain has come through loss. The sorrow or suffering that seems so useless and vain, contending with the hard rocky cause of it, fretting and fuming among the trying restraints of life, is, as it were, removing from them lessons of faith, and patience, and love, which afterwards, when the sorrow has subsided and the suffering has become tranquil, will enrich and beautify the whole life. So is it with all enlargements both in the natural and human worlds; the increase in one direction is the result of decrease in a nother, as the seashore acquires its sand by a process of continental disintegration. God's chastisements, which seem to limit our joys and to make our life poorer and meaner, are in reality designed to enlarge our hearts and to widen the bounds of our being. And so, throughout the history of Christendom, we find that communities tempted solfishly to confine to themselves their special blessings have been compelled, by external shocks and internal sufferings, to enlarge their bounds and make others partakers with them of their privileges. New ages of larger liberty, of wider vision, of purer faith, of more just and loving relationships between man and man, have been ushered in through periods of terror and pain! The hearts of men everywhere have been enlarged through their fears; and the storms and strifes of the world have been the pains of progress—the birth-pangs of grander liberties. The framework of Society, like the framework of Nature, is broken up from time to time, that out of the wreck may be formed the shore-line that limits the encroachments of evil, and the dry land of truth that lifts the level of life nearer heaven. The sand on the seashore is com-

posed of small particles. It is vast in the aggregate, but the grains are individually minute: and so the largeness of heart, which resembles it, is made up of the fulfilment of little duties and the adorning of little occasions as they arise. The largeness of the Christian's heart is shown, not only by the comprehensiveness of its range of regard, but also by the minuteness of its interests and sympathies. His piety is proved, not by his conduct on great and exciting occasions, but by his conduct in ordinary circumstances. It requires less grace in reality to be a martyr for Christ on a public stage than to be kind and considerate in the familiar intercourse of domestic life, or to maintain a guileless integrity in the ordinary transactions of business. The Christianity that is faithful in that which is least is a more difficult Christianity than that which glows and triumphs on grand occasions. Little love can perform great actions; but it requires great love to present like little children small offerings—and to devote every moment and task of our life to God. A largeness of heart which thus attends to the smallest details of piety—to the little things in which love most powerfully shows itself, which recognises God habitually, and seeks constant opportunities to please Him, will never be oppressed with listlessness and ennui. Without this enlargement of heart we cannot appreciate the broad wide world of God's salvation. Without an enlargement of heart to place us, as it were, on higher ground, from whence our view can take in more and more of God's universe, our life will be centred in the mere spark that animates the body. We need that the grace of God should do for our hearts what the microscope does for our eyes—enlarging our vision so as to see new beauty and wonder in the most familiar objects. We have had moments when we obtained fleeting glimpses of this joy. (*H. Macmillan, D.D.*)

Ver. 30–34. **Solomon's wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the children of the east country.**—*The aloneness of Jesus Christ*:—Christ towers up above the history of the world and the process of revelation, like Mount Everest among the Himalayas. To that great peak all the country on the one side runs upwards, and from it all the valleys on the other descend; and the springs are born there which carry verdure and life over the world. (*Alex. Maclaren, D.D.*)

Ver. 33. **And he spake of trees . . . he spake also of beasts.**—*Plant-life*:—The wise man had a genuine delight in plants, herbs, flowers, and trees. Read the Book of Canticles, and from its pages is caught the very fragrance of spring. He speaks with enthusiasm of the "rose of Sharon," of "the lily among thorns," of the "apple-trees and orchards of pomegranates with pleasant fruits," of the "garden of nuts," and the "smell of Lebanon." He rejoices when "the winter is past, the rain over and gone," when "the flowers appear on the earth," when "the time of the singing of birds" comes, when the "voice of the turtle is heard in the land," "when the fig-tree putteth forth her green figs, and the vines with the tender grape give a good smell!" Such expressions indicate a fervent delight in Nature and an accurate observation of her phases. Jesus also, the greater than Solomon, directed His disciples to "consider the lilies," and to notice the way in which God "clothes the grass of the field." I. GOD'S DELIGHT IN VARIED BEAUTY. From the "cedar of Lebanon to the hyssop," what a range! What an almost infinite number of species! What variety of colouring and form! All are the expression of God's thought of beauty. What a God of glory we serve! In Society and in the Church, many varieties of men and systems, God is working through all and delights in all. What a painful thing would be a uniform colour or shape for plants. II. HOW BEAUTY MAY SPRING OUT OF CORRUPTION. God has arranged this. It is His plan throughout. Plants flourish best on the mould full of decayed vegetable or animal life. Striking their roots deep down into this reign of decay and death they gather life therefrom. Death supports life. So if only we are enlightened we shall find that out of our natures so sinful, so imperfect, these passions so overmastering, we may, under the influence of the forgiving love of Christ and of God's Spirit renewing our hearts and lives, bring that which shall be beautiful, good, noble, pure, and approved of God. III. GROWTH IS A GREAT MYSTERY. True, the plants draw nourishment from the moist earth, but what power or principle is it that set all its ducts and roots at work? We may call it "life," "attraction," "assimilation," or what we like, we are as far off as ever. God is the Author of their life. But the mystery remains. So in our spiritual life. How our receiving as true the fact that Christ died and rose again, should be as new life to our souls, we cannot explain. IV. THE WAY GROWTH

SHOULD TEND. Upwards. Higher, higher, is echoed by every flower and every tree. Heavenward should be the constant aim of the Christian, nearer to God. Stretching forth our hands in prayer we should grow. See how the palm-tree shoots upward, surmounted by a graceful tuft of foliage that seems like a symbol of the crown which shall hereafter grace the Christian's brow when he has reached the heaven of his joy. V. UPWARD GROWTH MUST BE BY THE AID OF THAT WHICH COMES FROM OUTSIDE AND ABOVE. The willow grows by the water of the dark and lazy stream, but the flowers of the field rejoice when the rain cometh down to water the earth. Notice how the one droops downward in reverence, while the others spread their leaves or lift their branches so as to welcome the bounty of God. So we point to Him who came from above, who revealed the Father, who died for sin, and who has been ready to give to every thirsty spirit the water of life, who has brought life and immortality to light; and whose Spirit alone can nourish us that we may grow. VI. EVERY PLANT IN ITS PLACE. Each clump of moss, bunch of ferns, hyssop, flower or tree has its habitat. In the myriad plants of a dense tropical forest, there is not one that is not fulfilling some purpose. The hyssop or fern may help to soften rugged edges of rock or wall. The tree may be for shade to man or shelter to birds, and the cedar may be for timber for the temple. The tall palm standing near a well intimates to the far-off and famishing traveller of the desert that there is relief at hand. The flowers may bloom or die, but they fulfil the end of existence. Let us learn to do so. VII. PLANTS teach us also to MAKE THE BEST OF CIRCUMSTANCES. Winter cuts down the flowers, withers the leaves, bares the trees. Its winds sweep through the branches, its keen frosts nip the buds and early blossoms. Yet they went through all, and in time are re-clothed with beauty. VIII. HINTS GIVEN OF A GLORIOUS RESURRECTION. Well, indeed, for us that we should so live that we can look forward to the spring-time of heaven as a further step in the stage of being, and revelation of the glory of God. We shall sleep in the dust of death and rise in the glory of springtide. (*Homiletic Quarterly.*) *A royal horticulturist*:—When Lysander brought presents to Cyrus, the prince conducted his illustrious guest through his gardens. Lysander, struck with so fine a prospect, praised the manner in which the grounds were laid out, the neatness of the walks, the abundance of trees planted with an art which knew how to combine the useful with the agreeable; the beauty and the glowing variety of flowers exhaling odours throughout the delightful scene. "Everything charms and transports me in this place," said Lysander to Cyrus; "but what strikes me most is the exquisite taste of the person who drew the plan of these gardens." Cyrus replied, "I drew the plan and entirely marked it out. Many of the trees which you see were planted by my own hands." "What!" exclaimed Lysander with astonishment, "is it possible that those purple robes and splendid vestments, those strings of jewels and bracelets of gold, those buskins so richly embroidered—is it possible that *you* could play the gardener, and employ your royal hands in planting trees?" "Does that surprise you?" said Cyrus. "I assure you that when my health permits I never sit down to my table without having fatigued myself either in military exercise, rural labour, or some other toilsome employment, to which I apply myself with pleasure." *The study of Nature*:—It is said of Wordsworth that a stranger having on one occasion asked to see his study, the maid said, "This is master's room, but he studies in the fields." In doing so the poet followed a venerable example. We read that Isaac went out to meditate in the field at eventide, where in the margin "to pray" is put for "to meditate." Nor could there be a better place either for prayer or for study than the fields. The Word of God is written very clearly for His seers in the green book of Nature. Wordsworth's study is one that we can all use, however small our house may be. (*Quiver.*) *The world is worth seeing*:—Men must not live under a bushel. A gentleman once met a French priest on board an Atlantic liner. They entered into conversation, and the priest said that months ago he had a dream. He dreamt that he was dead, and that God asked him how much of the world he had seen. His answer was that he had seen only a very little of it, for he had been so long in preparing for death, and in helping other people to die, that he had no time to see the world. He saw that God was displeased, and on awakening he resolved to see as much of this beautiful world as he could. It was a wise resolve. The earth is the Lord's and not the devil's, and we have no right to ignore it. Nature is a temple of God, and we must ever walk through it in a sacramental mood. (*Sunday Circle.*)

CHAPTER V.

VERS. 1–18. **Hiram king of Tyre sent his servants unto Solomon . . . to build the house.**—*The co-operation of Hiram*:—According to tradition, Hiram was a tributary or dependent monarch. The embassy which Hiram sent on this occasion was evidently meant to express the congratulations of the King of Tyre—in 2 Chron. ii. 14, 15, we find the words, "My lord," "My lord David thy father." There is a notable mixture of affection and reverence in the spirit which Hiram showed to Solomon; Hiram was "ever a lover of David," and yet he speaks of David in terms which an inferior would use to a superior. Hiram preserved the continuity of friendship, and herein showed himself an example, not only to monarchs but to other men. Although Solomon was blessed with "rest on every side," and was enabled to look upon a future without so much as the shadow of an adversary upon it, yet he was determined not to be indolent. Suppose a man to come into the circumstances which we have described as constituting the royal position of Solomon, and suppose that man destitute of an adequate and all-controlling purpose, it is easy to see how he would become the victim of luxury, and how what little strength he had would gradually be withdrawn from him. But at all events, in the opening of Solomon's career, we see that the purpose was always uppermost, the soul was in a regnant condition, all outward pomp and circumstance was ordered back into its right perspective, and the king pursued a course of noble constancy as he endeavoured to realise the idea and intent of heaven. The same law applies to all prosperous men. To increase in riches is to increase in temptation, to indolence and self-idolatry: to external trust and vain confidence, to misanthropy, monopoly, and oppression; the only preventive or cure is the cultivation of a noble "purpose," so noble indeed as to throw almost into contempt everything that is merely temporal and earthly. Even the noblest purpose needs the co-operation of sympathetic and competent men. Thus the Jew seeks assistance from the Gentile in building the house of the Lord. How wonderful are the co-operations which are continually taking place in life! so subtly do they interblend, and make up that which is lacking in each other, that it is simply impossible to effect an exhaustive analysis. Nor would it be desirable that such an analysis should be completed. We should fix our minds upon the great fact that no man liveth unto himself, that no man is complete in himself, that every man needs the help of every other man, and thus we shall see how mysteriously is built the great temple of life, and is realised before the eyes of the universe the great purpose of God. Co-operation is only another word for the distributions which God has made of talent and opportunity. In vain had Hiram responded in the language of generous sympathy if Israel itself had been a divided people. This must be the condition of the Church as a great working body in the world. It will be in vain that poetry, history, literature, music, and things which apparently lie outside the line of spiritual activity, send in their offers, tributes, and contributions, each according to its own kind, if the Church to which the offer is made is a divided and self-destroying body. When all Israel is one, the contributions of Tyre will be received with thankfulness and be turned to their highest uses. A beautiful picture is given in verse 14. The picture represents the difference between cutting down and setting up; in other words, the difference between destruction and construction. It was easier to cut down than it was to build up. The two operations should always go on together. The business of the Church is to pull down, and to build up; even to use the materials of the enemy in building up the temple of the living God. The picture has an evident relation to the ease with which men can pull down faith and darken hope and unsettle confidence. Thus the work of foreign missions should help the work of missions at home. Every idolatry that is thrown down abroad should be turned into a contribution for the upbuilding and strengthening of the Church at home. The care shown of the foundation is another instance of the wisdom of Solomon. The stones which were used in the foundation were in no sense considered insignificant or worthless. The stones which Solomon used are described as "great stones, costly stones, and hewed stones"; the terms which are used to describe the foundation which was laid in Zion are these—"A stone, a tried stone, a precious corner-stone, a sure foundation." We read also of the foundations of the wall of the city which John saw in vision—"The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb." A curious illustration of the union

between the permanent and the temporary is shown in all earthly arrangements. Solomon laid foundations which might have lasted as long as the earth itself endured. Judging by the foundations alone, one would have said concerning the work of Solomon, This is meant for permanence; no thought of change or decay ever occurred to the mind of the man who laid these noble courses. It is the same with ourselves in nearly all the relations of life. We know that we may die to-day, yet we lay plans which will require years and generations to accomplish. Yet we often speak as having no obligation to the future, or as if the future would do nothing for us, not knowing that it is the future which makes the present what it is, and that but for the future all our inspiration would be lost because our hope would perish. Let us see that our foundations are strong. A beautiful illustration of contrast and harmony is to be found in the distribution which Solomon made of his workers and the labour they were required to undertake. Here we find burden-bearers, hewers in the mountains, officers, and rulers. There was no standing upon one level or claiming of one dignity. Each man did what he could according to the measure of his capacity, and each man did precisely what he was told to do by his commanding officer. It is in vain to talk about any equality that does not recognise the principle of order and the principle of obedience. Our equality must be found in our devotion, in the pureness of our purpose, in the steadfastness of our loyalty, and not in merely official status or public prominence. The unity of the Church must be found, not in its forms, emoluments, dignities, and the like, but in the simplicity of its faith and the readiness of its eager and affectionate obedience. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

Vers. 7–11. **When Hiram heard the words of Solomon.**—*Hiram and Solomon:*—I. GRATIFICATION. Hiram "rejoiced greatly" when he heard the words of King Solomon. This arose partly from the love he bore to his father David. The gratification of Hiram sprang also from a recognition of Solomon's wisdom: gratification in another's good. II. CONSIDERATION (ver. 8). The demand of Solomon was no small one, and deserved consideration. It involved, in all probability, a great sacrifice on the part of the Tyrians. III. SATISFACTION. "All his desire" (ver. 10). There was not one thing which Solomon asked, which Hiram did not grant; it is not right to ask or expect unreasonable things. It is right to grant reasonable requests, even if they should occasion sacrifice. Unreasonable requests should not be granted, even if it should be more easy to do so than to refuse. IV. RECOGNITION. "Endued with understanding" (2 Chron. ii. 13). Knowledge, genius, skill are of heavenly birth, and to despise them is to be guilty of a sin. V. COMBINATION. Solomon and Hiram were not independent of each other. No one can serve God properly in isolation: "two are better far than one," &c. Query—Have Christians a right to remain detached from the Church of Christ? VI. DISTRIBUTION (2 Chron. ii. 16). Each did the part allotted to him; the result was success. (*F. Wagstaff.*) *Joy of sharing in a good work:*—It was a saying of the late Professor Samuel Miller, of Princeton, that he loved to have "a nail in every building intended for the glory of God or the good of man." Here and there he scattered the gifts he had, a portion to seven and also to eight—benedictions wherever he went. Few are so poor but that they can adopt this plan of continuous beneficence.

Ver. 14. **A month they were in Lebanon, and two months at home.**—*Church and home:*—The building of the temple was the distinctive glory of the reign of Solomon, the most important monument of his administration. Although its erection was not originally contemplated in the Mosaic law, it had long been evident that such a building was necessary. I. EVERY GREAT UNDERTAKING DEMANDS GREAT AND VARIED EFFORT FOR ITS ACCOMPLISHMENT. The design of the temple, originated by David, had been adopted and elaborated by Solomon. Solomon's was the inspiring and directing mind. The results which fill us with gladness bear a direct proportion to their causes. "Out of nothing, nothing comes." You can achieve no worthy purpose, you can rear no solid structure, either as a witness to the glory of God or a place of sanctuary and healing for men, without an expenditure of thought, of affection, and of energy. In matters temporal and spiritual alike, success is, under the blessing of God, given to unrestrained labour. There is being reared among men a grander temple than Solomon's. Believers in Jesus Christ are "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief Corner-stone. It is

for us to dig deep in the earth, to fashion the stones into shape, to place them row upon row, until the whole edifice is complete. We have to rear the columns, to execute the carved workmanship, and to fix in their places the richly stained windows. II. THE IMPORTANCE OF THE DUTIES WHICH BELONG TO OUR BUSINESS AND OUR HOME. "A month they were in Lebanon, and two months at home." The men whom Solomon drafted off to aid him in his momentous task were not to neglect the cultivation of their fields and their vineyards. Devotion to the duties of religion neither justifies nor requires the neglect of our "secular calling." Business also is a Divine appointment; an essential element in our moral and spiritual education; training us to habits which can be learned in no other way so simply and effectually. So likewise of our homes. The family is the oldest of all our institutions, older even than the Church. Our first thoughts are associated with it. We should not be absent from our homes more than is really needful. Do not forget the proportion—one month at Lebanon and two at home. By no ethical or spiritual standard with which I am acquainted can negligence be justified. No husband is true to his name unless he is indeed "of house and home the band and stay." Even religious and philanthropic meetings should not be allowed to thrust home duties into a corner. (*J. Stuart.*) *Homes and how to make them*:—Every human being ought to be a member of some household, and every household ought to have a fixed place of residence, a place of its own—in one word, both short and sweet, a home. That is the only right way of living. A home is, for every human being, the first condition of the highest happiness and the best growth. No one ought to be satisfied until he has supplied it for himself. There are among us a multitude of homeless ones. Of these there are several sorts. There are the sturdy tramps, who go wandering about from city to city and from hamlet to hamlet, stopping where night finds them. When men take up the trade of vagrancy, they are too apt to follow it as long as they live. We cannot afford to have this subdivision of our homeless class increase. Next are the gypsies, that dusky race from over the seas, who have managed for so many years to puzzle the ethnologists and frighten the children. Here is a whole race that for centuries has been homeless, and for that reason has no history, no literature, not much religion if any, and hardly any knowledge of the arts of civilisation. Such possessions and acquirements as these are scarcely within the reach of people who have no homes. Next after the gypsies there is a considerable class of persons who are too restless to stay long in any place, and whose lives are spent in constant migrations from one place to another; who tarry nowhere long enough to get wanted. Next after the floating population comes that large class of persons who have a local residence but not a local habitation; who continue to live in the same community, but do not live in homes; who make their abode in such public residences as hotels or boarding-houses. Now, as respects these, it must be said that many of them are compelled to adopt this manner of life. Young men and women whose homes have been broken up by the death of their parents, or who have been called forth from the habitation of their childhood to seek education and livelihood in distant places, cannot, of course, have homes of their own. 1. The strongest justification of the home life, is in the fact that there are certain affections of the soul that can be developed in no other manner of life. The domestic virtues and graces are not easily described or catalogued, but they form an important part of the best human character. There are sentiments, sympathies, habitudes of thought, which are native to the home, and which are essential to the best growth and highest development of human beings. Domesticity gives to every beautiful character an added charm. No man is truly good who is not good at home; and the best men are always best on the side that touches home. 2. Public spirit is fed and fostered at the fireside. The man who has a home of his own is interested that the community in which he lives should be lacking in nothing that could help to make it desirable as a place of residence. He who makes himself a householder by that act gives a hostage to society for his good behaviour and his devotion to public interests. Patriotism, too, has its foundations laid upon the hearthstones of the land. The patriot's love for his country is rooted and grounded in his love for his home. And for the nation's heart-beats you must listen in the nation's homes. When the great mass of the people are not only householders but freeholders—when they own the homes they live in—the sentiment of patriotism finds its intensest development. 3. Your home must be a place of comfort and repose. That, of course. You will take delight in contriving all its appoint-

ments so that the burdens of toil shall rest as lightly as possible upon those who have the ordering of it; you will find pleasure in furnishing and arranging it, so far as you can, in such manner that gloom and cheerlessness shall be excluded, and it shall seem to be a true haven of rest and good cheer to all upon whom its hospitable doors shall open. 4. Your home must be a school of culture. I do not mean that you will fill it with pedagogic instruments and appliances; but it will be so arranged as to educate by impression those who dwell within it. Probably few of us are fully aware how sensitive we are to the influence of external objects. A minister travelling in Vermont entered a farmhouse, and fell into conversation with a farmer and his wife, persons in middle age. He inquired for their children, and learned that they had four boys, and that they were all at sea, following the hard trade of the sailor. "But how happened it," asked the minister, "that your boys should take such a fancy? They never lived by the seashore." The good people could offer no explanation whatever. It was simply a notion, they said, and a strange one, they had always thought, but it was a very strong one, and they had found it impossible to dissuade the boys from their purpose. But, pretty soon, the minister was invited into the little room which served the family for parlour, and there, hanging over the mantelpiece, the only picture in the room, was a magnificent engraving of a ship under full sail. The parents said it had been hanging there ever since their boys were little children. Who could doubt that the daily sight of this beautiful picture had had much to do in inflaming the passions of the farmer's boys for the seafaring life? This is hardly an exaggerated instance of the effects produced upon our lives by the objects that surround us. 5. Your home will also be a place of enjoyment. Innocent play will often be in order. If there are young folks in the house, they will more easily be kept at home by liberal provision in this direction than in any other way. The grown people should not only tolerate the children's pastimes, they should participate in them for their own sakes, as well as for the children's. 6. Finally, your home, when it is builded, will be, I trust, a sanctuary of religion. There will be an altar there on which, every day, the sacrifices of prayer and praise will be laid. The children of your household will remember, when they are grown up, that their first impressions of the Christian life, and their strongest impulses to enter upon it, were furnished them in their earliest years at home. (*W. Gladden.*) *The conduct of life*:—I.—THE WISDOM OF REGULATED TIME.—In the days in which kings could command the labour of their people, sometimes without regard to their people's convenience, the wisdom of Solomon was shown in this, that he did not press over-harshly upon the people under his command. He gave them labour to do, but tempered it with the opportunity of following their own avocations. When he wanted wood hewn down from Lebanon, he arranged that those who were to be the labourers in this behalf were to work in what we call relays or shifts; they were to spend one month in Lebanon doing that work which was needful for the temple of the Lord, but two months they were to spend at home. It is this division of work, time, and labour, which constitutes one of the suggestions of wisdom. Every man was brought face to face with two sides of life—his own affairs, which were constantly pressing upon him, and the larger affairs and interests of the nation. Every man was brought face to face with two aspects of life—the aspect of life in which he had to labour for the support of his own family, and the aspect of his life in which he had to be contributing his share towards the work, as it were, of God in the world. They were to recognise two things—the Divine side and the human side, the heavenly side and the home side of their careers, and therefore they were given that opportunity which contributed to the enlargement of their thoughts. You see, then, the principle which comes here in the conduct of life. What principle then shall I adopt? This, that whatever else my life shall be it shall not be wanting in the capacity of living on the slopes of Lebanon and facing the Divine thought and the Divine meaning of life, neither shall it be so much the life of an indolent recluse, that it cannot minister amidst the neighbours and the friends of my own old home. II. THE RIGHT SYNTHESIS OF LIFE. Is not this the combination of exactly the two principles—the recognition of the great Divine, the aspiring aspect of life, the recognition also of its serious and solemn duties: the recognition of God, and the recognition also of self as a labourer in the midst of the world. A man who lives upon the slopes of Lebanon all the year round, and is acquainted with the cedars of Lebanon, and knows something of the sky, over his head, and the shifting scenes of the beauty of that sky, may be absolutely without any

knowledge whatever about the big world and the home and the children that he has left there, and the man in the home. Why, what destroys our judgment, what makes us full of pride, but this, that we live so much in our own little affairs, that we are not capable of taking a dispassionate view at all. This man, so eager in business, so devoted to it, measures an event entirely by the influence it will have upon his opportunity, industry, or vocation, as the man who merely measures the legislation which is proposed in the Houses of Parliament by its effect upon his own trade. This makes it impossible for him to judge dispassionately. In order to escape from the egotism which thrusts aside and perverts your judgment you should live somewhat in the Lebanon, that you may come back to the world, and judge somewhat impartially concerning the affairs and the propositions for the improvement of life. III. How to grow character. Not only does all this improve and strengthen the powers and faculties of your minds, delivering you from one-sidedness, delivering you from a dreamy, unreal idea of life, and from that careworn egotism which distorts men from the larger outlook, but it also tends to strengthen character. Over and over again it has been said thought ripens in solitude, character in the busy world. So true it is. Like the artist who wishes to paint his picture truly, you must sometimes go to a distance from your easel to judge of it in its due proportion. Character loses its proportion from being continually in one atmosphere. So, to come down from your Lebanon into the busy world, and test your theories in life, is to find that your character grows by the strenuous necessity of exerting your judgment and exercising your will. Live amongst your fellow-men that you may exercise that, and that you may test judgment, live also upon the sunny heights where the sunlight of God falls, in order that you may have the warm, affectionate, glowing interest in things that take away from you the meanness and selfishness in your lives. IV. Life without reserves. The man who lives—and that is the great temptation in the present day—so much in the busy world that he becomes an eager and constant citizen, following his avocation with keenness, and also public affairs, if you will, with a certain amount of attention, but has no quiet garden, as it were, within his life, is a man without what I call the reserves of life. As in military matters the strength of a position is guarded by reserves, so the strength of your influence will be in proportion to the possession of some reserve in your being, something which is yours and God's and nobody else's. Like the difference between one man and another is the difference often between the fact that you feel as one speaks he is putting all his wares upon the counter immediately before you, but as another man speaks you know that he is like the prudent shopkeeper who has a large storehouse behind and plenty to bring forth. Also the power that the man is wielding when he is driving the nail into the wall, is not to be measured by the sharpness of the nail, not even the surface of the hammer, but the weight of the hammer which drives the nail home. And so it is that men have been thought to be strong and great in their influence. Emerson, in his essay on "Character," calls attention to the fact that Lord Chatham and Mirabeau and Washington, when their achievements are examined, strike you as having left upon the record less reason for their reputation than their reputations seemed, as it were, to lead you to expect; they were bigger in their reputation than in their actual achievement. Is this to their discredit? Nay, nay. Washington lives, you will say, less upon the result of achievement than his great reputation would have led you to expect. But it was precisely because these men carried a weight behind them that they were able to achieve what they did. You are poising the hammer in your hand, and you say it has driven but a few inches home; yes, but what a weight of iron there was in the hammer, and how many inches it could have driven home! This is the possession of reserves. Men knew that there was force behind these men. So I would have it with you. Cultivate, therefore, this habit — the accumulation of the reserves of knowledge, the accumulation of reserves of will, the accumulation of reserves of noble and lofty thoughts, the accumulation of reserves of deep and magnanimous ambitions. Live somewhat on the side of God's Lebanon, whatever else you do. Is this selfish that I should say thus prepare yourselves to be strong and worthy in the world? Nay, nay. Just as it is the highest hills that catch the sunshine first, and they are the pledges that by and by every valley shall be filled with sunshine, so is it true that there are men in a nation that are making these accumulations of sunny knowledge, they are the harbingers, the omens, that knowledge will be widely diffused. And you who have made these reserves, lived somewhat upon Lebanon and caught

the diviner ideas, will be centres of influence for good, because, wherever you may be placed in the world, you will have reserves and accumulations which you can use in helping on and in forming and inspiring the minds and the lives of others. There is a reserve which you need more than all else—the reserve of the Divine help. You must live upon the Lebanon which means communion with God. Jesus Christ, your Master and mine, gave that counsel, that there should be a little Lebanon height of prayer in each man's life, when he could be away from the care and the fret and the fevered ambitions of life. (*W. Boyd Carpenter.*)

Ver. 15. **And Solomon had . . . hewers in the mountains.**—*The pioneers of civilisation* :—Alike in its building and furniture the temple of Solomon had an evangelical and a spiritual signification. Our Lord institutes analogies between Himself and the temple, and the apostles constantly refer to it as an image and a foreshadowing of the Church of Christ. There are many "hewers in the mountains" to-day—servants of Christ working in wild places, difficult places, distant places, so that the temple of humanity may be built up for the indwelling of God. I. THE IMMENSE IMPORTANCE OF THE INITIAL WORK OF THE CHURCH OF CHRIST. These "hewers in the mountains" did the initial work of the temple building. They came before all masons and carpenters; in fact, the building of the glorious shrine was out of the question without the toil of these humble workers. It was so with the old civilisations — with Egypt, Assyria, Persia, Greece, and Rome, they all emerged out of, were vitalised by, a spiritual faith. And it is still more clear that the modern civilisations were inspired by a spiritual faith, the faith of Christ. Out of the Gospel of God's love in Jesus Christ preached in Italy, in Greece, in Spain, in the forests of Germany, in the forests of Britain, arose the rich civilisation in which we rejoice, and in which is the hope of mankind. And as our civilisation originated in the Christian faith so it is still sustained, invigorated, and developed by spiritual life. Edgar Quinet says: "Any political revolution to be permanent, must be preceded by a religious one, and here is the secret of the comparative failure of the French Revolution." And may we not add, that the success of the modern Reform movement in this country is largely owing to the fact that it was preceded by the Evangelical Revival? II. THE INITIAL WORK OF THE CHURCH IS ATTENDED BY MUCH THAT APPEARS VIOLENT AND OBJECTIONABLE. The "hewers in the mountains" had rough work to do—their instruments, like the axe and the crowbar, were rough, their methods were rough, and their work was announced by the thunder of the riven rock, the crash of the falling tree. Their action meant noise, dislocation, disruption, destruction. And the superfine critic of the period would turn impatiently from this scene of violence to admire the cunning work in gold, the lily work of the pillars when the temple reached a more advanced stage. So it is still. In certain stages the work of God is almost necessarily attended by much that offends the philosophic mind, the critical taste. When Christ came, He who is the Adoniram, who is over the levy of all the "hewers in the mountains," what disturbances He made! He disturbed Church and State. When the apostles commenced their mission it was the same. They were aggressive, they disturbed the existing order, they troubled cities and empires, and soon awoke the protest, "These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also." Luther made much noise, which has exasperated the tranquil critics—he fiercely wielded axe and hammer, and tremendous cleavages and crashes followed his blows. It was the same with Wesley; his critics objected to an enthusiasm which often meant ecclesiastical, social, and political rendings. And the evangelical worker in heathen lands has been open to the same criticism. Again and again have the missionaries been accused of violence and imprudence in one form or another. Sometimes they are accused and attacked in the interests of antiquity. The missionary is attempting ruthlessly to destroy creeds and systems, which have existed for thousands of years, and critics with a veneration for antiquity are indignant. No sooner does God's forester lift his axe to smite some hoary error than they raise the cry, "O! woodman spare that tree." But, this is the normal course of the development of the purposes of God. Bring together certain chemicals and an explosion is inevitable; bring the truths of God into contact with systems of superstition and idolatry, and terrible consequences ensue—not unlikely, many even perish. In the Book of the Revelation the development of the kingdom of God is dramatised, and it expresses the fact that that kingdom comes largely through antagonisms and martyrdoms. Trumpets peal, lightnings flash, thunders boom; trees are burnt up, rivers become worm-

wood, seas turn into blood, and suns and moons are darkened; the redeeming purpose of God unfolds amid battles, earthquakes, plagues, and voices. The regeneration of the earth is not to be worked out in a serene atmosphere. The time comes when civilisations grow silently, as the temple was built without hammer or axe or any tool of iron being heard in the house; but there must be the preliminary stages, when the "hewers in the mountains" startle and trouble by their blows and cries. III. THE INITIAL WORK OF THE CHURCH OF CHRIST IMPLIES TREMENDOUS SACRIFICE. These "hewers in the mountains" made certain sacrifices and encountered great difficulties that Solomon might be put in possession of the stone and timber essential for his projected house. And so the temple of humanity built on the grandest pattern is possible because certain pioneers are willing deeply to deny themselves. IV. THE SPLENDID HOPEFULNESS OF THIS PIONEER SERVICE. Out of the wild mountain these devoted hewers brought the wonderful temple. Rough, violent, forbidding as their work might seem, it at last took shape as the palace of God. The Papuans, the Polynesians, the Malays, the Amazonian Indians, the aboriginals of Africa, and other uncivilised tribes have distinct and precious powers, although mainly undeveloped. Some excel in poetry, song and music, some in the artistic sense. Richard Semon says: "I dare to maintain that the love of artistic ornament is deeper and more general in the poor and naked savages of New Guinea than in ourselves." Now can we believe that all these endowments are in vain? That these peoples will be the curse of the future? If we believe in the rationality of the universe we cannot believe in anything of the kind; it is much more sane to believe that the fulness of the Gentiles will enrich and raise civilisation gloriously. "The light and power of the Gospel" will work the miracle and develop, uplift, and perfect all nations and tribes. Christ can see the glorious possibilities of men even when they are at their worst. Anybody knows a Rembrandt when he sees it in a sumptuous frame in the National Gallery—even if it isn't one!—but we need a fine eye to detect an immortal masterpiece on a blackened canvas, amid the dirt and lumber of a cellar. But this is the very genius of Jesus Christ, who came to seek and to save that which was lost. When we were without strength, down in a gulf of dark despair, He recognised our essential glory and stooped from heaven to lift us to the throne. And Christ has opened the eyes of His people and caused His Church to recognise the intrinsic greatness of the savage and the slave, whatever the cynic may have to say. A sculptor can see in the rough marble quarries of Carrara a world of glorious imagery, an architect can see in the wild forest of Lebanon palaces and temples, and since Christ has opened our eyes we can see in the forlorn and lapsed classes, in the outlandish and savage nations of the earth, the most splendid possibilities of life and destiny. We hear from critics of a certain sort a great deal about failure in our work, but in all directions we judge of the worth of men's efforts by their triumphs, not by their failures. Just outside Rome there is an ancient artificial mound, formed through long years by the pile of earthenware vessels in which various wares were brought to the great market of Rome, and whose fragments the peasants threw into this rubbish heap. Now if I wished to judge of the art of antiquity I should not waste my time turning over these miserable, worthless potsherds; I should study the vases, wonderful in amplitude, grace and colour, which are the jewels of museums and palaces. So we do not judge the efficacy of missions by what our critics may consider as rubbish cast into the void, but by tens of thousands of noble souls gathered into the Church of Christ, by myriads of glorified saints who are the pride of the palace of the King. (*W. L. Watkinson.*)

Partakers in the process share in the honour of the result:—Imagine how Solomon's temple was built, that went up in Jerusalem without sound of the hammer. In the umbrageous forest of old Lebanon, many and many a day-labourer worked, cleaving and sweating, cleaving and sweating in obscurity, and wondering of what consequence all his work could be. As they toiled, day after day, at the large butt of some century-crowned cedar, with the rude instruments of their time, till at last it came down with a crash; and as they lopped off the limbs, and sawed up the vast trunk into various forms, they said to themselves, "We are slaves, labouring here among the mountains unrewarded." And not far from them, in the gorge, were men that wrought in stone. In another place were workers in metal. Some did one thing, and some another; but none knew the plan of the temple, none knew what they wrought, till on a certain day, when they all trooped to Jerusalem. It was the day on which the dedication was to take place. And when they gathered there; when the hewer of wood, the carver of stone, and the

worker in metal, from the various seclusions where they had wrought, each on his separate part, came together to see what had been made with all the different parts, they saw in the columns in the cornices, in the decorations, in all the paraphernalia of the wonderful temple, the result of their toil. They stood entranced, and wondered that out of things so insignificant in the mountains, there should come such glory in Jerusalem. God has sent some to the cedar forest, some to the stone quarry, some to the dark and dank places of this world; but He is collecting materials which will glow with untold splendour in the temple that He is building for the New Jerusalem. What the issue of life is to be you cannot tell now; but you are working for God, and with God, and according to God's plans; and ere long you will be summoned to see the result of all your work. Before that time, you cannot tell what that result is to be. (*H. W. Beecher.*) *Scope for every faculty in Christ's service*:—It is impossible to find in one man a summary of all qualifications; take each one in his own sphere and you will discover a vast variety of gifts—there is the polished scholar, the eagle-eyed critic, the eloquent orator, and we ought to recognise and appreciate the ability of each. Do you depreciate the sun because he is destitute of fragrance? Do you undervalue the rose because no light flashes from its leaf of beauty. So each man has his own style of working, and is never so effective as when he is natural. A recognition of this fact will save us from passing adverse criticism upon any individual if he is diligent in cultivating the different gifts God has given into his possession. (*R. Venting.*) *Men of many types used in the work of God*:—How many have aided in the erection of Christ's spiritual temple? Keenest intellects have toiled, noblest hearts have planned, sweetest, purest lives have been lived in this sublime effort. O varied workers! Paul, with his relentless, flaming logic. John, with eagle eye, scanning and then writing of the future and the past. Augustine, with his pauseless, countless toils of pen and speech. Chrysostom consecrating his golden eloquence to themes of transcendent and golden worth. Bede labouring on our own northern shore, and in making the blessed Gospel accessible to the Saxon people, finding "the last dear service of his parting breath." Luther, with his strong human tenderness and unquailing knowledge. Calvin, with his severe purity and indomitable industry. Latimer, with his home-spun, ready, and racy heart-compelling speech. Bunyan, that true Greatheart of countless pilgrims. Wesley, that statesman. Whitefield, that captain of preachers. And what more shall I say? Time would fail me to tell of the great preachers and teachers with voice and pen who have lived to win souls to Christ. If His service can be ennobled by human associations, it is ennobled by such names as these. Let us be worthy of them. (*G. T. Coster.*)

Ver. 17. **The foundation of the house.**—*Foundation work*:—"The king commanded": that is the beginning of all. Holy zeal waits for the king's orders. But as soon as the command was given there was neither pause nor hesitation; "the king commanded, and they brought." Solomon began to build the temple at the foundation. Begin with the foundation. The foundation, in his case, had to be carried to a great height, because the area upon which the temple stood was on high above the valley. Very much of foundation work is out of sight, and the temptation is to pay but small attention to its finish. It was not so with Solomon. I want to urge that all our work for God should be done thoroughly, and especially that part of it which lies lowest, and is least observed of men. I. THIS IS GOD'S METHOD. 1. Observe the work of creation. God took care that even in the material universe there should be a grand foundation for His noble edifice. 2. The same is true of God's work called Providence. No event happens but He has planned it, and ordained that a multitude of other events should precede or follow it. The doings of Providence are threaded together, like pearls upon a string; there is a relation of this to that, and of that to another. Events dovetail the one into the other. Every fact is fitted and adapted to take its place in the design of the Great Architect. 3. But we come into clearer light when we look at the Lord's greatest work of redemption. You and I are not saved haphazard. It is not as though God had saved us on the spur of the moment, as an after-thought which was not in His first intent. No; redemption plays an essential part in the purposes of the Lord. II. THIS MUST BE OUR METHOD. We must build after this fashion, and make sure of our foundations. 1. Let it be so in the building up of our own life. 2. So it must be, next, in the building up of a church. Is that a church of God which is not founded on everlasting truth? There are numbers of hasty

builders with wood, hay, and stubble; but these neither attend to foundation nor to material laid thereon. 3. In the building up of character in others we must mind that we do the foundation work well. Sunday-school teachers are those who do the foundation work; for they begin first with young hearts, while they are tender and susceptible. It is a most important thing that we have our children and young people well instructed in Divine truth and soundly converted. III. IT IS A WISE METHOD. 1. Because it is suitable for God. You build your temple for God, and not for men: you should, therefore, make that part of the building good which will be seen by him; and as he sees it all, it must be all of the best. 2. Next, look well to the foundation that is out of sight, for your own sake. No builder can afford to be negligent over the unseen part of a building; for it would involve a serious injury to his character. The very act of scamping is mean and degrading, and lowers a man's tone. 3. Further, lay the foundation well, and look to that part which is out of sight, because in this way you will secure the superstructure. There was a bit of a flaw in the foundation, but nobody saw it; for the builder covered it up very quickly, and ran up the whole concern as quickly as possible. The walls were built, and built well. It seemed clear that the fault down below was of no consequence whatever; and as it had a little cheapened the underground construction, was it not so much the better? How long was this the case? Well, the next year nothing happened: a longer time passed away, and then an ugly crack came down the wall. Had there been an earthquake? No, there was no earthquake. Perhaps a cyclone had beaten upon the work? No, there was no cyclone: the weather was the same as usual. What was the cause of that gaping space which marred the beauty of the building, and threatened to bring it down? It was that blunder long age: that underground neglect produced the terrible mischief above, which would involve a great expense, and perhaps render it needful to take all the building down. That which was out of sight did not always remain out of mind; it only needed time to produce a dangerous settlement. 4. Besides, to lay a good foundation, on Solomon's part, was the way to save himself from future fears. Buildings which have to hold a crowd endure seasons of test and trial. Years ago, I was preaching in a building which was exceedingly crowded, and, to my apprehension, there was a continuous tremor. I grew so anxious that I said to a friend, who understood such matters, "Go downstairs and see whether this building is really safe; for it seems hardly able to bear the weight of this crowd." When he returned he looked anxious, but gave me no answer. The service ended quietly, and then he said, "I am so glad that everything has gone off safely. I do not think you should ever preach there again; for it is a very frail affair; but I thought that if I frightened you there would be more risk in a panic than in letting the service go on." Solomon had built with "great stones, costly stones, and hewed stones"; and therefore, when the vast multitudes came together around the temple, it never occurred to him to fear that the great weight of people might cause a subsidence of the foundation. 5. Do look well to the foundation, and to the secret part of your dealings with God, because there is a fire coming which will try all things. "Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is." (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Faith's foundation secure:*—There is no kind of construction known to the modern engineer or builder which requires at all times so perfect and absolutely secure a foundation as a bridge. So, precisely, there is no faculty of the soul known to man's keenest spiritual sense which requires so perfect and absolutely secure a foundation as faith, and since faith is the bridge between man and God over the otherwise impassible chasm of doubt and destruction, the Great Constructor, the Engineer of the Universe, has seen to it that its foundations shall rest upon nothing less secure than His own Almighty Word. *The comfort of a sure foundation:*—As you gaze with admiration at the wonderful tower of the cathedral of Antwerp, it looks as if it were made of lace suspended by some invisible chain from the heavens; but you know when you come to examine it, that all the exquisite lacery and tracery is built upon a most solid foundation. So the experience of the saint, which seems to pierce the very heavens, and is lit up with the light of God, rests on a firm basis. That is assurance of a personal interest in the salvation, procured by the atoning love and sacrifice of Jesus. (*R. Venting.*)

CHAPTER VI.

VERS. 1–14. **He began to build the house of the Lord.**—*The temple built* :—Solomon's temple is the most wonderful and interesting building in the world's history. It was "the mysterious centre of Israel." It was far more to Israel than the Vatican is to Rome. It was, so long as it stood, God's only earthly palace and temple. The Pyramids of Egypt were old when it was built, and they show no signs of decay. Solomon's temple utterly perished after four centuries. Greek and Roman artists have given the laws of beautiful and stately architecture to the world, but no one has ever dreamed of copying, in any respect, the sacred building at Jerusalem. Brunelleschi's dome at Florence, St. Peter's at Rome, the Milan Cathedral are almost miracles of daring genius and patient toil. The temple was in comparison a homely and plain building in its style. Its size was, as compared with these, small and insignificant. Yet God in a peculiar sense was its architect. He filled it with His glory. "His eyes and His heart were there." The simple description before us is greatly amplified in this Book of Kings, and in that of Chronicles, where there are differences noted. Our attention may rest at present on the—I. DATE OF THE TEMPLE. It is given with precision. Months and years are mentioned for the first time since the Exodus. Here we have one of the two or three points clearly made in the Scripture by which its chronology is determined. We can easily remember that Solomon's reign began about one thousand years before Christ. Homer was singing of the Trojan war. Two and a half centuries must pass before Romulus and Remus founded Rome. It seems long since Columbus discovered America. Add a century nearly to this period, and you have the time between the Exodus and the temple. How long the decay! Wilderness wandering, rude days of the Judges,—nearly three hundred years. Samuel and the prophets, King Saul, and then David,—these all must come before God can have a permanent home on earth for men to see and admire and love. II. THE SITE OF THE TEMPLE. This is not mentioned in our text, because so familiar and so often recorded elsewhere. It was on Mount Moriah, to which Abraham centuries before had raised his eyes in sad recognition of the place for the sacrifice of Isaac. III. THE SIZE AND PLAN OF THE TEMPLE. Many a country church is larger than this famous edifice in its interior dimensions. The cubit is an uncertain measure; but allowing it the largest limit, we have a room inside of only ninety feet by thirty. It had three distinctly-marked parts. First, the "temple of the house" (ver. 3), or holy place, sixty feet long by thirty wide. Then, second, came the "oracle" (ver. 7), or most holy place, a perfect cube, thirty feet in each of its dimensions. This was perfectly dark. In front came, although part of the whole building, a porch fifteen feet deep, running across the whole east end of the structure. All this was of stone, covered, according to Josephus, with cedar. On the sides of this building there was what we should call a lean-to, *i.e.* sets of chambers, not for residence, but for some other purposes connected with worship. They were entered from without by a door and winding-stairs, so that the holy places themselves were always kept separate. IV. PREPARATIONS FOR THIS WORK. They had been going on for thirty years, ever since the day when David conceived of giving the ark of God a suitable home. Money had been accumulating, and a special treasurer had charge of it. It amounted, perhaps, to eighty millions of dollars. Spoils of battles were brought to it, like the banners hanging in Westminster Abbey. Shields and vessels of gold and silver were gathered in great numbers. But the materials of the temple itself were all brought from afar. V. THE WORKMEN AND THEIR WORK. They were largely foreigners, under Hiram, King of Tyre, or native Canaanites, reduced to practical slavery. Their numbers were immense, one hundred and fifty-three thousand Gibeonites alone engaging in the toil. Thirty thousand Jews, in relays of ten thousand, worked side by side with Tyrian and Sidonian. The significant statement is made that their work was so perfect that part came to its part without the sound of the axe or hammer. This is unparalleled in architecture. In boring the Mont Cenis Tunnel under the Alps, so exquisitely accurate were the engineers, that the two shafts begun at opposite sides of the mountain met each other with scarcely the variation of a line. The Brooklyn Bridge is a triumph of human courage and skill; but those silent seven years on Mount Zion, in which the house of God grew into form, each stone hoisted to its place without the shaping touch of the chisel, in which every beam sunk into its socket with no shading of its already

true lines,—that perfect design, perfectly carried out,—where shall we find its equal? That silence was suggestive. It was Divine. VI. THE BUILDER OF THE TEMPLE. Not David, the man after God's own heart. Not the father, but the son: not the man of blood, but the man of peace. Thus one life completes itself in another. VII. THE USES OF THE TEMPLE. Here we must abandon our modern conceptions of a house of God. The temple was not a place for congregational worship. There was no such thing known in the world at that time. The congregation could assemble in the court before the temple, and witness the sacrifices of animals, but they could not enter there. Only the priests were seen within those mysterious portals. We must banish from our minds all conceptions growing out of the modern church, save as all churches are sacred to the worship of God. Solomon repeatedly says that Jehovah desired this place that His name might be there,—the name of His holiness. There God was to be represented in His true character,—merciful and gracious, but perfectly holy. Israel was to pray towards that place, but God was to hear in heaven, His dwelling-place. VIII. THE CONDITION OF GOD'S BLESSING ON THE TEMPLE. While Solomon was busy in the seven years' work, he was reminded that all his toil and expenditure would be in vain unless he walked in the way of the Lord. Stones and cedars, gold and jewels, fine needle-work and silver could not enclose and secure a purely spiritual presence. God speaks to Solomon himself as if He held him alone responsible for the preservation of the temple's sanctity. IX. THE TEMPLE A TYPE AND PROPHECY OF THE WHOLE BODY OF CHRIST. It expressed to the ancient people of God the idea of His dwelling amongst them. He ruled the world, even all the heathen nations; but Zion was His home. Israel was His abode. Amongst them His glory and power were to be displayed. Josephus and Philo thought that the temple was a figure of the universe. Others have thought it typical of the human form, others still a symbol of heaven itself; but we have the Scripture proof of its being a prophecy and type of that final temple silently reared by the Spirit of God,—each stone a living soul,—and the whole structure filled and glorified by Christ. (*Monday Club Sermons.*) *The temple built*:—I. THE LORD'S HOUSE BEGUN. 1. The date. 2. The doing. (1) When Solomon was ready, and the right time had come, he began to build the Lord's house. (2) Solomon did not begin to build the Lord's house before he was ready. He did not rush into the Lord's service without counting the cost. (3) Solomon could the more readily build well for the Lord's use, because his father had foreseen the needs of the work. The Christian parent can make much easier the child's entrance upon Christian service. (4) Solomon began to build for the Lord, and he didn't stop with the beginning, as do some so-called servants of the Lord. II. GOD'S HOUSE BUILDED. 1. The size of the temple. 2. The porch of the temple. 3. The chambers of the temple. 4. The building of the temple. (1) The temple was a magnificent one. Nothing was too good for the Lord's use. Solomon did not belong to the class of men who put their punched coin into the contribution-box and give their unmarketable produce to the minister. (2) The temple was a large one. But Solomon and the parish committee didn't commence to build until they had means to complete the Lord's house without the assistance of a colossal mortgage. (3) The temple was builded in silence. Many a great and grand Christian work is accomplished with little stir. For the time being a man may make as much noise in making a chicken-coop as in building a church. (4) The temple was a permanent structure. Building for God is work that abides. And we may be stones in a temple of God that shall outlast the stars. III. GOD'S PROMISE TO THE BUILDER. 1. The condition. 2. The conclusion. (1) Performance promised. (2) Presence promised. 3. Completion. (1) The word of God came unto Solomon with the promise that his building for God should secure his up-building from God. (2) The word of God comes unto us with the assurance that if we do a good work for Him and love Him, all things shall work together for good to us whom He loves. (3) The word of God that came to Solomon comes to us with the warning that even our temple-building will not avail unless we offer the sacrifices of obedience on its altars. (4) The presence of God was specially promised to Solomon just after he had made special preparation for God's worship. (5) The presence of God in our hearts is assured to us so soon as we show suitable readiness to welcome His presence. (6) The presence of God in some manifestation has never failed to His children. The temple of Solomon was destroyed; the later temple was burned. But their usefulness was over, for the presence of God now makes a temple of every believer's heart. (*S. S. Times.*) *Church*

building :—One of the greatest living architects, writing on church architecture, says: "I do not forget the profound emotion that an ancient church must still excite in any susceptible breast. We need not try to analyse it. But when we are building our sanctuaries to-day, we must ask ourselves how much of this is really religious, how much artistic or historic in its promptings; and further, how much of its really religious portion is genuine and personal, and how much merely sympathetic and imaginative?" *Church architecture* :—Dr. Cuyler, in his "Recollections of a Long Life," has some interesting remarks on church buildings. "I fear," he says, "that too many costly church edifices are erected that are quite unfit for our Protestant modes of religious service." It is said that when Bishop Potter was called upon to consecrate one of the "dim religious" specimens of medieval architecture, and was asked his opinion of the new structure, he replied: "It is a beautiful building, with only three faults. You cannot see in it, you cannot hear in it, you cannot breathe in it!" *The temple built* :—That temple, which Solomon built and dedicated, which was restored from its desolation in the time of Nehemiah, and which Herod the Great rebuilt, was known to all devout Israelites as the house of God. God by His prophets taught them so to regard it. I. DEVOUT INTERCOURSE OF MEN WITH GOD IS PRAYER. "Prayer is an offering up of our desires unto God, in the name of Christ, by the help of His Spirit, with confession of our sins, and thankful acknowledgment of His mercies." In the ancient temple-worship God caused His people's prayers to be symbolised by the smoke of incense, the sweetest possible fragrance that could be devised and secured by the art of the apothecary (Ex. xxxvii. 29; Luke i. 8–10). It is only trusting, submissive, unselfish prayer that we can offer up with any good hope of pleasing Him. Such prayer will not limit itself to the things which we feel the need of for ourselves—things which will do good to us. II. THIS SPIRITUAL FULFILMENT IS FOR ALL MANKIND. 1. This was plainly enough taught in the original declarations concerning the temple which we have in the Old Testament. The text (Isa. lvi. 7) affirms that Jehovah called His house a house of prayer "for all nations." 2. The dispensation which had its local seat at Jerusalem was predestined to be temporary, while the spiritual worship which it taught and temporarily helped was to be permanent and universal. This even pious Israelites were slow to learn, slow to believe. Ought our worship to be less reverent than that in the ancient temple? In these Christian synagogues ought not attention to the Word of God to be as serious and devout as in the Jewish synagogues? Our prayers and our service of song,—ought we not to be as careful that they be true and pure heart-worship as of old they were careful not to offer strange fire or unhallowed incense? Are we keeping our dedicated sanctuaries quite clear of everything which would strike our Lord as unsuitable for His Father's house of prayer? (*H. A. Nelson, D.D.*) *Solomon's temple viewed as a type of the glorified Church* :—I. IN THIS TEMPLE WE HAVE A DIVINE IDEA. 1. The church in heaven is a Divine idea of mercy. What St. Paul said to and of those who composed the church at Corinth is applicable to the redeemed in heaven—"Ye are God's building." The idea of forming a society of perfect spirits claims God for its Author. Roman force, Popish prescription, and philosophic reasoning have failed to weld together in blissful harmony the spirits of men. The Almighty Intelligence is at the foundation of the "church of the firstborn." The plan of the building is God's plan. 2. The church in heaven is a Divine idea of remedial mercy. "Christ loved the church, and gave Himself for it, that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the Word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy, and without blemish." II. IN THIS TEMPLE WE HAVE A DIVINE IDEA EMBODIED. 1. The building of Solomon expressed the Divine contrivance or idea. It was God's thought made palpable or visible. The Supreme Being gave Solomon the idea, and he gave visible effect to it; he prepared the materials. As the king found them, they were unfit for use. Man in his natural state is unfit for the church in heaven. A sinner in the building of the glorified church would disfigure the whole edifice. A change is necessary here before such an one is fit for the perfected church. The statement—"Ye must be born again," is applicable to every man who has not experienced the change. 2. He prepared the materials at a distance from the temple. Lebanon was some distance from Zion, and here Solomon's men shaped the stone and wood, and hence it was the scene of action and noise, but it was all quiet at Zion; there was not the sound of hammer nor axe, nor any tool of iron, heard at Zion. And in a religious sense,

all the squaring and shaping of character for the temple in heaven must be done and is done on earth. There is no Gospel-hammer used in eternity to break men's hearts; there is no fiery blaze of Christian truth in heaven to burn out depravity and sin from the soul. 3. He prepared the materials by different kinds of agency. The glorified people of God have been prepared by different agencies for their position in the heavenly temple, but all instrumentalities have been under Christ. He works all according to His purpose. III. IN THIS TEMPLE THERE IS THE UNION OF A VARIETY OF MATERIALS. 1. The temple of redeemed spirits in heaven is composed of a great variety of character—the young, the old, the rich, the poor, the learned and unlearned are there built into a splendid edifice. No family can be pointed out which has not a member placed in that building. 2. This variety is blended in perfect harmony. Every character has been shaped by Divine skill for its exact position in the structure. "Holiness to the Lord" is inscribed upon every "living stone" therein. The abiding principle of pure love is the uniting and harmonising principle. Rome has a kind of outward union, but no incorporation or vital unity; but the perfected church is one vitality, and for ever. IV. IN THIS TEMPLE THERE IS MAGNIFICENCE. 1. Look at it as a work of art. The temple upon Zion was the marvel of creation, and the church in heaven is, and ever will be, the wonder of the universe! What a blaze of concentrated glories is that celestial temple, what consummate purity and Divine art! 2. As a work of art executed upon the noblest principle. Love to God moved King David to suggest the building, and love to God impelled his son Solomon to carry out the work. The glorified multitudes before the throne are there through the love of God—love brighter, wider, deeper and higher than imagination in her loftiest—Divinest soarings has ever described or even conceived—love which only the greatness of a God could have displayed. V. IN THIS TEMPLE THERE IS GREAT VALUE. 1. The temple church is composed of spirit—hence of greater value. The building at Jerusalem cost nearly nine hundred millions of money, but the treasures of creation are a mere bauble in comparison to the glorified church. 2. The temple church is composed of spirit, through a greater agency than the edifice at Jerusalem—hence of more value. The structure in David's royal city was erected by Solomon, but the church is built into a holy temple by our Divine Saviour through the Holy Ghost. Solomon was a great being, but "behold, a greater than Solomon is here," in the work of humanest roration. 3. The temple church is composed of spirit for immortality. The splendid fabric on Zion lasted upwards of four hundred years, and then it was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar. The glorified church, however, is to last for ever—"I give unto My sheep," says Christ, "eternal life." The good of all ages and climes are built into "a habitation for God through the spirit," and this building will continue longer than the sun, even for ever. VI. IN THIS TEMPLE THERE IS GLORIOUS PURPOSE. 1. It was erected as a dwelling-place for God. On the mercy-seat of that hallowed building God met the high priest, and other men through him. Probably no higher end can be contemplated in any work than this—to make earth the house of God. The great purposes of the Incarnation are to make earth the residence of God—to eject Satan—to sap the foundations of his empire, and to turn this wilderness world into a Paradise, wherein innocence and God shall reign triumphantly for evermore. 2. As the dwelling-place of God for the good of mankind. What a sacred spot was the temple at Jerusalem! Here the Supreme and ever-blessed Potentate unfolded His purposes of mercy, and made man acquainted with redemption by blood. God dwells in the midst of disembodied spirits, as their Everlasting Light, and the Perennial Fountain of all their joy! A river of blessedness, pellucid and permanent, flows through the heavenly temple, and on either side of it grows the tree of life, whose fruits convey an element of immortality to the participants. We shall see God from every point of the glorious pavilion of redeemed and perfected men. (*J. H. Hill.*) *The heavenly temple:*—I. IN THE MATERIALS OF WHICH IT WAS BUILT. Solomon's temple was a type of the spiritual temple in the material of which it was built. 1. It was built of stone. The heart of man in its natural state is a heart of stone. 2. It was built of stones brought a long distance. God might have made His temple out of materials on the spot. He might have chosen angels and archangels and seraphs, and beings who had never sinned. But such was not His purpose. He selected the stones from a distant country, the souls of man from earth rather than the angels of heaven. It was made of stones, made ready before they were brought to the spot. The stones of the heavenly temple are prepared before they are removed

to their eternal position. We must be hewn out of the rock,—converted here; we must be prepared on earth, and fitted to occupy the exact spot intended for us before the time comes for us to be taken away. II. IN THE MANNER IN WHICH IT WAS CONSTRUCTED. 1. That it proceeded gradually. It was impossible for a building to be made all at once, when the materials were brought from a distance and one by one fitted together. The temple of God has been going on ever since Abel the first righteous man was admitted to heaven. 2. That it was carried on according to a plan. It was impossible that each stone could fit into its appointed place unless that place was pre-arranged and foreseen. Nay, every detail must have been provided for, and all the parts accurately suited one to another. So the wisdom of Almighty God has foreseen and provided for every detail connected with His heavenly temple. Not only have those been selected who shall form part of the building, but every stone is numbered and has its appointed position assigned to it. 3. It was carried on in solemn and mysterious silence. A fit type of the mysterious work of God in the construction of His temple in heaven. III. SOLOMON'S TEMPLE WAS A TYPE OF THE GREAT SPIRITUAL TEMPLE IN THE OBJECT FOR WHICH IT WAS ORDAINED. This was the glory of God. It was not for the pleasure of the king, or for manifesting the beauty of the carved stones—it was for the praise, the worship, and the glory of the Almighty. Let us remember that the end of our salvation is not merely, or even chiefly, our own advantage. There is a higher, a nobler object to be obtained—the praise of God. Conclusion—1. In all buildings, there are stones of all sorts, shapes, and sizes required. There are the massive pillars, the keystones to the arches, and the small rubble to fill up the courses. These may not all occupy so prominent a position, but they are all essential to the construction of the building. So the humblest Christians are required in the temple above as well as the more prominent and important. 2. In all buildings there must be builders. So God is the great Master Builder and the Divine Architect. He superintends the work. The under builders in this work are His ministers. 3. The foundation is Christ. The topstone is Christ. He is the Alpha and the Omega—the beginning and the end. He is the basis and the glory of the whole building. (*J. S. Bird, B.A.*) *Character* :—There is an eminent satisfaction in reading this terse sentence. King Solomon not only began the house; he finished it. I have often thought that the temple was a fit emblem of a true man's character, and Solomon's action and energy a fit example for a true man to follow. I. A MAN'S CHARACTER MUST BE BUILT UPON A SOLID FOUNDATION. The foundation of a man's life must not and dare not be a thing of chance. The ancient temple taught us that. It was founded through agony, its position was indicated by an angel, itself was consecrated by sacrifice. Life and character stand upon great, solid, permanent principles. No opportunism is of any use. Quick methods, suggested by selfishness, and attempted by inexperience and ignorance, will give us a house of cards to be blasted by a breath. What is more, a temporary success upon any other foundation than these enduring principles is worthless. It has no true element of success. It is like a gilded ball for a baby; or a bubble to be pricked by the first chance and disappear. Eternal principles must be our foundation. Let me point out a few. 1. The deepest down must be truth. Without moral truth no man is tolerable to others or sure of himself. Moral truth teaches him to say what he believes, and upon no plea whatever to say anything else. 2. Another principle is honesty. A large portion of honesty is candour: for a mysterious person, with secret designs and practices, is never altogether honest. 3. Another principle is purity. This lies deep, but it is a sweet, enjoyable, and beautiful rule. There is no section or class to whom it ought not to be dear. It is very close to truth and to honesty, and without it no character can be strong. It belongs to ourselves, our thoughts, imaginings, wishes, and motives. It has a kind of chemical action going out through our whole nature, and so belonging to others so far as we belong to them and affect them. It is a function of our bodies, our intellects, and our souls. It wears the sunlight of holiness, for the perfectly pure is God. 4. Deeper yet, for Jerusalem was built upon the foundation of the hills; and man's foundation is God. Jesus is the foundation which lies eternal. Religion is our relation to Jesus. II. THE CHARACTER MUST BE BUILT UP FOR A HIGH PURPOSE. It was the consciousness of this which added the factor of greatness to the work of Solomon. The father of the work was the Tabernacle. That, at all events, provided the outline. But circumstances had shifted and lifted themselves during the four hundred years which stood between. New possibilities had arisen, and therefore larger and richer

work must be effected. Here the ideal of character comes forward. That shows what we wish; the possible translates the vision into what we can. Therefore the purpose of our life aims at the highest service we can conceive and hope to render; such service contemplates God as its object—its highest is found in Him only. Hence, the character that is to be built is built for these:—1. For Sacrifice. 2. A second purpose must, like that of Solomon, be Thanksgiving, for thanksgiving is as much a duty as prayer. 3. The Residence of God. It is almost astounding in its presumption. The heaven, even the heavens of heavens, cannot contain Him. He is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, and how shall He come into perpetual association with it? Yet God vouchsafed to come down within a dwelling-place formed by these hands of sinful men; He was openly seen there, and His presence remained. Nor will He disdain the work which is of His own hands, nor refuse to dwell in the fleshy and spiritual temple which we consecrate to Him. III. THE CHARACTER MUST BE BUILT UP WITH LARGE AND NOBLE IDEAS. It was a huge undertaking. The quarries and the forests of Lebanon, the raising and shaping of the stones, the conveying of the cedar to the sea and then to Joppa, and thence to Jerusalem, the textile work probably from foreign looms, the brass, the silver, and the gold, all expressed—and as they seem to us, exhausted—the grandest conception of the eleventh century before our Lord. Such are to be the kind of ideas that go to make up our character: the greatest we can, with all of care, all of patience, and all of completeness we may add. (*W. M. Johnston, M.A.*) *The law of beauty*:—When the marble, refusing to express an impure or a wicked thought, has fulfilled the law of strength, suddenly it blossoms into the law of beauty. For beauty is no outward polish, no surface adornment. Workers in wood may veneer soft pine with thin mahogany, or hide the poverty of brick walls behind thin slabs of alabaster. But real beauty is an interior quality, striking outward and manifest upon the surface. When the sweet babe is healthy within, a soft bloom appears upon the cheek without. When ripeness enters the heart of the grape, a purple flush appears upon the surface of the cluster. When the vestal virgin of beauty had adorned the temple without, it asks the artist to adorn his soul with thoughts and worship and aspirations. If the body lives in a marble house, the soul should revolt from building a mud hut. The law of divine beauty asks the youth to flee from unclean thoughts and vulgar purposes as from a bog or a foul slough. It bids him flee from irreverence, vanity, and selfishness as men flee from some plague-smitten village or a filthy garment. Having doubled the beauty of his house, having doubled the sweetness of his music, having doubled the wisdom of his book, man should also double the nobility and beauty of his life, making the soul within as glorious as a temple without. (*N. D. Hillis, D.D.*) *The soul's temple*:—If Milton says that "a book is the precious life-blood of a master-spirit embalmed and treasured up on purpose for a life beyond life," and affirms that we may "as well kill a man as kill a good book," then the Divine voice whispers that the soul is the precious life-temple into which three score years and ten have swept their thoughts, and dreams, and hopes, and prayers, and tears, and committed all their treasures into the hands of that God who never slumbers and never sleeps. Slowly the soul's temple rises, slowly reason and conscience make beautiful the halls of imagination, the galleries of memory, the chambers of affection. Character is a structure that rises under the direction of a Divine Master-Builder. Full oft a Divine form enters the earthly scene. Thoughts that are not man's enter the mind. Hopes that are not his, like angels, knock at his door to aid him in his work. Even death is no "Vandal." When the body has done its work, death pulls the body down as Tintoretto, toiling upon his ceiling, pulled down his scaffold to reveal to men a ceiling glorious with lustrous beauty. At the gateway of ancient Thebes, watchmen stood to guard the wicked city. Upon the walls of bloody Babylon soldiers walked the long night through, ever keeping the towers where tyranny dwelt. And if kings think that dead stones and breathless timbers are worthy of guarding, we may believe that God doth set keepers to guard the living city of man's soul. Man's soul is God's living temple. It is not kept by earthly hands. It is eternal in the heavens. (*Ibid.*)

Ver. 6. **The nethermost chamber was five cubits broad, and the middle was six cubits broad.**—*Enlargement upwards*:—As the temple was highest, so it enlarged itself still upward; for as it ascended in height, so it still was wider and wider; even from the lowest chambers to the top. And this was to show us that God's

true gospel temple, which is His Church, should have its enlargedness of heart still upward, or most for spiritual or eternal things, wherefore He saith, "Thy heart shall fear, and be enlarged," that is, be most affected with things above (Isa. lx. 5: Col. iii. 1). Indeed it is the nature of grace to enlarge itself still upward, and to make the heart widest for the things that are above. The temple therefore was narrowest downwards, to show that a little of earth, or this world, should serve the Church of God. And having food and raiment, let us therewith be content. I read not in Scripture of any house, but this that was thus enlarged upwards; nor is there anywhere, save only in the Church of God, that which doth answer this similitude. All others are widest downward, and have the largest heart for earthly things. (*John Bunyan.*)

Ver. 7. **And the house . . . was built of stone made ready before it was brought thither.**—*Living stones made ready for the heavenly temple:*—In the New Testament the Church is termed "God's building"—"the temple of God"—"the temple of the Holy Ghost"—"the temple of the living God"—"an habitation of God in the Spirit." These terms denote, that as God by the bright symbol of His glory manifested His presence in the movable tabernacle erected by Moses, and the stately temple built by Solomon; so does He by His Spirit dwell in the hearts of Christians as individuals, and in the Church collectively. I. THE STONES OF WHICH IT IS COMPOSED. St. Peter says of Christians, that "as lively stones they are built up a spiritual house." A stone is a shapeless mass of rock. It is inert—lifeless: could never split itself from its native quarry; could never fashion itself into classic shape and beauty; and could never set itself up as a lintel or column in any edifice of man. And such by nature is the spiritual state of all men. But believers, having been hewn out from the quarry of humanity by the grace of God, are termed "living stones"; not inert masses of rock, not senseless blocks of marble, but full of life, feeling, action; and they are thus designated because Christ, as "the tried corner-stone," "the sure foundation," is called "a living stone," and diffuses His own life through all parts of the spiritual temple which rests on Him. So that every stone in it, from the foundation to the top stone, is made a precious, a glistering, a living stone, through the indwelling life of Jesus, the Prince of Life. II. THE WAY IN WHICH THESE LIVING STONES ARE PREPARED FOR THE TEMPLE, FURNISHES A SUBJECT OF INTERESTING AND PROFITABLE THOUGHT. The wood and stone used in Solomon's temple were carefully prepared at a distance from the place where the edifice was to be built. The sacred house was planned out in minutest detail by David, under the direction of the Spirit of God. Each stone, column, lintel, architrave, capital, beam, rafter, had its special and appointed place; but as yet the wood was waving its branches in the forests of Lebanon, and the stone was unquarried in the mountains of Judea. Many an axe and sharp-edged tool passed over that tree before it became a stately pillar; and many a hammer and instrument of iron was used on that once unsightly block ere as a polished stone it was fitted for the temple's wall. Most beautifully does all this illustrate the way of God in building up His spiritual and living temple. Though at conversion the child of God is a marked man, though he is justified freely by the grace that is in Christ Jesus; yet how much spiritual trimming and dressing, how much hewing and squaring does he need to fashion him aright for the position which the Divine Architect intends he shall occupy hereafter! There are sharp angles of character to be rounded off; unsightly protuberances of conduct to be chipped away; many roughnesses of temper to be smoothed down; many flaws and cracks of mind and heart to be chiselled out; and then, when the general form of the stone is prepared, how much severe friction is required to give it the right polish, and bring out all its beauties, so that its smooth surface may fling back the rays of the Sun of Righteousness! Our earth is the place where this work is to be done; for, as there was no noise of any axe, or hammer, or tool of iron heard on Mount Moriah while the temple was building, so in the New Jerusalem above there will be heard no crushing strokes of conviction, no sharp hewings of an awakened conscience, no sound of preparatory discipline. The greater part of the preparation to which we are subjected as professing Christians, is of a disciplinary character, and hence is fitly represented by the axe, the hammer, and the tool of iron. Now the axe seems driven into the root of his happiness; now he is broken as a block of granite under the blows of the hammer of God's word; and now the iron of a sore adversity has entered into his soul, and he feels himself stricken, smitten, and afflicted. In these dispensations, however

severe, he is being fitted by the hand of God Himself for a place in glory. God knows for what position in that heavenly temple He has designed us. III. THE END FOR WHICH THESE LIVING STONES ARE DESIGNED. The real end, then, for which God hath chosen us in Christ Jesus before the world began, and fitted us on earth by His providential dispensations is, "that in the dispensation of the fulness of time, He might gather together in one, all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth, even in Him." And this recapitulation of all things in Christ, is to be effected by building all things on Christ as the sure foundation which God Himself has laid in Zion; and Christians, as living stones chosen of God and precious, are, in the language of St. Paul, built upon the foundation of the apostles. This spiritual temple God is now building up, and it progresses just as fast as the living stones are prepared to take their places above. And this building process is going on every day, in our midst, under our own eyes. (*Bishop Stevens.*) *Hidden quarries:*—There is a hidden, withdrawn realm in every one of us, where life is getting itself chiefly shaped.

> Not e'en the truest heart, and next our own,
> Knows half the reasons why we smile or sigh.

"Do noble things, not dream them all day long," urges and sings Charles Kingsley; and it is a good music and a right urging. Yet it is still true that no one can do noble things except he first dream them. There was a voyage to the New World in the thought of Columbus before he left Spain, or there could have been no voyage by ship. There was the boat propelled by steam in the thought of Robert Fulton before the actual boat could go puffing up the Hudson, drawing in its wake the vast retinue of later steam navigation. There must be the hidden dreaming before the doing can be possible. Think of some of these withdrawn and hidden quarries, where the stones are chiefly shaped, which became builded in the temple of our lives—the hidden quarries of the imagination, the affections, the will. (*Homiletic Review.*) *Grace prepares the stones for the spiritual temple:*—To this our New Testament temple answers. For those of the sons of Adam who are counted worthy to be laid in this building are not by nature, but by grace, made meet for it. No man will lay trees, as they come from the wood, for beams and rafters in his house; no stones, as digged, in the walls. No; the stones must be hewed and squared, and the trees sawn and made fit, and so be laid in the house. Yea, they must be so sawn, and so squared, that in coupling they may be joined exactly, else the building will not be good, nor the workman have credit of his doings. Hence our gospel church of which the temple was a type, is said to be fitly framed, and that there is a fit supply of every joint for the securing of the whole (1 Pet. ii. 5; Eph. ii. 20, 21, iv. 16; Col. ii. 19). (*John Bunyan.*) There was neither hammer nor axe nor any tool of iron heard in the house.—*Building in silence:*—Incidenial as the mention of this curious fact may be, we cannot well doubt that it was intended to have a spiritual significance. God's house was built in silence. Those who watched it, as it rose in its beauty and majesty, must have felt a sense of awe stealing upon them as the great work proceeded without the din and clatter with which earthly buildings are raised. Much might be spoken in a general way of the eloquence of silence. If you have ever been alone on a mountain-top, lifted above the sounds of earth, you must have had a very solemnising sense of being brought nearer to God and to the awful world unseen. Shallow rivers are commonly noisy rivers, and, as has been well said, "the drum is loud because it is hollow." The profoundest gratitude, the deepest love, the intensest anxiety, are mute. The inability to express them is itself expressive. But to speak more directly of the relation of silence to our spiritual life, observe—1. Silence seems fittest when we first think of God. Surely the earliest consciousness of His presence and His nearness, if it be a real and a vivid consciousness, commands our silence! And then, close as we feel God to be to us, it is undeniable that there is much in His nature that must ever remain mysterious; much that, as far as logical statement goes, seems contradictory. Not mysterious, observe, in such a sense as that we should be justified in giving up thinking of God altogether; but mysterious as implying that, when we have reached certain lines of limitation to our inquiries, there we must stop. We can know God; but there is much relating to God which we cannot know. 2. When our religion passes into personal conviction, then again we find the value of silence. "Then Job answered the Lord, and said, Behold, I am vile; what

shall I answer Thee? I will lay my hand upon my mouth. Once have I spoken; but I will not answer: yea, twice; but I will proceed no further." When the sense of self-reproach is keen, when the conviction of guilt is fairly awakened, the sinner is dumb before his God. What can he say? Can he give utterance to the overwhelming sense of personal demerit, or express the depth of humiliation in the convicted soul? And then, when we go forth redeemed and disenthralled, how feebly can words indicate the sense of relief, of gratitude too profound for words! Let not noise, then, be the test of truth. Believe nothing merely because it is said by many, and said very loudly. The people of Ephesus cried with a loud voice for the space of two hours, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians!" but I do not suppose that any truthful person at the end of the two hours was more impressed by her greatness than at the beginning, or more inclined to believe that her image had fallen down from Jupiter. As you value truth and fairness, as it is the sacred duty of every man to form his convictions without fear or favour, his duty for the sake of others as for his own, resolve never to be led by clamour. 3. But silence has its proper relation to spiritual worship. Certainly this truth is distinctly involved in all that Scripture says of the worth of silence, viz. that if we would commune with our own hearts we must be "still"; we must cease from the stir and fuss and superficial chatter of a superficial world; above all, from the wilfulness of our hearts and their clamorous devices and desires. We must say in the same spirit as the child-prophet of old: "Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth"; and then, in self-forgetfulness, listen for the voice that is best heard in silence. 4. But silence has its proper place, its due relation, in regard to our intercourse with our fellow-men. Among the valuable things that some of us have learned from Thomas Carlyle, we shall not forget the value of silence. It seems that there is far too much talking in the world. After all, Carlyle only said what the wise man of old had wisely affirmed, that "in all labour there is profit, but the talk of the lips tendeth only to penury." The author of Ecclesiastes reminds us that "there is a time to keep silence, and a time to speak." We return, last of all, to our original thought. The temple of God is to be built in silence. In silent conviction the individual is built up a dwelling for God's Spirit. In silence is His spiritual temple, His Church, built in its glory and beauty, "which temple ye are." It is a silent work, because it is a spiritual work. "The kingdom of God," to put this truth into New Testament language, "is not in word, but in power." It depends upon the invisible touch of the Divine Master's hand, "whereby all the building, fitly framed together, groweth into an holy temple in the Lord." (*J. A. Jacob, M.A.*) *No sound of hammer or axe*:—1. A single soul under the action of God's Spirit illustrates both the steady continuity with which great forces operate, and also what we may call the periodicity of exceptional and startling upheavals. None can tell how long it has taken to form a single geologic stratum; silently and slowly, and by a prearranged law, the processes take place by which what we call a rock, a stone, a formation is made; but, in some moment of violent interference, the aspect of a continent is changed. To those close and steadfast years of formation we attach too little importance. The currents of electric and other forces, so essential in various ways, are distinctly active, and may be tested, even where no violent action may be traced; but there comes a thunderstorm, the elements seem at war; and then we see the awfulness of this power for good or for devastation. The efflorescence of life, as one may call it, has the same moral meaning. The pre-ordained flower is in the seed, and grows into its organic beauty by a living vitality which has its pre-ordained type. You look out upon the snow-mantled earth; one snowflake, with innumerable crystals, each exquisite in its beauty and perfect in its structure, is not a snowstorm. But it is essential to it, and has been separately framed so that each fits into each for the perfect whole. Do we not see how all these become as parables, equally with the blocks of quarried stone, which, fitly hewn, went to build the temple? When, for instance, we ask concerning the origin of spiritual life, we are thrown back into the sphere of the hidden and incomprehensible. A good man always, however, refers all his goodness to the contemplated purpose of the Almighty. Hence he does not hesitate to use and apply to himself the word, "elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father." The response of the soul to the words of the Saviour, "I have chosen you and ordained you," is immediate and unfaltering. "Even so, Lord; the love that was before all my sin, my very existence, was the fountain of my life and love." But I have called it hidden and incomprehensible. Yes; it is in

the Divine secrecies that all the life to be revealed lies. These are the depths which are unsearchable, the mysteries which are inscrutable. 2. Let us now trace some of the methods by which, in practical experience, the setting of these spiritual stones takes place. That there are such upheavals as correspond with the periods of inorganic nature we have been reminded. Sometimes stormy religious experiences herald "the peace which passeth understanding"; and the transfer from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light is most emphatic and marked. The world intrudes too much upon our notions of what a spiritual change is. We come to expect something startling and showy. We want a spectacle to see and to exhibit; but the kingdom of God cometh, a true kingdom too, "without observation." Readers of the lives of Madame Guyon and Fénelon will at once have grasped my allusion. For "interior silence" was one of those qualities which made the mystics so devout, and still makes them so interesting a study. But that "interior silence," that submission of the will to God, that entire absence of self-dependence which has given to mysticism a peculiar charm for a certain order of minds, does it not afford us,—in these days of sensationalism, when everything must be tabulated, set down by name, and labelled with some distinctive sign,—some needful check and counteractive? Does it not suggest to us that the holiest, and therefore the best and safest, ways along which men may pass towards the highest life, are those along the Divine silences? But natures are different. Some need the stimulus of great external excitement. Let us not condemn them, even while we claim a place for those who find refreshment and nutriment both in the things that make no noise. Silence does not mean inaction; nay, has not silence been called the very "voice of God"? We may be touched to the very core of our being without any deeper, fuller pulsation than that which indicates a healthy, natural inward life. Let the good man be encouraged to hold on his way in goodness, to cherish with a tender regard the quiet virtues which blossom for Heaven alone to look at; let him not be discouraged that he hears not the throb of his inward vitality. If the fruit of the Spirit be with him, let him not doubt that the Spirit is there. And it would be well to guard against those laboured substitutes for the Divine endeavour, which often accompany an outward show of religion. You are not stirred as once you were, let me suppose; this may be because your nature offers less resistance to the holier will. The noise of the babbling brook as it dashed against the pebbles or rocks in its onward course, has subsided because the flow is less impeded; but the deep stream flows with equal force. My busy, restless, eager friend, we have need of all your earnestness and energy; but settle it well that there are other natures with as true an earnestness which are not equally restless and busy. With an inward reserve force, they, while expending themselves in various ways, have yet something hidden away from human observation; great reservoir forces which will not dry up in summer heat, nor become useless in winter's frost. It is of the first importance that our wills shall be confirmed to God's; and that, without uneasy effort, we endeavour to walk in the light of God. Our outward life may make no noise, even as our inner life may work without friction, but both have their sure reward. We may, on the other hand, be so busy that—like one in ancient story, "As thy servant was busy here and there, he was gone" (1 Kings xx. 40)—the special charge with which we are entrusted may escape us. Let every man bring such gifts as he has, and always the best he can bring; but it may please God to set more honour upon those which are lightly esteemed among men and even by ourselves. All these things press home to us this conviction, that above all we are required to be simple and faithful, laying bare every energy we have to the eye of Infinite Love, and willing to have even our best labours passed by and our unconscious and unpretending efforts crowned with such blessing as the Lord may allow. (*G. J. Proctor.*) *Building in silence*:—St. Paul, in his Epistles, frequently alludes to the temple, and employs it as a figure or type or symbol to set forth some great Christian truth. 1. Sometimes he speaks of the individual Christian being the temple of God (1 Cor. vi. 19). 2. Sometimes he speaks of the Church collectively as the temple of God (2 Cor. vi. 16; 1 Cor. iii. 16, 17). 3. Sometimes Paul speaks of the Church glorified under the figure of a temple, not yet completed, but progressing, continually growing unto a holy temple in the Lord (Eph. ii. 19). In some invisible realm, God is rearing a temple of sanctified souls gathered from this evil world. I. THE NATURAL UNFITNESS OF THE MATERIAL. The house was built of stone made ready—made fit, implying natural unfitness. The stone when raised from the quarry is rough, shapeless,

unsightly, totally unfit to occupy a place in the walls of a temple. It may serve to fill up a place in a mean and humble structure; but the builder of a temple requires it hewn, shaped, so as to fit with nicety into its appointed place, that the entire building may at last be symmetrical and beautiful, revealing the skill of architect and builder. We all need the mighty working of the Divine Artificer in order to fit us for the service of heaven. Our total unfitness is manifest, unfitness of nature, of character, of disposition, of taste. In what then does fitness consist? 1. You must be in harmony with your environment in heaven. You must be made ready before you are brought thither. 2. You must be in harmony with the employments of heaven. Heaven is not a place of inactivity. Ample scope will be given for the development and growth of both mind and spirit. Every employment there will, however, be of a highly sacred character, and will be joyful only to those who are in perfect sympathy with holiness. 3. Another qualification is sympathy with God. In heaven God will be the supreme joy of angels and all unfallen spirits; God in Christ will be the joy of all redeemed spirits for ever. There is only one will in heaven. II. THE MATERIAL FOR BUILDING THE TEMPLE WAS BROUGHT FROM A DISTANCE. The woodwork was wrought from Lebanon-Cedars, the stones also are supposed to have been brought chiefly from the sides of Lebanon; brass "without weight" from the foundries of Succoth and Zaretan; gold, silver, and precious stones from Ophir and Parvaim. This fact symbolises the distance, the moral distance, from God of the material with which He builds for Himself the heavenly temple. Strangers, foreigners, aliens, enemies, afar off are the expressions employed in the Scriptures to describe our condition when sought and found by a gracious God. III. THE MEANS EMPLOYED. Ordinary means only were used in the erection of Solomon's temple. No miracle was wrought. To men hath God committed the ministry of reconciliation. "We have this treasure in earthen vessels." Saved ourselves He sends us forth to save others. While the instruments are human the means are varied. In the quarry some blast the rock, some hew the stone, some may be seen sawing, others polishing, others removing it when finished. While holding fast the unchanging truth, that the Holy Spirit alone effects the great moral change in every regenerated soul, the means He employs are varied. "There are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all" (1 Cor. xii. 4–7). Stones differ materially in their character and nature. Some will break, others split, others crumble, others polish. As human beings we differ greatly in temperament, disposition, tastes, qualities, and we require different treatment in order to bring out the best that is in us. The discipline that would be a blessing to one might prove a curse to another. God, who holds in His hand the weapon, knows perfectly the nature, the qualities, the character of the man He is working upon. IV. ITS GRADUAL ADVANCEMENT. Solomon took seven years to build his temple, but it took David many more years to provide and prepare the materials. So the great spiritual temple in the heavenlies has been in process for about six thousand years, and even now it seems far from completion. The foundation may be considered laid when the first promise of a Saviour was proclaimed to fallen man. The seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head. Throughout the centuries the building has been rising beautiful and fair under the superintendence of the Divine Architect. Fresh stones are gathered and piled on the sacred edifice. Every day reports progress. V. THE SILENCE WITH WHICH THE TEMPLE RISES. "There was neither hammer nor axe nor any tool of iron heard in the house while it was in building." This world is the quarry where the souls of men are to be prepared for the kingdom of heaven. Whatever change your spirit requires in order to fit you for a place in the heavenly temple must be realised here. This world is the only one where renewal is possible. Probation is limited to our earthly life. (*R. Roberts.*) *Greatest works wrought in silence:*— I. THE ERECTION OF THE TEMPLE. The building of the temple at Jerusalem was a grand work. But this grand work, we are informed, was wrought in silence; and when we consider the nature and dimensions of the material used, this seems very extraordinary. Some of the blocks of stone were 80 feet long, 10 feet high, and 14 feet wide. Its pillars were socketed in solid masonry. Yet these ponderous masses were hewn, squared, fitted without the sound of a hammer, an axe, or any tool. This silence not only demonstrated that the work was Divine, but symbolised the mode in which the Eternal works out His vast designs. II. THE PROCESSES OF NATURE. He who built all things is God. How did He rear this grand temple of the universe, compared to which the building on Mount Moriah

is a mere atom? How did He round and burnish and set agoing the innumerable worlds and systems that roll throughout immensity? Without any sound of "hammer," or "axe," in infinite silence. How does He bring round the various seasons of the year, change the aspects of the landscape, draw up the herbs, the plants, and flowers, from the silent earth, and build up the majestic trees of unnumbered forests? It is all done in silence. "In solemn silence all" grow and all move, flourish, and decay. III. THE EDIFICATION OF CHRISTLY SOULS. All virtuous souls are His building, His temple to dwell in. But how does He build them up in true knowledge in unbounded confidence in the truth, and invincible love for all that is right, beneficent, and Divine? In the most silent way. How did He, the great Architect, begin this work in Christ? He did "not strive nor cry, neither did any man hear His voice in the streets." Thus now He proceeds, He inbreathes a regenerating, holy thought silently into the soul, and there it works and works until it builds up the temple of a noble character. CONCLUSION. 1. Do not judge of the prosperity of any Church by its boisterous sounds. All Divine operations are in silence. In the working of human machinery, the grating noise and rattling din are often insufferable to the ear; but how noiselessly works the stupendous and complicated mechanism of the great universe! Scarcely a sound is heard where God's hand is most manifest. 2. Do not endeavour to promote any Divine cause by noise and bluster.

In silence mighty things are wrought,
Silently builded thought on thought,
  Truth's temple greets the sky.
And like a citadel with towers,
The soul with her subservient powers
  Is strengthened silently.

Soundless as chariots on the snow,
The saplings of the forest grow
  To trees of mighty girth.
Each nightly star in silence burns,
And every day in silence turns
  The axle of the earth.

The silent frost with mighty band
Fetters the river and the land
  With universal chain,
And smitten by the silent sun,
The chain is loosed, the rivers run,
  The lands are free again.

(*Homilist.*) *Quiet and order in the temple*:—I. It might be expressive of the CHARACTER OF THE WORSHIP WHICH WOULD BE ACCEPTABLE TO GOD IN THE TEMPLE. 1. Worship prepared for. The stones were cut and shaped beforehand. So should we go to the house of God in the spirit of devotion. Many go expecting there to get spiritual thoughts, who keep worldly thoughts in their heads until they reach the very doors of the sanctuary. To cultivate a spirit of prayerfulness and reverence before going to the house of God will warrant us to expect the acceptance of our worship, and a blessing on ourselves. 2. Worship quietly conducted. God is not delighted with loud and noisy declamation. A reverent tone will be subdued; but not hypocritically so. 3. Worship conducted in an orderly manner. Random, irregular, disorderly services cannot be such as God would approve. Late attendance, listlessness in God's house, unseemly haste to leave, all these appear to be condemned. 4. Worship appropriately conducted. There should be regard paid to the fitness of things. II. The circumstance mentioned in this narrative may be expressive of the CHARACTER OF THE SPIRITUAL TEMPLE, OF WHICH THE MATERIAL TEMPLE WAS TYPICAL. 1. There must be a change in those who are made stones in the living temple. 2. Religion has to do with the externals of man's life. An uncouth, rough, rugged Christian is an anomaly. The servant of God should be gentle, meek, patient, lovely, amiable. 3. The work of preparation must be done outside the church. Men are not to be brought into Christ's church as members in order that they may be converted, but because they have been already converted. 4. All stones in the

temple were serviceable. Christians in different spheres of life have greater or less responsibility according to circumstances; but all are "precious in the sight of the Lord." (*F. Wagstaff.*) *The quiet world*:—One might often think that the great world-life is mostly characterised by strife and stress and storm. And true it is that these are facts. In business, competition; in politics, conflicting parties; in international relations, either war or rumours of war, or, at best, armed peace—the strain of jealousy and fear; in the church, sectarianism; in theology, endless controversy; in ethics, even, different schools with many unsolved problems. In such a world it would appear almost impossible to live a quiet, tranquil life—to enjoy anything like harmony of being. And this reflection is not without its danger. There is a temptation to catch the fever; to live in the storm; to think ourselves on to the rack; to be ever on the wave of excitement; and to regard life as mainly consisting in its more tumultuous elements. It is therefore of some value to reflect that behind all the tumult there is always a great body of life which is quiet and tranquil. The world is not as noisy as it sounds, nor as stormy as it appears. Paul was no doubt right when he said that there were many voices in the world, and that none of them was without signification. It is also true that there is a great deal of substantial life which is not loud; of solid sound building where the noise of tools is not heard; of weaving durable material after beautiful patterns without the din of machinery, on the silent looms of tranquil souls. The sea is in many ways a fit emblem of life. We have watched it when strong winds made it angry; how it rose in wrath; how the waters roared and were troubled; how the waves broke on rock and shore; it looked as if the whole volume of the ocean had been stirred to its depth. But it was not so. It is even so in the great human world. Even its most tremendous revolutions leave its largest part in the steady sway of orderly life, where feeling and thought and action are normal and peaceful. It is the same along the whole course of history, and we are apt to forget it. History as written is for the most part the history of what made a noise. The sound of warriors rushing to battle, the clashing of armour, the groans of the conquered, and the shouts of the conqueror fill our ears. And yet it is evident that these were at no time the whole of life. The vast body of life is always unhistoric; the quiet world is not reported because it is quiet. Drop into history at any one point that we may think it more concretely. Harold, the English king, hears of the coming of William of Normandy. Immediately he marshals the war forces, and soon you hear the tramp of soldiers on the march. They meet the enemies; the armies fight; there is tremendous excitement. Ask any historian what the great event of the year 1066 was in England, and he will say it was the battle of Hastings. And it looks indeed as if English life then was a battle and nothing else. Yet even when that battle was being fought, which undoubtedly was the great event of the year, and which had such important consequences for this country, it is certain that of the two million people then in England, the vast majority went calmly and regularly on with their life, many not knowing, and many not heeding the engagement of the soldiers. Thousands of yeomen and cottars, of freedmen and serfs went the daily round as if there was no Duke of Normandy on the south coast; hundreds of monks chanted the canticles divine, undisturbed by the noises of the warriors. And all these who lived in the quiet world contributed their share to the national advancement. What is life in Britain from the first coming of the English down to the establishment of their final supremacy? It is mostly made up of battles—battles with the old Britons; battles among the different kingdoms of the English themselves; battles with the Danes—terrible battles; battles with the Normans; and battles all the way. William of Normandy said on his death-bed, "I am stained with rivers of blood." And in reading the history of this long period we seem to be walking on the bank of a river of blood all the way. English life then was one long battle? No, no; battles there were indeed, many and furious, but even then I think the quiet world was larger than the world of storm. And in the story of those old times, rude and rough as they were, we can afford to turn our eye from the battle-field to the hearth, where nature has already opened the fountains of tenderness; where the mother fondles her child with sweet delicious love; and we may be very sure that more than king or soldier, the mother builds the nation. If it be true that in noise and tumult the enemies are driven back and conquered, it is in silence for the most part that character is built. Japan surprised the world in her war with China. It has been said that her fighting power has made her a

is a mere atom? How did He round and burnish and set agoing the innumerable worlds and systems that roll throughout immensity? Without any sound of "hammer," or "axe," in infinite silence. How does He bring round the various seasons of the year, change the aspects of the landscape, draw up the herbs, the plants, and flowers, from the silent earth, and build up the majestic trees of unnumbered forests? It is all done in silence. "In solemn silence all" grow and all move, flourish, and decay. III. THE EDIFICATION OF CHRISTLY SOULS. All virtuous souls are His building, His temple to dwell in. But how does He build them up in true knowledge in unbounded confidence in the truth, and invincible love for all that is right, beneficent, and Divine? In the most silent way. How did He, the great Architect, begin this work in Christ? He did "not strive nor cry, neither did any man hear His voice in the streets." Thus now He proceeds, He inbreathes a regenerating, holy thought silently into the soul, and there it works and works until it builds up the temple of a noble character. CONCLUSION. 1. Do not judge of the prosperity of any Church by its boisterous sounds. All Divine operations are in silence. In the working of human machinery, the grating noise and rattling din are often insufferable to the ear; but how noiselessly works the stupendous and complicated mechanism of the great universe! Scarcely a sound is heard where God's hand is most manifest. 2. Do not endeavour to promote any Divine cause by noise and bluster.

In silence mighty things are wrought,
Silently builded thought on thought,
  Truth's temple greets the sky.
And like a citadel with towers,
The soul with her subservient powers
  Is strengthened silently.

Soundless as chariots on the snow,
The saplings of the forest grow
  To trees of mighty girth.
Each nightly star in silence burns,
And every day in silence turns
  The axle of the earth.

The silent frost with mighty band
Fetters the river and the land
  With universal chain,
And smitten by the silent sun,
The chain is loosed, the rivers run,
  The lands are free again.

(*Homilist.*) *Quiet and order in the temple:*—I. It might be expressive of the CHARACTER OF THE WORSHIP WHICH WOULD BE ACCEPTABLE TO GOD IN THE TEMPLE. 1. Worship prepared for. The stones were cut and shaped beforehand. So should we go to the house of God in the spirit of devotion. Many go expecting there to get spiritual thoughts, who keep worldly thoughts in their heads until they reach the very doors of the sanctuary. To cultivate a spirit of prayerfulness and reverence before going to the house of God will warrant us to expect the acceptance of our worship, and a blessing on ourselves. 2. Worship quietly conducted. God is not delighted with loud and noisy declamation. A reverent tone will be subdued; but not hypocritically so. 3. Worship conducted in an orderly manner. Random, irregular, disorderly services cannot be such as God would approve. Late attendance, listlessness in God's house, unseemly haste to leave, all these appear to be condemned. 4. Worship appropriately conducted. There should be regard paid to the fitness of things. II. The circumstance mentioned in this narrative may be expressive of the CHARACTER OF THE SPIRITUAL TEMPLE, OF WHICH THE MATERIAL TEMPLE WAS TYPICAL. 1. There must be a change in those who are made stones in the living temple. 2. Religion has to do with the externals of man's life. An uncouth, rough, rugged Christian is an anomaly. The servant of God should be gentle, meek, patient, lovely, amiable. 3. The work of preparation must be done outside the church. Men are not to be brought into Christ's church as members in order that they may be converted, but because they have been already converted. 4. All stones in the

temple were serviceable. Christians in different spheres of life have greater or less responsibility according to circumstances; but all are "precious in the sight of the Lord." (*F. Wagstaff.*) *The quiet world*:—One might often think that the great world-life is mostly characterised by strife and stress and storm. And true it is that these are facts. In business, competition; in politics, conflicting parties; in international relations, either war or rumours of war, or, at best, armed peace—the strain of jealousy and fear; in the church, sectarianism; in theology, endless controversy; in ethics, even, different schools with many unsolved problems. In such a world it would appear almost impossible to live a quiet, tranquil life—to enjoy anything like harmony of being. And this reflection is not without its danger. There is a temptation to catch the fever; to live in the storm; to think ourselves on to the rack; to be ever on the wave of excitement; and to regard life as mainly consisting in its more tumultuous elements. It is therefore of some value to reflect that behind all the tumult there is always a great body of life which is quiet and tranquil. The world is not as noisy as it sounds, nor as stormy as it appears. Paul was no doubt right when he said that there were many voices in the world, and that none of them was without signification. It is also true that there is a great deal of substantial life which is not loud; of solid sound building where the noise of tools is not heard; of weaving durable material after beautiful patterns without the din of machinery, on the silent looms of tranquil souls. The sea is in many ways a fit emblem of life. We have watched it when strong winds made it angry; how it rose in wrath; how the waters roared and were troubled; how the waves broke on rock and shore; it looked as if the whole volume of the ocean had been stirred to its depth. But it was not so. It is even so in the great human world. Even its most tremendous revolutions leave its largest part in the steady sway of orderly life, where feeling and thought and action are normal and peaceful. It is the same along the whole course of history, and we are apt to forget it. History as written is for the most part the history of what made a noise. The sound of warriors rushing to battle, the clashing of armour, the groans of the conquered, and the shouts of the conqueror fill our ears. And yet it is evident that these were at no time the whole of life. The vast body of life is always unhistoric; the quiet world is not reported because it is quiet. Drop into history at any one point that we may think it more concretely. Harold, the English king, hears of the coming of William of Normandy. Immediately he marshals the war forces, and soon you hear the tramp of soldiers on the march. They meet the enemies; the armies fight; there is tremendous excitement. Ask any historian what the great event of the year 1066 was in England, and he will say it was the battle of Hastings. And it looks indeed as if English life then was a battle and nothing else. Yet even when that battle was being fought, which undoubtedly was the great event of the year, and which had such important consequences for this country, it is certain that of the two million people then in England, the vast majority went calmly and regularly on with their life, many not knowing, and many not heeding the engagement of the soldiers. Thousands of yeomen and cottars, of freedmen and serfs went the daily round as if there was no Duke of Normandy on the south coast; hundreds of monks chanted the canticles divine, undisturbed by the noises of the warriors. And all these who lived in the quiet world contributed their share to the national advancement. What is life in Britain from the first coming of the English down to the establishment of their final supremacy? It is mostly made up of battles—battles with the old Britons; battles among the different kingdoms of the English themselves; battles with the Danes—terrible battles; battles with the Normans; and battles all the way. William of Normandy said on his death-bed, "I am stained with rivers of blood." And in reading the history of this long period we seem to be walking on the bank of a river of blood all the way. English life then was one long battle? No, no; battles there were indeed, many and furious, but even then I think the quiet world was larger than the world of storm. And in the story of those old times, rude and rough as they were, we can afford to turn our eye from the battle-field to the hearth, where nature has already opened the fountains of tenderness; where the mother fondles her child with sweet delicious love; and we may be very sure that more than king or soldier, the mother builds the nation. If it be true that in noise and tumult the enemies are driven back and conquered, it is in silence for the most part that character is built. Japan surprised the world in her war with China. It has been said that her fighting power has made her a

nation, but we might well ask, what made her fighting power? It was in the quiet world of mutual devotion, patriotic sentiment, and noble sacrifice, her strength was reared for battle. And in our day, in these times of national disquietude, one might sometimes think that the world is made up of governments and armies and speculators—they make such a noise. And depend upon it, the national well-being is more dependent upon the quality of the quiet world than upon noisy action. There must be noisy action, of course; there must be public service; we must have men whose speeches shall resound to the ends of the earth, and whose words shall be heard everywhere; but we are too liable to think of our national strength as consisting in these. Every nation has been asking itself recently how strong it is. And for an answer they have been counting their ironclads and their armies, and estimating their exchequers. England has been displaying her flying squadron to advertise her strength. Our American ambassador in London wisely reminded us that not in these things lie the real forces of a nation's life. I would say indeed that the three great spheres in which a nation is built are the home, the school, and the church. In the sweetness and purity of its domestic life, in the character of its education, in the depth and reality of its religion, a nation's life mostly consists. And the best work in these is quietly done. Now, it is very necessary for those who have to live much in the loud world, to keep in close touch with the world that goes quietly on its way. The hard serious student will find life full of problems. To the thinker, there is no doubt that it is so. And you can find a problem everywhere. The simplest objects when you examine them put you at the heart of mystery. The simplest statements if you analyse them throw you upon the profoundest problems. This sometimes becomes a source of great depression; men are weighed down by it into inaction. Out of this mood I know no better way than to reflect upon the quiet world. When you are debating what is duty, thousands are just quietly doing it, and they have peace and harmony of being because they do. When you cannot decide as to whether or not there is ground for theism, thousands quietly turn their souls in reverence to the Unknown and worship, and though they cannot theorise, they know they are helped, they feel the lift, and the problem is not there to them. Believe me, there is often an escape from the over-pressure of a problem in the contemplation of a fact. The life of quiet goodness, of unostentatious fidelity, of calm, resolute devotion, of aspiring prayer, is a life fed from eternal sources, and drawn onward and upward by the everlasting energy, ruling all finite movements from the mind of God; and it will survive the indignities of time, and live in immutable glory. (*T. R. Williams.*) *The fruits of silence*:—The gems of the world's literature, the marvels of inventions of science and art, the great thoughts and words which live age after age, are the fruit of silence. From silent studies of a Raphael comes, at length, the work of art. The poet broods long in silence and then gives to the world his immortal song. Inventors with knit brows bend over models, and by and by produce a boon to toiling races. The orator shuts to the door, and then comes forth to sway great audiences and sweep away tyranny and wrong. The Christian lingers in the hush of prayer and meditation, and then appears with his face all aglow.

Ver. 18. **No stone seen.**—*The temple of God flawless*:—"All was cedar; there was no stone seen." Take stone in the type for that which was really so, and in the antitype for that which is so mystically, and then it may import to us, that in heaven, the antitype of this holiest, there will never be anything of hardness of heart in them that possess it for ever. All imperfection ariseth from the badness of the heart, but there will be no bad hearts in glory. No shortness in knowledge, no crossness of disposition, no workings of lusts, no corruptions will be there. Here, alas, they are seen, and that in the best of saints, because here our light is mixed with darkness; but there will be no night there, nor any stone seen. (*John Bunyan.*)

Ver. 29. **Carved figures of cherubim and palm trees, and open flowers.**—*Cherubim, palm trees, and open flowers*:—The question cannot but occur, Why this peculiar carving exclusively? Everywhere they looked they were met by this threefold ornamentation, everywhere cherubim, palm trees and open flowers; these and nothing but these. If only beauty had been the object, if simply ornament had been studied, greater variety would have been introduced; but

the perpetual recurrence of these three, amid all the visible forms that convey ideas of beauty, could not fail to strike and to raise inquiry. I. THE UNION OF THE EARTHLY AND HEAVENLY, THE NATURAL AND THE SPIRITUAL, IN WORSHIP AND RELIGION. The highest spiritual creatures and two of the most prominent natural objects were portrayed together in the house of God. The cherubim representing heaven, the highest grade of spiritual creation, and the palm tree and the open flower representatives of earth and nature in their finest and noblest shapes, were brought together on the walls of the house of God. And there was nothing else to be seen. The highest creature in the spiritual realm was here set alongside of natural objects known to all. Teaching that heaven's service, though higher, is of the same sort with the service on earth. Representatives from the temple of nature were there, and representatives from the heavenly temple. In the house of God and in worship heaven and earth are brought together. We represent in our worship all creatures that cannot worship. We are the priests of the whole visible creation, and our worship unites us with the highest intelligences. We link together the seraph and the flower. Both are represented and contained in us. In worship, space and time vanish. We are in the same company with those who are worshipping around the throne the unveiled glory. II. LIFE THE GRAND SOURCE, MATERIAL, REALITY. There were three kinds of life portrayed on these walls. Of all the beautiful objects in nature they were living and only living things that were pictured there. Life was here in three stages: life rooted and growing, like the palm tree; life expanded, like the open flower; and life in its highest state, the life of the cherub. How plainly did the voice come from the innermost sanctuary: "Life is all." It is life that is the grand desideratum in the worship of God. It is life that gives value to all things. Nothing is valuable without life. The true life of the soul, then, what is it? The temple explains this. The worshippers were incessantly brought to this question: What is life which is thus so prominent? And they were evermore thrown back on the temple for the answer. In the temple was the answer found. What is life? Life is that which has fellowship with God, life is that which loves God, and longs after Him; life is that which feeds upon God's truth. We are no nearer answering the question precisely and definitely in words than they were. It is still the grand secret. One great lesson taught by this threefold exhibition of life in the temple was undoubtedly this, that all life has the same grand, general laws. How widely apart these different forms of life were—vegetable life and highest seraphic life; and yet widely apart as they are they have the same laws. God does all His work from the humblest to the highest according to the same principles. The life of the plant is sustained by the same laws as the spiritual life of the cherub. The seraph burns and sings by the same simple laws of being as the plant grows and the flower expands. III. THE UNION OF THESE THREE THINGS IN SPIRITUAL LIFE—WORSHIP, FRUITFULNESS, AND BEAUTY. Worship represented by the cherub, fruitfulness by the palm tree, and beauty by the open flower. True spiritual life shows itself not in one of these but in all. Worship is the foundation and the nutriment of life. It is by the perception of the glory of God and by the adoration of it that the soul is sustained; and it is by fruitfulness that this food finds scope for its energy; for food that is taken into the spiritual nature, and that does not find outlet and space for its energy ceases to be food. Wherever there is true worship of God there is also the fruitfulness of the palm tree, and wherever there is true fruitfulness arising from the worship of God, there is beauty as the result of these. True spiritual beauty is the outcome of the union of these two things—worship and practical fruitfulness. IV. THE UNION OF THESE THREE THINGS IN THE WORSHIP OF GOD—ASPIRATION, GROWTH, AND RECEPTIVITY. Aspiration was taught by the cherub. The highest form of spiritual life was presented continually before the worshipper in order that he might know what he had to aspire to; and the palm tree, the emblem of steady, straight, upward growth, was a constant lesson and reminder. Did the question rise, How shall I become like the cherub? Were there no hearts that could read the answer in the open flower? The open flower is the way to the cherub. One of the finest pictures of reception among all the objects that God has made is a flower that lies open to catch the sunshine, and to drink the rain and the dew, shuts up when the sun departs, but expands itself again when the sun's rays touch it. By reception the plant and the flower live; and by reception the soul of man lives and grows. Our life is that of a flower. Man cometh forth like a flower and is cut down. It is by aspiring to the cherub life that we gain the

victory over that. We are no longer distressed with the thought of the brevity of the life when that of immortal beauty has dawned upon us, and when we firmly grasp the record that God hath given to us eternal life, and that this life is in His Son. (*T. Leckie, D.D.*)

CHAPTER VII

VERS. 1–12. **Solomon was building his own house thirteen years.**—*Building God's house and one's own*:—A very curious thing this, that whilst Solomon was building the temple of God he was also building his own house. It does not follow that when a man is building his own house he is also building the temple of God; but it inevitably follows that when a man is deeply engaged in promoting the interests of the Divine sanctuary, he is most truly laying the foundations of his own house, and completing the things which most nearly concern himself. "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you." No man loses anything by taking part in the building of the temple of God. He comes away from that sacred erection with new ideas concerning what may be made of the materials he is using in the construction of his own dwelling-place. The Spirit of God acts in a mysterious manner along all this line of human conduct. The eyes are enlightened in prayer: commercial sagacity is sharpened in the very process of studying the oracles of God: the spirit of honourable adventure is stirred and perfected by the highest speculations in things Divine, when those speculations are balanced by beneficence of thought and action in relation to the affairs of men. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *The satisfaction of completing a work*:—Mr. Charles had a strong and ardent desire to procure a correct and indefective edition of the Bible for his Welsh countrymen; therefore his toil and labour were very great, though without any remuneration from man. While engaged in this work, he acknowledged that he had a strong wish to live until it was completed; "and then," said he, "I shall willingly lay down my head and die." He lived to see it completed; and he expressed himself very thankful to the Lord for having graciously spared him to witness the work finished; and the last words ever written by him, as it is supposed, were these, with reference to this work—"It is now finished."

Ver. 6. **And he made a porch of pillars.**—*The porch*:—Since this porch was the common place of reception for all worshippers, and the place also where they laid the beggars, it looks as if it were to be a type of the church's bosom for charity. Here the proselytes were entertained, here the beggars were relieved, and received alms. These gates were seldom shut; and the houses of Christian compassion should be always open. This therefore beautified this gate, as charity beautifies any of the churches. Largeness of heart, and tender compassion at the church door, is excellent; it is the bond of perfectness (1 Cor. xii. 31; xiii. 1–4; John v. 5, 7; Col. iii. 14). (*John Bunyan.*) *The pillars of the house of Lebanon* (vers. 6–22):—These pillars were sweet-scented pillars, for they were made of cedar; but what cared the enemy for that, they were offensive to him, for that they were placed for a fortification against him. Nor is it any allurement to Satan to favour the mighty ones in the church in the wilderness for the fragrant smell of their sweet graces; nay, both he and his angels are the more beset to oppose them because they are so sweet scented. The cedars, therefore, got nothing because they were cedars at the hands of the barbarous Gentiles—for they would burn the cedars—as the angels or pillars get nothing of favour at the hands of Antichrist, because they are pillars and angels for the truth, yea, they so much the more by her are abhorred. Well, but they are pillars for all that, yea, pillars to the church in the wilderness, as the others were in the house of the forest of Lebanon. The glory of the temple lay in one thing, and the glory of this house lay in another; the glory of the temple lay in that she contained the true form and modes of worship, and the glory of the house of Lebanon lay in her many pillars and thick beams, by which she was made capable, through good management, to give check to those of Damascus when they should attempt to throw down her worship. (*John Bunyan.*)

Vers. 13, 14. **King Solomon sent and fetched Hiram out of Tyre.**—*Hiram, the master builder* :—I. HIRAM WAS A BORN MASTER BUILDER. The influence of heredity needs no more signal illustration. He combines his mother's heart and his father's mind. Strange, that in a correspondence between Eastern kings of antiquity, with whom woman's fame was of less than cypher value, Hiram's mother should be mentioned at all; stranger still, that the premier place is given to her, implying that, while both parents were eminent, the mother was pre-eminent. Who was she? "A woman of the daughters of Dan" (2 Chron. ii. 13, 14). The Danites bore the brunt of all the Sidonian incursions, until, driven from hearth and home for refuge to the hills, privation and isolation but varied the form of the disasters that dogged them. Finally, submitting to capture or surrender, they were taken across the border into Tyre to suffer further ignominy amid alien surroundings. But never did the sons and daughters of Dan forget their tribal ancestry or affinities. Their traditions and pride became a splendid inheritance, and their faith sustained them under the sharpest persecution. Even their oppressors grew to respect them, and permitted them to thrive in their midst. Hiram's mother had the tribal grit, the unswerving courage of her people, so that when named at the Tyrian Court, it is as "a woman of the daughters of Dan." And, in his letter to Solomon, Hiram the King lets drop this bit of feminine biography that is a tribute to her fine fidelity to conscience. Do not think that this passes in the record as of no account. You can prophesy with tolerable certainty as to Hiram's future when you read his mother's story, and you can as surely anticipate as much for every child of promise whose mother is true to the form of faith that holds her to the people of God—call it what you will, whether Danism or Methodism. Keep your eyes open for these embryo workers, who are, like poets, born, not made. It is the self-constituted man we want. It is character, and not birth, that mainly tells. The river has its source in the mountain torrent, but the true test of its strength is in the assimilative power with which, while preserving its identity, it absorbs its tributaries. Therefore we judge Hiram as we would judge ourselves, at the bar of self-examination—and he emerges from the ordeal admirable. II. HIRAM THE MASTER BUILDER HAD A MASTER-MIND. 1. He was a cunning man. When the Saxons said a man was "cunnen" they meant that he was knowing—that he had his wits about him. And they implied more. The root of the word obtained amongst the Latins also. It means a wedge, and we get its signification in the word cuneated, which precisely hits off the disposition of the man Hiram. He was a wedge-shaped man. Let opportunity give him but the smallest conceivable opening, and in he went, especially if the hammer of necessity but tapped home the wedge. Every Christian worker should be of wedge-shaped character. 2. Hiram, the cunning man, was endued with understanding. To have an understanding is to be able to get to the bottom of things; and to be endued with understanding, as Hiram was, is to exercise this faculty from circumference to centre. It means that he had not only a mental bias, but also a mental equipment, thoroughly comprehensive. III. HIRAM OF THE MASTER MIND WAS ALSO A MASTER CRAFTSMAN. 1. Hiram wrought in gold, to him the most precious of metals; of supreme quality, of standard value, capable of sovereign impress, non-rusting, non-corroding. Gold is the one mineral that does not depreciate; it is immutable amid all change of time and circumstance; it is gold—always gold. This he used for overlay work, for the decoration of the holy place, and for the consecrated vessels. We, too, work in gold when we work in Divine truth. We cannot alter the material, but do we make its presentation attractive or repellant? Is the image and superscription of the King upon it? When we use it in the holy place, does it shine as the wings of a seraph or an overlaid panel would when Hiram wrought? Are the "vessels unto honour sanctified, and meet for the Master's use"? 2. Hiram wrought also in silver—fair and chaste. Silver is subject to market fluctuation, but it is increased manifold in value when it receives a sovereign impression. It is the rich man's plenty, and the poor man's wealth. We, too, work in silver, when we serve in human sympathy, that is brightened by use, and that, when beautified with the Divine likeness, as "the liquid drops of tears that you have shed, " brings ten times double gain of happiness." And, when you work your silver into the Gospel trumpet, the world will hear sounds that for thrill and cadence will rival the music of a thousand harps. 3. Hiram wrought in brass. The word is used technically for a compound of metals, that should be rendered bronze. It is a fusion of copper—the only alloy with gold—and tin. And our thoughts, like the sea, must be wide

and deep, generous and cleansing. Join prayer and thought, and you will get a spiritual amalgam of the utmost use in temple service. 4. Hiram wrought in iron, that is rough, resistant, obdurate; but in his hands it became ductile, and exceeding serviceable. When we forge these our wills, we, too, toil in iron. Proud, repellant, unlovely they are; yet, when, by the grace of God, they become wrought-work, they are marvels of resource, strength, control, support. 5. He worked upon stone, rugged and hard; but, by patient continuance in well-doing, he formed the useful block that helped to make the temple, and brought out upon it the artistic form and beauty of the sculptured decoration. This is just what we do. 6. Hiram wrought upon timber, that supported the roof, that panelled the holy place, that formed the tables for the shewbread, which was the symbol for the bread of life. 7. Hiram wrought upon textiles, and in their subdued colours he could see mysteries. Perhaps only mysteries; whereas, to you and me, the mysteries seem revealed. But, small blame to the worker Hiram. It was the purpose of his dispensation to make the marvel, and sustain it. IV. HIRAM HAD THE MASTER SPIRIT. He came to Solomon a man skilful "to grave every manner of graving, and to find out every manner of device." Nothing issues from his master mind that is not a sublimely pure conception; the Divine touch glorifies everything he fashions. That is true sacrifice; it is the master art, and you know it to be true, for it is your Master's art. V. FOR SUCH SERVICE AS HIRAM'S, WHAT WAS THE REWARD? No man labours as he did without recognition, for no man serves God for naught. The upraised temple; its outer ornamentation; its inner splendour; its acknowledgment of the people; the accepted sacrifice, and the consummate approval of the Divine presence—surely these tokens were enough? Shall we each be a master builder? Then let us remember that he who would seek to fulfil this high calling must have a master mind; that he who would have the master mind must have the Master's spirit; that he who would have the Master's spirit must be much in the presence of the Master. There, amid the silences, he will hear the Master's voice: there are the hidden victories that overcome the world. (*J. R. Jackson.*)

Ver. 22. **Upon the top the pillars was lily-work.**—*Lily-work*:—1. Strength. These pillars were deemed of such importance as to deserve a name, a name for each. The one was called Jachin, which means "He will establish"; and the other was called Boaz, which means "in strength." The two ideas are near akin, and together express stable strength. Why these names were given we are not told; whether to indicate the magnitude and fixedness of the pillars, or the stability of the religion which was to be represented in that temple, we cannot say. But we read—and probably in allusion to these pillars with their crowns of lily-work—"strength and beauty are in His sanctuary." These pillars are symbolic, or may be considered as symbolic, of truth, not merely in the world of grace, but in the world of nature. The world in which we live may be justly regarded as a temple reared gradually and progressively through long ages under the ever-active hand of the Divine Architect. But look at the order. It did not begin with what we call beauty. No doubt every atom of it was beautiful to Him whose eye seeth all things, but relatively to us the beauty was not at the beginning. The strength and firmness came first. "The world is established that it cannot be moved." "The earth He hath established for ever." Here, indeed, you have the Jachin and Boaz of our text, the two kindred and complementary ideas of "strength" and "stability." You have the firm, deep, compact rock, hidden for the most part beneath your feet, or piled in massive mountains. Then in due time come the living things, which could only live on firm foundations. Let the foundations be destroyed, and all the beauty will perish with them; as when an earthquake swallows in its devouring abyss gardens and orchards which were laden with the richest flowers and the sweetest perfumes. Now man is a temple, as the earth may be viewed as a temple. He is designed to be the temple of the Holy Ghost; and in this temple are meant to be strength and beauty, the pillars of Jachin and Boaz, and on their top "lily-work." And the religion of Christ starts with the conceptions of strength and stability. Its very first notion and foundation-idea is that of "a stone laid in Zion, a sure foundation-stone, a stone elect and precious." It is a rock on which God builds His Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. Great pains are taken to set forth this as the first idea, on which all the others depend. The same idea in another form is found in the fact that the Gospel is called a kingdom and therefore a thing of power and

strength. The Christian, therefore, is to be, and must be in proportion as he is a Christian, a man in whom strength and stability are to be found in conspicuous force and play. For he is in a world in which he cannot hold his ground without them. It is not an uncommon thing for men of the world to look on the Christian Church as if it were a refuge for the weaklings of the race. What is it that the Christian does which shows his weakness? He confesses his sins; but is that weakness or is it strength when a man is a sinner and brazens it out before the face of Almighty God? He asks for mercy; but is that weakness when to ask for mercy is to acknowledge the righteous claims of God? He seeks for Divine guidance; but is that a weakness in a world like this in which it is so easy to err and lose oneself, and in which "it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps"? And what are these robuster graces, these rocky principles of the Christian life? There must be truth, the lip that will not lie. There must be honour and justice, which will not swerve to the right hand or left from fear or for reward. These things there must be as the primary formation at the basis of a Christian life. The pillar of the Christian character must be upright whatever else it be, and sound in its structure from base to capital and from side to side. Jachin and Boaz were of this character. 2. Beauty. We have looked at the elements of strength, let us now glance at the elements of beauty as set forth in the lily-work which crowned and glorified the heads of the two columns. As we have seen, the world itself has grown up from strength to beauty. Hiram did not invent his decorations. They were furnished to his hand from another and more skilful hand. "Behold the lilies of the field, how they grow," &c. He borrowed his art from nature, that is, from God, from whom, indeed, all the noblest and purest art has ever been borrowed, and must be to the end of time. The Greeks, pagan though they were, seem to have seized this secret with a firm hand, for their name for the world was "Beauty." They saw beauty everywhere, and they saw it because it was there. They saw what God had seen before them, and had put there that it might be seen by them. Oh, what infinite beauty there must be in the Divine nature, seeing that all the beauty of the world comes from it as from a fountain, and still comes from year to year! And just as the world has grown from strength to beauty, and just as the pillars of Jachin and Boaz were not finished till their capitals bloomed, as it were, in "lily-work," so must it be with a true human life and character. This is not completed without its capital, a capital which need not be of lily-work, but must be the reproduction of some Divine flower. It is a still more mournful imperfection and defect when men are dead to the sense of what is beautiful in the moral and religious life. And some are thus dead. They believe, and they do well to believe, in the sterner qualities of that life. They believe in the firm grit of character, granitic compactness and strength. They like the heroic nerve which never shakes, the eye which blenches at no danger, the tongue which can utter boldly unwelcome words to an age which needs them though it hates them, the valiant courage which dares not lie, but dares to die. These are the only forms of character for which they care. They have a touch about them of stern sublimity, like bold headlands that shatter the waves into spray, or mountains that challenge and defy the storms of heaven. Still it must be repeated that Christian character is very incomplete until it rises up to the efflorescence which crowns strength with beauty. It may be thought that the two are incompatible, that you may have your choice between men whose characteristics are those of strength or those of beauty, but you cannot have them both in one. But this is a mistake. We have them both in one, and in perfect union and harmony in Him who is the Son of man, and the type of that perfect humanity which by His redemptive work He came to create. The full, true man was Christ, and to become a perfect man in Christ is to become transformed into His image, and to re-embody in ourselves all the elements of His character. And what were these elements? Were they not strength and beauty? Now, the more tender, gracious, and softer aspects of the Christian life are to find their authority, inspiration, and nourishment in the example and work of our blessed Lord. And if you read the Epistles carefully, you will observe how deeply their writers had drunk into the spirit of their Lord. The strength is there, and also the beauty. We are not to lie, to defraud; we are to abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul; we are to endure hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ; we are to put on the whole armour of God, to watch, to stand in the evil day, and having done all to stand. These ideas form the pillar of the Christian life. But the lily-work is also set forth again and again. "Be kind one to another, tender-hearted, forbearing one

another, and forgiving one another, even as God in Christ hath forgiven you." "Above all things, have fervent charity among yourselves, which is the bond of perfectness." "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ." "Be courteous." "Use hospitality one towards another without grudging." It is not enough to speak the truth, we must speak it in love. It is not enough to be just, the justice must be tempered with compassion. (*E. Mellor, D.D.*) *Lily-work*:—In the porch of this building were two pillars, "strength" and "beauty." Even they, besides their immediate purpose, would suggest meanings to the reverent observer. Solomon was not what we should call a utilitarian. The pillars could and should be made beautiful as well as useful. People might say, "Why this waste?" But he did not think it waste at all, and he was right. God has given to some men special genius for things of beauty, men like Aholiab and Bezaleel and Hiram. And such genius can hardly be better employed than in making God's house beautiful. But the temple was used by prophets and by apostles as a type of the great spiritual church. And do not these pillars, divinely designed, in the material temple, bring home to ministers and all church officers, the pillars of our churches, some qualities which they also should possess? I. ESSENTIAL QUALITIES. 1. Strength. The pillars had to uphold, to give security to the building. They must be strong enough to sustain the weight which is to rest upon them. So pillars of the church should be strong men, with a faith in God which makes them upright, reliable characters. They should be men who do not need propping and persuading, but with an independent and tenacious strength. 2. Soundness. Some hidden flaw in a pillar might one day be the cause of disaster to the whole edifice. The discovery of a serious flaw in the moral character of a leading man in a church has sometimes wrought irremediable mischief. 3. Suitable and staunch material. Any substance will not do for a pillar. Wood will not. It is not stern enough, and it is liable to catch fire. But it would be madness to use unseasoned wood for such a purpose. So all members are not made for pillars. There needs endurance and firmness. A pillar must always be there—should uphold his church in good report and evil report, should be present whenever possible, night as well as morning, week-night as well as Sunday. This steadiness and fidelity is an invaluable quality in a pillar. Between the pillars Hiram made five mouldings in imitation of pomegranates. There should be a connection of mutual trust and reciprocal courtesies between the officers of a church. Now on the top of the pillars was lily-work. II. NON-ESSENTIAL BUT VERY DESIRABLE QUALITIES. The lily-work did not add to the strength of the pillar. There have been very useful pillars of the church who had little enough lily-work about them. But these men would have been still more useful if their characters had been winsome too. A church is not like a prison. It needs to attract men. For this it should be beautiful as well as strong. (*David Brook, M.A.*) *Strength and beauty*:—I. GOD FINDS ROOM FOR STRENGTH AND BEAUTY. Is it not by these that God makes the world what it is to us? The rugged rock affords a home for the soft mosses and the plumes of ferns as if these things paid for board and lodging by their adorning. The trees with roots thrust deep into the earth, with thick black branches, stretching into heaven—how are they decked with the leaves, and how are they now gay with blossoms and now rich with fruit. Strength and beauty. Is it not the very picture and the very perfection of the home? Here comes the man stained and soiled by his day's toil; and here is she who keeps home sweet and clean, and makes his heart bless her as he sets foot within the place. Strength and beauty—yet more complete if possible as the toiling father and the busy mother bend over the little one that looks and laughs its music at them. So God blesses the world with strength and beauty. II. FIRST STRENGTH, THEN BEAUTY. The constant emblem of our religion is the rock. The house built upon the rock, against which the winds blow and rains beat, but the house abides, for that its foundation standeth sure. The Church of God is built upon the rock, the Rock of Ages, that abideth for ever. Religion is not a matter of sentiment, of feeling, of changeful emotion. It is rooted and grounded in the everlasting Word of the living God. What triumphant strength is begotten within the soul when it can cry, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day." That first, always and everywhere—strength. Is there anything in the world more miserable than religion without any bones, a thing that you can squeeze into any shape you like?—religious sentiment that can talk piously and yet is not exact in its sayings and doings, that can be particular

about its creed, and yet slipshod in business? There are some people who affect to despise beauty, and consider it a weakness. "Give me a brass pillar," say they, "solid and substantial. I don't want any nonsensical lily-work about the top of it." Now such people may do much harm in the world—more harm than good. Strength and beauty—how shall we combine the two? In one way, and in one way only. Love is both. He that loveth hath the secret. For is there any strength like love? Is there any endurance like love's? Is there any defiance like the defiance of love? Love is strength and love is beauty. And love is ours as nothing else could make it ours but the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. Here is love compelling love that sustains our strongest service and our tenderest thought. How graciously are these two combined in that word concerning Jesus Christ: "As many as received Him to them gave He power to become the children of God." Authority and strength to become children, simple, trustful, loving, obedient. Strong that we may be made beautiful. Thus doth our God seek to make us pillars in His temple, strong with His strength, beautiful with the beauty of the Lord our God. (*M. G. Pearse.*) *Strength and beauty*:—I. THE HANDIWORK OF GOD in the wide field of nature. The rocky steeps of the mountain are belted with pines; the rivers that fertilise the soil nourish the flowers which grow on their banks; "the great wide sea" is often surpassingly lovely on its surface, and there are beautiful corals in its depths, brilliant shells on its shores; on the broad, unmeasured plains and moors are the blue-bell and the purple heather. If this earth be a temple in which God manifests His presence, His wisdom, and His power, then are the mighty and massive objects upon it the pillars of that temple, and all exquisite and delicate things are the flowers His hand has fashioned upon them. We have it also in—II. THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST. In the Gospel are many mighty and massive truths which may be said to be the very pillars of the sacred edifice: such as the leading truth that "God is a Spirit," &c.; but in close connection with these great and solid truths is that which is exquisite, delicate, beautiful. Such is the truth that the faintest whisper of prayer that comes from the lips of the little child may enter the ear and touch the hand of God, and bring down His benediction; or that the first sigh of the relenting human spirit is dearer to the Father's heart than the finest anthems of the angels; or that the cherishing of a pure feeling of forgiveness or the doing one act of real peace-making brings us further into the likeness and childhood of God than would the accomplishment of the most brilliant intellectual achievement. III. CHRISTIAN CHARACTER. We have in our churches strong men, helpful, influential, sustaining—men who are pillars. They may be strong in virtue of adventitious aids, or of natural endowments, or of acquired powers, or of spiritual acquisition: and these "pillars" may be either as beams in a mine, rude, rough, unpolished; or they may be as the fluted columns of a cathedral, as these pillars of Solomon's temple with lily-work on the top of them. IV. CHRISTIAN SERVICE. The worship of God, the service of Jesus Christ, is the power for good in human society; it upholds the goodness and the happiness of the world. Its strength and its beauty are determined partly by the stage to which we have come in our Christian course. 1. The strength of service in age is in submission, willingness to decline, to take the lower place, to be of diminishing account; and the beauty of submission is cheerfulness of spirit. 2. The strength of service in prime is in activity, in usefulness, in putting out our "talents" for the glory of Christ and the well-being of the world; and the beauty of activity is thoroughness, regularity, punctuality, heartiness, doing effectively and continuously what has been undertaken. 3. The strength of service in childhood and youth is obedience and self-denial; and the beauty of this is alacrity, promptness, rendering it not tardily and reluctantly, but readily and sweetly, with willing feet and cheerful voice. It is well to have strength and beauty in our Christian buildings; it is far better, in the estimate of Christ, to have these two harmoniously combined in the character we are forming and the life we are living. (*W. Clarkson.*) *Strength and beauty in character*:—In this divinely planned structure I know of nothing outside the Holy of Holies more impressive than the pillars built by Hiram. These were of the finest brass, of great height, splendid in symmetry and crowned with lilies. It is a law of art that the most perfect and enduring effects are produced by the combination of things unlike each other. A painter throws into his picture the darkest shadows that he may intensify his clearest lights. A sculptor carves for the top of his columns capitals of delicate design. An architect relieves the heavy masonry of his walls with items of exquisite device and forms of sculptured

beauty. God Himself is our original teacher; for whilst He "setteth fast the mountains, being girded with power," He hath woven around their summits tender vines and rooted in their crevices sweet scented flowers that warmly clasp and colour the cold grey cliffs. That widow's son from Tyre was not a stranger to this alliance, and so wrought his pillars as to adorn the sanctuary of the Highest with both strength and beauty. Observe that the strength was first and the beauty of lilies afterward. We have here the uplifting of those two qualites which are worshipped by the soul of man the world over. Power and beauty alike win his homage, but not unfrequently he yields himself to that which is but the sham of strength, and renders service to that which has but the semblance of beauty; to power ungifted with love, and to beauty unadorned by holiness. It is the lie of the world, often uttered and often believed, that the righteous must needs be the weak and the pure the uncomely. God declares the right to be the only strong, and the good, the only beautiful. The power that enters human life to rule it within and without must be a power of conquest, having the inherent qualities of stability. Man is born in battle. His cradle is rocked by his own strugglings. His history is that of a shifting factor in a shifting world. He can neither command himself nor control his surroundings. Antagonisms swarm on his path. Struggling alone, he can have but one experience: the shame that comes of perpetual impotency and the confusion that arises from continued defeat. Sooner or later he learns this truth, that "all power is of God," and that the strength that conquers for the spiritual—that takes hold of eternal things and abides, that elevates life into firmness of character and adorns it with real beauty, is possible only through the patient, helpful, regenerative ministry of Jesus Christ. (*R. W. Davis.*) *Strength and beauty*:—1. The Divinity of labour. Hiram, who wrought these pillars, was the son of a widow in Tyre. To him labour was a divinely ordered force, which a man took into his life and into his faculties, and which taught him that he was a workman, not simply for himself, or for some taskmaster, who was set over him to watch him; but that he was a workman for God, and that the fidelity of his toil must represent the purity of his worship. Whether he sculptured a column, carved lilies, drove a nail, or set the plough in the furrow, he believed he was doing a Divine thing. The curse of labour to-day is that men have lost God out of it. The highest conception of Christianity is the idea that Christianity can get itself down into the ordinary processes of life, can find a God there, and, grasping the details of things, can change them and beautify them as life goes on; that no matter what our work may be, it is worship, and if faithfully done, every day that comes and goes will leave behind it something in the reservoir of life, some deposit of character which, when all days are over, shall constitute our treasure laid up in heaven. 2. Beauty without strength. In our day there is a great desire for the lily work without the pillars, a vain longing for the graces of life and for the beauties of character without the supporting power of truth and duty. There are thousands of men who would like the virtues of the fathers, but who do not want the faith which made them virtuous. They would like to have reproduced in their life the qualities of soul which marked the early Christians, the Reformers, and the Puritans; but not their sturdy faith, nor their tenacity of conviction, not their majestic conscience or their tremendous hold on things unseen. They want the simplicity and affection of the Waldenses, but not their faith in God; the audacity and fearlessness of John Knox and Oliver Cromwell, without their vivid sense of the Divine Presence; the morality of John Robinson and Miles Standish, without their heroic creed; the integrity of Washington and Lincoln, without their trust in a sustaining and over-ruling God. Mothers are anxious that their daughters should shine in every social accomplishment; that their sons should be men of talent and of skill; that their homes should be beautiful with music and art and all kindly grace. But they are not so solicitous about the solid foundations of character. The spirit of the time is to dwell on the surface. To dig deep is to contradict the age. Glittering pinnacles on insecure foundations! Remember all skaters are not navigators. It is one thing to skim the surface of a pond, and quite another to sail upon the angry deep. The twittering sparrow has as many wings as the eagle, but he cannot dip them in the glory which burns just beneath the sun. A candle is not a comet. The keels of mighty ships are not built of mushrooms. Depth of character first, not ornament, is to be sought for. In house building digging must precede decoration. You do not begin with the painter and the gilder, but with the stone-layer. A pasteboard hut is not a castle, it will be borne away by the mocking winds. It is

dangerous to reckon the virtues of a man's character by buttons on his coat, for some are all coat and no character. The looking-glass is the only book some people read. They are splendid advertisements for their tailor, but a sorry disgrace to their schoolmaster. Never mistake the mystery of an echo for the originality of a voice. 3. The foundation of faith. I tell you the quickest way to produce a sweet and beautiful life, either individual or national, is by placing underneath it a strong, unwavering faith. "The Parthenon, which lifts toward the golden-tinted sky the whiteness of its untarnished front, must repose on the immovable Acropolis of truth and goodness." The modern professor of fine arts, who prefers form and finish to substance and thought, who, forgetting all that is greatest in architecture and sculpture, in painting and music and poetry, asserts that ethics and æsthetics have nothing in common, who prates about "art for art's sake," who scorns the teaching of Schelling that the æsthetic lies in character, and of Dante that art is a descendant of God, is the apostle of the unwholesome, the tawdry, and the lustful, the art of literary fops and the disciples of what Carlyle called the gospel and the philosophy of dirt. But the highest art, which lifts us to the joy of elevated thoughts as in imagination we watch the hand that pencilled a Madonna, or the greater—

> Hand that rounded Peter's dome,
> And groined the aisles of Christian Rome,

is always found the friend and promoter of truth and goodness, of aspiration and of faith. "The highest art," as Professor Blackie has said, "is always the most religious. A scoffing Raphael or an irreverent Michael Angelo is not conceivable." We must have the strength first, and beauty afterward. It is disaster to reverse this order—to try to get beauty and then have strength. The magnificent Brooklyn Bridge, when viewed at a distance, is a beautiful poem. But the beauty is dependent on the strength of mighty abutments which reach down far below the river bed, and take hold of the foundations of the earth. In everything, both artistic and moral, strength is the stalk; beauty is the flower that blooms on it. 4. Divine deliberation. The Almighty shows great deliberation in all His works. Haste, a hurry, fussy activity is always an evidence of weakness. The six days of creation may have been six sunsets or six millenniums; but the days moved slowly and majestically forward toward man as a child of God's infinite Spirit, and in that result the process finds its climax and its justification. If God pronounces each of these days of creation to be very good, it is because He beholds them in the unclouded light of that seventh glorious morning when He finds Himself not Creator merely, but, since He can commune with a spirit kindred to His own, finds Himself a Father of immortals. Study the bases of the mountains and the foundations of the everlasting hills. He who is girded with power has settled them in their sockets unchangingly. Then He gave the earth beauty, the forests and ferns, the waving grasses and the flowers. And the young woman who concentrates all her life on attitudes, effects, sensations, impressions, striving to get the ornamentation, oblivious to the sterling, splendid qualities that should be wrought into the womanly character—she asks only for lilies. But there are no lilies worth having that do not come out of columns. If you were to knock the pillars from under the globe, where would your flower-gardens be next morning? We have most excellent illustrations of strength and beauty in the study of two national characteristics—Hebraism and Hellenism. It is in the ultimate realisation of a union of the Hebraistic and Hellenistic elements that ultimate perfection is to be found; the son of Abraham is to join hands with the son of Hellas. The Hebrew furnished the indispensable basis of faith, of conduct, of self-control; the immovable foundation upon which alone the perfection aimed at by Greece was to come to bloom. The Hebrew Bible is not wanting in suggestions of the radiant beauty of God's thoughts and works, but there the beauty is subordinate to morality, it is a blossom on the stalk of strength. As the indestructible azure in sea and sky, as the golden glory of the sunshine, so this characteristic of beauty shines forth from strength all through the Bible, immortal in God. 5. God's love of beauty. There are qualities aside from strength and truth and courage that every life ought to cultivate. We see that He who setteth fast the mountains also garnishes the heavens and the hills. Charles Kingsley used to say, "Study matter as the countenance of God." "Strength and beauty are in His sanctuary." And God wants beauty incorporated into religion. Strength and beauty have

been divinely joined—what God hath joined together let no man put asunder. 6. The transforming power of beauty. Beauty dwells in and finds its basis in strength, as sunshine breaks into glory through the mist, as life beats and blushes in the flesh, as an impassioned thought breathes out of a thinker's face. There are numberless analogies in human life—if we could stop to consider them—of the way in in which one life can influence another by the impartation of strength or beauty. Here is a man who has been always stern, truthful, moral, cold—a human pillar. Some day he loves a noble woman, full of all womanly and lovely graces. That transforms and transfigures him. Under her influence his sternness flowers into grace. And Tennyson shows us how the ideal union will be that one where—

> The man is more of woman, she of man;
> He gain in sweetness and in moral height,
> Nor lose the wrestling thews that throw the world;
> Till at the last she set herself to man,
> Like perfect music unto noble words.

With every man the real man is the woman he carries in his heart. He is her strength; she is his grace. He upholds; she adorns. The one is the complement of the other. History is full of the names of men who had strength; how few there are who had both strength and beauty. I shall never forget the lessons I learned at the tombs of two men born in almost the same year, men equally though differently famous—Napoleon Bonaparte and Walter Scott. Napoleon was born two years before Scott, in the same month and on the same day of the month, August 15. The years passed by. Both do their work and die. I have stood under the "Column of Napoleon," built by himself from twelve hundred pieces of cannon taken from the Austrian and the Prussian, and crowned with a statue of the emperor in his imperial robes, and I could not help contrasting it with that noble monument in Edinburgh, not built by Scott to commemorate his own glory, but by the generosity and love of his fellow-countrymen to honour one they loved. And when I stood at the tomb of that great soldier, guarded by the stained flags of so many battlefields, arranged in his fated number of nine, I could but think how many burning cities had been laid waste, with suffering and starving populace, and all for one man's glory. How different from all this hollow mockery and fictitious grandeur is the hallowed peace of St. Mary's ruined aisle in the Abbey of Dryburgh. In May 1871 the "Column of Napoleon" was hurled to the ground by his own infuriated countrymen, though since rebuilt. And in the same year Scott's magnificent monument at Edinburgh was wreathed with flowers. Napoleon had only strength, and lives mainly in the recollection of the ruin he wrought and his blasted ambitions. Scott had both strength and beauty. He did something good and lasting for mankind. His life was a real blessing to humanity. He never wrote an impure or hateful or revengeful word. Amid crushing financial disaster he kept his temper and his faith in God. 7. Goodness and grace. As all adornment of life finds its basis in truth, it is equally necessary that all truth should find expression in a noble life, that all the pillars should blossom at last in lily work. Nature is full of genuine reality as one true existence, yet manifested in the endless variety with which the earth teems. There is the solemn, stately mountain standing in its serene strength—but upon the mountain nature takes up endless incarnations of loveliness. The bird sings, the lily blossoms, the sunbeam dances, the brook flashes—and they are all one, while yet our eyes and ears and all our senses are tingling with the tidings of the difference which they always express. The mountain, the ocean, and the man—first strong each in its own way, and then each beautiful with the superadded things, great and gracious. That is what makes life so full of fascination to the man who has eyes—the eternal, undivided unity of strength, of permanence, of Divine stability, ever unfolding itself "into one glory of the sun, and another glory of the stars," and all together fill the radiant sky. And when Paul comes to speak of the flowering of Christian character, he shows how healthy and rational he is when he says it is a change from glory to glory. (*F. L. Goodspeed, A.B., S.T.B.*) *The lotus*:—The lily referred to as adorning the capitals of Solomon's temple pillars was the lotus or water-lily. Graceful in form and delicately beautiful in colour, serenely floating on the surface of the rising Nile, the sacred Ganges, and inland lakes of the old world, apparently anchored to the soil yet rising and falling with the flood, and opening its peerlessly fair petals to the sun, the mystic ship-flower

of the waters naturally found a place in the ornamental symbolism of every temple-building race. To the Egyptians it was a token of blessing because it appeared with the annual overflow of the Nile, a type of immortality, of the creation of the world, of the Deluge and the Ark, and other sacred mysteries. It adorned and finished the capitals of Jachin and Boaz in Jehovah's temple at Jerusalem. It was an emblem of purity. Over the gateway of the temple of Phocis was written, "Let no one enter here whose hands are unclean." David says, "I will wash my hands in innocency: so will I compass Thine altar, O Jehovah." Purity of heart and life was the lesson of the lily work over the pillars of God's house in Solomon's day, as it is in ours. (*W. Balgarnie.*) *Simplicity in decoration*:—The character of sublimity is chaste and simple. In the arts dependent on design, if the artist aim at this character, he must disregard all trivial decorations, nor must the eye be distracted by a multiplicity of parts. In architecture there must be few divisions of the principal members of the building, and the parts must be large and of ample relief; there must be a modesty of decoration, contemning all minuteness of ornament, which distracts the eye that ought to be filled with the general mass; and with the proportions of the greater parts to each other. In this respect the Doric is confessedly superior to all the other orders of architecture, as it unites strength and majesty with a becoming simplicity, and the utmost symmetry of proportions. (*Tytler's History.*) *Alliance of strength with beauty*:—Beauty is ever seen to best advantage in its natural alliance with strength. The lotus on the river, the dove in the cleft of the rock, the wife by her husband's side at church, the infant in the parent's arms, the voices of young men and maidens blended in harmony in the praise of the sanctuary, the wrestling power and child-like pleading at the throne, the force and tenderness of the Gospel, are combinations in nature and grace that are doubtless intended to teach us how all forms of strength may become beautiful, and all that is beautiful may become strong. Is it not when our Lord is seen in the might of His Deity and the peerless beauty of His humanity that He becomes to us all our salvation and all our desire? God in Christ is Omnipotence become beautiful to us in its condescension and love; Christ in God is our security and strength. When at last the Bridegroom shall come to take His Bride to Himself, and the Church puts on "her beautiful garments" to receive Him, when they enter the Father's house together, then strength and beauty in their completeness will be seen in the sanctuary. On the top of the pillars there will be lily work, and the work of the pillars will be finished. (*W. Balgarnie.*) *Sensitive to the beautiful*:—I am sorry for persons who always see the bad first, and the good last, or never. Whether it be in art, or whether it be the conduct of affairs, or whether it be in social life, one should know what is harmony and what is discord, what is straight and what is crooked, what is right and what is wrong. A man that is strongly sensitive to the beautiful, and true, and right, is in a healthy condition of mind—and health is the most beautiful thing in the world. In the plant, in its place; in the animal, in its place; in society, in its place; in all parts of the mental economy, a healthy, normal condition—that is the thing which is the most beautiful, and which ought to be the most attractive. (*H. W. Beecher.*) *Character attractive*:—Character is not determined by a single act, but by habitual conduct, says the Rev. Theodore L. Cuyler, D.D. It is a fabric made up of thousands of threads, and put together by uncounted stitches. Some characters are stoutly sewed, others are only basted. A Christian ought not only to have his spiritual garments well sewed, but kept clean—in fact, as a representative of Jesus Christ, he ought to present such an attractive apparel before the world that others should say to him: "Where did you get this? I want one just like it."

Ver. 50. **Snuffers.**—*Snuffers* (Children's service):—You smile at such a text, and no wonder! But snuffers were very useful in the temple; they kept the lights trim and bright. 1. Now you see what snuffers are for; they are for making a dull light shine brighter. When the candle has been burning for some time it seems to get dull and drowsy, then "snap" go the snuffers, and the light gets bright! There are snuffers which do that for boys and girls, and men and women, too, for that matter. There was that sum you worked out on your slate. It was all wrong. What did the master do? Rub it all out. That was the "snap" of the snuffers. It made you brighter; you took more care over your sums next time. You see these men lopping the trees? Why do they do that? To make them bear more fruit. The trees are the better for the sharp snuffers—and so are you. Never be

discouraged. 2. Sometimes you are the snuffers. There's your little brother, for instance, he isn't half so wise as you, and sometimes he makes mistakes. Put him right; but take care how you use the snuffers. If you use them carelessly you may put out the light altogether. What I mean is this—you may so discourage him that he won't have any heart to try to do better. Therefore, use the snuffers gently. Don't call him "stupid," or ridicule him. Remember, God wants your light to shine that others may get blessing by it; so you must expect Him now and again to trim it. By one way or other He tries to trim our light that it may shine the brighter. Think of this when any trouble comes: God wants to make use of it to make you braver, better, purer. (*J. Reid Howatt.*)

CHAPTER VIII.

VERS. 1–9. **Then Solomon assembled the elders of Israel.**—*A royal priest:*—It is remarkable in connection with the dedication of the temple how the leading part was taken throughout by King Solomon. One would have thought that in the dedication of a sanctuary the leading men would have been the priests, Levites, scribes, and other persons distinctively identified with religious functions and responsibilities. We find, however, that exactly the contrary is the case. The priest occupied a second and tributary position, but it is the king who consecrates the sanctuary, and it is the king who offers the great prayer at its dedication. The question arises, Was not Solomon in reality more than king? Or, being a king, was he not, according to the Divine ideal of Israel, a priest unto God? Did he not indeed occupy a kind of typical position as being in anticipation none other than the great high priest Jesus Christ Himself? The kingship and the priesthood are combined in the Christian character of the later dispensation: "Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation." This is precisely what Solomon was, namely, a "royal priest"! (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *A king dedicates a church:*—A missionary in the Hawaiian Islands gives an account of the dedication of a place of worship by the king. He says: "Quite 4000 persons were present, including most of the great personages of the nation. An elegant sofa, covered with satin damask of a deep crimson colour, had been placed for them in the front of the pulpit. The king, in his gorgeous uniform, sat at one end, and his sister, in a superb dress, at the other. Before the religious services commenced, the king arose from his seat, and, addressing himself to the chiefs, teachers, and people generally, said that this house, which he had built, he now publicly gave to God, to be appropriated to His worship. The religious exercises were appropriate; and when these were closed, the king again stood up, and saying, 'Let us pray,' addressed the throne of grace, commending the building and the people to God."

Vers. 17–19. **And it was in the heart of David my father to build an house for the name of the Lord God of Israel.**—*Unaccomplished aims:*—We are often conscious of inability to carry into effect cherished designs of the soul. As David vainly wished to build the temple, so do all noble souls project service which the limitations of this poor life forbid. Our plans are many and grand, our performances few and small at best. It is a perilous voyage from desire to realisation, and many a gracious speculation is shipwrecked ere it reaches port. Therefore are we often fretted, and regard these unrealised aspirations as a disheartening phase of experience. Why was David prevented from carrying this gracious thought into effect? His purpose seemed in harmony with the Divine commandment: "When He giveth you rest from all your enemies round about, so that ye dwell in safety; then there shall be a place which the Lord your God shall choose to cause His name to dwell there." Further, David's purpose seemed altogether pure and generous. David was forbidden to build the house. God saw an unfitness in him for this particular service which had escaped other eyes. There was an impropriety in the red hands of War building the temple of Peace and Mercy, so God excluded His servant from this ministry. Thus we may believe that God often sees deep and cogent reasons for putting aside His servants, even when they contemplate desirable and magnanimous service. The reasons may

not be apparent; may never in this life be discovered, and yet such reasons may exist. "Trophimus have I left at Miletum sick" (2 Tim. iv. 20). Another grand source of practical failure is here touched. How many broken-down servants of God are there to-day, who have proved their sincerity, but whose thin hand can do little or nothing in raising the stones of the shrine they so passionately desire to build. As in the busiest thoroughfares of great cities we behold wistful faces looking down from hospital windows, longing to share in the strong life of the streets; so are there frail, broken watchers of the work of God who long to share the toil and sacrifice of God's workmen. "And Moses said unto the Lord, O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither heretofore, nor since Thou hast spoken unto Thy servant: but I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue" (Ex. iv. 10). Physical and educational defects are often real limitations of practical service. Gifted, warm, aggressive souls, without the orator's tongue or scholar's pen, do what they can and sorrowfully wish it more. "Moreover, brethren, we do you to wit of the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia; how that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality. For to their power, I bear record, yea, and beyond their power they were willing of themselves" (2 Cor. viii. 1–3). Here is another example of restricted power. Out of much poverty the Macedonians revealed a rich generosity, and would have gone still further, but their power fell behind their will. "My days are past, my purposes are broken off, even the thoughts of my heart" (Job xvii. 11). Job views his life as at an end, and in consequence of the premature ending, his cherished designs frustrated. "My heart-purposes are broken off; my profoundest hopes disappointed." This limitation is felt by all genuine vehement natures—the longest life not being long enough to realise all the great, gracious ideas which spring up in the soul under the brooding of God's Spirit. And here we may distinguish between those who have a real interest in the consolatory teaching of the text and those who have none. Folks of a certain order are very ready to infer how differently they would have acted if their fortune had been different, whilst they give no proof of sincerity by doing what is possible to them; in fancy they are ministering cups of wine, whilst in fact they deny the cup of cold water. There are several sources of consolation which ought not to be overlooked by sorrowing souls denied the service on which they have set their affection. Life is not so cruel as it seems, and with all these high aims and great failures, these epic purposes and fragmentary results, it is well to remember several compensations. 1. God knows and accepts the generous purpose of the heart. "God is a Spirit," and all within the realm of mind is most real to Him. He knows as a fact whatever is felt in the heart, sanctioned by the judgment, determined by the will, anticipated by the imagination. In the count of God, thoughts are things, desires deeds, purposes performances. As a man "thinketh in his heart, so is he"; and God knows not only the tangible world, but that ampler, richer world which is veiled to the senses. The artist knows that his glowing picture tracing the line of beauty with purple of Tyre and gold of Ophir is but a soiled, blurred reproduction of his dream. So is it with all life. We feel a thousand times, and some baffled ones feel with special grief, how the practical life has come short of the large purpose. The contrast is depressing indeed. But the grand truth in all this is: the ideal is the real; the intentional the actual; and all these non-suits of life stand accepted and rewarded before Him. 2. Again, the sense of unrealised desire is an index of character we may regard with some satisfaction. We live in the presence of a world of infinite need; the infinite love of Christ expands our heart; and we feel the hope and inspiration of immortality. What wonder that purposes should be born of such sentiments transcending the possibilities of this encumbered life and inelastic world! The power of an endless life works in us, and it is not strange that our desires and designs should outrun these narrow means, rude instruments and fading years. 3. Another manifest consolation in the midst of unfinished work is, what we are not allowed to do will yet be done. David was not to build the temple, but God had a builder in reserve. 4. Finally, wounded by disappointment may we not be comforted in this: that our apparently abortive desires really facilitate the work we have at heart? David proposed and Solomon executed; and this is frequently the order still. One man schemes and another operates; one generation invents and another executes; and if one had not dreamed the other had not executed. It has been said that Lord Falkland's life was sacrificed in "an indecisive action"; so

thousands of the noblest servants of the race have fallen in indecisive actions, but if they had not fought bravely and fallen thus, we had never celebrated the decisive battles, the magnificent victories! (*W. L. Watkinson.*) *Unwrought purposes*:—I. THAT MEN OFTEN LEAVE OUR WORLD WITH THE GREAT PURPOSES OF THEIR HEART UNWROUGHT. David was sincere in his purpose, and God approved of it; but it was nevertheless unaccomplished. With many, the brightest ideals of life are unfulfilled. Life with most is only a broken column—*e.g.*, man of business, student, minister, philanthropist, patriot, politician, &c. By this we are taught the mystery of Providence and the incompleteness of human life. Among the things which contribute to such disappointments are: (1) want of means, (2) ill-health, (3) lack of opportunity. The Master's life is the only exception. He could say, "It is finished." II. THAT GOD IS PLEASED TO ACCEPT THE SINCERE, THOUGH UNWROUGHT, PURPOSES OF THE HEART. David did not withhold or withdraw. In his heart and mind he saw in intention a beautiful temple erected to the honour and glory of God, and God accepted the will for the deed, because nothing more than purpose was within his power. Many poor, devoted, godly men and women have resolved to do great things, if only, &c.; weak ones, if only they had strength given; enthusiastic workers, if only doors should open, &c. But the purposes have remained unaccomplished, and God has said to each and all, "Thou didst well that it was in thine heart." III. THAT THE GOOD PURPOSES UNWROUGHT BY ONE MAN MAY BE TAKEN UP AND COMPLETED BY ANOTHER. Solomon did what David could not. He completed what David began. No man is indispensable. Workers die, but God's work goes on. We enter into other men's labours, are heirs of the affluence of the ages. Responsibility is commensurate with privilege and opportunity. Let us, above all, seek to have our hearts right with God, filled with love for His works, ways, and word. (*F. W. Brown.*) *Success in failure*:—All of us have failed, especially those who have been really in earnest. We started full of hope and of high purpose; but "the heroic proved too hard," and now in poignant regret it is our portion to contrast what has been with what might have been. We lament that the prizes of life are so few and the blanks so many; but is it not best that it should be so? While it is true that some who have attained success are great men, it is also true that the great majority of those who succeeded are by no means great men. Be it said with all needful reservation, success does not usually develop the best qualities of a man. It frequently vulgarises, and generally hardens. Failed! But, why did they fail? There are ignoble failures: yes, but they are not so numerous as the ignoble successes. 1. The finest things in this world's history have been the world's great failures. Nor should you be surprised to hear that spoken in church, where we worship a crucified Man. There are some failures more beautiful and useful to mankind than a thousand triumphs. It is impossible to weigh the value or to judge the legitimacy of a hopeless but heroic sacrifice. Those who die in a forlorn hope are remembered long years after their attempts have failed. 2. Then, be it remembered, failures have made success possible. One success comes after many failures, one victory after many defeats. The work of every great discoverer and inventor, every legislator and reformer, rests on the unrecognised work of unknown predecessors. Our national liberties were won for us, less by the men whose names are blazoned on our historic rolls than by the men who dared too much and were beaten, who died and made no sign. 3. Again I say that the men who "succeed" are not the men who deserved most, or contributed most. We speak of "Solomon's Temple," and but few remember that it was David who gathered the materials. Solomon's was but the executant hand: the son administered the father's will. David's ideal became the accomplished work of his successor. And we call it "Solomon's Temple," but its foundations were laid in David's heart. The way of the world is to render tribute to the man who lays the coping-stone. Men lightly say of the idealists and would-be reformers, "Their efforts went for nothing; things got no better for all their trying." Not so. No true work perishes; the good of it remains. Every noble life (as Ruskin so finely says) leaves the fibre of it interwoven for ever in the work of the world. Oh, there is a fine rebuke to despondency, if you will but take a long view of the past. 4. Finally, failure will put iron into your blood, and make a man of you. I suppose that David was all the better man because he had cherished an ideal that was never to be realised by himself. I suppose that it helped to purge the blood of battle from his robes, and to mellow his old age. I am sure that it lifted and purified his thoughts. "He did well that it was in his heart." The best thing

in your life is your finest failure. That is the Trinity-high-water-mark of your life: not the greatest thing done, but the greater thing that you tried to do and could not do. Thank God, this world's judgment is not the final court of appeal. Wordsworth did not feel himself a failure because the British public would not read his poetry: he bated not one jot of heart or hope, but pressed right onward. (*B. J. Snell, M.A.*) *The will for the deed*:—I. OUR MASTER IS MOST GENEROUS WITH HIS APPRECIATION. He does not seem to be afraid of spoiling us. He is too good and wise a Father to pamper us, but He is not niggardly with His commendations, as if there were fear of puffing us up, or making us presumptuous. He has other ways of preventing those excesses, but wherever He sees an opportunity to praise, the praise is ungrudgingly given. 1. God did not blame David for any error of judgment. A harder master would have found fault with his servant for his ignorance. Nor does He charge him with presumption. There is no sort of blame. God regarded the motive; since that was pure He approved, so far, the purpose. David thought that it seemed incongruous that while he dwelt in a house of cedar, God should abide within mere curtains. He was jealous for the Lord his God. 2. Moreover, it is evident from this that God never despises the day of small things. So far, it was only in the heart, and, as we know, it was to get very little further. Only in the heart, and yet God could approve, though He Himself knew that the purpose was now to be restrained. You have in your heart many a holy desire, many a blessed aspiration, many a noble ambition. God says to you that He does not despise the day of small things. This is just a seed-corn in the heart, and it may seem to die, to spring up to glorious harvest, or it may actually die. It matters little which if God is in it. 3. Notice next that God actually commends what He eventually forbids. II. GOD ALWAYS HAS SOME PERFECTLY RIGHTEOUS REASON FOR DISAPPOINTING HIS PEOPLE. It must be admitted that David's plan appeared not only honourable and reasonable, but most commendable. Nathan, who was a prophet of the living God, a specially far-seeing and faithful prophet, approved the plan. This he did, not because it was the king's plan, for when occasion demanded he could rebuke King David to his face. Said he, "Do all that is in thine heart, for God is with thee." Yet for all that, God steps in and says, "No." Can you understand this? Of one thing we are certain; God does not break off our threads just out of caprice. It is something other than whim that causes God to step in and blast our gourds. He is not arbitrary. You know that in David's case there were reasons. The time had not fully come, for one thing. The throne was not sufficiently established yet, peace was not by this time perfectly secured. But there was also a personal unfitness. God said to David, "Thou hast been a man of war, and hast shed blood." That was God's reason, and a sufficient one. In any case you like to quote there is a reason, though it may not be apparent. There is a reason, a right good reason in every case, why the Lord says, "No, I prefer that this purpose of yours shall be nipped in the bud. You would like to see it grow, but I like to have some buds on My table sometimes." There is a charm about a half-grown flower, is there not? I wonder who of all this congregation needs just such a word as this. You hoped for a nobler service. You did well that it was in your heart, but the Lord is right, you are better in the humbler position; be content to serve Him there. III. THE LORD NEVER LEAVES HIS DISAPPOINTED ONES WITHOUT COMPENSATION. He never takes away a blessing without giving another in return. If He empties one hand, He fills the other; if He does not allow the plan to come to maturity, He gives some blessing that more than makes up for the denial. None like He can interweave mercy with judgment. What did David get? We have seen what he missed and might have mourned. 1. He gave him credit for originating and cherishing this holy design. "Thou didst well that it was in thine heart." God's "Well done" is the best compensation that even heaven can give. 2. Then David had the pleasure of preparing for the erection of the temple, the special joy of collecting the material and, as I suppose, of designing the building and certain of the vessels. 3. God gives a corresponding blessing to that which He removes. David said, "Lord, I want to build Thee a house," and God replied, "'Tis good, David, that is a kind thought. It cannot be, however, but I tell you what—I will build you a house instead." God said, "I will build thee a house," not a structure of stone and wood and gold and silver, but a living house, a posterity that should ever sit upon His throne. God pays us in our coin sometimes, and if He seems to rob us with one hand He pays us with the other, and pays us in a corresponding fashion. 4. Then the greatest

compensation of all was this, the assurance that the work that David could not do should nevertheless be done. "Nevertheless thou shalt not build the house, but thy son that shall come forth out of thy loins, he shall build the house unto My name." That sufficed; there could be no murmuring after that. (*T. Spurgeon.*) *David's purpose to build the house of God*:—I. IT WAS WELL THAT DAVID IN HIS PROSPERITY REMEMBERED GOD AS THE AUTHOR OF ALL PROSPERITY. This proved David's own piety. But others, besides himself, were concerned in what David did. He was a king, and had the interests of a people to promote. And it was well that such were his thoughts, because it proved that David knew the real foundation of happiness; that happiness of his subjects, which it was his duty to consider. The house of God is the main instrument of religion. Without it, religion can hardly exist, certainly can only be in a languid state, unless there is a place where the word of God be regularly proclaimed, to teach the ignorant, to satisfy the inquirer, to warn the careless, to edify the devout and godly. And without religion, what is human life? We might compare it to a dream, except for the awful difference, that a dream leaves no consequence behind. David, therefore, judged well, rightly understood the welfare of his subjects, when he resolved to build an house to God's name, and so provided, as far as in him lay, that the rich among his people should walk in the fear of God, and live to his glory. II. IT WAS WELL, BECAUSE HE THUS GAVE PROOF, HE UNDERSTOOD HIS WEALTH AND HONOUR TO BE TALENTS FOR WHICH HE MUST GIVE ACCOUNT. It was well that he did not incur the reproof due to one who is "rich to himself, and is not rich towards God." And, further, it was well, it showed a right state of mind, a concern for the real welfare of the community under his charge, that he desired to raise a temple where "the rich and the poor might meet together," and worship the Maker of them all. III. THE DIVINE TESTIMONY TO A CHARACTER. Judge concerning yourselves by this analogy. All religion must be judged of by its fruits; by the conduct to which it leads. David was approved, because he set himself strenuously to promote God's glory; because, having been placed upon the throne of Israel, his first thought was to honour the God that is above. (*J. B. Sumner, D.D.*)

Vers. 22–61. **Solomon stood before the altar of the Lord.**—*The dedicatory prayer*:—Now we approach the great prayer by which the temple was dedicated. The house itself was nothing. It was but a gilded sepulchre, an elaborate and costly vacancy. First of all, therefore, we stand convinced that however much we may do technically, it can only be regarded as in a preparatory or introductory capacity. We can build the house, but we cannot supply the tenant. 1. Solomon's conception of the personality and dignity of God stands out quite conspicuously in the pages of history for its unrivalled sublimity. He speaks as one who was well instructed in the mysteries of the kingdom. In this prayer of Solomon's there is what some persons often mistakenly call preaching even in the language of devotion. Prayer is not request only, it is fellowship, communion, identification with God; it is the soul pouring itself out just as it will in all the tender compulsion of love, asking God for blessings, praising God for mercies, committing itself to God in view of all the mystery and peril of the future. Solomon having thus addressed the God of Israel, turns to Providence as revealed in the history of the chosen people, goes back even so far as the bringing-forth of Israel out of Egypt, and indicates point after point, at least suggestively, until David was elected to reign over the people Israel, and purposed as king to build an house for the name of the Lord God of Israel. Solomon does not take the whole credit to himself for the origination of this idea of the temple. He connects his action with the purpose that was in the heart of David his father. The temple, so beautiful and so costly, is not to be associated with anything that is merely religiously mystic. This is not a tent of superstition, not a habitation created for the purpose of indulging spiritual romances which can never have any bearing upon actual human life. Throughout his prayer we discover on the part of Solomon how thoroughly he identifies the house of God with all human interests. 2. How natural it is that human imagination should be confounded by the impossibility of the infinite God locating Himself within finite space. We do not consider that it is because God is infinite that He can, so to say, thus become finite. The finite never can become infinite, but it would seem to belong to infinite perfection to adapt itself to human limitation and necessity. God Himself has addressed the ages in a tone precisely coincident with the language of Solomon; "Thus saith

the Lord, The heaven is My throne, and the earth is My footstool: where is the house that ye build unto Me? and where is the place of My rest?" Solomon was therefore strictly within the line of revelation when he propounded the solemn inquiry. Everything depends upon our point of view in considering this great question of God's condescension. 3. One might well think that the millennium had set in with the solemn dedication of the temple, and that all things would begin anew, and certainly that the time of tragedy, rebellion, and suffering had for ever passed away. We find, however, that Solomon orders his prayer in such a manner and tone as to recognise distinctly the fact that all things which had ever occurred which could try the faith, the patience, and the virtue of men would occur again and again to the end of the chapter. No; on the contrary: though the temple stands as a monument of human piety and as a fulfilment of a divine promise, human life will go on in all the variety of a divine promise, human life go on in all the variety of its experience much as it had gone on from the beginning. What then, is there nothing in the point of history thus established by the building of this holy house? Henceforth it is to be understood that whatever happens admits of religious treatment, and is to be taken to the temple itself for consideration and adjustment. Solomon recognises God as the ruler of providence and the controller of all nature. He is not afraid to trace the absence of rain to an ordinance of the Most High. A perusal of the history of his own people would make it clear that from early times God had been recognised as ruling over the elements of nature. Thus is the dominion of God enlarged by the religious imagination of Solomon; and thus, from the other point of view, is the revelation of God confirmed by the testimony of those who have most profoundly studied his ways and purposes in the earth. 4. Solomon, having ended his prayer, "stood, and blessed all the congregation of Israel with a loud voice," and in that blessing he made one declaration which cannot but be quoted from age to age with increasing emphasis and joy—"There hath not failed one word of all his good promise." This is the continual testimony of the Church. Thus with hardly any variation of language is the continuance of the Divine goodness reaffirmed. This is matter of personal experience. Every man can examine his own life, and see wherein he has been faithful, and wherein he has been faithless, and say distinctly whether faithfulness has not been followed by benediction, and faithlessness by disapprobation. Many promises remain yet to be fulfilled. Specially there remains the promise to be fulfilled that God will be with His people in the valley of the shadow of death. There is no discharge in that war! These triumphant conditions can only be realised by continual and growing faith in Him who is the resurrection and the life. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *The Temple dedicated:*—I. THE CHURCH IS THE HOUSE OF GOD. Every home in Israel had its family worship and secret prayer; but the cloud of glory came only upon the Temple. So now God is present in His house with a blessing which we can get nowhere else. II. THE CHURCH BRINGS BLESSINGS TO THE NATION. All other institutions, our good schools and happy homes, depend upon it. Just to see in a town a building consecrated to God makes men think of Him; it is His sign, inviting people to come for heavenly riches and heavenly healing. III. THE CHURCH HAS A SPECIAL PROMISE FOR CHILDREN. God's covenant with David brought to Solomon much of his glory and honour. The covenant with Abraham included his descendants. The Heavenly Father knows how dearly earthly parents love their children, and promises that if they will bring them up rightly, He Himself will take especial care of them. The special lessons we can learn to-day are very plain. 1. Reverence the House of God. 2. Love the Church. 3. Attend Church regularly. 4. Consecrate yourself to God. (*Monday Club Sermons.*) *The Temple dedicated:*—The undivided kingdom of Israel reached the zenith of its course in the reign of Solomon. Like Julius Cæsar, David was the military hero and champion of his nation. He extended its territory from Egypt to the Euphrates, and centralised its government on the conquered heights of Jerusalem. But Solomon, the Augustus of Hebrew history, was an organiser and administrator. Jehovah, instead of teaching his hands to war, gave him rather "a wise and an understanding heart," and "both riches and honour," so that he was the greatest king of his day (1 Kings iii., xii. 13, iv. 24). These gifts and opportunities naturally made him also the Pericles of his race. His reign was distinguished for its magnificent architecture. This dedicated temple of Solomon is a pregnant type. 1. It is a type of Jesus Christ. The architectural magnificence of Solomon's temple but feebly prefigures the perfection of Christ's wonderful person. Solomon's

temple was to Israel a symbol of permanence, but Jesus, looking at its second successor, declared that not one stone should be left upon another; and then, thinking of his own mastery even over death itself, declared, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. But he spake of the temple of his body" (John ii. 19, 20). The temple was the dwelling-place of God; Jesus Christ is God incarnate. The temple was the meeting-place for God and man; Jesus is the divine-human Mediator, and whatsoever we ask in his name we receive (John xvi. 23). The temple was the place for intercession and atonement; Jesus ever liveth to make intercession for us, and he is the sacrificial Lamb whose blood cleanseth us from all sin. The temple contained the ark of the covenant; Jesus has fulfilled all law, and in love he binds all filial souls to the divine Father. 2. Solomon's temple is a type of heaven. It is Jehovah's permanent dwelling-place (1 Kings viii. 30, 32, &c.). 3. Solomon's temple is a type of every Christian. For the Christian is the temple of God, and the Spirit of God dwells in him, demanding a pure home (1 Cor. iii. 16, 17). Thus the glory of Solomon was the temple which bears his name; the glory of that temple was its typifying of Christ, of His Church and His heaven; and the glory of Christ, of the Church, even of heaven, is a human life fully consecrated to God in Christ. (*S. J. Macpherson, D.D.*) *The dedication of the Temple*:—I. SOLOMON BEGINS WITH THE EXPRESSION OF HIS SOBER SENSE OF THE DIVINE GREATNESS. He exclaims, "Lord God of Israel, there is no God like thee, in heaven above, or on earth beneath." Now it will be of no use whatsoever for any human being, who is intelligently proposing to consecrate himself fully to God's service, to attempt to covenant with the Almighty without realising that he has entered upon the most awfully serious moment of his life: for he is dealing with the one supreme Head of the universe. II. THEN COMES AN AFFECTING REMEMBRANCE OF THE DIVINE GRACE. Solomon openly admits that he is now in the immediate presence of that God who was accustomed to keep covenant and mercy with his servants that walk before him with all their heart. III. SOLOMON MAKES A HUMBLE ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF THE DIVINE CONDESCENSION. He has prepared for God this palace. But now in this moment of his highest satisfaction he appears surprised by a fresh revelation of the glory of God. No sentence in all this extraordinary address is more pathetic in its disclosure of experience than that we find here: "But will God indeed dwell on the earth? behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house that I have builded!" It is the grand simplicity of such an exclamation that fixes an unusual character upon it. The candour of the confession shows a heart penetrated with the consciousness that its very best gift must be sanctified by the altar of God it lies upon before the infinite holiness of Jehovah can accept it. IV. SOLOMON TRUSTFULLY ACCEPTS THE FULNESS OF THE DIVINE INVITATION to continue to hold communication with him in the building he was offering. Attention was long ago called to the fact that the disciples going to Emmaus were not enlightened so as to recognise Jesus all along the way where they conversed with Him; not until they fulfilled His commands in the exercise of hospitality did they suddenly discover how their hearts had burned with the thoughts He had given them. "Not by hearing His precepts," says Gregory in one of his homilies, "but by doing them, did they receive illumination." The souls that only freely receive, it is not at all certain will be those who will understand. It is when souls freely give, they begin to grow intelligent. Mystery then ceases, mysticism ends, and reality begins. One of the loftiest steps of Christian consecration is reached when a man is beginning to realise fully that God has invited him to pray for all he needs, in that very moment in which he has given away all he has in this world. V. SOLOMON SUGGESTS HIS SENSE OF A LIFELONG NEED FOR THE DIVINE COMPANIONSHIP AND FAVOUR. (*C. S. Robinson, D.D.*)

Ver. 24. **Who hast kept with Thy servant David my father that Thou promisedst him.**—*The promises of God*:—I. IT HAS PLEASED GOD TO DEAL WITH HIS PEOPLE IN ALL AGES, BY WAY OF PROMISE. II. HIS POWER IS CONSTANTLY ENGAGED IN FULFILLING HIS PROMISES. 1. His power is exercised in illustration and vindication of His truth in the promises. 2. In proof that His power is supreme and unlimited. Is not His power equal to the love of His heart? All resources are His. 3. His power is always exercised in proof of His faithfulness. III. THERE ARE SOME SPECIAL SEASONS WHEN WE ARE CALLED UPON TO BEAR TESTIMONY TO HIS FAITHFULNESS IN HIS PROMISES. 1. When

looking back to the advent of the Saviour. 2. And to another period, not less memorable, the effusion of the Holy Ghost. 3. And to the day of individual conversion. 4. Another special season is that of our consecration and dedication. 5. When we have received extraordinary mercies, we ought to acknowledge His faithfulness. (*Evangelical Preacher.*) *Trust in God's faithfulness* :—"God was under no obligation to covenant with you for your redemption; but since He has covenanted it ceases to be a matter of mercy and becomes a matter of truth. It had nothing to do with your deserts, but it has something to do with His honour. Like the coloured woman in the South, who was very old, and poor, and ignorant, but very confident she was going to heaven. 'Why,' said one, 'nobody knows anything about you, and if you go to hell the universe will be ignorant of it.' 'No,' said she, 'it won't make any difference to the universe, but it will make a great difference to the Lord, because His honour would be for ever gone.' So, the great thing is to trust Him, and He will be true to Himself and to you, and the habit of meditating on His mercies begets the confident hopefulness of His future absolute fidelity." (*A. T. Pierson, D.D.*) *God's promises* :—To turn to the promises of God is like turning to a sky lighted with constellations of suns; or to a world bespangled with rarest flowers; or to a land flowing with milk and honey. To record the promises would be a task almost equal to transcribing the Bible. (*R. Venting.*)

Ver. 27. **But will God indeed dwell on the earth?**—*Of the omnipresence of God* :—I. THE TRUTH OF THE ASSERTION ITSELF. That God must of necessity be omnipresent; 'tis to be observed that if being or existence be at all a perfection, it will follow, that in like manner as continuing to exist through larger periods of Time, so also extent of existence through larger portions of space, is the having a greater degree of this Perfection. And as that Being, which is absolutely perfect, must with regard to duration be Eternal; so, in respect of greatness, it must likewise be immense. Otherwise its perfections will be limited; which is the notion of imperfection; and, by being supposed to be finite in extent, the perfection of its power will as totally be destroyed, as it would be, supposing it to be temporary in duration. For as any Being, which is not always; at the time when it is not, is as if it never was; so whatever Being is not everywhere; in those places where it is not, is as if it had no Being in any place at all. For no being can act where it is not, any more than when it is not. Power, without existence, is but an empty word without any reality; and the scholastic fiction of a being acting in all places without being present in all places, is either making the notion of God an express contradiction, or else a supposing Him so to act by the ministry of others, as not to be Himself present to understand and know what they do. It cannot but be evident, that He who made all things, as He could not but be before the things that He made, so it is not possible but He must be present also, with the things that He made and governs. For things could not be made without the actual presence of the Power that made them; nor can things ever be governed with any certainty, unless the Wisdom that governs them be present with them. Whatever arguments therefore prove the Being of God, and His unerring Providence, must all be understood to prove equally likewise His actual omnipresence. He who exists by necessity of nature, 'tis manifest must exist in all places alike. For absolute necessity is at all times and in all places the same. Whatever can be absent at any time, may be absent at all times; and whatever can be absent from one place, may be absent from another; and consequently can have no necessity of existing at all. He therefore who exists necessarily, must necessarily exist always and everywhere: that is, as he must in duration be eternal, so he must also in immensity be omnipresent. II. TO OFFER SOME PARTICULAR OBSERVATIONS CONCERNING THE NATURE AND CIRCUMSTANCES OF THIS DIVINE ATTRIBUTE. 1. The excellency of the perfections of God does not consist in impossible and contradictory notions, but in true greatness, dignity, majesty, and glory. The eternity of God does not consist in making time past to be still present, and future time to be already come, but it consists in a true proper everlasting duration, without beginning and without end. And in like manner the Immensity of God does not consist in making things to be where they are not, or not to be where they are, but it consists in this; that whereas all finite beings can be present but in one determinate place at once: and corporeal beings even in that one place very imperfectly and unequally, to any purpose of power or activity, only by the successive motion of different members and organs; the Supreme Cause on

the contrary, being a uniform Infinite Essence, and comprehending all things perfectly in Himself, is at all times equally present, both in His real essence, and by the immediate and perfect exercise of all His attributes, to every point of the boundless immensity, as if it were all but one single point. 'Tis worthy of observation, that this right notion of the omnipresence of God, will very much assist us to form a just apprehension of the nature of that Providence, which attends to and inspects, not only the great events, but even the minutest circumstances of every the smallest action and event in the world: Even that Providence, without which not a sparrow falls to the ground, and by which the very hairs of our head are all numbered. There is a certain determinate number or quantity of things, which every intelligent creature, according to the proportion of its sphere of power and activity, is able to attend to. And by this we may judge, that as creatures of larger capacities can observe a much greater number of things at one and the same time, than beings of a lower rank can imagine it possible they should, so God, who is present everywhere, can with infinitely greater ease direct and govern all things in the world at once, than we can attend to those few things which fall within the compass of our short observation. 3. As the beams of the sun are not at all soiled by the matter they shine upon, and as the purity and holiness of the Divine nature is not in the least diminished by beholding all the wickedness and moral impurity which is acted in the world, so the omnipresent Essence of God is not at all affected, by any natural impurity of things or places whatsoever; it being the superlative excellency and prerogative of His nature, to act always upon all things everywhere, and itself to be acted upon by nothing. All the sensible qualities of matter are merely relative to us in our present state, depending on the frame of our bodily organs, and not being anything really inherent in the things themselves. We behold only the outward surfaces of things, and are affected only by the various motions and figures of certain small parts of matter, which, by the help of microscopes, appear even to us to be really very different in themselves from what our senses represent them; and to a spirit, which sees the inward real essences of things, and not the external sensible images which affect us, they have no similitude at all with our imaginations. 4. The true meaning therefore of God's being in heaven, is to express His height and dignity, not in place, but in power: It being only a similitude drawn into common speech, from the situation of things in nature. As the heavenly bodies, the sun and stars, are high above us in place, and all earthly blessings depend on the sun and rain and the descent of kindly influences literally from above, so, by an easy figure of speech, whatsoever is above us in power, we are from hence used to represent as being above us in place. III. SOME USEFUL INFERENCES FROM WHAT HAS BEEN SAID. 1. By this character of omnipresence, the true God of the universe is distinguished from all false deities; and the vanity of idolatry, made plainly to appear. The gods of the nations pretended to be but gods of particular countries; as the gods of Henah, Ivah, and Sepharvaim (2 Kings xviii. 34). Or, of particular parts of the same country; as gods of the hills, and not of the valleys (1 Kings xx. 28). 2. If God is omnipresent, from hence it follows that he is to be worshipped and reverenced everywhere, in private as well as in public. Honour is to be paid Him, not only by angels before His throne in heaven, and by the congregation publicly in His Temple on earth, but also by every man singly in his most private retirements. 3. From the consideration of God's being omnipresent, it follows that His power (as well as knowledge) is unlimited; to be everywhere relied on by good men, and to be feared by bad. As there is no time, so neither is there any place, where He is not at hand to protect His servants (Ps. xlvi. 1). (*S. Clarke, D.D.*) *God's dwelling-place*:—Collins the free-thinker met a simple countryman one Sunday morning going to church. He asked him where he was going. "To church, sir," was the man's reply. "And what do you do when you get there?" said the free-thinker. "I worship God." "Pray tell me," said Collins, "whether your God is a great God or a little God?" "He is both," said the man. "How can He be both?" said Collins. "Why, sir," was the answer, "He is so great that the heavens cannot contain Him, and so little that He can dwell in my heart." Collins afterwards declared that this simple answer from the countryman had more effect upon his mind than all the books the learned men had written against him. (*Quiver.*)

Ver. 29. This place.—*Meditations in a new church*:—I. WHAT THE HOUSE OF GOD IS NOT. 1. In this place is no architectural type; it is no homage to the

esthetics of form. Architecture is but a help and a convenience; it is not a religion. 2. "This place" is not reared in homage to any principle, so called, of Natural Religion; on the contrary, it is an admission that Natural Religion is not enough to satisfy the heart of the worshipper; it is true the groves were God's first temples; it is equally true that the early Persian made his peak an altar, and worshipped the Lord of nature from the tops of earth's over-gazing mountains; it may be true that our Gothic architecture is an attempt to torture the stone to the grace and grandeur of the forest aisles, but it will not do, it will not do. "This place" is not reared to emulate, "in the long-drawn aisle and the fretted vault," the mysteries of the groves and the trees; it is to point to one tree—the Cross; it is not to celebrate the mountain majesties of heaven, but to be a cleft of the rock, in which the people may hide themselves while the tempest and the wrath pass by. 3. "This place" is not an Ecclesiasticism; it is not the place for mere hierarchical assumption; it does not exist to symbolise any particular creed; it derives any value it may boast, not from man or men, but from God. 4. "This Place" is not built in homage to Intellectual Achievement, or to the consecrating efforts of Taste. II. WHAT THE HOUSE OF GOD IS.—"This place" is the assertion that a new church has come to view. Hebraism was a church—the Jew was, in fact, a Christian. But he was so pictorially, and he must represent to us God as working the salvation over and independent of him. What, then, is suggested to us by "this place"? 1. It is Consecration. This is the stone for a memorial; and the prayers of the people and their dedication words are the holy oil poured upon the stone. This is the place of an almond-tree, beneath whose shade the weary Jacob rests, and beholds the vision of ascending and descending angels; and says, "Lo, God is in this place; this is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven." 2. And with that idea goes this other of seclusion, seclusion even here. But it will be said, is not every place God's—is not every place equally Divine? To Him, Yes; to us, I must say, No, certainly not. Is not God equally diffused over all creation? To Himself, Yes; to us, No, certainly not. As well ask, Does magnetism reside equally in all substances? Is there not a loadstone, and a magnetic needle? The Sabbath is an answer to our necessities, by being a seclusion in time; the temple is an answer to our necessities by being a seclusion in space. Man needs, not only Sabbath hours, he needs Sabbath spots. Cannot man worship alone, it is said, in his own life and heart, and have there his own still Sabbath? What some may do, I will not say; but on the whole, I shall reply, Certainly not; man's true seclusion will be the temple: seclusion in such a place is very beautiful. As consecration is the act of setting apart to and for God, so seclusion is that retiring into ourselves; we always "enter into our closet" when we retire into ourselves; but how large and mighty is the idea that in this place we retire not only into ourselves but into and with God. 3. But this place reveals the principle of association as surely as of seclusion or consecration. Here is revealed the unity of the Church—here is realised the image of "the harmonious interworkings of countless spirits, who, though scattered over the whole globe, endowed with freedom, and possessing the power to strike off into every deviation to the right or to the left, yet preserving still their various peculiarities, constitute one great brotherhood for the advancement of each other's spiritual existence, representing one idea, that of the reconciliation of men with God, who, on that account, have been reconciled with one another, and have become one body." 4. But, again, this place is not merely emotional, it is conservative, it is the centre of doctrine, and therefore there is associated with it the idea of teaching it is the House of God; it is the home "of the chosen of the living God"; it is the depository of "the pillar and ground of the truth." 5. Another sentiment suitable to "this place" is, that it is perfectly in harmony with all that has gone before; it may be naturally described as the centre of conversion. "Repent and be converted, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand"—this is the word which must often be uttered here, "and of this man it shall be said, he was born there." These buildings exist for the purpose for which the Gospels were written; they were built that believers "may have life," but they were built also that men "may believe." Lessons: To regenerated hearts this place is a memory. Here we pierce back into the night of time, and the eye surveys the splendid piles of ancient days. This place is an anticipation: it is a promise from God to man of his future home, and it is the declaration to man's heart, from the deeper instincts of his being, of the great, the hallowed, and all-hallowing truth,

that "there remaineth a rest for the people of God"—our rest in this place is the assurance of our rest yonder. (*E. P. Hood.*) *The place of worship*:—I. THE HOUSE OF GOD. Our text speaks of heaven as God's dwelling-place. Perfectly true. But where is heaven? Heaven is above us, but it is also beneath and about us. Now it was this thought that appealed even to Solomon as he knelt with outspread hands before the glory lit altar of the new temple. For a moment he seems to have been staggered: But he recovers himself speedily, however. It was God's house. Why was it God's house? He Himself had selected the site; it had been built on the Divine plan; the builders had been directed in all the arrangements. God's own promise was in the matter, and it had been fulfilled to the letter. II. THE HOUSE OF PRAYER. I like, however, to remember that it is, in the second title, a place of worship, a House of Prayer. Solomon used the first Temple for that purpose at the outset, and named it so from the beginning. And those who could not tread its sacred courts were to open their windows toward Jerusalem, and throw the arrows of their prayers through the lattice which looked that way. The Temple, in a word, was to be the medium and the mediator between the yearning hearts of men and the bounteous hands of the Lord God of Israel. Things have changed since then; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. III. THE HOUSE OF MERCY.—"When thou hearest, forgive." Forgive! Ah yes, yes, we shall need to pray that prayer amongst the rest. Prayers for succour and for strength, prayers for comfort and for joy, will need to be supplemented with prayers for pardon. Some nowadays profess to have got far away beyond this. I am not ashamed to confess in one sense that I have not. The Lord has taught us so to pray, "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors." (*Thomas Spurgeon.*)

Ver. 30. **When thou hearest, forgive.**—*The first prayer in Solomon's Temple*:—Simple, touching, and beautiful were the words of the first prayer offered under the roof of Solomon's Temple. Forgiveness is the first thing asked for. Solomon takes it for granted that forgiveness will be the great thing needed by those who in after days would pray in that house. He does not tell us what shall be the prayer, further than as the nature of the prayer is implied in the nature of the answer he bespeaks for it. In that single request, in that one word, Solomon gathers up the essence, as it were, of all the prayers that ever should be offered beneath that Temple's roof. I. THAT ALL MEN ARE SURE TO NEED FORGIVENESS: that whatever differences there may be among them in other respects, they all agree in this, that they are sure to need forgiveness. Now, what is forgiveness? Forgiveness implies that a man has done something that is wrong—some wrong that is especially directed against some other being—and so which might justly excite the being wronged to regard the wrong-doer with an unfriendly and angry feeling, and seek to inflict punishment upon him: but that the being wronged resolves to pass by the offence done him—to blot it out from recollection, so far as may be—to cherish no angry spirit towards the offender, and to take no vengeance upon him for that which he has done. II. THE CHIEF THING WHICH BEINGS LIKE US OUGHT TO ASK FOR IN OUR PRAYERS, IS THE PARDON OF OUR SINS. Solomon seems to have thought that there was nothing which men needed so much; nothing which it was so important that they should get; nothing which included and meant so much. It was of this, no doubt, that our Blessed Lord was thinking, when, alluding to something which He did not name, but which all would understand, He said, "One thing is needful." For see what is meant by being an unforgiven sinner. It means that a man has the anger of the Almighty God resting upon him. It means that the creature, weak, helpless, dependent, is at enmity with the Creator, without whose aid he cannot draw a breath, move a limb, live a moment. It means that the word of the True is solemnly plighted to destroy him: that the power of the Almighty is solemnly engaged to destroy him. It means that he is one of those, concerning whom God has declared that when they leave this world, they must enter into a place of infinite and never-ending woe and wretchedness; and there dwell through eternity still under the burden of His wrath. That is what is meant by being a sinner, not forgiven; it means that everything is wrong! And what is meant by being forgiven? It means that everything that was wrong before, is now set right. It means that everything that was ban before, is now made good. It means that God, before an enemy, is now a friend. It means that God, formerly the angry Judge, is now the reconciled

and gracious Father. It means that God's true word, formerly plighted to destroy us, and God's Almighty power, formerly engaged to destroy us, are now plighted and engaged to preserve and bless us. III. GOD IS THE ONLY BEING WHO CAN FORGIVE in the large and full sense of that word. You will remember, when I say this, the remark of the Scribes and Pharisees when our Saviour told a certain man that his sins were forgiven: they said, "This man blasphemeth: who can forgive sins but God only? And they said what was true, if Christ had been a mere man. No one but God can forgive sin. And it is quite easy to show you how and why it is so. For, you know quite well, an offence can be forgiven only by the person against whom it was committed. Now all sin is in its essential nature, something committed against God; and therefore it can only be forgiven by God. There is a striking illustration in Scripture of this great truth, that sin especially consists in wrong done to God—that its great aggravation consists in this—and that when the conscience is awakened, the thing that weighs most heavy on a man's heart is, that he has sinned against God. IV. PRAYER IS THE WAY TO OBTAIN THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS. You see Solomon looked forward to days when sinful beings should, under the consciousness of guilt, employ the natural and recognised means for getting that guilt forgiven. He took it for granted, that when men felt they needed forgiveness, they would pray to God to forgive them: and so he himself, in anticipation of very many prayers which would be offered for pardon, says, "Hear Thou in heaven Thy dwelling-place; and when Thou hearest, forgive." But indeed it is so plain that when you want anything from God, the right way to get it is to ask for it: this is so completely the dictate of common sense, that the matter needs no enforcement or illustration. (*A. K. H. Boyd.*) *Possibility of the soul's recovery*:—If Kant emphasised the starry heavens and the moral law, if Daniel Webster emphasised the thought of personal responsibility to God, Hawthorne believed the greatest thought that can occupy the human mind is the thought of justice and its retributive workings through conscience. Doubtless there are a thousand problems that compete for the attention of youth; but for men grown mature and strong life offers no more momentous question than this: Can the soul, injured by temptation and scarred by sin, ever recover its pristine strength and beauty? Is there no place of recovery, though men seek it long with tears? "I do not know," answers the old Greek, "I do not know that God has any right to forgive sin." But Dante, having affirmed that man cannot forgive himself, thinks that sin may be consumed, and therefore makes the transgressor walk up a stairway of red-hot marble that pain may consume his iniquities. Hawthorne felt that somewhere life holds a fountain divine for cleansing the dust from the soul's wing. Therefore, at the very gates of the jail into which the prisoner enters, Hawthorne makes a rose-bush grow, with thorns indeed to typify the sharp pains that society inflicts upon the wrong-doer, but with blossoms, too, offering fragrance to the prisoner as he goes in, and suggesting that if the petals fall through the frosts of to-day, these falling petals, passing into the roots will reappear in the richer blossoms of to-morrow. As if another life might recover the disasters of this; as if, no matter what man's harshness, great nature and nature's God hold a wide, deep pity that can atone, forgive, and save. (*N. A. Hillis, D.D.*)

Vers. 33, 34. **When Thy people Israel be smitten down before the enemy.**—*Thy people England*:—I. THE CONDITIONS OF NATIONAL UNITY. When any one desires to understand what is meant by a nation, he had better look unto God's people Israel first of all, for they fulfilled the two great conditions of national unity. The first is faith in God, and no nation has ever risen to greatness, and no nation, having arisen, has ever maintained its greatness except so far as it believed in—and publicly as a nation, and privately by individuals—acknowledged Almighty God. There is this analogy between the individual and the nation, that an individual is not able to say "I," with any intelligence of what "I" means, except in God; and an individual is not able to say "I will," with any force in the will, except in God. It is in the Unseen and Eternal that we realise ourselves. The other condition of national unity with Israel was vocation. Therefore the prophets were perpetually telling the people that their fathers had been called and blessed not for their own sake—and there is no man ever blessed for his own sake, but for the sake of the man that is next him—that their fathers had not been called and blessed for their own sake, but for the sake of the world. They were the receptors of a Revelation, and received the touch of truth to pass

it down from hand to hand, and every man to blow it brighter as it went from patriarch to prophet, from prophet to psalmist, from psalmist to martyr, till the day came when the nation could be sent out, each man a torch-bearer, unto the ends of the earth, carrying the light of eternal truth. II. A MESSAGE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS. What was the message they were to carry to the world? The message they were to carry to the world was righteousness. As the Greek was raised up of God to give us the sense of beauty, so was the Jew raised up to give us what is far better than beauty, the sense of righteousness; and to write the ten words of Moses upon the conscience of the individual and the conscience of the nation. Comes then the question: Is there any nation to-day that has, as it were, succeeded to a great and world-wide mission, and a mission of the same practical and ethical nature as that which God gave to His people Israel? Is there any nation that has been secluded in its island home, and guarded round from other people so that the invader could not touch it; is there any nation that within its own home, being men of mixed blood, has gradually been welded together by common human sympathy and common faith in God; is there any nation that has gradually been led into a fuller sense of the truth of God; into political, and religious, and social liberty; is there any nation whose ordered and beneficent freedom is the admiration of every people, of its enemies and friends alike? Finally, is there any nation whose members have gone unto the ends of the earth, and wherever they have gone have been able to teach, to govern, to give justice unto the nations placed under their charge? There is only one nation of whom these things can be said; only one nation with whose history you can draw out this analogy to Israel, and that is the English people. Ought we not to ask ourselves whether as a nation—and having had this great favour of the Eternal—whether, as a nation we have borne ourselves like the servant of God? In one—in perhaps the most tender and beautiful passage in all the Old Testament, Isaiah liii.—there is a description of God's servant, which is supposed by some to be the Messiah, by some to be God's people Israel; but the mark of Him is not only that He is the means of great blessing to the world, but His humility, His tenderness, His sympathy, His lowliness. Have we been, as a nation, courteous to foreign nations, as we go by individuals through their midst? Have we, in our Literature and in our Press, always done justice to foreign peoples, and never blown our trumpet, our brazen trumpet, loudly in their faces? Is our character such—the character which we have earned through centuries such—that a foreigner will at once appreciate the goodness that is in us? III. THE SIN OF MATERIALISM. The other sin which we always realise in a national crisis is the sin of Materialism, which also greatly beset Israel. While Israel was a handful of farmers, Israel was more or less spiritual. When Israel became rich and increased in goods, you have only to read the prophets to note how the race for wealth entered, and the power of the rich and the suffering of the poor made an unhappy and miserable nation. We have grown rich, and I am told—though you know better about these things than I do—that we were never richer than at the present day. Rich in goods? I pray you to define goods; and when we define goods, how are they defined? I think it is the money in the savings' bank, which is very good so far as it represents thrift and intelligence; and the railways which we have made, which represent enterprise and the development of the country; these things and many other things. But these in themselves are not the goods of a nation. No, not exports and imports, and population and money—these are not the goods of a nation. The goods of a nation are its intelligence; the goods of a nation are its integrity; the goods of a nation are its charity; the goods of a nation are its high and just spirit before God. Wherefore be not too lifted up, but let us remember this, that if our nation ever decay, it will not be from any power from without, or any unfaithfulness on the part of our God. It will be because some men have too much money, and some other people have too little; and the west end of a city is one place, and the east end is another, and the west and the east they come not together. (*J. Watson, D.D.*)

Ver. 53. **For Thou didst separate them.**—*Solomon's plea*:—I. THE FACT. "Thou didst separate them from among all the people of the earth." 1. That separation commenced in the eternal purpose of God. Or ever the earth was He had set apart unto Himself a people whom He looked upon in the glass of His foreknowledge, and viewed with infinite affection. 2. This first act of separation

was followed up by a distinct act of grace, in which the chosen were given over to the Lord Jesus Christ. "Thine they were," says Jesus, "and Thou gavest them Me." 3. So far the separation is hidden from us, but what is hidden in the purpose in due time develops itself in the event, for all the people of God are at the proper moment called out by effectual calling, and in this way they are separated from among the people of the world. 4. Believers become separate from the hour of their conversion by possessing a new nature. 5. The separateness of the believer comes out in his life. 6. There shall be a final separation by and by when the wheat shall be gathered into the garner, and the tares cast into the oven, when the great Shepherd shall come and set His sheep on the right hand and the goats on the left. Oh, in that day of final separation, may we be found among those of whom He has said, "They shall be Mine in the day when I make up My jewels." II. THE DESIGN. What has the Lord aimed at by separating His people from among men? 1. The text tells us: "to be Thine inheritance." God has made choice of a people who are to be called "the Lord's portion," "the lot of His inheritance," by which is meant that He would have a peculiar interest in them. 2. A man when he takes anything to be his inheritance expects to have it used for his own purposes. 3. A man will generally take up his abode in the spot which he has selected to be specially his own. "For the Lord hath chosen Zion; He hath desired it for His habitation. This is My rest for ever: here will I dwell; for I have desired it." 4. In a man's inheritance He takes His delight. "The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; He will save, He will rejoice over thee with joy; He will rest in His love, He will joy over thee with singing." 5. When a man takes a portion to be his inheritance he means never to give it up. III. A PLEA. If you have realised that you are separated to belong to the Lord, this is a plea; and the plea applies in prayer to all your trials. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Detachment from the world through attachment to Christ*:—The first duty is to attach ourselves, detachment comes afterwards. The chrysalis covering in which the butterfly was imprisoned only breaks and falls away when the insect's wings have grown—it is by opening that these burst their melancholy integuments. We only begin to detach ourselves from the world when we have learned to know something of a better. Till then we are capable of disappointment and weariness which are not detachment. (*The Twofold Life.*)

Ver. 55. **And he stood, and blessed all the congregation of Israel with a loud voice.**—*The king "blessing" his people*:—The great ceremonial of dedicating the temple was threefold. The first stage was setting the ark in its place, which was the essence of the whole thing. God's presence was the true dedication, and that was manifested by the bright cloud that filled the sanctuary as soon as the ark was placed there. The second stage was the lofty and spiritual prayer, saturated with the language and tone of Deuteronomy, and breathing the purest conceptions of the character and nature of God, and all aglow with trust in Him. Then follows, thirdly, this "Blessing of the Congregation." 1. Note the thankful retrospect of the nation's past (ver. 56). 2. Note the prayer for obedient hearts (vers. 57, 58). The proper subject-matter of this petition is "that He may incline our hearts to walk in His ways," and God's presence is invoked as a means thereto. The deepest desire of a truly religious soul is for the felt nearness of God. That goes before all other blessings, and contains them all. But Solomon desires that God may be with him and his people for one specific purpose. As in his choice in his dream, so now, he asks, not for these things, but for an inward influence on heart and will. What he wants most for himself and them is moral conformity to God's will. All will be right if that be right. The prayer implies that, without God's help, the heart will wander from the paths of duty. 3. Note the prayer for God's defence (vers. 59, 60). The proper subject-matter of this petition is that God would maintain the cause of king and nation; and it is preceded by a petition that, to that end, the long former prayer may be answered, and is followed by the desire that thereby the knowledge of God may fill the earth. The prayer for outward blessings comes after the prayer for inward heart-obedience. Note the grand aim of God's help of Israel—the universal diffusion of His name among all the peoples of the earth. Solomon understood the Divine vocation of Israel, and had risen above desiring blessings only for his own or his subjects' sake. God's choice of Israel was not meant for the exclusion of the Gentiles, but as the means of transmitting the knowledge of God to them. The one nation was chosen that God's grace

might fructify through them to all. The fire was gathered into a hearth, that the whole house might be warmed. 4. The blessing ends with one brief, all-comprehensive charge to the people, which seems based, by its "therefore," on the preceding thought of Jehovah as the only God. The only attitude corresponding to His sole and supreme Majesty is the entire devotion of the heart, which leads to thorough-going obedience to His commandments. We, too, are tempted to bring Him divided hearts, and to carry some of our love and trust as offerings at other shrines. But if there be one God, and none other but He, then to serve Him with all our hearts and strength and mind is the dictate of common sense, and the only course which He can accept, or which can bring our else distracted natures peace and satisfaction. His voice to us is, My son, give Me thy whole heart. Our answer to Him should ever be that prayer, "Lord, . . . unite my heart to fear Thy name." (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*)

Vers. 57–60. **The Lord our God be with us, as He was with our fathers.**—*The travail of the ages*:—This text plants us on the border-line between two generations. A king was dead. A king was born. Only a heart-throb divided the two reigns, but within the secrecy of that moment a new age began to be. Our text stations us at a point where, with dramatic impressiveness, we witness the onward march of time, sweeping past and burying in shadow the workers of yesterday; creating fresh conditions, calling out new men, commissioning advanced endeavour, for the day that is to be. But the text erects for us a higher platform. It lifts our thought to the Eternal, and plants us by the ageless throne. It speaks to us of our God, our fathers' God, the God of ages. The very name works magic, and lifts us above the fleeting shadows of time and sense. Earth with its grinding effort and its vanishing forms, with its intermittent lights and shifting scenes, fades into mist beneath us. Our souls are loosed. Upward we pass into the white radiance of eternity. Time knows no succession. Space surpasses measurement. Progress is a heightening consciousness without the undulations of effort or the tide-marks of accumulation. Motion is rest. Life is an eternal joy, in which all memory and all hope centralise in a present of infinite peace. Boundless and changeless is the vision. And suffusing it all, constituting it all, is God, our God, our fathers' God, the God of ages. We think of Him as surpassing the limits of past or future. But the text affords us still another platform. It has shown us man, the shifting. It has unveiled God, the Eternal. Now it passes into petition, and reveals subtle links of love and purpose joining God above to men beneath, and throwing a chain of union across the moving ages. The Eternal fills and saves the temporal. The nations and epochs of a fading life are united in origin and destiny. The children of a day are made sons of God. And that vision is best and brightest of all. God is shown in contact with man. He was with our fathers. He is to be with us. His heart feels. His power obeys His love. Heaven enswathes earth. God in very truth dwells with men. The Eternal becomes the Gracious. The Strong becomes the Worshipful. But if this revelation is necessary to God's praise, it is not less needful to man's uplifting. The mere lateral outlook on life has in it the germs of all despair. "That way madness lies." Ill were it for any man to dwell long on the sight of swift-declining generations, till he has learned to link them with a stable purpose and a noble destiny. Time must be looked at from eternity. Man can only be seen as we stand close by God. History is an enigma and a despair till we read its pages under the lamps of the light eternal. And under those lamps we stand to-day. The light is dimmed by many an earth-cast shadow. Round and above us sweeps the purple haze of mystery. Such are the three outlooks of the text. They are instinct with an atmosphere which is favourable to my purpose. I am to speak to the new generation. I am to commend to young men and maidens the tasks which come from vanished hands, or hands now failing for lack of strength; to stir in them the sense of kinship to the travail of humanity; to create or to revive that zeal for Christ which is the service of man; and to arouse ambition to help the weary ages to the issue of their pain. Where better could I ask them to meet and meditate than amid these outlooks? I. ACHIEVEMENT. That word is capable of two meanings. In one sense it suggests something absolutely completed; not only work well done, but so done as to overtake all necessity and leave nothing to be added. With that significance we gratefully apply the word to the great facts and provisions of religion, and supremely to that central sacrifice by which Christ offered Himself once for all to

put away sin. The gospel is an achievement in the absolute sense; there is no more sacrifice for sin—it is finished—and the last age no more than the first can add to its efficacy or dispense with its grace. But there is another and equally admissible use of this word. It is spoken approximately to denote stages of accomplishment and single steps of progress. In this sense only can we apply it to the upward toil of the ages. Man has finished nothing. He has cleared primeval forests of difficulty, and dug out many a vein of silver thought, and quarried goodly stones of excellence, and made the trenches and laid the foundations for noble structures he had seen in dreams. But he never finished anything. It was not his business to complete. Alas for us if it had been! Imagine a civilisation, an educational system, a political standard, a social ideal, a compact religion, completed once for all by Aaron or Isaiah, by John Knox or Oliver Cromwell! No. It was not their business to finish things,—theirs to contribute to the one toil of progress, to add to the slow structure of humanity. But in that sense they bequeathed achievements. Behind us lie armies of heroes and centuries of toil. Had they not been, and been what they were, we were not here to-day. We do well to recall their memory. Augustine, patiently erecting his city of God as an ideal of the new home in which the new humanity might dwell; Anselm, silent, profound, meek of heart, looking with fixed gaze and reverent soul into universal questions that have no certain answers; Melancthon, the man of brave and gentle spirit, possessed of piercing insight and persuasive speech, abler perhaps to see than to do, yet an architect who made the builder possible; Luther, inspired of God to man's much-needed service, a man of lion heart and iron will, the executor of Europe's prayers and God's purposes, the father of our new liberty because the saviour of our ancient faith. These are they who have done God's work and lifted humanity into a fairer heritage. From them have we sprung. To them we owe all. Our age has outgrown theirs. In many directions our faiths and outlooks have advanced and broadened. But it is on the foundations which they laid that we have been able to build. II. SUCCESSION. Achievements, as we have seen, grow from age to age. But the workers are taken. The generations move onward with ceaseless change. Abraham had been and was not. David did a big day's work and then slept with his fathers. Fresh faces greet us as we travel each mile through history. New voices take up the old-time song. It was ever thus. God's work needs many workmen, and workmen oft renewed. No man, no age, is allowed to stay on. There was one Melchizedek whose presence spanned a longer time; but men know nothing of him, and his like was not repeated. There was one Methuselah who measured years as days, who lived as long as many a dynasty; but he did nothing in particular, and was not made a copy. No age can do God's whole work, so He puts ages in succession. No man can do more than a set portion, so God is ever sending fresh men. God's method of rejuvenescence is not to dip an old man in a stream which renews his youth, nor to mix for him an elixir to wing away his years. It is the spring-time method of rejuvenescence which sends fresh leaves upon the ancient tree. But there is another point to note in this succession. The generations are made to overlap each other. Not at one fell moment does one age go and another come. Every hour men die. Every hour men are born. The change proceeds silently and secretly. God enables the succeeding ages to clasp hands. He has so ordered it that the lessons of experience shall wait upon the untried energies of youth. Ours to-day is this glory of inheritance, this solemn duty of broad human service. Do we perceive? Have we considered? Are we ready? The time is short. We must soon make room for others. What shall the record mark when our day is done? Shall its increase of wealth measure a decrease in heroism, godliness, humanity? Shall its more accessible means of life end in the loss of all that makes life worth living? Because our age has discovered the path to a new and swifter possession of what life can give, are we to allow our larger place to degenerate into a bog of barren selfishness? God forbid. III. PROGRESS. Solomon not only followed David, he increased upon him. The ages have not only come in succession, but with steady improvement. Isaiah the prophet was more and better than Jephthah the judge. Paul the apostle was of higher capacity and nobler mission than Solomon the king. In this sense history, controlled by providence, has ever moved up as it has pressed on. Succession, spoken of highest things, carries with it the idea of advancement. A horse is not a successor; he is a repetition. Anatomists will tell you that even in a horse there is develop-

ment; but the most searching study will show you only modifications of a function and adaptations of a limb. A horse is as horses have been—a repetition. But the world was not made for horses, nor for repetitions, else Christ had never supplanted Adam, nor our fair English piety the iron paganism of Rome. Progress marks the ages, and still must mark our time. But what do we mean by progress? There are some things we cannot move from. Would you call that world progressive that broke away from the sun? Would you call that man progressive who in his business repudiated the principles of arithmetic? That word "progress" needs guarding by careful definition. Progress, as the cry of a party, is often the emptiest of all hypocrisies. Progress with some men is only a euphemism for that excitable restlessness which is ever seeking change. But it is not in such sense we speak of progress. That is not progress which leads us away from the fixed sources of spiritual energy. The modern locomotive presents a remarkable advance upon the gaunt machine which first did duty in drawing a train; but it depends on the same force and is governed by obedience to the same laws. Progress does not mean the repudiation of ancient force, but its fuller recognition. And progress can mean nothing else in the spiritual advancement of mankind. Christ was more and better than Moses, had a larger message to speak and a grander work to do; but He came from the same God, and in the same God found His inspiration. The modern teacher of religion presents an interpretation of truth and duty which distances a great stride from early or medieval instruction; but the foundation is the same, and by the same Spirit does he accomplish his task. And because Christ is the "fulness of the Godhead," our progress must be *on* Him, not *from* Him. IV. SOLIDARITY. The ages are many and fleeting; the race is one and permanent. The work is partial and progressive; the purpose and the goal are ever the same. David departs and Solomon comes, but humanity remains. One age reforms, another consolidates, but the work is one. "The individual withers, and the world is more and more." And as in destiny so in interest are all men joined. Humanity was made for God: only in God can it find the solution of its problems and the realisation of its dreams. And we shall best help to its issue the pain of progress by first giving ourselves to God, and then by striving to set in right relation to God the weary hearts of men and the multiplied interests of mankind. (*C. A. Berry.*) *Prayer for the New Year:*—I. THE NEED THAT SUGGESTED THE PRAYER. II. THE FAITH THAT PROMPTED THE PRAYER. III. THE LOVE THAT DICTATED THE PRAYER. IV. THE HOPE THAT INSPIRED THE PRAYER. V. THE MEMORIES THAT SUSTAINED THE PRAYER. (*F. W. Brown.*)

Ver. 59. **At all times, as the matter shall require.**—*A good practice for the New Year:*—But the marginal and more literal rendering of the last clause is, "as the thing of a day in its day shall require." I. Living by the day, as the thing of a day in each day shall require, WILL WHOLESOMELY REMIND US OF OUR DEPENDENCE UPON GOD. We are dependent upon God, whether we think of it or not. It is a good thing to think of it. When we think of things in bulk, we are not so apt to recognise the giver as when we think of things piecemeal. Just take the days thoughtlessly, in bulk, and you will not be apt much to recognise God as the Giver of them. But take each day, as it really is, as a special gift from God's gracious hand, and such separating, piecemeal thought of the days will necessarily breed in you a feeling of dependence upon the God who gives the days. And this feeling of dependence as you take each day as a separate gift from God will prompt you to much nobleness. 1. To prayer concerning each day. 2. To attempt at loftier living in each day. 3. To flushing the service that each day brings with the religious colour of the motive—for the sake of God. II. Living by the day, as the thing of a day in each day shall require, WILL DELIVER US FROM FOREBODING. III. Living by the day, as the thing of a day in each day shall require, will best help us to VANQUISH THE DUTIES OF EACH DAY AND SO ALL THE DUTIES OF THE NEW YEAR which will be made up of days. "I'm no hero; I'm just a regular," said an officer of the army. What he meant was that it was not in his profession to be a man spectacular and of spasms; that he must steadily do whatever his country called for, whether the great, resounding thing or the small. This is what we all need to be—not searchers after the heroic, but just regulars, ready for service lofty or lowly, as it may come. And the way to do it is to do each day as the thing of the day in each day shall require. There is nothing so discouraging, perplexing, preventing, as a herd of undone duties rushing

pellmell into to-day, which duties ought to have been finished in the days gone. IV. THE BEST WAY TO OVERCOME A BAD HABIT IS TO OVERCOME IT BY THE DAY. V. WE SHALL BEST KEEP OUR LOYALTY TO OUR LORD AND TO HIS CHURCH AS WE KEEP IT BY THE DAY. I cannot be loyal to my Lord and His Church in a lump and all at once in this New Year. I can only be thus loyal as each day brings its tests of loyalty, and I answer to them, day by day, triumphantly. (*W. Hoyt, D.D.*) *The matter of a day in its day* :—Now, I think in the words "the matter of a day in its day" we may see both a principle in reference to God's gifts, and a precept in reference to our actions. Just let us look at these two things. I. A PRINCIPLE IN REFERENCE TO GOD'S GIFTS. Life comes to us pulsation by pulsation, breath by breath, by reason of the continual operation, in the material world, of the present God's present giving. He does not start us, at the beginning of our days, with a fund of physical vitality upon which we thereafter draw, but moment by moment He opens His hand, and lets life and breath and all things flow out to us moment by moment so that no creature would live for an instant except for the present working of a present God. If we only realised how the slow pulsation of the minutes is due to the touch of His finger on the pendulum, and how everything that we have, and the existence of us who have it, are results of the continuous welling out from the fountain of life, of ripple after ripple of the waters, everything would be sacreder, and solemner, and fuller of God than, alas! it is. But the true region in which we may best find illustrations of this principle in reference to God's gifts is in the region of the spiritual and moral bestowments that He in His love pours upon us. He does not flood us with them; He filters them drop by drop, for great and good reasons. Let me just quote three various forms of this one great thought. 1. God gives us gifts adapted to the moment. "The matter of a day," the thing fitted for the instant, comes. In deepest reality, it is all one gift, for in truth what God gives to us is Himself; or, if you like to put it so, His grace. 2. He never gives us the wrong medicine. Whatever variety of circumstances we stand in, there, in that one infinitely simple and yet infinitely complex gift, is what we specially want at the moment. 3. God gives punctually. Peter is lying in prison. Herod intends, after the Passover, to bring him out to the people. The scaffolding is ready. The first watch of the night passes, and the second. If once it is fairly light, escape is impossible. But in the grey dawn the angel touches the sleeper. He gets safe behind Mary's door before it is light enough for the jailers to discover his absence and the pursuers to be started in their search. "The Lord shall help her, and that right early"—"the matter of a day in its day." 4. Again, God gives gifts enough, and not more than enough. He serves out our rations, for spirit as for body, as they do on ship-board, where the sailors have to take their pots and plates to the galley every day, and every meal, and get enough to help them over the moment's hunger. So all the variety of our changeful conditions, besides its purpose of disciplining ourselves, and of making character, has also the purpose of affording a theatre for the display, if I may use such cold language—or rather, let me say, affording an opportunity for the bestowment—of the infinitely varied, exquisitely adapted, punctual, and sufficient grace of God. 1. Of course, we have to look ahead, and in reference to many things to take prudent forecasts, but how many of us there are who weaken ourselves, and spoil to-day by being "over-exquisite to cast the fashion of uncertain evils." It is a great piece of practical philosophy, and I am sure it has a great deal to do with our getting the best out of the present moment, that we should either take very short or very long views of the future. 2. Again I say, let us fill each day with discharged duties. If you and I do not do the matter of the day in its day, the chances are that no to-morrow will afford an opportunity of doing it. So there will come upon us all, if we are unfaithful to this portioning out of tasks to times, that burden of an irrevocable past, and of the omitted duties that will stand reproving and condemning before us, whensoever we turn our eyes to them. 3. I would say, keep open a continual communion with God, that day by day you may get what day by day you need. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*) *Content to see only the inch* :—I want to give my readers a little counsel which I think is not sufficiently emphasised. We frequently hear advice as to the wisdom of looking far enough ahead, and of taking the broad view of things. Everybody counsels the telescopic vision, but not everybody advises the vigilant use of the microscope. Now I want to urge the long vision for the sake of the short one. All true looking into

distance should aid us to a better discernment of what is immediate. There is an old belief in the North of England that our eyes are strengthened by gazing into deep wells. Robert Louis Stevenson once wrote home to his father from Paris: "I am lonely and sick and out of heart, but I still believe. I still see the good in the inch and cling to it!" That is the kind of sight I want to encourage. Cultivate the eyes which see the good in the inch, and this kind of sight is obtained by peering into the infinite. I was once talking to an old resident on the shores of Westmoreland, and was somewhat lamenting the blackness of the beach at that particular spot. It seemed as though it were thickly coated with coal-dust. The old man replied: "Have you ever stooped down, sir, and looked closely at the spot? You will find it crowded with exquisite shells." I found it was as the old man said. To gaze upon the whole shore was to be oppressed with the sense of blackness and dirt. To gaze at the inch was to find most exquisite treasure. Let us first of all contemplate our God, and then with our strengthened eyes gaze at the inch that is nearest to us, and I think we shall find many of the treasures of grace. This inch of disappointment, this little patch of sorrow, this space of adversity—let them be looked at with microscopic intensity, and we shall find that in the darkness the Lord has hidden jewels of rare price. (*Hartley Aspen.*)

Ver. 66. **On the eighth day he sent the people away; and they blessed the king.**—*The earthly fellowship of the good*:—I. THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE GOOD ON EARTH IS IMPERFECT. Secular concerns, physical infirmities, incongruities of mind, temper, education, worldly condition, and other circumstances, expose it to interruption. "On the eighth day he sent the people away." Follow them in imagination. Some go south to Bethlehem, and Hebron, and Libah; some to the east, to the pleasant vales of the Jordan, &c. II. THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE GOOD ON EARTH TENDS TO THE PROMOTION OF ALL GOOD FEELING. 1. Increased attachment to those who are over them in the Lord. "And they blessed the king" (1 Pet. ii. 13–17). 2. Increased sympathy with, and delight in the work of God. "Joyful and glad of heart, for," &c. No petty jealousies, no sectarian strifes, no proud boasting. The tribes are lost in "Israel." Solomon and David are one. "The Lord" is "all in all." What a lesson to Christians. 3. Increased aptitude for the service of God in their several houses. They seem to have had a deep sense of the transitoriness of earthly things. "Went unto their tents." The word stands for houses. It had come down from the time of the patriarchs. Would suggest the thought, "we are pilgrims. What are our houses, and the fabric of our families, the organisations of our churches, but tents?" (Heb. xii. 27, 28). III. THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE GOOD ON EARTH PROPHESIES OF A MORE PERFECT AND ENDURING FELLOWSHIP HEREAFTER. 1. More perfect. No distractions, no weariness, no incongruities, nothing to mar or interrupt the universal harmony. 2. More enduring. All things earthly are transitory. The sweetest song must come to an end, the pleasantest book must be laid aside, the most endearing "fellowship," &c. Not so hereafter. In heaven there is no sending away. (*William Forsyth.*) *The afterwards of Divine worship*:—"After the worship of the Lord's Day, and especially after the Lord's Supper, we should continue in devotion, and make the whole day a post-communion. As civet boxes retain their scent when the civet is taken out, so, when the act of visible communion is over, our thoughts and discourse and actions should still savour of the solemnity. Certainly it is an argument of much weakness to be all for flashes and sudden starts." This retaining of their perfume by boxes and drawers in which sweet scents have been placed is a fragrant figure of the abiding nature of grace in a heart wherein it has once been stored up. If ordinances yield the influence designed by them, their savour will remain in our lives. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

CHAPTER IX.

VERS. 2–9. **The Lord said unto him, I have heard thy prayer.**—*Essential points in prayer* :—It was an exceedingly encouraging thing to Solomon that the Lord should appear to him before the beginning of his great work of building the temple. See in the third chapter of this First Book of the Kings, at the fifth verse, "In Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night: and God said, Ask what I shall give thee." I cannot forget when the Lord appeared unto me in Gibeon at the first. Truly there are things about the lives of Christian men that would not have been possible if God had not appeared to them at the beginning. If he had not strengthened and tutored them, and given them wisdom beyond what they possess in themselves; if he had not inspirited them. It is a priceless blessing to begin with God, and not to lay a stone of the temple of our life-work till the Lord has appeared unto us. I do not know, however, but that it is an equal, perhaps a superior, blessing for the Lord to appear to us after a certain work is done; even as in this case: "The Lord appeared to Solomon the second time, as He had appeared unto him at Gibeon." We want renewed appearances, fresh manifestations, new visitations from on high; and I commend to those of you who are getting on in life, that while you thank God for the past, and look back with joy to His visits to you in your early days, you now seek and ask for a second visitation of the Most High. All days in a palace are not days of banqueting, and all days with God are not so clear and glorious as certain special Sabbaths of the soul in which the Lord unveils His glory. Happy are we if we have once beheld His face; but happier still if He again comes to us in fulness of favour. I think that we should be seeking those second appearances: we should be crying to God most pleadingly that He would speak to us a second time. I. OUR PROPER PLACE IN PRAYER. The Lord said, "I have heard thy prayer, and thy supplication, that thou hast made before Me." There is the place to pray—"before Me": that is to say, before the Lord. But we should take care that the place is hallowed by our prayer being deliberately and reverently presented before God. 1. This place is not always found. The Pharisee went up to the temple to pray, and yet, evidently, he did not pray "before God"; so that even in the most holy courts he did not find the place desired. 2. This blessed place "before God" can be found in public prayer. Solomon's prayer before God was offered in the midst of a great multitude. 3. But prayer before God can just as well be offered in private. 4. The prayer is to be directed to God. 5. We should endeavour in prayer to realise the presence of God. II. OUR GREAT DESIDERATUM IN PRAYER. It is that which God said that He had given to Solomon. "I have heard thy prayer and thy supplication." 1. The first thing the soul desires in prayer is audience with God. If the Lord do not hear us, we have gained nothing. And what an honour it is to have audience with God! 2. But we want more than that: we want that He should accept. It were a painful thing to be permitted to speak to a great friend, and then for him to stand austere and stern, and say, "I have heard what you have to say. Go your way." We ask not this of God. 3. Still, there is a third thing which we want, which God gave to Solomon, and that was an answer. III. OUR ASSURANCE OF ANSWER TO PRAYER. Can we have an assurance that God has heard and answered prayer? Solomon had it. The Lord said unto him, "I have heard thy prayer and thy supplication, that thou hast made before Me." Does the Lord ever say that to us? I think so. Let us consider how He does so. 1. I think that He says it to us very often in our usual faith. 2. But sometimes you require strong confidence. You have to solicit some extraordinary blessing. You get to a place like that to which Jacob came, when common prayer was not sufficient. 3. Sometimes this comes in the form of a comfortable persuasion. 4. The Lord also gives to His people a manifest preparation for the blessing. He prepares them to receive it. Their expectation is raised, so that they begin to look out for the blessing, and make room for it; and when it is so, you may be sure that it is coming. 5. Actual observation also breeds in us a solid confidence that our suit is succeeding. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Prayer penetrates* :—Which are the sounds that penetrate furthest? We on *terra firma* are scarcely in a position to judge. However, a number of scientists have been making a series of experiments to test the relative penetrating quality of sounds. The Government lent them a military balloon, which ascended from the artillery camp at Woolwich, and passed over London. A sharp ear was kept for the sounds

of the vast city that penetrated upward. Trains were heard in practically continuous rumble, punctuated by their shrill whistles. Sirens from the river and various factories rose sharp and clear. Most noticeable were the barkings of high-voiced dogs, which could be distinctly heard even at a mile high. The highly-instructive fact was noted, however, that, though the city was crossed just at noon, when from the streets the striking of clocks and bells is always such a noticeable feature, yet the most careful listener aloft could detect no such sounds. These observations go to prove how inferior are the carrying powers of bells as heard from aloft, and to emphasise the fact that noises of an unmusical, discordant nature have much better chance of making themselves heard at a distance than have more harmonious sounds. But the reverse is the case in the spiritual sphere. It is the discords of earth that have no carrying power, and that last but for a day. It is the sweet and harmonious utterance, the secret prayer, the quiet deed, that reaches unto the heavens. (*Signal.*)

Ver. 4. **If thou wilt walk before Me, as David thy father walked.**—*Imperativeness of law* :—General Grant, while president, caused the injury of a woman by his fast driving. He invited a police officer to enter his buggy, and drove with him to the police station, where he paid a fine of twenty dollars for "fast and reckless driving." President M'Kinley once had to reprove his driver for crossing a chalk-line which marked the limit of space allowed to carriages. He leaned his head out of the window, apologised to the policeman in charge, and ordered his driver to obey the rule at once. Obedience comes hard when we think that for some reason we ought to be exceptions to the rules that govern others. (*J. B. Morgan.*) *The power of a sainted parent* :—After the news of his father's death, Thomas Carlyle set himself to describe with pride his peasant parent. A living picture he gives: the large head, grey ever since he could remember; the strong face, full of earnestness; the clear eyes, through which honesty streamed—his dear, good father! Only a common farmer, though. Digging and ditching were part of his work. He drove the plough through the furrow. But, writes Thomas, "his son also is part of his work. An inspiring example I owe him. The pale face stiffened into death will certainly impel me. I seem to myself the second volume of my father." The dead spirit of the Ecclefechan farmer lived in the brilliant writer of books. The instructions of his father soaked into his very flesh and bone. He, being dead, yet shaped his life. O blessed office of parenthood! (*F. Y. Leggatt.*) *The law of obedience* :—To that law of truth that firmly fixes foundations for cathedrals, Ruskin adds the law of obedience. In springing his wall the architect must plumb the stones of obedience to the law of gravity. In springing his arch he must brace it, obeying the laws of resistance. In lifting his tower he must relate it to the temple, obeying the law of proportion and symmetry; and he who disobeys one fundamental law will find great nature pulling his towers down over his head. For no architect builds as he pleases, but only as nature pleases, through laws of gravity, and stone and steel. In the kingdom of the soul also obedience is strength and life, and disobedience is weakness and death. In the last analysis liberty is a phantom, a dream, a mere figment of the brain. Society's greatest peril of to-day is the demagogues who teach, and the ignorant classes who believe that there is such a thing as liberty. The planets have no liberty; they follow their sun. The seas know no liberty; they follow the moon in tidal waves. When the river refuses to keep within its banks, it becomes a curse and a destruction. It is the stream that is restrained by its banks that turns mill wheels for men. The clouds, too, have their beauty in that they are led forth in ranks and columns generaled by the night winds. And in proportion as things pass from littleness towards largeness they go toward obedience to law. (*N. D. Hillis, D.D.*)

Vers. 6–9. **But if ye shall at all turn from following Me.**—*A note of warning* :—A druggist in Ansonia, Conn., has an electric bell in a cabinet containing poisons. When the door is opened the bell rings, reminding the compounder he is handling poisons. What a grand thing it would be were it possible to sound an alarm every time a man puts forth his hand to touch that which will kill the soul. True, God in His great love has provided such an alarm, but, alas, men are prone to disregard its notes of alarm, and by and by it tolls forth its notes only to fall upon closed ears, and finally the bell, like that spoken of in the legend, is cut loose by the hand of a ruthless pirate, and its warning notes no longer are heard.

CHAPTER X.

VERS. 1–13. **When the Queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon.**—*The Queen of Sheba:*—In this history, there are various points of view wherein the Queen of Sheba appears as a type and representation of the Church, as we know that Solomon is in many respects a striking type of Christ. We have illustrations of God's dealings with His people, and of the workings of Divine grace, in the following particulars relating to the Queen of Sheba. I. THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD'S ELECTION, AND THE FREENESS OF HIS COVENANT MERCY AND GRACE, are set forth in her being brought to the knowledge of the truth and being taught and led by the Spirit of God. The calling of God is not confined to any time or place or people. Rahab of Jericho, Ruth the Moabitess, Nebuchadnezzar King of Babylon, the King of Nineveh, and other interesting characters may be cited, along with this Queen of Sheba, to whom God came in the sovereignty and freeness of His grace. II. WE SEE IN THIS HISTORY HOW THE PURPOSES OF GOD ARE SURE TO BE ACCOMPLISHED AND FULFILLED. In the lives of saints and holy men of old, whether in the Scriptures or in private biographies, many such wonderful leadings of Providence can be admired. Every child of God can tell of such in his own experience. III. WE OBSERVE IN THE EXPERIENCE OF THE QUEEN OF SHEBA THE ORDINARY WORKINGS OF THE SPIRIT OF GOD IN THE HEART. Hard questions arise when the mind thinks at all about spiritual things, and recur all through the Christian's experience. IV. THE CONDUCT OF THE QUEEN OF SHEBA IS WHAT OUGHT TO BE THE CONDUCT OF EVERY SOUL IN REGARD TO DIVINE THINGS. V. AS IT WAS WITH THE QUEEN OF SHEBA, SO IT IS WITH EVERY SPIRIT-TAUGHT AND SPIRIT-LED SOUL, AS TO THE KNOWLEDGE AND ADORATION, AND WORSHIP OF CHRIST. (*J. Macaulay, M.A.*) *The Queen of Sheba:*—The Queen of Sheba was an earnest inquirer. She was not content with the reports which she had heard in her own land. She thought she knew something which even he could not answer. She would have her own questions put in her own way. That is what every earnest inquirer must insist upon. No man can ask another man's questions. The inquiry is never the same; in substance it may be identical, but in spirit, in tone, in quality, there is always a critical point and measure of difference, which every man realises for himself, and must insist upon making clear to the person to whom his inquiries are addressed. The Queen of Sheba was herein a model inquirer. She came a long way to see Solomon. She travelled northward, mile by mile, day by day; and the miles seemed nothing, and the days flew away, because her heart was full of a great hope that at last she would receive solutions to problems which had filled her with the spirit of unrest. She put herself to trouble on her own spiritual account. Therefore she became a prepared listener. Persons who do not put themselves to trouble in order to have their case stated and considered are not in a fit position to receive communications from heaven. We must not be mere receivers; we must be suppliants intensely interested in our own prayers, and so enriched with patience and with the grace of rational expectation, that God may see us in a waiting posture, and know that we are tarrying until the door open, or the answer in some way come. The Queen of Sheba represented the common desire of the world. The interview with the king was long-continued and marked by supreme confidence.—"She communed with him of all that was in her heart" (ver. 2). We nowadays cannot get at people's hearts. Civilisation has lent new resources to hypocrisy. We now put questions merely for the sake of putting them, and to such questions kind heaven is dumb. Jesus Christ answered some people "never a word." He looked dumb. They were not speaking of what was in their hearts. Given a hearer who will tell the speaker all that is in his heart, and behold Jesus Himself will draw nigh, and, beginning at Moses, He will pursue His way through prophets and minstrels and all writers, until the listening heart glows with a warmth hitherto unknown. The great questions are in the heart. Let the heart speak its doubts and fears, tell its tale of perverseness, selfishness, littleness, relate all that is in its secret places, and force itself to put into words things that shame the heavens; then we shall see whether the gospel leaves unanswered the great questions of the soul. The Queen of Sheba saw with a trained eye that the accessories were in keeping with the central dignity: "And when the Queen of Sheba had seen all Solomon's wisdom, &c." (vers. 4, 5). This was fair reasoning. We may reason from within. Some cannot begin from the

point that is within: for they have no experience that would warrant their assuming the right to reason from such an origin; but the open Bible is accessible to all men—namely, the open Bible of nature, life, and the whole scheme of providence. Jesus Christ often trained His disciples to reason from the point that was external. The reasoning remains the same to-day in all its broadest effects. How very vividly the Queen of Sheba represented faith as overtaxed—"Howbeit I believed not the words" (ver. 7). No wonder. And herein we should be gentle to those who on hearing the gospel, say, "How can these things be? Whence hath this man this wisdom? Never man spake like this Man!" But the Queen of Sheba also showed that imagination was overborne by fact: "Behold," said she, "the half was not told me: thy wisdom and prosperity exceedeth the fame which I heard" (ver. 7). Here is truth again. This woman is true from the beginning of the interview unto the end. And all that Christ asks of us is to be true, and in our own way to say what we have seen Him do, and especially what we have seen Him do for ourselves. Nor could the Queen of Sheba limit her commendation and ecstasy to the king himself. Said she, "Happy are thy men, happy are these thy servants, which stand continually before thee, and that hear thy wisdom" (ver. 8). And is the servant of Christ unblessed? Are they who are humblest and lowliest in all the Church without benefaction? Nay, do they not all live in the sunshine and eat at the hospitable table of God's own summer? Is there a servant of Christ who has not a heaven of his own? We should be happier if we knew our privileges more. It is an awful thing to have outlived Christian privilege. What use did Jesus Christ make of this incident of the visit of the Queen of Sheba? We find an answer in Matt. xii. 42:—"The Queen of the South shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here." "A greater than Solomon:" He answers greater questions, He distributes greater blessings, He reigns in more glorious state. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *The Queen of Sheba*:—I. THAT WE SHOULD DILIGENTLY SEEK THE HIGHEST AND THE HOLIEST, AND NOT BE CONTENT WITH ANYTHING LOWER. II. THAT DIFFICULTIES AND DANGERS SHOULD NOT KEEP US FROM THE RECEPTION OF TRUTH. III. THAT AS WE SHOULD DILIGENTLY, AND IN SPITE OF ALL DIFFICULTIES, SEEK DIVINE TRUTH, SO SHOULD WE ADMIRE IT WHEN WE HAVE FOUND IT. The Queen of Sheba does not attempt enviously to find fault with or to depreciate any of the endowments of King Solomon. She admires heartily his wisdom, his knowledge, his power, his riches, his grandeur. A useful example for the present age—an age especially given to criticise, rather than to admire; an age that laughs at romance, ignores mystery, and ridicules the idea of the supernatural. We know that romance and reality are one, that life is itself a mystery, and that without the supernatural there could not be any natural. The credulity of early ages may have been excessive; but it was likely to be productive of more noble deeds than the scepticism and indifference of to-day. IV. THAT IN MATTERS THAT CONCERN OUR ETERNAL WELFARE IT BEHOVES US TO ACT ON EVIDENCE A LITTLE LESS THAN CERTAINTY. It has sometimes been objected to the Christian creed, that if God had sent it as a revelation of His will to man, it ought to have been universally diffused and supported by irrefragable evidence. This argument, however, if carried out to its logical consequence, would go to prove that God ought to have dispensed with the necessity of a revelation to man at all, either by keeping him free from sin, or by supplying him with such an additional faculty as would have enabled him to intuitively grasp spiritual truths. All these suggestions, however, are the presumptions of ignorance. God chose to act in His dealings with men in a certain way; and what is man, that he should question the ways of God? V. THAT THOSE WHO ARE IN THE PRESENCE OF PERFECT WISDOM MUST BE HAPPY. "Happy," says the Queen of Sheba, "are thy men, happy are these thy servants, which stand continually before thee, and that hear thy wisdom." With God is wisdom; and those therefore who, whether on earth or in heaven, feel themselves to be perpetually in His presence or watched over by His care, are indeed truly happy. VI. THAT AS THE POSSESSION OF THE WISDOM THAT IS FROM ABOVE CAN ALONE MAKE US TRULY HAPPY, WE OUGHT TO BE PREPARED FOR IT TO OFFER THE BEST GIFTS THAT WE HAVE. The Queen of Sheba pours forth before Solomon her most valuable presents. The best of our life, of our labour, of our talents, of our riches, should we give to God, for from Him we obtained all that we have, and all our blessings we hold at His will. VII. THAT THE POSSESSION OF HEAVENLY WISDOM,

WHICH IS THE TRUE RICHES, MORE THAN COMPENSATES FOR THE LOSS OF ANY UNRIGHTEOUS MAMMON. Not merely is the man who has reached to the appreciation and enjoyment of Divine truth happy, he is also rich—rich in treasures that moth and rust cannot corrupt and that thieves cannot break through to steal. (*R. Young, M.A.*) *A queen's example* :—Mudie has no more interesting story with which to beguile the waiting hours of tired and lonesome women than this old tale of a woman's perplexities and how she solved them. She lived in "the uttermost parts of the earth," and in a far-away time, but we recognise our sister all the same. She had her difficulties and her dreams as we have to-day. She had all a woman's longings to do the right, and to become strong and wise, and able efficiently to discharge her important duties. She was a queen, and had therefore an earnest desire to be the mother of her people. She was, we think, anxious to secure their love, which was, perhaps, not very difficult; and she longed to possess their reverence, which was, possibly, almost more than she could achieve. She had an intuitive comprehension of what real greatness was. And there is no doubt that she felt the need of some one wiser, stronger, better than herself, who should gently, firmly, and unhesitatingly tell her what to do and how to do it. She had, too, the woman's wish to know, which is generally described by the word "curiosity," but to which might often be applied the nobler term "aspiration." She did not like secrets, probably could not keep her own, and took a little trouble to fathom those of other people. But the world was full of secrets which she could not understand. She wanted to know the meaning of everything; but all earth's books were written in strange characters which she could not decipher. It was God whom she wished to hear of—God whom she wished to know—God whom she longed to worship and obey. The queen was much more earnest than curious. Of course she was wearied with her journey. Equally of course there were many enticing things to see in this great, grand place at which she had arrived. But she had come to Jerusalem with one dominant, overpowering intention, and nothing might put her aside from it. First of all, before she looked about her, or even took rest, she must have a long, close talk with the king. "And when she was come to Solomon she communed with him of all that was in her heart." But what if she should be disappointed? She was not the first woman, and she most certainly was not the last, who has come to a king among men, with trembling hopefulness that her ignorance might be instructed, and her doubts set at rest. What if he should prove but little better than other men, and she should discover that the greatness of his wisdom was only pretence, and that his superiority lay only upon the surface? Alas for the queen if this should be! for then she would wearily return to her own country, and there hopelessly search in the darkness for that which she could never find. But we, who sympathise with her, are glad to know that it was not so. For "Solomon told her all her questions: there was not anything hid from the king." Happy woman! She had leisure now for other things. There was, however, a good deal of honesty and candour in her even yet. She remembered her distrust of the tidings which she had heard, and could not be quite happy until she had made some honourable amends for her incredulity. There is not a woman among us but would like to have had the queen's opportunity; for we, too, are trying, amid the darkness of doubt and uncertainty, to feel our way to the light. We, too, are longing to become wise by contact with wisdom, and strong by leaning upon strength. We, too, have our longings to know more, and to do better; and I think we would gladly take a journey as formidable as that of the queen to get what we want. But "behold, a greater than Solomon is here." We have our Lord's authority for using this narrative as an illustration of spiritual truth; and it is remarkable in how many points the Queen of Sheba resembles what we are and ought to be, and how truly Solomon is a faint image of Christ. 1. But our duty is plainly taught us by this queen's example. We shall never know more of Him unless we go and see; and, if we are sensible women, that is exactly what we shall do. We need have no more fear than had this queen as to the reception that awaits us. Indeed, we know beforehand. We are not told that an invitation was sent from Judæa to Sheba, but Christ has most distinctly and pressingly invited us. "Come unto Me, and I will give you rest," is the message which He has forwarded to us. Nay, He has done more, much more than this. He has not waited for us to go to Him, but He has come to us. "Behold, I stand at the door and knock." This is our opportunity. Shall we let it go, or shall we thankfully avail ourselves of it? Oh, my sisters, do not let this Queen of the South rise up in judgment against you and condemn

you, but be equally resolute in mind and prompt in action, and at once come to Jesus. 2. When we have taken this first decided step we may follow the queen's example in another particular. "When she was come to Solomon she communed with him of all that was in her heart." And we may do the same when we have come to our King. Let us make the most of our privileges. Why are any of us weak and miserable, and full of sin, seeing that Jesus is able to make us—even us—great and good, useful and happy? 3. But when we have proved Him to be all that we have heard, let us be honest and say so. 4. But neither He nor ourselves need be satisfied with words. There must be a mutual exchange of gifts. Who can describe the greatness of His royal bounty?

The love of Jesus, what it is
None but His loved ones know.

Nor can any one beside tell the precious things which He gives to His beloved. 5. There is yet one other particular in which we are like the Queen of Sheba. "She turned, and went to her own country;" and we have to go back to the world after seeing our King, and to dwell among our own people. But we ought to be very much better than when we first came to Him. (*Marianne Farningham.*) *The wisdom of Solomon:*—In considering the interview between these two royal personages, we note—I. THE VISITED KING. On every side were untold accumulations of wealth. The country was at peace, with a dominion extending from Thapsacus, on the Euphrates, to Gaza, on the Mediterranean. The king's popularity was unbounded. He listened equally to the meanest of his subjects and those of courtly bearing, and gave judgment to each in accordance with that skill which was his without measure. II. THE VISITING QUEEN. Her lineage is not certain, nor the exact place of her sway. Probably she was a descendant from Abraham by Keturah, with a kingdom occupying the greater part of Arabia Felix, between the Indian Ocean and the Red Sea. This Sabean kingdom, whose capital was Sheba, was the richest among the Arabians, and would naturally be visited by the fleets of Solomon. III. THE VISIT. 1. Its motive. It is not difficult to find reasons prompting the Sabean queen with desire to stand in such a presence. It were easy to imagine her as urged by curiosity or by thoughts of rivalry. Hers was an empire of exceeding richness. Did the king's really surpass it? She could bear presents to him indicating resources vast and varied. Could he lay at her feet those denoting wider imports or an ampler revenue? Doubtless, however, worthier reasons moved her. Could he solve the deep, perplexing problems of her soul? Hers was a deeper want, a profounder longing. Like the patriarch Job, her soul was stirred with profoundest questions of life, death, and immortality. II. THE VISIT'S DISCLOSURE. III. THE VISIT'S RESULT. Among the lessons suggested by the passage, note—1. Wealth and piety are not necessarily opposed. The time of this visit marks the climax of Israel's strength and prosperity. Never before and never after did the kingdom take its place among the great monarchies of the East, able to cope with Egypt and Assyria. To-day as never before the duty of the Church is to make wealth the handmaid of religion. 2. Nothing but God satisfies. Neither the wealth of her own realm nor the glory of Solomon's could satisfy the queen. In her heart was a void which nothing but the knowledge of God could fill. Augustine's words are ever true, "Thou, O Lord, madest us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless until they repose on Thee." 3. There is no safety but in a right heart. It is sad that to one like Solomon a decline should come. This favoured ruler fell because he was unfaithful to Him who had made him both wise and prosperous. His life departed from what his lips proclaimed. There is always danger when obedience to God keeps not pace with knowledge of God; when the head has more understanding than the heart has love. "Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life." (*Monday Club Sermons.*) *The Queen of Sheba:*—I. THE TIME OF THE TALE. The time is that of Israel's grandeur. Politically, his star is at its zenith; his rose is full blown. In Saul's days a department for foreign affairs would have been a sinecure. Israel was not recognised as having any place in the comity of the great powers of the time. What Italy was in Europe previous to 1859, that—less than that—was Israel in the then Mediterranean world, under the Judges and even under Saul. But all this is now changed. Solomon takes his place among the potentates of the time. The extension of his empire towards the east brings him into touch with the nascent nations of the Euphrates Valley; towards the north magnificent Tyre—at once the London and the Paris of

the age—is his ally, and her king is his friend; towards the south the old national oppressor Egypt is reconciled into a fatal friendship, and the royal houses have met in an ill-omened alliance. II. THE HERO OF THE TALE. It is somewhat curious that, although we have a fuller account of Solomon's reign than of that of any other monarch mentioned in Scripture, we know comparatively little about himself. His personality stands by no means clearly out in relief against his time. The very blaze of his magnificence dazzles the eye and obscures the vision. His reign has been called the "Augustan Age of the Jewish nation." Dean Stanley, with characteristic felicity, calls attention to the fact, that "Solomon was not only its Augustus but its Aristotle." Might he not have added, "and its Alexander and its Timon, too!" But as he is at the point of time of which we now treat, he is in the full sheen of his noonday glory, with no forecast of the clouds of the sunset. To him thus, and to his capital which his genius and his wealth have made to be "the joy of the whole earth," a visitor comes. And so we reach—III. THE HEROINE OF THE TALE. Like her royal host, she, too, can be but vaguely seen. Her very name is unknown. She has a title given but no name; she is a queen, and as a queen rather than as a woman can she be known by us. And yet the motive of her visit is essentially feminine. It is curiosity, alike of the higher and the lower kind combined. And not only was the motive thoroughly feminine; it was also characteristically national. For, though tradition assigns her a different origin, there can be little doubt she was an Arab, and the Arabs are, of all peoples, notoriously the most addicted to gossip and curiosity. The tradition to which I have referred represents her as queen of that city, on an island in the Nile, which, for so many centuries, either as tributary to Egypt or as independent, was one of the mighty cities of the ancient world, Meroë. Thus influenced in her mind—excited on the lower side by the lower curiosity and on the higher side by the higher, uniting and elevating the natural curiosity with the spiritual aspiration—the plan of a personal visit and the establishment of a personal friendship and communion takes shape and grows within her, till it becomes an imperative and mastering demand. It is a meeting most picturesque and full of interest—the heathen queen in the presence of Jehovah's anointed king; natural piety seeking revelation's light. As the motives which brought her to Jerusalem were of two orders, of a higher and a lower level, so would be the subjects on which they "communed" when they met. The Arab traditions, preserving the materials that were akin to Arab tastes, are full of stories of quaint enigmas and riddles propounded and of ingenious answers given, such as those in which the sportive fancy of the East has always delighted, and by which Solomon and Hiram had long corresponded, had stimulated their intellectual activities and relieved their cares of state. The queen, according to these traditions, tested the royal wit and ingenuity by such devices as the following: artificial and natural flowers to be recognised and marked by the use of sight alone; boys and girls, dressed alike, to be detected and distinguished; and a cup to be filled with water from neither earth nor cloud. Solomon read the first riddle by letting bees loose upon the flowers; the second, by setting the young people to wash their hands; and the third, by causing a slave to gallop furiously upon a wild horse and filling the cup from the flowing perspiration! In such playful manœuvres the wit of the one was exercised and the curiosity of the other was satisfied. But we cannot doubt but that these were the relaxations not the substance of their communion, the relief not the satisfaction of the spirit of the Sabæan queen. But all the same we must conclude that the higher subjects that were, in measure, congenial to the better nature of both obtained a place in their fellowship, and that in the queen the king secured not only an ardent admirer of himself but a devout worshipper of his God, a reverent pupil in religion as well as a fascinated partaker in trifling. And so she passes off the Jerusalem stage, out of sight, and we see her no more. The traditions which tell of her marriage with Solomon, and of the three months which he spent with her every year at Saba, and of her burial at Tadmor, are utterly worthless. She lingers and figures in these legends, but they are void of credit and value. (*G. M. Grant, B.D.*) *The Queen of Sheba's visit*:—I. CHRISTIANITY CHALLENGES THE GREATEST OF THE WORLD TO INVESTIGATE ITS BOLD CLAIMS FOR SUPREMACY AS THE ONE RELIGION FOR THE HUMAN SOUL. It was not mere curiosity which brought this Queen of the South to see Solomon. A question was raised; it could be settled by nothing except rigid experiment. Christ has represented Himself in Christianity: He is to be tested in the system of faith He came to proclaim. And what we insist

upon is, that every thinking soul is bound to seek, search, sift, and examine what this Son of God, who was the Son of Man, has to say. This revelation from heaven for men's salvation is either everything or nothing to each immortal being going to God's judgment. For it claims to be all that any one needs for the final redemption of his soul. II. SCEPTICS MIGHT AS WELL PAUSE IN UTTERING THEIR DECISIONS OF PERSONAL REJECTION OF CHRIST TILL THEY HAVE FULLY UNDERSTOOD HIM. It is not every one that is competent even to disbelieve. It requires much thought to dispose of Christianity thoroughly. It is a system that stands very determinately upon conduct; and it insists that, before any intelligent investigator shall come to a fixed conclusion, he shall follow up what he already knows by working it into his life. And then he will, quite possibly, be surprised by further disclosures which he did not previously suspect. There is a great pertinence just here in the splendid figure of the traveller Humboldt; he says: "At the limits of exact knowledge, as from a lofty island shore, one's eye loves to glance towards the distant regions. The images that it sees may be illusive; but, like the illusive images that people imagined they had seen from the Canaries, or the Azores, long before the time of Columbus, these may also lead to the discovery of a new world." There is no field of study of which this remark is truer than that which religious investigation offers. III. RELIGIOUS INQUIRERS SHOULD NOT HESITATE IN COMING TO JESUS CHRIST FOR A SATISFYING ANSWER TO ALL THE SOUL PERPLEXITIES WHICH BESET THEM. If there were only the revelations of God in nature for a direction and a comfort, there would be no small gain over what the heathen have in their poems and dreams; for what would come to us would be at least trustworthy, because it would be true. The best minds have often found solace in the mute world around them. Chaucer used to say that walking in the meadows, at dawn of day, to see the blossoms spread against the sun, was a blissful sight which softened all his sorrows. Henry Martyn, lonely and sad, in his far-away mission-field, exclaimed, "Even a leaf is good company." And Ruskin writes in his essay: "What a fine thought that was, when God Almighty earliest thought of a tree!" Even with this for our Bible, our Lord would excel Ecclesiastes: "Consider the lilies," &c. But the living Word and the written Word are better for a man, immortal and sensitively intelligent, than all this friendly communing with nature only, for he is pondering questions in his heart. (*C. S. Robinson, D.D.*) *Beauty attracting*:—A scientific writer of wide experience and observation declares that all nectar-gathering insects, such as the common honey-bee, manifest a strong preference for the finest flowers. The more perfect in form, colour, and fragrance, the more are they attracted to it, as they seem to know by instinct that there they will find the richest supply of honey. It is from the characters and lives of those who are most like Him who is the altogether lovely that the souls of others can gather the most sweetness of God's love and grace. To be Christlike is to be winsome; to grow in grace, to grow in divine attractiveness. (*Helps to Speakers.*) **She came to prove him with hard questions.**—*Consulting with Jesus*:—I. ADMIRE THIS QUEEN'S MODE OF PROCEDURE WHEN SHE CAME TO SOLOMON. We are told, in the text, that "she came to prove him with hard questions." 1. She wanted to prove whether he was as wise as she had been led to believe, and her mode of proving it was by endeavouring to learn from him; and if you want to ascertain what the wisdom of Christ is, the way to know it is to come and sit at His feet, and learn of Him. He has Himself said, "Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls." 2. The Queen of Sheba is also to be admired in that, wishing to learn from Solomon, she asked him many questions;—not simply one or two, but many. If you want to know the wisdom of Christ, you must ask Him many questions. 3. The Queen of Sheba proved Solomon "with hard questions." II. LET US IMITATE HER EXAMPLE. IN REFERENCE TO CHRIST, WHO IS "GREATER THAN SOLOMON." Let us prove Him with hard questions. 1. Here is the first hard question: How can a man be just with God? 2. Here is another hard question: How can God be just, and yet the Justifier of the ungodly? 3. The next question is one which has puzzled many: How can a man be saved by faith alone without works, and yet no man can be saved by a faith that is without works? 4. Here is another hard question: How can a man be born when he is old? At first sight, it seems as if that were unanswerable; but Jesus Christ has said, "Behold, I make all things new." 5. Here is another hard question: How can God, who sees all things, no longer see any sin in believers? That is a puzzle which many cannot

understand. 6. Here is another hard question: How can a man see the invisible God? Yet Christ said, "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God;" and the angel said to John: "His servants shall serve Him, and they shall see His face." 7. Moving upward in Christian experience, here is another hard question: How can it be true that "whosoever is born of God sinneth not," yet men who are born of God do sin? 8. This helps also to answer another hard question: How can a man be a new man, and yet be constantly sighing because he finds in himself so much of the old man? 9. Here is one more of these hard questions: How can a man be sorrowful, yet always rejoicing? 10. I have one more hard question: How can a man's life be in heaven while he still lives on earth? III. LET US ANSWER CERTAIN QUESTIONS OF A PRACTICAL CHARACTER. 1. Answer first, this question—How can we come to Christ? 2. "Well," says one, "supposing that is done, how can we ask Christ hard questions?" You may ask anything of Him just the same as if you could see Him. 3. "But," you say, "if I ask of Him, how will He answer me?" Do not expect that He will answer you in a dream, or by any vocal sound. He has spoken all you need to know in this Book. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Questions answered:*—What were these questions? They may have been riddles like the one which the story of Samson recalls. Asking riddles was a common pastime amongst the ancients, especially the Arabs. Still, it is hardly likely that a sensible queen would have journeyed all the way from Arabia to Judæa merely to have a game of conundrums. More probably she did so in order to get a solution of mental and moral difficulties of what we call the enigmas of life. A thoughtful, earnest woman she was, no doubt; perplexed by the problems of her day, as some of us are with those of ours, and she felt that it would be a relief to talk them over with one wiser than herself. There is a greater than Solomon, whom we can prove with hard questions with whom we can commune of all that is in our hearts. Have we done so? If not, we cannot say that our doubts are unanswerable. A correspondent wrote to Canon Liddon: "The only thing that now attaches me at all to Christianity is that it alone of the systems of thought with which I come into contact seems to give a working answer to two questions: 'Whence am I?' and 'Whither am I going?' All else is dark, all else at least uncertain." Many of us are attached to Christianity for the same reason. We have proved its Founder with hard questions, and our creed has simplified itself into some such form as this: "About God, the soul, a future life, the sin and sorrow of the world—about such matters as these I know little, but Christ knows much, and any conclusion that was good enough for Him in reference to them is good enough for me." The German philosopher, Kant, tells us that there are three questions which mankind has always been asking: "What can I know?" "What shall I do?" and "For what may I hope?" What answer does He who called Himself the Way, the Truth and the Life give to these questions? Some persons, says Bishop Butler, "upon pretence of the light of nature, avowedly reject all revelation as in its very nature incredible." Things have changed since Butler's day. Few now think that the light of nature is sufficient; with most of us it is Christ or nothing. We have come to see that the objections made to Christianity may be urged with equal force against natural religion—that the difficulty, for instance, of accounting on the supposition of a good Creator for the origin and continuance of evil in the world ought to be felt by the Deist far more than by the Christian because the latter has a theory of redemption to offer which at any rate professes to reconcile God's preknowledge of evil with His wisdom, power, and goodness. This, together with the history and present condition of the Church of Christ, makes it easier to be a Christian than a Deist or Theist. But here comes the Agnostic, and he says to humanity, with its recurring questions, "Do not ask yourself or any one else what you can know about God, the soul, and a future state. These matters are unknowable, and you had better be humble, as I am, and acknowledge the fact." In reference to this state of mind it may be remarked that we can only assert the unknown to be unknowable on the assumption—surely, anything but an humble one—that we know all that can be known. If it be true that God cannot be known by man, it will be the last truth which man will ever learn. I heard lately an intelligent, sympathetic woman remark that there is no being in the Universe she so much pities as God, for if He has a heart, she said, He must feel terribly the responsibility of creating such a world as this. That God does feel for the sorrows of the world and does admit responsibility in the matter He proved when He gave His Son to die for it. What more could

He have done for His vineyard? There is the pathos of a beautiful simplicity in those words in Genesis, "It repented the Lord God, and grieved Him at the heart." May there not have been some contrariness in the nature of things which it was as impossible for even Him to prevent, as it would be to make two and two five instead of four? May it not be said, for instance, in all reverence, that even God could not create a virtuous being without the discipline of trial—the very idea involving a contradiction? Plutarch tells us that Alexander, King of Macedon, used to say that he loved and revered his teacher Aristotle, as much as if he had been his own father, because if to the one he owed his life, to the other he owed his power of living well. What is it that we do not owe in this second respect to our Saviour? No Solomon has answered as He has the hard question, "What shall we do?" This is admitted even by those who do not accept the full measure of Christ's teaching. John Stuart Mill, for instance, has observed that it would not be easy, even for an unbeliever, to find a better translation of virtue from the abstract to the concrete than to endeavour so to live that Christ would approve our life. In any moral difficulty we can and we should ask ourselves, "What would Christ have me to do in this matter?" But Christ does more than enable us to perceive and know what things we ought to do. He gives us grace and power faithfully to fulfil the same. In this He differs from merely earthly teachers. They are like a man standing on the shore showing a drowning man how the arms should be moved in swimming. Jesus Christ rescues the drowning person, or at least gives him a helping hand, as He did to Peter when that apostle began to sink. Lord Tennyson, in the biography of his father, tells us that the late Poet Laureate had a measureless admiration for the Sermon on the Mount, and for the parables; "perfection beyond compare," he called them. At the same time he used to express his conviction that "Christianity with its Divine morality, but without the central figure of Christ, the Son of Man, would become cold, and that it is fatal for religion to lose its warmth." The question for what may we hope when the few years of life's fitful fever here on earth are over is answered by Christ as no mere man, though as wise as Solomon, could answer it. Apart from Christ we could not know whether death were a door or a wall; a spreading of wings to soar or the folding of pinions for ever. Before Christ's coming the human body was thought of as a mere instrument made use of by the soul, and no part of man's true self. The soul was considered to be free only when at death it was disunited from it, and became the "shade" of ancient classical poetry. This was a very shadowy belief, and one that physical research entirely contradicts. The fuller discoveries in modern days of the action and reaction of body and soul, of the need of physical machinery, not only for act and word, but even for thought, have shown that the body is a part of man's true self. In this matter Christianity agrees with science. It teaches the resurrection of the body, or that there will be a continued existence of soul and organism, that in the next world the soul will not be unclothed, but clothed upon. Jesus Christ is the Head and Representative of our race, and by rising from the dead Himself He brought life and incorruption out of the haze of speculation into the calm, clear light of fact. (*E. J. Hardy, M.A.*) *How to act when perplexed*:—We very often puzzle ourselves, and tug and strain. Dr. Arnold, of Rugby, used to say that his mind could lie as quietly before a confessed mystery as in the presence of a discovered truth. It would be better for us if we cultivated more such serene trust as Dr. Arnold's. In the nature of things there must be mystery. Certainly there is such a thing as limit to our capacity. Certainly, therefore, the action and the knowledge of a limitless God must wear frequently a misty look to us. Certainly the conjoining of revealed truth into an exact and harmonious system may be a piece of work quite beyond our simply finite powers. The truths do conjoin, but at a point so far beyond the range of our finite vision that we cannot see their marriage. What, then, are we to do? Grasp firmly both of the revealed truths, and where the point of their conjoining runs up beyond the region of our finite capacity, wait lowlily and trust steadily. (*Homiletic Review.*) *Christ the revealer of truth*:—The greatness of the ancient world culminated in Socrates and Plato, and the greatness of Socrates and Plato culminated in their power to ask questions, and not in their power to answer them. The ancient world started problems; it remained for the new world to solve them. Herein lies one of the vital differences between the wise men of the East and the West and the founder of Christianity; they were mere seekers after truth—He was its revealer. (*Cynddylon Jones.*)

Ver. 2. She came to Jerusalem with . . . camels that bare spices.—*A gospel of sweet spices* :—1. All theologians agree in making Solomon a type of Christ, and in making the Queen of Sheba a type of every truth-seeker; and I will take the responsibility of saying that all the spikenard, and cassia, and frankincense which the Queen of Sheba brought to King Solomon is mightily suggestive of the sweet spices of our holy religion. Christianity is not a collection of sharp technicalities, and angular facts, and chronological tables, and dry statistics. Our religion is compared to frankincense and to cassia, but never to nightshade. It is a bundle of myrrh. It is a dash of holy light. It is a sparkle of cool fountains. It is an opening of opaline gates. It is a collection of spices. Would God that we were as wise in taking spices to our Divine King as Queen Balkis was wise in taking the spices to the earthly Solomon. 2. We need to put more spice and enlivenment in our religious teaching; whether it be in the prayer-meeting, or in the Sunday school, or in the church. We ministers need more fresh air and sunshine in our lungs, and our heart, and our head. Do you wonder that the world is so far from being converted when you find so little vivacity in the pulpit and in the pew? We want, like the Lord, to plant in our sermons and exhortations more lilies of the field. In other words, we want more cinnamon and less gristle. Let this be so in all the different departments of work to which the Lord calls us. Let us be plain. Let us be earnest. When we talk to the people in a vernacular they can understand, they will be very glad to come and receive the truth we present. Would to God that Queen Balkis would drive her spice-laden dromedaries into all our sermons and prayer-meeting exhortations. 3. More than that, we want more life and spice in our Christian work. The poor do not want so much to be groaned over as sung to. With the bread and medicines and garments you give them, let there be an accompaniment of smiles and brisk encouragement. 4. Religion is sweetness and perfume, and spikenard, and saffron, and cinnamon, and cassia, and frankincense, and all sweet spices together. Just put it on the stand beside the pillow of sickness. It catches in the curtains and per umes the stifling air. It sweetens the cup of bitter medicine, and throws a glow on the gloom of the turned lattice. It is a balm for the aching side, and a soft bandage for the temple stung with pain. It lifted Samuel Rutherford into a revelry of spiritual delight, while he was in physical agonies. It helped Richard Baxter until, in the midst of such a complication of diseases as perhaps no other man ever suffered, he wrote *The Saint's Everlasting Rest.* And it poured light upon John Bunyan's dungeon,—the light of the shining gate of the shining city. And it is good for rheumatism, and for neuralgia, and for low spirits, and for consumption; it is the catholicon for all disorders. Yes, it will heal all your sorrows. Some one could not understand why an old German Christian scholar used to be always so calm, and happy, and hopeful, when he had so many trials, and sicknesses, and ailments. A man secreted himself in the house. He said "I mean to watch this old scholar and Christian"; and he saw the old Christian man go to his room and sit down on the chair beside the stand, and open the Bible and begin to read. He read on and on, chapter after chapter, hour after hour, until his face was all aglow with the tidings from Heaven, and when the clock struck twelve, he arose, and shut his Bible, and said "Blessed Lord, we are on the same old terms yet. Good-night. Good-night." (*T. De Witt Talmage, D.D.*) She communed with him of all that was in her heart.—*Heart-communing* :—I. WE OUGHT TO COMMUNE WITH JESUS OF ALL THAT IS IN OUR HEART. 1. Tell Jesus all that is in your heart, for neglect of intercourse with Christ, of the most intimate kind, is ungenerous towards him. 2. And we must tell him all that is in our heart, because to conceal anything from so true a friend betrays the sad fact that there is something wrong to be concealed. 3. If we cannot tell Jesus all that is in our heart, it shows a want of confidence in His love, or His sympathy, or His wisdom, or His power. 4. I am quite certain that if you will carry out the plan I am commending to you, it will bring you great ease of mind; whereas, if you do not, you will continue to have much uneasiness. 5. If you do not come to Jesus and commune with Him of all that is in your heart, you will lose His counsel and help, and the comfort that comes from them. 6. Sometimes our habit of reticence towards Jesus is aggravated by our eagerness to tell our troubles to others. In the time of trial we often imitate King Asa, who, when he was sick, "sought not to the Lord, but to the physicians." II. WE NEED NOT CEASE COMMUNING WITH CHRIST FOR WANT OF TOPICS. 1. There are, first, your sorrows. 2. Then, also, tell him your joys, for He can have as much true

fellowship with the joyous as with the sad. 3. You may also go to Jesus and tell Him all about your service. 4. Then, next, go and tell Jesus all your plans. 5. When you have any successes, go and tell Him. The seventy disciples returned to Jesus with joy, saying, "Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through Thy name." 6. And when you have any failures,—when your hopes are disappointed,—go and tell it all to Jesus. 7. Tell Him all your desires. If thou desirest anything that thou oughtest to desire, and mayest desire, let Him know it. Tell Him also all your fears. Tell Him that you are afraid of falling. 8. Tell Him all your loves. III. WE SHALL NEVER CEASE COMMUNING WITH CHRIST FOR WANT OF REASONS. 1. For, first, it is most ennobling to have fellowship with the Son of God; "and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ." 2. It is also highly beneficial to commune with Christ. 3. How consoling it is to do this! You forget your griefs while you commune with Him. How sanctifying it is! A man cannot take delight in sin while he walks with Christ. How delightful it is, too, to commune with Jesus! There is no other joy that is at all comparable with it, and it prepares us for the higher joys above. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

Vers. 4–9. **And when the Queen of Sheba had seen all Solomon's wisdom.** *The Queen of the South* versus *the men of this generation*:—1. When the Queen of Sheba came to Jerusalem she did not come to find fault, she did not come to drive away whatever she might see by an envious or jealous, or petulant or unbelieving, questioning disposition. She evidently was prepared for a feast, and she got it. Come dull, come with the blinds pulled down and the shutters up, and you will go away thus. I think that element is in the gospel, and the other side of it is—come with the pure spirit, and you will get the pure blessing. Come expecting nothing, and you will get nothing. What is nothing? Nothing is what you get in church, for you came for it. Oh, come expecting! Although the preacher may be very dull and very flat, the Lord will remember you, and the Lord will remember Himself, and before you or I are aware, through His grace, our hearts may be made like the chariots of Amminadab! Sometimes the Lord comes with wonderful suddenness, just because there are people sitting here who are worth their room, and He cannot disappoint them. 2. And Solomon told her all her questions. There was not anything hid, or secret thing, which he told her not. And if this woman came from the uttermost ends of the earth, to speak of hard questions, so may we well come to the heavenly Solomon. Which of us has not his hard question—your torturing question, that tortures your own soul; your question that you can get no answer to anywhere else? Oh, what deep hard questions, I had almost said, are natural to our minds when we begin just to reflect and to think ever so little! Whom am I? Where am I going? Yes, there are hard questions. Come to Christ with them! I despise no man's researches and no man's science, but as the truth of the heavenly Solomon is in me, and is loved by me, I trust I have increasingly a most healthy and perfect contempt for their contempt of the Christ of God. Let us all be dowered with the hate of their hate, the scorn of their scorn. Ay, come to Him who is a greater than Solomon, and He will answer the hard questions. 3. Further, "And when the Queen of Sheba had seen of Solomon's wisdom," &c. "When she had seen,"—what? "When she had seen all Solomon's wisdom, and the house that he had built." Have you seen the heavenly Solomon's house? That is to say, have you seen His person? He is fairer than the sons of men. You never saw His like. Think of His Godhead, and think of His manhood, and think of the perfect way in which these two are joined together. There He is walking by the Lake of Galilee, a man among men; and yet the eternal glory of the Godhead is in that man from Nazareth. This is the house that the Father built for Him: this human frame, and this human flesh, and this human nature of ours; think of that! Who—what architect piled a house like the house that God's Son dwelt in and will dwell in for ever and ever? The Eternal in the human; think of it! So like ourselves after a human plan, and after a human model, bone of our bone; else we never could understand Him. His glory would just be a blinding blur and blaze that would reveal nothing to us. But God built Christ's person a second Adam; "bone of our bone, flesh of our flesh," and yet so high and towering and over-topping, so broad and wide, like us, and yet so unlike us. 4. "And the sitting of his servants and the attendance of his ministers, and their apparel." When she saw that, then as the eighth verse says, she broke out, "Happy are thy men,

happy are these thy servants that stand continually before thee and hear thy wisdom." Oh, believer, I want to re-echo the Queen of Sheba's word, spoken in that far-distant day! Dost thou know the Son of God? Hast thou come into the household of faith? Art thou His, and in such close relationship with Him, that thou art yielding thyself, body, soul, and spirit, a living sacrifice and help, for His service and glory? Then hear this word: Happy art thou. Rejoice, oh, man; rejoice, oh, believer; lift up the hands that hang down, and the feeble knees! Wherefore art thou moping and sighing and groaning, and for ever hanging thy head like a bulrush? What! in the presence of such a King wilt thou dare to mope and sigh? What! wilt thou sit down at such banquet as this, and begin with a soiled, tear-stained face? "Why art thou cast down, oh, my soul, and why art thou disquieted within me?" If thou art the close servant of this King of kings and Lord of lords, be more like your work; look as if a great honour and glory had suddenly and unexpectedly come to one who was a bond-slave till this Christ, by His truth and wisdom and grace, redeemed and made thee anew, and gave thee a place in His house for ever and ever. "The meat of His table." Have you thought of that. And what a splendid table! and the dishes on the table! and the meat in the dishes! You could not have translated the menu card if you had got a king's ransom. And you tell about it to your children, and it has filled your whole soul, and your memory, and your imagination. Well, well, if that is in the things of life, and it is genuine, and it is legitimate, there is a good thing in it—that, man, that is in religion. The meat of His table; think of it. Look at the dishes on that table! Look at the abundance provided to that people, not of the corporal and carnal kind, but the abundant feast for your reason, for your conscience, for your heart! Look at the piles that are there, the things you need, absolutely need, to fill your soul! Look at the wine and bread of heaven; look at the grace, look at the pardon! In this mountain doth the Lord make for all people a feast of fat things; of wines upon the lees! Look at the delicacies as well as the essentials! Look—look—all things in Christ that the heart can possibly conceive. "The meat of His table, and the sitting of His servants, and the attendance of His ministers, and their apparel." The world can show great things in dress, and so can the Church; so can Christ. Oh, poor man, poor woman, poor preacher, let us only get a look at ourselves as we are reflected in some of those flashing mirrors in the banqueting-hall of Christ's love and grace, and we will see something in the way of magnificent apparel! Clothed upon with what? With Christ Himself. With wonderful grace and power He that comes puts Himself, as a flowing garment, right over every soul into allegiance with Him. 5. There is one thing more to notice that took the heart out of the Queen of Sheba. "The ascent by which Solomon went up into the house of the Lord." She was almost overcome; heart and flesh began just a little to reel and stagger at the sight of this material splendour. What is the ascent to the house of the Lord? When I think of the ascent by which He has gone up to the temple of the Lord; that is to say, when I think of Christ's resurrection, the splendid staircase by which, O Lord, Thou hast ascended on high; when I see Christ's resurrection; when I gaze up that shining stairway, then glories upon glories burst in upon mind and heart and imagination. "Thou hast ascended up on high, Thou hast led captivity captive!" Surely, when that magnificent stairway was open, when Christ ascended to the highest glory, then the angels and archangels burst forth, "Lift up your heads, oh ye gates, and be ye lifted up, ye everlasting doors, and let the King of Glory come in." Again I charge you, again I charge myself, look—Behold the glories of the Lamb! Look at your ascended Lord, see His resurrection glory; see His resurrection magnificence, and never let your eyes shut to it again, never. Now, what are we going to say of all this? Oh, it is a pity to criticise, but when one thinks of how people creep and crawl into God's house and sit with their hands in their pockets, and then creep and crawl out again, and begin to grumble; and instead of saying, "Blessed, blessed! Happy, happy! Oh, my Saviour! Oh, His wisdom! Oh, the depths of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God, how unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out; may His name endure for ever, and last as long as the sun;" —no, instead of that, you drag yourself out, and what can you grumble at, and what can you find fault with, and how dark and dreary can you look! May it not be so! (*J. M'Neill*). *The wisdom of Solomon*:—Good was the quest of the earnest queen, and great was Solomon, whose wisdom she sought to hear; but far better the yearning for the "wisdom from above," as the Son of God is

"greater" than the earthly son of David. I. WISDOM IS WORTHY OF DILIGENT PURSUIT. 1. Wisdom does not come unsought. The Balearic mothers hang their children's food on the limbs of trees, and they must go hungry until they can bring them down with the bow. So God lets the vein of gold look through but not lie open upon the rock. He puts the star-depths within reach of the telescope, but not of the naked eye. The secrets of Nature are given up to the wit and not to the listlessness of men. "The clouds may drop down titles and estates," but "wisdom must be bought." In vain, however, is "the price of wisdom in the hand of a fool," if he have "no heart to it." 2. Wisdom is the principal thing." All else is appendage. Dean Stanley says, our success in life depends not only on a right perspective—that is seeing great things as great—but on a right order—that is, seeking first things first. In vain does the rich man "lay up much goods for many years" for his "soul," if he has not first made certain that he will have a "soul" beyond to-night. Wisdom "held (even) in her left hand riches and honour" for Solomon. She, and not they, made him known in "the uttermost parts of the earth." 3. Wisdom is akin to piety. It is the righteousness of the mind as that is the righteousness of heart and life. The wise man knows the truth, the religious man does the truth. And this is practical wisdom; for all sin is folly. The sinner breaks himself upon or grinds himself to powder under the rock which is always in the way, and on which the wise man builds. True science is no more at right angles with true religion than the multiplication table with honest dealing. II. THE TRULY WISE ARE TRULY GREAT. 1. He had a rare acquaintance with the facts of Nature, with "trees" and "herbs" and "fowls" and "creeping things" and "fishes." 2. He "knew" better than most "what was in man." His writings show ample knowledge of affairs and of the subtler agencies by which men are affected. 3. He had "largeness of heart." His large intercourse with other peoples had brought breadth of view and deliberateness. His utterances are neither provincial nor ephemeral; they are the fruit of judgment, not of passion, and so belong to all men in all times. 4. He had an eminently quick and penetrative glance. He did not look round the circumference, but shot at once to the centre. III. THE EARTHLY IS BUT THE SHADOW OF THE TRUE. Commendable as was the zeal of the queen, and splendid as were the attainments of the king, there were manifest flaws in both, for—1. Her notion of the nature and function of wisdom was low. Her supreme test was the ability to answer "hard questions," and when her riddles were mastered she was satisfied. 2. The wisdom of Solomon could not save him from ruin. All worldly wisdom is fallible, being limited in scope to the inductions of experience, and narrow in appeal, since it points mainly to prudential motives. The "wise are taken in their own craftiness"; wise in the abstract and for others, they are blind and weak for themselves. 3. In his old age he pronounced it "vanity" and pointed beyond. (*J. B. Thomas, D.D.*) *The worth of wisdom*:—We may regard the Queen of Sheba as a woman who paid a great price for wisdom. I. THE SENSE IN WHICH WISDOM IS OPEN TO US ALL. 1. The objects of nature are about us; human life is spent in our presence; we need but the open eye, the hearing ear, the understanding mind, and we shall be wise in that direction. 2. The record of revealed religion, of Divine truth, is to be had for a few pence. 3. Jesus Christ, who Himself is the wisdom of God, is offering Himself to us as our Saviour, our Friend, our Guide, if we will give Him our heart, if we will take His hand. 4. Eternal life, with all that it includes, both here and hereafter, is "the gift of God" (Rom. vi. 23). II. THE SENSE IN WHICH IT IS COSTLY. 1. Much of the practical wisdom of life is only to be gained from a suffering experience. We buy them at the counter of experience. 2. The fixed persuasion of the Divine origin of the Christian faith is often only to be reached after the upbreaking of early confidence; after painful and perplexing doubt; after earnest and prolonged inquiry; after prayerful waiting. With much tribulation many spirits enter the kingdom of truth. 3. Entrance on our Christian course is often attended with inward strife or outward loss. 4. Attainment of the loftier heights of wisdom is the result of patient effort, of sacred thought, of fervent prayer, of self-sacrifice. For we can only see God with the pure heart (Matt. v. 8). Only love understands love; nothing but spiritual excellency will appreciate spiritual beauty. "Only the good discern the good." III. THE SUPREME WORTH OF WISDOM. (*Anon.*)

Ver. 5. The meat of his table, and the sitting of his servants.—*At the king's table*:—"To be carved for at table by a great prince would be counted as great a

favour as the meal itself. To take outward blessings out of God's hand, to see that He remembereth us, and sendeth in our provision at every turn; this endeareth the mercy, and increaseth our delight therein." What, indeed, would most men give if they could say, "The queen herself carved for me, and was most anxious that I should be well supplied"? But each believer has the Lord Himself for his Provider. He loads our table, and fills our cup. Providence is no other than God providing. He measures out our joys, weighs our sorrows, appoints our labours, and selects our trials. There is no morsel on the saint's plate which is not of the Lord's carving, unless he has been so foolish as to put forth his hand unto iniquity. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *The king and his servants*:—Those who entertain a king reckon upon receiving his train. It is not fit that he should come alone. So those who receive Jesus by faith into their hearts, receive also His Church, His ministers, His Word, and His cause. They take the Saviour and all His belongings. As the old proverb hath it, "Love me, love my dog," so they love all who belong to Jesus for their Lord's sake. Where Jesus comes with pardon, He brings all the graces with Him and we are right glad to entertain them all: not only faith, but love, hope, patience, courage, zeal, and the whole band of virtues. It would be idle to say, "Christ is in me," if none of the graces of His Spirit lodged within our souls. (*Ibid.*) His ascent by which he went up into the house of the Lord.—*Ascent to worship*:—There are no such steps as these to be found anywhere in the world. A step to honour, a step to riches, a step to worldly glory, these are everywhere, but what are these to the steps by which men do ascend to the house of the Lord. He then that entereth into the house of the Lord is an ascending man; as it is said of Moses, he went up into the mount of God. It is ascending to go into the house of God. The world believes not this; they think it is going downward to go up to the house of God; but they are in a horrible mistake. The steps then by which men go up into the temple are, and ought to be, opposed to those which men take to their lusts and empty glories. Hence such steps are said not only to decline from God, but to take hold of the path to death and hell (Ps. xliv. 18; Prov. ii. 18, v. 5, vii. 25–27). (*John Bunyan.*)

Ver. 7. Howbeit I believed not the words until I came.—*Seeing and believing*:—This Queen of Sheba would not rest content with secondhand knowledge. Her example is worth following. Never rest content with secondhand knowledge. The great crisis is past, and the Christian life begins in its full beauty and strength when hearing gives place to seeing and the glory of the living Christ becomes a present fact and the governing factor in the daily life. There is something lacking in your experience unless you can say, "Mine eyes have seen." It is the eternal distinction between the world and the Church, the children of the age and the children of eternity. Have you thus seen the Son? Has the glory of Jesus been so revealed to you as to capture your heart and deprive sin and the world of their power to allure you? Or is your knowledge of Jesus Christ still secondhand, unconvincing, unsatisfying, ineffectual? We take this Queen of Sheba then as a model seeker after truth, one of those sincere and genuine souls of whom Jesus said, "Every one that is of the truth heareth My voice." I. SHE WAS TRUE TO THE NEEDS OF HER OWN HEART. As a great queen, she might easily have become engrossed in State affairs or in the pleasures of court life. But she would not allow even the din of an empire to drown the voice of her own heart. Spiritual suicide is seriously urged in some quarters as the ideal of true religion. People are urged to forget all about their own souls, and care or pretend to care for other people only. This Queen of Sheba put everything else aside until her inner life had been put right. For though a queen she was not satisfied. Questions kept coming before her which she dared not set aside and could not answer. II. THIS QUEEN OF SHEBA PROVED HER SINCERITY BY MAKING A PERSONAL INQUIRY. No man can put another's questions, for no man can read another's heart. You can never be saved by proxy. The hunger of your heart will never be met until you make personal application to Jesus Christ. And you must take trouble over it. Those who never put themselves to any trouble seldom get their questions answered. Of course you can hear the gospel without travelling 1500 miles. But with many there is a barrier between them and Jesus Christ more difficult to overcome than 1500 miles of space. It is the barrier of nearly 1900 years. The Bible seems such ancient history. It deals with a state of society so different to ours. It is an Eastern book wearing an Eastern dress, and its teaching is full of reference to Jewish customs and ideas. The education which can perfectly under-

stand Tennyson or Browning is often utterly at a loss in reading the New Testament. Those who would find Christ in the Bible must take real pains to master the history of Genesis and Exodus and the types of Leviticus, or they will never understand either the Gospels or the Epistles. You might as well expect to understand the differential calculus by the light of Nature as think to understand the Bible without giving years to patient systematic study of it. When the word of God was rare and precious, men studied it and meditated upon it night and day. Now that the Bible is in everybody's hands men think they know it because they can quote a few odd verses, though they have taken no pains to master its deep teaching. They will not take the trouble to make a personal inquiry. Certainly the Queen of Sheba will rise and condemn all such. III. THIS QUEEN WAS GENUINELY TRUE IN HER PRIVATE INTERVIEW WITH SOLOMON. "She communed with him of all that was in her heart." She had not meant to do this. Her questions had been carefully prepared, all couched in general terms and in the third person. How can one explain this? How can one answer this? How should one act under these circumstances? But when she came to Solomon it was no longer "How can one?" but "How can I?" She felt at once that her disguise was penetrated. Solomon read her heart and drew out with perfect tact all her personal longing and unrest. Do be true in your dealings with God. Never attempt to wear a mask in God's presence. As soon as you really draw near to God you find out that you are personally involved. You are the guilty culprit needing propitiation and forgiveness, you are the sick and helpless one needing the Good Physician's touch. You can never have a satisfactory interview with God until you take your right place. IV. THE QUEEN OF SHEBA WAS TRUE IN THE CONFESSION SHE MADE OF HER FORMER UNBELIEF. She was a sincere, candid, and whole-hearted seeker, but she was an unbeliever when she came to Jerusalem. Such unbelief is most wholesome. It is the unbelief of those who are staggered at the greatness of the gospel message. Have you ever been thus staggered? Has it come home to you as the greatest wonder in the world that God should love sinners? Have you ever when listening to the joyful tidings of a Saviour able to save to the uttermost, of a God willing to forgive and forget all your sins, of a throne of grace to which all needy souls may flee for succour, said in your heart, "It is too good to be true, I cannot believe it"? Solomon was not vexed when the Queen of Sheba said, "I believed not the words." It is the blind unbelief that sees no glory in redeeming love that deserves rebuke, not the weak faith that is so dazzled by it that it can hardly believe it to be true. (*F. S. Webster, M.A.*) *Truth seeking*:—I. THAT RUMOUR AS TO TRUTH SHOULD LEAD US TO INQUIRE AS TO ITS REALITY. How many are content with the mere rumour or report of what has transpired. It does not do to be content with hearsay; there must be some endeavour to learn the truth for ourselves. Listening must result in action. When we have heard, we must seek personal acquaintance with the facts. II. THAT THE REALITIES RELATING TO TRUTH WILL PROVE GREATER THAN THE RUMOURS. 1. If our pursuits arise out of our curiosity, until it becomes an anxiety to gather knowledge, we shall never fail to acquire more than we sought. The retailing of impressions is never the same as the possession of experience—the one is infinitely richer than the other can indicate. 2. Nothing that may be told us about Jesus Christ can equal what we shall know when we have been to Him for ourselves. The eye of the soul must behold His glory before His greatness and His beauty can be appreciated and understood. Thus nothing that can be written about Him ever seems to equal what the soul, when given up to Him, has experienced of His love. 3. There are some things which in their recital seem to transcend belief. If the account of them has stimulated inquiry, then any latent scepticism with which the facts may have been treated is beneficial—we are making the right use of doubt when we are looking out for the truth. Personal experience is the best criterion of truth. (*C. R. Gardner.*) *The visit of the queen*:—I. Learn first from this subject what a beautiful thing it is when SOCIAL POSITION AND WEALTH SURRENDER THEMSELVES TO GOD. If there are those here who have been favoured of fortune, or, as I might better put it, favoured of God, surrender all you have, and all you expect to be, to the Lord, who blessed this Queen of Sheba. Certainly you are not ashamed to be found in this queen's company. I am glad that Christ has had His imperial friends in all ages. Elizabeth Christina, Queen of Prussia; Marie Feoderovna, Queen of Russia; Marie, Empress of France; Helena, the imperial mother of Constantine;

Arcadia, from her great fortunes, building public baths at Constantinople, and toiling for the elevation of the masses; Queen Clotilda leading her husband and three thousand of his armed warriors to Christian baptism; Elizabeth of Burgundy giving her jewelled glove to a beggar, and scattering great fortunes among the distressed; Prince Albert singing "Rock of Ages" in Windsor Castle; and Queen Victoria incognito reading the Scriptures to a dying pauper. Again—II. WHAT IS EARNESTNESS IN THE SEARCH OF TRUTH. Do you know where Sheba was? It was in Abyssinia, or some say in the southern part of Arabia Felix. In either case it was a great way off from Jerusalem. To get from there to Jerusalem she had to cross a country infested with bandits, and go across blistering deserts. When I see that caravan dust-covered, weary, and exhausted, trudging on across the desert and among the bandits, until it reaches Jerusalem, I say, "There is an earnest seeker after the truth." But you want the truth to come to you; you do not want to go to it. There are people who fold their arms and say, "I am ready to become a Christian at any time; if I am to be saved, I shall be saved; and if I am to be lost, I shall be lost." A man who says that, and keeps on saying it, will be lost. Jerusalem will never come to you; you must go to Jerusalem. The religion of the Lord Jesus Christ will not come to you; you must go and get religion. Bring out the camels; put on all the sweet spices, all the treasures of the heart's affection; start for the throne. Goad on the camels! Jerusalem will never come to you; you must go to Jerusalem. Take the kingdom of heaven by violence. Urge on the camels. Again—III. RELIGION IS A SURPRISE TO ANYBODY THAT GETS IT. This story of the new religion in Jerusalem, and of the glory of King Solomon, who was a type of Christ—that story rolls on and rolls on, and is told by every traveller coming back from Jerusalem. Religion is always a surprise to any one that gets it. The story of grace—an old story. Apostles preached it with rattle of chain; martyrs declared it with arm of fire; death-beds have affirmed it with visions of glory, and ministers of religion have sounded it through the lanes, and the highways, and the chapels, and the cathedrals. It has been cut into stone with chisel, and spread on the canvas with pencil; and it has been recited in the doxology of great congregations. And yet when a man first comes to look upon the palace of God's mercy, and to see the royalty of Christ, and the wealth of His banquet, and the luxuriance of His attendants, and the loveliness of His face, and the joy of His service, he exclaims with prayers, with tears, with songs, with triumph, "The half—the half was not told me!" (*T. De Witt Talmage, D.D.*) *The reality beyond the report*:—A brief enumeration and invoice of some of the departments of Christian truth and life. 1. First among these riches of grace should be named the life-giving, everlasting book which we call the Bible. As to its certainty, completeness, and power "not half has been told." 2. Not half has been told by poet, artist, or preacher concerning the wisdom, power, and love of God in the created universe. God's world as well as His Word should be studied. "Nature is Christian and preaches to us." 3. Not a tithe has been told of the glory of the words, works, and life of Christ. 4. The most sanguine saint has scarcely dreamed of the power of the gospel to save, yea, "even to the uttermost." *Modern Miracles*, such as Leila Thompson writes of, should become common occurrences. 5. Not half has been told of the blessedness and possibilities of Christian experience;—"exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think" (Eph. iii. 20). 6. How faint our conception of the golden opportunities of Christian activity and usefulness. 7. And who can delineate, who can tabulate the attractions of heaven? That is the true home of the soul, the ideal society and kingdom without fault, the Church without spot or blemish. The exclusion of all evil, the inclusion of all that is pure, true, and good. (*P. Ross Parish.*) *Exceeding all thought*:—The love of God passeth knowledge; man cannot grasp it. When Columbus landed in America, he did not know that he had discovered a vast continent. He knew nothing about its vast rivers, its great lakes and valleys. What did he know about the wealth of minerals hidden in its mountains? So it will take us all our days to discover the love of God; its depths we know nothing about. We shall need all eternity to fathom it. *Realisers alone can appreciate*:—The queen's words and gifts suggest wide truths. Her experience that the reality transcended all report and expectation is repeated in every heart that faithfully clings to Jesus and brings its questions and doubts to Him. "He must be loved ere that to you He will seem worthy of your love." Just as, after all the speech of poets from the beginning of the world, the sweetness of love has not been told, and every heart that is blessed by it feels

that it is more than all words can declare; so, after all that saints and evangelists have said of Christ, each soul which enters into faithful fellowship with Him finds that "the half was not told" it. No painter can put the melting glories of sunset on his canvas. No description can give one who has not heard it a true impression of the majesty and pathos of Beethoven's thunderous music. Nothing but tasting for ourselves can tell us how good the Lord is. Even here Jesus gives "to eat of the hidden manna," and the secrets of His love are only known by the loving heart. No man who rejects Him knows rightly Him whom he rejects. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*)

Ver. 9. Because the Lord loved Israel for ever, therefore made he thee king.—*Christ appointed King*:—The Queen of Sheba acknowledgeth and praiseth Jehovah, as the author of Solomon's advancement. She observes, that it was an evidence of God's special regard to him, that he was set on the throne of Israel, God's peculiar people. And she further observes, that it was a token of God's great and everlasting love to Israel, that so wise and pious a prince was set over them. With much more justice may these words be applied to our Lord Jesus Christ, whom God hath "set as king, on His holy hill Zion." Let us see how the words are applicable to Christ, and what reason we have to bless God for so wise and gracious an appointment. I. THE DESIGNATION OR APPOINTMENT OF CHRIST TO BE HEAD AND KING OF THE CHURCH WAS AN EVIDENT INSTANCE OF GOD'S DELIGHT IN HIM. Thus a great honour was conferred upon the Son of God. It is an honour to be any way employed for God. In this view the work of Christian ministers is honourable, and it becomes them to magnify their office. It is an honour to the angels to be the ministers of God and do His pleasure. But signal honour was conferred upon Christ, in being invested with so great authority, exalted to so extensive a dominion, and having all things put under His feet. This was an evidence that He loved righteousness and hated iniquity, that God thus exalted Him. II. THE APPOINTMENT OF CHRIST TO BE KING OF THE CHURCH, IS A REMARKABLE INSTANCE OF GOD'S LOVE TO MAN. Because He loved the world, He made Jesus Christ king, to do justice and judgment. It was an evidence of God's love to men, that He appointed prophets and teachers to instruct and reclaim an ignorant, idolatrous, sinful world. But in proportion to the excellency of the persons commissioned to this work, will the Divine love and grace be apparent. It is a merciful scheme, to rescue the world from ignorance, superstition and vice; to erect a spiritual kingdom in it; to destroy the works of the devil, and to deliver men from the worst slavery. But to manifest His Son for this purpose, was an astonishing instance of mercy. The perfections of His nature, and especially His moral excellences, qualify Him for this work. (*J. Orton.*)

Ver. 10. Behold, the half was not told me.—*The religious function of language*:—This incident brings before us the penalties of a great reputation. When once a man rouses popular expectation, he is its slave. Every one of his acts must henceforth be titanic, every casual word must flash and smite like one of the bolts of Jupiter. Obscurity has this advantage, that it gives us a chance of being appraised at our worth, and even of occasionally surpassing our fame. Those who aspire to notoriety should be sure of their resources, otherwise they will rise only to fall, and their end will be worse than their beginning. For it is not given to many to surpass a great reputation, as Solomon did in his contest of wit with the Queen of Sheba. It is to the credit of this queenly woman, however, that her admiration outgrew her envy; and her grateful homage took the shape of warm praise and costly gifts. It is not often, as I have said, that language fails to do justice to human greatness; but there are certain great, ultimate realities in the universe of God of which it is true that the half of their glory hath never been told. I. THE FUNCTION OF LANGUAGE. And first let me try to make clear what language is, and its function in relation to thought. Language is a distinctively human endowment, and its place is to form a bridge between one mind and another, so that the ideas, emotions, and intentions of one man may become known to his fellows, and that all may share the mind of each. Now, thoughts are, primarily, the reproductions of things; and since, in the far-off ages when language was first evolved, men's thoughts were almost exclusively of their physical surroundings and needs, we find that the fundamental words of every language are names of material objects or of the impressions made by them on the primitive, childlike mind. And when man's mental horizon widened, and his grasp of abstract ideas strengthened, instead of inventing new names for these higher operations of his mind, he linked each abstract thought to a physical symbol, and used for the

purpose the words already in vogue. It would surprise some of us, if we studied the matter, to find what a large proportion of our intellectual, moral, and religious vocabulary has physical roots. Right means straight; spirit means wind; transgression, the crossing of a line; supercilious, the lifting of an eyebrow. We still use the word heart to denote not only the physical organ, but the abstract emotions of love; and the word head, not only for that part of the body, but for the intellectual processes which are supposed to go on within it. And here we have the first suggestion of both the beauty and the imperfection of language as a vehicle of mind. It is beautiful because, by the use of natural imagery, we employ nature as a symbol of the spiritual world of which she is the antechamber, or as an index finger, pointing away from herself into the deeper mysteries of the spiritual world. Language helps us to realise that these mountains and clouds, these trees and flowers, this earth, sky, sea, still have more to say when they have told us all about their physical properties. Words are the symbol of spirit, and every natural object they connote is a letter of some Divine word. Thus the more clearly we have it proved to us that language is sense-born, the more spiritual are its uses seen to be; for leaf, bud, fruit, horizon-line, mountain-masses, the foam of ocean waves, the eternal stars that blossom nightly in the skies, are one vast illuminated scroll on which, in letters of crimson and gold, green and midnight blackness, is spread the message of the Eternal. But now, if the physical basis of language is a part of its beauty and its power, it is also a source of its weakness. There is no philosopher who does not acknowledge that matter and mind are the most widely sundered realities in the universe. The spiritual and the material are at opposite poles of our experience. Yet we have to use the one not only to illustrate but to express the other. The spiritual has to clothe itself in a material image in order to be communicable at all. Our souls are like prisoners in the cell of sense, able to communicate with each other only through narrow loopholes of eye and ear. And so in dealing with the deep realities of the spirit we are never able to express exactly what we think and feel. Every great sentence is an unsuccessful effort to body forth an elusive thought in words too clumsy to hold it. Always more is meant than meets the ear. We feel like Titans who have strength and passion enough to sport with the hills and to fling mountains at one another, but who can lay their hands on nothing better than a handful of pebbles on which to exercise their muscle. So much greater is sense than body, so much finer is spirit than matter! Human language can no more compass the spiritual riches and vastness of life than a narrow inlet can contain the ocean. And so I might go on to show, by one line of example after another, how it is that in spiritual matters—where the mysteries of the soul, and God, and the life eternal brood darkly within and around us—when we have done what we can to compass them in thought and describe them in words, "the half hath not been told." Far beyond our reach still stretch the heaving waters, still breaks the eastern dawn, still rise the everlasting snows. If this is fairly clear, some important conclusions follow. II. THE MYSTERY OF RELIGION. The first conclusion we are led to is this—we can understand the great difference between the clear results of scientific thought and the uncertain and debatable questions that still try us in our theologies. The plain man—he who is now usually called the "man in the street"—and the scientific thinker are constantly throwing it up to us theologians and preachers, that while they see their way so clearly in practical things, and in dealing with the laws of matter, we never seem to quite agree for long about anything. That is quite true, but the inference which they draw is wrong. If religious thought dealt with material realities, our conclusions about it would be as clear, I suppose, as the rule of three or the theorems of Euclid. But it deals not with matter, which provides the basis of language, but with spirit, which can only use the clumsy instrument lent to it as best it may. This being so, it is unreasonable to expect the same exactitude of thought in theology as in science. We are battling with realities too big for us, and with weapons forged in a furnace too cold for the work. Man, it is true, is made for science, for he is the creature of time and space; and we know something of his surroundings, and it is well. But still more, man is made for religion, for he is the child of eternity, and in the mighty things of the spirit we find our truest and highest life; and so, even at the cost of being condemned to an endless quest, we must battle with the mystery which is also the glamour of religion. And we cannot leave spiritual realities alone for another reason. For in this higher quest and battle there is a supreme reward. Here are the supreme problems and hopes and aspirations of our soul. In this dim, tremendous region

we find our truest selves we find each other, we find God, our Maker and Redeemer. And in wrestling with the realities of religion, the soul grows, realises its true self, comes to its own, makes progress in all that is holy and good, as in no other way. 2. And here I would point out an obvious but perpetual snare that lies in the path of all religious thinkers. That is the danger of thinking that any one can reach finality in theologic thought. How often has this warning been forgotten, or not even recognised? It is the besetting sin of theologians, and of Church councils, and of all system-mongers, to imagine that they have reached the ultimate goal of religious certainty. Too often, in their hurry to reach religious rest, they have treated the high subject-matter of theology—God, the soul, personality, atonement—as if it could be tabulated like the contents of a museum. But museums are for dead things, not for living souls. Let creeds have their place. Let them rise as spontaneous utterances of the common faith of Christian communities—as the changing forms the ever living and growing tree of truth. But directly they claim to be more; directly, to change the figure, they profess to be other than the high-water marks of devout thought, and to be binding on the mind and heart of living men, they become dams, keeping back the swelling tide; they are prison walls that exclude the light and air. The only worthy attitude towards the great mysteries of the spiritual life, then, is one of humility. 3. A word in conclusion to the plain man. Where does he come in in this big, wide, mysterious world of religious thought? He has had no training in exact thinking; he is no logician; he has no time, and less inclination, to dive into the perplexing problems of theology. Yet he has his place and function in religion. For it is his business to live great truths even though he may not be able to understand them. He may have a reasonable faith, even though he may not be able to give full reasons for his faith. And we must always remember that but for the plain, ordinary, devout, and more or less unthinking Christian man or woman the theologian's occupation would be gone. For it is the common everyday religious experience and consciousness that provides the theologian with his material. Therefore, let us all live the life. Let us put religion to the test. Let us "follow the gleam." Let us pray and wrestle and fight with temptation. Let us in the strength of God and by His redeeming grace follow Jesus, and put His promises to the proof. (*E. Griffith-Jones, B.A.*)

Ver. 12. **The king made of the almug-trees pillars for the house of the Lord.**—*Strength and sweetness*:—Pillars and psalteries were made out of the same timber, and in this respect we may take the tree of the text as a symbol of the strength and sweetness which inhere in the Christian character. I. THE FIRST CHARACTERISTIC OF THE TRUE CHRISTIAN IS STRENGTH. "Pillars for the house of the Lord, and for the king's house." The almug-tree was close in grain, firm in fibre, only such wood being fit for pillars. The people of God must first be strong in spirit. Our Lord Himself was distinguished by sublime faith and bravery, and His apostles and disciples shared His supreme power and confidence, bearing triumphantly immense strain and suffering, as a pillar its tremendous burden. Another point to be noted is this: in the various catalogues of the virtues which occur in the New Testament the virile virtues are as amply recognised as in the most austere ethical systems of Greece and Rome. And this strength of conviction, sternness of principle, and constancy of purpose, this force of character and conduct, formed the basis of the beauty and sweetness which distinguished the primitive Christians. 1. Without strength there is no beauty of life. Without depth and thoroughness character does not attain to sweetness. We say, "Beauty is skin deep"; but really this is a consolation of philosophy in which the consolation is much in excess of the philosophy, for beauty springs from the roots and foundations of things. The loveliness of the earth is maintained by forces which operate below the surface; the bloom of the human face is secured by the health of organs concealed in the depths of the body; and the loveliness and sweetness of character spring from the soul—spring from the soul when pure and strong. Without firmness and vigour character does not attain beauty and sweetness. Reality, solidity, and energy underlie all satisfying winsomeness of manner and conduct. Hidden within the leaves of the tree are stout boughs, beneath the blooming skin hide well-knit bones, the greensward rests on granite, and the basis of flowers is not rarely iron and flint. So genuine charm of character is impossible without strong conscientiousness, serious views, unbending principle, firm, pure, uncompromising purity of mind and heart. There is no short and easy way to grace of life; its

secret is the strength and integrity of the soul. Seeking to make life sweet, first make your heart sound, for out of radical, organic purity blossoms real courtesy, gentleness, and the manifold graces of life. "Whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely." The pure comes before the lovely. Do not patch, powder, and paint the face, get health at the centre; do not coax your dress, get a better figure; do not revise your etiquette, be transformed in the spirit of your mind. Depth, strength, vitality, freedom, harmony, love, joyfulness are the roots of beautiful Christian character. "Out of the heart are the issues of life," and in the love of God, the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, do we find the secret of satisfying and abiding sweetness. 2. As there is no real grace of life without strength, so there is no efficient service without it. "He made pillars for the house of the Lord." Men efficient for high holy service in God's Church must possess positive qualities, elements of strength and stability, independence of thought, uprightness of character, steadfastness of faith, and power of patience and sacrifice. Fussy men in all the denominations seem to be pillars, but in fact are poor creatures of little moment. The secret of efficiency is reality. Lath-painted iron is soon detected; without sincerity, strength, and self-forgetfulness service is shallow and sterile. "And he made pillars for the king's house." If we are to render real and permanent service to the State, we shall need the strong, fine qualities of the Christian character. We cannot make a pillar of bamboo: there must be something in it, something of heart of oak, solidity of marble, texture of iron and bronze. He who would become a pillar in Church or State must first be a pillar in deed and truth. "Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out." II. THE COMPLEMENTARY CHARACTERISTIC OF TRUE CHRISTIAN CHARACTER IS SWEETNESS, "Harps also and psalteries for singers." Fragrance and music proceeded from the wood that furnished the pillars: so Christian character suggests harmoniousness, smoothness, sweetness. Mr. St. John, the naturalist, relates that when exploring the recesses of the Highlands he frequently came into contact with men living in the rude Highland way, and at first he thought them morose, unobservant, stupid; but as he continued to live amongst them the truth appeared: they appreciated their majestic hills and lakes more keenly than their visitor did, in their soul was the love of beauty, and in their lips the law of kindness; they were really thinkers, poets, saints. Many Christians who ruffle the polite and provoke the reproach of æstheticism are really the gentlest and loveliest of men and women. Forbidding to the hasty glance and superficial judgment of dilettantism, it is the exterior only that is uncut and unpolished, which is, after all, infinitely better than social refinement hiding moral rottenness. Harriet Martineau, writing about the disappointing revelation of the true Walter Scott in Lockhart's Life, ends with this just reflection: "If great men fall below our expectation, let it be remembered that there is another point of view from which the matter should be looked at—that we gain thus a new sense of the glory and beauty of virtue and incorruptibleness in the humble matter of everyday life." Dexterous exhibitors introduce into the flower-show blooms which put to shame their modest neighbours, but when the prizes are adjudged these pretentious flowers are rejected when it is discovered that their leaves and petals are artificial and doctored; so the great Day will doom many a manufactured article, and confer the final reward upon flowers of the field whose whole charm was truth and sweetness. We, therefore, magnify conscience at every turn, and think to show how much we have of it by ignoring the obligations of grace, and blurring the beauty of holiness whenever it tends to reveal itself. A perverse conception of the Puritan deforms our sanctuaries, impoverishes our worship, and blights our character. In the house study to express the sweetness of Christian character. One of the finest aspects of modern times is the art that is finding its way into lowly homes, and giving the touch of grace to every humblest, household, necessary thing. "The aim of art is to express the sublime in the trivial," said J. F. Millet; and if in the home we reveal our sublime faith and righteousness in doing gracefully many little things, the home will be far happier than it sometimes is. In the business sphere is much need of sweetness. Nowhere is gentleness more effective than in the stern world of toil and trade. Silk is said to be stronger than steel, and the graciousness of a strong man renders him as nearly omnipotent as a mortal may come. The lyre ought to figure in business as well as the firm, hard columns; and fine behaviour and persuasive speech in those who rule, without a moment's surrender of right and authority, are more influential than any outburst of vulgar

wrath. Instead of a cudgel try a psaltery. In our entire intercourse with general society we need to cultivate this grace of spirit and life. A sceptical writer in a current magazine argues that the old evidences for Christianity are utterly discredited, and that the one consideration which now gives sanction and effectiveness to its claim is "the beauty of the character of Jesus Christ." We do not for a moment agree with this contention; but it is undeniable that no evidence for Christianity is so commanding as that drawn from the incomparable, transcending loveliness of our Lord. (*W. L. Watkinson.*)

Ver. 22. **The king had at sea a navy of Tharshish.**—*The lessons of prosperity:*—The period of Solomon's reign was the period of the greatest commercial, political, and intellectual splendour that Israel knew. I. THE ADVANTAGES OF A STATE OF PROSPERITY. Christians are sometimes disposed to look with suspicion on wealth and greatness. Lord Bacon said that prosperity was the blessing of the Old Testament, and adversity the blessing of the New Testament. But this aphorism may very easily be misunderstood. Prosperity is the blessing of the New Testament as much as it is of the Old. In its proper nature, in its legitimate influence, in its Divine design, prosperity must be regarded as a blessing. One of Emerson's ancestors was in the habit of praying that none of his posterity might be rich. It is easy to imagine a man offering a prayer like that for his posterity, although it would be rather a shabby thing to do, but you will hardly find a sane man offering such a prayer for himself. Terrestrial prosperity is still one of God's benedictions. 1. Prosperity is a blessing, as it widens the range of our physical enjoyments. 2. Prosperity is a blessing, as it gives freer play to man's intellectual powers, and renders possible a fuller intellectual life. Elihu Burritt laments that the English peasant is a blind painter, creating on the hillside glorious pictures in green and gold, but strangely insensible to the splendour he creates. Ruskin complains that few people ever look at the sky. Emerson writes ruefully that whilst he was strolling on the beach in raptures with the azure and spiritual sea, the tanned fishermen had nothing to say to one another except, "How's fish?" And most of our intellectual masters lash us for our neglect of the sights and sounds of a glorious creation. 3. Prosperity is a blessing, as it gives opportunity for the expression of highest character. Prosperity properly used, truly sanctified, brings character to its very highest and brightest manifestations. Humility is never more lovely than when it is clothed in scarlet; moderation is never more impressive than when it sits at banquets; simplicity is never more delightful than when it dwells amid magnificence; purity is never more divine than when its white robes are seen in palaces; gentleness and kindness are never more touching than when displayed by the great and powerful. 4. Prosperity is a blessing, as it enables us to act out more fully our noblest aspirations. It is quite true that many who promise large things when their ship of gold comes in, nevertheless on the arrival of that gallant bark forthwith put the whole cargo into bonded stores, but noble souls rejoice exceedingly to find their power increased to glorify God in the service of humanity. II. THE PERILS OF A STATE OF PROSPERITY. It has its perils to a nation. The ships of Solomon brought ruin; so did the ships of Carthage, of Greece, of Rome; so did the rich argosies of Spain. The other day in Whitby they showed me the ruins of the grand old Abbey. On the south aspect the wall is much more dilapidated than on the north, showing, it would seem, that the light of the sun had been more destructive than all the wild storms of the North Sea. So the sun of prosperity has often proved more fatal to empire than the bitterest tempests of danger and want and conflict. There is plenty of morbid matter everywhere, and the sun of prosperity soon develops it disastrously enough. Prosperity has its perils to the individual. It is said that birds of paradise are often captured through their becoming intoxicated with the spice forests on which they alight, and we have all seen fine men and women, with the light of heaven in their eye and the beauty of holiness in their life, fall miserable victims to prosperity. Some rich men degenerate fearfully, so do some popular men. On the American prairies travellers are sometimes brought to a standstill through the wheels of their chariots becoming locked by the flowers which grow there so profusely; and many a noble pilgrim to heaven has been hindered, brought to a fatal halt, by the golden and purple flowers of fortune which Heaven, in its goodness, had made to spring in his path. The lower good may destroy the higher good; as a man becomes richer in gold he may become poorer in faith, in virtue, in charity, in hope. Christianity gives us

a social ideal of prime interest and efficacy. The curse of the old civilisations was selfishness. "I made me great works; I builded me houses; I planted me vineyards," &c. (Eccles. ii. 4–9). The I's stand up like a regiment of Grenadiers. Here was the curse of the old nations, in the flush of their power and prosperity. Here is the curse of much of the prosperity of to-day. Selfishness is the rock on which rich argosies suffer shipwreck, the rock on which the grandeur of nations and the happiness of men go to pieces. Christ changes the I into we, the my into our. Christianity brings us the larger measure of moral power. (*W. L. Watkinson.*)

CHAPTER XI.

VERS. 1–13. **But King Solomon loved many strange women.**—*Solomon's sin:*—A few years ago two paintings were exhibited in this country, which attracted wide attention. One of them represented Rome in the height of her splendour, and the other in the depths of her decay. The contrast was melancholy and instructive. One could not repress the question as he turned from one scene to the other, What led to this mighty change? It was the old story, which every great nation thus far in history has illustrated sooner or later, that of a secret, slow-moving moral decay, preceding and occasioning social upheaval and ruin. We might fancy that a similar picture might be drawn between two periods in the history of Israel—one, that of the latter part of Solomon's reign, when there was an unsurpassed wealth and glory and power in the holy city: and the other, only a few years later, when the kingdom was rent and the sceptre had departed. I. SOLOMON'S SIN. This was no ordinary transgression of an ordinary evil-doer. It was not the general unworthiness of his life—an unworthiness that pertains to every child of Adam. It was a distinct thing. It had an historical character—Solomon's sin. We now ask briefly in what did it consist? 1. It was not, primarily, sensuality. That was only the outworking of an inner and far deeper evil. The simple and honest historian tells us that he loved many strange women, thus breaking an explicit command to the chosen people. Now the ultimate evil against which Moses was led to legislate in this particular was not polygamy nor licentiousness, but the idolatry which the foreigner would inevitably introduce. Among these women he found an intellectual stimulus and gratification. They were more brilliant than Jewish maidens, and their culture was a distinct and attractive element in the royal pursuit of "wisdom." For in that great experiment of life Solomon commanded the most costly and varied forms of pleasure and of learning. All the world—all there was in man—was made tributary to the object held up in view. 2. Nor was it pure and simple idolatry. That also was a symptom of inner disorder and weakness. It was like polygamy, a form only of heart-wandering from God. He built high places for his wives, which burned incense and offered sacrifices to their gods. There is not the slightest evidence that he ever abandoned the worship of Jehovah, or set up images of him as Jeroboam did, or that he ever lost faith in Jehovah as the one and only true God. But his heart was not perfect; and this was the sin beneath his sensuality and idolatry. He began to waver by tolerating the false religions of his wives. He was liberalised in religion. If people were only sincere, he may have said, no matter what they worship. If they live up to their light, it is well enough without letting in more light. Who knows absolute truth? Who can say, "Thus saith the Lord"? Who, thought this king, sets himself up to say that there is only one narrow way of life? The religious world of to-day finds its most subtle and powerful temptation in the general revolt against restraint and constraint. It takes now one form and now another. It comes as a protest against what is called narrowness, even in construing the terms of the gospel upon which men enter into life. The world has always seen the insolence of greatness against the law of God. It sees now the same insolence under cover of the grace of God. But whatever we may discover in science or art, whatever gains we may make in the domain of reason, there can be nothing essentially new in the way of life by Jesus Christ. The data of theology are all furnished, and have been for ages. The path of life is just as narrow and just as broad as ever. God demands the whole heart, because anything less is nothing at all to Him. Half even of Solomon's great soul is worthless in the kingdom of heaven. II. SOLOMON'S

PUNISHMENT. We observe at once that it was of a character to be peculiarly felt by one of his great endowments and brilliant opportunities. It came very slowly. In the first place, although we do not find it here recorded, he lived long enough to see that his splendid experiment in life had been a miserable failure. Vanity of vanities, all is vanity, was his sad verdict. His "world" passed away and the lust of it. He ceased to desire. Punishment came in another form. He was unable to transmit the kingdom to his posterity; and such men have an eye to the future, in which their greatness will come to be fully seen and honoured. They are above the narrowest lines of an ignorant selfishness. They would make coming ages tributary to themselves. To Solomon, who had been made acquainted with the mind of God towards Israel, there must have been a profound sorrow in the certainty that his failure carried the nation down with himself. Those in authority hold a peculiar place in the divine economy, because their defections entail such widespread disasters. Hence God rightly exacts extraordinary punishments of them. (*Monday Club Sermons.*) *Solomon's sin:* Solomon had come to the throne of the most important kingdom then on the earth at the youthful age of twenty. Proud of his sublime eminence and flattered by the obsequious attentions of foreign nations, he formed matrimonial alliances with the royal families of them all until a harem of seven hundred wives disgraced the Holy City. These heathen wives required their heathen chapels and chaplains, and the complaisant king surrounded Jerusalem with temples for the enactment of pagan idolatries. To the king, prematurely old, at length comes the prophetic voice declaring the wrath of Jehovah upon the apostate kingdom, the doom, however, softened in two particulars for the sake of David, who, though long dead, still benefited the land by the effects of his piety. The rending of the kingdom from the Solomonian line should not take place till Solomon himself had passed away, and then a remnant (Judah) should remain with the regular succession. I. A LIFE OF LUXURY IS PERILOUS TO THE SOUL. God intended man to labour even when he was in Paradise. The idler is practically opposing a fundamental law of the Most High. An abundance of wealth tempts a man to a life of pleasure, which is selfish idleness, and when official power is added to the wealth the flood-gates of sin are opened in the soul in almost all cases. He who, if busy in an honest trade or profession, would readily throw off the approaches of gross sin by his preoccupation. Solomon was a luxurious idler. He was not a statesman busying himself for the good of his country. The young man who has independent resources is in a very hazardous position. He is tempted to play the Solomon on his own small scale. The sin, however, is just as great, and the ruin as profound. He seeks associates who will amuse him, and, instead of growing in spiritual wisdom and strength, he descends rapidly to the plane of stupid carnality. II. THE WAY OF WICKEDNESS IS A STEEP DESCENT. Solomon found the step from Pharaoh's daughter to Pharaoh's god a very easy one. Youth flatters itself with an idea of its own strength, and plans a descent into sin only a short distance, when it will return and walk in the path of righteousness. It is the silly bird caught in the fowler's net. Association with evil blunts the perception of the evil, and the young man is soon found apologising for the wickedness he formerly condemned. III. THE WRATH OF GOD IS A DREAD REALITY. Men of loose life love to harp on the truth that God is love, and then interpret love as amiable weakness. It was the Divine anger with Solomon and his corrupted people which rent Israel asunder and raised up formidable foes to destroy the prosperity of the land. Our text is perfectly plain on that head. IV. THE SOURCE OF THE FALSE LIFE IS IN THE FALSE HEART. Solomon's heart was not perfect with the Lord God. The word "perfect" here is not to be understood as referring to the character, but to the motive and intent. A perfect character never existed on earth since man fell, except the Lord Jesus. Solomon's religion was a political and fashionable affair. A heart devoted to God had nothing to do with it. He would pay outward respect to the religion of the land, but with the grand liberality of a worldly heart he would be so broad in his views and so free in his charity as to welcome all religions into his realm and capital. It is simply the heart that is not perfect with God pursuing its course of nature. It is the heart that can indulge in sin to any extent, and yet speak eloquently on universal love and the excellent glory of humanity in general. The so called philosophy of the day is brimful of it, destroying the idea of the personality of God in order that it may make room for a universal righteousness, sin being eliminated as an old wife's fable. It is the religion that is lauded on the stage by depraved men

and women, because it finds no fault with their defilement. This is the Solomonian religion, which is set over against the Davidic religion in our text. (*H. Crosby, D.D.*) *Solomon's fall* :—I. THE NATURE OF SOLOMON'S FALL. 1. It was gradual. No man becomes wholly abandoned or altogether depraved at once; formation of character is, both in its construction and destruction, a gradual process. (1) Because of the power of conscience. (2) Because the Spirit strives. (3) Because the Mediator pleads, "Let it alone this year also." (4) Because a warning is oftentimes given. 2. It was sure. From bad to worse, like a stone rolling down a hill. II. THE CAUSES OF SOLOMON'S FALL. 1. The mixing of self-interest with God's service. He chose wives from nations with whom God had forbidden His people to intermarry; hence contagion from such a bad example. 1. The union of piety and superstition. III. THE CONSEQUENCES OF SOLOMON'S FALL. 2. It brought down God's displeasure. 2. It brought ruin on his kingdom. Even the sins of obscure men pass in their effects beyond the power of their perpetrators (as no man liveth, no man dieth, so no man sinneth to himself) but how much more the sins of the great ones of the earth! IV. THE LESSONS OF SOLOMON'S FALL. 1. Great opportunities bring great responsibilities, and such cannot be neglected with impunity. 2. Riches hinder access into the kingdom of God. Wealth applied to selfish ends carries no blessing, but hardens the heart and causes it to lose its hold upon God. (*C. E. E. Appleyard, B.A.*)

Ver. 4. **When Solomon was old.**—*An aged sinner* :—Colporteur Pantel of Marseilles once offered a Bible to an old man who angrily replied, "Wine is my god." "Indeed," said Pantel, "then let me tell you that you have not imitated your god." "What do you mean?" "Well, wine becomes better as it grows old, while you, as you have grown old, have become more wicked!" The man was taken aback by this reply. "Look here," he said, "I'll buy a Bible. It is least I can do after such an answer." (*British and Foreign Bible Society's Report*, 1902.) *Deterioration with years* :—A picture of a man who has grown in the wrong direction! Backwards—downwards! A bright morning ending in a stormy night. What are these snowy leaves which strew the ground? Perished buds and blossoms of holy character. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *Age reveals character* :—Age seems to take away the power of acting a character, even from those who have done so the most successfully during the main part of their lives. The real man will appear, at first fitfully, and then predominantly. Time spares the chiselled beauty of stone and marble, but makes sad havoc in plaster and stucco.

Ver. 6. **Solomon did evil in the sight of the Lord.**—*Solomon the brilliant failure* :—The character of Solomon is unique—one of the loftiest and saddest of the sacred volume. Grand in its stately strength and towering height—sad in its demoralisation and fall. A morning fair and bright as ever dawned on mortal vision—high noon golden and glowing, flashing its glories far and wide—an evening clouded and mournful, with wailing winds and muttering thunders. Is it not the type of many another life? What were the causes that produced this mournful decline, and overhung with darkest clouds the closing years of a life beginning with such high promise? We approach this question with the more eager interest, because the principles upon which character is built, and the influences effecting its demoralisation, are generically the same in all ages. Men are rotting inwardly to-day, and the pillars of their characters crumbling to decay, from the very same influences that wrought the ruin of Solomon. Moreover, this fact of the decline and fall of character, once lofty and apparently strong, is but the commonest occurrence in modern society. We do well to study its insidious causes. 1. First, then, the superior endowments of Solomon became a snare to him, as they are liable to prove to every gifted nature. Great talents involve great liabilities. Every being is subject to inexorable laws, which cannot be violated with impunity: God secures no man from the legitimate penalties of their violation. One of these laws is that which requires the improvement of talent as a necessary condition of increasing or even retaining it. When God gave Solomon that priceless largess of wisdom He did not exempt him from this law, nor take the work of preserving his character and insuring his ultimate well-being into his own hands. It is a fatal delusion that there is a mysterious gift of God, called Grace, which allows a man to sleep on the lap of some fair Delilah, without being shorn of the locks of his strength—a magic power that holds a man to the right against his own deliberate choice. 2. Another cause wrought with insidious influence to effect

his overthrow. Solomon was the dupe of that prince of deceptive devils, misnamed Policy. It was from motives of policy, doubtless, that he entered into alliance with Egypt's king; it was from motives of policy that he married the daughter of that king, and took to his bosom his first heathen wife. Did ever man or woman marry from policy—political, financial, or social interest—that in the end did not find it the most miserable policy that ever mortal pursued, yielding its bitter fruits of sorrow and sin? There is but one bond that can ever bind two human hearts together in union strong and holy enough for the marriage relation; and that golden bond is Love—true, pure, uncalculating, heaven-born love. 3. In estimating the causes of Solomon's decline, we must also remember the danger that attends great worldly prosperity. Human nature is too weak to bear, unharmed, great elevation. Dazzled and blinded by the splendour of rank and honour and power and wealth, man reels and falls from the giddy height. 4. But finally Solomon fell, a willing victim to the seductive charms of pleasure and carnal indulgence. One sentence of the Inspired Volume reveals to us this fatal cause: "Solomon loved many strange women: . . . his wives turned away his heart after other gods; and his heart was not perfect with the Lord his God." Of all the insidious, corrupting, dangerous influences that ever wrought the ruin of man, the influence of a bad woman is the most fatal and irremediable. How powerless are reason and learning to preserve character in the light of such a history as this! How weak is human nature in its best and strongest estate! Who can trust his own heart when such as Solomon fall? Can you, young man? Are you stronger, safer than he, leaning on that broken staff? Let us learn to beware of the beginnings of sin. Not suddenly did this mighty prince fall. Young man, take care that no worm secretly gnaws at the staff of support on which you lean. What of Solomon's final state? Saved or lost? The good God only knows. In the series of frescoes on the walls of the Campo Santo, at Pisa, he is represented, in the resurrection, as looking doubtfully to the right and to the left, not knowing on which side his lot will be cast. If he wrote the Book of Ecclesiastes, as it is probable he did, he saw at least the folly of his sins. Let us listen to the deep-toned voice of warning that comes to us from his inspired wisdom—sadly illustrated by his uninspired life—"Fear God, and keep His commandments." (*C. H. Payne, D.D.*) *Solomon's fall*:—I. NEITHER AGE NOR EXPERIENCE BRINGS ANY RELEASE TO A MAN FROM HIS EXPOSURE TO SIN. "For it came to pass, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods." There is no fool worse than an old fool. Wise man it was who said, "Count no one safe or happy till he dies." II. IT IS POSSIBLE FOR EVEN A DEVOUT MAN TO BECOME A PRACTICAL IDOLATER IN HIS SECRET HEART. "For Solomon went after Ashtoreth, the goddess of the Zidonians." We are solemnly warned against idols in our hearts, three times in one chapter, by a prophet. Idolatry is still a possible sin to dread. III. PROGRESS BY STEPS OF PERSISTENT ADVANCE INTO DEEPER SIN MAY ALWAYS BE EXPECTED WHEN ONE HAS TAKEN QUICK START AWAY FROM THE RIGHT AND TOWARDS WRONG. "Then did Solomon build a high place for Chemosh, the abomination of Moab," &c. There is nothing more to be feared than the unperceived inroad of what might be termed a little sin. The old parable relates that the trees of the forest once held a solemn parliament, wherein they consulted concerning the innumerable wrongs which the axe, first and last, had done unto them and their neighbours. They insisted that this dangerous implement of steel had no power of its own; and they therefore instantly passed an enactment that no tree should hereafter be allowed to furnish any blade with a helve on pain of being itself cut down to the root. So the axe journeyed through the forests, begging but a bit of wood from the oak, from the ash, from the cedar, from the elm, from even the willow and the poplar; but a stern denial met it at each turn; not one would lend it so much as a splinter from its branches. At last, it desired just this small indulgence: give it but a chip—a mere handle with which it could trim away useless boughs, or cut off briers and bushes, for such suckers, as was well known, only used up the juices of the ground; they always hindered the growth of any thrifty tree and obscured its fairness and beauty. The forest was impressed with such moderation in the argument; it agreed that the axe in this instance might be supplied with one fragment which a storm had riven from an unfortunate sapling—a mere little stick, lying there, which no one prized and no one dreaded. But the instant that keen edge of steel was fitted with any sort of a handle, it struck off the branch of a sturdy oak at a stroke, then hewed itself a new helve at its will; and down went the elms, over toppled the cedars, and the

hills grow bare as never before. The time for all defence was passed when the forest surrendered. IV. THE GUILT OF ALL TRANSGRESSION IS IN THE SIGHT OF A HOLY GOD AGGRAVATED BY PAST WARNINGS GIVEN. "And the Lord was angry with Solomon, because his heart was turned from the Lord God of Israel," &c. V. RETRIBUTION GATHERS UP THE ENTIRE HISTORY OF THE SINNER, EVEN IF IT IS DISCHARGED IN ONE ACT. "Wherefore the Lord said unto Solomon, Forasmuch as this is done of thee, and thou has not kept My covenant and My statutes which I have commanded thee, I will surely rend the kingdom from thee, and will give it to thy servant." Henceforward it would do no good for this rejected monarch to awake himself to paternal zeal, and try to build up the fortunes of his shattered realm for his children. It is often worth while to attempt to avert a great catastrophe; but one of the punishments sometimes inflicted for sin is the denial to the sinners of all success in after usefulness. VI. IT MAY BE POSSIBLE TO MISUNDERSTAND AND EVEN PERVERT GOD'S FORBEARANCE INTO EXCUSE FOR FURTHER SIN. "Notwithstanding, in thy days I will not do it for David thy father's sake: but I will rend it out of the hand of thy son. Howbeit, I will not rend away all the kingdom; but will give one tribe to thy son, for David My servant's sake, and for Jerusalem's sake which I have chosen." On the shore of eternal history stands this beacon-light for human warning. The wisest man in the world lived to behave like a fool! (*C. S. Robinson, D.D.*) *Solomon's life; its spiritual significance:*— I. THE CO-EXISTENCE OF GOOD AND EVIL IN THE SAME HUMAN SOUL. So long as we are in this world, this is more or less the case with the best of us; evil is not perhaps entirely subdued, until this "mortal puts on immortality." In heaven evil is not found in alliance with good in any heart, nor in hell is good found in alliance with evil. Their co-existence is only in the human heart, whilst here. This fact should always be recognised by us in estimating the characters of our fellow-men. A man is not to be pronounced utterly bad because he has committed a wrong, nor completely good because he has performed some virtuous deeds. "Who can understand his errors? Cleanse Thou us from secret faults." II. THE ENERGY OF THE DEGENERATING TENDENCY IN HUMAN NATURE. There seems to be in all men a something, call it original sin, depravity, or what you like, which urges to the wrong; a law in the members warring against the laws of the Spirit. You see this force in the case of Solomon. It was in him stronger than three things. 1. It was stronger than the influence of parental piety. 2. The degenerating force within him proved stronger even than his own religious convictions. 3. It proved stronger, moreover, than his own clearest conceptions of duty. III. THE UTTER INSUFFICIENCY OF ALL EARTHLY GOOD TO SATISFY THE MIND. "I said in my heart, go to now, I will prove thee with mirth, therefore enjoy pleasure: and behold this also is vanity." IV. THE SUPERIORITY OF TRUE THOUGHTS TO ALL THE OTHER PRODUCTIONS OF MAN. Solomon was an active man, and accomplished many material works while here; but what were they all compared with his thoughts contained in the Book of Proverbs? 1. What are they as to their utility? 2. What are they as to their duration? Where now is his throne of "ivory and gold"? &c. (*Homilist.*)

Vers. 7, 8. **Then did Solomon build an high place for Chemosh.**—*Solomon and toleration:*—1. Proverbs, it has been said, are "the wisdom of many and the wit of one," at least they are most often trustworthy exponents of a uniform experience. And there is a proverb which tells us that no one ever became thoroughly bad all at once. And so it was with Solomon; as the stream of his career sweeps by us in Holy Scripture, windows, as it were, are opened for us through which we gaze out on that sunny flood, so full of promise, carrying on its bosom such rich opportunities and varied treasures, and we note that as it gets wider it loses its pure beauty, as it gets deeper it parts with its simplicity. Here and there these glimpses into his life prepare us for a catastrophe. It requires a vast store of wisdom to keep a man unspoiled amidst popular applause. The power of wealth with all its opportunities may very easily sweep away the calmer dictates of a higher reason. Solomon is the liberal patron of error. He is not an idolater; it would not be fair to call him that. But as he would tell us, "he is no bigot," that the Zidonians and Moabites were sincere in what they believed and practised. That his first duty was to the empire, and to consolidate the acquisitions which he had made. After all, there is an element of truth underlying all religions—"All worships are true." Take care, Solomon! The next step is only too easily taken, which goes on to proclaim, "All worships are false." I suppose there is no

chapter in Church history which we look back upon with such unfeigned horror and humiliation as that which deals with religious persecution. We never shall forget the fires of Smithfield, or look with anything but disapproval at the stern and repressive violence of the Puritan Rebellion. At the same time it must be remembered that there is one thing which, if less repulsive, may be equally deadly in God's sight. Toleration, which springs from a real respect for our neighbour's convictions, is one thing; indifference, which does not feel strongly enough to oppose, is another. At the present moment we are oddly enough confronted with these two developments combining in their efforts to weaken religion. 2. But Solomon does not stop at undenominationalism. No one does. It is an impossible position. He settles down a step further into æstheticism—the worship of the beautiful, the luxurious, the fascinating. A protest against Ritualism is, no doubt, an excellent thing in which every intelligent Churchman should join, if we mean by the term a religion which consists of mere rites and ceremonies, void of real significance, subversive of the sterner realities of religious truth. There is always a tendency, in view of the extreme difficulty of religion, to put up with something easy, in which the heart and the intellect, and the better part of man, need of necessity have no share. Some people think they can saunter into heaven on a ceremony; or be wafted there on the wings of music; or be carried there on a text of the Bible; or be admitted without any trouble, if they sufficiently protest against somebody else. But the very essence of religion is intense personal exertion and personal devotion, and religion has always had to pay the penalty of this difficulty, which belongs to all true excellence, in the various shifts and substitutes invented by indolent humanity. Ritual, music, the accessories of Divine service, are utterly abhorrent unless they mean something. Solomon was not spreading religion when he erected his numerous shrines for the manifold superstitions of the East, and their attractive rites. He was degrading it, he was vitiating the religious instinct and depraving the religious sense. Do let us remember, dear brethren, that all the beauty, all the magnificence of the services of the Church, are for the honour and glory of God, and that if we fail to honour Him, fail to find Him, fail to worship Him, they only add to our own condemnation. 3. But the worship of æstheticism has no finality about it. It is a religion of butterflies after all, who flit from flower to flower, who expand in the sunshine and die in the frost, who are here to-day and are gone to-morrow. Ephemeral, creatures of a day! Do not suppose it, for one moment, if any of you have given up vital belief, if you have ceased to believe in God, that you will be able to go on finding religious satisfaction in beautiful sounds, and artistic sights; you will either get better, or you will get worse—and it is terribly easy to get worse. The end of Solomon's career is not encouraging; the best you can say of it is, that it is shrouded in gloom. It was an easy step from a worship of the beautiful to the nature-worship so-called, which was the distinguishing feature of so many of the cults which he imported to Jerusalem. There is a seamy side to many a renaissance, so-called, and there is a seamy side to much which is dignified now by the name of the love of the beautiful. Nature-worship in its simplest form, and apparently its least harmful form, takes the shape of the worship of what we take to be our own nature. It is startling to find how intensely people dislike anything in religion which is stern, or causes them trouble, or appeals to self-denial. This appears in all manner of little ways. Solomon erects his nature-shrine for the pent-up denizen of the city, at some little distance outside, and tells him that it is far better for him to go and worship God in the green fields, and among the hedgerows, or even on the river, than to shut himself up in a musty church in Jerusalem. He will tell him that "the Sabbath was made for man," and that to fill his lungs with pure air, and to scent the flowers and be cheerful, is the best worship which God seeks from him. And the worshipper of nature comes back with a tired body, a dissatisfied mind, and a starved soul, and believes that he has spent a happy Sunday. There, in the old temple at Jerusalem, are the double sacrifices and the long round of services, because those who have studied the mind of God believe that He requires on His day a certain proportion of our time, not the smallest contribution which a Christian can make, at the earliest possible hour in the morning, or the latest moment at night. And if they ask for happiness and enjoyment, they remember how Mary says, "He fills the hungry with good things," or how the Psalmist says that God "never fails them that seek Him." But Solomon turns his back. his wisdom departs from him, and he seeks for other gods. He is indifferent, and he calls it toleration. He is intolerant, and he calls

it religion. He dishonours the Church, and he thinks that he does God service. He becomes æsthetic, he is lingering now in the courts of the temple, he has turned his back on her realities, he is like a man who just stays a little longer to hear the anthem. He has turned his back, he is gone, he is worshipping nature, in all the downward gradations of that terrible cult. Wise Solomon! who began with building the temple, goes on by tolerating error, to become a besotted voluptuary, and to insult God. It is the history of many a soul, who has forgotten the lesson of his youth, who is false to his tradition, and falls below his own standard. "Seest thou a man wise in his own conceits? There is more hope of a fool, than of him." (*W. C. E. Newbolt, M.A.*) *The half-and-half man*:—Up to a certain point, being a true Christian is a terrible thing. The advantage lies in carrying it far beyond that point where fruit is to be reaped. As long as the nights are long and the days are short we have the stern certainties of winter; as long as the days are long and the nights are short we have the sweet, precious, genial hours of summer; but when the days and the nights are just about alike, and the equinox comes on, and light and dark strive for the mastery, that is the time for storms to rage. And so, in Christian experience, so long as the night is longest, you have the peace of darkness; and when the day is longest, you have the peace of light; but when the night and the day are of about the same length, and they strive to see which shall rule, that is the time for storms. The hardest way to live is to be half a Christian and half a sinner. The easiest way to live is to be wholly a sinner or wholly a Christian. Harmonise on one side or the other, if you want quiet. Take the middle ground, if you want perpetual gales. (*H. W. Beecher.*)

Ver. 12. Notwithstanding in thy days I will not do it.—*Solomon's sin*:—I. THE ACTION RELATED TO US. To appreciate it, we must consider (1) the greatness of the offence. Here was authority itself doing that which it ought to have prevented and punished; David's son departing from David's God; wisdom guilty of indescribable folly; a man conspicuously favoured (ver. 9), conspicuously disobedient; the appointed builder of Jehovah's temple building rival temples close by. Yet observe, in comparison with it (2) the lightness of the correction. The offender loses nothing of his power or renown. He has enemies (ver. 14, &c.), but they dare not attack him. There is not a loose stone in his throne till he dies. Only he is warned of the consequences to happen after his death; those consequences themselves, moreover, not being carried out to the full extent even then. Compare the case of pious Hezekiah, who acknowledged the "goodness" of God, when, for a less offence, he received a heavier stroke (2 Kings xx. 17–19). Just so it is God's "goodness" that is here revealed to us most (Rom. xi. 22). II. THE MOTIVE REVEALED TO US. Why this mercy shown in this instance? Only two reasons are mentioned. One had to do with Jerusalem (ver. 13), the place of Solomon's throne. God had chosen it for His dwelling-place, with great objects in view. The other motive (twice mentioned) has to do with Solomon's father. "For David's sake" the threatened evil was postponed till after his son's death; and even then, for the same "David's sake," it was not to be complete. See, finally, how all this encourages us in the hope of salvation through Christ. See how completely it is part of God's character to spare one man for another's sake; especially where they are so connected that they may be considered as one. Also, if He does thus for a sinner and a servant (as here), how much more for His Holy One (Acts ii. 27), His own Son, the Christ of God: (*W. S. Lewis, M. A.*) *Children honoured for their fathers' sake*:—Many peerages have been created in this realm which descend from generation to generation, with large estates, the gift of a generous nation, and why? Because this nation has received some signal benefits from one man and has been content to ennoble his heirs for ever for his sake. I do not think there was any error committed when Marlborough or Wellington were lifted to the peerage; having saved their country in war, it was right that they should be honoured in peace; and when for the sake of the parents perpetual estates were entailed upon their descendants, and honours in perpetuity conferred upon their sons, it was only acting according to the laws of gratitude. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

Vers. 14–22. And the Lord stirred up an adversary unto Solomon.—*Divine impulses*:—Is this an old story that has in it no modern pith or music, or is it our own life anticipated and set in strange lights? Does it not throw some light upon the unexplained restlessness which now and again comes over the spirit of

perhaps the quietest man? What is it that tugs at the heart and that says, "Come this way?" We are not sitting upon barren rocks, nor are we ploughing inhospitable and unresponding sand: we are in paradise: we have but to touch the ground and it blooms with flowers or teems with luscious fruit. And yet that same invisible hand keeps tugging at the heart, that same weird voice sustains its appeal in the reluctant, wonder-struck and unwilling ear—"Leave the gilded roof, leave the marble floor, leave the loaded table, leave the streams of ruddy or foaming wine; come away, come away." What is it that will not let us alone? I said, "I will die in my nest," and lo, it was torn to pieces. You cannot escape the religious element in life; you may shut your eyes, you may close your ears, you may learn the language of earth and the worse language of the pit, and you may exclude all outward religious ministries and appeals, but now and again there is a shaking in the life, a whisper in the ear, a strange quiver in the air, a face at the window, a quantity you cannot name. Then again, this incident shows us how impossible it is, sometimes, to give reasons for our action. Persons say to the Hadads who come round them, "Why do you leave Egypt?" and Hadad says, "I do not know." "O foolish man, are you going back to Edom, the memory of cruelty, shame and agony, without knowing why you are going back?" And poor Hadad can only answer, "Yes." And to the men who can give a reason for everything, Hadad's answer is a reply of insanity. Oh, happy is the man who has never to leave the paved pathway, who knows nothing of the pains of inspiration, the pangs of a high calling, the surprises of a Divine election! Yet not so happy, measured by the higher and larger scale; if he misses much pain, he misses much high delight; if he is commonplace on the one side, he is commonplace all through. Is it not better sometimes to be mad with inspiration, though afterwards there be collapse and suffering, than never to feel the Divine afflatus, and never to respond to the call of God? In the fourteenth verse of the chapter in which the narrative is recorded the whole secret is given. The Lord had stirred up the heart of Hadad against wicked Solomon. It was a Divine stirring, it was an impulse from heaven, it was the sound of a rushing mighty wind from the skies, a song without words, a ministry without articulation, a movement of the soul. Have you ever been in that case in any degree? I have, and persons have said to me, "Surely you can give us some reasons for going?" I have said, "Really, I cannot." "Well, but a sensible man always bases his conduct upon reason. Think of it and tell us what your reasons are, and they will relieve our minds, for our anxiety is very painful," and I have only had to say, "I cannot tell you anything more about it, but I must go." This narrative suggests the inquiry, How am I to know when I am stirred by Divine impulses? When the impulse moves you in the direction of loss, pain, and sacrifice, the probability is that the impulse is Divine. Now where is your stirring? Gone. I thought it would go. I have frightened many birds in the same way, and they have flown from the trees on which they had alighted, in chaffering crowds. Moses is called—to what? To hardship and difficulty, and much pain, and long provocation in the wilderness. Before him Abraham is called—to what? To a pilgrimage that has a beginning only that he can ascertain: what the explanation and conclusion of it will be he knoweth not: the impulse was Divine. Then I hear a dear old father-friend: now, what says he? Listen. "Howbeit, let me go, in any wise." Where to, dear father? "To the other country." What other country? "I have a desire to depart." What, to leave the old house at home, with all your children and grandchildren, and the garden, and the library, and the church—you have not a desire to depart, have you? "Yes. O that I had wings like a dove, for then I would flee away and be at rest. My Lord calls me, I must meet Him in the promised land." Ay, God sends that home-sickness over the heart when He wants to take us up. We begin to say, "I am much obliged to you for all your kindness; you have bestowed favours and honours upon me. God bless you, but—I want to go, to go home, to be at rest; I want to see God's heaven—let me go.

> "Hark! they whisper: angels say—
> Sister spirit, come away.

I want to go now. Lord, now lettest thou Thy servant depart in peace: I am ready; put in the sickle, cut me down and garner me in heaven." It is a Divine stirring: it is the beginning of immortality. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

Vers. 21–22. **When Hadad heard in Egypt that David slept with his fathers.**—*A few turns of a kaleidoscope:*—Let me use this text like a kaleidoscope, giving it three or four turns, and try to describe what I see. Dealing with the incident as it stands here, there is a lesson for kings and all that are in authority. And it is something like this: Do not abuse your power. "In wrath, remember mercy." When you have your enemy at the point of the sword, remember mercy even while you remember justice, and pay off old scores. The national lesson we might learn is, that if we will be over severe, if we will harass the Jews, for example, as all nations have more or less combined to do, God will spread the lap of His skirt over the Jews. "Vengeance is mine; I will repay." God likes to see justice done; but God will not have vindictive and sinful revenge, and He will spread the lap of His cloak over the Jews as He did over Hadad. God may find His executors of vengeance in the descendants of those with whom we deal too harshly, or our fathers before us, long, long ago. Ay, they will spread through your English cities and towns, and play the very mischief with you at voting times, and make the balance "kick the beam" in most undesirable and provoking fashion. We forget that God hates inhumanity, and God's heart repents Him for those who seem to be utterly trampled under foot, and denied the right to live. He has strange ways with Him, and He is worth watching. Therefore let mercy season justice. Then there is the same lesson, not now from a national, but from a private and personal point of view. Do not be vindictive. You may have power to-day, but use it mildly; let mercy season justice, for you do not know what may happen to yourself; and long after you are gone. The roots of this business are very deep, and go very far back. In your hour of power be patient even to the evil, lest you be betrayed into sinful abuse of power. As much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men. I know a man just now, and this is what has come to him. Years ago he was in a certain business, and he was strong and flourishing. But he dealt in a very high-handed and dictatorial manner with one under him. He cast him out, or forced him to flee. And now—it has taken some thirty years to do it, but thirty years have done it—now that man who was cast out—Hadad over again—Hadad to-day has destroyed his former master's business. He started a rival establishment, has got on and prospered, and things have so come about that he who was up is down, and he who was down is up. Therefore take care; and just because you have the ball at your foot, and you have only to kick it, kick it with discretion. Be magnanimous; the day may come when you may need all your friends. But there is a spiritual lesson. Hadad comes back to do mischief to Solomon, for he has heard things and drawn inferences. It has spread among the surrounding nations that the strength of Israel now is not so strong as it seems to be. It is far more pasteboard and stucco, than granite and marble. They come and afflict him whom erewhile they feared. So with individual men. Are there not men and women here to-day, and Solomon's history and danger is theirs? You are not what you seem to be. With all your credit and reputation, you are backslidden in heart. And these old sins, like vultures, are sharpening their beaks, and they are coming round upon you. For God's sake and thine own, take care: hie thee back to God, return to faith, and prayer, and penitence. But I want to use this text in an entirely different way. One cannot read this without wishing to apply it to a certain class of Gospel hearers in this land of ours, and very likely in this very church, to whom it may be useful. This is the time that a soul comes to when, known only to itself and to God, there comes across it yearning and discontent. You can hardly explain it to yourself, and do not like to speak about it to other people. This longing comes to you, not when you are young and struggling, but, mayhap, when you are in mid-manhood, or growing age. Ask your own heart, and it will teach you. Does it not ring responsive to my poor words this morning? It is Hadad before Pharaoh over again. The genuineness of that feeling, may be tested by this: the sacrifice it will involve. See what Hadad had to give up; see the risks he had to run. To become truly regenerate, sons of God will make a wrench. If you had become a true Christian years ago, it would have been, humanly speaking, kind of natural and easy. But now, for all these years, you have been away in exile. And you have got on, I don't deny it. But what, I repeat, is that yearning in your heart? Why are you not contented? Why can't you be at rest? Will it cost you something to put yourself right now, to go to Jesus, to become a Christian, to give up your world like Hadad, with its positions, and its honours, and its ambitions? Then all the more make

the wrench. Ah yes! Thank God for times like these. All through your boyhood, or girlhood, your open youth, your busy, bustling middle life, the world sufficed. Thank God for that dissatisfaction; it is a spur in your lazy sides to send you home. What is happening to you is what happened to Noah's dove. The raven could sit pecking at any corpse on the water, and find its satisfaction there. But doves are doves, and not carnivorous. The dove found no rest for the sole of its foot, and it winged its way back across the black hills of water, back to that great ship that came drifting slowly along. Back to yon window, which is a kind of frame for the face of weather-beaten old Noah, standing there with his hand stretched out so that the weary thing may light. So Christ Jesus comes to weary hearts in London to-day. And He holds out His hand and asks for weary worldlings to light upon it. He will take you into warmth, and light, and love, and peace, and an ark of safety that will ride all storms. Gleaming lightnings may flash past, the last judgment may thunder upon the world, all things be overwhelmed in the wrath that is coming, but your soul has reached its rest, its refuge, its abiding home. (*J. M'Neill.*) *Hadad: the pressure of destiny:*—David, and Joab the captain of the host of Israel, wrought great desolation in Edom; "for six months did Joab remain there with all Israel, until he had cut off every male in Edom." Amongst those who escaped was a little child, comparatively speaking, an infant member of the royal house. He was so little that he could not have made his escape alone, but he was taken care of by certain Edomites of his father's servants, and in their company he fled into Egypt. Pharaoh was very kind to his royal exile. "He gave him an house, and appointed him victuals, and gave him land." With growing years he came into growing favour, and by and by he married the sister of the queen of Egypt. It would seem, then, that he did well to escape from his own ill-treated country, and to put himself under the protection of the mighty and gracious Pharaoh. It came to pass, however, that Hadad (that is the name of the Edomite) said to Pharaoh, "I want to go home; let me depart, that I may go to mine own country." Pharaoh was astounded by the inquiry, and began to wonder whether Hadad had been unkindly treated in Egypt, and in the frankest manner he said, "What hast thou lacked with me, that, behold, thou seekest to go to thine own country?" A very proper question; to which Hadad appears to have returned an ungrateful and insufficient answer—"Nothing: howbeit let me go in any wise." You will find the secret in the fourteenth verse of the chapter:—"And the Lord stirred up an adversary unto Solomon, Hadad the Edomite: he was of the king's seed in Edom." It was a Divine stirring! It was a restlessness sent from God! It was a hunger created in the heart! 1. Men cannot always give an account of their impulses. We seem to have everything, yet we want something else. What that something else is, we perhaps seldom know, or if we do know, we cannot put the want into words. We have all Egypt, yet we are willing to leave it for Edom. 2. What we mistake, either in ourselves or in others, for mere restlessness may be the pressure of destiny. We blame some men roughly for desiring a change, and when we question the men themselves as to their reason, they tell us that they have been treated well, even handsomely, yet they want to go! Then we condemn them as unreasonable, and we predict many a judgment for them! Alas, how ignorant we are, and how cruel to one another! 3. We may judge of the value of our impulses by the self-denial imposed by their operation. Consider what Hadad had to lose! "Except a man deny himself and take up his cross daily," he cannot be moving in the Divine direction. Remember in the cases quoted David was impelled to war, and Samuel to make revelations which must have cost his heart no small strain. Are our impulses towards self-enjoyment? 4. Is it not by some such impulse that the good man meets death with a brave heart? How else could he leave loved ones, home, manifold enjoyment, and social honour? Yet he pines for heaven. "I have a desire to depart." "Oh that I had wings like a dove."

To thee, O dear, dear country,
Mine eyes their vigils keep.

God surely sends this home-sickness into our hearts when He is about to call us up higher. 5. Remember how possible it is to overrule our best impulses. Pharaoh said stop, Hadad begged to be allowed to go. Peter said, "That be far from thee, Lord," but Christ called him an offence, and drove him behind. "Grieve not the Spirit." "Quench not the Spirit." Is not the Spirit of Christ urging

every man to leave the Egypt of sinful bondage? "Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord." "Ye will not come unto me that ye might have life." (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *Hadad the Edomite (love of country)*:—This narrative of Hadad comes in as a short episode in the later days of King Solomon, when he was being punished for his defection. The story has an interest of its own. We wish to take this one feature—the love of country—and look at it as implanted in the human heart for a wise and Divine purpose, passing beyond this simple instance, and drawing whatever light we can from God's providence and Word. 1. The first remark we make is, that it is a feeling not only deep in our nature, as we do not need to show, but acknowledged and approved in the Bible. This has been denied, and some have blamed, while others have praised, the Book on this account; but whether it be to its blame or praise, the feeling is there. We cannot surely fail to perceive that the love of country was employed by God to build up the place He gave the Jewish people in preserving His truth in the long period of darkness, before the time came for the Gospel to go out into the world. Their love was drawn to it before they saw it as the land of Promise. But what purposes are served by this? There is one which may seem low enough to begin with, but which has its own importance. It is one of the ways by which God secures that the earth should be inhabited. There is a dispersive force in the world which began long ago, and which has been going on ever since, the spirit of adventure and energy which seeks action and change; so waste places are peopled and tilled. But there is needed not less an adhesive power to maintain what is gained. The world must have an anchor as well as a sail. Rocky Edom is dear as fertile Egypt, and bleak, storm-struck islands more than southern Edens. If it were not for this, wars for sunny spots would be more common than they are, and kindreds and peoples could not be gathered and held together to build up communities. But the building up of communities is a part of God's providential design. Each one in its own place brings out its own character, and, in the end, may be found to bring its own contribution to the interests of humanity. We may come to a higher view of this feeling when we think of its effect on the individual man. This love of the native soil has been one of the great springs of the poetry of the race; and whatever we may think of poetry ourselves, we cannot fail to see its power. God, who gives the bird wings for its safety and delight, has given man imagination. It is certainly His gift, if men would only use it for Him. And it can be said with truth that, apart from the region of the spirit itself, it is never more pure and purifying than when it takes for its subject the things of native land and home. 2. Another thought suggested by this feeling is that it leads to acts of great self-sacrifice and endeavour. Next to religion, there is probably nothing in human nature which has called out such a heroic spirit of martyrdom, or such long, persistent labour, as the love of native land. The grandest part of the history of nations has been the period when they have risen for independence and freedom, against the attempts to crush out their liberty or their separate life, and when they have left names of leaders which make hearts of men throb and thrill wherever they are heard. It is a poor Christianity, because it is not a true humanity, which affects to disregard this. There is an heirloom of stimulus to a whole race in the heroic acts of those who have bequeathed them a name among the nations of the world. There are men who can be reached by the love of fellow-countrymen, when they cannot be moved by the love of their fellow-men; and it is quite possible for a man to have both. The narrower is sometimes more intense and energetic than the wider. In the annals of the civil wars in England, an officer, who had fought in many battles abroad, tells that in his first fight on English ground he heard a cry of agony in his own tongue, and he looked behind him to see who of his men was killed. He discovered that the cry came from the opposing ranks, and then first he realised what a terrible thing it was to kill his own countrymen. There are many who feel it so in our quieter times, and who can be stirred more strongly to save from destitution and death those who speak their own language, and have a nearer blood beating in their heart. 3. Another thought suggested by this feeling is, that it should enable us to understand the hearts, and work for the rights of all men. There is a rule recommended by some religious communities, that their members should have no special friendships; that they should do nothing for each other as friends. And there are some philosophers who defend this. They say that "friendship is a barrier which hides from view the qualities of many who are more worthy of regard, that it is

a kind of theft from the common good for the benefit of a few, and that, in a higher state of society, friendship will disappear;" which amounts very much to saying that if we put out our eyes, so as not to see things that are close to us, we shall be more likely to discover those that are far away. These are the theories of men who have either had no hearts to begin with, or have managed to cover them by cobwebs of speculation. Augustine has said that we may make a ladder of the dead things within us, to climb to the highest; but there is another ladder of living things by which we can rise as high, and by which our sympathies can be travelling to and fro like the angels in the dream of Bethel. The vision begins in the dreamer's own breast, and then it passes up into the skies. This is the very way in which God Himself has dealt with us. He came from the limits of the universe into this world, and became our friend, that He might lead us step by step into the fulness of Him that filleth all in all. 4. The last thought we suggest is, that this feeling may help the conception of another and a higher country. It is quite true that we find the spirit of patriotism filling the hearts of men with the highest enthusiasm, and spreading itself over masses of men and long periods, but bringing little spiritual desire. Yet it is one of the ways, as we have said, by which God keeps the heart above sensualism and utter selfishness—a kind of salt that saves nations from entire corruption. We see in the Bible that the thoughts of native land and home are more than any others the figures which God has used to convey to us conceptions about the future. They are more than figures. They have been woven into His plan of education. He made the old patriarchs exiles, in order that He might create in them the longing which went further than any land, behind or before them, in this world. The last view given us of the heavenly world is that of a land and city which have over them a Father and an Elder Brother, and for friends the nations of the saved. (*J. Ker, D.D.*)

Patriotic sentiment:—An American citizen in a foreign city, seeing the meteor flag of his native land floating at the masthead of a ship, is inwardly moved by the associations it revives to patriotic feelings, to emotions of love, to fond anticipations of his return to the joys and repose of his fireside. But of his secret thoughts the people about him know nothing. To them the flag of his country is but as one flag among many others. They meddle not with the secret joys it kindles within his swelling breast. It is even so with the secret of the Lord in a good man's breast. He walks the street like other men. Yet while their thoughts are of things visible and earthly, his are of God and things unseen. He sees God in everything about him. God is communing with him, feasting him on holy thought, quickening his spiritual aspirations, comforting him with assurances of his sonship, and with visions of his incorruptible inheritance. (*W. Hoyt, D.D.*)

Vers. 31–33. **Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Behold I will rend the kingdom out of the hand of Solomon.**—*The purpose of God*:—"Nothing," we are told, "succeeds like success." It is the sign of a man of transcendent genius and power that he is able to carry through all his projects, and bring his schemes to a successful issue. And yet God seems to fail. What could be a greater failure than this world, if it was made by a beneficent God, says the average observer? Why are evil, misfortune, pain, and failure so obvious in its history, and so marked upon its operations? So with Christianity itself; it is the commonplace of missionary meetings that only a small fraction of the world has as yet become Christian, after centuries of preaching and earnest effort. Even where the Church has spread, and fixed her seat, how many schisms and controversies rend her unity, how imperfect is the faith of professing Christians, how unworthy their lives, how poor the realisation of those promises to which they cling. Before we can criticise anything we must know the facts. Before we can give a worthy judgment we must be in a position to judge, and in pronouncing on the great work of God in the universe, we may well ask ourselves, are we in a position during our short visit, which we call life, when we know so imperfectly what came before, when we know absolutely nothing of what comes after—are we in a position to judge? There we stand with the vast ocean before us. Here the wave has receded and left a bare patch of sand, there it is thundering with overwhelming catastrophe against some crumbling barrier. Is the tide coming in, or is it receding? Is there a progress or a steady shrinking back? Before we can decide we have to move away. Has God failed? Is this world in any sense a mistake? Are the Chronicles of Israel and Judah an uninteresting record of a monotonous disaster, unedifying to the soul, and powerless to arouse any attention, or fire our enthusiasm?

Is Christianity to alter its name to Civilisation? and to substitute the worship of the beautiful for the service of the sanctuary, the book of science for the Book of God? Is the Church to be carted away in its crumbling masses to the lumber room, where lie now covered with the dust of ages the mouldering forms of Utopias, Republics, and "Cities of God," in the model room, where repose the unattainable visions of unpractical men? I. THE PLAN OF GOD, REGARDED FROM THE SIDE OF HIS WISE OMNIPOTENCE. Is this world a failure? Does it whirl unchecked and uncontrolled along an aimless path, where luck and fortune and chance are the apparent and only guide to its caprice? Is life a game of chess with an unknown adversary, whom we neither see nor hear—where a mistake on our part is followed by a blow, and that a blow without a word? Have vice and violence and cunning, on the whole, the upper hand in the control of the world? Have all the improvements, the luxuries, the refinements of life, only crushed off in their path a wider and a more sordid fringe of poverty, a *moraine* of misery, and secured the greatest happiness of the few at the expense of the happiness of the greater number? No! Just remember that God is dealing with a fallen world, a world not as He made it, but as man marred it. A child no doubt, as he lies on his bed, powerless, faint, and ill, crippled by an accident, thinks the doctor cruel as he handles his aching limb, and probes the dangerous wound, and prescribes the bitter medicine; he wishes to be free, to be active, to be playing with his fellows, to feel life in his limbs and health in his frame, to eat what is pleasant, to taste what is sweet, and to fill his life with joy. But the father or the mother, and those who have at heart his welfare, marvel the rather at the skill, the nerve, the resource of the careful physician who is bringing health out of sickness, and a wholesome life out of deformity and mishap. An orchard of trees pruned and cut back is a sorry sight to one, who does not understand the secrets of fruit-bearing, and will not be there to see the golden clusters in the rich autumn. God is dealing with a fallen world, where the measures must be largely remedial, and tending towards a future, rather than self-sufficient in the present. The world is better than it was, it has advanced, and is advancing. Although here and there men sigh over the barren sand, as the wave sighs off with a gasp and a groan, and a sound of falling and disaster. Look out over the world and you will see progress—you cannot deny it—a tending towards a renewal of that time, when in the beginning God saw everything that He had made, and behold it was very good; while by the side of progress we see the unerring punishment which overtakes sin and evil; retribution we call it; a sign that God has given us a law, which cannot be broken. II. EQUALLY SHALLOW IS THE CRITICISM WHICH WOULD BELIEVE THE PURPOSE OF GOD TO HAVE FAILED IN HIS CHURCH. The Church is God's Kingdom set up for the better management of the world. And most emphatically the Church has not been a failure. We have the strange spectacle of lands, once covered with its beneficent richness, now barren and dry, and in the hands of the infidel. We see large fields of the Church, once covered with ripe grain, and rippled with the breath of Heaven, now lying fallow, untilled, apparently uncared for, and yet all waiting on the good purpose of God. If we refuse to despair of the world, much more do we refuse to despair of the Church. The purpose of God in spite of drawbacks is being worked out here. Who can deny it? III. BUT THERE IS ANOTHER REGION WHERE WE ARE APT TO CHARGE GOD WITH FAILURE. I MEAN THE REGION OF OUR OWN SOUL. God has called us through the Red Sea, and, we say, would God we had stayed in Egypt. God has led us into the promised land, and we say it is no land of milk and honey. Men turn round on the old Bible and say it has failed; on the simple life of prayer and devotion; and say that it has proved powerless to effect its purpose. It is a bitter thing, dear brethren, to look back on life and say that it has failed. To look back on a pure home and careful training only to deride it, and get away from it. To have that bitter severance in life, which owes no piety to the past, which has lost all sense of vocation, or duty, or mission, and simply lives on from day to day a life which would be bearable were it not for its pleasures, and hopeful were it not for its ambitions. It is a terrible verdict which the world records of a man when it says, "He has thrown himself away." It is a terrible sense of failure, when a man owns to himself, "I am not what I used to be." It is sad for the returning prodigal to think of a large portion of his life, of which the most hopeful wish would be, that it might remain a blank. It is a more awful thing for a man to feel that his early hopes and aspirations have failed, and that a brilliant morning is likely to be obliterated in a stormy sunset. What can be more sad than the complete breakdown of the moral sense in the heart once alive

unto God? Wise Solomon sunk in sensuality; David, whose heart was responsive to every ripple of the Divine breath, dull and insensate; the altar of God spurned, Sunday desecrated; evil eagerly followed; the shame of vice causing no blush, the meanness of it no compunction? And yet God's purpose survives in another way. Magdalen stands before the world to cheer it with the sight of penitent love, more deep, more utter, because like a pre ious flower, it has been snatched out of the abyss of sin. An Augustine stands before the world, stored with an experience written in letters of blood, and burned in with horror into his soul, invites those who have made shipwreck of youth, to hope to revive and seek Him ten times the more. Ah! my brethren, believe in the inherent vitality of all God's good gifts to you. If ever you have been religious, when you now are cold and dead, cherish that seed of life. God means yet again to revive it if you will let Him. If ever your heart was open and responsive before sin blinded your eyes, and the ways of the world made you hard, put yourself back before the first wilful sin, and know and believe that God wishes to revive in you the promise of a better past. (*W. C. E. Newbolt, M.A.*)

CHAPTER XII.

VERS. 2–20. **When Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, who was in Egypt heard of it . . . they sent and called him.**—*The kingdom divided*:—1. This chapter reveals one of the turning-points in Israel's history, for it is as true in the history of Israel as in that of any other people that there are periods comparatively insignificant, and hours as well, that are full of great events. 2. It had seemed to be one of the chief purposes of God to make Israel a great nation. That is the promise made to Abram. The nation seems to have been essential to the carrying out of God's purpose in giving a revelation and establishing His kingdom in the world. Truth does not gather momentum while it is propagated by an occasional teacher or prophet. Great institutions, educational, civil, and religious, such as can be developed only in a great nation, are necessary to make truth mighty, to give it power among the masses, and that volume which sets it moving over wide areas. The revelation, which had been sporadic in Israel throughout patriarchal times, now by means of the great civil and religious institutions of Israel as a nation—prophecy and the school of the prophets, the priesthood and the great religious festivals—gathers momentum and moves grandly on toward the fulfilment of the promise made to Abram. 3. But by this Scripture we are introduced to a condition of things that is startling. The very chosen instrument essential to the carrying out of God's purpose to bless and save the world—the Israelitish nation—is threatened with destruction. There is something violent in the very tones of the cry, "To your tents, O Israel." Where now is the nation through which God is to bless the world? Can His purpose be accomplished by these fragments? 4. A study of the actual course of history among these tribes would show that there were many natural causes leading to this division of the kingdom. Rehoboam was weak and wicked. He who will rule others must first learn to rule himself. The young men "probably sons of Solomon's chief officers, who had been trained at the royal court and were designed to be the officers of the succeeding king," had inherited the bitter hostility that had long existed, especially between the tribes of Judah and Ephraim; thinking themselves strong under the new king, they were ready to advise and help to carry out rash measures. There was no lack of occasion for dissension on the side of Rehoboam. On the other hand there can be little doubt that the taxes exacted of Israel were oppressive. Ephraim had always been jealous of and restive under Judah's rule. "To the house of Joseph—that is to Ephraim, with its adjacent tribes of Benjamin and Manasseh—had belonged all the chief rulers of Israel, down to the time of David: Joshua, the conqueror; Deborah, the prophetess; Gideon, the one regal spirit of the judges; Abimelech and Saul, the first kings; Samuel, the restorer of the people after the fall of Shiloh. It was natural with such an inheritance of glory that Ephraim always chafed under any rival supremacy." And when "the Lord refused the tabernacle of Joseph, and chose not the tribe of Ephraim, but chose the tribe of Judah," the old jealousy was intensified and ready to burst forth on

any pretext. Jeroboam had once lifted up his hand against King Solomon, and Solomon had attempted to kill him, and had driven him into Egypt. Weakness, wilfulness, and impetuosity on the part of the king and his advisers, all of which served to intensify an inherited jealousy of prerogative, were the influences at work on the one side. On the other a powerful people fired with a sense of injustice, with a powerful, ambitious, and unscrupulous leader—these certainly afforded causes for a disruption deep and irremediable. 5. But the prophet expressly tells us that this division is of God. 6. What was the real cause? The record makes it plain, and reveals at the same time God, the long suffering and the holy One. It was not that the king had fleeced them, as Samuel a century earlier had told them he would (1 Sam. viii. 11–17). It was that they had rejected God, as God told Samuel they had, when they asked a king (1 Sam. viii. 6–8). What are the lessons to be learned? 1. God gives opportunities to individuals and to nations even though He knows that they will not improve them. Jeroboam was justified in taking possession of the Ten Tribes. It was part of the Divine plan. He had been so instructed. But Jeroboam departed from God, and he has gone down in the sacred history as the man that made Israel to sin. Rehoboam had his opportunity also both before and after the division of the kingdom. He wasted it wickedly. Whether we use or abuse our opportunities they come to us, and God with and in them all, to work out His righteous will through us if we will, and, if not, to abandon us and to find a way for His will and purposes through others. 2. We may learn also that, however essential an institution may seem to be for carrying forward the purposes of God, if it fail it is doomed. The Israelitish nation, in order to express the Divine will and be a revelation of Jehovah, must be conscious of its dependence on Him. But this Israel had lost. There is no trace of the confidence or of the sense of dependence that appears in the song of Moses at the Red Sea. The spiritual hold on Jehovah has relaxed. 3. God works in the actual condition of things. It is a mistake to suppose that God must wait for eit er the ideal man or the ideal nation. The ambitious Jeroboam and the weak Rehoboam are alike His agents. The revelation which shapes the conditions under which the kingdom of God cannot flourish may be as important as that which shows the conditions of its prosperity. "To your tents, O Israel: see to thine own house, David," is violent language. Jehovah will find other means for propagating and perpetuating His truth. "The Arabian traditions relate that in the staff on which Solomon leaned, and which supported him long after his death, there was a worm which was secretly gnawing it asunder." The worm—idolatry—has done its work. (*B. P. Raymond.*) *The kingdom divided*:—God was in Israel's history, but He is equally in all history. He guided Israel with a very special purpose, yet no more truly or constantly than He guides us. If from the study of this ancient record we learn to interpret our own lives and the lives of all men and all nations in the spirit in which the sacred historian wrote of Israel and Judah, we shall have learned its main lesson: God rules in this world of ours. He exalts one, casts down another, and makes the very wrath of man to praise Him. 1. Israel's secession "was from the Lord." From terrible, relentless, persistent tyranny, after due but vain remonstrance, subjects have a Divine right to free themselves by revolution. "The powers that be are ordained of God," but no particular form of polity is so. Rulers exist for subjects, not subjects for rulers. The government of a nation at any time presumably deserves respect and support; but it may forfeit all claim to both by ceasing to fulfil its function as a blessing to the people. 2. Observe the pusillanimity of pride. Pride seems a source of strength: it is rather a source of weakness; it prevents one from acting according to his best light. Rehoboam must in his first calm moment have felt convinced of the superior wisdom of the course urged by the older counsellors. But the words of the younger men appealed to his pride and momentarily blinded him to their folly. 3. Consider how expensive such senseless pride may become. It cost Rehoboam far the best part of his dominions. Israel rather than Judah fills the chief place in the history of the next few centuries. Henceforth until the fall of Samaria Israel is ever upon the historian's page, Judah occupying a subordinate place. The history of Israel is that of a nation; Juda consisted of but a single great and s lendid city. Rehoboam's pride was an expensive luxury—it cost him the richest jewels in his crown. 4. Mark the peril of disregarding the wisdom of age. Had Rehoboam consulted only his seniors, he would have taken the right course. This his pride forbade. Was he not king? Old men, fogies, the Bismarcks and the Gladstones, had carried on the State long enough. Like William of Germany, he would show what wonders fresh blood and brain could do. Besides, was he not getting all the light he could,

inquiring of all rather than of few? Many a youth has thus cheated himself into the belief that he was proceeding with great prudence, when in fact he merely wished an excuse for some darling folly. 5. Notice, that serving is the only way to win true fortunes. How numerous are the applications of this principle in the household, in the workshop, in society, in government! If employers only treated their employees in this spirit, how it would assuage the friction between the two, to the advantage of both! If labourers always acted in this temper of love, what added strength it would assure to labouring men's organisations! How perfectly did the course of our Divine Lord and Saviour illustrate this! He came to win the world. How was it to be done? Had He been a mere man, He would never have sought to attain His end in the way He did. Instead of appearing as a grand monarch, ministered unto, courted, and flattered, He came as a servant, ministering ever unto others. Instead of being rich, He had not where to lay His head. Instead of courting the great and wise, He sought the poor and lowly. And He has in this world a Name which is above every name, at whose mention millions of hearts rise and millions of heads bow in loving adoration. (*J. B. G. Pidge, D.D.*) *Revolt of the Ten Tribes*:—The son of Solomon began his reign with a blunder, assuming that the throne was his by Divine right of succession and ignoring the ratification of the people. In this particular he is a good type of many young men at the present day, who think they see in the wealth and social position of their parents the claim to society's unquestioning homage to themselves. Real kinghood is personal. The true king, as Carlyle put it, is the canning—the man who can. The endorsement of a wealthy parent may carry a son's cheque; it will not carry him. Society recognises drafts on personal deposits only. Rehoboam fancied that the son of Solomon could pass to the throne unchallenged. Not so thought the proud and jealous Ephraimites; not so thought nine other tribes: and the young aspirant's self-complacency was rudely checked by the refusal of these tribes to come to Jerusalem and pay him homage, by their summoning him to Shechem, the tribe-centre of Ephraim, and by their meeting him there, not with submission, but with a bill of rights. This very check was an opportunity for Rehoboam to show whether he was made of true kingly stuff. The crisis which exposes a man's mistake often develops his wisdom, if he has any. The crisis proved him to be lacking in one of the prime qualifications of a king. "He lived," as one has remarked, "in a fool's paradise, blind and deaf to what would have arrested the attention of a sensible ruler." At any rate, the emergency was one which he could not meet alone, and therefore he sought counsel. There are, however, different motives for asking advice. That a man consults with others does not disprove his self-conceit. Men often seek advice only to have their own opinion or their own course confirmed, and consequently choose their advisers from among their sympathisers; and a sympathiser is not, usually, the best adviser. Decency required that Rehoboam should advise with the old counsellors of his father, but he evidently did so merely for propriety's sake. In the first place, the old counsellors clearly discerned the issue in Rehoboam's mind. It was between two ideals of sovereignty, the despotic and the paternal. Should sovereignty mean being served or serving? Evidently, as the result showed, Rehoboam's ideal was the former. Christ rules more than Cæsar because He put Himself at the world's service. The world's real rulers are invariably those who have served it. The world's thought is that power absolves from obligation; Christ's thought is that power emphasises obligation. One of the most impressive pictures of history is that of the young Edward the Black Prince of England, after the victory of Poitiers, serving the captive king of France at table and soothing the mortification of defeat with praises of his bravery and with kindly assurances; and the spirit of that scene is condensed into his favourite motto interwoven with the faded ostrich-plumes about his tomb at Canterbury, "Hon mout; Ich dien:" "High spirit; I serve." Well says Dean Stanley, "To unite in our lives the two qualities expressed in this motto—high spirit and reverent service—is to be indeed not only a true gentleman and a true soldier, but a true Christian also." Liberty is essentially a social principle, and every social principle imposes limitations on the individual. Love brings the two ideas of liberty and service into their true relation. Love uses its free choice to choose service, and so makes service the very highest expression of liberty. The young king could not appreciate this lofty ideal of sovereignty. He could not read in service any higher meaning than servility. This advice appealed to a packed jury. He wanted encouragement rather than counsel, and therefore, having satisfied the proprieties of the occasion, he turned to another and more

congenial class of advisers, the young men that were grown up with him—young men as proud, as shallow and as hot-headed as himself. There is nothing uncommon in that. It is a fact of our time no less than of Rehoboam's—a fact that carries with it a strange inconsistency, for one does not always nor often reject what is ripe. Crudeness, in most cases, is a reproach. One wants ripe fruit on his table and seasoned timber for his house or his carriage. One does not trust a law-student with the management of a fortune, nor put his child's life into the hands of yesterday's graduate in medicine. Youth seems to prefer the route through the shoals and rocks to that through the open sea to which ripened wisdom stands ready to direct it. Those shoals are strewn with wrecks. How few escape! The Bible, it is to be noticed, will not let the old past entirely lose its hold upon us. Enoch and Abraham and Moses appear as counsellors of the nineteenth century, which in so many respects is far in advance of them; and for the reason that they represent principles of life and character which are eternal. The consequences of Rehoboam's decision are familiar. We are indeed told that the cause was from the Lord, and that the catastrophe came about in fulfilment of his promise to rend the kingdom from Solomon's house; but it was in Rehoboam's power to have escaped all responsibility for that terrible result. God's decrees never relieve us of the duty of obedience. And this is a fair ground of appeal. The popular proverb is profoundly true: "A man is known by the company he keeps." Only let us be sure and emphasise the last word, "the company he keeps." We keep only what we like. The man is not truthfully indexed by the company in which he happens to be found at any particular time, not by the accidental contact of society, not by the circle into which he may have dropped in order to satisfy some conventional demand or to win some social prestige. That kind of company he does not keep; he only touches it. (*M. R. Vincent, D.D.*) *Revolt of the Ten Tribes*:—The fault of the prince lay not in consulting younger men—for they are often most favourable to progress—the error was in allowing his action, as a ruler, to be governed by private considerations. The young man's failing was a kingly one, but also a very common one. The great landowner cannot see the advantage of yielding his game-preserve to the uses of hard-worked tenants. The manufacturer does not frequently pay the sewing-women he employs more than the market price for their labour. Power and wealth men are as slow to give up as Pharaoh was the Israelite slaves. I. AN EARLY ILLUSTRATION OF AN ATTEMPT TO ADJUST DIFFICULTIES BY CONFERENCE. Though the people might not have remained for a long period loyal to the house of David, they made an attempt to adjust the difficulties between them and their hereditary prince. They did not go into open rebellion. They asked that their rights and their complaints might be considered. Kings who exercise despotic power, and their defenders, are wont to base their claims on the authority of the Bible. As Englishmen, we point with pride to the Barons at Runnymede as they demand the Great Charter from King John. This right of petition, exercised by Israelites and Englishmen, is not one that has always been conceded. Charles II. endeavoured to secure the passage of a bill limiting this right of his subjects so late as 1680. In early Bible times we find free speech, free petition, and methods of arbitration. This right of petition must be conceded before any adjustments can be made between sovereigns and their subjects, or between men and their fellows. We must be willing to hear men's causes and defence, before any result can be obtained that will be satisfactory. Before conference can begin, there must be this openness of discussion. There is one phase of this matter that is very practical. Do we not often condemn persons before giving them any opportunity to explain their action? We nurse fancied wrongs and bear ill-will toward those who ought to be dear to us. Have we ever told them of our grievances? Are we sure they are aware of fault or sin? We say too often, "Let them find out for themselves." Thus friends are alienated and homes made unhappy. Christ emphasised the adjustments of wrongs between men as individuals. In the Old Testament, we have the same duty enforced by example and precept. We have, also, an illustration of a proper method of righting public wrongs. This lesson is for labourers and capitalists, for servants and masters, as well as for kinsfolk and friends. II. THE INEVITABLE TRANSFER OF POWER FROM HIM WHO SERVETH NOT, TO HIM WHO WILL, SERVE THE INTERESTS OF OTHERS. The power of the house of the beloved David must be diminished when his descendants no longer served the people. Jeroboam, the rival claimant for the throne, was a man of few good qualities, but he professed to be willing to serve the people. He certainly

attempted to please them, though he finally degraded them, as is seen in the subsequent chapter. Even into the hands of demagogues, power will often pass, with God's permission, from selfish and despotic princes. God calls the world to witness the humiliation of greatness that is supported by injustice. There is continually a redistribution of power and wealth that goes on in the world with the Divine sanction. Where men may gamble and become suddenly rich, they may as suddenly lose their wealth. A house or family founded on unrighteousness has in it the elements of its own destruction. Drink may ruin the son of the millionaire. His wealth goes to strangers. Often the transfer of power is sudden, and proud men in their own lifetime behold their sceptre "wrenched by an unlineal hand, no son of theirs succeeding." Power that has not lifted the world's burdens will pass. III. GREAT REVOLUTIONS MAY TAKE PLACE UNDER GOD'S GUIDANCE WITHOUT VIOLENCE. We are told that this revolt was of the Lord. The people failed in their conference, but they succeeded in accomplishing a great change quietly. They had begun right to end well. Thenceforth the cause was in God's hands. Prayer is one of the means by which great changes are accomplished silently. God is always on the side of the earnest prayer, and any good that results is from Him. The history of the revolutions wrought by prayer must remain unwritten till the great day of revelation. (*Monday Club Sermons.*) *Tribal causes of schism*:—The first cause of the schism to be noted, from the human point of view, was the deep cleft between the northern and southern tribes. It arose from geographical and economical differences, accentuated probably by long-standing tribal jealousies. From the days of Deborah, at latest, the cleft had been visible, and the unity which had been achieved, largely under the pressure of the Philistine wars, that crushed the loose organisation into a more compact whole for self-preservation, and held the kingdom together under Saul and David, would have been hard to keep up, even with skilful and beneficent kingship. Both America and England know how deep the gulf between "North" and "South" may be, and how hard it is to cast the encircling bond of a common nationality round them. England and Scotland are not perfectly fused together even now, and there are other broad lines of separation than "the colour line" on the other side of the Atlantic. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*)

Ver. 7. If thou wilt be a servant unto this people this day . . . then they will be thy servants for ever.—*A royal servant*:—These words are of deep-reaching import, and contain a principle of universal application. They especially apply to starts in life. When the son leaves the parental home for his new calling, for a foreign land, to make his way in the world, our text contains a sentence which the father may, at the last moment of departure, whisper in his ear as an expression of the deepest thoughts in his heart for the guidance of the young beginner. To fulfil these words beautifies life, to have fulfilled them softens death. They contain a prescription which one can never repent of following. I. THE FOLLY OF REHOBOAM. In the ancient town of Shechem, a town that recalls to the Israelite memories of patriarchal times, a king is about to be crowned. Solomon the Great has gone the way of all his fathers, and by right of succession the crown falls to Rehoboam his son. All Israel assembled at Shechem to make him king. For ages that old city had retained traces of its ancient dignity, just as Rheims, the old capital of France, continued to be the scene of coronations long after it had ceased to be the national capital. There was a time when Amsterdam was threatened to be deprived of its right of Royal Coronation, but since the severance of Belgium and Holland, the New Church here holds that honour undisputed. Shechem was full of representatives from all parts of the country. The king came down in royal state from Jerusalem. No opposition was offered to Rehoboam's succession. He was the only son of Solomon, and the people were prepared to receive him as such. They had, however, many grievances which they wished to have redressed. Solomon had not been everything that a king should be. II. THE PREROGATIVE OF SERVICE. A wise king would have at once acceded to such a request. But Rehoboam, although the son of a wise father, had not the common sense to do so. Wisdom is not inherited. "Who knoweth whether his son will be a wise man or a fool?" He was the king. The people had no rights but what he chose to give them. They were his servants, not he their servant. His will was their law. He knew nothing and would hear nothing of the rights of the individual. According to the mind of Jesus, he is the greatest who renders the greatest service to others. "They assert that the strength of a

monarch's throne is service for and sympathy with his people." A throne built on such a foundation will last unshaken for ever. Oh, happy king to have such counsellors! Oh, foolish man to turn aside from them! The consequence of this incredibly foolish reply was such as might have been expected. "The work of two generations was undone in a moment." Under the leadership of Jeroboam, who promised them the reforms they wanted, the Ten Tribes revolted. III. SELFISH AUTOCRACY. It is the old story of the consequence of selfish and inconsiderate autocracy. It is a lesson which makes but slow progress in the minds of men. The old heathen idea of forcible dominion is still largely the governing one of politics—that to be great is to receive much service, not to render it. Politics has too often been a game of ambition rather than a sphere of service. (*W. Thomson, M.A., B.D.*) *The king as a servant*:—The honour of service is emphasised by Solomon in the title he gives to his father. He speaks of him by a more honourable name than that of king—"Thy servant David." Solomon recognised that he owed his exalted position entirely to God. The most universal function in nature is that of service. Nothing in creation is serving itself, but every element is intended to serve some other. The flowers bloom in beauty, but soon serve us by transformation into seed. The winds purify the earth. The clouds carry moisture across all regions. The sun is regal in majestic splendour, but this monarch of the planets is, in reality, far more their servant, as their light and heat bearer. Above all, the idea of service is ennobled by Jesus, who as minister to His disciples was "servant of all." So are we to seek to serve God and man. (*Christian Commonwealth.*)

Vers. 10–14. My little finger shall be thicker than my father's loins.—*Rehoboam's foolish answer*:—These were the words of an infatuated fool—a fool led on to his own destruction by the "irony of destiny." I. WISDOM IS NOT HEREDITARY. The question is often asked, as this kind of phenomenon comes under notice, how does it happen that great men seldom have great children? Does genius wear itself out? We incline to think that the gross neglect which geniuses manifest towards their children has much to do with it. Still, it cannot be denied that the descendants of many of our greatest men have been little better than "drivelling idiots." II. CURSE OF EVIL COMPANY. We could not find a more painful instance than the one under consideration, either in profane or sacred history. It was fraught with terrible consequences. 1. It is a curse to the man himself. Do evil, unholy, foolish companions make a person happy? Does it not rather bring trouble, sorrow, regrets, and present inconvenience? It is expensive, humiliating, degrading. 2. It is a curse to the man's influence. Character is assimilated with those with whom we associate. And even if the evil influence does not produce evil results, the name of the evil clings to him who mixes with it. 3. It is a curse to his future. It will ultimately bring him ruin. No person was ever yet strong enough in his integrity to resist the united influence of boon companions. Their influence sows a seed which will ultimately produce an abundant harvest. III. STUPIDITY OF DESPOTISM. A despot uses his power for the mere sake of using it, and not to effect any good purpose, or to bring about any desirable end. There are many minor despots in the world—persons put into little offices, who love to manifest and to parade their brief authority. IV. THE OVERRULING POWER OF GOD. He maketh even the wrath and the folly of man to praise Him. Had Rehoboam acted wisely, we do not know whether the judgment might not have been still further postponed; but as it was, this act precipitated God's wrath and effected His purposes. (*Homilist.*) *The character of Rehoboam*:—I. THE CIRCUMSTANCES IN WHICH REHOBOAM COMMENCED HIS REIGN WERE UNUSUALLY HAZARDOUS. II. THE MANNER IN WHICH THIS DEMAND ON THE PART OF THE PEOPLE WAS MET BY THE KING. III. THE FINAL REPLY OF REHOBOAM TO THE DEMAND OF HIS PEOPLE. It was nothing else, we cannot but say, than downright infatuation. IV. THE CAUSE WAS FROM THE LORD. And this is one among many proofs of God's absolute predestination, and of the perfect freedom of human actions. The division of the kingdom from Rehoboam was absolutely certain; it was determined by God; it was positively predicted by a prophet of God. V. THOSE POINTS IN THE CHARACTER AND HISTORY OF REHOBOAM, WHICH MAY BE CALCULATED TO CONVEY SUITABLE INSTRUCTION. And let me remark: 1. Talent and piety are not inherited by birth. No part of Solomon's far-famed wisdom descended to his son. He was even more than usually deficient in common prudence, and in the capacity for government. A father may convey to his heirs

the riches he has accumulated; but there is a nobler wealth, which cannot be bequeathed, and which cannot be transferred. Knowledge, mental opulence, talent—these are the result of individual application, of laborious industry, and of perseverance. Without these, no fancied gifts of nature can avail; and with these there is scarcely any extent of acquisition, which it is not possible to secure. But it is yet far more important to notice, that true piety does not descend by birth. Religion is a personal and individual thing; it is not transferred like property; it does not descend like any civil privilege. Religion is an individual matter; it is a change wrought upon the individual's mind; it is a living principle and energy within the individual heart and the individual nature. Talent and piety are not inherited by birth. 2. The king's rejection of wise counsel. The aged are not always wise, and they are often too cold and too calculating to be safe guides; and sometimes also their manner is unfortunate and repulsing; they are unamiable, they are impatient of the habits and feelings of youth, and they pronounce too magisterially to be very easily borne. But these are exceptions; and beyond all doubt, a multitude of years should teach wisdom. It was one of the laws of ancient Sparta (a heathen State), that whenever an old man appeared, the young in the assembly should rise up in token of their reverence. Reverence for age lies at the foundation of a sound moral character; it is not only becoming, it is not only beautiful, but it is essential; and where it is wanting in measure, it shows there is something utterly wrong, utterly unsound, in the moral constitution. 3. His arbitrary disposition. Instead of soothing, and gradually quenching the spirit of revolt, Rehoboam sought to cut down the clamours of his subjects, by arbitrary measures. The saying of the wise man cannot be too often repeated, "A soft answer turneth away wrath." 4. Rehoboam's imprudent choice of his associates. We cannot question that the ruin of this prince is to be ascribed to those whom he selected as his companions. Had it not been for the young men who grew up along with him, the kingdoms of Israel and Judah had been undivided, and he had retained the crown. And, in connection with this, "Evil communications corrupt good manners." There is nothing, so far as personal piety is concerned, so far as the salvation of the soul is concerned, of so much importance as the choice of your associates. (*J. Young, M.A.*) *Dangerous counsellors of James II.*:—But there was at the court a small knot of Roman Catholics whose hearts had been ulcerated by old injuries, whose heads had been turned by recent elevation, who were impatient to climb to the highest honours of the State, and who, having little to lose, were not troubled by thoughts of the day of reckoning. These men called with one voice for war on the constitution of the Church and the State. They told their master that he owed it to his religion and to the dignity of his crown to stand firm against the outcry of heretical demagogues, and to let the Parliament see from the first that he would be master in spite of opposition, and that the only effect of opposition would be to make him a hard master. (*Macaulay's England.*)

Ver. 24. This thing is from me.—*This thing is from me*:—I. SOME EVENTS ARE SPECIALLY FROM GOD. God is in events which are produced by the sin and the stupidity of men. This breaking up of the kingdom of Solomon into two parts was the result of Solomon's sin and Rehoboam's folly; yet God was in it. God had nothing to do with the sin or the folly, but in some way, which we can never explain, God was in it all. The most notable instance of this truth is the death of our Lord Jesus Christ; that was the greatest of human crimes, yet it was foreordained and predetermined of the Most High, to whom there can be no such thing as crime, nor any sort of compact with sin. How, then, was "this thing" from God? 1. First, it was so as a matter of prophecy. 2. And, secondly, "this thing" was from God as a matter of punishment. God setteth evil against evil that He may destroy evil, and He uses that which cometh of human folly that He may manifest His own wisdom. II. WHEN EVENTS ARE SEEN TO BE FROM THE LORD, THEY ARE NOT TO BE FOUGHT AGAINST. Rehoboam had summoned his soldiers to go to war against the house of Israel; but, inasmuch as it was from God that the ten tribes had revolted from him, he must not march into the territories of Israel, nor even shoot an arrow against them. 1. The thing that is happening to you is of the Lord, therefore resist it not, for it would be wicked to do so. If it be the Lord's will, so may it be. 2. But, next, it is also vain, for what can we do against the will of God? 3. Next, it would be mischievous, and would be sure to bring a greater evil upon us if we did resist. III. THIS GENERAL

PRINCIPLE HAS MANY SPECIAL APPLICATIONS. I believe it often happens that events are most distinctly from the Lord, and when it is so, our right and proper way is to yield to them. 1. A case in which this principle applies is when severe afflictions arise. 2. Sometimes, also, we are troubled by certain disquieting plans proposed by our friends or our children. 3. A very pleasant phase of this same truth is when some singular mercy comes. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Tracing events back to the final cause* :—The scribe is more properly said to write than the pen, and he that maketh and keepeth the clock is more properly said to make it go and strike than the wheels and poises that hang upon it, and every workman to effect his works rather than the tools which he useth as his instruments. So the Lord, who is the chief agent and mover in all actions, may more fitly be said to bring to pass all things which are done in the earth than any subordinate causes, as meat to nourish, clothes to keep us warm, the sun to lighten us, friends to provide for us, &c., seeing that they are but His instruments. (*T. Downame.*) *God's overrule of national events* :—Those who care to watch the hand of God in history may soon discern this truth in this incident. The attempts of France to acquire the sovereignty of the British Isles, and the corresponding efforts of the earlier English kings to become what their coins so long styled them, "King of France," have all been marvellously foiled by the Almighty Ruler of nations to the true welfare of both. Sir A. Alison has described the scene on the French coast in 1804, when the first Napoleon surveyed the flotilla which was to carry an invading army across the Channel, and saw them broken and dispersed by Him who rules the waves. God will not suffer the might or the cunning of man to wrest the sceptre from His hands. *God in history* :—The Old Testament "philosophy of history" regards all events as at once the results of human forces and of God's purposes, and finds no contradiction in the double aspect. Rehoboam was no less a criminal fool, Jeroboam no less a crafty traitor, because they were both working out God's purpose. The possible co-existence of freedom of action, necessarily involving responsibility, and God's sovereignty, is inexplicable, and as certain as it is inexplicable. Metaphysicians and metaphysical theologians may fumble at, or cut, the knot till doomsday, but it will not be untied or denied. Rehoboam ran the ship on the rocks, but God willed that it should be wrecked. But another mystery emerges, for the Divine resolve to shatter the kingdom was due to the thwarting of the Divine purpose in establishing it. Sovereign as that Divine will is, man has power to oppose it and to block its course, and lead to changes of its direction, as we sometimes hear of an army of caterpillars stopping a train. God's methods vary, but His purposes remain the same. The ship tacks as the wind shifts, but it is always steering for the one port. The unifying of the tribes into a kingdom, and the disruption of the kingdom, were equally in the Divine plan, and were both, in a real sense, also the direct results of men's sin and opposition to God. Hence it follows that "the history of the world is the judgment of the world." The "natural" consequences of national acts are the punishments or rewards of these acts. Solomon's tyranny, Rehoboam's folly, the rebels' indifference to the unity of the nation worked out the catastrophe, which was both a political effect, produced by political causes, and a Divine judgment, and was the latter just because it was the former. For nations, and for individuals, God "makes whips to scourge" them of their "vices," and in the mighty maze of human acts, has so ordered the issues of things that "every transgression and disobedience receives its just recompense of reward." So the "undevout" historian "is mad." (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*)

Vers. 26–33. And Jeroboam said in his heart.—*Idolatry in Israel* :—"History is God teaching by example." All history is that. But the annals of the Hebrew race possess a peculiar interest, because in them the divine tuition is divinely interpreted. In the historical books of the Old Testament we have the record of a revelation rather than the revelation itself. The real revelation lies in the national life, of which the books are partly an account, partly an interpretation. Jeroboam became king. Born in humble circumstances, he had risen by dint of his energy and genius to a place so prominent in public affairs that he was suspected of aspiring to royalty. In every age, in spite of custom, caste, or condition, the men who are determined to rise will rise. I. OPPORTUNITY. Seated at last firmly on his throne, Jeroboam was face to face with the opportunity of his life. It was a decisive hour in the young ruler's career. His future and the fate of a

kingdom hung in the balance. Should he determine to serve God, work righteousness, lighten oppression, promote religion—should he prove strong to do all that Jehovah his God commanded—he might easily make himself the mightiest monarch, and his people the foremost nation of the age. God would then be with him. But if he disregarded these high ends, his kingdom would come to nought, and his name be a hissing and a by-word. God would be against him. Strange that Jeroboam did not comprehend this. No lesson was more clearly taught in the history of his country. Jeroboam is not alone in this fault. For nations and rulers to meet and lose such crucial chances is not at all uncommon. Not "once." as Lowell hath it. but often—

> To every man and nation comes the moment to decide,
> In the strife of Truth with Falsehood, for the good or evil side.
> Some great cause, God's new Messiah, offering each the bloom or blight,
> Parts the goats upon the left hand, and the sheep upon the right,
> And the choice goes by forever, 'twixt that darkness and that light.

One immortal precept Jeroboam's case vividly illustrates—the only safe path is the right path. Our salvation from failure and shame lies in being absolutely true to our deepest convictions of right, unswervingly loyal to what we know of God's will. II. EXPEDIENCY VERSUS RIGHTEOUSNESS. Before his great opportunity Jeroboam failed. The causes of his downfall were all the more seductive because they seemed to be justified by the soundest maxims of governmental policy. It would never do, he reasoned, to have the centre of the national religion in a foreign city, and especially in the chief city of the country from which his subjects had just seceded. They might as safely have the seat of government in the capital of a rival nation as to have the seat of religion there. If the people continued to go up to the prominent feasts at Jerusalem, there was danger of a revolution backward. The old ties might prove too strong. Religious scruples might overcome political considerations. It was necessary to isolate the nation religiously as well as governmentally. The secession must be complete. To this end Jeroboam now devoted his energies. Having fortified some of the chief cities of his realm, he set to work to create a public sentiment favourable to his scheme. "It is too much," he said to the people, "for you to go up to Jerusalem." There was plausibility in this plea. Devices to lighten the stress of duty, or give a liberal interpretation to moral obligations, are apt to be popular. The new arrangement seems to have sprung into general favour at once. Following up the advantage thus gained, the king established two centres of worship—one at Bethel, a place already sanctified by many sacred events; the other at Dan, on the northern frontier. So, for mere political ends, the national connection with the religion which God had ordained was broken off. Jeroboam had made a fatal mistake. He had set politics before religion, chosen convenience instead of duty, made expediency take the place of righteousness. Disastrous consequences always follow a choice like that. Keen-sighted men are often short-sighted. They see vividly, but only at close range, like those party leaders whose foresight does not extend beyond the next election. But the immutable laws move relentlessly on to exact in due season their last ounce of penalty. "They enslave their children's children who make compromise with sin," saith the Delphic Oracle. Thousands of Esaus are all the time peddling their birthrights for messes of pottage. For the sake of temporary gain, or the gratification of a present desire, or to tide over an immediate crisis, they put in pawn their manhood, purity, and honour, and mortgage their future to the Devil. This evil tendency is greatly increased by current sentiments about success. Success is a cardinal virtue with most of us. We worship the goddess of victory. Having exalted to a superlative rank the matter of gaining our end, the severity with which we criticise the means is inversely as the degree of success hoped for. The great thing nowadays is to get ahead—by honourable courses if one can; but to get ahead. Herein he is a warning to us. Whoever puts policy before religion, chooses convenience before duty, or makes expediency a greater thing than righteousness, has foredoomed his career to ultimate failure, and his name to certain shame. III. IDOLATRY. One false step necessitates a second. Having adopted his policy, the new king must needs devise suitable means for carrying it out. An evil aim and end calls for evil devices. The results of Aaron's experiment, however, would seem sufficient to have deterred any one from imitating it. Common sense should have perceived the advisability of making as few changes as need be, and of introducing

gradually such as were imperative. The religious sense of the worthiest classes was sure to be shocked at any radical alterations in the established order. But the king, having entered upon a wrong road, went rashly on. It is argued by some commentators that this was not idolatry in the strict sense, but only the worship of Jehovah under the form of a calf. And indeed the phrase may read, "This is thy God, O Israel, that brought thee up out of the land of Egypt." Be that as it may, Jehovah had expressly forbidden men to worship him in that fashion, for the wise reason that worship by the aid of sensuous forms invariably degenerates among the masses into actual idolatry. The making of images results in the worship of false gods. Fifty years later, in the days of Elijah the reformer, we find the nation wholly given over to idols. The worship of Jehovah had almost entirely ceased. Baal, Astarte, and Moloch were the reigning deities. 'Tis ever thus. Idolatry involves also the sin of disobedience. God had said, "Thou shalt not." This Jeroboam well knew. He ought to have remembered the hot displeasure with which in the history of his nation infractions of God's will had been punished. What a strange infatuation possesses men who suppose that they can please God while doing the very things which He has sternly forbidden! Yet men are guilty of this folly all the time. But the crowning iniquity of Jeroboam, for which more than for all else he was condemned, was that he used the public power, the Divinely bestowed authority of the state, for the furtherance of ungodliness. There is a warning here for legislators who legalise a nefarious traffic, give respectability to lotteries and gambling-dens, or load unjust taxes upon the poor and weak, and for rulers who wink at bribery, theft, and other wickedness in high places. IV. DOOM. In his procedure Jeroboam overlooked a universal law. Consequences are inevitable. Effects follow their causes. Every road has its proper terminus, every seed its peculiar harvest. Choose your course, and you will come to the end of it. Sow your seed; you must reap the sort of grain which you have sown. Flesh and corruption, wind and whirlwind, spirit and life, obedience and blessing, transgression and ruin: these things go in these pairs. The two names in each pair are but two names for the selfsame thing. In natural matters, in physical science, this principle is everywhere respected; in spiritual it is almost universally ignored. Since the foundation of the world men have been doing evil that good might come, seeking blessedness by the way of the transgressor, sowing tares and watching for wheat. (*F. W. Ryder.*) *Idolatry in Israel*:—I. THE MAN—JEROBOAM. The man inaugurates the policy. The idolator precedes the idolatry. The sin does not force itself into Israel, but is introduced by the king. Jeroboam was the son of Nebat. Dean Stanley says his mother had been a woman of loose character. The son had courage, ability, and industry. He held an important office, under Solomon, and "was known as the man who had inclosed the city of David." II. THE PEOPLE—ISRAEL. The people followed their king. (There is a tradition that one family held out against calf-worship.) The national conscience was not sensitive, the national faith not vigorous, the sense of loyalty not strong, the spirit of obedience not quick. The people, though knowing better, were easily led into disobedience. They knew the law, and the history of Aaron's golden calves. Their eyes were open, but they lacked the moral fibre and high spirit that will refuse to follow a false leader in his wrong plans. Many of them must have surrendered conscience in following this apostate king. Let us not be too severe in our judgment of them. Hosts of informed people are being led in evil ways by modern Jeroboams. Men like him still frequently decide public policy, even in matters of morals and religion, and the multitudes follow even into the ditch. Conscience goes to the wall. The king, the government, or the party chooses the policy, offering plausible excuse for violating God's law, and the people follow. The result is certain. A nation surrendering conscience loses conscience. A people disobedient to God suffers His wrath. Israel did. III. THE SIN—IDOLATRY. This evil surrounded the Jews. They knew the nature and results. God was training them for pure worship. The spiritual God was trying to get a spiritual people. He had always to resist a tendency to idolatry. His word is full of warnings against it and woes upon it. He knew its nature and deadly result. Evermore He tries to prevent it, not in petty jealousy, but for the love of His children. Worship is love. God does not so jealously guard mere forms and ceremonies. He does guard the love of His people. Worshipping Him is loving Him. And that is the deepest relation between God and man. His supreme expression toward man is the utterance of His love. Man's supreme response is

love. Love brooks no divided heart. Love needs no images. "God is a spirit." Love is spiritual. Worship, in its essence, is love. He "seeketh such to worship Him as worship Him in spirit and in truth." "For two hundred and fifty-seven years this terrible indictment, 'he made Israel to sin,' follows Jeroboam and his kingdom through all the pages of this sacred record, until the kingdom was utterly destroyed and the Ten Tribes blotted from the map of human history, even as Moses and the prophets had predicted." Why does this result follow idolatry? Because right relation to God is the root of character. If that relation be wrong life itself is wrong. This is fundamental. Error or fault here is fatal. There are not two centres to this circle. Men cannot keep the first commandment and break the second. In idolatry men satisfy their religious feeling by a false worship which pretends to be true. The essence of it is disobedience; self-choice instead of self-surrender. It denies God by choosing other ways than His. It looks religious; it is the essence of sin. It begins with materialism and ends in polytheism or atheism. A close student has said: "Idolatry does not begin as idolatry. There is evolution down as well as up. The argument for image-worship is specious, and it is always in essential spirit the same. Every tendency toward materialisation is a backward tendency in religion. The golden calves which Jeroboam sets up as a representation of God lead naturally and speedily to the horrible pagan rites which come in with Ahab and Jezebel." "Idolatry in the ancient Church," says the *Britannica*, "was naturally reckoned among those *magna crimina* or great crimes against the first and second commandments which involved the highest ecclesiastical censures." The danger of idolatry has not ceased. St. John's message is still to men: "Little children, keep yourselves from idols." The golden calf still exists in "covetousness, the which is idolatry." It exists to destroy. (*W. F. McDowell.*) *Idolatry established*:—It is no less man's highest duty than his supreme blessedness to know and love and serve the true and living God: to know Him is life eternal; to be ignorant of Him is death for evermore. The character of the God who is worshipped reproduces itself in the characters of the worshippers; if He is vile, His worshippers will be vile; if He is pure, they will be pure. The essential nature of idolatry renders it, of necessity, one of the vilest and most debasing of sins. The worship of false gods has been almost universally associated with the use of idols, images, and pictures. Where you find the false god you find his image, and where you find the image there also is the false god; hence Jehovah forbids the use of material objects that have always been used in connection with the worship of false gods. He is a spirit, and His worship must be pure and spiritual. But the connection between worshipping the true God by images and the worship of other gods than the Lord is most intimate; and two generations later, and after Jeroboam had corrupted the worship of Jehovah, Ahab, instigated by his wicked heathen wife Jezebel, formally established the idolatrous worship of other gods, Baal, Ashtoreth, and Moloch, in the capital of his nation. The enormity of Jeroboam's sin is seen in the light of Jehovah's peculiar relations to him and to his people. God entered into the most solemn covenant relations with them. He was to them not only Creator and Lord and Judge, as He was to all other nations, but He was their Friend, their Guide, their Protector. Had Jeroboam been pious as he was brave, had he received the kingdom as a sacred trust from the Lord, had he ruled as theocratic king, had he relied upon the promises and protection of Jehovah, then indeed would the Lord have built him a sure house, and his kingdom would soon have absorbed the two other tribes and have endured for generations; but, alas! he took counsel of his own wisdom, not of the wisdom of God; he trusted to human power rather than to the protection of Jehovah, and proceeded promptly to organise and consolidate his kingdom. Four important measures received his immediate attention: a capital, a worship, a festival and a priesthood. He selected Shechem in the great tribe of Ephraim, and built there a city as the capital of his kingdom. But the worship of the people was the matter of greatest importance in the establishment of his kingdom. The children of Israel brought with them from Egypt many of the customs and idolatrous manners of their masters. During the period of their sojourn and bondage they had become contaminated by their daily contact with Egyptian idolatry, and the animal-worship of this ancient and august civilisation had made on their minds a most profound and lasting impression. So deeply rooted was this foul idolatry in the hearts of Israel that in sight of Mount Sinai, and while Moses was receiving the law from God and delayed to come down, the people gathered themselves unto Aaron and

said, "Up! make us gods which shall go before us," &c. Jeroboam doubtless remembered this incident in the history of his people; he had this venerable precedent for his guide—a precedent established by the first high priest of Israel; whereupon he took counsel and made two calves of gold, and said, It is too much for the people to go up to Jerusalem: behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. And this thing became a sin, for the people went to worship before the golden calves, and it gave colour and direction to the whole subsequent history of the northern kingdom of the ten tribes. And thus idolatry was established by the king himself as the national religion of the ten tribes, constituting the northern kingdom of Israel. 1. The wise Solomon saw the many abilities of Jeroboam, and made him, when a young man, ruler over all the charge of the house of Joseph; he was a man of decision, discretion, industry and valour. But he was destitute of faith and devoid of that fear of the Lord which is the beginning of wisdom. 2. Jeroboam in thus establishing idolatry in order to strengthen the throne and consolidate his kingdom ignored the living God as a potent factor in the problem. The Divine element, which was the all-controlling one, found no place in his plans, his calculations or his conduct. 3. In the establishment of idolatry he did not openly reject the Jehovah of Israel, but corrupted His worship—with what far-reaching evil let Israel's shameful history and ignominious end proclaim. 4. The corruption of the people proceeded, *pari passu*, with the corruption of the worship of God. The life of the nation began with flagrant violations of the Divine law and with an idolatrous worship, and the effects of these sins are seen in all the subsequent history of Israel. The national life was polluted at its very fountain, for the religion and worship of any people are the very innermost springs of being, development and civilisation; and so Israel passed from bad to worse with frightful rapidity and momentum, and her history is red with blood and dark with defilement. 5. Israel's idolatry led not only to her decay, but to her death. The wages of sin is death, no less for the nation than for the individual. The soul that sinneth and the nation that sinneth shall die. (*A. W. Pitzer, D.D.*) *Ecclesiastical policy of Jeroboam, read in the light of our own day*:—I. JEROBOAM'S DIFFICULTY. The difficulty was a religious one. In the northern kingdom which he had founded there was no temple—no place consecrated for offerings and sacrifices. The temple was the crowning glory of Jerusalem, the capital of the southern kingdom, "Whither the tribes went up, the tribes of the Lord, unto the testimony of Israel." The only place of sacrifice, the only place in which the highest religious duties could be discharged, was in the rival kingdom over which Rehoboam reigned. The hour had not yet come when "neither in this mountain nor yet at Jerusalem should men worship the Father." It was the hour in which every devout Jew felt compelled to offer the appointed sacrifices in the appointed place. No provision could be found in Jeroboam's kingdom for the religious wants of the people. He had to rule a nation (which was nothing if it was not religious—a nation which, in former times, had been ruled by Jehovah without the aid of kings) without any of the signs of His presence—no ark, no shekinah glory, no tables of stone, no altar, no priest, no temple. Jeroboam knew full well that these were essential to the nation—that unless these religious needs were met within his own borders the people would go up to Jerusalem, they would be found within the temple of Solomon. He feared that they would be fascinated by the glory both of the city and temple; that their hearts would be drawn thither; that the rival kingdom of Judah would acquire new glory in their eyes; and that, sooner or later, they would forsake their allegiance to him and his throne, and return to the dynasty which they had so recently forsaken. II. JEROBOAM'S REMEDY. The difficulty was very evident. The remedy was not easily to be found. It probably gave the king much anxious thought, and, when it was found, was of the kind to be expected both from his character and antecedents. Altars were reared, objects of worship were devised after the model afforded by the sacred calf of Heliopolis. The cry heard long before beneath the granite crags of Sinai was repeated: "These are thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt." The feast times were altered to suit the later harvest of the more northern climate. To borrow the felicitous historical illustrations of Dean Stanley, just as Abder-rahman, Caliph of Spain, arrested the movements of his subjects to Mecca by the erection of the holy place of the Zeca at Cordova, or as Abdelmalik, because of his quarrel with the authorities at Mecca, built the dome of the rock at Jerusalem, so Jeroboam sought to rear rival seats of sacrifice in his kingdom to keep the heart of the people from Jerusalem, and

bind them more closely to his person and his throne. III. LESSONS SUGGESTED BY THIS POLICY OF JEROBOAM. 1. The inconvenience of the State busying itself with religious matters. The true policy of Jeroboam would have been to have left religion alone. He had been called to the throne for political purposes. After all, the root of the whole mischief is to be found in want of faith. Assuredly it was thus with Jeroboam. On two distinct occasions, by symbolic but most expressive methods, he had received the assurance that over the ten tribes he would be called to be king. He knew that "the thing was from the Lord." This religious difficulty met him, it is true, at the very opening of his reign. Why could he not leave it in Jehovah's hands? Why could he not fill the throne assured that God would provide for the Church? Why could he not believe that called to the throne he would be preserved therein, although the people did go year by year to sacrifice in the rival kingdom? It is thus in our day. Men are filled with all manner of fear if this union be not preserved. Why cannot we believe that God will provide for His Church, and that the more she trusts in Him and the less in men, the stronger she will be for her work? 2. The evil of preferring policy to principle. Policy lay at the root of Jeroboam's mischief. Although he had lived in Egypt, he belonged to the chosen race, and was ignorant neither of its history nor laws. Policy is a word too often on men's lips. The very commonness of its use is significant of the prevalence of the thought. To many minds it is quite sufficient to dissuade from a course of action to say it is not good policy. If right go with policy, all is well; if right part company with policy, right pleads in vain. The men who range themselves fearlessly under the banner of truth, who adopt the motto of our great English orator and statesman, "Be just, and fear not," are regarded as dangerous men. The cry needs to be heard, "Let integrity and uprightness preserve me, for I wait on Thee." The conviction needs to take strong hold of our spirit, "Thou desirest truth in the inward parts." We need to listen to the words of our great Poet, words which sound like an echo of the voice of prophet and apostle, words filled with the spirit of Him who came to bear witness to the Truth—

> To thine own self be true,
> And it must follow, as the night the day,
> Thou canst not then be false to any man.

(*W. G. Horder.*) *Idolatry established*:—I. THE KING MADE USE OF THE CHURCH TO SERVE HIS POLITICAL AMBITIONS. Historical illustrations of success in a similar line to that entered upon by Jeroboam are abundant. The Roman Church has this sad record to face, of its having been a support or cover to all the personal ambitions that throb in a human breast. The important thing, however, is that, under all forms of church establishment or order, these influences are liable to manifest themselves. The dangers to the church arise not merely from the desires of prominent individuals to exercise undue control in ecclesiastical affairs; the false sentiments of men within and without the church are the sources of evil. Pressure is brought to bear upon the Christian community to declare itself positively on difficult or doubtful questions. Political motives often mingle with those that are personal in leading men thus to antagonise the church into a position favourable to their views. II. THE PEOPLE SACRIFICED THEIR RELIGIOUS PRINCIPLES TO THEIR LOVE OF EASE. If a young man who has been taught secret prayer neglects that duty and privilege till bedtime, and delays still further till he retires, that prayer will not be a vital, faithful prayer. Frederick W. Robertson used to say, "Begin the day with a sacrifice." He rose quickly. He engaged his mind, instead of allowing it to wander in the precious morning hours. It was his habit to learn a verse of Scripture while dressing. Some vigorous mental and moral effort is necessary to bring one into a proper state for worship. III. THE INTRODUCTION OF OLD ERRORS MADE IDOLATRY MORE ACCEPTABLE. Jeroboam took advantage of an incident in the early history of the people of Israel in setting up the golden calves. The old sin of the tribes, in worshipping the calf made by Aaron in the absence of Moses, was yet to bear fruit. The new ritual is made more acceptable by being linked with an old sin. The people fell again into the pit from which they were digged. The results, however, were those that universally followed disobedience to God's commands. Moab and Damascus were soon as near as Bethel and Dan, and their worship as acceptable to deceived Israel. IV. A SERVILE PRIESTHOOD AIDED IN ACCOMPLISHING THE ENSLAVEMENT OF THE PEOPLE. We need not understand, by the lowest orders of the people, the worst of the population of the ten tribes. The king chose his priests where it pleased him,

outside of the tribe of Levi. This would undoubtedly be a popular measure. Probably the king did not choose all bad men. It does not appear a matter of great importance to many in this day that a man be called of God to the ministry; it is, however, a most vital matter. If he does not recognise God's call upon him, he will not feel responsibility to God. He is only, or chiefly, responsible to men. We obey the master that elevates us. The priests, out of the lowest orders of the people, served the king. Men will treat lightly the word of God unless an inward voice has declared to them its sacredness and their commission in regard to it. The servility begotten of a feeling of responsibility to men expresses itself in formalism. It recognises custom and tradition as the law by which men are to guide their lives. A ministry that the world calls will obey its master. Let us have a consecrated and called ministry. (*Monday Club Sermons.*) *A Man-made religion*:—Jeroboam sought to satisfy the people's longings. I. MUCH OF OUR RELIGION TO-DAY IS MAN-MADE. This is seen, 1. In work done in the churches from wrong motives. 2. In accepting doctrines which are merely pleasing to us. 3. In modifying God's Word to suit the times. 4. In making our standard the standard for testing salvation. II. BUT TRUE RELIGION HAS GOD FOR ITS AUTHOR. Only the God-made religion (1) is acceptable to God; (2) will satisfy man's deepest longings; (3) will save man and stand the test of time. Is your religion man-made or God-made? (*Homiletic Review.*)

CHAPTER XIII.

VERS. 4–6. **He put forth his hand.**—*The prophecy against Jeroboam and its attendant circumstances*:—I. ALL HUMAN POWER AND SKILL ENGAGED AGAINST GOD WILL WITHER. The hand of man is the bodily mark of his superiority to the animal creation; it represents his power and skill. It is the bread winner of the body. By its skilful use he imitates the works of God in nature, and by its means he sends down his thoughts to posterity. Jeroboam's outstretched hand was the type of all human opposition to God's rule, especially the opposition of the rulers of the world. Its withering was the exposition of "No weapon formed against thee shall prosper" (Isa. liv. 17); "He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh" (Ps. ii. 4, &c.) II. PHYSICAL BLESSING IS OF MORE IMPORTANCE TO THE UNGODLY MAN THAN MORALITY OF CHARACTER. Christ's teaching is, "If thy hand offend thee, cut it off" (Matt. xviii. 8), count no earthly loss worthy of a thought compared with an injury to the spiritual life. (*Outlines from Sermons by a London Minister.*) *Hospitality refused*:—As the man of God from Judah so nobly refuses Jeroboam's royal hospitality, I am reminded of Lord Napier. On one occasion his lordship was sent down to Scotland by the Queen on a royal errand of review and arbitration between a great duke and his poor crofters. The duke, the administration of whose estate was to be inquired into, was good enough to offer his lordship his ducal hospitality for as long as the royal session of review lasted. But Her Majesty's Deputy felt that neither his Royal Mistress nor himself could afford to be for one moment compromised, or even suspected, by her poorest subject; and therefore it was that his lordship excused himself from the duke's table, and took up his quarters in the little wayside inn. "At any rate, you will come to the manse," said the minister, who was on the crofter's side. "Thank you," said Napier. "But in your college days you must have read Plutarch about Cæsar's wife. No, thank you." And his lordship lodged all his time in the little hotel, and went back to his Royal Mistress when his work was done, not only with clean hands, but without even a suspicion attaching to her or to him. "Come home with me and refresh thyself." But the man of God said to the king, "If thou wilt give me half thine house, I will not go in with thee, neither will I eat bread nor drink water with thee." So he went another way, and returned not by the way that he came to Bethel. (*A. Whyte, D.D.*)

Vers. 11–32. **Now there dwelt an old man in Bethel.**—*The nameless prophet*:—This passage forms part of a very remarkable narrative. The miraculous element is so prominent that certain critics would have the chapter expunged from Holy Scripture. The natural and the supernatural are closely interwoven, as are the woof and web of a fabric, and the destruction of either would be the practical dissolution of the whole; indeed, nowhere is this more manifestly true than in the life and death, in the resurrection and ascension, in the works and claims of

our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Who was this bold prophet? Josephus identified him with Iddo, the seer; but the statement is merely conjectural. The man must remain nameless, as he is left in this chapter. I. THE MESSAGE DELIVERED BY THIS NAMELESS PROPHET. 1. Its Divine origin is expressly asserted in the second verse: "he cried . . . in the word of the Lord." This is a remarkable phrase. It is not said that he cried the word of God, but that he cried "in" it—as if his message were the sphere in which he lived, the atmosphere he breathed. Nothing could more forcibly suggest the source from which all religious teachers draw their power. It is the consciousness of having a Divine message, the sureness of a Divine call, the confidence that what they have to say is "the Word of the Lord," which is the sign of the true prophet. 2. The definite nature of this message deserves attention. The very name of the avenger, Josiah, is mentioned, though it was 300 years before he was born; and it was distinctly foretold that idolatrous priests would be slain on the altar erected in defiance of God, and that the site now being set apart for heathen worship would be defiled and dishonoured by the bones of the dead. Centuries elapsed before the fulfilment of this threat, but it came at last, and came at the appointed time, proclaiming to all future ages this solemn truth, which it is madness to ignore: "the wages of sin is death." God's punishments are never arbitrary. They are the legitimate issues of the crime or vice they belong to. The sinner is destroyed by his own sin. And this is in harmony with all that we know of God's works. Science is showing the links between cause and effect with ever-growing clearness and certainty; and the doctrine of evolution reveals that limbs may perish by disuse or may be developed by necessities of life in new surroundings. This is true everywhere, not least in the punishments and privations threatened in Scripture, here and hereafter. II. THE COURAGE HE DISPLAYED. His boldness it is not easy to overrate. It was the consciousness the prophet had that he was God's messenger that gave him this heroism. It was this which prepared Moses to dare the wrath of Pharaoh; this which nerved Elijah to stand alone face to face with the prophets of Baal; this which enabled Peter and John undauntedly to face the Sanhedrim; and this which made Ambrose, and Knox, and Luther, and Zwingli types of a truer heroism than any field of battle has revealed. III. THE SAFETY OF THE PROPHET was assured, and credentials of his commission were given, when the altar was suddenly cleft in twain, and all the ashes poured out. We see nothing incredible here, or in many other miraculous signs mentioned in the Old and New Testaments. Supernatural signs are surely the legitimate evidences of a supernatural revelation. They are simply the assertion of the supremacy of the spiritual and unseen over the material and visible; and if we really believe that the things seen were not made of things which do appear, we need not be incredulous when evidences of the existence of these are given. Among the phenomena of Nature, we all know that a mountain may be still and silent for ages, villages cluster round its base, men toil and children play on its sides, and they have no suspicion that it is volcanic; but at last the subterranean fires may burst out, and just as that force, long hidden, asserts itself within the limits of half-known law, so it may be, so it has been, within the limits of unknown law. Our Lord Jesus Christ boldly said of His own miracles: "If ye believe not Me, believe the works." the works which modern admirers of His moral teaching would rule out of court!—and the apostles put the resurrection of Christ, which some would explain away, into the very forefront of Christian evidences. IV. THE TEMPTATION HE RESISTED, to which our text alludes. Jeroboam failed in the use of violence; but, nothing daunted, he sought to overcome the messenger of Jehovah by craft. Doubtless there are many who have had such conflicts and conquests. Tempted to sin, you have replied: "How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" Sitting among the sinners, when you could not avoid them, you did not approve their mockery even by the faintest smile. Able to win wealth and position, you resolutely refused to stoop to do what you knew was base and false. In such hours of triumph I would entreat you most vividly to remember, and most humbly to acknowledge, that the victory came only through Him that loved you, or you may ultimately experience the fall which came to the prophet after his first victory was won. V. THE SECOND TEMPTATION, which we must not overlook, was successful and fatal. It came from an "old prophet," who lived near by, who approached his fellow-servant when he was tired, and who, professing to have received a message from God, induced him to enter his house in Bethel, and thus to disobey the command of the Lord. If it be asked why this temptation succeeded, while

that of Jeroboam failed, we should attribute it to the self-complacence and self-confidence engendered by successful resistance to the king, and to the sense of false security which generally succeeds in a crisis of peril. Evidence of this is seen in the fact that he rested under a terebinth, instead of pressing homeward, as he had been told to do. 1. Learn from this that the conquest of one evil often leads to an assault from another. 2. Learn also that it is a perilous thing to linger in a scene of temptation, though for a time we may have to go into it in order to do God's work. If this prophet had not rested, instead of hurrying forward, he would not have been overtaken before he crossed the border line of safety between the two kingdoms. VI. THE TRIFLING DISOBEDIENCE which brought about so terrible a retribution. It seemed a very small offence to go home with a brother prophet for pleasant, and perhaps profitable, intercourse. But there was no doubt about the will of God in this matter. An act may seem as trifling as that; and yet it may involve a momentous principle. It was a small thing for Eve to take the fruit of the tree; but it was an act of direct disobedience, and therefore brought death into the world, and all our woe. It is in what we call trifles that God tests our obedience and love. (*A. Rowland, B.A.*) *The penalty of disobedience*:—It may seem, at first sight, that the prophet was hardly visited for breaking such a commandment as this; and yet we may remember that Adam brought death on himself and us all by an act of disobedience much akin to this; for he was commanded not to eat, but he did eat: why should any of his children fare better, especially when sinning like this prophet, to whom the word of God came not as to other men, immediately into his heart from the Holy Spirit of God? He grieved the Holy Spirit. But though he did not sin wilfully, but was most artfully tempted into his sin, God's justice could not spare him; an example must needs be made of the punishment of faithlessness in so high a commission. Such is the example: now how does it concern the Christian? 1. The Christian is a prophet, for he has the gift of the Word of God and of His Holy Spirit, and the revelation of the world to come. And his profession is to protest and struggle against the corruption of the world, against which he must denounce the wrath of God which cometh on the children of disobedience. 2. As the prophet had the commandment given him, "to eat no bread, nor drink water, nor turn again by the same way that he came," that is, to have no fellowship with the sinners whose idolatry God had sent him to denounce, so the Christian has a special injunction on this head: it has been given him both in the word of his Saviour, and in the example of his Saviour. We must not as Christians eat and drink by the way; we must not waste our precious time and heavenly substance in the carnal enjoyments of this life; but we must go on the way which God hath pointed out to us, without turning to the right or to the left for refreshment, for if we do, then we are out of His way, then we are in the forbidden habitations of sin; still less must we return by the same way that we came. 3. The prophet was tempted by a false brother; and even so are Christians tempted by false brethren, and persuaded by them to sit down to the meat and drink of sinful indulgence, and to return by the same way that they came, going backward, though at a much quicker rate, through the same steps that they have come forward in the Christian race. 4. And whom did God choose to pronounce sentence of death upon him? His very deceiver. And is not this continually the case? Is not the tempter into sin often the very first to reproach the tempted with his sin, and to mock at him when it is beyond remedy? Is he not often the first to open his eyes to his real state, and laugh at him? This is the way of Satan, the grand tempter of all, and therefore the way of his children also. Thus sin is felt by the tempted as the sting of death indeed! 5. And now see the end: a lion met the prophet in his way and slew him. And is there no lion ready for the faithless Christian too? Yes; the lion is at the door ready for all the unwary, gaping upon them with his mouth, staring upon them with his eyes, on the crouch, and ready to spring at the first favourable moment, and rend and tear the soul in pieces. 6. If God could visit with such strict justice the disobedience of a man who was tempted to believe that he was obeying God, how will He visit those who yield to temptation with the clear knowledge that they are disobeying God, and hearken to men who they know cannot be prophets of God, as was the man to whom this prophet listened, but are evidently prophets of Satan. (*R. W. Evans, B.D.*) *The prophet's temptation and fall*:—Holy Scripture gives some terrible warnings as to the power and danger of temptation. Notably, the fall of men of God through temptation. This narrative is such a warning. Brings before us—1. Generally, the subject of temptation. 2. Specially, temptation. (1) By means of our

fellow-men. (2) To disobedience of God's express command. It is thus illustrative of, and illustrated by, other passages of Scripture. I. TEMPTATION PROMPTLY REPELLED. 1. Plain command had been given to this "man of God" (ver. 9). But no reason assigned. This is in keeping with many positive obligations of God's law. 2. King Jeroboam desires him to act in opposition to God's command. (1) It is an open temptation, recognised as such. (2) It is a temptation of the world. (3) It appeals to self-interest: something is to be gained (ver. 7). Like the temptation of Eve (Gen. iii. 5), of Balaam (Num. xxii. 16, 17), of Christ (Matt. iv. 8, 9). 3. He understands it, resolves, acts. He turns away from it (ver. 10). Like Joseph (Gen. xxxix. 9–12). Learn—our real safety is to flee from temptation. II. TEMPTATION FEEBLY RESISTED. 1. Again the same temptation comes: but not now from standpoint of the world, of open enmity with God. A seeming prophet is tempter (vers. 11–15). 2. The man of God feels some inward desire to comply with the temptation. There is hesitation in his resistance; he says, "I may not," and therefore "will not." Learn—(1) The beginning of our fall is when our will begins to be out of accord with God's law; when we would sin, but dare not. (2) There is danger in parleying with temptation. III. TEMPTATION YIELDED TO. 1. For third time same temptation assails him, and with additional inducement. Satan becomes as an "angel of light," his emissary assumes the position of a minister of God (ver. 18). This case resembles Satan's quotation of Scripture (Matt. iv. 3. 6). 2. The man of God is deceived by the insidiousness of the lie. (1) Temptation at first repelled, then entertained, is at last successful. (2) He yields, and disobeys God's Word. (3) His sin meets with direct judgment (ver. 24). Learn—(1) The transgression of God's law in any particular is sin. (2) The wages of sin is death. Conclusion—Two passages in the New Testament sum up and enforce the whole subject:—1. 1 Cor. x. 13. (1) Temptation is a law of all human life. The man of God is not exempt. (2) Temptation is in God's mercy regulated according to our ability to resist. (3) A way of escape is ever open to us. Generally by our promptly turning away from the person or thing tempting us. 2. Gal. i. 8. (1) Temptation often comes by the example or persuasion of our fellow-creatures. (2) It will come as though with the authority of God. This specially in temptations to scepticism and disbelief as to the truth of Rom. vi. 23. (3) God's Word cannot contradict itself. Should it seem to do so, or any human interpretation make it appear to do so, we may doubt our own views or the interpretation of others, and should adhere to the plain truth of Holy Scripture. (*T. H. Barnet.*) *The disobedient prophet, and the liar, masked in the angel-face of truth.—The first and last phase of the evil one*:—I. THE MISSION OF THIS MAN OF GOD TO BETHEL IS A MOST IMPORTANT ONE. He is entrusted by his heavenly Master with unfolding the Divine judgments to King Jeroboam, on account of his great sin in making the lowest of the people priests of the high places, and in consequence also of his open and zealous patronage of the most abominable idolatry. 1. The time of the prophet's arrival at Bethel. It happened when Jeroboam stood at the altar to burn incense. To face a guilty monarch and unveil the Divine denunciations threatened on account of his rebellious conduct, is by no means an easy task. 2. The mode of address. He addresses himself not to the guilty monarch, but as if he wished Jeroboam to feel he had forfeited the honour of being addressed like a rational agent, the prophet accosts the inanimate altar, that altar by which the king now usurpingly stood to burn incense. "O altar, altar!" he cries, not in his own name, but in the name of that God who sent him, "Thus saith the Lord." 3. The matter of the prophet's address. Now it is well worthy of remark, that though this predicted king is so particularly mentioned by name, none of the kings of Israel thought fit to assume the name, until the real and good Josiah himself appeared as the executor of all the vengeance of a righteous God against sin. This name was given by the wicked Manasseh to his son quite undesignedly, a name which was to be the terrible watchword of the downfall of idolatry practised by Manasseh and Jeroboam: it was a name given by Manasseh to his son, in spite, as it were, of Manasseh himself, in diametrical opposition to Manasseh's policy. II. REGARD HIS TEST OF OBEDIENCE. The man of God having executed in a bold and faithful manner the grave commission entrusted to him, is preparing to take his departure, when Jeroboam, anxious it would appear to render the man of God some recompense for his kindness in having petitioned the Majesty of Heaven to restore his hand, approaches him with the friendly invitation. The prophet having manfully, by the grace of God, resisted the temptation of the king's invitation, is already on the way back to

Judah, the way pointed out by the Lord for him to take. But although he has resisted one temptation and got apparently clear of Bethel, he is not yet safe. We are never secure while we are pilgrims and travellers in this world, which is not our rest, against the varied and constant assaults of Satan's temptations; as soon as one temptation is overcome, another is ready to overtake us on life's road; which teaches us ever to be watchful and prayerful. III. THE PROPHET'S DISOBEDIENCE, AND ITS RESULT. How does the faith of the man of God now stand against this tremendous trial? He, who had a little previous so triumphantly combated the temptation to eat bread and drink water at a royal table, now, alas! totters in his obedience, and listens to the unlikely lie of an aged prophet, sanctioned, as he diabolically pretended, by an angel's revelation, and consents to return with him. The most dangerous form temptation can assume, is that of a lie, disguised in the mantle of truth, uttered by the ravening wolf clad in the sheep's clothing. By the snares of this temptation, the prophet now fell into the labyrinth of disobedience. It is Satan's master temptation. By this truth-gilded lie our first parents fell, and sin and death entered into the world. The devil put on a goodly outside, entered into the then attractive serpent, approached our unsuspecting mother in that so sleek form, and led her to fail in the first great test of human obedience, which was to be the proof of man's love, the eating of the forbidden fruit. The man of God, disobedient to the Divine command, accompanies the old prophet back to Bethel. There, dead to the fearful consequences of what he is doing, he refreshes the exhausted body at the board of hospitality. Swift indeed, and signal is the punishment inflicted on the man of God, and some may think the punishment severe; but the disobedience of the prophet in eating bread and drinking water was aggravated by the circumstances under which it was committed. Learn a lesson from this sorrowful circumstance, which Jeroboam failed to learn, even the lesson of obedience to the Word of God. Keep only in the track pointed out by that Word, though an angel from heaven might tell thee to do contrary to its Divine message to thy soul. Obey its every precept, small or great. (*R. Jones, M.A.*) *The disobedient prophet*:—We have in this account a very striking illustration of the truth enunciated by the Apostle James, the Lord's brother, at the first council at Jerusalem, namely, that "known unto God are all His works from the beginning of the world" (Acts xv. 18). The prediction uttered by the man of God against the altar at Bethel was not fulfilled for the space of 360 years; and yet, when the time fixed in the counsels of Omnipotence arrived, not one thing failed of accomplishment of all that he had declared should come to pass. Now, this truth may afford comfort to all who love and fear God. Many of God's people, when they hear of the overflowings of ungodliness and unbelief, may be almost inclined to think that God hath forgotten His gracious promises, and that He will in truth shut up His loving-kindness in displeasure. But they may chide away their unbelieving fears as David did: "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God" (Ps. xlii.). But I must point out a few lessons of instruction which this portion of holy writ may furnish us with. 1. And, first, it may teach us that, whenever God hath plainly declared His will, no grounds of supposed expediency, and no less fully authenticated declarations, however they may profess to proceed from Him, should ever induce us to depart from it. This we may learn both from the conduct of Jeroboam, as well as from that of the man of God. And, assuredly, we have abundant examples of its danger. We know that the Jews, who lived at the time when our Saviour was upon earth, are accused by Him of making void the law of God by their traditions; and even to the present day, by listening to the same fallacious guide, though they nominally admit the Divine authority of the Old Testament scriptures, they fritter away all their most important requirements. But how, it may be asked, does it arise that men can satisfy themselves to pay any attention to such a pretender? And the answer is, because, like the old prophet, it comes forward with a bold assertion of its Divine authority, though with as little regard to truth as he displayed. Tradition, among the Jews, professes to be an interpretation of the law given by God to Moses, and transmitted through elders, prophets, and wise men. 2. Another lesson to be learned from what is here recorded is that we cannot judge of a man's eternal state from the way in which he may be taken out of this world. A man of God sins; and within a few hours a lion slays him: the lying prophet that seduced him lives on, and goes to his grave in peace; yea, wicked Jeroboam continues his idolatrous worship, and treads upon the grave of his reprover. What shall we make of this? Doubtless such events teach us that there must be a judgment to come, when all these seeming

inequalities will be corrected, and when rewards and punishments will be dispensed with impartial justice and unerring wisdom. At present God's people are chastened; but it is that they may not be condemned with the world; whereas the ungodly and the profane are in many instances unpunished. 3. A third lesson which may be learned from this narrative is, not to be induced heedlessly to follow any guide, whatever may be his pretensions, or whatever his apparent sanctity. The Apostle John gives the following caution: "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God; because many false prophets are gone out into the world" (1 John iv. 1). And, if such advice was needful in apostolic times, much more is it required now. 4. The last lesson which I would point out to you as derivable from this passage of Scripture is, that no command of God is to be lightly regarded, and that the nearer people are to God the more certainly will their transgressions be punished. Implicit, unquestioning obedience has been in all ages the characteristic of God's most eminent servants. (*T. Grantham.*) *The disobedient prophet of Judah*:—The fate of the prophet of Judah has always been deemed a hard one. That it should be so is by no means surprising. We should certainly expect so striking a punishment to have been inflicted upon a very different kind of person. And it is that very circumstance which makes it the more important that we should look into the case. To sum what may be said for him, it comes to this: (1) he fulfilled faithfully the essential part of his mission; (2) his trifling transgression was excusable considering the plot laid to deceive him; and (3) in any case his punishment was extreme in severity. In thinking of the severity of the punishment, I have no doubt that we unconsciously infuse into our thoughts the assumption that the prophet of Judah suffered eternal death, because it was deemed necessary to execute him. As to his future state we know nothing whatever. No doubt at the great day his destiny will be settled, not by one act, but by his life. "But he fulfilled the essential part of his mission." Even supposing that we could so far enter into the Divine mind as to say what is essential in any command; still it is plain that there may be a wide difference between that part of the Divine command which was the more important in, so to speak, its missionary and public aspect, as regarded Jeroboam, and that part of it which regarded the prophet personally, and would be the more likely to try him. But surely, setting aside all thought of religion, we know that "trifles" lead into serious evils, and are often the turning-points of life as well as the tests of principle. And, as men of the world and men of honour, we shall admit that the importance of a principle does not depend upon the importance of the thing to which it is applied in some particular instance. You decide upon a man's dishonesty, not by the magnitude of his fraud, but the fact. When once we receive, no matter how, what we believe to be a Divine command, it is plain that we have no right to decide how much of it God meant to be attended to, and how much we may set aside as immaterial. Here is the case of no vulgar sinner, no thoughtless transgressor of the Divine law, but one whom we are justified in regarding as a man of pre-eminent virtue, honoured by the King of kings by being chosen to discharge a difficult and dangerous duty, and supplied with minute instructions. The difficult and dangerous part of his mission he performed; he even so far discharged the seemingly less important part as to refuse the royal invitation. The crisis, as we should naturally think, had been passed. But it was not in the great matter, but in the small matter that he was tried, and that he failed; as he who has escaped perils of waters over thousands of miles of angry ocean, sometimes is drowned in the narrow unrippled river, within sight of home. It is not in the hour of persecution only, or of open and obvious peril that we need to be on our guard. We often brace ourselves for that. It is in the smaller occurrences of life that we need to be careful and watchful unto prayer, if principle be involved. And in how few things is it not involved, after all? The thought, doubtless, suggests danger in these "small things"; but does it not also invest them with dignity? Does it not raise them out of the dust? What can be small in action or in suffering by which the character can be tested and the soul tried? (*J. C. Coghlan, D.D.*) *On the character of the man of God that came from Judah*:—Now, in order to come to a right understanding of the conduct of "the man of God which came from Judah," and to appreciate the error of which he was guilty, and for which he suffered; it will be necessary to remember how critical were the circumstances under which he was called to act; how extensive and sacred were the interests which were, more or less, to be involved in the discharge of his mission to Bethel. He came on an express mission, to denounce the apostasy of the times. He came to confront the very author of all this mischief as he stood by the altar

of his own pride; to tell him, and his benighted worshippers, of their blasphemy and iniquity; to prophesy the day, when God's signal vengeance should be poured on the altar at which they so blindly knelt; when one of His anointed servants, of the kingly race of David, should fearfully purge that land of its crimes; should destroy the houses, and all the priests of the reigning idolatry, and burn the very reliques of their bodies on the altars of their profane worship. Nothing, therefore, could have been more important, nothing more full of trust, than the mission of him who was thus sent from Judah to Bethel. His instructions must have been of the most solemn kind; and we have reason to know that they were in all things express and minute. Now, in reviewing the conduct of the prophet, we are furnished with a key to a right apprehension of its error, and the cause of its signal punishment. In the outset of his conduct, when the temptation was manifest, and the snare but clumsily laid, he acted in every respect with fidelity and decision. Here, then, it becomes a natural question,—in what had the great guilt of the man of God consisted? True, he had disobeyed the Divine command; but was not the force of that command in a manner cancelled by what the old prophet professed? Could the prophet of Judah have judged that his aged brother was lying to him? if not, wherefore this great and summary punishment? The answer to this is that the "man of God" ought so to have judged. He should have remembered, that on the one part he would be obeying his Maker, whose will he fully knew; on the other, he would be listening to a mere mortal, whose truth and authority he did not know, but which he even had good reason to suspect. Against the dictates of conscience, and calm judgment, he yielded to the latter; and therefore brought himself under the displeasure and condemnation of his God. In such times of apostasy and disbelief as those, slight actions assumed the importance of great ones; especially if depending on the known will of God. The prophet of Judah was placed in a conspicuous and important post; and it was essential that his conduct in it should be signally marked. As to the punishment itself, we only know that it affected the body; not a word do we know of the destiny of the soul. Lessons—1. What God has commanded and sanctified, can be no trifle. If it be but a particle, a tittle of His will, it is enough. The least compromise on our part may tend to evil that we know not of; and our only safe and right course is in simple, implicit obedience. 2. Again, we must be always on our guard against the effect of any apparent sanctity in profession. "I am also a prophet as thou art," was the rock on which the prophet of Judah foundered. Let us not be so deceived. We know where to look for God's revealed will; we know where to look for its authorised interpretation and enforcement. 3. Finally, looking at the example in a more general point of view, let it teach us the peril of all dalliance, vacillation, and delay. Let us not be found sitting under the wayside oak; loitering on the world's highroad. We cannot toy and idle as we pass, in a region of contamination and guilt. Wherever there is one thoughtless, vacant, indifferent to his everlasting salvation, that man is first marked for a prey by his eternal foe. (*J. Puckle, M.A.*) *The disobedient prophet*:—I. THE GREAT PROFESSIONAL AND SPIRITUAL EMINENCE OF THIS YOUNG PROPHET WHO CAME OUT OF JUDAH. He belongs to that great company of men and women of all ages and countries who have contributed much to the service of God, much to the well-being of their fellow-creatures, while on earth. It is only remembered what they did and not who they were. But as to his high standing among his fellows there can be no question. 1. This would appear, first of all, from the Divine mission with which he was entrusted. 2. And the high character and capacity of the nameless prophet of Judah appears, secondly, from the manner in which he discharged his mission. II. AND NOW CAME HIS TRIAL. Now, it is natural to ask, what was the old prophet's motive in taking so much trouble to induce the younger man to do what was wrong? Was the old prophet a false prophet of the type which a few years later abounded in Israel during the ascendency of the Baal-worship? Were his sympathies really on the side of Jeroboam and the new religion of the Egyptian calf, and did he think anything fair if he could only ruin the courageous young man who, on an occasion of such capital importance, had covered both the upstart religion and the upstart king with such great and public discredit? This is what has been thought by some eminent authorities, but it cannot easily be reconciled with the sequel of the history: for how should a false prophet be entrusted with the message announcing to the prophet of Judah the punishment of his transgression? How would a prophet who was opposed to the whole mission and work of the prophet of Judah have insisted on giving him honourable burial in his own grave? Once more, if the old prophet were at heart on the side of Jero-

boam and the calf worship, how are we to explain his confirming the prediction of the prophet of Judah, about the coming destruction of the altar at Bethel? It is impossible to suppose that the old prophet was other than a true prophet of God, who had settled at Bethel. And here we must observe that this old prophet, although a true prophet, was evidently a person with no keenness of conscience, with no high sense of duty. There he was, settled at Bethel, witnessing the triumphant establishment of the new idolatry and of the false, uncommissioned, intrusive priesthood. It does not appear that he had the heart to say a word against the profane proceedings of Jeroboam, while yet he had no hesitation about claiming heavenly authority for a message which he knew was solely dictated by his own wishes. He was evidently an easy-going old prophet, not embarrassed by scruples when he had an object in view, and the appearance on the scene of a younger man, conspicuous for the courage and energy in which he himself was personally deficient, would naturally have affected him in a double manner. III. SEE HERE A TRAGICAL INSTANCE OF THE MISUSE OF AUTHORITY. The prophet of Bethel had the sort of authority which accompanies age and standing. It is an authority which comes in a measure to all who live long enough: it is an authority which belongs especially to fathers of families, and to high officers in Church or State, to great writers, to conspicuous philanthropists, to public eminence in whatever capacity. It is a shadow of a greater and unseen authority which thus rests upon His earthly representatives, and invests this or that creature of a day with something of the dignity of the eternal. What can be more piteous than when, with deliberation or thoughtlessly, it is employed against Him whose authority alone makes it to be what it is? What more lamentable than when the old make truth and goodness more difficult of attainment to those who look up to them, or when, like this prophet of Bethel, they deliberately allure youth into the paths of sin, by appealing to its simple confidence in the wisdom of riper years, or to its reverence for a claim to teach, which would speedily disappear if the world at large were to join them in undermining loyalty to God's commands? Ah! there are prophets of Bethel in all ages. This disposition to discourage high and generous ideals of duty which have not presented themselves to an older generation, or still worse, have been neglected by it, is not unknown in the history of the Christian Church. A great movement may have taken place, in which God the Holy Ghost has placed before a generation of younger men a higher conception of what God's truth and God's service really mean than had occurred to their predecessors. It is always possible, or more than possible, that in a movement like this men will make mistakes, and that such a movement is all the better for the restraining, steadying, guiding influence of authority. But when authority, instead of guiding, discourages, instead of making the best use of the sacred fire—of which, after all, there is not too much in the world—sets to work deliberately to extinguish it, the consequences are disastrous. IV. THE PROPHET OF JUDAH, WHO HAD BRAVED DEATH AND HAD REJECTED ROYAL COURTESIES AT THE ALTAR OF BETHEL, FELL WHEN TEMPTED BY THE OLD PROPHET. It may be thought that the younger prophet sincerely believed his own instructions to be cancelled by the alleged message of the angel to his older brother at Bethel. A moment's thought would, should, have told him that this could not be. He knew that God had spoken to himself; he knew that God does not contradict Himself. He might have been embarrassed for the moment by the confident story of the old prophet about the angel, if he did not suspect, as he might well have suspected, that all was not right, and that there was dishonesty somewhere. When any of us know certainly one piece of the Divine will, we simply have to act upon it, let others say what they may. No earthly authority can cancel, or suspend, or dispense with a duty which is perfectly clear to our own conscience. It has been maintained that the punishment awarded to the prophet of Judah was a disproportionately severe punishment. He forfeited his life, men say, not for committing murder, not for committing adultery, but only for eating bread in a particular place. After all, the command to abstain from eating and drinking at Bethel was not a moral precept, it was only a positive precept. But there are times when positive precepts assume high moral importance, and there are persons upon whom the observance of positive precepts exerts, or may exert, the very highest obligation—persons in whose case a precept positive assumes a distinctly moral character. (*H. P. Liddon, D.D.*)

Disobedience visited:—I. HIS GENERAL CHARACTER—"The man of God." The designation itself may serve to denote, in those to whom it refers: 1. Their special employment. 2. Their special qualifications. As God engaged them in His

work, so He furnished them for it. 3. Their eminent devotedness. (1) Observe his fidelity and zeal. (2) Observe his meekness and placability. (3) Observe, too, his fortitude and disinterestedness (vers. 7–9). II. HIS TEMPTATION (vers. 11–18). This temptation was—1. In suitable time and circumstances. 2. By a suitable agent;—an old prophet. Venerable through age,—a prophet in garb and appearance,—and professing a direct and special revelation (ver. 18.) III. HIS FALL. Here we must blame—1. His unwatchfulness. 2. His easy credulity and compliance. 3. His positive transgression. IV. HIS PUNISHMENT. (*Sketches of Sermons.*) *The disobedient prophet*:—I. HE DISCHARGED A TRULY HEROIC DUTY AND THEN FAILED TO DO A MOST ORDINARY ONE. Jeroboam was not in the mood to listen to a prophet from the land of Judah. There was a breach at that time between Israel and Judah, and he did not desire that breach to be healed. He was full of the pride of his newly-acquired power as king over Israel, and full of envy and of hatred of the rival kingdom of Judah. He had established religious services at Dan and at Bethel, so that his people might not need to go up to Jerusalem. We may do the truly heroic deed in some great crisis of our life and show that we are ready to die rather than be disobedient unto God, and yet in the manifold trials and duties of our daily life we may fail to cherish the spirit and reveal the mind of Christ. It is the little duties, the trivial cares, the small disappointments and vexations of our daily life which most severely try our faith, and it is in these that we are most in danger of doing dishonour to our Lord. II. THIS MAN OF GOD VERY NOBLY RESISTED ONE TEMPTATION AND THEN WAS OVERCOME BY A SECOND AND MORE SUBTLE TEMPTATION. III. THIS PROPHET IS AN EXAMPLE OF THOSE WHO COME ALMOST TO THE CLOSE OF LIFE WITH HONOUR AND THEN END IT IN SHAME. How often do we find that towards the evening of life men yield to temptation which covers them with shame and which mars the whole of the glory of their life! Dr. Dale once said that special sermons were often preached for the benefit of the young, but it was equally needful to give special counsel to men of mature age, for the temptations which assail men when the fires of youthful enthusiasm have died away, are often more perilous and more deadly in their effect than those which attack the young. (*G. Hunsworth, M.A.*) *The fatal result of disobedience*:—I. THE SUCCESS OF THE PROPHET. 1. His sudden disappearance. History is silent regarding his birth, education, and family; his very name is concealed—simply, "The man of God, who came from Judah." Travellers tell us that the river Jordan, after springing out of the mountains of Anti-Lebanon, runs underground for miles, and then rushes forth suddenly, a strong, transparent current, and meanders towards the Dead Sea. Even so the early history of this prophet runs through the dark tunnel of silence, unseen by mortal eye; but at Bethel he rushes forth into public life with suddenness and force, and it is easier to imagine than describe the effect of his unexpected appearance both upon the king and populace. It was a moral ambuscade. 2. His stern honesty. When he arrived on the scene of action he did not shrink from his duties, but proclaimed his message as a man who felt the awfulness of his position. 3. His forgiving temper. Instead of taking advantage of the misfortune which befel the apostate king, the man of God prayed that his hand should be restored. II. THE TRANSGRESSION OF THE PROPHET. Under our changing western sky, we have often seen the sun shining brilliantly in the morning, and at noon its smiling face was veiled by dark clouds. So the morning of this man's life was successful and promising, but soon and suddenly the meridian splendour of his character became tarnished by the clouds of misfortune. The best of men have their faults. 1. His indecision of character. Indecision is a great blemish in a man's character—a crack through which the steam of resolution escapes—and an impediment in his way to accomplish any heroic deed. 2. That temptation is strongest when it comes in the guise of friendship. This renegade prophet enticed him into the net by false pretensions. Are we not troubled by these false prophets in modern times? Yea, they are found in the pulpit and under it, and yet they will not leave religion alone, but persist in offering strange fire upon the altar of God, like the sons of Aaron, and will, like them, receive their reward. III. THE JUDICIAL DEATH OF THE PROPHET. The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. His death shows—1. That disobedience is a great sin. 2. Once a man steps off the path of duty he is out of the path of safety. We hear people often complain of Providence, whereas their misfortunes arise from their own folly. All the trouble which comes from God to meet us, He gives strength according to the days to bear and to

conquer them; but the troubles that arise from perverse temper and wilful caprice in us, we cannot make God responsible for them, and so we must carry or drag them ourselves. Duty is like the "magic circle" of the old magicians—all that was inside it was perfectly safe, but all that was outside the ring was liable to be destroyed. Duty likewise is a magic circle—whilst we are inside destruction is impossible. 3. God showed mercy in judgment. Though the lion was permitted to slay him, he was not allowed to feast upon the dead body. Natural historians say that the king of the forest will not attack anything except when hungry. In this case we are not positive whether he was hungry or not, but we are told this much, that "the lion had not eaten the carcase nor torn the ass." Cruel animal! "hitherto shalt thou come, and no further." The man of God had a burial; the prophet of Bethel performed the ceremony, and pretended to mourn, saying, "Alas, my brother!" Nations and families often profess to weep after those whom they had ill-treated in their lifetime. (*W. A. Griffiths.*) *The law of obedience*:—Because the dead leaf obeys nothing, it flutters down from its bough, giving but tardy recognition to the law of gravity; while our great earth, covered with cities and civilisation, is instantly responsive to gravity's law. Indeed, he who disobeys any law of Nature flings himself athwart her wheels, to be crushed to powder. And if disobedience is destruction, obedience is liberty. Obeying the law of steam, man has an engine. Obeying the law of speech, he has eloquence. Obeying the law of fire, he has warmth. Obeying the law of sound—thinking, he has leadership. Obeying the law of Christ, he has character. The stone obeys one law, gravity, and is without motion. The worm obeys two laws, and adds movement. The bird obeys three laws, and can fly as well as stand or walk. And as man increases the number of laws that he obeys, he increases in richness of nature, in wealth and strength and influence. Nature loves paradoxes, and this is her chiefest paradox—he who stoops to wear the yoke of law becomes the child of liberty, while he who will be free from God's law wears a ball and chain through all his years. Philosophy reached its highest fruition in Christ's principle. "Love is the fulfilment of the law." (*N. D. Hillis, D.D.*) *Disobedience in one point*:—Does it make any difference where the murderer's knife touched me? Whether in the face, or on the arm, or over the heart? He may say that he only touched one part. Yes, but it was I whom he attacked; he only touched one part, but he was guilty of injuring the whole body, for it was the whole body that received the shock and felt the pain. Does it make any difference where Prussia strikes in her war on France? Whether at Strasburg, or Metz, or Fontainebleau, or Epernay? She might say, "Oh, I have only taken one or two cities." Yes, but France is a unit, and her government is one body; so that wherever Germany strikes, whether a petty village, or a railroad, or a fort, or a city, she means to strike death to the heart of France. So is the law of God one body, containing the outspoken will and nature of the Lord. If you treat it with violence at any point you strike a blow at the whole government, the very throne itself of God. The law of God is a perfect sphere, and if you mar or disfigure it at all, you mar and disfigure it as a whole, and strike a blow at its whole symmetry and beauty. We all understand this unity of government. If a master makes rules for his pupils, and a pupil offends purposely against the least of them, he opposes his teacher. If my father has certain rules for my guidance, I need not break them all in order to array myself in opposition to him, for on the very least of them I may confront and oppose his authority; and in disobeying one rule of the house, I dispute my father's just right to enforce the remainder. So with the law of God. Disobedience even in one point is the man in his entire nature against God in His entire nature. (*F. F. Emerson.*)

Vers. 18, 19. **He said unto him, I am a prophet also as thou art.**—*Truths about conscience*:—I. CONSCIENCE, OF ITSELF ALONE, IS NOT A SUFFICIENT GUIDE FOR LIFE. Every night, set in the front of the locomotive as it dashes on through the darkness, gleam the rays of the headlight, piercing the gloom for a mile ahead. So, say many, man is himself luminous. Surround him with whatever darkness, and at once it is pierced and thrust aside by a blaze of inherent radiance. But neither Scripture nor experience sustains such notion. Yet conscience is a guide for life. Still, simply in itself conscience is not a sufficient guide for life. For, conscience does not possess the power of origination. It cannot make right right, or wrong wrong. It is only our power of recognising the distinction already made, and as eternal as the heavens. And, just as a blind eye cannot distinguish

between night and day; just as a guide-board wrongly written may send the wearied and famished traveller from the warmth and help of home; so may a blinded, misinformed conscience lead toward wrong instead of toward the right. And therefore, if a man would do the right, he must not only follow his conscience, but he must follow a conscience educated into a knowledge of a higher law; of a standard higher than itself; a conscience conformed and bending to some exact and supremely reigning rule. This, then, is the all-important question—where may the conscience find such enlightenment and education? The answer is immediate. In the Bible and especially in the character of Christ, standing out from the pages of the Bible, gathering up into Himself the vigour of its law, the loveliness of its mercy, the winningness of its invitation. God manifest in the flesh is the real standard and education for the conscience. II. LEARN THE DANGER OF MAKING FEELING, RATHER THAN AN ENLIGHTENED CONSCIENCE, THE TEST FOR LIFE. Feeling is not to rule. Conscience, educated by the Divine command and teaching, is always to rule. III. LEARN THE DANGER OF A CONSCIENTIOUS ERROR. It is no less error. It is not less surely sin. The prophet was conscientiously deceived. That did not hinder the Divine retribution. It does make all difference what a man believes. It does make all difference if a man conscientiously hold to what is false. God has not only given conscience; He has also given light for conscience. It is a man's duty to hold his conscience in the light which God has given. (*W. Hoyt, D.D.*) *The way of the tempter*:—I. THAT THE TEMPTER OF OUR RACE ASSAILS THE BEST OF MEN. The man who now became the victim of temptation was no other than a prophet of the Lord. He was Heaven's appointed delegate. While in this world we are on the tempter's ground. His agencies thickly play around us, and try us in every point of our character. If invulnerable in one part we are tried in another. Through them the best of men have been overtaken in faults. Once they turned the meek Moses into a creature of stormy wrath; the spiritually minded David into a hideous adulterer; the bold indomitable Peter into a contemptible coward. "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." II. THAT THE TEMPTER OF OUR RACE INVARIABLY ACTS THROUGH THE AGENCY OF MAN. How did the tempting spirit appear to this prophet of Judah now? Not in the form of a serpent, as he appeared of old in Eden, nor in the form of an angel, but in the form of a MAN. The devil comes to man through man—acts on man by man. Look for the devil in man. Man is the tempter of man. The fact that man is the tempter of man shows: 1. The moral degradation of human nature. Man has become the tool of Satan. The false religionists, the hypocrites, the infidels, the blasphemers, the carnal, what are they? The instruments of the devil, to seduce and corrupt their fellow-men. Who shall destroy his works? There is One who can, and to Him we look, and in His all-conquering strength we trust. The fact that man is the tempter of man shows: 2. The necessity of constant watchfulness. In social circles be ever on your guard; be cautious as to the companionships you form, as to the books you read, as to the guides you follow. III. THAT THE TEMPTER OF OUR RACE ALWAYS ASSUMES THE GARB OF GOODNESS. The temptation came to this "old prophet" not only through a man, but under the garb of piety.

O that deceit should steal such gentle shapes!

The fact that the tempter ever assumes the garb of goodness teaches: 1. The latent sympathy with virtue that still exists in human nature. If men had a natural sympathy with error as error, wrong as wrong, the devil need not disguise himself so. All the mis-showings, hypocrisies, hollow pretensions, in this false world, are a practical homage rendered to that sympathy with virtue and truth which still exists in human nature. The devil himself appeals to this in order to succeed. The fact that temptation works under the form of goodness teaches: 2. The importance of cultivating the habit of looking through appearances. "Things are not what they seem." Every man "walketh in a vain show." Brush off the varnish and examine the wood; ring the coin and test it; melt the metal and ascertain its worth. Believe no man because he says he is a prophet; trust no man because he says he is a Christian; yield to no man because he professes to love you. IV. THAT THE TEMPTER OF OUR RACE GENERALLY BECOMES THE TORMENTOR OF HIS VICTIM. This tormenting conduct of tempters is: 1. A matter of necessity. A tempter is a sinner, and no sinner has any consolation to offer to a sinner. 2. Prophetic. It shows what must be the case for ever. The response of every appeal in the future world of misery, of the infidel to his agonised disciple, of the seducer to his tormented victim will be "What is

that to us? see thou to that." V. THAT THE TEMPTER OF OUR RACE ONCE YIELDED TO MAY ACCOMPLISH OUR RUIN. In the physical fate of this prophet we are reminded of two things: 1. The course of justice. That dead carcass lying in the wayside is an eloquent homily against sin. In it the voice of justice declares, with telling emphasis, that compliance even with the most plausible temptation is a sin, and that sin even in a good man, and a true prophet, must be punished. In the physical fate of this prophet we are reminded of: 2. The interposition of mercy. The ravenous lion, contrary to his instincts, instead of devouring his victim, stands over it as a kind guardian. Justice made that lion do so much, but mercy restrained him from doing more. Mercy triumphs over judgment. The philosophy of all human history is symbolised here. Justice goes with nature. It was the nature of the lion to destroy. Mercy interrupts the course of justice. It was contrary to the nature of the lion to guard rather than devour its victim. VI. THAT THE TEMPTER OF OUR RACE IS COMPELLED TO DO HOMAGE TO THE VIRTUE HE HAS ASSAILED. There is not a being in the universe, even the prince of tempters, that is not bound by the laws of conscience to respect the virtue he seeks to destroy. (*Homilist.*) *Disguises of sin*:—It is said that a few years ago a detachment of forty Russian soldiers—part of an advanced guard of reconnoitrers—crossed the Yalu river, Korea, to an island in the middle of the river, and there changed their costume, so that they might appear as civilian settlers instead of military invaders. This is said to have been one of the many features of the invasion of Korea compelling the recent strife between Japan and Russia. So sin and error often come in friendly guise, when their intention is very aggressive and destructive. We need much Divine wisdom to recognise the cunning devices of our enemies. *Evil under the guise of good*:—Sir Charles Follett, the chief of H.M. Customs, speaking on the clever tricks of smugglers says: "We have had many extraordinary dodges come under our notice. For instance, innocent looking loaves of bread, when accidentally examined, were discovered to have every particle of crumb removed from them, and the inside crammed with compressed tobacco. This is only one example of manifold specimens of cunning to bring in prohibited goods." How cunning is our great enemy to bring into our souls his contraband. Evil thoughts, desires, and deeds, covered with the most innocent and harmless-looking excuses; so that we need the wisdom from above if we are not to be unmindful of his devices. (*H. O. Mackey.*)

Vers. 20–22. And it came to pass as they sat at the table.—*The two erring prophets*:—1. If the word of God has spoken, the vision or the interpretation which essentially contradicts it cannot be followed without destruction. Nothing short of a real, well-attested revelation could have furnished a better excuse for departing from the word of the Lord; and yet for departing he was slain. Here a lesson is written as it were on the arch of heaven, and hung out for a warning to all generations, not to depart, on any pretence, from the plain word of God. Whatever He has said we must believe and obey, and an angel from heaven must not be allowed to contradict it. We may compare Scripture with Scripture to ascertain what He has actually spoken; but that being determined, we must suffer neither our own reasoning, nor the authority or reasoning or ridicule or glosses of others to weaken our confidence in any revealed truth. Men act over again the part so strongly condemned in the history before us. They leave the plain revelation of God for another guide more congenial with their feelings. At the suggestion of others who set up pretensions to superior knowledge, or at the sole instance of their own depraved hearts, they depart from truth and duty in defiance of the plain prescriptions of God's word. Let them beware. These paths lead "down to death," and these "steps take hold on hell." The Almighty God will rend them like a lion, and there shall be none to deliver. All this becomes more credible when we see, as we do in the account before us: 2. That it is some selfish and sinful bias which leads men to forsake the word of God for fables. In the present case it is most plain by what influence and by what process of mind the man of God came to believe the fatal lie. It was under the spur of an appetite awakened by long abstinence. Pressed with hunger and fainting with thirst, in a sultry climate in the heat of the day, no sooner was the sound in his ear that God had released him from the burdensome restraint, than he rushed to the conclusion that so it was. He opened his ear to hear the refreshing tidings, as he would his parched lips to receive the cooling draught. Any one can almost see the operations of his mind, who has ever studied his own. That selfish desire of personal gratification,—that impatience under the restriction of a burdensome command,—predisposed him

to fall in with the suggestion, and to believe (for he doubtless did believe) that God had released him from the prohibition. How easily do men believe what they wish should be true. No man ever went over from the revelation of God to believe a lie, without being led by a selfish and sinful bias. 3. We perceive in this history how men, and even prophets, will lie to draw others from the pathway of the Lord. The Jewish priests and Roman soldiers equally conspired to cheat the world, by a deliberate lie, out of that infinitely important fact on which the whole Gospel rests. Every revival of religion brings out confessions of this sort. The religion of these several classes is a religion supported, not by their reason, but by their passions. So it was with the religion of Jeroboam. 4. It may be our duty so to bear testimony against errors and vices, as to refuse to eat or drink or associate with those on whom they are found. And when the evil is so great as to call for this marked condemnation, no feelings of courtesy ought to turn us aside from the course of duty; nor ought such a withdrawment to be stigmatised as uncharitableness or bigotry. All this is fully supported by the history before us. 5. We learn from the history before us that strong resistance of temptation will not screen us from death if we are overcome at last. This man of God made a noble stand against the temptation by which he fell. When men have long resisted temptation and are overcome at last, they are prone to raise some excuse from the resistance they have made. But there is no excuse. The virtue of their past resistance is annihilated. They have sinned, and the sentence is out that they must die. 6. Seducers are often made the instruments of punishing their own victims. The old prophet, after decoying the man of God to his house and table, is made the organ of the terrible denunciation against him. The tempter becomes the instrument of punishment. In sin and sinful things is found the punishment of sin. If you touch what is polluted, it will thrust you through with a dart. 7. From this illuminated section of Divine providence we learn that good men, when they transgress, are often more severely punished in this life than the wicked. Instead of being protected by the sanctity of their profession, their nearness to God, the dignity of their office, or any services they may have rendered, they frequently receive a double portion of the cup of trembling. But there is another reason why, under certain circumstances, God punishes His children in this life more than others. When their sins are public, it behoves Him to wipe off the aspersion thus cast upon Himself. 8. This piece of history affords a specimen of the complexness of God's providence, and particularly the extensive effects which are sometimes connected with the punishment of His people, beyond the immediate ends of the chastisement. In the case under consideration, the immediate ends in view were to disown the communion which the prophet had held with idolaters, and to show those idolaters God's abhorrence of sin, and His unalterable determination to punish it on whomsoever found. But besides these ends, the miraculous death of the prophet for disobeying what he had publicly declared to be a part of his instructions, furnished irresistible proof of his Divine mission, and of the truth of the prediction which he had hurled against the altar of idols. By his death also his body was left at Bethel, where his sepulchre, with a broad and legible inscription, hard by the temple of idols, daily delivered anew the same denunciations of heaven, and proved a standing testimony against the idolaters. 9. God corrects His children "in measure," and does not let loose all His wrath, but in the midst of "wrath" remembers "mercy." Thus always does He break the stroke by which He chastises His children; and when the end of the infliction is answered, He opens to them a Father's heart. And at last, when for sin He has sunk them in death, He will set himself down to guard their dust until the last morning bids it rise. (*E. D. Griffiths, D.D.*)

Ver. 24. **And when he was gone, a lion met him by the way, and slew him.**—*A sharp punishment accords*:—But, surely, to be slain by a lion on the way home was a much too sharp punishment for taking one's supper with a prophet and an angel; uneasy conscience and all. But then, "some sins," says that noble piece, the Westminster Larger Catechism, "receive their aggravation from the persons offending; if they be of riper age, greater experience in grace, eminent for profession, gifts, place, office, and as such are guides to others, and whose example is likely to be followed by others." The very case, to the letter, of the man of God out of Judah. The sublimity of his public services that morning had henceforth set up a corresponding standard for his private life. And this is one of our best compensations for preaching the grace of God and the law of Christ. Our

office quickens our conscience; it makes the law cut deeper and deeper into us every day; and it compels us to a public and private life we would otherwise have escaped. Preaching recoils with terrible strokes on the preacher. It curtails his liberty in a most tyrannous way; it tracks him through all his life in a most remorseless manner. Think it out well, and count the cost before you become a minister, or an elder, or a Sabbath School teacher, or a young communicant. Yes, it was surely a little sin, if ever there was a little sin, to sup that Sabbath night at an old prophet's table, and that, too, on the invitation of an angel. (*A. Whyte, D.D.*)

Vers. 26–32. **And when the prophet that brought him back from the way heard thereof.**—*On the character of the old prophet of Bethel*:—The most careful review of this man's conduct does not make it easy to comprehend it; nor, indeed, do we know enough about him to satisfy us in pronouncing decidedly on the subject. Still there are circumstances in his history which do throw light on certain points of his character; and give them sufficient distinctness for us to apprehend a drift in them, and see an instruction which they convey to us. The first circumstance I would notice, is what we find in the twenty-third chapter of the Second Book of Kings; where we read, at the eighteenth verse, that the relics of him who was buried by the side of the man of God, are stated to be "the bones of the prophet that came out of Samaria." He was originally of Samaria, the capital of his country; and now, in his old age, we find him removed to Bethel; the very mount of corruption, the temple of sacrilege, the very throne and stronghold of that "son of Nebat," who had so fearfully "made Israel to sin." Wherefore was he there? Had he gone there in grief and dismay at the doings of his prince, to remonstrate against and correct them? Had he gone, in jealousy of zeal and affection for the honour of his God and his Church? Alas! no; he could have gone with no such wish or object as this, or it would not have required God's special mission of one of His prophets from Judah, to declare the violated truth before king, and priests, and people at Bethel! It is too clear that the old prophet must have been, at least, a consenting party to the doings which had made Israel an abomination in the sight of God. He must have even preferred the new order of things under this spiritual revolution of Jeroboam, or he need not have remained where they must day after day have done violence to his habits, and shocked his principles of religion. 1. That the burden of causing this misery and sin was mainly to be laid to the old prophet's charge, there can be no doubt whatever. Although the delinquency of the man of God was great, the guilt of his aged brother was greater far; the former, indeed, yielded unjustifiably to temptation, but the latter assumed a part fit only for the malice of Satan himself. Our blessed Lord spoke with His characteristic monitory expression, when He joined the character of "a liar and a murderer" together; and pointed out to certain of the Jews that their "father the devil" had been "a destroyer from the beginning, because he abode not in the truth, and there was no truth in him." 2. The next thing we should observe, is the singular faith and courage of his conduct, after he had been forced to announce his own victim's punishment, and after the result of his treachery had broken, in its dreadful reality, upon his mind. Compunction and remorse evidently seized upon his mind, when he set forth upon the sorrowful errand of bringing back to an honoured burial, and a deep mourning, the man whom he had hurried to this untimely end. He saw and acknowledged the finger of God in this thing. 3. Moreover, it is evident that he must by this time have become touched with the truths which God had proclaimed by the mouth of His servant, and the richly earned vengeance in store for the crying sins of Israel. For, according to the words of our text, he solemnly forewarned his sons of the certain accomplishment of "the saying which was cried by the word of the Lord against the altar in Bethel, and all the houses of the high places which were in the cities of Samaria"; this, said he, "shall surely come to pass." And that there was repentance in the after-conduct of the old prophet; and that God was mercifully pleased to look upon it with a pitying eye, there is some ground for hope in the issue of the event, as it came to pass in God's own time. For when Josiah had accomplished the Divine vengeance on all the abominations of Bethel; had deposed its priests, broken down its high places, and defiled its altars; and was in the act of taking the dead from the sepulchres on the mount, and burning them on the altars of the former sin; we read that he religiously spared "the sepulchre of the man of God that came from Judah"; and that

they let his bones alone, together with "the bones of the prophet that came out of Samaria." A signal act of mercy this, on a day of severe and general retribution! Lessons: 1. I need scarcely say that this example directs its first and broadest rebuke against all such as would ever knowingly and wilfully oppose and pervert the truth. This is a species of guilt so monstrous and offensive in the eyes of God and man; so merely malicious in its whole drift, and policy, and endeavour; that one would think it needs only to be noted, to be at once shunned and abhorred. It was the first origin of all corruption and misery on the face of God's pure and perfect creation; the cause of man's degradation, and the cursing of the earth for his sake: by it "sin entered into the world, and death by sin." 2. But further, there is a modification of the old prophet's sin, into which we may sometimes fall, without at all going to its full extent. We are apt to be enamoured of our own particular views of what we are pleased to think is truth; to cherish these, and to propagate these, without sufficient warranty for their sound and solid foundation in what is right. (*J. Puckle, M.A.*) *The grave and its epitaph:*—"Bury me," said the remorseful old man to his sons standing in tears around his miserable death-bed, "bury me in the same grave with the bones of the man of God out of Judah." And the old prophet's sons so buried their father. And an awful grave that was in Bethel, with an awful epitaph upon it. Now, suppose this. Suppose that you were buried on the same awful principle—in whose grave would your bones lie waiting together with his till the last trump to stand forth before God and man together? And what would your epitaph and his be? Would it be this: "Here lie the liar and his victim"? Or would it be this: "Here lie the seducer and the seduced"? Or would it be this: "Here lie the hater and him he hated down to death"? Or would it be this: "Here lie the tempting host and his too willing to be tempted guest"? Or, if you are a minister, would it be this: "Here lies a dumb dog, and beside him one who was a crowded preacher in the morning of his days, but a castaway before night"? Alas, my brother. (*A. Whyte, D.D.*)

Vers. 33, 34. **Jeroboam turned not from his way.**—*Jeroboam: a character study:*—Jeroboam had decidedly a fine start with a flattering prospect of success, a rare opportunity for excelling both temporally and spiritually. There was the promotion of the king, and by God the conditional promise of kingship, together with His guiding, protecting, and counselling presence. Permanent regnancy for himself and his children after him. Hence, having God to begin with, and God's unfailing promise to rest on, provided he fulfilled the conditions, what could he have better, what more? A grand start! A splendid chance to march to the coveted goal of success on the very threshold of an untried life enterprise. But every fair morning does not end in a cloudless eventide; neither does every such beginning as Jeroboam had culminate in continuance in well-doing. The start may be the best part in a man's life. It was so with Jeroboam. 1. There was manifest distrust of God. Evidently he had forgotten God's promise to be with him and to establish his house and kingdom. 2. This distrust of God led to departure from God. Leaning to his own understanding, he resolved to build two altars and to make two golden calves, and place one of them at Bethel, and the other at Dan, the extreme points in his kingdom. 3. Another point which strikes us in this man's history is his despising Jehovah's warning and servant. These histories of the Bible repeat themselves in the lives around us to-day. There are many men to whom God has given a good start in life. They have been blessed with an auspicious entrance into the world, with social and religious environment most favourable and helpful, God-fearing parents, a religious training, a comfortable home, good education, business tact, common-sense views of life, and men, and things, and, above all, with Heaven's call to fellowship and godliness. Each has started right, with high aims and noble purposes. Public favour has greeted them, success has blossomed in their path of enterprise and effort, until, by sweat of brain and brawn of muscle, and the smile of Providence, they have taken a steady and straight course to wealth and position. But, as in the case of Jeroboam, temporal prosperity has been followed by spiritual degeneracy. A going up in the world has resulted in a going down in grace. Such persons, however, are not left without warning. God's ministers are commanded to prophesy against them. This is done, though it provokes anger and brings disfavour. Faithfulness ofttimes forfeits popularity and position, but it ensures the "Well done" of God. To rebuke sin in high places, to tear the mask from the face of the

hypocrite, to denounce a man's pet idol—indifference, intemperance, or impurity—is like touching gunpowder with a lucifer. You must expect an explosion if not an expulsion. Persecution in some form will hound you; but fear not, for He who has said, "Touch not My anointed and do My prophets no harm," covers you with His wings, and smites your persecutors with the rod of judgment. He wastes their strength and withers their health. 1. Learn from this study of character the influence of one life. 2. Learn, too, the danger of attempting to injure God's true servants. "Whoso toucheth you, toucheth the apple of My eye." 3. Lastly, beware of the developing power of evil. The seedlings of sin finding congenial soil grow into a harvest of woe. The rill of evil first, the river of corruption at last. Jeroboam went from bad to worse. Slighting God grew into abandonment of God. Worship through the medium of symbols became rank idolatry. No man intends to become a drunkard when he lifts the first glass to his lips, but he takes the beginning step towards it. The possibilities of sin—the resources of wrong-doing pent up in every man's nature—no mind can gauge, no tongue can tell. Safety alone lies in salvation from sin, salvation through the cross—full, free, eternal. (*J. O. Keen, D.D.*)

CHAPTER XIV.

VERS. 1–18. At that time Abijah the son of Jeroboam fell sick.—*A good boy and a bad family*:—One beautiful flower in a desert; one lovely rose amongst thorns; one fruitful branch on a corrupt tree. We are going to speak of a boy who was like that flower, rose, or branch. I. THIS BOY'S FATHER WAS VERY WICKED. God had been kind to this man. Instead of remembering God's kindness and obeying Him, he tried to put away all thoughts of God from his mind, and disobeyed Him. He caused two calves of gold to be made. One he placed in Dan and the other in Bethel. These he worshipped himself. Sin is like descending a hill, a river in its course, a tree in its progress. This was seen in his life. Some of the kings who preceded him were wicked, but he was the worst. II. THIS BOY'S MOTHER WAS A DECEIVER. III. ALTHOUGH THIS BOY HAD A WICKED FATHER AND A DECEIVING MOTHER, HE WAS GOOD. We are told that in him there was found some good thing toward the Lord God of Israel. 1. This good thing was religion. It is called good for four reasons: (1) It comes from the good God. (2) It makes those good who truly receive it. (3) It leads them to do good to others. (4) It prepares them for the good place, heaven. 2. Religion was in this boy: (1) In his mind. (2) In his heart. (3) In all his words and actions. Religion was found in this boy. (1) It was found by God, for He sees all things. (2) It was found by the boy himself. It made him happy, strong and hopeful. (3) It was found by all who knew him. To them he was a shining light, or as a city on a hill. 3. How could he be so unlike his father and mother? (1) He believed what was written in the sacred Scriptures. (2) He prayed to God. (3) His will was the king of his circumstance. Imitate him in these three things. If some of you have ungodly homes, you will then learn, as he did, that you can be godly there. IV. THIS BOY DIED. (*A. McAuslane, D.D.*)

Ver. 6. Why feignest thou thyself to be another?—*A cheat exposed*:—I. WICKEDNESS INVOLVES OTHERS, TRYING TO MAKE THEM ITS DUPES, ITS ALLIES, AND ITS SCAPEGOATS. Jeroboam proposed to hoodwink the Lord's prophet. Iniquity is a brag, but it is a great coward. It lays the plan, gets some one else to execute it—puts down the gunpowder train, gets some one else to touch it off—contrives mischief, gets some one else to work it—starts the lie, gets some one else to circulate it. Jeroboam plots the lie, contrives the imposition, and gets his wife to execute it. Stand off from all imposition and chicanery. Do not consent to be anybody's dupe, anybody's ally in wickedness, anybody's scapegoat. II. ROYALTY SOMETIMES PASSES IN DISGUISE. The frock, the veil, the hood of the peasant woman hid the queenly character of this woman of Tirzah. Nobody suspected that she was a queen or a princess as she passed by; but she was just as much a queen as though she stood in the palace, her robes encrusted with diamonds. Glory veiled. Affluence hidden. A queen in mask. A princess in disguise. When you think

of a queen you do not think of Catharine of Russia, or Maria Theresa of Germany, or Mary Queen of Scots. When you think of a queen you think of a plain woman who sat opposite your father at the table, or walked with him down the path of life arm in arm—sometimes to the thanksgiving banquet, sometimes to the grave, but always side by side, soothing your little sorrows and adjusting your little quarrels. "Mother, mother!" Ah! she was the queen. Your father knew it. You knew it. She was the queen, but the queen in disguise. The world did not recognise it. III. HOW PEOPLE PUT ON MASKS, AND HOW THE LORD TEARS THEM OFF. It was a terrible moment in the history of this woman of Tirzah when the prophet accosted her, practically saying, "I know who you are; you cannot cheat me; you cannot impose upon me; why feignest thou thyself to be another?" She had a right to ask for the restoration of her son: she had no right to practise that falsehood. It is never right to do wrong. IV. HOW PRECISE, AND ACCURATE, AND PARTICULAR, ARE GOD'S PROVIDENCES. Just at the moment that woman entered the city the child died. Just as it was prophesied, so it turned out, so it always turns out. The sickness comes, the death occurs; the nation is born, the despotism is overthrown at the appointed time. God drives the universe with a stiff rein. Events do not just happen so. Things do not go slipshod. In all the book of God's providences there is not one "if." God's providences are never caught in *déshabillé*. To God there are no surprises, no disappointments, and no accidents. The most insignificant event flung out in the ages is the connecting link between two great chains—the chain of eternity past and the chain of eternity to come. (*T. De Witt Talmage, D.D.*) *A hearer in disguise*:—I. We have before us THE OCCASIONAL HEARER. Jeroboam and his wife did not often go to hear Ahijah. They were not people who went to worship Jehovah; they neither feared God nor regarded His prophet. 1. This occasional hearer was totally destitute of all true piety. Most occasional hearers are. Those who have true religion are not occasional hearers. 2. The second remark about these occasional hearers is, that when they do come, they very generally come because they are in trouble. When Jeroboam's wife came and spoke to the prophet, it was because the dear child was ill at home. 3. This woman would not have come but that her husband sent her on the ground that he had heard Ahijah preach before. It was this prophet who took Jeroboam's mantle and rent it in pieces, and told him he was to be king over the ten tribes. That message proved true; therefore Jeroboam had confidence in Ahijah. 4. They had one godly member of their family, and that brought them to see the prophet. Their child was sick and ill, and it was that which led them to inquire at the hands of the Lord. 5. But there is one sad reflection which should alarm the occasional hearer. Though Jeroboam's wife did come to the prophet that once, and heard tidings, yet she and her husband perished after all. II. THE USELESS DISGUISE. Jeroboam's wife thought to herself, "If I go to see Ahijah, as he knows me to be the wife of Jeroboam, he is sure to speak angrily, and give me very bad news." Strange to tell, though the poor old gentleman was blind, she thought it necessary to put on a disguise. There was a Judas among the twelve; there was a Demas among the early disciples; and we must always expect to find chaff on God's floor mingled with the wheat. After the most searching ministry, there are still some who will wrap themselves about with a mantle of deception. III. THE HEAVY TIDINGS. Sinner, unrepenting sinner, I have heavy tidings for thee. The wrath of God abideth on thee. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

Vers. 8, 9. David kept my commandments . . . thou hast gone and made thee other gods.—*Servitude or service—which?*—The people of God had left their God, and He had left them, so that Shishak, the King of Egypt, came against them; and though the Lord had respect to their humble prayer, and would not suffer Shishak to destroy Jerusalem, yet He brought them into subjection to the Egyptian king. Our text tells us the reason for this servitude: "They shall be his servants; that they may know My service, and the service of the kingdoms of the countries." I. THERE ARE SOME WHO HAVE ALREADY CHOSEN THE SERVICE OF THE KINGDOMS OF THE COUNTRIES. We have many round about us who have deliberately chosen not to serve God, but to serve other masters. 1. Some choose to be the slaves of open sin. 2. There are many persons who are not the worshippers of vice, but they are the votaries of money-making. They are the slaves of the thirst for wealth. 3. There are some others who do not try to get much money, but they are lovers of fashion, lovers of society, admirers of the world. 4. Then there

is another cult that has lately come up, which some have chosen, so that they have become the devotees of "culture." 5. I will only refer to one more class of those who have chosen the service of the kingdoms; these are the seekers of self-righteousness. This is an old-fashioned and very respectable deity whom many still worship. II. SOME SEEM TO BE PINING TO GIVE UP THE SERVICE OF GOD, AND TO GO TO THE SERVICE OF THE KINGDOMS. It is a strange thing; but this evil is always breaking out even among the people of God. 1. Some want to change out of sheer love of change. 2. Some want to be off to their idols, because of the outward aspect of the new thing. 3. Sometimes men turn aside because of their loss of joy in the service of God. They are not serving the Lord as they used to do; they are doing but little for Him. 4. Then there are many who are led to want a change from the service of God by the flagging of others. 5. There are some who turn aside because religion now has brought them to a point where it entails some extra self-sacrifice. III. THERE IS A GREAT CONTRAST BETWEEN THE SERVICE OF GOD AND ANY OTHER SERVICE. 1. If you are about to engage in the service of God, there is nothing demanded of you that will harm you. There is no commandment of God which, if you keep it, will injure either your body or your soul. 2. Next, notice that there is nothing denied you, in the service of God, that would be a blessing to you. The promise is, "No good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly." 3. Once more, observe, that in the service of God strength will always be given according to your day. 4. And all the while that you are the servant of God, you have a sweet peace in reflecting upon what you have done. As George Herbert said, when he helped a poor woman with her load, and men wondered that the parson of the parish should carry a poor woman's basket for her, "The memory of this will make the bells ring in my heart at night," so the service of God makes the bells ring in our hearts. 5. Lastly, there is above all this a hope of the eternal reward which is so soon to come. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

Ver. 13. **And all Israel shall mourn for him.**—*Early cut off, but long remembered:*—That the grace of God may convert a man in the prime of life, ay, and bring even a grey-headed sinner to the foot of the cross, is a truth of which, happily, examples can easily be found. But, while this is true, let it never be forgotten that the great majority of conversions take place in early life. I. THIS DESCRIPTION OF HIS PIETY. "In him there is found some good thing towards the Lord God of Israel." What, think you, might this "good thing" be? Certainly, it was not his rank, nor wealth, nor power, nor intellect. And, as this "good thing" was not any mere material endowment, so neither was it any mere moral excellence. It does not mean simply that Abijah was what the world calls "good-hearted," "a good-living lad"; that he was amiable and well-behaved; that, in the midst of abounding debauchery, he preserved his virtue unstained. This, indeed, would be much, but it would not be expressed in the peculiar language of the text; "the good thing" was a "good thing towards the Lord God of Israel," a gracious, a spiritual, a Divine, a holy thing. It was a something that sprang not out of nature, nor of the flesh, something that his father did not give him, something that he never learnt from the royal but dissolute court of Israel. 1. There are two things which, when found in a man, are good and acceptable to God. The first is true repentance, or what the Bible calls the "broken and contrite heart." A second thing on which God specially sets the seal of His approbation is "faith in that one sacrifice which doth for sin atone." Amongst all the princes of the royal house, Abijah alone refused to worship the golden calves which his father had made. Jewish writers tell us that Abijah would not bow down to the idols, but insisted on worshipping the true God at Jerusalem. His faith might have been but a little spark, but that secured his acceptance before God. But without these two things, "repentance from dead works, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ," there is nothing in you that God can approve. II. BUT NOW THERE ARE ONE OR TWO SPECIAL LESSONS TO BE DRAWN FROM THE CASE OF ABIJAH. 1. Real piety may exist under most adverse and unfavourable circumstances. Here was a youth, all of whose surroundings were of the worst possible character. An ungodly home, an idolatrous court, parents both wicked, every relative he had under the curse of God: why, you would say, piety could not live a day amid such conditions as these. The brightest diamonds have been found in the darkest mines, and the richest pearls in the deepest seas. Satan sometimes outwits himself. Sin is used to secure its own defeat. Even unconverted men are shocked by

wickedness which exceeds their own. 2. Even a young and brief life may be fruitful in blessing. Young as he was, the whole nation mourned for him. In the highest view of it, the length of life is not to be judged by the number of its years. It is possible for the longest life to be briefer than the shortest; and the smooth-cheeked youth may die older, that is, with more of life crowded into his brief history, than he whose stagnant and profitless existence drags on to an inglorious old age. That life is the longest—however limited the number of its years—in which God has been best served, and the world most benefited. 3. Piety in life is the only guarantee of peace in death. An early departure from this world is not a thing to be dreaded, provided your heart is right with God. (*J. T. Davidson, D.D.*) *Abijah's grave*:—I. We have here a BEAUTIFUL DESCRIPTION OF RELIGION. It is "some good thing in the heart toward the Lord God of Israel." Religion is "some good thing in the heart" (not merely towards our fellow-man, but) "towards the Lord God of Israel." II. GENUINE PIETY MAY EXIST UNDER VERY UNFAVOURABLE CIRCUMSTANCES. Men need not say, their surroundings in life are sufficient excuse for their ungodliness. III. Again, TRUE PIETY OF ONE WHO WAS A CHILD. Abijah is always mentioned in the context as a child. IV. TRUE PIETY COMMANDS THE RESPECT AND REVERENCE OF THE UNGODLY. The subjects of Jeroboam were wicked men, who had repudiated the temple at Jerusalem, and had gone from bad to worse. Yet, when the death of this pious child was announced, these wicked men evinced for him a reverential affection, which the context touchingly records. "All Israel shall mourn for him," was the prediction of the blind prophet: and so it was. (*W. F. Bishop.*) **In him there is found some good thing toward the Lord God of Israel.**—*Abijah; or, the pious youth in an ungodly family*:—This young prince was greatly respected in life, and in death he was highly honoured. He alone out of the house of his father died a natural death—he alone came to the grave in peace. Indeed, he only came to the grave at all. I. THAT RELIGION IS A "GOOD THING." It is good in itself—in its very nature. What is true piety? It is a right state of the heart in regard to God. 1. Religion is a "good thing" because it comes from a good God. As to its origin, its first principle—it comes directly from Him. He is the fountain of all goodness. 2. Religion is a "good thing," for it is good in its influence. Piety has the most beneficial influence upon the whole of our being; upon the faculties and ideas of our mind; upon the love and affections of our heart; upon the whole life and conduct. 3. Religion is good, because it leads into a good place. As all rivers run into the sea, whence they came, so the streams of goodness flow to the great ocean of love. God, like a mighty magnet, attracts the heart of the good man, and ere long He will draw him to the bosom of eternal love. II. THAT RELIGION IS A GOOD THING IN MAN. "There is found in him," &c. Piety is an inward principle. "The kingdom of heaven is within you." "Christ in you the hope of glory." Religion is essentially a matter of the heart. It proceeds from the centre to the circumference. III. THAT RELIGION IS A GOOD THING TENDING TOWARDS GOD. "Toward the Lord God of Israel." There are people who have nothing good in them either towards God or man. Selfishness is their ruling principle. They never act from principle; they never ask, What is right, what is true? but—"Will this course answer my purpose?—will it be of advantage to me personally?" They "live to themselves, and they die to themselves." There are others who have something good in them towards man, but nothing towards God. The religious man seeks God's glory in all things. The bias of his soul is also towards God; he moves Godward. IV. THAT RELIGION IS A GOOD THING EVER MANIFEST. "There is found in him," &c. True religion always manifests itself where it exists; it is seen and felt. "The good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth good things." 1. This "good thing" is "found" by the Searcher of hearts. He sees it first. He can see it when no one else can. 2. This "good thing" is "found" too by the man himself. He cannot remain ignorant long of the real state of his own heart. At first he may not possess a "full assurance of faith," yet he must know his own moral state. He must know whether he is a hypocrite, or whether he is a true Christian. 3. It is "found" also by his fellow-creatures. Such a character tells powerfully upon a neighbourhood. He is influential. His "light is not hid under a bushel." Religion is not a dead, worthless thing; no, it is a living principle. (*H. P. Bowen.*) *Abijah, or some good thing towards the Lord*:—I. LET US HERE ADMIRE WHAT WE CANNOT PRECISELY DESCRIBE. 1. There was in this child "some good thing toward the Lord God of Israel"; but what was it? A boundless field for conjecture opens before us. We know there was in him some good thing, but what

form that good thing took we do not know. It was not merely a good inclination which was in him, nor a good desire, but a really good, substantial virtue. 2. Let us admire, also, that this "some good thing" should have been in the child's heart, for its entrance is unknown. We cannot tell how grace entered the palace of Tirzah and gained this youthful heart. God saw the good thing, for He sees the least good thing in any of us, since He has a quick eye to perceive anything that looks towards Himself. 3. This "good thing" is described to us in the text in a certain measure. It was a "good thing towards Jehovah, the God of Israel." The good thing looked towards the living God. 4. In this dear child that "good thing" wrought such an outward character that he became exceedingly well beloved. We are sure of that, because it is said, "All Israel shall mourn for him." 5. The piety of this young child was every way of the right kind. It was inward and sincere, for the "good thing" that is spoken of was not found about him, but "in him." He did not wear the broad phylactery, but he had a meek and quiet spirit. II. LET US HEARTILY PRIZE WHAT WE ARE TOO APT TO OVERLOOK. 1. Let us heartily prize "some good thing" towards the Lord God of Israel whenever we perceive it. All that is said of this case was that there was in him "some good thing"; and this reads as if the Divine work was as yet only a spark of grace, the beginning of spiritual life. There was nothing very striking in him, or it would have been more definitely mentioned. 2. Further, I am afraid we are too apt to overlook "some good thing" in a child. "Oh, only a child!" Pray, what are you? You are a man; well, I suppose that a man is a child who has grown older, and has lost many of his best points of character. A child is at no disadvantage in the things of God from being a child, for "of such are the kingdom of heaven." 3. Another thing we are apt to overlook, and that is, "some good thing" in a bad house. This was the most wonderful thing of all, that there should be a gracious child in Jeroboam's palace. The mother usually sways the house, but the queen was a princess of Egypt and an idolater. III. LET US CAREFULLY CONSIDER WHAT WE CANNOT FULLY UNDERSTAND. 1. I want you first to consider the very singular fact which you cannot understand, that holy children should be often placed in ungodly families. God's providence has arranged it so, yet the consequences are painful to the young believer. 2. The next thing that we cannot understand is this, that God's dear little children who love Him should often be called to suffer. We say, "Well, if it was my child I should heal him and ease his sufferings at once." Yet the Almighty Father allows His dear ones to be afflicted. There is a meaning in all this, and we know somewhat of it; and if we knew nothing we would believe all the same in the goodness of the Lord. 3. There is something more remarkable still, and that is that some of God's dearest children should die while they are yet young. 4. Once more, it is a very singular thing that such a child as this should die and yet produce no effect whatever on his parents; for neither Jeroboam nor his wife repented of their sins because their child was taken home to God. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *The history of Abijah*:—I. THERE IS "SOME GOOD THING" SPOKEN OF "TOWARDS THE LORD GOD OF ISRAEL." I suppose that all who spiritually read their Bibles will acknowledge, by this "good thing" is not to be understood any mere external good thing, such as rank, title, influence, or his prospects. We cannot say these are good things; only as they are sanctified to us, they become good things. It is evidently a description of a righteous man. This young man was one that feared God and loved God; he knew God savingly. Nothing else can come up to the expression of there being "some good thing toward the Lord God of Israel"; nothing short of that can be a "good thing toward the Lord God of Israel." It must be the new creation in the soul; it must be the principle of grace in the heart. II. BUT THIS "GOOD THING" WAS FOUND IN A PLACE WHERE IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN BUT LITTLE EXPECTED. It was found in a place little calculated for its nourishment. If there is a spot on earth uncongenial to the life of God in the soul, it is within the precincts of a palace. The self-importance, the self-indulgence, the self-deception, the want of honesty so mark it. Yet here was the grace of God displayed. I see too the sovereignty of God's grace in it. I see too the invincibility of His grace. Here is everything to impede, the most unlikely of all situations. One might as reasonably expect to find the most beautiful flower that seems to require great depth of earth, growing on the bare rock, as one might expect to find one of the Lord's lilies growing in such a soil as this. Yet what can the grace of God not achieve? what can it not conquer? III. WHO IT WAS THAT NOTICED IT—who took notice of this "good thing"? Observe, it is spoken of as "some good thing." Our translators have been so

honest as to put the word "some" in italics; but there being no other word between "found" and "good thing," the sense is this, "some good thing," "a good thing." When the Lord says "some good thing," it gives one this idea. It might have been a very feeble work. Here was but "some good thing," a good thing; and that too was in a child; yet God the Spirit noted it. Why did He? Because it was His child; Jeroboam's child, Jeroboam's after the flesh—His by adoption and by grace. (*J. H. Evans, M.A.*) *Abijah; or, early piety and evil parentage:* Abijah was the good son of a bad father. His name meant "Jehovah is his father." This name had probably been given before Jeroboam broke away from the service of Jehovah. The name and the character of the youth agreed. Abijah was possessed of real piety. To have religion is to possess the best thing possible. It is called a "good thing." Similar descriptions of religion are given in other parts of Scripture. "That good thing which was committed to thee, keep." Again, "Being confident that He who hath begun a good work in you will carry it on till the day of Christ." "It is a good thing that the heart be established with grace." "Mary hath chosen that good part that shall not be taken away." Religion, is, undoubtedly, a "good thing," in that it draws man near to God, leads to good actions, gives good aims. It has a good influence on a man's companions, on the family, and on society. The possession of a real piety by Abijah brought him honour from men. He had found a deep place in the affections of the people. When he died all Israel mourned for him. Men would not have cared so much for him if he had been an indifferent, callous, wilful, cruel, passionate, self-indulgent youth. God, as well as man, honoured this early piety in Abijah. Christians should be earnest in seeking to lead others to early decision for Christ, remembering that youth is the most suitable because the most impressionable time. Religion is the best check to the weeds of evil, and it cannot be implanted too soon in the heart. As well forbear to teach the alphabet, or figures, or principles of science, or the customs of trade until manhood is reached, as forbear to instil in youth the principles of morality and the doctrines of Christ—doctrines which are the embodiment of the highest morality. No; these are flimsy objections. They are out of harmony with the Divine will and revelation. Abijah became pious none too soon. He died early. "Briers and thorns wither not so soon as lilies and roses." Anyhow, Abijah was prepared to pass away, prepared to meet death. (*F. Hastings.*) *The piety of Abijah:*—Concerning the piety of Abijah, observe: I. ITS EARLY EXISTENCE. Piety, at any period of life, is pleasing. In old age, it is venerable. We cannot look on a Christian advanced in years, and more advanced in holiness, without feeling peculiar respect. In early youth, piety is chiefly amiable. It is the image of God restored on the soul, when its powers are most vigorous, when its passions are most warm, when its prospects of life are most fair and flattering. II. ITS SINCERITY. It was piety "in him," not appended to him, or merely professed by him—"in him was found some good thing." Of Job it is asserted, "the root of the matter" was found in him. That is not genuine piety which regards, with religious respect, any other but Jehovah; or which falls short of the one living and true God. III. ITS SECRECY. This is what we cannot altogether commend. His goodness was real, but was in a great measure concealed. Small as might be his advantages of education, the Lord by His Spirit had taught him, had renewed his heart, and formed him for Himself. However secret a good work may be in the soul, however hid from the observation of men, it is visible to God: He beholds it with acceptance and pleasure. Yet remember, where "some good thing" exists, it is desirable it should more than exist—it ought to appear in corresponding fruits and effects. Good principle is valuable, but let it be seen in practice: good desires are laudable, but these should be attended with active efforts: good designs and resolves are entitled to commendation, but worthy deeds and useful service are much more beneficial. IV. ITS DECISION. There was evidently in his family much to oppose the spirit and practice of piety. 1. Rank opposed it. Men in elevated stations are rarely eminent for religion. 2. Idolatry opposed it. The insult offered to Jehovah which false worship implies, the absurdity and iniquity which it always involves, were directly inimical to spiritual devotion. 3. And wickedness opposed it. This doubtless prevailed in its varied forms, and to a serious degree, in the court of Jeroboam; for when men are alienated from the true God, none can say to what lengths they will run. V. ITS RECOMPENSE. Abijah died, was buried, and all Israel mourned at his funeral. This may appear a singular recompense of piety; but the circumstances of the case must be considered. The Lord had threatened the utter

destruction of the family of Jeroboam, on account of their sin. "Him that dieth of Jeroboam in the city shall the dogs eat, and him that dieth in the field shall the fowls of the air eat; for the Lord hath spoken it." But Abijah was exempt from the threatening, and saved from the calamity. Is it nothing to attain in youth, fixedness of character? When a young man's character is fixed, he sets out in life as he means to proceed; he acts on such principles and adopts such conduct as create no regret, and are followed with advantages of the utmost importance. Is reputation nothing? Most people profess to prize it; and, in early life, to be devoted to God, secures it. Is it nothing to be useful? In such a world as this, is it not of acknowledged importance to live to some good purpose? They, surely, are most likely to be thus honoured, who are the subjects of early and decided piety. Opposite characters are at best indolent and heedless; but, in general, their example and efforts are pernicious in a very serious degree. And is it nothing, when you quit the world, to leave behind a fair example? You feel it desirable that survivors have the recollection that in you was exemplified, though with lamented imperfections, a disciple of Jesus, a lover of His truth and of His ways. "The memory of the just is blessed." (*T. Kidd.*) *Unexpected goodness*:—I. THE SCENE OF ITS DEVELOPMENT. It grew in very uncongenial soil. There are several stimulating instances where godliness has been pursued under difficulties. There were a "few names even in Sardis which had not defiled their garments." These, in common with the one of the text, go to prove that religion can be practised under all imaginable circumstances. There are situations which make it very hard to be good, but none which make it impossible. II. THE SEAT OF ITS POWER. "In him there is found," &c. Out of the heart are the issues of life, keep it then with all diligence. Dwellers in the Isle of Anglesea say that they have a wonderful pool at the bottom of one of their native hills, into which if you throw pieces of old iron, or worthless tin, they will all come out in the course of time as precious copper. "All things work together for good, to them that love God." Most assuredly then religion is the chief good—a good within, that overcomes all evils without—good for all, in all places, at all times, under all circumstances. III. THE SUM OF ITS QUANTITY. It was not large by any means, but under such an inhospitable roof we are only astonished at finding any at all. "In him there is found some good thing." (*D. Thomas.*) *Abijah; a good child in a bad home*:—1. What was the good thing referred to? The grace of God, or true religion. Religion is in itself a good thing—good for this life: (1) in school, (2) in situations, (3) in home; and good for the life to come. 2. This good thing was in him. It was not a mere matter of outward show or of words. 3. This good thing had been put within him. We are not told how or when. But it certainly had been imparted to him. The gardener who wants to get very fine roses, first gets up the roots of the briar and plants them. The briar is then pruned and prepared for the rosebud. In a very skilful way the bud is inserted into the stem of the briar. The rosebud and the briar become one. But the rosebud rules, and makes the briar good. It is very likely St. James had seen some one doing this before he exhorted his hearers to receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls. As the rosebud saves the briar from its degraded state, so the Word saves the soul that receives it. Abijah received the word of God's grace, and it was in him a living power. 4. But this good thing went out toward God who gave it—towards the Lord God of Israel, not towards the gods his father had set up. 5. Some good was found. Not every good thing. Well is it not to despise the day of small things. Some good thing, however small, is the promise of greater. We cannot tell how much good may come of one word. 6. The good thing within him did not die when he was buried. The life of grace is one which the hand of death cannot touch. The memory of this good thing was a power for good in the lives of others who outlived him. All Israel mourned for him. Child though he was, he had exerted an influence for good. Two or three lessons may be learned from this narrative:—1. It is possible God may in His wise providence raise up in a bad family at least one true witness. 2. Such a witness may be but a child. 3. Such a youth may be alone in his testimony. 4. How much more possible is it to be a true witness in a good family where there are many faithful ones. (*Henry Smith.*) *The history and example of Abijah*:—THAT RELIGION IS A THING WITHIN US. Godliness is something in the heart and mind. Piety is an internal principle. It is the gift of God. It is the implantation or transfusion of a new nature. Then comes the inquiry—How is it to be had? in what manner is it to be gained? "If ye, being evil," said Christ, "know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly

Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him!" How much more, I may add, will He give it to the inquiring, youthful, praying mind! II. THAT RELIGION IS INTRINSICALLY GOOD. It is called here "some good thing toward the Lord God of Israel." It is intrinsically good. I mean, in its own nature and essence. Jesus Christ has pronounced it to be "the good part," which shall never be taken away from us. And He likens it to a pearl, which it would be worth a man's while to "sell all that he had" in order to gain. It is "good." To whom is it good? It is "good" to yourselves. It is "good" for your souls. For the mind to be enlightened, for the will to be in subjection to the will of God, to reflect the beauty of Christ's own image, to walk in the way which God's own wisdom has appointed and ordained—is not this good for the soul? It is "good" to the eye of your parents. It is beautiful to the vision of your friends. It is lovely in the circle in which you move. They see the fruits of grace; they behold sweetness of temper, amiableness of demeanour, rectitude of conduct; they see high moral principles. How do they see all this? With indifference and insensibility? No, but with gladness and with gratitude. It is "good" to God. It is precious in the sight of God. You remember the twenty-eighth chapter of the Book of Job, where "wisdom" is said to surpass jewels and precious stones of every kind and description. What is this "wisdom"? The grace of God—internal purity. And as it is "good" for you in time, it will be better for you in eternity. III. IT HAS SPECIAL REGARD TO THE LORD GOD OF ISRAEL. And here is its chief glory; this is the fairest, the most impressive aspect. You know how it is with the sun. Let the sun shine upon what it may—let the beams of the sun descend upon what they may—the object is illuminated; the object reflects the radiance more or less. I look upon God, according to this image, as the sun. Whensoever He comes in contact with the mind, He enlightens it; the mind reflects the brightness. And this is our chief good, this is our highest honour, this is our purest joy—that our religion has deeply and intimately to do with the Lord God of Israel. IV. REAL RELIGION IS VERY BEAUTIFUL IN YOUTH. V. WHERE IT EXISTS, IN DUE TIME IT WILL BE DISCOVERED. 1. It may long be as the seed under ground, that has taken root, but has not yet sprung up. It will spring up; and you shall see the blade, then the ear, and after that the full corn in the ear. Here is the bud; just opened—not expanded. It can be seen. There shall be the blossom presently. There shall be the ripe fruit in due time. So, if it be in the heart and mind, there is a period of its discovery. 2. It may be found sometimes in circumstances where it was not looked for. VI. RELIGION MAY NOT EXEMPT YOU FROM DEATH, for "the child died," but it will secure to you a blessed immortality. (*J. Stratten.*) *Modest goodness:*—I. GOD CAN SEE THE REAL THING IN THE OBSCURE THING. The "good thing" recorded in the text—that is, if any single special act is intended at all—is unknown. We are assured of the inwardness of his piety. The good thing was "in him." He had a true heart, a right spirit, a righteous disposition and design. "The root of the matter" was in him. The root never shot up into a grand stem, never cast abroad strong branches, never held up a harvest of rich, ripe fruit; but whatever was above ground of beauty and promise, there was a living root below. Remember the inwardness of true goodness. Our goodness must not be merely a matter of social etiquette, of conventional propriety, of ecclesiastical prescription; it must unfold from the heart; it must be full of gratitude, love, trust, and hope. The living God loves living things, and most of all He loves living virtue. Neither was the goodness of Abijah lacking in outwardness. "It was found" in him. The original means the very opposite of what we might easily take it to mean. It was found in him without seeking; in other words, it was manifest and indisputable. And it is the same with genuine goodness; really in us, it will reveal itself. Some people are not naturally good organs for the expression of sublime thought, principle, feeling—they have defects of constitution, uncouthness of manner, educational limitations; but if they have the reality and enthusiasm of goodness it will be found in them without seeking, and their very frailty and failure of style will often prove a foil to set forth with greater impressiveness the Divine thing it cannot obscure. Do not believe in the goodness that ever fails to display itself. There may be grand character in a man when circumstances do not serve to bring that character out in its full majesty and beauty. But God knows all. The botanist will detect a rare flower where we should see only weeds and grasses; the geologist will discern a gem when we see only gravel; the astronomer's eye will seize a star in what seems to us empty darkness; the mariner will descry a sail where we should see

only mist and wave. Now, God delights in goodness, and in darkest corners and lowliest forms He recognises and blesses it. He knoweth the thought afar off, the latent quality, and reads the living epistle in invisible ink. II. GOD CAN SEE MANY THINGS IN ONE THING. "Some good thing"; one good thing standing for many good things, for all good things. Our life does not afford occasion to illustrate many virtues, not to play many parts, not to achieve many works, and we are in danger of making ourselves unhappy over these limitations. God accepts your "only," seeing He gave you no more than that. The assayer does not need to test the whole golden talent; a few ounces in the smelting-pot is enough: the draper does not need to unroll the whole web; a few yards will reveal the beauty and value of the fabric: the merchant does not need to examine the bulk throughout; a handful is enough to show the quality of wheat or wool. Life may afford few gifts, few opportunities, but the few are enough to show what we are made of, and what it is that we mean. God knows the quality of a man from the accomplishment of one simple calling. One act was quite enough to demonstrate the character of Grace Darling, and to cover her with glory. One act at Harper's Ferry was quite enough to display the spirit of John Brown, and to give him rank with the immortals. And one calling worked out faithfully day by day is sufficient to reveal in any of us the hero, the saint, the martyr. "Faithful in a few things." It is but "few things" that we have here; still we have enough. The painter has only a few colours out of which to paint his pictures, but what a wealth of glory he brings out from the meagre palette: the musician has but a few notes, and yet what a world of ravishing sound he brings out of the few chords! We have all but few things, some of us very few—few talents, few opportunities, few days—and yet if we are faithful and diligent we shall work out an exceeding and an eternal weight of glory. Faithful in a few things, He shall make us rulers over many. III. GOD CAN SEE THE GREATEST THING IN THE LEAST THING. Just as we complain about the dulness of life and the narrowness of life, so we complain about the poverty of life—we cannot do magnificent things or give princely gifts. But we forget that God can see the great in the small, the greatest thing in the least. If the least thing has a great principle in it, it is great; if the least thing has a true love in it, it is great; if the least thing has a high aim in it, it is great; and although men may see only the least thing, God regards the essential thought and quality and aspiration, and blesses accordingly. See the Gospel story of the widow casting her two mites into the treasury. IV. GOD CAN SEE THE FULNESS OF THINGS IN THE FIRST THING. Just as we complain about the dulness of life, the narrowness of life, the poverty of life, so do we complain about its brevity. But God can see the end in the beginning. In Abijah's first act God saw the fulness of the longest life. In the acorn He sees the oak. Tradition tells us that Titian happened one day to see the sketches of a lad who had entered his school—or, as another account relates, the painter accidentally noticed a lad drawing roughly on the public wall—and the great artist divined at once that another painter of power had been born into the world; and so it proved, for that boy was Tintoretto, who was destined to divide with Titian himself the artistic glory of Venice. That lad's drawing was, be sure, rather a poor affair to a common eye, but the eye of a master saw in it galleries of masterpieces. This is but a faint image of God's insight and foresight. In first rude sketches of character and action He distinguishes the artists, the cartoons, of eternity. Life may be short with us, but that is no matter; let us see to it that it be true. "And it was in the heart of David my father to build an house for the name of the Lord God of Israel. And the Lord said unto David my father, Whereas it was in thine heart to build an house unto My name, thou didst well that it was in thine heart" (1 Kings viii. 17). We do not want great things to make us great, or to prove that we are great. The daisy—modest, wee crimson-tipped flower—was theme enough for Robert Burns to prove himself a prince of poets; a single string, stretched across a wooden shoe, was enough for Paganini to prove himself a prince of musicians; a bit of canvas, a few inches square, was enough for Raphael to prove himself a prince of painters; and in a dim corner, with a lowly task, with a short life, with no spectators but God and the holy angels, we may attain and reveal the veriest greatness of soul. "By patient continuance in well-doing" let us "seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life." (*W. L. Watkinson.*) *The good thing*:—I. THE GOOD THING FOUND IN ABIJAH. 1. There was nothing good in him by nature. The passions of envy, pride, and selfishness show themselves in early life. "Foolishness is

bound up in the heart of a child." It is implanted in his nature, sunk deep into his heart. It entwines round his faculties like the ivy, and is rooted like the oak. 2. No good thing could have been produced in him by mere human efforts. The father of the faithful could not do it. Hence his prayer for the son of the bond-woman: "O that Ishmael might live before Thee!" The man after God's own heart could not do it. Hence his lamentation over the death of his wicked son: "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!" 3. The good thing that was in Abijah must have been infused by the Spirit of God. The principle of a natural man in religious actions is artificial; he is wound up like the spring of an engine to a certain power; but as the motion of the engine ceases when the spring is down, so the motions of a natural man hold no longer than they give him pleasure, or contribute to his earthly profit; but the principle of a spiritual man is internal, and the first motion of this principle is toward God, so that he acts from Him and for Him. 4. Observe, this "good thing" was found in Abijah. (1) It was found of God. "Man judgeth by the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh at the heart." (2) It was found of angels. For "are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister unto them that shall be heirs of salvation?" And is there anything which can enhance their joy? O yes, for "there is joy in the presence of the angels of God, over one sinner that repenteth." (3) It was found of the godly around him. They saw it in the humility and love which beamed in his countenance—in the grace of his conversation, in the uniformity of his conduct, and in the zeal which he manifested for the glory of God, the prosperity of the pious, and the conversion of sinners. 5. Observe, this good thing was found in Abijah "in the house of Jeroboam." This circumstance teaches us two things. (1) The sovereignty of Divine grace in his conversion. (2) The decision of his religious profession. Decision and firmness of mind and character are of essential service in all the affairs of life: and nothing that is great or good has ever been done without them. In religion it is of the greatest moment to be decided, so that when the question is asked, "Who is on the Lord's side?" O that we could all answer without the fear of being confronted, one by one, "I am!" II. THE GOODNESS OF IT. 1. It was a good thing for himself. 2. It was a good thing for others. As "one sinner destroyeth much good," so one saint may (as an instrument in the hand of God) save from much evil. "I will bless thee," said Jehovah to the patriarch Abraham, "and thou shalt be a blessing." The circumstance of "all Israel mourning for him and burying him," speaks volumes in his praise, and leads one to hope that his counsels were appreciated, and his prayers answered in the reformation—if not in the saving conversion—of his survivors. (*T. Hitchin, M.A.*)

Grace in different degrees:—Behold the goodness of God! a little good in him, and yet the great God takes notice of the little good in him. God found (as it were) one pearl in a heap of pebbles, one good young man in Jeroboam's household, that some good in him towards the Lord God of Israel. In the whole verse, three parts: I. A lamentation for the death of this son of Jerobоam. It is said, "All Israel shall mourn for him," and so they did (ver. 18)—which argued there was goodness in him; for if he had not been desired and prized while he lived, he would not have been so lamented at his death. II. A limitation of his punishment; he only of Jeroboam's family shall come to the grave, the rest of his posterity that died in the city, dogs should eat, and him that dieth in the field, should the fowls of the air devour (ver. 11). III. The commendation of his life, "In him was found some good," &c. (of this I am now to treat). He is commended by the Holy Ghost; for his goodness is set forth, 1. By the quality of his goodness; it was a good thing, not a good word only, or a good purpose or inclination, with which too many content themselves; but it was a good action. 2. By the quantity of it; it was but some little good thing that was found in him, and yet that little good God did not despise or overlook. 3. By the sincerity of his goodness; there are two notable demonstrations of this young man goodness: 1. It was towards the Lord God of Israel. 2. It was in Jeroboam's house. 1. His goodness was towards the Lord God of Israel. This argued Paul's sincerity, that in his speaking, writing, and actions he could and did appeal to God. That religion, saith the apostle, is pure and undefiled, that is so before God and the Father. Many hypocrites may be good towards men, who are not so towards God; to be rich indeed, is to be rich towards God. True repentance is repentance towards God; and he is unblamable indeed that is void of offence towards God, as well as towards men. 2. He was good in the house of Jeroboam. A wicked man may seem good in a

good place, but to be good in a bad place argues men to be good indeed. To be good in David's house, this was not so much; but for this young man to be good in the house of Jeroboam his father, whom the Scripture brands for his idolatry, that he made all Israel to sin, and yet could not make his son to sin; this argued he was sincerely good. There is only one difficulty in the text, viz., What was that good thing that was found in Abijah? For answer to this, it is true, the Scripture doth not particularly express what that good thing was which was found in him: but Tostatus and Peter Martyr affirm from the Hebrew Rabbins, that when the Jews of the ten tribes did on their appointed times repair to Jerusalem to worship according to the command of God, and Jeroboam commanded soldiers to intercept them, this Abijah did hinder the soldiers to kill them, and gave them passes to go to Jerusalem to worship God, and encouraged them therein, notwithstanding the rage of his father, who had forsaken the true worship of God, and set up calves at Dan and Bethel. Others think the goodness of this young prince was in this, that he would not consent to his father in taking away the government from the house of David; but where the Scripture hath not a tongue to speak, we have not an ear to hear, and therefore we shall not undertake to determine what the Scripture hath not determined. There are many collateral observations which I shall deduce from the several circumstances in the text, and but name some of them. 1. From the consideration that this good Abijah died: Good men, and useful and hopeful instruments may be taken away by death, when wicked men may live long upon the earth. Bad Jeroboam lived long, his good son died soon; so true is that of Solomon. A righteous man may perish in his righteousness, when a wicked man may prolong his days in his wickedness. Briers and thorns and thistles wither not so soon as lilies and roses. They may be taken out of the world, of whom the world is not worthy; and they remain behind, who are not worthy to live in the world. 2. From the consideration of the death of godly Abijah, when wicked Nadab the other son of Jeroboam lived. Observe, That good children may be taken away by death from their parents, when ungodly children may live to be a shame and a curse to their parents. There are two other circumstances upon which I shall a little enlarge myself, before I come to the main point I intend to handle. From the age of this son of Jeroboam, who is here commended for his goodness, it is said, he was "a child" (ver. 12). Whence it may be observed, It is very commendable to see goodness in young people: to see young men good men, is a very commendable thing. There were many good men in that time, but to be good so soon as Abijah was, when he was a child, the Scripture records this to his praise. I shall show you that it is a commendable thing to see young men good men. This I prove: First, because the Scripture makes very honourable mention of young men, when good men; as, first, of Obadiah, that he feared the Lord from his youth. And it is recorded to the honour of Timothy, that he knew the Holy Scriptures from a child. Jerome conceives that John was the most beloved disciple, because he was the youngest of all. Secondly, because God commends moral and common goodness in the young man in the Gospel, Christ is said to love him for his moral goodness and natural ingenuity. 1. The reason why it is so commendable in a young man to be a good man, is this, because their temptations are more, and their affections are stronger to carry them from God; youth hath a stronger aptitude and proclivity to sin than any other age. 2. The time of your youth is the freest age of your life to betake yourselves to the exercise of religion and duties of godliness. 3. Consider, if thou art not gracious in youth, the sins of thy youth may trouble thy conscience in thy old age. Many young men who are active and venturous in the heat of their youth, get those bodily bruises and blows that they feel the ache thereof to their dying day. A second remarkable circumstance is this, that this young Abijah was good in the house of Jeroboam. Whence observe, that it is a great commendation for men to retain their goodness whilst they live in bad places and families. To be a saint in Nero's family is very commendable. And the reason thereof is, 1. Because many of God's children have failed, and abated much of their goodness in bad places. How did Peter fall in the high priest's hall! though when in good company he was zealous, yet there he denied Christ. 2. Because it is a clear evidence of the sincerity of a man goodness, to be good in a bad place. This shows thy grace to be grace indeed, when thou hast discouragements to be good, and then art holy. From hence learn the power and unloseableness of saving grace; grace keeps a man good in the worst times. Nehemiah in the court of Artaxerxes, Obadiah in Ahab's court, Daniel in Nebuchadnezzar's,

the saints in Nero's household, and Abijah in wicked and idolatrous Jeroboam's house. Though it be a commendable thing to be good in bad places; yet you ought to bewail your living in bad places, it is your misery though not your sin; thus did Isaiah, "Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of unclean lips." Hence we may gather, that it is our duty, the more bad the place or family is where God hath cast your dwelling, the better and more blameless you should labour to be; you will by this adorn your profession, stop the mouths of adversaries, allure and win others to embrace Christianity. Then certainly it is a vain plea for men to excuse their wickedness, because they live in bad places; this was Abraham's fault, to excuse his lie by being at Gerar. Seneca blames men of laying the fault of their badness on the place where they live. "I am not ambitious by nature, but no man that lives at Rome can be otherwise. I am not given to costly and rich apparel, but I must do so when I am at Rome." It is the badness of thy heart, and not the place that makes thee bad; no place, though never so good, can exempt a man from sin; the angels sinned in heaven, Adam in Paradise, Judas in Christ's family, and no place though never so bad can excuse a man from sin. If it be so commendable to be good in bad places, then it is abominable to be bad in good places, to be dirty swine in a fair meadow. Oh how many are bad in good families, who despise good counsels, and hate the duties of religion in religious families! (*C. Love.*)

Grace with its different degrees:—God doth not only exactly take notice of, but also tenderly cherish and graciously reward the smallest beginnings, and weakest measures of grace, which He works in the hearts of His own people. I might produce a cloud of testimonies to confirm this point. Our Saviour Christ said, that He "will not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax." Observe, it is not said, the strong oak shall not be broken; but the bruised reed shall not be broken. The green buds are regarded by Christ as well as the ripe and grown fruit. In opening of the doctrine, I shall endeavour to clear these two things. 1. That some of God's people have but weak measures and small beginnings of grace. 2. Though there be but a little grace, yet God will regard and reward it. 1. That some of God's people have but a little grace—have but the beginnings of grace wrought in their souls. In the handling whereof are three things: (1) The truth of the proposition may be made good from the Scriptures. (2) I will lay down notes of discovery, to know such as have but small measures of grace wrought in them. (3) And then show why God, in His wisdom, will not suffer His people to be all of an equal strength and stature in grace. How doth it appear that some of God's people are but weak in grace? 1. By the different names and titles that are given unto Christians in Holy Scriptures, arguing they are of different measure and growth of grace. (1) Some are called strong men, and others weak. (3) Some are called babes in Christ, and others called grown men. 3. Some are called trees of righteousness, plants of renown, that grow like cedars in Lebanon; others are but a bruised reed. Some are kids in Christ's flock, and lambs. 2. By the analogy that is between spiritual and natural differences of age, strength, and stature in man; the Holy Scriptures exactly sets down all the different degrees of grace under the similitude of the different ages of men. (1) There is a forming of Christ in the heart, and so a spiritual conception. (2) There are those that are but newborn babes in Christ. (3) There are some who are advanced from infancy to be young men. (4) There are some that are grown men in Christ, old men. And all this doth but set forth the different degrees of grace that are in Christians, some having less, and some more. A second question, how may a man know himself, that he is but of a little measure and small beginning in grace? 1. To be much in dependence on duties, argues thou art but weak in grace. A young Christian is like a young carpenter, he makes many chips and hath many blows, but doth not make such smooth work as an experienced carpenter, who will make fewer chips, and at fewer blows better work; so young Christians, they are much in the use of duty, but they are apt to rely upon duty; they think duties make them saints, and they are apt to make saviours of their duties. Young Christians are, (1) affectionate in duties, and (2) frequent in their duties; (3) and see not their failings in their duties, and so are apt to rest on their duties. 2. A weak Christian is not clearly insighted into the close and spiritual failings, which cleave to his performances. He doth see his gifts, and take notice of his affections, but he doth not see the vanity of his mind, the unsoundness of his mind, the unsoundness of his ends, his carnal dependence upon his duty, self-love, and vain-glory. An experienced Christian will take as much notice of his failing in duty, as of his ability in it.

3. To have a scrupulous conscience about matters of indifferency argues a weak Christian; for so the apostle calls them, weak in the faith, such as did bind conscience when the Scriptures left it free. One believer thought he might eat anything, and another doubted of lawfulness of eating sundry things. Now those that doubted, the apostle calls weak; and the weak conscience is apt to be defiled. Not to know our liberty, and to abuse our liberty, is an argument we have but little grace. 4. To be so intently set on the exercises of religion as to neglect our particular callings, is a sign we are but weak in grace. It was a good saying of that famous man of God, Dr. Sibs: "I like that Christian well, that will hear much and live much, that will pray much and work much." In young converts their affections are strong and stirring, and they think they can never hear enough, and they many times do neglect the duties of their callings, which doth argue their weakness and infirmity. An experienced grown Christian is regular in his general and particular calling; so as the one shall not jostle and hinder the other. 5. To have men's persons in admiration argues weakness in grace; such were the Corinthians, who had men's persons in admiration. A solid Christian loves all good ministers, and can contemn none. 6. To be easily seduced and led away into error argues but weakness in grace. Those the apostle calls "children, who are tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine." Weakness of head doth argue that grace is not very strong in thy heart. 7. Such as are only acquainted with the common principles of religion, without further search into the depths and mysteries of religion. 8. Weak Christians are strong in affections, and not in judgment, they have usually more heat than light; young Christians are like young horses, they have much metal, but are not so fit for a journey, because they are not so thorough-paced: there are many Christians that have much zeal and affection, but are not solid in their judgment; but this argues much weakness in grace. 9. A weak Christian is one that cannot bear reproof. Sharp weather will discover whether thou art of a weak or sound body. Be not then discouraged you that discern in yourselves but small measures of grace; look on your wants and imperfections, so as to grow in grace, and not to be content with any measure: but look not on the small beginnings in grace, as discouragement to you. When you see in a field a great oak, you may say this great tree was once but a small acorn. Those Christians who are now but small sprigs, may hereafter be tall cedars. Why doth God so order and ordain it, that among His own people all shall not be of an equal stature in Christ, but there are of them some in whom there shall be but the beginnings of grace found? It is true, it is not with regeneration as it was in the creation; it is not with the trees of righteousness as it was with the trees of Paradise, which were created all perfect at the first: but it is not so in the work of grace, we are not perfectly sanctified, nor at once, but we perfect holiness in the fear of God, and that by degrees; and God hath given to some of His people but small beginnings and measures of grace, and that for these reasons: 1. To put a difference between our estate on earth and our being in heaven. In heaven we shall all have an equal stature in grace, though it be disputed that there are different degrees of glory. But in heaven the spirits of just men shall all be made perfect, and there we shall all come unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ. All believers here are justified by God alike. God doth not acquit the strong, and hold guilty the weak, but justification is alike to all, but our sanctification is not alike; but when we come to heaven, our sanctification shall be then as our justification is now, that is, perfect and equal, we shall have not only a perfection of parts, but of degrees. 2. This is to make men live in a continual dependence upon Divine influx and supplies from the Spirit of God. 3. For the greater ornament of the mystical body of Christ. In a natural body, if every member should be of an equal bigness, the body would be monstrous: but the body is so proportioned in its different members, that the lesser become serviceable to the greater, and so they all orderly discharge their mutual operations. As in music there would be no harmony if the strings were all of an equal bigness; but one string being the bass, and the other the treble, that makes the music to be more melodious; so it is in grace, the different degrees of grace makes the body of Christ more harmonious. It is here as in some curious piece of needlework; if all the silks were of one colour, it would not set out the work with so much lustre and amiableness as the variety of colours will do. 4. To make God's people see a necessity of maintaining fellowship and communion together, to edify and build up each other. There would be no need of Christian discourse and holy fellowship, did not our weakness require it. 5. To set out the glory of God in all His glorious

attributes. (1) This different size of grace in Christians, doth glorify the mercy of God, and the free grace of God, who when there are some Christians that have but a little grace, yet God rewards those small measures of grace with great measures of glory. (2) This magnifies the power of God, who, when we are weak, yet the great God manifests His power in our weakness, yea, His strength is made perfect in weakness. And therefore Paul adds (2 Cor. xii. 10), "For when I am weak, then am I strong," that is, in Christ. It is by God's power that the least measure of grace shall be preserved. And as God's power is seen in preserving of a little grace, so it is also seen in the increasing of small grace. (3) God doth hereby glorify His wisdom. As God's wisdom is demonstrated in the world by the variety of creatures, which are not all of the same bulk and bigness, but some bigger and some lesser: so in the Church of God His wisdom appears, that some Christians are of greater, and some of a lesser measure of grace. Search the whole creation, and you shall find the wisdom of God in the variety of creatures. In the heavens there are the greater and lesser lights. In the air, the great eagle and little sparrow: on the earth, the elephant and little dog: amongst the creeping things, there is the great serpent and the little pismire: amongst the vegetables, the tall cedar, and the hyssop on the wall. That in the Church there are found more weak Christians than strong, more young converts than old and grown Christians. As in a forest there are more young sprouts than old trees, in a garden more young slips than old roots, in the world more young children than old men. In Nineveh there were one hundred and twenty thousand infants, but there was not such a number of old men. By how much things are perfect, by so much they are the fewer. Look amongst other creatures, those that are of a bigger bulk are of a lesser number, as in the sea there are more young and little fish than great whales; on the earth the smallest things are innumerable; in the air there are more swarms of flies than flocks of birds; so in the Church of God there are more that are young and weak converts than old Christians. That there are many that have but weak measures and small beginnings of grace, who have been a long time under the profession of religion, and under the means of grace; such were the Hebrews, "who for the time that they ought to be teachers, yet had need that one should teach them 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"; and I may accommodate to this purpose that speech of Christ, "Many that are first shall be last, and the last shall be first." There are many who went out early, and took as it were the first step in profession of religion, and yet others have overgone them, who went out after them. Many who have but weak measures of grace, have been of long standing under the means of grace. It is not how many years you have been professors, but what experience and judgment have you gotten under ordinances? That believers ought not to rest satisfied with the small measures of grace they have received; though a little grace may bring you to heaven, yet you are not to take up therewith, but if you have got a little grace, labour for more; and to quicken you hereunto, consider: 1. Small measures of grace are not so sensible and evidential to yourselves; little things because they are little are not seen. There may be little dust hovering up and down in the air, yet because it is small we see it not: this is the reason why Christians doubt; grace is little, and therefore it is not discerned. 2. Consider, that small measures of grace, though they may bring you to heaven, yet they are not so useful to others; a weak Christian cannot do much good in Christian converse, because they want judgment and experience in the ways of God; and therefore such are not to be received to doubtful disputations, but are to be borne withal. Spiritual and strong Christians are most useful. Young converts are not fit for some exercises about religion; they are not fit to strengthen others. 3. Nor are small measures of grace so honourable to God. God is glorified, when His people bear much fruit. It is our duty to improve those small measures of grace which God hath given us. And consider, he that is faithful in a little, God will make him ruler over much. Use of grace will increase it; yet if thy grace be increased, ascribe all to God, it is God's pound, and not thy pains hath gained. Use is of comfort to weak Christians, to those young Abijahs, in whom there is found but small little good. Let such know to their comfort: 1. Though thy grace be but little in quantity, yet it is much in value. A pearl, though but little in substance, yet it is of great worth: so a little grace is of great value; the heart of a wicked man is nothing worth; you may have much knowledge and seeming grace, but no true worth. A shop full of barrels will not make a man rich, unless those vessels be full of commodities;

gifts as to heaven are but the lumber of a Christian, it is grace that makes him rich towards God. 2. Though thy grace be little for the present, yet it will grow for the future to a greater measure. The little grain of mustard-seed (the least of seeds) will in time grow up to a tree. 3. The little measure of grace once begun in the soul shall be perfected. God will not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax, until judgment be perfected in victory. 4. The weakest Christian hath grace alike for quality, though not for quantity: though thy grace be not so much, yet it is as true as others: though but a convert of yesterday, yet grace as true as if an old stander in religion—faith is alike precious in all believers for quality, though not for quantity. Faith in all believers is alike. (1) In respect of the Author, God. (2) The object, it holds upon, the same Christ. (3) The means working it are the same. (4) The end, it hath the same salvation of soul (1 Pet. i. 9). (5) God will not put your weak grace to trial beyond your strength. God will debate with it in measure, He will stay His rough wind in the day of His east wind. (6) Take this for your comfort, the least measure of grace is enough to bring you to heaven. 1. Consider, that things merely necessary and sufficient to maintain a natural life will not content a man; what man is content, though he hath clothes enough to hide his nakedness, and food enough to keep life and soul together—but he desires not only clothes for nakedness, but ornament, and only food for hunger and necessity, but delight? Now shall men be unbounded after their desires for outward things, and shall they sit down and say they have enough for heavenly things? 2. Consider, if thou contentest thyself with a small measure of grace, though thou shalt have the fruit of thy grace when thou diest, yet thou wilt want the comfort of thy grace whilst thou livest. It is strength of grace that gives assurance; weak grace will bring thy soul to heaven, but it is the strength of grace will bring heaven into thy soul. The work of righteousness shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness shall be quietness and assurance for ever. The second caution is, Take not those things to be evidences of the truth of grace, which are evidences only of the growth and strength of grace. Weak converts do involve themselves in a labyrinth of misery, in judging themselves by those symptoms which are evidences only of the strength of grace. Thou must not judge thyself whether thou art in the state of grace by this; as whether thou hast ravishing joys and comforts of the Holy Ghost: these are things that God indulgeth unto some few, and those of a long standing in the school of Christ. In a school, a scholar must not compare himself with one of the highest form: if thou wouldst judge of the truth of thy grace, judge by the lowest measure. The reason why hypocrites and low-form Christians do mistake, is this: hypocrites judge they have grace because they have gifts, and weak Christians judge they have no grace because they do not find such measures of grace in them as are in others. We do not use to say, it is not day because it is not noon. It is unthankfulness to God, and uncharitableness to ourselves, to argue a nullity of grace from the weakness of it. Do not conclude you have small measures of grace, because you have but small measures of comfort; this is the fault of young converts; they take measure of their grace by their comfort, which is a false and deceitful rule; growth of grace is not to be measured by the working of joy: the sweet blossom of joy may fall off, when the fruit of grace may come on; yea, sometimes Christians of the greatest measure of grace may have the least measure of comfort; and all to let us know, that as the being and exercise, so the comforts of our graces, come from free grace. Do not conclude the measure of thy grace little, because thou hast but a little measure of gifts. Gifts are the issues of time and experience, and the fruits of studies advantaged by the strength of natural parts. A man may have a quick and pregnant invention, a profound judgment, a retentive memory, a clear elocution and the like, and yet none of these things can be arguments of grace, but all are but natural endowments. Gifts may be high, and grace may be low. 1. Comfort yourselves, ye weak Christians, for you have a strong God. In Jehovah is everlasting strength. 2. You have a strong Saviour, though your grace is weak; yet He is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him. 3. You lie under a strong Word, which is able to carry on the work of grace which is begun in you. The Word of God, though it be foolishness to them that perish, yet it is the power of God to them that are saved. 4. You are weak, but you stand on a sure foundation. 5. Weak believers are assisted by a strong Spirit. The Spirit of God is not only a Spirit of grace and supplication, but it is also a Spirit of power. I come now to the second part, which is this, that God doth exactly take notice,

tenderly cherish, and graciously reward the least beginnings, and the smallest measures of grace in the hearts of His people. In the prosecution of which point, I shall proceed in this method. 1. I shall prove the truth of it. 2. I will also endeavour to give you the grounds hereof, and then make application. First, that God doth thus cherish the small beginnings of grace will appear, if we consider, 1. These Scripture instances, Matt. xii. 20. He will not quench the smoking flax, that is, by the figure meiosis (as I have shown already) He will kindle it. He will not break the bruised reed, that is, He will strengthen it. God regards not the flame only, but the smoking of grace; not the ripe fruit, but the tender buds. 2. The truth of this point may be made out by those sweet and gracious promises God hath made to grace though weak. I will give you one instead of many, mentioned by the prophet Isaiah, "He shall feed His flock like a shepherd, He shall gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom, and gently lead those that are with young." 3. By counsels that Christ giveth to us, how we ourselves should carry ourselves to those that are weak, viz., to use them with all tenderness. Why doth God cherish the least measures of grace in His people? Because the least measure of grace is of a very great value; the least grace, and least measure or degree of it, is the purchase of Christ's blood, and the merit of His great sufferings. The smallest spark of a diamond is precious; pearls and precious stones are but little for quantity, but great for quality and esteem. The least degree of grace is the work of God, and God will not forsake His own work. Little grace is of the same nature and excellency with the greatest degree of grace; for as the very filings of gold are of the same nature with gold, so the least measure of grace is grace. The faith of all believers is the same faith specifically, though not the same gradually: their faith is in all alike precious, but not alike strong. Because God is the author of weak grace as well as of strong. Solomon gives a good rule why the rich should not slight the poor, because God is the Author and Maker of them both. The Lord will perfect His work that concerneth His people, *i.e.*, He will perfect and encourage the least beginnings of grace, because grace is His work in His servants. It is a very good argument in prayer, O Lord forsake not the work of Thy hands. Property is the ground of love, care, and tenderness: as a man will look to a weak child, because it is his child, and will repair a weak house, because it is the house wherein he dwells. And that is the third demonstration of God's tender care over His people, that the meanest measure of grace shall not be deserted or forsaken, because God is the author of it. A fourth reason may be drawn from the covenant of grace, the nature and tenor whereof is to accept of sincerity instead of perfection, desires for deeds, purposes for performances, pence for pounds, and mites for millions; and therefore God will accept and reward the least measure of grace, that is, in truth and sincerity. If God doth cherish and will reward the smallest measure of graces, then it will follow that God takes notice of the smallest sins to punish them. He that graciously eyes the very buddings of grace, will also justly eye the buddings of corruption in His own people. Learn from hence, that the same mind should be in Christians of greater growth to the weak, as was in Christ Jesus; who, though He be higher than the highest, yet He looks upon the poor and lowly without disdain, and so should we. Learn from hence, how God doth by leisure and degrees carry on in the hearts of His people the work of grace unto further perfection. Mushrooms and such like worthless things, like Jonah's gourd, may spring up in one night; but things of most moment are of longest growth before they come to perfection. And therefore let young converts learn from hence not to be discouraged. God's works both of nature and grace are perfected by degree. 1. Though God regards the least measure of grace, let not this make you regardless to grow in grace. 2. Though you have but a little grace, yet do not despise it, or disparage it. O do not despise the day of small things in thy soul. Do not tread upon the bunch of grapes, upon the new wine in the cluster, but say, there is a blessing in it. (*C. Love.*)

Ver. 16. Jeroboam, who did sin, and who made Israel to sin.—*The sin of making others to sin*:—1. Here we see the tendency of sin to produce sin—to go on propagating sin; here is the connection between the first sinner, who sets the thing in motion—a connection, clear to the eye of God—between him and the very last result. The Bible does not create this—that book is not accountable for it; for if you had not the Bible, or if you put it out of the question altogether, there is still the fact in the nature of things. People nowadays are perpetually wanting

us to keep away from the supernatural revelation, and to take our stand on the natural. Very well. Let us now look at it in that way. I mean to say it is just the natural course of things. Whether there is a God or not, does not alter the question. Put that aside for the moment, and just hear the reality as seen amongst us. The thing is an obvious, absolute fact, wherever it came from, that bad men make bad men—the corrupt produces corruption, and the evil thought, word, or act exerts an influence and propagates itself. Take a man that is dead and buried, and who has been in his grave a hundred years, and you can conceive of his mind coming actually into direct contact with the minds of the present generation, and producing a corrupting influence upon them. Well, then, imagine a man—picture to yourselves the writer of a popular book, aiming to overturn the faith of the young, the indiscreet, and unlearned. Supposing such a man to write such a book which continues to be circulated from generation to generation; copies of it are multiplied and sent forth. Young minds come into contact with it; these minds are corrupted by it; they are defiled and led away from the faith, giving up their confidence in God, and perhaps seduced to what is immoral. Do you not see that though he has been dead two or three hundred years, this author has still a living presence in society? His mind is coming into contact with other living minds; and thus, though dead, he yet speaketh—speaketh against God—speaketh with blasphemy—speaketh to corrupt—and men are thereby corrupted, and taught to blaspheme, and he is thus living, speaking, and operating till the present day by the printing and publication of that work. 2. I want you to see, in the next place, that there is no help for this. On purely natural principles it cannot be helped. If you could get all the readers of Tom Paine to give up their bad books, and agree that they should all be burned, would it not be a miracle? I should like you to try to get that done! But you must do more than that—you must not only destroy the books, but you must annihilate all the impressions on their memories and their hearts that this man's books have made, if you are to stop the evil influence he has set in motion by sinning and teaching others to sin. 3. If a bad man—a man that has sinned himself, and that has taught others to sin, seduced the innocent, sapped the foundations of virtue, destroyed the religious faith of men—supposing such a one to come to a better mind; supposing his heart is changed, and he becomes a penitent believer. He could never undo what he had done for the great mass of those on whom he had exerted a bad influence; and when he wanted to undo what he had done, and exert a good influence, they would just receive his words with mockery, and would go in the way he had led them at first. But even this could not be done. You know that it would be impossible for a man who has exerted a bad influence on others to collect them together and thus to reason with them. No! Before he comes to that better mind, some who were his associates, and whom he has influenced for evil, are dead and beyond his reach. Others are gone to the other side of the globe; and they are beyond his reach. He cannot find where these multitudes are; and they, because of what he did, have influenced others, and others have influenced again; and the thing has gone on, and it is not for him to know its ramifications and its consequences. Now this is the "course of nature," and you cannot help it. 4. Now I want you again to make a supposition for the sake of argument. Supposing that there should be a future life; and supposing that, after death, the souls of men are awakened into a new life, with all the recollections of this—with all the memories of this? The only difference, in all probability, is that they would be delivered from what here darkens the judgment—from what here misleads the mind—and from what here hides a man from himself—and what hides from him the characteristics and properties of his sin. Suppose that he will waken into another life—that he will see things as they are in themselves, and see people as they are; and, perhaps, be able to see and to trace the connection between his sin and the sinning of others? Suppose that he will be able to see and trace the influence on generation after generation, of the evil that he did, and of the influence which he set in motion? Supposing that he should waken up, in this other life, to a moral perception of what he did while alive, and what he continues to do by the influences he then set in motion, and which continued to be a power in the world after he had departed? Well, now; only think of a man waking up to that! Where is it to end, supposing the human spirit does wake up to that? You must take your choice; that, I believe, is the real fact of the case. You must take your choice, looking at nature, at the course of things, at the real, awful, terrible facts of our existence! You must take your choice between two things

—either that there is nothing but nature, or that there is a fixed course of things, and we must look forward, both in this world and in the next; and, depend upon it, nature never deceives with respect to those great instincts that she has planted in all her creatures. There is not an instinct, in all animated being, which has not an appropriate good. I only state this. Take your choice. You must believe either that nature is all you have, or you must believe that God in His mercy and grace, and looking down on our condition in its natural state of sin, has done something above nature to reach us—to lead us up—to give us hope! 5. The Gospel comes to destroy the spiritual consequences of your sin, and, through repentance, and faith in God, to give you a hope in mercy, and to save your souls; but as long as you continue unfaithful, you continue subject to the course of nature; and any consequences of sin which you have brought on yourself must be taken to the grave with you, and the Gospel will not help you out of it. If you ruin your health by vice, or your character by crime, you may repent, and God will save you, and the interposition of His grace will sanctify your soul, and you may get to heaven; but it will not give you health, nor will it destroy the consequences which sin has brought on your body—it will not set you in society where you were before—you will still be remembered as having been a criminal and dishonest man, as long as you live; and though people may rejoice at your conversion, and hope for the best, you will never stand where you once did stand in society. Never! There is another thing I am obliged to submit to. I do not understand it. It is a matter of faith, and I say I do not know how it can be, but I believe that it is, in some way or other. That is to say, I believe this—that a very great sinner, who has led a great many into sin, and been the means of the utter destruction and corruption of many, influentially—well, it is a great mystery, but I believe the Gospel is such, that the grace of God can so operate that that soul may hereafter enjoy repose! It is wonderful to think it; but I believe the Gospel makes a provision for it—I believe that it is within the resources of God's omnipotent mercy, that that soul may be happy in God, notwithstanding the consequences of its sin are going on injuring others! He will go to the grave mourning over that; but then his soul will enter into repose, though these consequences still remain going on. (*T. Binney.*)

Ver. 27. King Rehoboam made in their stead brazen shields.—*Shields of gold and bronze*:—Solomon in his reign decorated his court of justice, called the house of the forest of Lebanon, with three hundred shields of beaten gold. These shields of gold hung there until his son Rehoboam's reign, when Shishak, King of Egypt, came up and pillaged Jerusalem. When he had taken these golden shields away, Rehoboam made for their empty places shields of brass or copper; and whatever trouble he may have taken to secure the shields of gold, he committed his brazen shields to the care of a trusty guard. "And when the king went into the house of the Lord, the guard bare them, and brought them back into the guard-chamber." 1. The kingdom of Israel was a figure of that real kingdom which every man possesses—himself, with some good or evil principle regnant over its thoughts and desires, its life and aims. And this kingdom may be like the kingdom of Solomon, a realm regulated by a noble and wise power, and rich in the resources of a good and capable nature. Its protecting and inspiring principles may be as pure and as beautiful as shields of gold; justice and innocence, mercy and truth set up like shining shields within its inmost sanctuary. But if human life has any lesson more sad than another it is that which teaches that men often depart from their purest and best principles, and permit lower and less noble motives to guide them. Many men begin life with a real desire to become useful and a blessing to the world, who afterwards become mere seekers after wealth or pleasure. The bright, generous youth grows into the hard and selfish man; the frank, sympathetic, and lovable spirit shrivels up into the narrow, suspicious, grasping, and unloving seeker after self. A process of transmutation goes on, but not of baser metal into gold, but of gold into copper or bronze. This incident is a picture of this decline from high principle to something less noble and unselfish; it is the emblem of that change too common with us, from gold to brass. 2. There is one side of Rehoboam's energy in making shields of copper that pathetically resembles our own sometimes—that which displays the haste and eagerness with which men hasten to conceal the loss of their highest feelings; how strenuously they strive to preserve the appearance of principle, of magnanimity, and of honour, when they have lost their essential spirit; how strictly they adhere to the forms

of godliness when often its life is entirely gone! Burnished bronze is substituted for pure gold, and it often looks like gold and passes for it, but it lacks the true ring and the unsullied lustre of the genuine metal none the less. Yet it is important for us to learn that the substitution of copper for gold is a right thing when our gold is gone, if we do not deceive ourselves into the belief that our bronze is gold, for the loss of inward innocence and purity of motive can, at least, be partly atoned for by the steady pursuit of outward goodness and righteousness. It is sad, indeed, to depart from the best principles that we possess, but it is far more sorrowful not to repair our loss by the pursuit of some lesser good. Sometimes goodness seems instinctive, and we cannot do wrong, because it fills us with an unconquerable horror; but when such feelings fail, it is wise to resist evil from much lower motives rather than yield ourselves willingly to sin. If we cannot hearken to the voice of love, it is well for us to listen to the word of command; if full desire should fail to move us to do right, then it is wise to use the compulsion of law and obedience. 3. Many of our deepest and purest feelings do not seem able to bear the stress of this hard world. We quickly lose many of the sweetest and holiest feelings that were stored in our hearts in childhood; the teachableness, the peacefulness and humility, the sense of the Divine nearness, and our dependence upon our Heavenly Father; our reverence for truth and goodness, and our instinctive love of the right, are apt to fade away beneath the harsh light of this world of sin; but if our shields of gold should go, there is wisdom in making shields of copper; fitting up our minds with harder and lower principles; determining to obey the law of God; determining, at least, to keep our conduct pure; our hands, if not our hearts, clean; and doing our duty faithfully amongst men. It is Shishak, King of Egypt, the worldly principle, the principle of this life and its comforts, that robs us of our golden shields. We become engrossed with our earthly life, with its physical pleasures and pains, with its present hopes and disappointments, and the higher forces and influences lose their authority over us; what is better then, to use in preserving our religion, than those lower, but most needful, principles that bid us control our earthly and outward lives by a Divine law and force, that make religion a duty we owe to God, to ourselves, to our fellow-men, and unswerving fidelity to right our fixed course, because we must suffer and perish by any other way? 4. Men often make the mistake of giving up altogether their faith, their religion, their early principles and hopes, because they lose their charm, because they seem remote from their worldly daily life; but this is losing their shields altogether; they are depriving themselves entirely of what they might possess under another form; they should seek to make these things at least a check upon their lives, and follow what is right and good from a sense of duty if not from love. It is strange how precious such things become when we cling to them thus; it is easy indeed to lose the habit of prayer, which was once a pleasure to us; or the habit of attendance at the house of prayer, which was once a joy, when some fresh and more worldly influences come upon us; but it is remarkable how soon prayer and worship become a joy again, when we persevere in their use, and persist against our will in their practice. It is easy to lose our golden shields, but if we make for ourselves shields of copper, and guard them steadfastly and carefully, they will at length be transmuted into fine gold, for it is ever he that doeth the works that knows, and finds, and loves the doctrine. The pathway back to purity of heart is by purity of life; to the love of God's commandments by obedience to them; to faith, and joy, and trust in heavenly things by steadfast duty to their laws in all we do below; and the method by which God restores to us our treasures of gold is by making us faithful over our treasures of bronze, for he that is faithful over a few things shall be ruler over many things. (*W. F. Stonestreet.*)

Vers. 29–31. Now the rest of the acts of Rehoboam.—*The power and weakness of external circumstances in the life of man*:—Though this man lived fifty-eight years in this world, and for seventeen years occupied the throne, how little is said of him! Inspired historians pay no more attention to the life of kings than to the life of ordinary men. I. THE POWER OF EXTERNAL CIRCUMSTANCES. Whilst we are far enough from admitting that man is by necessity the creature of circumstances, we cannot gainsay the fact that they tend greatly to shape his character and determine his fortunes. Here we find them investing the most worthless man with worldly opulence and regal power. Some men amass wealth and climb to power by skilful and persevering industry. But here is a man born

to it. His ancestors made his position for him. He was not the architect of his own fortune. This is the case with thousands to-day. Experience teaches that to get wealth and power in this way is as undesirable as it is unmeritorious. Many sons have had reason to curse the day when their fathers bequeathed them a fortune. Here is a man whom circumstances made a king, who had nothing kingly in his soul. II. THE WEAKNESS OF EXTERNAL CIRCUMSTANCES. 1. They did not give him wisdom and piety. 2. They did not give him social respect. We are so constituted that we can have no true moral respect for a man, however elevated his position, if he is destitute of moral worth. To true souls corrupt men on a throne are far more contemptible than if they lived in hovels of obscurity. Conclusion:—1. That a man's external circumstances are no just criteria by which to judge his character. To regard them as such, has been the tendency of men in all ages. 2. That man's external circumstances do not necessarily shape his character. The circumstances into which the life of Rehoboam was thrown, did not by necessity make him the vile man and ruthless despot which he became. The fact is, there is a sovereign power in the soul, to subordinate external circumstances to its own interest. It can turn apparently the most adverse circumstances into blessings. (*Homilist.*)

CHAPTER XV.

VERS. 11–15. **Asa did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord.**—*The character of Asa*:—In Asa, King of Judah, we have one of the most melancholy, yet perhaps one of the most marvellous instances on record in the Holy Scriptures of the depravity of our nature. What strikes us in this prince is not merely that sort of inconsistency which is, more or less, part of every man's character; that strange admixture of opposing principles and motives which may be said to influence the actions of the generality of men; neither is it—what is a still more common evil among men—the succumbing to the power of any one evil disposition which is not sufficiently counteracted by a corresponding virtue. It is his failure in that very point in which the chief of his virtues seemed to lie—his faith and perfect confidence in God. I. THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF MAN'S ARRIVING AT A SINLESS STATE OF PERFECTION SO LONG AS HE IS CLOTHED WITH THIS MORTALITY. In Asa we have a proof that a man may be perfect before God, and yet have sin. "In many things we offend all," and "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves"—if we were to infer that a state of faultless perfection were attainable in this world from the fact that there are many who, like Noah, Abraham, or Asa, are said to have walked perfectly with God, it would be difficult to reconcile such an inference with the sins they are known to have committed. When we find such injunctions as this—"Walk thou before Me, and be thou perfect." It is plain that the word "perfect" must be interpreted in that sense of general uprightness of character which it is only possible to apply to the best of men in this world. The main difference between the righteous and unrighteous—and this we ought chiefly to bear in mind—lies in habitual character. It is this which God principally regards, and not occasional sins, grievous though they be. The pith of all true religion, the grand substance of the doctrines of both Old and New Testaments, is summed up for us at the conclusion of both—the last words of the Old Testament being: "Then shall ye return and discern between him that serveth God and him that serveth Him not"; while among the last utterances of the Holy Ghost speaking by St. John, are these: "His servants shall serve Him"—"He that loveth not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be anathema maran atha." Thus the constant service of God is spoken of in both Testaments as the distinctive feature of the righteous. II. THE MORE PRACTICAL LESSON OF CAUTION IN THE MANNER OF OUR DAILY WALK. If Satan be suffered to exercise so great power over the hearts of the faithful servants of God, how watchful over our own hearts should we be! How necessary to each one of us the godly admonition of the apostle: "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall"! And how are we to take heed lest we fall? By standing always in the grace of God—this is the secret of final perseverance; this is the secret of Asa's heart being perfect all his days. It is a mere matter of history that the saving mercy of God is

more generally shown to those in whom we find habitual goodness of heart to have pre-existed, or, more strictly speaking, by whom grace given has been constantly used and persevered in, than to those whose habit of life has been careless and negligent of God's service. The case of a seemingly virtuous child being led astray might well presuppose a want of real hearty piety, or a degree of pride and self-confidence which has withdrawn the special care and love of God, and left that child a prey of his enemies. This is not, however, the case of a really righteous person fallen from his uprightness. In all this we have a strong caution. If habitual piety is never forgotten, and rarely goes unrewarded at last, how much ought we to be on our guard lest we lose aught of that piety, lest we slacken the fervour of our zeal, and suffer our love to grow cold, or even lukewarm; lest, in a word, we forfeit aught of that grace wherein alone we stand. (*J. B. Liller, M.A.*)

Ver. 22. **They took away the stones of Ramah.**—*Old material for new buildings:*—The King of Israel went up against Judah and built the strong fortress of Ramah, but the King of Judah strengthened himself by calling in, on the basis of an ancient treaty, the assistance of Benhadad, the King of Syria. Benhadad and Asa went up against the King of Israel and overthrew him and took his fortress called Ramah, and with the stones of that fortress two cities of Judah were built. Surely there is a great lesson here by which all sensible men may profit! Asa turned the old material to new uses, and said in effect, "A stone is a stone, a beam is a beam: there is no harm in the material itself: it has been used against me, now it shall be used for me," and thus, in the eloquent language of Bossuet, "with the fortresses of Samaria he built the cities of Judah." Thus the subject begins to reveal itself, and we see how, amid these ancient names, often unknown and sometimes uncouth, the very freshest lessons may be gathered. 1. Is it not much the same as if a man should use the materials of his old self with which to build the structure of a new and nobler manhood? Suppose a man to have come over to what is expressively termed the Lord's side: we will ask, What have you done with the old material—is it to be left—is it to be utilised? Have you been so foolish as to leave all the old stuff in the enemy's hands? The stuff itself is not bad: it was only put to bad uses. We want you to bring away every stone and every beam, and with the old material to build a new palace. You have come over to the Lord's side, what are you now? How much of the old material have you saved and appropriated to better purposes? In some cases, we fear, the disguise is so complete that your own mother would not know you now. You have succeeded in burying every talent, powdering every stone, burning every beam—the old material is not found among the resources of your better life. Ramah has not become Mizpah. You were once musical; and now you scarcely mumble a hymn in church, much less sing. Ramah has not become Geba of Benjamin, or Mizpah. You have left the music with the enemy instead of bringing it with you and sanctifying it, by a new baptism, to higher and diviner uses. 2. What is true of the building up of the individual, is true also of the building up of the Church. It is recorded of one of the Wesleys that when he heard anybody singing a nice tune on the streets, he used to loiter about until he got the melody thoroughly into his head, and then he went away and set divine words to the prostituted music. He said, "The devil has all the best tunes." Persons looking at Wesley standing listening to the street singer, would say, "What, is he caught by the song?" and they might have attributed wrong motives to his standing there, but he was pulling down Ramah that he might build Geba of Benjamin, and Mizpah. The tune that was used to carry evil sentiments or bad language was brought over to tell the world the great gospel. Here is a man whom we have taken from the enemy who has a gift of music: what is he going to do with it in the Church? Let us employ him at once as a singing missionary; send him out to sing. He will find the voice, we find the words. Is it possible to sing the gospel? Verily so. In a recent walk I saw some little fellows about two feet and a half high—little bunches of papers on their arms, sitting on the steps, and looking at one another so coyly and nicely, with unkempt hair, and their bare feet and their tattered garments—and there was I, poor dumb priest, on my way to talk to the luxury of the age, and I felt the tears in my throat as I cursed myself. I would that some lady could have gone to those little fellows and have sung them some little hymn or sweet song. It would have been odd: it might have been useful. It would have created a laugh for the time being: it might have won a conquest. It would have been called ridiculous: in heaven it might have been termed sacrificial.

What are you doing with the old material? Here is a man we have captured, who used to be quite famous for his humour. He was in very deed a wit. He saw the comical aspect of every question, he had a keen eye for the ludicrous, a happy tongue for the expression of all that he saw and felt. He is now in the Church—what is he doing? Sleeping. The Church will not have him. The Church is wrong. We should make a modern Elijah of him, and he should taunt the priests of evil on their own ground and across their own altars, till they ran away for very shame. Such a man should have a function in the Church. But is there not danger in employing such persons to do such work? Yes, there is danger in doing it; but, as we view the case, there is more danger in not doing it. We are too much afraid of danger. There was great danger in entrusting the revelation of Christianity to a few fishermen, ignorant and feeble in every aspect of social importance. We dare not have done it. We should hardly have trusted any one of those men to have posted a letter. But Jesus entrusted them with a letter for the universe. Clothe men with responsibilities if you would call up their supreme power to its best expression, its most solid and massive and dominating attitude. We want to know what has become of the old material. You were greater on the other side than you are on this. You made more of a figure, you created a deeper impression, you were better known as an actor than ever you have been known as a preacher—how is that? You were better known as a blasphemer than you are known as a suppliant—how is that? O that we could utilise all the old forces! Jesus Christ works in the spirit of this text in building up His kingdom. Jesus Christ will overthrow the fortress of the enemy, and take every stone and beam and timber away, and rear new edifices with them. Out of the ruins of the drunkard, Jesus Christ builds the apostle of temperance. Jesus is building His great house, and some day men will say about the stones that are in it, "What are these, and whence came they?" and Jesus will answer with a pride of satisfaction flooding and flaming His soul, "Every stone that is there is precious to Me: this is Ramah, rebuilt as Geba; this is the old fortress turned into the new sanctuary"; and as He looks upon that palace, wide as the horizon, high as heaven, what wonder if, seeing the travail of His soul, He is satisfied? (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

Ver. 23. Nevertheless in the time of his old age he was diseased in his feet.—*Asa; or, failure at the last*:—Few personages in Holy Scripture appear to have commenced their career with more decided promise of good, and more energetic measures against evil, than Asa, King of Judah. Asa was the third of those princes of the house of David, whom God, though for the sins of Solomon He had alienated ten tribes from their sway, permitted for His ancient servant's sake to retain a throne and a name. Asa was preserved pure amid the corruptions of his age; and his acts immediately on ascending the throne, and for a large portion of his life, showed, not merely that his heart was not perverted to idols—that is, was in this sense perfect before the Lord—but that he leaned on Him, and found Him to be his Strength and his Redeemer. When ten years are over, we find that a great change has passed upon Asa. Hostilities are threatened at the hands of Baasha, King of Israel. That prince is building a fortress on his very frontier. His purpose cannot be mistaken. It is to check the growing intercourse between Asa's subjects and his own. Asa is naturally alarmed; but in his alarm he seeks not God—he seeks a human, a heathen ally. He bribes the King of Syria, with his own treasures and the treasures of the temple, to break an existing league with Baasha, and invade the north-eastern provinces of Israel. A diversion is thus effected; for Baasha is summoned from his scheme of offence by tidings that the whole of the coast of Gennesaret is being wasted by fire and sword. Asa improves his opportunity. He destroys the rising fortress, Ramah, and applies to the strengthening of two cities for himself the materials prepared by the enemy. Yes, he has repelled the danger, but he has incurred a greater danger. He has made God his enemy, for he has not trusted in Him as his friend. How strange, how very mournful, that he who for more than a quarter of a century had led men to God, should at length have himself turned from Him: that he who, by his life and reign, had preached to others, should himself be a castaway! And is it indeed so? Hanani the prophet has come to remonstrate with him; and his remonstrance, truly though severely kind, must surely move him. Alas! Asa's heart is hardened. The voice of honesty grates harshly on him; he is wroth with the prophet; he even imprisons him. And the sacred historian adds, "He oppressed some of the people at the same time"; it may be, because they reminded him of

the oath which they had sworn at his bidding, and in which he had bound himself, that God should be their God. A few more years pass on, of which we read nothing, but of which we must fear much. Asa is now stretched on his sick-bed; a lingering disease is wasting him; at length, it is exceeding great. Two or three years he lies in deep agony, yet he never thinks of God; he "seeks not to the Lord, but to the physicians." Is no more said of him than this? Does no repentance for his evil deeds come upon him? No remembrance of his youthful faith, and of the way in which it was rewarded, flash upon him? Does no light illume the chamber of death? No fear of what is beyond death appal him? He had long ceased to live by faith, and he does not die in faith. To the words, "he sought not to the Lord, but to the physicians," succeeds the simple announcement, "and Asa slept with his fathers, and died in the one and-fortieth year of his reign." He died. He died, and was buried in his own sepulchre, which he had provided for the body, however much he had neglected his soul. He was buried with great honour in the city of David. He was buried "with an empire's lamentation." But what was all this, unless we have reason to suppose that angels received his soul, and conveyed it into Abraham's bosom, there to abide till the resurrection? But what were the causes of his fall? Scripture is silent on this point; we may, however, discover two or three o' them. 1. He was tried, in the first place, by great success. People are inclined to think that success is no trial. They are much mistaken. Nothing is more liable to produce self-confidence, and neglect of Him who bestoweth on the wise their wisdom, and on the strong their strength. Unless a man watches himself very narrowly, pride will insinuate itself even into the midst of his thanksgivings; complacent thoughts of his own foresight underlie his recognition of God's providence; convictions of his own good desert qualify his confessions of sin. Idols had bowed at Asa's word. Profligacy had shrunk abashed from his presence. The appointments of the temple had risen to fresh splendour on his opening the doors of his treasury. The ancient renown of his people had revived under his sway. The borders of his kingdom had been extended by his policy. He had spoken, and cities long dismantled had resumed their coronal of towers. He had led out his armies, and barbarians had fled before him. Whatever he had taken in hand, the Lord had made it to prosper. This was at length too much for him. He dwelt on his wisdom, it became foolishness—on his strength, and it turned to weakness; in a word, he forgot God, who, as He had raised him up, had power to cast him down. 2. But mark a second point in which Asa was tried, and having been tried was found wanting. He was placed in the perilous position of having to guide and instruct others—to provide for their spiritual welfare—to correct whatever tendencies he discovered towards vice or towards idolatry. Now, little as we are accustomed so to view it, this is a great snare to any one. The mother, who teaches her child to pray; the father, who watches over his son's moral progress; the master, who is a strict censor of the behaviour of his servants; the Scripture reader, the district visitor, the nurse of the sick, the almoner of the poor; yea, even the minister of God who has professionally to bring before his people the means of grace and the hopes of glory, the right use of the one, and the sober entertainment of the other; these persons are all of them in danger of neglecting themselves; of placing themselves, as it were, *ab extra*, to the duties which they have to inculcate; of losing their interest in them as things in which they have a deep personal concernment. Such persons are tempted then in the contemplation of their works, to forget themselves, to abate their self-discipline, and, when the novelty of their employment has passed away, to fall back upon other things; it may be, to end with languor, disgust, or carelessness, if not with utter faithlessness and sin. Gradually, indeed, and very slowly, such lethargy may creep over the soul; as gradually as the fumes of the chafing-dish overpower the senses of the sleeper, or as the deathlike chill of the mountain steals over the weary traveller, and lulls him into a slumber from which there is no awakening—but like these, it is subtle, silent, fatal. It is only sure-walking that is safe-walking. To be sure we must not be secure, we must be careful; carefulness is the earnest of safety; carefulness, whose maxim is, "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall"; carefulness, which, in the words of our Litany, petitions the Almighty for deliverance not merely in the "time of tribulation," but in the "time of wealth." (*J. A. Hessey, D.C.L.*)

CHAPTER XVI.

VERS. 8–10. **Elah . . . Zimri . . . Arza.**—*Elah, Zimri, and Arza* :—There was once a king in Israel called Elah. He reigned over Israel in Tirzah two years. He had a servant called Zimri who was a captain of his chariots. Zimri was a born traitor. Treachery was in his very blood. In the case of Elah, Zimri had a marked advantage; for Elah was a drunken fool. He was in the habit of visiting the house of another of his servants, a steward called Arza, and there he had what drink he asked for; and he asked for a good deal, so much so that he was often drunk in his servant's house, and on one of these occasions, Zimri went in and killed him, and reigned in his stead. These are the facts which we have to deal with. Are they very ancient, or are they happening round about us every day? 1. Elah lives in every man who has great chances or opportunities in life, but allows them to slip away through one leak in the character. Elah was a king, and the son of a king, so his openings in life were wide and splendid; but he loved strong drink, and through that leak in his character all that might have made him a man oozed away, and left him a king in nothing but the barren name. Strong drink will ruin any man. What is true of this leak in a man's character is true of every other. Take indecision for example, or idleness, or love of company, or devotion to pleasure. A great merchant once said to me of a certain man in his employment, "I would to-morrow give that man a thousand a year to begin with, if he could do one thing, and that is, hold his tongue; but he would no sooner get the appointment than he would go into an ale-house, and tell the whole company everything I am doing." There is the leak in the character, and it means ruin! It is astounding what one leak will do. 2. Zimri still lives in all persons who take advantage of the weaknesses of others. Zimri knew that Elah was a drunkard, and he further knew that through his habit of drunkenness alone he could reach the king. On every other side of his character Elah may have been a strong man: acute, shrewd, far-sighted; but when in drink, weak and foolish. And Zimri played his game accordingly. Some people trade on the weaknesses of others. They study them. Thy adapt themselves to them. They watch for striking time, and seldom miss the mark. How else could the net be always ready for the bird? How else the pit be always prepared for the unexpected and bewildered traveller? There is an infernal science in these things—a devil's black art! 3. And does not Arza still live in those who find the means whereby men may conceal their evil habits and indulge their unholy desires? They seem to say, "In my house you may do what you please. I shall not look at you. Come when you please; go when you like; I am nobody, if you like to call me so." My wonder is that any young man can keep his morals uncorrupted in a strange city. Houses of destruction are open in every street. How foolish, too, are the wicked! If they would devote their talents to some virtuous end they would attain honourable success, sweetened with a sense of honesty. They often have great talents, fine powers, large capacities, and if they gave themselves with ardour and energy to the pursuit of good ends they would outrun many, and gain a prize worthy and lasting. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

Ver. 22. **So Tibni died, and Omri reigned.**—*Tibni and Omri* :—We have often been struck by the difference in the lot of men upon the earth; for example, as between the rich man and Lazarus, and between the great king and the poor wise man. The text brings these differences before us sharply—"Tibni died, and Omri reigned." A short explanatory story is needed here. When Zimri killed Elah, the people proclaimed Omri as king; but the proclamation was not unanimous; half of the people wanted Tibni, and half wanted Omri: the half that wanted Omri prevailed; so Tibni died, and Omri reigned. Our purpose is to show that both Tibni and Omri are still living, and that we may learn a good deal from their different lots in life. 1. Tibni and Omri are both living in the persons of those who divide public opinion respecting themselves. Is there any man living with whom everybody is satisfied? Take a Christian minister—any minister in this great London, and see how public opinion is divided about him. To one set of men he is the supreme human teacher; to another set of men he is almost unfit to be in the pulpit at all. Take a statesman; to one class he is the salvation of the kingdom, to another he is an empiric, a traitor, or in some degree a political rascal. Take any friend in social life; to one man he is an idol, to another he is a bore. There are great moral lessons coming out of these simple facts. Society

will always be divided about its leading men; but let us insist that there may be difference without bitterness, and that you may make one man king without taking away the character and perhaps the life of his rival. Let us pray God to show us the best points in every man's character. 2. Tibni still lives in the man who comes very near being a king but just misses the throne. Half the people in the camp were in his favour. In some of t e popular shouts you could hardly tell whether Tibni or Omri was the uppermost name. Now the one seemed to fill the whole wind and now the other. The men themselves did not know for certain which of them was to have the crown. Let us see if there be not a good deal of our own life in this apparently remote and uninteresting fact. Whatever you strive for most anxiously in life is the crown to you, because it is the thing you want beyond all others. Sometimes it is so near! You feel as if you could put out your hand and take it! And yet though so near, it is so far, like a star trembling in a pool. Here we come upon the very first lines of Providence, and the finer the lines the subtler the temptation. We are tempted to step over some lines; it seems right that we should do so; we say we ought to take advantage of our good fortune, and if God has come so near He means us to take the one last step. It is just there that many a man suffers the supreme trial of his faith and the supreme agony of his sensibilities. We have referred to the supreme trial of a man's sensibilities; let us explain our meaning. We often say of this man or that, How narrowly he escapes being a great man! There is only one thing wanting, one element, one force, one virtue—one thing thou lackest, one thing is needful! And the man himself is tormented by a sense of greatness which is always nearing the point of royalty but never absolutely reaching it. He feels that the great poem which would give him literary immortality is breathing within him and around him, but the moment he puts pen to paper the inspiration ceases and will not harden into words. He has in him strange wild dreamings of power; he can write a book, he can found a new school of philosophy, he can illumine the whole horizon of theology, he can save the State; innumerable things he attempts and completes in his dreams, but the day of execution never dawns! It is in such men that Tibni still lives; in disappointed hearts, in blighted hopes, in brilliant prospects overcast, in kingdoms made of cloud, in castles built in air. 3. Omri still lives in those who turn great powers and great openings to dishonourable and unholy uses. Omri got the throne. For twelve years he reigned in Israel, six of them in Tirzah. His rival died, and he was left in undisputed sovereignty. But his way was not honourable be ore the Lord. "Omri wrought evil in the eyes of the Lord, and did worse than all that were before him." Some providences seem to be altogether thrown away, and we stand aghast at the destruction, saying, "Why was t is waste made?" Great talents are made to serve the devil; great voices of song are never heard in the sanctuary; noble powers of speech are dumb when the righteous cause has to be pleaded. Application: (1) If we cannot be great we can be good; (2) There is one throne which we need not miss. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

Ver. 28. **Omri slept with his fathers . . . Ahab his son reigned in his stead.**—*Omri and Ahab*:—A careful study of the two kingdoms, Israel and Judah, compels one to feel that communities do the best when they most honour God, and that forgetfulness of Him, and especially revolt from Him, brings disturbance and destruction. It is true these events transpired more than two thousand five hundred years ago, but they "are written for our learning." Why should they be if there is nothing that we need to learn from them? 1. We need not trouble ourselves with the settling of the periods making up the dozen years of Omri's reign, which had its opening portion in Tirzah, the royal seat (ver. 17). Omri had ability of a certain sort, and hence, probably, was able to secure the adhesion of so many of the people and the conquest of his two rivals. He showed it in the selection of a new capital. Shemer owned a tract of land with a hill of great strategic value. With an opening out into the wider distant plain through the level grounds which divided it elsewhere, all around, from the mountains, it had on one side a gentle slope, and on all the others it was easily made strong against an enemy, when bows and arrows and spears constituted the common weapons of assault. The town got its name from him who owned the hill, and most fitly, for it was the synonym of "watch-tower," the very thing at which Omri aimed, having in mind through the slaughter of how many enemies he had to wade to the throne, and how necessary it was to be strong against any future assaults. They who part with Jehovah as Guide and Protector, and trust to human resources, need to multiply

these to the utmost. Jeroboam had not flung off God formally. He had only modified the way of serving Him. He had set up the calves. This was politic, expedient, necessary. It was in harmony too with the ways of the nations. This was "the way of Jeroboam the son of Nebat" (ver. 26). It was not the way of loyalty to Jehovah; it was not the way of truth. It was the way of disobedience under the inspiration of policy. Between this sin and the others that followed it was only a question of degree, not of kind. Set up taste, usage, popular craving, fashion, artistic completeness, or anything else as changing, modifying the method of Divine appointment, and you enter on the inclined plane. How far down and how fast you will go is determined by circumstances. So Omri's working "evil in the eyes of the Lord," and doing "worse than all that were before him" (ver. 25), is only walking in all "the way of Jeroboam the son of Nebat," and in his corrupting and contaminating sin. So it is ever. Given the supremacy of Peter, then his control of all things, secular and sacred; then his infallibility! What was the effect of all these modifications? Toward man, to keep Israel together and from union with Judah. But in the other and higher direction—toward God—the effect was "to provoke (ver. 26) the Lord God of Israel to anger with their vanities." (See, for the "statutes of Omri," Mic. vi. 16.) When Omri died, the chronicles of the kings of Israel (ver. 27) containing the record of his deeds, they buried him in his capital, Samaria, and the throne fell to his son Ahab in the thirty-eighth year of Asa of Judah (ver. 29), and about nine hundred and eighteen years before the coming of our Lord. His career is as full of darkness and weakness as a king's life could well be. His reign of twenty-two years was a continued curse to the people. He held on the way of his father, but, according to the common rule in such cases, descending lower and lower. Moral rottenness, like material putrefaction, must increase. "Evil men and seducers wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived." He married Jezebel, the daughter of Ethbaal, King of the Zidonians. We are not surprised at the character of the daughter when we know the career of her father as it is learned from outside history. Among the innovations of Ahab our version mentions a "grove," a misleading word into which the translators were led from its being really an idolatrous image or group of images, including the "sacred symbolic tree" so frequently seen in Assyrian monuments. That it could not be a grove, a wood, is clear from 2 Kings xxii. 4, where Josiah brought out "the grove"—*asherah* in Hebrew—from the house of the Lord. It was doubtless a new and imposing idol, in keeping with the luxurious life now being lived by the Israelites as wealth grew through commerce. (1) There is a real connection between the moral and religious condition of a nation and its temporal affairs. If we as a people defy God or disregard His laws, He in His government of the world may be expected to show that He is "contrary to us." (2) The temptation is always great to God's people to be like their neighbours; and if these neighbours be cultivated, be deemed standards of excellence in arts, in manners, or in arms; if they be wealthy; if their trade is of importance to us; if they be powerful and it is our interest to stand well with them—the inducements to conformity are all the greater. The distinctive elements of our religion are set aside. Why thrust our Bibles, our family worship, our Sabbaths, on them? True, God says of us that we are to be "holding forth the Word of life." "Ah, yes, but that was in other circumstances." (3) The next step is to take up the ways of our friends. Much in their methods can be described as nice, impressive, beautiful—especially if we have taken their standard of "loveliness"; and, having done this, there is a stage of attempted combination. But it is awkward, difficult—in the end possible. One or other must go. And when man is choosing between his own products and God's orders, he prefers his own. So the light is superseded by the darkness; spiritual religion gives place to "impressive" forms, which put no check on tastes or lusts or passions, and make no conscience uncomfortable, while sin is swallowed as a sweet morsel. (*J. Hall, D.D.*)

CHAPTER XVII.

VER. 1. **As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand.**—*The source of Elijah's strength*:—This chapter begins with the conjunction "And": it is, therefore, an addition to what has gone before; and it is God's addition. When we

have read to the end of the previous chapter—which tells the melancholy story of the rapid spread, and universal prevalence, of idolatry, in the favoured land of the Ten Tribes—we might suppose that that was the end of all; and that the worship of Jehovah would never again acquire its lost prestige and power. And, no doubt, the principal actors in the story thought so too. But they had made an unfortunate omission in their calculations—they had left out Jehovah Himself. He must have something to say at such a crisis. When men have done their worst, and finished, it is the time for God to begin. The whole land seemed apostate. Of all the thousands of Israel, only seven thousand remained who had not bowed the knee or kissed the hand to Baal. But they were paralysed with fear; and kept so still, that their very existence was unknown by Elijah in the hour of his greatest loneliness. Such times have often come, fraught with woe: false religions have gained the upper hand; iniquity has abounded; and the love of many has waxed cold. So was it when the Turk swept over the Christian communities of Asia Minor, and replaced the Cross by the crescent. So was it when, over Europe, Roman Catholicism spread as a pall of darkness that grew denser as the dawn of the Reformation was on the point of breaking. So was it in the last century, when Moderatism reigned in Scotland, and apathy in England. But God is never at a loss. The land may be overrun with sin; the lamps of witness may seem all extinguished; the whole force of the popular current may run counter to His truth; and the plot may threaten to be within a hair's breadth of entire success; but, all the time, He will be preparing a weak man in some obscure highland village; and in the moment of greatest need will send him forth, as His all-sufficient answer to the worst plottings of His foes. Elijah grew up like the other lads of his age. In his early years he would probably do the work of a shepherd on those wild hills. As he grew in years, he became characterised by an intense religious earnestness. He was "very jealous for the Lord God of hosts." But the question was, How should he act? What could he do, a wild, untutored child of the desert? There was only one thing he could do—the resource of all much-tried souls—he could pray; and he did: "he prayed earnestly" (Jas. v. 17). "He prayed earnestly that it might not rain." A terrible prayer indeed! Granted; and yet, was it not more terrible for the people to forget and ignore the God of their fathers, and to give themselves up to the licentious orgies of Baal and Astarte? Physical suffering is a smaller calamity than moral delinquency. And the love of God does not shrink from inflicting such suffering, if, as a result, the plague of sin may be cut out as a cancer, and stayed. Elijah gives us three indications of the source of his strength. 1. "As Jehovah liveth." To all beside, Jehovah might seem dead; but to him, He was the one supreme reality of life. 2. "Before whom I stand." He was standing in the presence of Ahab; but he was conscious of the presence of a greater than any earthly monarch, even the presence of Jehovah, before whom angels bow in lowly worship, hearkening to the voice of His word. Gabriel himself could not employ a loftier designation (Luke i. 19). Let us cultivate this habitual recognition of the presence of God; it will lift us above all other fear. 3. The word "Elijah" may be rendered, "Jehovah is my God"; but there is another possible translation, "Jehovah is my strength." This gives the key to his life. God was the strength of his life; of whom should he be afraid? (*F. B. Meyer, M.A.*) *Elijah before Ahab*:—"Elijah the Tishbite said unto Ahab." All revelations seem to us to be sudden. Look at the suddenness of the appearance of Ahijah to Jeroboam, and look at the instance before us. No mild man would have been equal to the occasion. God adapts His ministry to circumstances. He sends a nurse to the sick-room; a soldier to the battlefield. The son of consolation and the son of thunder cannot change places. You are right when you say that the dew and the light and the soft breeze are God's; but you must not therefore suppose that the thunder and the hurricane and the floods belong to a meaner lord. "As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand." Imagine the two men standing face to face. This is not a combat between two men. Mark that very closely. It is Right against Wrong, Faithfulness against Treachery, Purity against Corruption. As we look at the scene, not wanting in the elements of the highest tragedy, we see (1) The value of one noble witness in the midst of public corruption and decay, and (2) The grandeur as well as necessity of a distinct personal profession of godliness. It is not enough to be godly, we must avow it in open conduct and articulate confession. Let us now observe how Elijah proceeds to deal with Ahab. "There shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word." Here is physical punishment for moral transgression,

So it is; and that is exactly what a parent does when he uses the rod upon his child for falsehood. You can only punish people according to their nature. Physical punishment for moral transgression is the law of society. So the liar is thrown out of his situation; the ill-tempered child is whipped; the dishonourable man is expelled from social confidence. With regard to the particular punishment denounced against Ahab, it is to be remembered that drought is one of the punishments threatened by the law if Israel forsook Jehovah (Deut. xi. 17; Lev. xxvi. 18). (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *Elijah standing before the Lord:*—This solemn and remarkable adjuration seems to have been habitual upon Elijah's lips in the great crises of his life. We never find it used by any but himself, and his scholar and successor, Elisha. I. LIFE A CONSTANT VISION OF GOD'S PRESENCE. 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. 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 these prophets. In some measure, it was with them as it shall be perfectly with all one day, "His servants serve Him, and see His face,"—action not interrupting the vision, nor the vision weakening action. It is hard to set the Lord always before us; but it is possible, and in the measure in which we do it we shall not be moved. How small Ahab and his court must have looked to eyes that were full of the undazzling brightness of the true King of Israel, and the ordered ranks of His attendants! How little the greatness! how tawdry the pomp! how impotent the power, and how toothless the threats! II. LIFE WAS ECHOING WITH THE VOICE OF THE DIVINE COMMAND. 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. People talk about the consciousness of "a mission." The important point, on the settling of which depends the whole character of our lives, is—Who do you suppose gave you your "mission"? Was it any person at all? or have you any consciousness that any will but your own has anything to say about your life? These prophets had found One whom it was worth while to obey, whatever came of it, and whosoever stood in the way. III. LIFE FULL OF CONSCIOUS OBEDIENCE. No man could say such a thing of himself who did not feel that he was rendering a real, earnest, though imperfect obedience to God. So, though in one view the words express a very lowly sense of absolute submission before God, in another view they make a lofty claim for the utterer. He professes that he stands before the Lord, girt for His service, watching to be guided by His eye, and ready to run when He bids. We may well shrink to make such a claim for ourselves when we think of the poor, perfunctory service and partial consecration which our lives show. But let us rejoice that even we may venture to say, "Truly I am Thy servant." Such a life is necessarily a happy life. The one misery of man is self-will, the one secret of blessedness is the conquest over our own wills. To yield them up to God is rest and peace. And is there not a broad general truth involved there, namely, that such a life as we have been describing will find its sole reward where it finds its inspiration and its law? The Master's approval is the servant's best wages. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*) *Elijah before the king:*—Elijah was a mountaineer. He was a big man, with broad shoulders and a tall and striking appearance. He had a massive frame and muscles that had grown strong with climbing the mountains and wresting his daily bread from hard circumstances. But he was, above all, a man of prayer, and the knowledge of what was going on in Israel stirred his soul to its profoundest depths; yet he could not act unless God sent him. With his hand lifted above his head this strange creature of the desert and the mountains exclaims, "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." Note his description of his relation to God, "As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand." There was the secret of Elijah's power. As another has well said: Every man stands before something which is his judge. The child stands before the father, not in a single act, making report of what he has been doing on a special day, but in the whole posture of his life, almost as if the father were a mirror in whom he saw himself reflected, and from whose reflection of himself he got at once a judgment as to what he was, and suggestions as to what he ought to be. The poet stands before nature. She is his judge. A certain felt harmony or discord between his nature and her ideal is the test and

directing power of his life. The philosopher stands before the unseen, majestic presence of the abstract truth. The philanthropist stands before humanity. The artist stands before beauty. The legislator stands before justice. The politician stands before that vague but awful embodiment of average character, the people. The scholar stands before knowledge, and gets the satisfaction or disappointments of his life from the approvals or disapprovals of her serene and gracious lips. Every soul that counts itself capable of judgment and responsibility stands in some presence by which the nature of its judgment is decried. The higher the presence, the loftier and greater the life. And so Elijah, standing before God, was in the highest and most splendid presence that any man can know, and it was this that gave him his lofty courage and his noble power. This was Luther's power. He dared to face the emperor and to face the worldly, sensual church of his time, when from every human outlook it seemed sure that his life must pay the penalty, because he stood in the presence of God. He knew that God was with him, and that knowledge gave him a tremendous power over men. Wesley stood in the presence of God, and a man who is conscious of that presence fears no mob. Finney was a man like that, and God gave him wonderful fruits to his ministry. (*L. A. Banks, D.D.*) *Elijah, the model reformer* :—I. ELIJAH WAS, IN THE FIRST PLACE, A MODEL OF—PROMPTNESS. Whatever God told him to do, he went to work at once, and did it. II. ELIJAH WAS A MODEL OF—PATIENCE—as well as of promptness. When God wanted Elijah to work, he was, as we have seen, prompt to do whatever he was bidden to do. And when he was told to wait for the further manifestation of God's will, he waited patiently. When the long three years' drought came on the land, God told him to go and hide himself "by the brook Cherith," near Jordan. He went and remained there in patience till he was ordered to leave. III. But, in carrying on his work of reformation, Elijah was, in the third place, A MODEL OF—CONFIDENCE; and we should try to follow his example in this respect. IV. ELIJAH WAS A MODEL OF—COURAGE. (*R. Newton, D.D.*) *The hero prophet* :—I. THE PRINCIPLE OF DIVINE SELECTION. Elijah comes suddenly and unexpectedly upon the scene. What has been his previous career we cannot say, all we know about him is that he was rudely and scantily clothed, with shaggy hair, a conspicuous personality among the people. However strange it may seem that such a man should be chosen for such a work, it is nevertheless in keeping with the Divine procedure. God makes His own selection of men to meet the demands of every crisis. For every crisis in the world's history God has taken a leader from very unlikely quarters. A German monk for a great Reformation; a Wesley for a much-needed revival; Abraham Lincoln to guide our ship of state, in terrible times, amid stormy seas; and a William Taylor, "rough and ready," to become the "flaming evangel" of "Darkest Africa." God is always ready with a man to stand in the gap. So it was in the time when the sin of Ahab and his people had become abominable, He had in reserve a man already trained and willing to assert the sovereignty of God to that crooked and perverse nation. This chosen Tishbite, this prophet hero, recognises that he is—II. GOD'S REPRESENTATIVE, hence he manifests the utmost fidelity and loyalty. III. PROVIDENTIAL PROVISIONS MEET HUMAN EXIGENCIES. Elijah proved this fully. Delivering mercy is not only timely, but also comes through unexpected means. It was a very strange method God pursued with Elijah. IV. NO UNREASONABLE DEMAND UPON HUMAN RESOURCES. God is merciful. God is just. He may have given us but little of this world's good, but of that little He demands a portion. We may possess but one talent, but we must not be selfish in the use of that. He gives grace that we may use grace. We may further learn from this narrative the duty of—V. UNQUESTIONING OBEDIENCE TO GOD. Elijah did not speak complainingly of living alone by the side of the brook Cherith and trusting to the ravens for his food; nor did he say it was improper to go to the house of a widow and ask of her food to eat. No, he trusted in the wisdom of God and obeyed His command. (*G. Adams.*) *The preacher—an ambassador* :—We send an ambassador to England; there is a difference of opinion between our government and that of England. The ambassador is in a circle in society, but he does not take his opinions from the English people; he cares nothing what they think on national subjects; the crowd around him may be indignant against this country, but the ambassador listens not to the voice of the populace around him. He bends a listening ear for the telegraphic communication from Washington, and whatever words he hears these he utters, no matter how they may be received, no matter what the

people or the Crown may think. He stands an American in the midst of English society; he thinks the thoughts and has the feelings of the government at Washington; he dares to say words, however unpleasant, to the English Crown because the power that sustains him, though it is invisible, he knows to be real. Well, now, so it is with a man, principally the true minister of Christ. (*Bishop Simpson.*) *Standing alone*:—Thank God for the many instances in which one glowing soul, all aflame with love of God, has sufficed to kindle a whole heap o' dead matter, and send it leaping skyward in ruddy brightness. Alas! for the many instances in which the wet, green wood has been too strong for the little spark, and has not only obstinately resisted, but has ignominiously quenched its ineffectual fire. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*)

Vers. 2–7. The word of the Lord came unto him.—*The word of the Lord*:—We have in our theme a suggestion of the Divine guidance. The word of the Lord as a guide comes to the man of prayer. I suppose Elijah was greatly disappointed at the message which came to him. He had the heart of a soldier, and he grieved at the idolatry which he saw everywhere. But it was the best thing for Elijah and for the cause. We have a case like it in the New Testament where Philip, who was a very popular preacher and was enjoying great success, was suddenly instructed by word of the Lord to leave where he was and go away into the desert. It must have been a great disappointment to Philip, a severe cross for him to bear. But Philip obeyed, and it was on that journey that the treasurer of Queen Candace came driving by, and the word of the Lord again indicated to Philip his duty. Then Philip knew why the word of the Lord had guided him as it had. So Elijah's great soul was burning to tear down the idols of Baal and Ashtaroth: but the time was not yet ripe, and God was saving the prophet's life and giving the bold message he had uttered time to work by guiding him away into the wilderness. God went with Elijah into the wilderness, and long afterwards he knew the wisdom of Heaven. The word of the Lord, if we are obedient to it, will work while we are hidden. No doubt Elijah, if he had used his own judgment, would have backed up the Lord's message day after day with his own big body and his own ringing voice. But it was not the time for that. God used Elijah for His message, and he delivered it well. He acted promptly and faithfully, and with perfect courage, and then, against his own judgment, he followed the word of the Lord and went into hiding and into silence. (*L. A. Banks, D.D.*) Get thee hence, and turn thee eastward.—*Beside the drying brook*:—I. GOD'S SERVANTS MUST LEARN TO TAKE ONE STEP AT A TIME. Our Father only shows us one step at a time—and that, the next; and He bids us take it in faith. If we look up into His face, and say: "But if I take this step, which is certain to involve me in difficulty, what shall I do next?" the heavens will be dumb, save with the one repeated message, "Take it, and trust Me." But directly God's servant took the step to which he was led, and delivered the message, then "the word of the Lord came to him, saying, Get thee hence, hide thyself by the brook Cherith." So it was afterwards: "Arise, get thee to Zarephath." II. GOD'S SERVANTS MUST BE TAUGHT THE VALUE OF THE HIDDEN LIFE. "Get thee hence, and turn thee eastward, and hide thyself by the brook Cherith." The man who is to take a high place before his fellows, must take a low place before his God; and there is no better manner of bringing a man down, than by dropping him suddenly out of a sphere to which he was beginning to think himself essential, teaching him that he is not at all necessary to God's plan; and compelling him to consider in the sequestered vale of some Cherith how mixed are his motives, and how insignificant his strength. Every saintly soul that would wield great power with men must win it in some hidden Cherith. A Carmel triumph always presupposes a Cherith; and a Cherith always leads to a Carmel. We cannot give out unless we have previously taken in. Bishop Andrewes had his Cherith, in which he spent five hours every day in prayer and devotion. John Welsh had it—who thought the day ill-spent which did not witness eight or ten hours of closet communion. David Brainerd had it in the woods of North America, which were the favourite scene of his devotions. Christmas Evans had it in his long and lonely journeys amid the hills of Wales. Fletcher of Madeley had it—who would often leave his classroom for his private chamber, and spend hours upon his knees with his students, pleading for the fulness of the Spirit till they could kneel no longer. Or—passing back to the blessed age from which we date the centuries—Patmos, the seclusion of the Roman prisons, the Arabian desert, the hills and vales of Palestine, are for ever memorable as the Cheriths of those who have made our modern world.

III. GOD'S SERVANTS MUST LEARN TO TRUST GOD ABSOLUTELY. We yield at first a timid obedience to a command which seems to involve manifest impossibilities; but when we find that God is even better than His word, our faith groweth exceedingly, and we advance to further feats of faith and service. This is how God trains His young eaglets to fly. At last nothing is impossible. This is the key to Elijah's experience. There is strong emphasis on the word *there*. "I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there." Elijah might have preferred many hiding-places to Cherith; but that was the only place to which the ravens would bring his supplies; and, as long as he was there, God was pledged to provide for him. Our supreme thought should be: "Am I where God wants me to be?" Only trust Him! IV. GOD'S SERVANTS ARE OFTEN CALLED TO SIT BY DRYING BROOKS. Cherith began to sing less cheerily. Each day marked a visible diminution of its stream. Its voice grew fainter and fainter, till its bed became a course of stones, baking in the scorching heat. It dried up. What did Elijah think? Did he think that God had forgotten him? Did he begin to make plans for himself? This would have been human; but we will hope that he waited quietly for God, quieting himself as a weaned child, as he sang, "My soul, wait thou only upon God; for my expectation is from Him." Many of us have had to sit by drying brooks; perhaps some are sitting by them now—the drying brook of popularity, ebbing away as from John the Baptist. The drying brook of health, sinking under a creeping paralysis, or a slow consumption. The drying brook of money, slowly dwindling before the demands of sickness. (*F. B. Meyer, B.A.*) *God's care of Elijah*:—I. GOD SUITS HIS WORKMEN TO THEIR WORK. To the hospital He sends a nurse; to the battlefield, a soldier; to penitence and sorrow, a son of consolation; to wickedness and brutality, a son of thunder. Such was this rude, stern, volcanic Tishbite as he comes to the rescue of his country; to champion a cause that seemed lost; to stand alone against a huge and dominant iniquity; to challenge Ahab and Jezebel in the palace of their licentious pleasure, in the citadel of their idolatrous power. He came like the flash of a scimitar, uttered his appalling message, voiced the wrath of the Almighty, and was gone. II. THE PROPHET VANISHED, BUT THE DROUGHT REMAINED. We know little of the horror of a rainless year. Our seasons come and go, and the bounteous heaven waters the bounteous earth, until we cease to associate plenty, beauty, and life itself with the unfailing rain. But to an Oriental dwelling on the desert's verge, where food is a precarious question of moisture, and bread a problem in irrigation, rain is life; the clouds drop fatness. A rainless sky is a heaven of brass, and an unwatered earth an earth of iron. At first there was no alarm. The farmers sowed their seed in hope, the caravans trailed toward the horizon. But the rains were late. Anxious eyes scanned the western sky, the streams became gravel beds, the wells were drained, the vineyards withered in the burning sun. The temples resounded with prayers to Baal, and great pillars of smoke rose to heaven from the altars of Ashtaroth. At last, from out the fiery furnace, Israel raised a cry of despair; and from the king in the palace to the beggar by the wayside came one common, desperate inquiry, "Where is Elijah the Tishbite?" III. WHEN GOD UNDERTAKES TO HIDE A MAN WE MAY BE SURE HE WILL BE WELL CONCEALED. Elijah was sent to a secluded ravine east of Samaria, through which the brook Cherith still rippled to the Jordan. There he lived, solitary but safe, an idle but not a useless prophet. When God sends a man into retirement and inactivity let him not think that he is set aside. In the Divine purpose and plan, as poor blind Milton discovered and sang—

They also serve who only stand and wait.

(*M. B. Chapman.*) *Elijah and the famine*:—I. A GREAT NATIONAL CALAMITY. A nation without rain or dew for three years and a half! "And," it is said in the next chapter, "there was a sore famine in Samaria." "National panics are to be regarded as steps in the demonstration of some great problem of government which Almighty God is working out for the advancement and sanctification of the world." II. THE CARE OF DIVINE PROVIDENCE. The calamities which befall nations visit also the people of God who dwell in them. The tares and the wheat grow up together; and if the tares are withered for lack of moisture, the wheat suffers from the same cause. As a principle, God does not exempt His people from their share of national calamity and sorrow. But, although He permits His people to suffer in the midst of a general visitation, He never forgets or forsakes them. "Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivereth him out of them all." Elijah had his part in the national distress, but

the Lord remembered His servant. The modern history of God's providence furnishes many instances of suit and service rendered to His people by the animal creation, scarcely less wonderful than the supply of Elijah by ravens. I will relate one. Far up in one of the Highland glens, lived a poor but pious woman named Jenny Maclean. One day when her food was almost exhausted, and she was intending to take a journey to get a fresh supply, a heavy snowstorm came on. Never had been seen in that locality such a constant and heavy fall, with such deep snow-drifts. When the heavens at last became clear, the whole face of the country seemed changed. It was some time before the thought suddenly occurred to a shepherd, "What has old Jenny been doing all this time?" No sooner was her name mentioned than she at once became the theme of general conversation. But for many days, such was the state of the weather, that no mortal feet could wade through the snow-wreaths, or buffet the successive storms that swept down with blinding fury from the hills. Jenny was given up as lost. At last, three men resolved, on the first day that made the attempt possible, to proceed up the long and dreary glen, and search for Jenny. They reached a rock at an angle where the glen takes a turn to the left, and where the old woman's cottage ought to have been seen. But nothing met the eye except a smooth, white sheet of glittering snow, surmounted by black rocks; and all below was silent as the sky above. No sign of life greeted the eye or ear. The men spoke not a word, but muttered some exclamations of sorrow. Suddenly one of them cried, "She is alive! for I see smoke." They pushed bravely on. When they reached the hut, nothing was visible except the two chimneys; and even these were lower than the snow-wreath. There was no immediate entrance but by one of the chimneys. A shepherd first called to Jenny down the chimney, and asked if she was alive; but before receiving a reply, a large fox sprang out of the chimney, and darted off to the rocks. "Alive!" replied Jenny, "but thank God you have come to see me! I cannot say come in by the door; but come down—come down." In a few minutes her three friends easily descended by the chimney, and were shaking Jenny warmly by the hand. "O woman!" said they, "how have you lived all this time?" "Sit down, and I will tell you," said old Jenny, whose feelings now gave way in a fit of hysterical weeping. After composing herself, she continued, "How did I live? you ask, Sandy? I may say just as I have always lived, by the power and goodness of God, who feeds the wild beasts." "The wild beasts, indeed!" replied Sandy, drying his eyes; "did you know that a wild beast was in your house? Did you see the fox that jumped out of your chimney as we entered?" "My blessings on the dear beast!" said Jenny, with fervour. "May no huntsman ever kill it! and may it never want food in summer or winter!" The shepherds looked at one another by the dim light of Jenny's fire, evidently believing that she had become slightly insane. "Stop, lads," she continued, "till I tell you the story. I had in the house, when the storm began, the goat and two hens. Fortunately, I had fodder gathered for the goat, which kept it alive, although, poor thing, it has had but scanty meals. I had also peats for my fire, but very little meal. Yet I never lived better, and I have been able besides to preserve my two bonnie hens for summer. I every day dined on flesh meat too, a thing I have not done for years before; and thus have I lived like a lady." "Where did you get meat from?" they asked. "From the old fox," she replied. "The day of the storm he looked into the chimney, and came slowly down, and set himself on the rafter beside the hens, yet never once touched them. He every day provided for himself and me too. He brought in game in abundance for his own dinner—a hare almost every day—and what he left I got, and washed, and cooked, and ate, and so I have never wanted. Now that he is gone, you have come to relieve me." "God's ways are past finding out!" said the men, bowing down their heads with reverence. "Praise the Lord!" said Jenny, "who giveth food to the hungry." This incident was related by an old clergyman who attended Jenny's funeral. How much like the supply of Elijah by the brook Cherith! Why are we surprised almost to scepticism at such facts? III. THE EXERCISE OF HUMAN SYMPATHY. It came to pass, after a while, that the brook dried up, because there had been no rain in the land. The continued drought and heat of the sun gradually lessened the stream; it dried to a narrow thread; then that narrow thread dwindled and disappeared, and Elijah was left by the brook, with no prospect before him but to perish, unless the Lord interposed to save him. The Lord did interpose; and mark how—"The word of the Lord came unto him, saying, Arise, get thee to Zarephath." IV. THE REWARD OF CHEERFUL GENEROSITY. Elijah found the

widow gathering sticks to dress her last handful of meal for herself and son, that they might eat it and die. Elijah said unto her, "Fear not." The word of the Lord comes to us with a promise similar in principle. "The liberal soul shall be made fat, and he that watereth shall be watered himself." That is God's principle of recompense still. "He that hath pity on the poor lendeth to the Lord, and that which he hath given will He pay him again." If that is true, if the Word of the Lord is to be relied on, then no man is the poorer for what he gives to the poor. Lending to the Lord, the Lord becomes his creditor: and surely He may be trusted with our deposits. As good Matthew Henry says, "What is laid out in charity or pity, is lent out on the best interest, upon the best security." (*J. H. Wood.*) *Elijah at Cherith*:—I. MEN MUST BE PREPARED TO ACCEPT THE CONSEQUENCES OF THEIR OBEDIENCE TO GOD. We do not always see such consequences, and when they come upon us they very often find us unprepared to meet them. Obedience to God often exposes men to hatred, scorn, ridicule, opposition, inconvenience, loss of trade, loss of liberty, and even life itself. But when we chose God's service we chose these consequences, and when they come they should not deter us from our duty. Daniel, when he knew that the law was passed, condemning to the lions' den any who should pray except to the king for thirty days, went into his chamber and prayed as aforetime. Peter and John determined to obey God rather than man, notwithstanding the threat of stripes and imprisonment. II. THAT GOD MAKES PROVISION FOR THE EXIGENCIES INTO WHICH OBEDIENCE TO THE DIVINE COMMANDS MAY BRING HIS SERVANTS. He imposes no task but He provides strength for its accomplishment. Whatever may be the consequences of their obedience, He will not leave His servants to meet them alone. III. THIS PROVISION IS FREQUENTLY NOT MADE KNOWN TO THE OBEDIENT UNTIL THEIR NEED IS PRESSING. When the drought comes upon the land, God will not forsake His people; but His voice shall be heard directing them to Cherith, where their need shall be amply provided for. (*The Study and the Pulpit.*) *Elijah at Cherith*:—I. THE UNCERTAINTY OF EARTHLY COMFORTS. When Elijah went to Cherith under the direction of God, he would never dream of that brook becoming exhausted. What a picture of human life this is! How many there are of whose worldly comforts it may be said: "After a while the brook dried up." One man is settled in life, with circumstances all that could be desired, and he contemplates the future with pleasure; but, unexpectedly something arises—bank failure, or commercial crisis—which tells him that the brook is dried up, and he has to leave his Cherith. Another looks with pride and hope upon a child—his pleasure and joy flow from that child—but, unnoticed, disease settles upon it and takes it away. After a while the brook dried up. And so with earthly comforts. They are uncertain, and do not warrant the eagerness with which they are sought or the value with which they are invested. II. THE CERTAINTY OF GOD'S CARE. Though the water of the brook failed, God's care was not exhausted. He had made provision for Elijah at Zarephath before He commanded him to leave Cherith. Decay and change may characterise all our earthly comforts, but they do not characterise God; He remains the same, and His care can never fail. III. GODLY GENEROSITY SHALL NOT LOSE ITS REWARD. Whosoever even giveth a cup of cold water to a disciple, in the name of a discip'e, shall not lose his reward. (*Ibid.*) It was the water that failed, not the ravens. It was the natural, not the supernatural, provision that came to an end. That for which the prophet looked upward morning and evening continued steadily. That which had been flowing at his feet all day long began suddenly to diminish. When a trouble comes straight from heaven we are more likely to see God's hand in it, and to submit patiently and trustfully. When, however, the trouble seems to come quite naturally, we are tempted to look at secondary causes, and to forget that God is behind them all. (*F. S. Webster, M.A.*)

Ver. 6. **And the ravens brought him bread and flesh in the morning.**—*Elijah fed by ravens*:—I. A MORALLY GREAT MAN IN GREAT PHYSICAL NEED. Elijah was a morally great man. Worldly greatness is but tinselled paper. He only is great who is great in thoughts and noble purposes. Elijah was such: a greater could not be found. Yet he was reduced to the greatest need. II. THE GOD OF NATURE MINISTERING TO A LONELY MAN. The Infinite Father knew His servant's destitution, sympathised with it, and sent relief to him morning and evening by the ravens. Observe, 1. God makes the humblest things in nature serve His people. 2. God supplies His people as their wants return. (*Homilist.*) *Elijah*

fed by ravens :—I. IRRATIONAL CREATURES DIVINELY DIRECTED. All creatures, from the lowest up to the greatest, are under the Divine rule. Generally they are ruled by their own instincts. Here is an exception. II. LOWER CREATURES ENGAGED IN THE SERVICE OF MAN. III. GOD'S ATTENTION TO THE AFFAIRS OF THE INDIVIDUAL. IV. HELP COMING FROM UNLIKELY SOURCES. (*Ibid.*) *The battle for bread :*—There is an incident in my text that baffles all the ornithological wonders of the world. Tho grain crop had been cut off. Famine was in the land. In a cave by the brook Cherith sat a minister of God, Elijah, waiting for something to eat. Why did he not go to the neighbours ? There were no neighbours, it was a wilderness. Why did he not pick some of the berries ? There were none. If there had been, they would have been dried up. Seated one morning at the mouth of his cave, the prophet looks into the dry and pitiless heavens, and he sees a flock of birds approaching. 1. Notice, in the first place, in the story of my text, that these winged creatures came to Elijah directly from God. "I have commanded the ravens that they feed thee." They did not come out of some other cave. They did not just happen to alight there. God freighted them, God launched them, and God told them by what cave to swoop. That is the same God that is going to supply you. He is your Father. You would have to make an elaborate calculation before you could tell me how many pounds of food and how many yards of clothing would be necessary for you and your family ; but God knows without any calculation. You have a plate at His table, and you are going to be waited on, unless you act like a naughty child, and kick, and scramble, and pound saucily the plate, and try to upset things. God has a vast family, and everything is methodised, and you are going to be served, if you will only wait your turn. 2. Notice, again, in this story, that the ravens did not allow Elijah to hoard up a surplus. They did not bring enough on Monday to last all the week. They did not bring enough one morning to last until the next morning. They came twice a-day, and brought just enough for one time. You know as well as I that the great fret of the world is that we want a surplus—we want the ravens to bring enough for fifty years. You have more confidence in the Long Island Bank than you have in the royal bank of heaven. You say : "All that is very poetic, but you may have the black ravens—give me the gold eagles." We had better be content with just enough. If, in the morning, your family eat up all the food there is in the house, do not sit down, and cry, and say : "I don't know where the next meal is coming from." About five, or six, or seven o'clock in the evening just look up, and you will see two black spots on the sky, and you will hear the flapping of wings, and, instead of Edgar A. Poe's insane raven," alighting on the chamber-door, only this, and nothing more," you will find Elijah's two ravens, or the two ravens of the Lord, the one bringing bread and the other bringing meat—plumed butcher and baker. God is infinite in resource. When the city of Rochelle was besieged, and the inhabitants were dying of the famine, the tides washed up on the beach as never before, and as never since, enough shell-fish to feed the whole city. God is good. There is no mistake about that. History tell us that, in 1555, in England, there was a great drought. The crops failed, but in Essex, on the rocks, in a place where they had neither sown nor cultured, a great crop of peas grew, until they filled a hundred measures ; and there were blossoming vines enough promising as much more. 3. Again, this story of the text impresses me that relief came to this prophet with the most unexpected, and with seemingly impossible conveyance. If it had been a robin redbreast, or a musical meadow lark, or a meek turtle-dove, or a sublime albatross that had brought the food to Elijah, it would not have been so surprising. But no. It was a bird so fierce and inauspicate that we have fashioned one of our most forceful and repulsive words out of it—ravenous. That bird has a passion for picking out the eyes of men and animals. It loves to maul the sick and the dying. It swallows, with vulturous guggle, everything it can put its beak on ; and yet all the food Elijah gets for six months or a year, is from the ravens. So your supply is going to come from an unexpected source. You think some great-hearted, generous man will come along and give you his name on the back of your note, or he will go security for you in some great enterprise. No, he will not. God will open the heart of some Shylock toward you. Your relief will come from the most unexpected quarter. The providence that seemed ominous will be to you more than that which seemed auspicious. It will not be a chaffinch with breast and wing dashed with white, and brown, and chestnut, it will be a black raven. Children of God, get up out of your despondency. The Lord never had so many

ravens as He has this morning. Fling your fret and worry to the winds. (*T. De Witt Talmage, D.D.*)

Ver. 9. **Arise, get thee to Zarephath.**—*Ordered to Zarephath*:—A friend of mine, spending a few days in the neighbourhood of our English lakes, came upon the most beautiful shrubs he had ever seen. Arrested by their extraordinary luxuriance, he inquired the cause; and learnt that it was due to a judicious system of transplanting, constantly pursued. Whatever may be the effect of such a process in nature, it is certainly true that our heavenly Father employs similar methods to secure the highest results in us. He is constantly transplanting us. And though these changes threaten at times to hinder all steady progress in the Divine life, yet, if they are rightly borne, they result in the most exquisite manifestations of Christian character and experience. Another illustration of the same truth is given by the prophet Jeremiah (Jer. xlviii. 11). The quiet life is by no means the greatest life. Some characters can only reach the highest standard of spirituality by the disturbings or displacings in the order of God's providence. Will not this cast light upon God's dealings with Elijah? Once he stood in the vessel, "Home"; then emptied into the vessel, "Jezreel"; then into the vessel, "Cherith"; and now into the fourth vessel, "Zarephath": and all that he might not settle upon his lees. Believe only that your circumstances are those most suited to develop your character. To one who lives ever in the presence of the unchanging God, and who can say, "Thus saith Jehovah, before whom I stand," the ever-varying conditions of our lot touch only the outer rim of life; whatever they take away, they cannot take away that; whatever they bring, they cannot give more than that. The consciousness of that Presence is the one all-mastering thought; the inspiration, the solace, the comfort, of every waking hour. I. FAITH AWAITS GOD'S PLANS. "It came to pass, after a while, that the brook dried up, because there had been no rain in the land." Week after week, with unfaltering and steadfast spirit, Elijah watched that dwindling brook; often tempted to stagger through unbelief, but refusing to allow his circumstances to come between himself and God. Unbelief sees God through circumstances, as we sometimes see the sun shorn of his rays through the smoky air; but faith puts God between itself and circumstances, and looks at them through Him. Only then, to his patient and unwavering spirit, "the word of the Lord came, saying, Arise, get thee to Zarephath." Most of us would have got anxious and worn with planning long before that. We should have ceased our songs, as soon as the streamlet carolled less musically over its rocky bed. And, probably, long ere the brook was dry, we should have devised some plan, and asking God's blessing on it, would have started off elsewhere. Alas! we are all too full of our own schemes, and plans, and contrivings. "Lord, show me Thy way; teach me to do Thy will: show me the way wherein I should walk, for unto Thee do I lift up my soul." II. GOD'S PLANS DEMAND IMPLICIT OBEDIENCE. "So he arose and went to Zarephath," as before he had gone to Cherith, and as presently he would go to show himself to Ahab. We catch sight of God's ideal; we are enamoured with it; we vow to be only His; we use the most emphatic words; we dedicate ourselves upon the altar. For awhile we seem to tread another world, bathed in heavenly light. Then there comes a command clear and unmistakable. We must leave some beloved Cherith, and go to some unwelcome Zarephath; we must speak some word, take some step, cut off some habit: and we shrink from it—the cost is too great. But, directly we refuse obedience, the light dies off the landscape of our lives, and dark clouds fling their shadows far and near. Search the Bible from board to board, and see if strict, implicit, and instant obedience has not been the secret of the noblest lives. III. IMPLICIT OBEDIENCE SOMETIMES BRINGS US INTO A SMELTING-FURNACE. "Zarephath" means a smelting-furnace. It lay outside the Land of Canaan, occupying the site of the modern Surafend, which stands on a long ridge, backed by the snowclad steeps of Hermon, and overlooking the blue waters of the Mediterranean. Many things might have made it distasteful to the prophet. It belonged to the land from which Jezebel had brought her impious tribe. It was as much cursed by the terrible drought as Canaan. It was impossible to reach it save by a weary journey of 100 miles through the heart of the land, where his name was execrated, and his person proscribed. And then to be sustained by a widow woman belonging to a heathen people! Surely it was a smelting-furnace for cleansing out any alloy of pride, or self-reliance, or independence which might be lurking in the recesses of his heart.

And there was much of the refining fire in the character of his reception. When he reached the straggling town it was probably toward nightfall; and at the city gate a widow woman was gathering a few sticks to prepare the evening meal. To some it might have seemed a coincidence; but there is no such word in faith's vocabulary—that which to human judgment is a coincidence, to faith is a Providence. "Everything that may abide the fire, ye shall make it go through the fire, and it shall be clean" (Num. xxxi. 23). If, then, there is aught in you that can bear the ordeal, be sure you will be put into the furnace. But the fire shall not destroy; it shall only cleanse you. IV. WHEN GOD PUTS HIS PEOPLE INTO THE FURNACE, HE WILL SUPPLY ALL THEIR NEED. God had said that he should be fed, and by that widow; and so it should be, though the earth and heaven should pass away. Difficulties are to faith what gymnastic apparatus are to boys, means of strengthening the muscular fibre. Like the fabled salamander, faith feeds on fire. And so with heroic faith Elijah said: "Fear not; go and do as thou hast said: for thus saith the Lord God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the Lord sendeth rain upon the earth." Our only need is to inquire if we are at that point in God's pattern where He would have us be. If we are, though it seem impossible for us to be maintained, the thing impossible shall be done. (*F. B. Meyer, M.A.*) I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee.—*The widow of Zarephath*:—1. This woman was a Phœnician, of Jezebel's own race and country, and by birth and training a believer in those very idolatries which the bloody Queen was then establishing in Palestine, and against which it was the chief part of the prophet's burden to witness. From earliest days she had adored her gods. Doubtless the gorgeous ritual of Baal-worship had impressed and awed her senses, and under the terror of Astarte, the lover of blood, she had lived and cowered. Yet it is in her home that the persecuted Preacher of Jehovah finds refuge and welcome! And it is to her home that, in turn, he brings blessing. The Prophet of the Separation is also the Apostle of the Reconciliation. The essential germ of ultimate universality, that was in the Church from the beginning, bursts forth even in him who is the vindicator of her Dispensational exclusiveness. What a world of suggestion lies in the picture of Hebrew Prophet and Phœnician widow, Jehovah's champion and Jezebel's countrywoman, under the same roof, sharing the same meal, in friendship and fellowship! The sternest anti-idolater of history by the side of an idolater, blessed and blessing! It is a forecast and prophecy, amid the world's enmities and hates, of the reconciliation of the future to be wrought out by a greater than Elijah. 2. We have here, too, an illustration of the part which, in the economy of God, suffering plays in the education and perfection of men. The presence of common woe or want, of common peril or pain, has been to multitudes as the very angel of God, conciliating feuds, softening asperities, enlightening prejudices, cementing sundered souls, and forming those sympathetic attachments which give warmth to character and sweetness to life. These two in that narrow house at Zarephath, dwelling in harmony under the pressure of a common straitening, represent in themselves the emollient and healthful influence of suffering in softening and sweetening souls. They illustrate the part which the "Divine economy of pain" plays in purifying from prejudice, in bridging over the chasms of alienations and the gulches of hate. Dearth, drought, and the wrath of evil men drove these two to their meeting, a meeting for the gain of both, and of us too, and of all who have come between. 3. In this widow we have also a beautiful example of that faith that pleases God and is blessing to the soul in which it abides. I dare say there are some who may so unworthily judge about the matter as to think that she somewhat superstitiously concluded that this stranger was a miracle-worker, or that he was a God-possessed man, and that her "faith" was simply the credulity that led her to that conclusion. But I hope such persons are few. Let us not draw that sharp line between faith and faithfulness which such a way of thinking implies. The two are not, indeed, as some would seem to say, the same thing. There is a difference; but it is such a difference as that which exists between bud and flower, flower and fruit, or fountain and flow. Faithfulness is that which impels a man to walk in the way of duty or charity, no matter how hard it may be, and to bear the consequences, be they what they may. Faith makes him do all that, but it adds its own element too. Her faithfulness would have made her do her duty: her faith made the doing of it to be religious. In this spirit and confidence she received her guest, followed her purest instincts—the dictates of her womanly affections—into the ways of

self-forgetful charity, and looking up to the giving God overhead, left issues to Him. I do not say she thought or reasoned about it any more than a child would be likely to think or reason about the laws of respiration before breathing, or a flower to speculate scientifically before giving out its aroma. She herself was good, and kind, and self-denying, and she lovingly did her duty so as, according to her light, to please the power of the skies. A very commonplace village woman, in a lowly rut of life, tenderly doing the duty that lay next to her hand; and, within, a trustful heart, and an eye to look up. 4. But the point to which, just now, I must give the chief and closing emphasis is that she was a heathen. "But of a truth I say unto you, There were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah . . . and unto none of them was Elijah sent, but only to Zarephath, in the land of Zidon, unto a woman that was a widow." The point to which he here calls attention, and which was so distasteful to the Jews, is that the prophet was not sent to any of those within the circle of the visible Church, but to one living outside, in the darkness of a heathen land. And in her, the child of disprivilege, he found that faith which he found not among the children of privilege. (*G. M. Grant, B.D.*) *The widow of Zarephath*:—I. FAITH IN THE PROMISES OF GOD. II. OBEDIENCE. Elijah obeys God at the risk of his own life. The widow obeys when requested by the prophet to bring him first a little water, and then a little cake. As disobedience led to the ruin of our first parents, so is it ever still the cause of endless difficulties and dangers in our spiritual course. III. THAT GOD'S DEMANDS OFTEN INCREASE GRADUALLY IN THEIR STRINGENCY. The prophet asks the widow first for a little water, and afterwards, as if water was not sufficiently difficult to be obtained in such a time of drought, he further requests a little cake, when only a small store of meal and oil was left to the poor widow. So God demands often the lighter sacrifices from us first, and then, as our faith and our patience increase, He afterwards asks from us sacrifices of a higher character; until at length, when, by a course of afflictions He has weaned us from earthly attachments, He exclaims, "My son, give Me thy heart." IV. THAT THE DARKEST HOUR OFTEN PRECEDES THE DAWN. It was when the widow woman was about to resign herself to despair, and to despondently await death, that the prophet appeared with the promise of prolonged support for life. The darkest cloud frequently has a silver lining. "Never despair," is a good motto, and is a still better one if coupled with another maxim, "Put your trust in God." V. THAT GOD IS NO RESPECTER OF PERSONS. This moral our Lord Himself draws from the story of this widow of Zarephath, or Sarepta. The lesson that to the Gentiles also the mercies of God were to be shown, was one that the prejudiced and self-righteous Jews were loath to admit. In the same way the modern Pharisee is disinclined to allow that salvation is possible for those who are outside his own little coterie of professors. (*R. Young, M.A.*) *Lessons from the obedient widow*:—I. THE PERSONALNESS OF THE DIVINE PROVIDENCE. It is always toward a Providential personalness that the Bible reads, *e.g.* Joseph in his dungeon; Daniel in Babylon; Saul in the house of Judas in the street called Straight—how beautiful that is, God knew the street and number of the praying Saul who became Paul; Elijah at Cherith; this widow at Zeraphath. In hard times get vision of this fact and lean your heart against the solid truth of the personalness of Providence. II. WHAT SEEM TO BE OFTEN OUR WORST TRIALS, ARE REALLY OUR BEST BLESSINGS. What could seem worse to this widow than the advent of Elijah demanding that she make him the little cake? But what seemed worst embosomed what was best—the unwasting meal, the unfailing oil. Do not let us be overmuch scared at black trials; they may hold the best benignancies. III. HOW SMALL SOEVER OUR RESOURCES, WE CAN STILL DO SOMETHING FOR GOD. IV. THE VALUE OF SHARING. "This woman gave one meal to the prophet and God sustained her for two years." It is as we give we get. This is specially true in religious experience. If we seek to impart the blessedness of our own faith we infallibly get increase of faith. V. GOD FIRST. Elijah, representing God, commanded, Make me a little cake first. Ah, that first! "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things shall be added unto you." (*W. Hoyt, D.D.*) *Gracious people outside the church*:—Nature has her wild flowers, and they have their own loose lawless beauty. Yet the finest effects in form, colour, and fragrance are only to be found under careful cultivation. Wild roses are no argument against the value of gardening; for even cultivated flowers, if left to themselves, will revert little by little to their wild, rude state. And so outside the church of Jesus Christ there are good and noble, and in some senses morally winsome souls, and yet it is true that, for the full

cultivation of Christian character, we need the garden of the Lord, Christ Jesus, by His Spirit being the Chief Gardener. Even the wild flowers, in whatever measure they possess beauty and perfume, get it, from His secret influence, though they know it not. In the realm of spirit it is as true as in nature and history, "He upholdeth all things by the word of His power." (*H. O. Mackey.*)

Ver. 13. **Make me thereof a little cake first.**—*Faith tested:*—First, take the narrative in its literal sense; then, examine the truths which are suggested by it; and finally, note its mystical import. I. LITERAL SENSE. 1. Here is a test of faith: "Make me thereof a little cake first, and bring it unto me, and after make for thee and for thy son." It was a sharp test. Famine brings out selfishness in hideous shapes (2 Kings vi. 28, 29). To be asked to give to a stranger a little cake from the "handful of meal" that was left, before she met the cravings of hunger in herself and her son, must have been a searching demand. 2. A woman, too, of Zidon, like the woman in the Gospel, when Jesus came into those coasts; a woman without the privileges of the covenant of Israel and the opportunities of God's people; a flower in the common hedge, not in the hothouse, but yet a flower—able to respond to the claim of God through His prophet—"Make me a little cake first"; for "he that loveth son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me" (Matt. x. 37). 3. It was more than a test of faith; it was a test of trust. This is something more. The prophet's demand appealed to the will, and not merely to the assent of the understanding. She had to make a sacrifice; it was a trifle in itself—"a little cake"; but when people are starving it was not a trifle; and she had to trust to a promise, from the standpoint of human calculation, least likely to be fulfilled. 4. "She went and did according to the saying of the prophet" (ver. 15). II. THE TRUTHS WHICH THE PROPHET'S DEMAND SUGGESTS. 1. God to be served first. God must be loved—to use the language of divinity—"with a love of preference." As a king, St. Chrysostom says, should be served as a king, so God should be loved as God, that is to say, "preferably to all creatures." In the same way, the claims of God and His service must stand first. The demand, "Make me thereof a little cake first," is like that which our Lord gave on the mount, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness." It is the law of the first-fruits. 2. God's commands are to be taken upon trust. His positive commands test not only our obedience, but our confidence in Him. Moral commands are echoed from within, so that not to obey them "is not folly alone, but also impiety" (St. Augustine); but commands of which we do not see the reason, yet which must be obeyed as simply coming from God, are touchstones of trust in Him. 3. How little, after all, God requires of us! "Make Me a little cake." He gave our first parents licence to eat of every tree in the garden save one—just an acknowledgment of His Sovereignty. He turns the water into wine; we have only to fill the water-pots. His commandments are "not grievous" (1 John v. 3), but we may have made obedience difficult through having abused our powers. God asks little, but makes a large return (Matt. xxv. 23). "The barrel of meal did not waste," &c. III. ITS MYSTICAL IMPORT. When Aristotle in logic, and Plato in philosophy, ruled the day (twelfth century), "Hugo and Richard de St. Victor were the great mystics of the period" (Milman); and it is from the former of these I transcribe the mystical interpretation of the subject in hand. The widow of Zarephath represents the holy Church—a widow—waiting for the advent of the Saviour. Elijah came to the woman, when Christ, through the mystery of the Incarnation, came to the Church. The woman was gathering "two sticks"; for the holy Church received the faith of the Cross. The "handful of meal" is said to signify the imperfection of Divine knowledge at the time when Christ came; and the "little oil in a cruse," the scarcity of grace. But Elijah multiplied both, because Christ, "full of grace and truth," imparted both to mankind. The woman sustained Elijah; for the faith and holy works of the Church refresh the Lord: "I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me" (Rev. iii. 20). IV. LESSONS. 1. The leading lesson throughout is one of trust. "Fear not." The woman of Zarephath affords a striking instance of obedience and submission, not only of the will, but of the judgment. 2. To remember that God should have the first claim upon us and upon our substance, which increases through parting with it, as did the five loaves as they were distributed to others by the disciples' hands. 3. It is a great mistake to suppose that only the rich should give into the treasury of God. The poor widow's "two mites" were more to Christ than the large gifts of the rich, because it was her all. (*The Thinker.*)

Ver. 15. **She went and did according to the saying of Elijah.**—*Modern liberality, and the widow of Zarephath*:—I. THE TREATMENT HE RECEIVED WAS VERILY THE MANIFESTATION OF THE WOMAN'S MIND TOWARDS GOD HIMSELF. Were it otherwise, it would be hard to point out anything in which we could be pronounced as doing it for, or contrary to the will of Almighty God. He has Himself, however, placed this matter beyond all dispute, for He has said, "He that giveth to the poor lendeth to the Lord"; and Christ represents the judgment scene in telling you that He will welcome His people with the assurance, "Inasmuch as ye did a deed of charity unto one of these My brethren, ye did it unto Me." II. THIS GIFT IS TO BE NO ACT OF NECESSITY, BUT ONE OF PURE OBLATION. To grudge while you give, or to give because the necessity of fashion, or custom, or demand is laid upon you, is to spoil the gift altogether. That is but half a gift which is not brought freely home. It is one thing to give of our substance in obedience to a reiterated request; it is another thing to bring it unto God freely and with delight. III. OBSERVE WHAT IT IS WHICH GOD DEMANDS? Satan, the world, or vanities, let these obtain your service, and you are speedily enhanced in their thraldom, and all is sure to be at length drawn into and swallowed in their insatiable vortex. You cannot, even if you would try deliberately to make the compromise, arrange for the bestowment of a certain portion of your means, or time or thought, upon unhallowed pursuits. All absorbing is the power of sin. The energies of body and mind insensibly flow into its channel, and the votary becomes the slave, and ultimately the ruined victim. But what is His demand of you, whose service is perfect freedom? Not so much as He has a right to demand; far less than many, moved by His grace, are willing to bestow. Sin, which absorbs all if it can, is but a robber at the best, for it can lay claim to no sort of right whatever, while God, who has a right to all, demands but little. What I do here claim, however, is, that though the requirements of God be comparatively small, they are, nevertheless, universal. IV. NO ACT FOR GOD IS PERFORMED WITHOUT HIS FAVOUR, and the "blessing of the Lord it maketh rich, and He addeth no sorrow with it." (*G. Venables.*)

Ver. 26. **The barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail.**—*The inexhaustible barrel*:—In the midst of wrath God remembers mercy. Divine love is rendered conspicuous when it shines in the midst of judgments. Fair is that lone star which smiles through the rifts of the thunder-clouds; bright is the oasis which blooms in the wilderness of sand; so fair and so bright is love in the midst of wrath. I. THE OBJECTS OF DIVINE LOVE. 1. How sovereign was the choice. Our Saviour Himself teaches us when He says, "I tell you of a truth, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land. But unto none of them was Elias sent, save unto Sarepta, a city of Zidon, unto a woman that was a widow." Here was Divine sovereignty. 2. What undeservingness there was in the person! She was no Hannah. I read not that she had smitten the Lord's enemies, like Jael, or had forsaken the gods of her country, like Ruth. She was no more notable than any other heathen. Her idolatry was as vile as theirs, and her mind as foolish and vain as that of the rest of her countrymen. Ah, and in the objects too, of God's love, there is nothing whatever that can move His heart to love them; nothing of merit, nothing which could move Him to select them. 3. Her condition was miserable too, in the very last degree. She had not only to suffer the famine which had fallen upon all her neighbours, but her husband was taken from her. Ah, this is just where sovereign grace finds us all—in the depth of poverty and misery. I do not mean, of course, temporal poverty, but I mean spiritual distress. So long as we have a full barrel of our own merits, God will have nothing to do with us. So long as the cruse of oil is full to overflowing, we shall never taste the mercy of God. For God will not fill us until we are emptied of self. II. THE GRACE OF GOD IN ITS DEALINGS. 1. The love of God towards this woman in its dealings was of the most singular character. 2. The dealings of love with this poor woman were not only singular, but exceedingly trying. The first thing she hears is a trial: Give away some of that water which thy son and thyself so much require! Give away a portion of that last little cake which ye intended to eat and die! Nay, all through the piece it was a matter of trial, for there never was more in the barrel than there was at the first. III. THE FAITHFULNESS OF DIVINE LOVE. "The barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail, according to the word of the Lord, which He spake by Elijah." You will observe that this woman had daily necessities. She had three mouths

to feed; she had herself, her son, and the prophet Elijah. But though the need was threefold, yet the supply of meal wasted not. You have daily necessities. Because they come so frequently—because your trials are so many, your troubles so innumerable, you are apt to conceive that the barrel of meal will one day be empty, and the cruse of oil will fail you. But rest assured that according to the word of God this shall not be the case. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *The miracle in Zarephath*:—God's blessings, whether of oil, or corn, or sense, or grace, come to us in accordance with three laws, and of these laws this miracle in Zarephath is a signal illustration. I. THE LAW OF ECONOMY. The little which we have must not be wasted. The smallest capacity must be utilised. The most rudimentary gift must be employed. Out of the inventory of to-day comes the more of to-morrow. God works no superfluous miracles. He wastes no energy in mere spectacular display. In his administration everything is generous, nothing is wasteful; everything is orderly, nothing is paroxysmal; everything by law, nothing by caprice. II. THE LAW OF CONTINUITY. There is no spontaneous generation in the chemistries of nature, character, or grace. The new comes out of the old; oil comes out of oil; meal comes out of meal; this year's harvest comes out of last year's corn crib; the perfect truth comes out of the partial truth; the extraordinary is only the ordinary carried up and completed. The supernatural is simply the natural touched with life, quickened with God. What we receive is the increase of what we have. What we may be is the outgrowth of what we are. Every future leaps out of the loins of some past. III. THE LAW OF INCREASE. Get a little meal underneath God's blessing, in the drift of His purpose, and it means more meal. "St. Theresa and two sons are nothing; St. Theresa, two sons, and God are everything." If we bring our weak faith to Him He will in rease it. If we bring our torpid hearts to Him He will make them beat and burn. (*M. B. Chapman.*) *The barrel of meal and the cruse of oil*:—This miracle illustrates—I. A PRINCIPLE IN CONNECTION WITH ECONOMY. The greatest generosity would often be to teach economy. The economy of nature is as startling as uniform. The gas flung off by the vegetable world—do you think it is wasted? It becomes a source of your health and life! And the gas that you exhale in breathing is not wasted; it becomes food for the trees, and that carbon. Whence is the rain that refreshes the face of the earth? It is the result of economy, of God's treasuring up the water, absorbed by the sun. Of all the refuse of this earth that the rivers bear into the ocean, there is nothing wasted. Out of it God is making the bones of fishes, coral reefs, &c. And if the principle on which the Deity is managing the great palace of nature were taken into the homes of destitution that abound, there might be less drunkenness, &c., but there would oftener be "the barrel of meal and the cruse of oil." II. A PRINCIPLE IN CONNECTION WITH PROVIDENCE. III. A PRINCIPLE IN CONNECTION WITH PIETY. "Man liveth not by bread alone," &c. We never starve in spiritual life for lack of help. IV. A PRINCIPLE IN CONNECTION WITH GENEROSITY. This woman gave and got. But let us remember that she gave unselfishly, and not in order to get. Moreover, she gave to her utmost. She gave to a prophet, in the name of a prophet, and she received a prophet's reward. The reward is not always a material one; it is sometimes sympathy, sometimes the benediction of poverty, and always the smile of the soul and God. (*H. J. Martyn.*) *The cruse that never fails*:—I wish to spiritualise this incident, with its barrel of unwasting meal and its cruse of unfailing oil, and see it in a type of that unfailing happiness and peace and comfort for which men are for ever seeking. We are all too well aware, though we are constantly deceiving ourselves about it, constantly trying to hide it from our eyes, that the ordinary stores of life's joy do waste and fail. 1. One of our first sources of joy and comfort is youth. 2. Health is one of life's great fountains of comfort and happiness. Our health is a barrel of meal and a cruse of oil constantly being used up. Most of us are already taking medicine to keep the worn machine sufficiently in order so that we can make it work awhile longer. 3. Closely allied to health is strength, though many men and women carry burdens through long lives on shoulders grown strong through tribulations, never knowing what it is to have health. Many people exult in their strength; many get happiness out of it; the mere ability to do things is a great blessing from God; but that, too, is a failing cruse. After awhile we come to know that there is only about so much force, about so much strength and vitality, in a human being, and that if men or women use their strength in one way it means they cannot use it in some other way. 4. This is true of all the joys and comforts that we get from earthly

fortune. 5. Then there is that great source of earthly comfort and confidence, the joy which comes from the fellowship and kindness of our relatives and friends. And now I gladly turn away from this side of our study to contemplate with infinite thanksgiving to God the cruse of oil that never fails. There is a life which Jesus came to give us which is not affected with the passing of youth, with the breaking down of our health, with the failure of our strength, or with the frail character of our fortunes—a life that may grow more abundant under them all and may never be more full of the vigour and enthusiasm of youth than when it faces the king of terrors; a life that does not fail though one is thrown into a dungeon with John Bunyan, or cast into the inner prison with Paul and Silas, or exiled among the heathen with David Livingstone; a life that can do without money, or health, or youth, or friends, and still remain sweet and patient and glad and loving and brave. If you to-night will take God's promise, with the same simplicity of faith shown by this poor woman towards the promise given through the lips of Elijah, you, too, shall save yourself alive unto eternal life. (*L. A. Banks, D.D.*) *The widow's barrel of meal*:—Nothing is more wonderful in the orderings of God's Providence than the economy of human supply, the marvellous adjustment of contingency and constancy, of precarious means and uniform provision. We often speak and feel as if the great marvels of God's Providence were its signal interpositions, its great deliverances or hair-breadth escapes occurring once or twice during a lifetime, deliverance from a fire in which others have perished, from a railway accident or shipwreck in which others have lost their lives. But, rightly viewed, the true marvel of God's Providence is its minuteness, its adjustment of little things, its constant maintenance of the myriad laws and causes upon which daily life depends, that pulse should follow pulse, that breath should succeed breath, that day after day and year after year all the mysterious functions of life should go on, and all the mysterious conditions of life be maintained—the chemistry of the atmosphere, the balance of forces, the supply of food, all the wonderful things of life within us and without us, by which every hour and every moment we live and move and have our being. It is a miracle in all ways, a miracle of power and wisdom, and a miracle of goodness, that God's loving arm should never for a moment be withdrawn, His eye never for a moment be averted, His supplies never for a moment fail. It needs not a miracle to demonstrate God's mercy. And the peculiarity of God's Providence is that a general uniformity is blended with circumstantial uncertainty. The great law is invariable—seed-time and harvest, summer and winter, day and night do not fail; and yet how precarious and changeful the sunshine and shower, the labour and the fructifying influences upon which they depend! How anxiously the farmer sows and cultures! how easily his hope is frustrated! He knows not which shall prosper, this or that. The uniform law has a margin of contingent circumstance about it, in which much depends upon human effort and upon Divine blessing. It seems in each individual instance as if there were no certain law at all. And for moral purposes, for the education and discipline of men this is an arrangement of wonderful wisdom. If our wants were supplied by some mechanical law, there would be no religious culture, no religious appeal; the daily and hourly play of religious feeling would be lost. We all know how rapidly uniformity produces indifference, even though it be uniformity of blessing; even the most marvellous goodness ceases to impress us if it be invariable; if our food were to be supplied by what we call miracle, it would surprise and affect us at first, but if of regular occurrence we should soon cease to feel either surprise or gratitude. The manna of the wilderness which excited such wonder at first soon became as familiar as drops of rain. One great reason therefore why God diversifies the experience of our lives is that by constant excitement he may keep alive our sense of dependence upon Him. Every man's experience attests the healthful influence of this diversity of things. How near to God it keeps us; how it enhances our sense of blessings! 1. How entirely dependent upon God we are for the common and necessary things of our life! And yet there is nothing that we are more prone practically to forget. Too often we become conscious of it only when they are withdrawn. 2. Another lesson is, into how small a compass the real necessities of life may be reduced. Were we to take an inventory of this poor widow's effects, how short and meagre it would be! A little meal in a barrel, and that perhaps not very fine meal, and a little oil in a cruse. Were we to look round her cottage, we should find no superfluities in it. No doubt her little furniture had been all parted with, ere her last despairing resolution was taken. If the barrel and the cruse were not the whole of her

effects, yet from them we may safely infer the rest. It is but an illustration of the process that every day goes on in many an English home: the deportation of goods to the pawnbroker's, sometimes superfluities, sometimes precious objects of loving associations, sometimes the very necessities of life, the bed upon which children sleep, the clothes that should cover their nakedness, or keep them from the cold; sometimes these sad shifts are the result of thriftless extravagance, or of sensual indulgence, but too often they are the sad necessity of poverty, and those accustomed to comforts are glad to hold body and soul together by the commonest and scantiest food. 3. Again: how easily God can supply us with what is necessary for us! What innumerable agencies are at His disposal! If ordinary channels fail, how easy for Him to employ extraordinary ones! One way is as easy to Him as another, only it is not so common. Elijah was supplied by the ravens as easily and as surely as when the corn waved in the fields. And then, again, when he was an apparent pensioner upon the poor widow's charity. Here were three different methods in which God supplied His servant's need—the one as much His method, and as easy to Him, as the other. "He opens His hand, and satisfies the desire of every living thing." (*H. Allon.*)

Vers. 17–24. **And it came to pass after these things.**—*The test of the home-life:*—Many a man might bear himself as a hero and saint in the solitudes of Cherith, or on the heights of Carmel, and yet wretchedly fail in the home-life of Zarephath. It is one thing to commune with God in the solitudes of nature, and to perform splendid acts of devotion and zeal for Him in the presence of thousands; but it is quite another to walk with Him day by day in the midst of a home, with its many calls for the constant forgetfulness of self. And yet it would be idle to deny that there is much to try and test us just where the flowers bloom, and the voices of hate and passion die away in distant murmurs. There is a constant need for the exercise of gentleness, patience, self-sacrifice, self-restraint. And beneath the test of home, with its incessant duties and demands, many men break down, whose character seems, like some Alpine peak, to shoot up far beyond the average of those with whom they associate in the busy world. Thy home-life was chosen for thee by the unerring skill of One who knows thee better than thou knowest thyself, and who could not mistake. It has been selected as the best school of grace for thee. And now, looking down upon thee, the Master says: "There is nothing in thy life that may not be lived in Me, for Me, through Me: and I am willing to enable thee to be sweet and noble and saint-like in it all." Elijah was the same man in the widow's house as on Carmel's heights. He is like one of those mountains to which we have referred, piercing the heavens with unscaleable heights; but clothed about the lower parts with woodlands, and verdant fields, and smiling bowers, where bees gather honey, and children play. He shows that when a man is full of the Holy Ghost, it will be evidenced by the entire tenor of his daily walk and conversation. I. ELIJAH TEACHES US CONTENTMENT. God's rule is—day by day. The manna fell on the desert sands day by day. Our bread is promised to us for the day. As our day, so will our strength be. And they who live like this are constantly reminded of their blessed dependence on their Father's love. If God guarantees, as He does, our support, does it much matter whether we can see the sources from which He will obtain it? It might gratify our curiosity; but it would not make them more sure. II. ELIJAH ALSO TEACHES US GENTLENESS UNDER PROVOCATION. "Art thou come to call my sin to remembrance, and to slay my son?" A remark, so uncalled-for and unjust, might well have stung the prophet to the quick, or prompted a bitter reply. And it would have doubtless done so, had his goodness been anything less than inspired by the Holy Ghost. But one of the fruits of His indwelling is Gentleness. We need more of this practical godliness. Many deceive themselves. If the Holy Spirit is really filling the heart, there will come over the rudest, the least refined, the most selfish, a marvellous change; there will be a gentleness in speech, in the very tones of the voice; a tender thoughtfulness in the smallest actions; a peace passing understanding on the face; and these shall be the evident seal of the Holy Ghost, the mint-mark of heaven. Are they evident in ourselves? III. ELIJAH TEACHES ALSO THE POWER OF A HOLY LIFE. Somewhere in the background of this woman's life there was a dark deed, which dwarfed all other memories of wrong-doing, and stood out before her mind as her sin—"my sin" (1 Kings xvii. 18). What it was we do not know; it may have been connected with the birth of that very son. There is a wonderful invention, recently perfected, by which

sound can be fixed pictorially; and, from the picture, it may be produced again, long years after it was spoken. Imagine your hearing once again the voices long hushed in death! But memory is like this: it fixes all impressions and retains them; it never permits them to be destroyed, though it may not always be able to produce them instantly to a given call. Some memories are like well-classified libraries, in which you can readily discover even the smallest pamphlet; others are so confused that they are useless for practical purposes: yet even in these, nothing that ever came within their range has ever been lost; and whenever the right clue is presented, there is an immediate resurrection and recovery of sounds, and sights, and trains of thought long buried. How terrible will it be, when the lost soul is met on the threshold of the dark world to which it goes, by the solemn words, "Son, remember!" IV. ELIJAH TEACHES, LASTLY, THE SECRET OF GIVING LIFE. It is a characteristic of those who are filled with the Holy Ghost, that they carry with them everywhere the spirit of life, even resurrection-life. We shall not only convince men of sin; but we shall become channels through which the Divine Life may enter them. Thus was it with the prophet. But mark the conditions under which alone we shall be able to fulfil this glorious function. 1. Lonely wrestlings. "He took him out of her bosom," &c. We are not specific enough in prayer; and we do not spend enough time in intercession, dwelling with holy ardour on each beloved name, and on each heart-rending case. What wonder that we achieve so little! 2. Humility. "He measured himself upon the child." How wonderful that so great a man should spend so much time and thought on that slender frame, and be content to bring himself into direct contact with that which might be thought to defile! It is a touching spectacle. 3. Perseverance. "He measured himself three times, and cried unto the Lord." He was not soon daunted. It is thus that God tests the genuineness of our desire. These deferred answers lead us to lengths of holy boldness and pertinacity of which we should not otherwise have dreamed, but from which we shall never go back. "Men ought always to pray, and not to faint." (*F. B. Meyer, M.A.*) *The dead made alive*:—There are some good suggestions here for every one of us who would win souls to Christ. For the condition of every one who is living without faith and confidence in God is compared in the Scriptures to spiritual death, and the conversion of a soul is spoken of as bringing the dead to life. First, there is—1. The personal interest, the actual effort; how many times we think about winning some one to Christ, but we let all our interest ooze out in thinking; we do not act. 2. We have suggested to us that we are to save them by prayer. Elijah knew he had no power to bring this boy to life, but he knew God had the power. He gave himself in prayer to God, and God heard his prayer. 3. We must add our personal influence to prayer. Elijah, as if to infuse some of his own vitality into the body of the dead child, stretched himself upon it three times. We never can tell when a personal touch may win a soul to the Lord. (*L. A. Banks, D.D.*) *Germs of thought*:—The resurrection of the widow's son at Zarephath. I. MAN THE ORGAN OF THE MIRACULOUS. This is confessedly a miracle—an event altogether out of the ordinary course of nature. In this very chapter there are no less than three miracles wrought by Elijah. The heavens were sealed by him;—there was no rain or dew for three years; and there was a famine. The widow's meal and oil remained undiminished, after supplying the wants of the widow, her son, and himself:—and now her son is brought to life. Why does the Almighty thus employ man as the medium of His miraculous agency? 1. It serves to impress us with the infinite regard which God has for good men. 2. It serves to foreshadow the wonderful power which good men, when perfected in eternity, may possess. May it not be that the grandest of their miracles here are but symbols and types of their splendid achievements there? II. POVERTY THE HOME OF THE GREAT. Elijah's chamber was a small "loft" in that humble cottage. This should teach us—1. Not to make secular position a test of moral character. This in every age man has been apt to do. Job's friends did this. 2. Not to make secular wealth an end of life. Our life "consisteth not in the abundance of things." 3. Not to shun men because they are poor. 4. Not to neglect the cultivation of spiritual excellence because of our poverty. Poverty is no excuse either for impiety or uselessness. Paul said, "Though poor, yet making many rich." III. EVIL THE OCCASION OF GOOD. This woman's trial was great in the death of her son. It would teach her—1. How absolutely life is in the hands of God. It taught her that He can take it away and give it back at pleasure. "The Lord gave," &c. 2. How great the influence a truly good man has with heaven. (*The*

Homilist.) "*Out of the depths*":—God's chastisements are always for our profit. It is only "out of the depths" that we can rise to the highest knowledge of God. So it was not in vain that both the prophet and the widow passed through the furnace at Zarephath. 1. The first is this, Trust and Obey. The departure from Cherith, the journey through Samaria, the encounter with a widow so poor that she was forced to gather sticks by the highway, were all a severe test of Elijah's faith. He had to look, not at outward appearances, but at the word of the Lord. So, too, with the widow. If she had asked for a full barrel and a new cruse to start with, it would have been only what our hearts are always craving. We say, "Give us this day our daily bread," but we like to see an assured income between us and want. 2. But the woman was to learn a deeper lesson still. It may be summed up in Remember and Repent. Before long God's hand was laid upon her son, and he fell sick and died. This awakened memories that had slumbered long. "Art thou come unto me to call my sin to remembrance, and to slay my son?" We do not know whether it was her general sinfulness that was brought home to her or some particular offence—some forgotten sin, buried and covered over in the rubbish-heap of the past. We notice, however, that this sense of sin was not awakened until death threatened her home, and her own son paid the first instalment of the dread penalty of sin. And yet surely she had not been resisting God's grace. The word of the Lord in Elijah's mouth had not been rejected by her. It needed death, however, to bring about in this widow a true sense of sin. "Grace and Truth" are both needed for the development of spiritual life. Grace was manifest in the daily supply of food. Truth shone forth with awful and searching power in the death of her son. Grace revealed the goodness of God—Truth made to pass before her the evil of her own heart. And God's people, as well as the careless and ungodly, need to remember and repent. 3. Our third motto is Ask and Receive. There are deep mysteries in life which yield to nothing but prayer. What a tangle there was in that home! How mysterious—how, from the human standpoint, inexplicable, the blow that had fallen! We are all prejudiced against God by nature, and unwilling to accept judgment without murmuring. But in this case God's dealings must have seemed terribly severe. There is one explanation, however, of all these mysterious and inexplicable dealings of God's providence. They are sent to teach us the value of prayer, to draw us out of ourselves, and to make us lay hold of that power of God, which reaches even beyond the grave. What a prayer was this of Elijah's! Prayer is still all-powerful along the line of God's will. We, too, may know the power of Christ's resurrection; indeed, a measure of resurrection power should be manifest in our lives, if we are indeed risen with Christ. 4. Love and know, is illustrated by this story. It is beyond our power to conceive the deep effect upon this widow of her son's resurrection. "Now by this I know that thou art a man of God," was the widow's comment. Clearly the bitterness had given place to love. She had learnt that God only wounds to heal. (*F. S. Webster, M.A.*) *Raising the widow's son*:—The mother, overwhelmed with sorrow, severely rebukes Elijah, and charges him with the loss of her son. This conduct may be accounted for (1) By a feeling of human nature which always seeks to blame something, or some person, for any calamity which may befall us; and (2) By a feeling of superstition which looks upon all afflictions as judgments from God. But how different is Elijah's conduct towards the widow. He does not resent her rebuke, as he might have done; he does not cross her troubled spirit, but sympathises with her, and treats her with exquisite tenderness. I. NO HOME EXEMPT FROM THE TRIALS AND SUFFERINGS OF THIS LIFE. This widow would doubtless be looked upon with envy by her neighbours. They would think that in the midst of the distress suffered by them that she was free, and protected by an unseen hand from wretchedness and woe. But a deeper sorrow than they imagined was soon her portion. And in looking upon some homes we are apt to think that they are strangers to the ordinary trials and sorrows of life. There is no home that can exclude these. II. THE DEEPEST SORROW MAY BE MADE THE INSTRUMENT OF OUR HIGHEST GOOD. III. AN ILLUSTRATION OF THE POWER OF PRAYER. (*Thomas Cain.*)

Ver. 24. I know that thou art a man of God.—*Elijah*:—1. From whom does the testimonial come? "I know." These are the words of the heathen villager, a poor widow, living in an out-of-the-way place, probably as ignorant as she was poor. Possibly she had heard nothing of the controversy about Baal, and knew nothing of Elijah's great work; yet she it is who sets up as a judge in

the matter. "I know." Quite so. Everybody is a judge of goodness. Like love, for which goodness is only another name, it is a thing which everybody can see and know and honour. There is no ignorance in the matter of goodness. (1) It is a testimonial from one of another religion. She was a heathen, belonging to another nation. She had her own notions of things, and held them as tenaciously as Elijah held to his religion. To her his belief and worship might be all unmeaning, possibly at first a matter of ridicule, even of scorn. Yet she cannot withhold her hearty confession, full of admiration, almost of envy—"I know that thou art a man of God." Goodness is greater than sects and more than names. Let the world see the goodness, and they do not care what church that man goes to; whether he uses a prayer book or not matters to nobody, or whether he is led up to service by a peal of bells or a big drum. "I know," said she. How much there was she did not know about the man. She had never seen him as the prophet of fire; had probably never heard how he had gone into the presence of the king and queen, and before all the priests of Baal, and the assembled hosts of Israel, and spoken the word of the Lord. Goodness is like love again in this, and like God whose name is Love, it is everywhere and in everything. (2) That this testimony comes from the right place. "I know," said this good woman of Zarephath. I think if anybody had questioned her right to an opinion she would have quickly silenced them. "The man lived in my house. I ought to know. There is nobody in the land who has seen more of him than I have, and I know that he is a man of God." You may accept that testimony. Depend upon it, if those at home do not believe in us, the less profession we make elsewhere the better. Our certificates of church membership are signed by the minister; it were well if they were countersigned at home. 2. Let us look at the character: a man of God. It is a grand title—the grandest ever conferred on any man. Let us think that day after day the character of each of us is being built up for eternity. The spirit and aim of the life is making more fixed and defined that which we shall be for ever. Let every one of us ask himself, Am I a man, a woman, of God? Whatever else we are, all must be a failure if we are not that. Whatever else we are, the best and highest life is ours only if we have surrendered ourselves to the love and service of God. (1) The man of God is much more than merely a religious person. There were many such, I doubt not, in those times; as there are in these. Listen to this one: "It is a mistake," he says quite angrily—"I knew it would be, and I said so all along—this religion of Jezebel's is all very well for the people of Phœnicia where she comes from; but it is not natural to bring it down here. It does not suit our soil." Here is another religious person. But hush—please do not speak so loud. Yes, he trusts that he is a true worshipper certainly—in heart, you know, in heart—and that is everything; isn't it? But please don't mention it—he would rather that it was not known. "Just now the times are really very trying, very; and it is difficult to know how to act for the best. To offend the queen would be so very damaging to one's prospects; and really Jezebel is so passionate that she would stop at nothing. Altogether it is very difficult to be what one would. So I do just go up to Jezreel and bow before Baal—only go through the form, you know, for the sake of peace; but at the heart I am, of course, a true Israelite." We know that man too. You may call him by very few names that are not too good. He certainly is no man of God. (2) A man of God! Make room for Elijah. A man who is given up to God; who lives to know God's will and to do it through and through him with all his might. Wherever that man goes, all know and feel that the God of Israel liveth. Think of the land from which God Himself is shut out: His voice is not heard; His authority is ignored; His worship is neglected. But here is one in whom God comes again into the very midst of men. That is ever the man of God—he brings a new light, by which things are seen aright: a new standard by which men do correct their estimate of things. Right and wrong are no mere names, but stand out sharply and severed from one another by a gulf like that which separates heaven from hell. Look at England in the last century, and at the transformation that was wrought from end to end of the land through the preaching of the Wesleys and Whitefield. Here and there, in town and village, some one got converted, and became a man or woman of God. Then there entered into the place a new light, a new conscience, a new authority. But many are children of God who do not become men of God. Feed upon the word; dwell in communion with God; exercise yourself day by day in His service. Set yourself every day in His strength to serve Him at any cost, and put yourself at His

disposal; check and test yourself by the thought of His will. Push out after higher things; live in this spirit and exercise it in faithfulness to God and service to men: then shall this high joy and dignity be ours—we shall come to be enrolled amongst the men of God. (*M. G. Pearse.*) *Charged with blessing*:—Touch the hand of a man who is being thrilled by a galvanic battery, and you will feel the shock. So, if we are charged with Holy Ghost power, those who come into contact with us will soon discover it. There is more connection with the name and character of Barnabas than appears. The man filled with the Spirit became a son of consolation to others.

CHAPTER XVIII.

VERS. 1–18. **Go, show thyself unto Ahab.**—*Ahab, Obadiah, and Elijah*:—What are the general lessons as affecting Ahab, Obadiah, and Elijah? 1. It is possible for a man to be very bad in one direction and very tolerant in another. It was so in the case of Ahab. He was the worst of the kings of Israel, yet he kept a governor over his house who feared the Lord greatly. 2. The Lord causes the most wicked men to pay His religion the homage which is due to its excellence. A bad king employs a good governor! The thief likes an honest man for steward. The blasphemer likes a godly teacher for his child. 3. He who is the slave of idolatry becomes an easy prey to the power of cruel tempters. We do not know that Ahab was a cruel man, but we do know that Jezebel was a cruel woman, and Ahab was greatly influenced by his passionate and sanguinary wife. 4. Ahab was a speculative idolater, Jezebel was a practical persecutor; Ahab showed that speculative error is consistent with social toleration. Redeeming points do not restore the whole character. "One swallow does not make a summer." 5. In the same character may be met great faith and great doubt. Obadiah risked his life to save fifty of the prophets of the Lord, yet dare not risk it, without first receiving an oath, for the greatest prophet of all! This mixture we find in every human character. "How abject, how august is man!" In Ahab, Obadiah, Elijah, and Jezebel, we see a fourfold type of human society; there is the speculator, the godly servant, the far-seeing prophet, the cruel persecutor. Society has got no further than this to-day. O wondrous combination! So checked, so controlled, by invisible but benignant power. Speculative error has its counterpart in actual cruelty, and patient worship has its counterpart in daring service. Application. (1) Be the servant of the Lord. (2) To-day, Christ calls for faithful testimony; (3) If we suffer with Christ we shall also reign with Him. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

Ver. 3. **Ahab called Obadiah, which was the governor of his house.**—*Obadiah*:—There are men in sacred story, and in every history, who play a secondary place in the strange stirring drama of human progress—lieutenants to the great leaders—men with firm wills, stalwart hearts, gifts of energy, wisdom, and restraint. And behind these a great number who have no name in "storied page," prophets who have no prophet renown, kings uncrowned, victors without honour, martyrs without a martyr's fame, saints uncanonised, wise men who have no enrolment among the world's sages! The glory of the firmament on a clear and radiant night is not fashioned of those few chief stars which flash with distinguished brightness, and catch the glance and win the admiration of the careless observer; but in the multitude of stars which are not chief—which wear not the most dazzling splendour—these bring their brightness, and those far off nebulous mists bring theirs. Were these to fail, how tame the heavens would grow! So in the Bible story—the glory is not concentrated in the chief men. All the interest of that history is not in those few who stand like giants among their fellows. There are men of less distinguished greatness who are worthy of observation, and will repay our study. The less known, and in some respects the less gifted men of Bible story have this interest for us: they are nearer to us—they are not set apart from us and hedged in by specialities of gifts or office, moving in a sphere in which we can have no place. Elijah stands like a mountain apart—lonely, grand, terrible—and though an apostle tells us "he is a man of like passions with our-

selves," yet the glamour of supernatural gifts separates him from us. But when we look at Obadiah, we see one who stands upon our level, who moves in our sphere. We do not stand in awe of him. Contact with him is contact of man with man, and no dazzle of the supernatural comes between us. We have only a feeble, broken outline of the man's character. The sketch which the sacred narrative gives is very brief. He is Ahab's servant, governor of his house. He is Jehovah's servant, and in the palace where Jezebel is queen and Baal and Ashtaroth are the worshipped gods. The hints which this brief narrative affords us are suggestive of a noble type of man, fearing God, defending the weak, rendering all lawful service. 1. He was the honoured servant of an impious king, "governor of his house." This was an office of great dignity and influence; that he reached it and held it is a witness alike to his integrity and efficiency. He was a careful, faithful, diligent servant to King Ahab. How came he to this high place? He did not purchase it by an unworthy deference; the fawning of the flatterer did not win it; the pliancy of an easy conscience did not secure it; "for he feared the Lord greatly: feared Him from his youth up." Such a fear, if it does not secure steadfast principle in life and character, is a mere profession—an utter sham. Obadiah has reached this place in the straight lines of integrity, not by the crooked, wriggling line of policy. The lines of principle do sometimes land a man in the high places. He was an honoured servant, because he was efficient; he did not do his work with a slack hand because Ahab was an apostate king and Jezebel a heathen queen. His religion was the inspiration of his work—the condition of his efficiency. What he did, he did with his might. Religion is no excuse for inefficiency in any honest work to which men set their hands. "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might." That injunction concerns our work in the world as well as in the Church—concerns the keeping of accounts as much as keeping the Sabbath; the discharge of business obligations as truly as the fulfilment of religious duties. The irresolute, indifferent, and inefficient servant cannot be excused, because he has a gift in prayer. Idleness at the counter, at the desk, the bench, the anvil, is not to be excused because the transgressor is a zealous teacher in his class. Inability may be an excuse for inefficiency, but religion cannot be; it is the enrichment and endowment of a man's nature; it should stir all gifts that are in him to a quicker energy, a finer power. What is the witness of this to you and me? That we who are servants of the Lord, in fulfilling our earthly duties and obligations, should be diligent and faithful. It is a commendation of Christ's religion which has been overlooked. 2. Obadiah was faithfully God's witness in a degenerate court. As far as it was possible, he served his king; but there are no indications that he trifled with conscience, no signs in the narrative that he was unfaithful to the claims of God. He feared the Lord greatly—this is the witness of no shallow religiousness. In that unhallowed court he was a leaven of purity. In that degenerate age he was a witness for God. In those high places, where pleasure and passion held wild carnival, he exercised self-control, and strove to live a life true to God. He feared the Lord greatly. He who fails in this allegiance, though he stands amid the splendour that beats upon a throne, is yet a child of darkness. Understand it well. Obadiah had no gifts of prophet power—no unique spiritual gift. He was for the most part a man just like ourselves. Yet in the court of Ahab, where influences of evil must have gathered the force and fierceness of a stormy sea, he was steadfast and immovable. Little faith would have been shattered and swept away; a faint heart, a feeble zeal, could not have borne the strain. It is only in the possession of a full, rich, spiritual power we shall bear in life and character clear witness for God and for His Christ. If we are to thwart in any way such powers of darkness as are figured to us in this imperious Queen Jezebel, we must fear the Lord greatly; our love of Him must glow like the morning; our faith in Him must be steadfast as the stars; our zeal for Him burn like a concentrated fire. It is this thoroughness in Christian life which is the condition of resolute faithfulness—the root of working power and widening usefulness. (*W. S. Davis.*) *A noble character:*—Obadiah "feared the Lord." That is to say, he was loyal to the Lord; the law of God was the rule of his life. He feared to sin; kept watch over his heart, held guard on his lips, and followed the commandments of the Most High. Obadiah "feared the Lord" from his youth. That is to say, this tree of righteousness, called Obadiah, was strong, widespread, and beautiful, bending with the fruits of goodness, because he was planted in the garden of grace when he was a sapling, a tender plant, whose childhood was given to the love and service of his God.

1. Obadiah's goodness makes us wonder. He lived in an age and in a country when and where goodness was sadly scarce. The wonder is that King Ahab would have this man by him, much more that he should commit the highest office and the most important trust into his hands. Obadiah's presence must have been a standing rebuke to the selfish and sensual king. If I wonder that Ahab would have him about him, I wonder more that Obadiah was willing to stay. The corrupt atmosphere of Ahab's shameless court must have been a rank offence to him. Then why did he not go? The Prophet Elijah, wandering alone among the glens of Thisbe, or the rocks of Horeb, or by the waters of Cherith, or the coasts of Zidon, would be glad, poor outlaw, of a little congenial company. Why doesn't Obadiah join him? Because "he feared the Lord greatly"; and both patriotism and religion, loyalty to the interests of his country and the honour of his God, bound him to his post. 2. I find still further cause for wonder, in that the goodness of Obadiah had been maintained during his residence in the court of King Ahab. I marvel at it. I know what comes to a statue of white marble exposed to the corrosive fogs of London. I know what happens to the rippling music and the silver beauty of the summer brook when it falls into the turbid river rolling its dull waters in sullen silence to the sea. I know the fate of May flowers when the blast of the east winds blow a malison on their beauty. I know, too, by sad experience, what comes to human hearts and consciences when fierce and fiery, or subtle and winsome temptations ply their evil power. This man, this one man Obadiah, "feared the Lord." He shone like a solitary star in a murky midnight sky. He bloomed like a lily in a bed of thorns. 3. The goodness of Obadiah gives me further cause for wonder in that it grew and ripened under unfavourable treatment. It is said of him, that he "feared the Lord from his youth." The guiding principle of his whole career was the fear of God. There is no doubt that his religion met with some shrewd blows and sore bruises as his beard grew; and that as he advanced to mature manhood, the world, the flesh, and the devil, hit both hard and often at the man who would be good in spite of them. "Now Obadiah feared the Lord greatly." Instead of descending a valley, he has been climbing the hill. Instead of lapsing into silence with broken strings, his life-harp vibrates with richer melody and a holier psalm. The way of duty is not only the way of safety, but it is the way to more perfect goodness and increasing strength. 4. I find further cause for wonder in Obadiah's simple faith in the supernatural, the miracle-working power of God. "Go, tell the king," said the stalwart and hairy Tishbite, "Behold, Elijah is here." "Nay," said Obadiah, "Ahab has hunted for thee high and low to kill thee, that at the ebbing of thy blood the wells and rivers may flow again. If I send him here, the Spirit of the Lord will carry thee away, and the king will slay me." Poor superstitious, old-fashioned, simple-hearted Obadiah! And yet the simple soul, palace governor though he be, thinks that Elijah can be suddenly spirited away; that the laws of nature can be tampered with, gravitation suspended, and a miracle can be wrought by a fancied Deity whom every one regards as an exploded myth! 5. I find still another wonder, still another lesson in the piety of Obadiah: his noble deeds of kindness to others at great cost and danger to himself. (*J. J. Wray.*) *Standing alone*:—Mr. Jackson Wray finely compares Obadiah to a scene he once saw on the west coast of Africa. Crossing a barren tract of country, he beheld a fair and stately palm tree springing up from the desert sand. Its graceful shaft rose to a height of near a hundred feet, crested with a coronet of leafy splendour, rich with clusters of ripening fruit. All around it was stunted brushwood and dwarfish thorn. It stood alone in solitary magnificence. Even so was Obadiah in King Ahab's palace. *Grace superior to the forces of environment*:—"A great city spoils everything within its circle, and you say it has the same effect upon character, and that a low type of character is excusable when you consider a city environment. No. That won't do for us. I rejoice to think that the grace of God makes a man triumph over the worst circumstances. Scientists say it is impossible for anything to exist and come to perfection except it has proper conditions. If you are to have the rose you must have the sun, and if you are to have the fern you must have the shade, and for the willow the watercourse. Suitable conditions, or life and perfection are impossibilities! Well, I suppose it is so, but I rejoice to say that breaks down when you come to character. This very day I can show you lovely roses growing in cellars; I can show you the purest of lilies in the miriest of places; I can show you the palms of the East growing in Lapland; in other words, to drop the imagery, I can show you the

purest and noblest of men and women under circumstances that seem altogether unsuitable to a pure and noble life. Don't say that because your environment is this or that, therefore you must be a this or that mean creature. The Kingdom of God is within you, and can set circumstances at defiance. (*W. L. Watkinson.*) *Unheroic Christianity* :—The poor man must often have been in a great strait to reconcile his duty to Jehovah with his duty to his other master, Ahab. And Elijah shrewdly hinted at it when he said : " Go, tell thy lord, behold, Elijah is here ! " Imagine a courtier of Oliver Cromwell trying to be true to the Commonwealth and to the cause of the exiled Stuarts ! The life of policy and expediency is a species of rope-walking—it needs considerable practice in the art of balancing. There are scores of Obadiahs everywhere around us, and in the professing Church. They know the right, and are secretly trying to do it, but they say as little about religion as they can. They never rebuke sin. They never confess their true colours. They find pretexts and excuses to satisfy the remonstrances of an uneasy conscience. They are as nervous of being identified by declared Christians as Obadiah was when Elijah sent him to Ahab. They are sorry for those who suffer for righteousness' sake, but it never occurs to them to stand in the pillory by their side. They content themselves with administering some little relief to them, as Obadiah did to the harried prophets, and whilst they conceal that relief from the world, they put it in as a claim to the people of God for recognition and protection, as Obadiah did (ver. 13). They sometimes are on the point of throwing up all to take up an uncompromising attitude, but they find it hard to go forth to suffer affliction with the people of God so long as they are well provided for within the palace walls. (*F. B. Meyer, B.A.*)

Ver. 6. **Ahab went one way by himself, and Obadiah went another way by himself.**—*Separated : and no tears at the parting* :—They separated ; and I am sure there were no tears shed on either side at the parting. Never were two men more utterly unlike. Never were associates more ill-matched. How they managed for some time to pull together, I cannot imagine. The text has sufficient allegorical suggestiveness to awaken many a solemn thought within you. 1. There are, after all, but two ways ; you must choose the one or the other. You must follow Ahab, or you must go with Obadiah. The snare into which large numbers of young men fall is the attempt at compromise. They shrink from the unblushing wickedness of the one, but do not care to commit themselves to the earnest piety of the other. The words which Fowell Buxton wrote near the close of his life are well worthy of being pondered by each of you :—" The longer I live, the more I am certain that the great difference between men is energy, invincible determination—a purpose once fixed, and then death or victory ! " " This quality," added he, " will do anything that can be done in this world ; and no talent, no circumstances, no opportunities, will make a two-legged creature a man without it." 2. Choose for your associates those with whom you would wish to company all through life. Try to look below the surface and read the character ; and do not give your friendship to any one whom, in your deepest soul, you do not respect. It was a good maxim of Lord Collingwood, " Better be alone, than in mean company." 3. Should your most intimate associate prove to be of evil principles, part company with him at once. Better offend your acquaintance than lose your soul. Pull up the instant you find you are off the road, and take the shortest way back you can find. When the shoe of conscience begins to pinch, it is about time we turn our steps into another path. Ahabs and Obadiahs cannot remain long in partnership, and the sooner that partnership be dissolved the better. (*J. T. Davidson, D.D.*)

Ver. 12. **I thy servant fear the Lord from my youth.**—*Fearing the Lord from one's youth* :—There are two valuable lessons we are to carry away from these words of Obadiah. I. THE IMPORTANCE OF EARLY DECISION FOR GOD. It was a favourite idea, a hobby in short, of that singular and austere sage Thomas Carlyle, that a select few of our race are to be set up for the admiration and imitation of the rest : and though, no doubt, the Chelsea philosopher pushed it too far (as he was in the habit of doing with most ideas that possessed him), the notion is a sound and scriptural one. The Bible teaches as much by example as by precept, and it seems to me that the grand lesson of Obadiah's life—and it is but a very brief biography we have—is the unspeakable value to a man, all through his career, of starting with fixed religious principles, and sticking to them at all

hazards. I quite believe, if you will allow me to say so, that some of you, who would hardly venture to call yourselves real Christians, are most favourably inclined towards religion, only you will not come up to the point of a full and absolute decision. But this is just where your danger lies: for these half-religious feelings are apt to satisfy you, whilst, until you have actually given your hand to Christ, you are as absolutely unsaved as if you were a railing infidel. II. THE IMPORTANCE OF COURAGE IN OPENLY AVOWING OUR RELIGIOUS DECISION. The first thing is to have sound principles; and the second thing is not to be ashamed of them. It was a remarkable saying of the Duke of Wellington, that "in war the moral is to the physical as ten to one." That is to say, that, if the soldiers know and feel in their conscience that right is on their side, they are ten times as brave as when they are not very sure about it. Well, when you know you are standing on sure ground, you can afford to despise the shots that are fired at you by godless men. Nay, more, the fact is, it is a great help to you, if your faith is genuine, to meet with a little opposition at times. A man is none the worse a Christian for having occasionally to stand up for his principles. It makes your religion more real, and gives you greater confidence in its power. You want a new principle within you, and that is faith in Christ as your Saviour. (*J. T. Davidson, D.D.*) *The "fear of the Lord," as illustrated in the character of Obadiah:*—I. THE GREAT PRINCIPLE OF ACTION IN THE LIFE OF OBADIAH, viz., "the fear of the Lord." II. THE NECESSITY FOR AN EARLY INCULCATION OF THIS FEAR IN THE MIND—"I thy servant fear the Lord from my youth." (*H. C. Cherry, M.A.*)

Vers. 17–20. **When Ahab saw Elijah.**—*Deliverance from the mouth of the lion:*—I. THE WONDERFUL PROTECTION OF THE PROPHET; II. THE UNJUST ACCUSATION BROUGHT AGAINST HIM; III. THE BOLD LANGUAGE HE USES; and, IV. THE SECRET POWER HE EXERCISES. (*F. W. Krummacher, D.D.*) *Elijah meeting Ahab:*—I. THAT IN DARKEST TIMES GOD RESERVES SOME MEN AND KEEPS THEM TRUE TO HIMSELF. Conspicuously does this appear in the great character Elijah. The word itself covers a wide field—Elijah. The history of an age is covered by such a character. As time goes by, after he vanishes from scenes on which he came suddenly, his proportions increase, as a mountain seems greater the farther you go from its base. By and by it comes to pass that the mighty hero of God's making will be expected again on earth when the extremity of human need is reached. Elijah must come, men said, as the forerunner of the great Messiah, and as a restorer of all things. God keeps such spirits as these in His unseen Army of the Reserve; and, when darkness covers the earth, and men's hearts fail them for fear, suddenly an Elijah steps upon the scene, pronounces doom on the guilty, gathers together the righteous, and re-enacts the eternal law by His word. II. WE LEARN THAT GOD DETERMINES TO LET MEN KNOW THAT HE GOVERNS THIS WORLD. III. We learn from the lesson before us, still further, THAT WICKED MEN CHARGE THE RIGHTEOUS WITH BEING DISTURBERS OF THE PEACE. "Whatever," said George Shepard, "may be true in medicine, God's system of moral cure is by contraries. He puts forth the truth to crowd out the error, and what if it does happen, in the fierce antagonism, that there are seasons of confusion and trouble? What though the tempest twirls everything into disorder, if it only blows away the miasma? There are people who are exceedingly alarmed at the presence or the prospect of agitation." IV. Finally, we must feel, as we read again this familiar meeting between Elijah and Ahab, that IT WOULD BE WELL IF THERE WERE MORE OF ELIJAH'S STAMP TO-DAY. (*Monday Club Sermons.*)

Vers. 17, 18. **Art thou he that troubleth Israel?**—*The source of a sinner's trouble:*—Our theme lies in this controversy between Ahab and Elijah as to the cause of the trouble which had come upon Israel. Ahab accused the prophet of being the cause of the trouble, while of course Elijah had nothing to do with it. He was simply God's messenger. It is a very common thing for a man who has been brought into trouble by his sin to find fault with Providence and with his neighbours and his relatives, or with anybody who points out his iniquity. He feels that some one else is to blame rather than himself. But Elijah lays his finger on the root of the difficulty. Sin is always a source of trouble to the sinner. Ahab's greatest enemy was in his own heart and in his own house. Seragastio, a servant in one of Plautus' comedies, asking another, "How doth the town seem to be fortified?" the answer given was this: "If the inhabitants be well governed and good, I think it will be

well fortified:" and then, reckoning up many vices, he concludes, "Unless these be absent, a hundred walls are but little enough for the preservation of it." And the history of the world shows us that that is a true representation of the destructive nature of sin in a nation. It will level the walls of the strongest governments. No nation is great enough to stand if it is honeycombed with sin in the hearts of its people. Sin is the great troubler in the individual soul. It was after Adam and Eve had broken the law of God that they were troubled, the first trouble they had ever known, and they tried to hide themselves among the trees of the garden so that God would not see them. Here is a young man who has fallen into the habit of strong drink and has lost his self-mastery, and he comes home drunk to his mother. Oh, the trouble that comes from such a sin. Oh, sin is the great troubler. But do not imagine that this sin or other outbreaking disgraceful sins that are easily detected are the only ones that give trouble to people. Disobedience to God is sin, and if we fail to keep God's commandments, it does not matter which one, it will get us into trouble, and if unrepented of and unforgiven, into terrible and eternal trouble. Beware of being self-deceived. Sometimes the foulest sins are cherished underneath what appears a very respectable exterior. I have seen somewhere the story of Sir Francis Drake, that after he had made his long sailing journey around the world and had returned to London he was one day in a boat upon the River Thames in a very rough tide when it seemed almost certain that they would be capsized. The famous traveller exclaimed, "What! have I escaped the violence of the sea and must now be drowned in a ditch?" And a man may drown in a ditch quite as easily as in the ocean. And many a one who has escaped vulgar, disgraceful sins that bring men into shame has been led away from God and finally kept from God by secret lusts and hidden selfishness and evil desires that prevented him from obeying God and keeping His commandments. Let us not forget that what we may esteem a little sin has the power to open the door of the heart to sins of which at first we would not dream of being guilty. The historian tells us that when Pompey could not prevail with the city to admit his army he persuaded them to admit a few weak, wounded soldiers. But these soon recovered their strength and opened the gates to the whole army. Thus it is that the devil persuades us to admit some small sin and soon gains the whole heart. (*L. A. Banks, D.D.*)

Vers. 19–40. **Now therefore send, and gather to me all Israel unto Mount Carmel.**—*The priests of Baal*:—Mendelssohn has wrought the harmonies and discords of this scene into a grand oratorio, and the painter or poet can find in it abundant material for his art. The actors are a king and royal court, hundreds of priests in splendid vesture, masses of people, anxious and hungry-eyed; and over against them a single man, big, fearless, with hairy mantle and leathern girdle, and loose locks waving like a mane about his stern face. Our lesson to-day stops short with the failure of the priests. We may call it the helplessness of heathenism. Who was Baal? Whence did he come? Where did he get his power? How did he rule? There was no such being. He never lived, never blessed a servant, or crushed a foe. When the priests cried, there was no answer, because there was no one to hear. Yet the name had a fiendish personality in the history of Israel, as a most alluring and ruinous force. An actual Baal never lived, possibly the ideal Baal has never died. I. THE HEATHENISM OF TO-DAY. We still find idolatrous nations, with the same licentiousness, cruelty, and error. One African tribe has six words for murder, not one for love. The missionary who goes among them is an Elijah pleading for Jehovah against Baal. May the prophet's mantle fall upon such, and may the Lord be with them as he was with Elijah. One definition of a heathen is "an irreligious, unthinking person"; a pagan, "one who is neither a Christian, a Mohammedan, nor a Jew." A cleaner and brighter heathenism appears in the high-bred infidelity, of which we hear more than its worth demands. This is not ignorant and boorish, but elegant and learned. It affects to look down on the simplicity of believers, as the gorgeously robed priests may have sneered at Elijah's rough mantle. It uses the terms of science and philosophy. Its worship is mostly of the silent sort before an unknown God. Investigating the development of religious belief, it finds everywhere the longing, but nowhere the Creator who inspires it; everywhere the child's heart, nowhere the infinite Father. Speaking for art, it forgets that faith has inspired its masterpieces, and would put its visions above Him who made the splendours of earth, sea, and sky, human face divine, teeming brain, and skilful hand. Be not deceived by them,

The greater number of sound thinkers and investigators are to-day, as in the past, believers. It is easy to see the paganism in such cases; not so easy where it touches us more closely in the heathenism of worldliness. Baal-worship was popular because it was gay, festal, splendid, while the Mosaic ritual was calm, earnest, self-controlled, chaste. Under the first, men could do what they liked best, and yet pass for religious. It dignified self-indulgence, and deified strength and lust. Love of God is the source and crown of all delights; but, to a multitude of meaner impulses in us, the world appeals with more flattery and promise than heaven. Let us hold fast to the Bible, in which speaks the only living and true God. If we turn from Jehovah, the deity we make ourselves will prove a Baal. Earth-born religions are dishonourable to the conscience, false to the intellect, and cruel to the heart. And if we acknowledge Jehovah to be God, let us follow Him. II. THE TESTING OF HEATHENISM. Anything which claims our service and our love should be able to support us in emergencies. Infidelity and worldliness may do very well in good times, when bright suns and genial rains mingle to bless our lot; so did Baal. And so all blasphemy, and polite infidelity, and everything that is not of God, when it has had its fling, and tried its power, drops back, helpless to save its followers. The testing is not often so dramatic as upon Carmel, but is continually repeated. (*Monday Club Sermons.*) *Elijah and the prophets of Baal*:—But Mount Carmel, a celebrated mountain on the southern boundary of the tribe of Assher, which extends itself into the Mediterranean Sea. It runs north-west of the plain of Esdraelon. I. WE NOTICE THE PROPOSAL OF ELIJAH TO THE MULTITUDE. He speaks to them, not to the royal court. Religion is not an affair concerning the great and titled of the earth only. It respects every man. It is for the multitude as well as for the rich and great. II. NOTICE THE PROPOSAL OF ELIJAH ACCEPTED. All the people said, "The word is good." It was an advantageous one to the prophets of Baal. They had the prepossessions of the people and of the royal court in their favour. It is easy to take up religion when it is in prosperity: but to take it up when it is in a drooping, dying state, is the work that demands principle, sterling principle. To be zealous, when the very stones of the altar are to be replaced—when the alternative is ruin or revival—extirpation or reform—then to be zealous—then to be a reformer—to seek to restore truth and religion to their pristine dignity, that is a work honourable indeed, and arduous as it is honourable. III. THE FAILURE OF THE PROPHETS AND THE IRONY OF ELIJAH. IV. THE APPEAL OF ELIJAH TO HEAVEN. V. THE PRAYER OF ELIJAH ANSWERED. VI. THE CONVICTION OF THE MULTITUDE. VII. THE DESTRUCTION OF THE PRIESTS. These prophets had been the cause of the grievous famine, of the death of cattle and human beings not a few. They had also sacrificed thousands of dear children to Baal. The rites of Baal were frequently celebrated with human victims. They had also brought Jezebel to think it a meritorious act to slay the prophets of the Lord. Also, according to the laws of Moses, idolatry was considered treason against God, as the national king, and death was denounced as the punishment of that sin. These men suffered nothing but the due reward of their deeds. Those who live by imposing on the weaknesses and superstitious feelings of others shall sooner or later meet with a suitable retribution. They that dig pits for others frequently fall into them themselves. Their own lies frequently slay the authors of them. Men first utter lies, then believe them, then perish by them. And they perish without pity. They perish amidst the execrations of those whom they have deceived. (*J. H. Cadoux.*) *Elijah and the prophets of Baal*:—1. We are reminded of the great disparity between these opposing forces. Now, as then, Truth is in the minority. It was one man against four hundred and fifty. But so it is always. The world has never seen a popular majority for the truth. Only eight souls were saved in the ark; Abraham was alone in his faith; Israel was but a handful; and the "peculiar peoples" in every age have been "a remnant." Even the Son of God did not restore the equilibrium. The Reformation effected but a partial equalisation. The present age of missions, with all its conquests, finds the Church outnumbered in every region by its foes. Not only so, but in respect to earthly rank, power, prestige, the advantage has always been on the side of error. If at intervals the tide seems to turn, as when David, Solomon, Constantine give to religious truth political pre-eminence, such episodes are transient, and soon the old disproportion returns.

Truth for ever on the scaffold,
Wrong for ever on the throne,

abides as the rule obtaining in every age for the fortunes of the kingdom of heaven on earth. 2. This disparity was intensified and emphasised by divine direction. Elijah was commanded to give to his opponents precedence at every point. The criterion which he must submit for the testing of the rival religions was "the god that answereth by fire." That was a concession to the claims of Baal, who was called the "sun-god," with whom fire was a native element. On the other hand, Elijah's task was rendered as difficult as possible. He must stand by and see his rivals consume the entire day. This magnifying of evil and minimising of the resources of good has marked the Divine policy from the first. God has seemed to give to sin every advantage that it could ask for, and to keep his own cause at a corresponding inferiority. What a surprising difference, according to earthly standards, between Jesus and His enemies! Not only was He alone, unfavoured and unhelped, but they were supported by all the power of the Jewish Church, the Gentile government, and even the infernal world. Sin was allowed to parade and employ its uttermost resources, while holiness seemed to be proportionately depressed in the person of Him who was born in a manger and reared at Nazareth, who became the Friend of publicans and sinners, was betrayed by His own followers, and condemned to the accursed death. Similar fortunes have attended the people of God to this day. Not only have they been left to engage in a one-sided conflict where the numerical odds were always against them, but peculiar aggravations of this disparity have been common. The Church is still burdened with such unnecessary drawbacks. How often are we tempted to take literally the words which speak of the "foolishness of preaching," and to wonder why God hath chosen such needlessly foolish, weak, and base things of this world to serve Him! 3. This disparity between the two contestants was emphasised by Jehovah for the purpose of suitably displaying His own superiority to both of them. He gave to Baal every advantage and reduced His own resources to a minimum, in order to show that Truth at its lowest is stronger than Error at its highest. The result justified this plan; for the people were all the more impressed by the final victory of Elijah, because of the tremendous inequality of the conflict at the beginning. This gives us a clue to that policy of the Divine government which has been referred to. God has allowed sin to prosper in this world, and has permitted His own religion to take an inferior place, for the purpose of thus furnishing an arena for the exhibition of the Divine self-assertion. We understand, then, why Christianity has never been allowed to compete on equal terms with the dominant faiths of the world. God does not intend that His religion shall obscure Himself. He knows how readily the eye of man is caught and held by visible forms, and that spiritual truth is always endangered by material associations. Accordingly the earthly medium through which His grace shines must be as thin and plain as safety will permit. This was the reason why Jesus the Christ asked and received so little from the world. He owed nothing to its favour or its help. But as we now see, all that humiliation was the most effective background that could have been provided for the display of the spiritual kingdom of God. 4. The triumphs of grace thus obtained are also magnified by the Divine concessions to the enemy. It was yielding much to Baal when the ordeal of fire was proposed, for that meant to meet the sun-god on his own field and with his own weapons. Other tests might have been chosen which would have been more favourable to Elijah. But no; he must go into the enemy's territory and challenge him in his very citadel. Do the Egyptians worship the river Nile? Lo, the rod of Moses turns those sacred waters into blood. Are they the most cleanly of peoples, making a religion of physical purity? They are stricken with vermin by the word of the Lord. Do they idolise the goat, the ram, and the bull? The cattle of their fields must perish before the Divine scourge. Thus Pharaoh is taught that even within the range of his own religion the God of the Hebrews can find means to overthrow him. Similar transformations mark all the great conquests of Christianity. He meets scientific scepticism with the scientific faith of Miller, Hitchcock, and Drummond. He compels the art of sensuous Italy to minister to biblical truth in the Madonnas and Nativities. He transforms the pagan temple into the Christian church, and puts the Gothic spire to spiritual uses. This process of overruling and utilising grace is spreading through all the ranges of human enterprise. 5. These exhibitions of Divine self-assertion furnish a severe but useful test of human character. The priests of Baal were not the only ones whose faith and patience were taxed on Mount Carmel. It must have cost Elijah not a

little to find himself placed for an entire day at so great a disadvantage. Nothing less than intense consecration and courage could have endured such a trial. This experience also was typical. It represents the lot of God's people in all ages. The very greatness of the Divine interpositions in their behalf has imposed on them burdens of self-denial and self-effacement. 6. The trials of God's people are sure to result in their triumph as well as His glory. (*C. J. Baldwin.*) *The prophet of the Lord* :—The debate on Mount Carmel was conducted by Elijah with remarkable ability. A vital question had forced its way into prominence. I. When he met his opponents on Mount Carmel, ELIJAH HAD VERY CLEAR CONVICTIONS. In some way he had gained a strong hold upon God. He was personally conscious of God. Unlike many a speculative philosopher who has framed an elaborate argument to prove that God is, Elijah seems to have advanced with a single step to a firm belief in God. His name was an announcement of his belief: "My God is Jehovah!" A conviction like this is an argument in itself. Men are willing to listen to a man who believes what he says. This was an important element of the success of Moses, who was compelled to go into the presence of Pharaoh and there to demand the liberation of a large number of valuable slaves. Daniel had the same advantage when he was called upon to face the idolatry of Babylon: it was widely known that Daniel feared God. The ministry of Paul was always conditioned by this strong faith. He was more than a match for his antagonists because he knew whom he had believed. Athanasius, the youthful archdeacon of Alexandria, became the successful advocate of Christian truth at the Council of Nicæa in view of his recognition of the divinity of our blessed Lord. Luther at the Diet of Worms rallied the unorganised resistance of Germany to the papal authority when he exhibited his confidence in the evangelical doctrines. These men, and others like them, were "strong in the Lord and in the power of His might." They felt the rock upon which they stood. They had clarified their thought, so that they could utter it forcibly. If we can gain this consciousness we shall be prepared for the great debate. II. When he challenged the Baal-worshippers to the proof by fire, ELIJAH UNDERTOOK TO PRESS THEIR OPINIONS TO A PRACTICAL EXPRESSION. The challenge was perfectly fair. They had accepted Baal and Ashtaroth as the representative of the life-principle in nature. They were asked to exhibit the results of their faith in these divinities. Any opinion which lays claim to the faith of man must bear the strain of his ordinary burdens. What is your religion good for? What is the quality of its manhood? What sort of a God does it present? What is its immortality?—these are questions which must be met. There is no escape from them. Now, we may inquire, What will be the natural results of the general prevalence of the opinions which antagonise the Gospel? III. When he had repaired the altar of the Lord and placed upon it a sacrifice, ELIJAH MADE AN APPEAL WHICH MET THE TERMS OF THE DIVINE COMMAND. There was an old altar on Mount Carmel—perhaps a relic of patriarchal times, but certainly a witness to the reality of a pure worship. As the day was closing Elijah called the people to this altar and began to repair it. You may safely press Christian truth to its proper issues. We should have a very happy world, indeed, if all Christians would show their faith by their works. Christ-like lives, what would they be!—how sober! how industrious! how pure! how sweet! how attractive! Multiply these Christ-like lives, and how beautiful the social life of the world would appear. It is essential, therefore, that the Christian in the great debate should state clearly "the truth as it is in Jesus." IV. When he had received the fire of the Lord, which consumed his sacrifice, ELIJAH DREW FROM THE PEOPLE THE CONFESSION, "Jehovah is God, Jehovah is God." The occasion was pentecostal. Conviction was instantaneous. Out from the clear, dry atmosphere flames of fire leaped as Elijah was praying; they seized upon the sacrifice and consumed it with the wood upon which it rested; they licked up the water in the trench and left the altar bare. A transformation occurred. An explanation must be given. What could be said except to confess the supremacy of Jehovah? Prof. Christlieb of Bonn has remarked that the regeneration of the human soul is the standing miracle of Christianity. This regeneration converts corrupt natures into natures which are holy. It is associated with Christian truth, and with belief in that truth. (*H. M. Booth, D.D.*)

Ver. 21. How long halt ye between two opinions?—*Elijah's appeal to the undecided* :—I. FIRST, YOU WILL NOTE THAT THE PROPHET INSISTED UPON THE

DISTINCTION WHICH EXISTED BETWEEN THE WORSHIP OF BAAL AND THE WORSHIP OF JEHOVAH. II. IN THE SECOND PLACE, THE PROPHET CALLS THESE WAVERERS TO AN ACCOUNT FOR THE AMOUNT OF TIME WHICH THEY HAD CONSUMED IN MAKING THEIR CHOICE. III. BUT THE PROPHET CHARGES THESE PEOPLE WITH THE ABSURDITY OF THEIR POSITION. IV. THE MULTITUDE WHO HAD WORSHIPPED JEHOVAH AND BAAL, AND WHO WERE NOW UNDECIDED, MIGHT REPLY, "BUT HOW DO YOU KNOW THAT JEHOVAH IS GOD? HOW DO YOU KNOW WE ARE NOT DECIDED IN OPINION?" V. And now the prophet cries, "If the Lord be God, follow Him; if Baal, then follow him"; and in so doing HE STATES THE GROUND OF HIS PRACTICAL CLAIM. VI. And now I make MY APPEAL TO THE HALTERS AND WAVERERS, with some questions, which I pray the Lord to apply. Now I will put this question to them: "How long halt ye?" When Elijah says, that "The God that answereth by fire let him be God," I fancy I hear some of them saying, "No; the God that answereth by water let him be God; we want rain badly enough." "No," said Elijah, "if rain should come, you would say that it was the common course of providence; and that would not decide you." I tell you, all the providences that befall you undecided ones will not decide you. God may surround you with providences; He may surround you with frequent warnings from the deathbed of your fellows; but providences will never decide you. It is not the God of rain, but the God of fire that will do it. There are two ways in which you undecided ones will be decided by and by. You that are decided for God will want no decision; you that are decided for Satan will want no decision; you are on Satan's side, and must dwell for ever in eternal burning. But these undecided ones want something to decide them, and will have either one of the two things; they will either have the fire of God's Spirit to decide them, or else the fire of eternal judgment, and that will decide them. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *The conflict on Carmel*:—1. Now, from this stirring incident, I learn that we must be prepared like Elijah to stand alone for God. Examine the biographies of great men, and you will not find a brighter example of sanctified courage than that which shone in the man of God on Carmel. Think of it! One man against a whole nation! Here was a Reformer, who had the patience of the ox, the courage of the lion, the eye of the eagle, and the intelligence of the man. Prince Bismarck once said in a characteristic epigram, "We Germans fear God, and nothing else in the world." This was especially true of Elijah, the Whirlwind Prophet, who struck Ahab pale with fright. Fearing God so much, he feared man so little. He was as a mighty rock standing alone in the midst of a stormy sea, braving and outliving the tempest. Take your stand for God wherever you may be, either in the office, or the shop, the workroom, or the home. You, like Elijah, have a Carmel. See that you play the man, and quit yourself right bravely. 2. From the incident on Carmel I also learn that the most of men are desirous of worshipping God and Baal at the same time. This is what the Israelites wanted to do, for you must know that the worship of idols was not proposed as a substitute for, but an accompaniment to, the worship of Jehovah. They wanted to do an impossibility—to amalgamate opposites. This God would not have, and will not allow to-day. Men must be either one thing or the other. Religions diametrically opposed cannot both be right. Things which are contradictory cannot be reconciled. You cannot have an altar to Baal and an altar to Jehovah standing side by side. Mark Antony is said to have yoked two lions to his chariot, but there are two lions which can never be yoked—the Church and the world. Yet men everywhere are trying to win the smile of the world and the "well done" of Christ. They want to serve God and Baal at the same time. 3. From my text I gather the further lesson that all men are called upon to make a choice between God and Baal. "How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow Him; but if Baal, then follow him." This searching remonstrance uttered by the solitary witness on Carmel is perhaps still more impressive in the original, for one rendering gives, "How long limp ye on two knees?" He likens them to a cripple hobbling along, first on one knee and then on another. Another translation gives the question thus, "How long hop ye on two sprays?" Like a bird which keeps hopping from bough to bough and is never still, and consequently never builds a nest. 4. Our text also clearly shows that God has given to us the power of choice, which power involves tremendous responsibility. We are endowed with the power of will, and are not to be like those derelicts that go floating about in the Atlantic and never reach any port. God asks us to take the evidence for and

against, and then deliberately decide whether or not He is to be our king. 5. And in this matter God has not left us without evidence of His superiority over Baal. Still the infallible test is "The God that answereth by fire let Him be God." If you will sit down and compare the claims of God and the claims of Baal, you will soon see which God has the sole right to your worship. If we translate Elijah's speech into nineteenth-century English, it simply means this, Will you have Christ or Barabbas; God or self? God can do what Baal cannot! An eminent evangelist once declared in a newspaper controversy that he was prepared any day, at a few hours' notice, to summon five hundred witnesses, ready to declare upon oath, if need be, the truth of that Gospel of Salvation from the power of sin which every week he preached. To-day the cry rings forth, "The God that answereth by saved men, let Him be God." There can be no comparison between the claims of Christ and the claims of the world. 6. I beg you to observe that God calls for immediate decision. You are this day to decide between God and the devil. Some of you have been halting till your hair has grown grey. How much longer are you going to fly from bough to bough? (*W. C. Minifie, B.D.*) *Indecision*:—A more striking appeal is scarcely to be found in the whole volume of inspiration. It was delivered under circumstances peculiarly impressive, and by one of the most eminent and most honoured among the prophets. I. AS TO THE NATURE OF THIS INDECISION IN RELIGION. II. LET US THEN CONSIDER THE GROUNDS AND CAUSES OF THIS INDECISION. The source of all this evil is the deceitfulness of the human heart. 1. The love of the world.—The Apostle St. John has left it upon record, that this disposition is totally inconsistent with the love of God. "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world," &c. 2. The fear of the world.—Nothing is more certain, than that the disposition and habits of the great majority of mankind, even in a Christian country, are totally and radically opposed to the precepts of the Gospel; and the world loves its own: and if any are not of the world, it beholds them with aversion. 3. The fashion of the world.—Under this term, I include the example and authority of those with whom we are conversant; or to whom it is customary to appeal. III. THE UNREASONABLENESS OF THIS PRINCIPLE. 1. It is unreasonable, on account of the great importance of the subject. 2. Something, perhaps, might be said in vindication of indifference and indecision, if these things were only obscurely revealed; but the fact is, that as we are more interested in the knowledge of salvation, than of all other things, so is the will of God most distinctly made known in respect to it. (*Christian Observer.*) *Elijah on Carmel*:—I. AN ALTERNATIVE PRESENTED. The alternative lay between Jehovah and Baal, and the object of this national gathering was to decide which was to be Israel's God. Notice the different elements composing this gathering. II. AN INCONSISTENCY EXPOSED. The inconsistency lay in blending the claims of Jehovah and Baal. Many, apparently, had no objection to divide their allegiance, their only concern being to keep on good terms with the ruling powers. The service of God is an exclusive service, it admits of no compromise. This truth is put in language of unmistakable clearness by lips that cannot err—"No man can serve two masters. Ye cannot serve God and Mammon." 1. A religious compromise, it is sometimes said, is surely better than no religion at all However plausible this may sound, we are bound to say that, from the nature of the case, it is an absurd position. A compromise in religion is, to say the least, unmanly and hypocritical; it is an attempt to pass off for what you are not. 2. Such conduct yields no satisfaction to the waverer. The troubles arising from indecision are endless. The man who will not take a decided stand exposes himself to the constant banter of his companions, and there is no end of annoyance to the man who cannot say, No. 3. Divided service is dishonouring to God. Why? Because it puts Him on a level with Baal, and robs Him of the glory which is His sole due. If you worship two or more gods at the same time, you put them on an equal footing; and the God of heaven has told us, in a way not to be mistaken, that He will not share His glory with another. A divided heart will not satisfy the Maker of it. III. A DECISION DEMANDED. The assemblage on Carmel was, for the most part, wavering between the claims of Jehovah and Baal, and Elijah urged them to take a side. The reasons for immediate decision are powerful and urgent. Time is short, the matter is of supreme moment, and there is no middle ground. You have to be either on the one side or on the other. Let no unmanly fears sway your choice. Be a Daniel, and if need be stand alone. Be an Elijah, a champion for God and the truth. (*D. Merson, M.A., B.D.*) *The*

Prophet's Question :—I. HEAR THE TEXT, FOR IT SPEAKS SIMPLY OF—1. Two opinions. Like others they tried to do both. Few like this in worldly matters. Some render this: "How long hop ye from twig to twig?" They were—uneasy: unhappy: unstable. 2. Two Gods. Baal. An ancient god: a spreading religion: a gaudy and costly religion: all this very attractive. God. The only God: The only God we need the only true God we can have. 3. Two positions. Halting and following: show the difference. II. HEAR THE PROPHET, FOR HE SPEAKS POINTEDLY. Notice—1. His manner. Firm: fearless: faithful. 2. His opportunity. Before all the people. How willingly he embraced it. 3. His question. "How long?" &c. They had already had time. They had time then. God did not want time. He could receive them at once. III. HEAR THE PREACHER, FOR HE SPEAKS EARNESTLY. Enlarge upon the theme, and address those who halt concerning—1. God's ordinances. 2. God's service. 3. God's people—*i.e.*, joining them. 4. God Himself. (*W. J. Mayers.*) *Halting between two Opinions* :—I. THIS INDECISION IS JUSTLY CONDEMNED. 1. It is not honest. It exists rather in appearance than in reality. It is an attempt to accomplish an utter impossibility. No man can have two objects of supreme affection. So long as their hearts are not fixed supremely on God, they are the servants of mammon. In all that they seem to do for God, nothing is truly done for Him. 2. They derive no full enjoyment from religion or the world. They resort to two opposite sources of enjoyment. What they derive from one is embittered by what flows from the other. 3. They have no peace of conscience. 4. This state of mind is attended more or less with a sense of shame. Few things are more wounding to the pride of man, than conscious imbecility of purpose and character. And in no case, perhaps, is this consciousness more inevitable than in a state of indecision with respect to religion. 5. This state of mind is full of danger. If such are not sooner or later discouraged, and led to abandon all thoughts of becoming religious, nothing will be effected, as the result of such a course. Indecision never did anything to the purpose in worldly pursuits, much less in religion. Analyse this state of mind, and you will see that it must be so. An undecided purpose is the want of all purpose. At the same time it has an awfully deceptive influence. The openly profligate can hardly admit that he is either right or safe. He can at least be more easily shown his danger. But the man who imagines himself but at a little distance from the path of rectitude and safety, who supposes at most but a few steps need be taken to reach it, and who perhaps persuades himself that he is fast approaching it, has of all men most cause for alarm. While the real danger of his condition is as great as that of any other, he is blind to the fact. 6. This state of mind is highly criminal. Whether Jehovah or Baal be God, he is the supreme good, the being who has a right to command; he ought to be obeyed. These obligations exist somewhere. We cannot annul or lessen them. We are created, we are upheld, we are blessed in this world, we are capable of joy and blessedness through eternity. There is one to whom we owe all that we are and possess. This being is Jehovah or Baal; there cannot be more than one supreme God. There must be one. There can be no conflicting claims, no compromise of services. II. THE TEXT ENFORCES THE DUTY OF DECIDING WHO IS TRULY GOD, and of serving him, whether Jehovah or mammon, God or the world. This may be done by considering what they are in themselves, what they have done for you, and what they can and will do for you. 1. What they are in themselves. 2. Consider what they have done for you. 3. What can the world, what can God do for you? (*N. W. Taylor, D.D.*) *God's call to undecided souls* :—I. THIS WORD OF GOD DOES NOT COME TO THE DULL, THE DEAD, THE SLEEPING SINNER. There are some of whom you cannot say that they are halting between two opinions. That awful stillness—I dare not call it a calm—that awful stillness which pervades their spiritual being has not been broken. They are led, blindfolded, by the devil; and there does not seem even to be a wish—not to say an effort—there does not seem even to be a wish to shake off that fold which is over their eyes. One opinion they are quite settled in; and that is, that sin is sweet, that the world is sweet, that self is sweet, and that sin, the world, and self are all satisfying objects. To them the word cannot be said to come—"How long halt ye between two opinions?" But it is not so with all. Besides those who have no care for their souls and those who have learned to prize Jesus Christ as a Saviour, there is a third class—the class of awakened, interested, inquiring, anxious souls; and unto them does this word come, "How long halt ye?" Their stillness has been broken; their eyes, as it

were, have been opened a little; a few dashes of light have broken in upon them; a fresh opinion has forced itself upon them now and then. As yet, indecision is their great characteristic. II. Let us notice, in the next place, THE OBJECTS BETWEEN WHICH THEY HALT. What were those objects in Israel's case? Baal and Jehovah the great God of Israel! What is there on the one side? On the one side there are objects, of which you have proved, and even confess, that they are unsatisfying. There are things which you know are empty things. There are courses which you know, which conscience tells you too plainly, must end in disappointment, and in sorrow and death. There are habits which only strengthen the cords of corruption, and draw you more and more into sin. There are pleasures which, alas! you know too often end in pain. There are sweets which, alas! you know crumble to very gall and bitterness when a man puts them in his mouth. There is that upon the one side; and what on the other? God. God, who is the source of all life; God, who is the fountain of all joy; God, who is the giver of every good and perfect gift; God, who is the perfection of every thing which the really enlightened soul can long for and enjoy; God is upon the other side, God the Father calls you. III. LET US CONSIDER THE REASONS WHY THEY HALT. One reason I would venture to speak of is ignorance. But I can say that there is ignorance of the danger of indecision. But besides this there is ignorance of the blessedness of following God. Then again, besides this ignorance there is unbelief, from which indeed ignorance springs. Then another reason is this—unbelief and ignorance spring from the carnal corruption of man's fallen nature. (*C. D. Marston.*) *Decision for God*:—Our first inquiry will be:—I. WHO ARE THEY THAT HALT BETWEEN TWO OPINIONS? They are not far to seek, nor difficult to describe. They may differ widely among themselves, but there are some points in which they all agree. We may say concerning all such that they are more or less enlightened in things divine. Moreover, the knowledge they possess makes them dissatisfied with their present condition. Their consciences tell them that if Christianity be true—and of this they have not the slightest doubt—their state is far from satisfactory. They know the destructive influence of sin here, and the terrible consequences of sin hereafter, and yet they remain in its power. They know that those who believe the Gospel enjoy liberty, are set free from condemnation, are made heirs of glory; and yet they are not believers, they have not obeyed the truth, and consequently they cannot claim these privileges—their position is that of men longing for something which they have not determined to seek. Our next inquiry will be:—II. WHY DO MEN HALT BETWEEN TWO OPINIONS? Some halt because they have never given the subject of religion that earnest, thoughtful, prayerful consideration which it deserves. Others halt because the interests of this life occupy too large a share of their attention. Others halt because they have not sufficient courage to abandon their present course of life. Others halt because they look forward to a time when it will be easier to decide. This leads me to call your attention to III. THE IMMENSE DANGER OF HALTING BETWEEN TWO OPINIONS. The longer you halt, the harder it will be to decide. Thus your chief object in halting is effectually defeated. Whatever may be your difficulties now, depend upon it, time will only increase their strength and add to their number. We know how speedily habits are formed, and how difficult it is to cast them off. They throw around us cords and fetters which we endeavour in vain to break through. Again, our time is very uncertain. Though the future were quite as advantageous as the present, though it were quite as easy to seek God's peace next year as this, it would be the height of imprudence to put the matter off until then; for the future is so very doubtful that you cannot reasonably build the slightest hope upon it. "Boast not thyself of to-morrow, for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth." Finally, the loss you may incur by halting will be irreparable. (*D. Rowlands, B.A.*) *Indecision in religion*:—In regard to the state of things existing at that time in Israel, we may remark—(1) That a large portion of the nation was decidedly inclined to the worship of Baal. (2) There were some who were as decidedly the friends of Jehovah. They were indeed few in number. (3) There was another, and evidently a large class, that was undecided. This was the class which Elijah particularly addressed in the text. The doctrine which is, therefore, taught in this passage, is the unreasonableness of indecision on the subject of religion. In discoursing on it, my object will be, I. TO CLASSIFY THOSE WHO ARE THUS UNDECIDED. 1. Those who are thus undecided may be regarded as comprising the following classes. (1) Those who are undecided

about the truth or reality of religion at all, or of any system of religion. They embrace no system; they make no pretensions to any religion. They are lookers-on in the world, and observers of the various forms and systems of worship, professing liberality to all, and manifesting a preference for none. (2) A second class is composed of those who hesitate between Christianity and infidelity. (3) There are those, as a third class, who are awakened to see their guilt, and who are hesitating about giving up their hearts to God. They see that they are sinners. (4) A fourth class is made up of those who are constantly forming resolutions to attend to the subject of religion, and to become decided Christians. (5) A fifth class is made up of those who are undecided about making a profession of religion. That it is a duty they feel and admit; and it is a duty which they often purpose to perform. II. REASONS WHY A DECISION SHOULD BE MADE WITHOUT DELAY. (1) The first is, that our great interests, if we have any great interests, or any that are much worth regarding, are on the subject of religion. If this be so, then religion is the last thing that should remain unsettled and undetermined. (2) You would suffer no other matter to remain undecided as this does. If you are sick, you leave no means untried to secure returning health. If you were in as much danger of becoming a bankrupt as you are of losing the soul, you would give yourself no rest until, if possible, you should feel yourself safe. (3) It is possible to come to a decision on this subject; and if possible, an affair of so much importance should not remain undecided. (4) The things about which a man is to decide are few in number, and may easily be determined. In our text, it was a simple choice which was to be made. There were but two objects before the mind, and the call was to determine which of them was to be acknowledged as God. So it is still. (5) This state of mind must be one that is infinitely displeasing to God. (6) You will never be in circumstances more favourable for a decision than the present. (7) I add but one other consideration. The present is the only time which you may have to decide this point. To-morrow may find you in another world. To-morrow God may have decided the question for ever. (*D. Barnes, D.D.*) *A call to decision:* — I. WHAT ARE WE TO UNDERSTAND BY HALTING BETWEEN TWO OPINIONS? Literally, how long hop ye about on two boughs? This is a metaphor taken from birds hopping about from bough to bough, not knowing on which to settle—balanced between opposing claims. To halt is to stop, to hesitate between opposite interests. Paul was balanced between a life of usefulness on earth and a life of enjoyment in heaven. The people, in the days of Elijah, were balanced between the worship of an idol and the worship of the God of heaven. Multitudes in our day are balanced between heaven and hell; two contrary influences acting upon them, as though God and heaven and holy beings were pulling one way, and the fiends of darkness and hell pulling the other, and they halt between the two claims. II. WHAT ARE THE CAUSES OF THIS HALTING? 1. The influence of the Spirit of God on the mind. This may seem strange, but we think it will be evident to you. The Spirit of God is not directly, but indirectly, the cause. He produces such effects on the head and heart, by the doctrines of the Bible, that the sinner is made to see his position, to see the awful future, to see the consequences of moving on in that direction, to see hell at the end of the path. He halts, stops to ponder whether to go backward or forward. Man is a free agent. "What is that?" says one. I answer, a power to choose or reject. There is a consciousness within you that you possess this power, and all the reasoning in the world cannot make a thing more clear to you than consciousness. 2. Secondly, heart weights. Many of you know something about these heart weights. You have had considerable experience in these matters. You have many a time been troubled by abstractions of mind, vacancy of thought, secret uneasiness. Sometimes that unbidden tear has stolen down your cheeks, and you could scarcely tell why—some unaccountable alarm about the future—some undefined dread of some all-pervading spirit fixing a searching gaze upon you. 3. You are unwilling to pay the price. (*J. Caughey.*) *Immediate decision:*—1. For different reasons, unconverted persons postpone deciding this question. They await a more convenient season—until after they get married, settled down, make money, grow old. I would not limit the mercy of God. 2. Reasons why the unconverted should make an immediate decision:—(1) You have the power to decide. Not independent of God. But aided by the power that God is ever ready to bestow, you can decide. (2) Decide, because in no other way can you be happy. (3) Decide, because your present example is injurious.

(4) Decide, because God has the first claim upon you. (5) Decide, because the time is short. I wish the unconverted to remember—1. That, if they neglect—neglect, that's all—this salvation, they have no Scriptural warrant whatever for believing that they will be saved. 2. That they have almost to force their way to perdition. 3. Remember, there is nothing that stands between the sinner and salvation but sin, and that comes from himself. (*Silas Henn.*) *The great alternative:*—I. THE GREAT ALTERNATIVE. II. DISTRACTION WITHIN THE KINGDOM. Within this spiritual realm are opposing forces which contend with one another, and there is deep unsettlement, a harassing and restless indecision. 1. Conscience insists that we ought to live unto Him from whom we came. 2. The heavenly voices and the best human voices summon us to consecrate our powers to duty and holy service. 3. Prudence, wisdom, exhorts us to seek God while He may be found (Isa. lv. 6). III. THE ONE WISE COURSE. Why halt and hesitate? 1. Indecision is (1) unmanly: we have our mental faculties that we may conclude and act. A man should know his mind and use his strength. It is (2) guilty: God has a right to require immediate obedience. Jesus Christ has a right to require acceptance and the service of a whole life. We have no right to keep Him waiting. (3) It is wasteful: for while we are halting and choosing life is passing; and with the passage of our life there are left behind us opportunities that are unemployed and that will not recur. Delay is death, in part if not indeed altogether; for (4) it is perilous in a very high degree. Duty seems less imperative and service less inviting the longer it is neglected. And (5) it is miserable. (*William Clarkson, B.A.*) *On the fence in religious matters:*—I. THE CONDITION OF THOSE WHO TRY TO SERVE THE WORLD AND CHRIST AT THE SAME TIME, BY COMPROMISING THE MATTER. II. THE CONDITION OF THOSE WHO HAVE GRACE IN THEIR HEART, BUT HAVE NOT DECIDED TO MAKE PROFESSION OF IT. III. THE INDECISION OF THOSE WHO DO NOT KNOW WHAT IS THE TIME TO ATTEND TO RELIGION. There are two clarion voices in that man's soul. The one says, "Now." The other says, "To-morrow." (*T. De Witt Talmage.*) *Indecision:*—Generally speaking, a strict consistency is maintained betwixt the character of a man and the object of his pursuit. His actions bear a conclusive testimony as to the nature of his individual purpose. There is a oneness of his whole being with the matter at issue. As his companion, you are left to no uncertain guess-work in determining the uppermost thing which engrosses his thoughts, concentrates his affections, quickens his desires, or invigorates his endeavours. The worldling is ever true to the worldling's creed; his god will not allow of any dereliction of duty, of any niggardness of service, of any neglects or deficiencies in the homage required. Let thus ambition be the ruling idol—and the devotedness of his powers proves the sincerity of his affiance. Let wealth be the ruling idol—and his "rising up early, and sitting up late, and eating the bread of carefulness," show how perfect is the agreement betwixt him and the influence which presides. I. FIRST, INDECISION IN ITS NATURE AND PREVALENCE. 1. In its nature. The mass of society does not consist of only two descriptions of persons—those who are eminently pious and those who are flagrantly wicked—but there is also an intermediate class, the victims of indecision; bespeaking that state of the mind and the heart which, instead of cleaving wholly to God, or yielding altogether to the world, alternates with both; an indecision which, as if passive to the influence of opposite claims, bends now to the one and now to the other, as accident or circumstances shall determine—now governed by the human, now by the Divine claims; an indecision that in seeking to couple the allegiance of two masters is a traitor to both—admitting, more or less, the force of Gospel statements, the powerful appeals of "the truth as it is in Jesus," while the occasion lasts, so that there is a sort of turning to Him, and being again open to the seductions of sensual objects, so that there is a turning to them; an equiponderant weight, having no settled place, but shifting to this side or that, as the case may be—the opponents pitching and pulling the man now hither and now thither, as if in contention for his whole captivity—the voice of the one saying "You are mine," and that of the other saying "You are mine," and the man is neither's. 2. The prevalence of indecision. By far the larger mass of all our congregations is composed of the undecided. Thousands say their prayers, who do not pray; thousands verbally assent to the truths of Christ, where there is nothing but the dead letter, where there is no spirit, no demonstration, no power. II. INDECISION IN ITS CAUSES. And these are multiform. 1. One is pride. This is ever lingering within us, checking the fulness of our reliance upon God. 2. Indecision,

again, arises from ignorance—ignorance of the relative value and comparative importance of things. 3. Indecision springs from our sloth. It is the reverse of the effort to maintain "a good confession." Decision in being "on the Lord's side," involves the necessity of great and painful self-denial. 4. Indecision proceeds from the love of the world. Whilst the heart is buried there, how can it be given to another? The affections cannot be placed upon two objects diametrically opposed to each other. 5. Indecision sometimes arises from the fear of man. It partakes of that moral cowardice which shrinks from the names that the malicious may invent to stigmatise, or the oppressions which the powerful may bear down upon an honest profession; though perhaps the fear of ridicule may tend more to prevent religious decision than the edicts of the sternest persecution. 6. Indecision has another cause in presumption. 7. Indecision has a cause in the neglect of prayer—of prayer for the assistance of that Holy Spirit, who being the "Guide into all truth," enables us to apprehend all the mysteries of godliness. III. INDECISION IN ITS CONSEQUENCES. And these are full of evil. 1. Indecision, in the first place, is an insult to the authority and the character of God. 2. Indecision works evil upon others. Every man, whether he thinks it or not, is surrounded by witnesses; and the world is sharp sighted in observing those flaws of inconsistency which bring so many professions of religion into contempt; where such as attend its ordinances, only leave them to exhibit the selfishness, the covetousness, and the earthly-mindedness of the natural man. 3. The undecided are the self-deceived. A hope is begotten which will never be realised; their day-dream of good, as a dream, cheats them with its images and all passes away in air. 4. The undecided, again, are criminal. "Whatsoever," it is said, "is not of faith is sin." 5. The undecided man is the unrecompensed man; self excluded from the privileges to be enjoyed within the Christian pale. "A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways; let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord." 6. The undecided man is the unsafe man. Hanging doubtfully, as betwixt two worlds, he has two worlds around him; he neither belongs to this world, nor to that kingdom which Christ said "is not of this world." 7. The undecided man is a condemned man. He being "neither hot nor cold," presents a state of Divine rejection. To die is to die under the ban of utter retribution. It is said that "the fearful and unbelieving shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone." (*T. J. Judkin, M.A.*) *Elijah's appeal to the undecided*:—I. FIRST, YOU WILL NOTE THAT THE PROPHET INSISTED UPON THE DISTINCTION WHICH EXISTED BETWEEN THE WORSHIP OF BAAL AND THE WORSHIP OF JEHOVAH. II. In the second place, THE PROPHET CALLS THESE WAVERERS TO AN ACCOUNT FOR THE AMOUNT OF TIME WHICH THEY HAD CONSUMED IN MAKING THEIR CHOICE. Some of them might have replied, "We have not yet had an opportunity of judging between God and Baal, we have not yet had time enough to make up our minds"; but the prophet puts away that objection, and he says, "How long halt ye between two opinions? How long? For three years and a half not a drop of rain has fallen at the command of Jehovah; is not that proof enough? Ye have been all this time, three years and a half, expecting till I should come, Jehovah's servant, and give you rain; and yet, though you yourselves are starving, your cattle dead, your fields parched, and your meadows covered with dust, like the very deserts, yet all this time of judgment, and trial, and affliction, has not been enough for you to make up your minds. How long, then," said he, "halt ye between two opinions?" III. BUT THE PROPHET CHARGES THESE PEOPLE WITH THE ABSURDITY OF THEIR POSITION. Some of them said, "What! prophet, may we not continue to halt between two opinions? We are not desperately irreligious, so we are better than the profane; certainly we are not thoroughly pious; but, at any rate, a little piety is better than none, and the mere profession of it keeps us decent, let us try both!" "Now," says the prophet, "how long halt ye?" or, if you like to read it so, "how long limp ye between two opinions?" (how long wriggle ye between two opinions? would be a good word if I might employ it.) He represents them as like a man whose legs are entirely out of joint; he first goes on one side, and then on the other, and cannot go far either way. IV. THE ABSURDITY OF THIS HALTING. The multitude who had worshipped Jehovah and Baal, and who were now undecided, might reply, "But how do you know that we do not believe that Jehovah is God? How do you know we are not decided in opinion?" The prophet meets this objection by saying, "I know you are not decided in opinion, because you are not decided in practice. If God be God, follow Him; if Baal, follow him. V. And now the prophet

cries, "If the Lord be God, follow Him; if Baal, then follow him," and in so doing HE STATES THE GROUND OF HIS PRACTICAL CLAIM. Let your conduct be consistent with your opinions. VI. Now I will put this question: "How LONG HALT YE?" I will tell them; ye will halt between two opinions, all of you who are undecided, until God shall answer by fire. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Decision of character*:—I. GIVES A STATEMENT OF OPPOSITE CLAIMS. There are many Baals in our land. What are they? Examine them. Hear their claims. We shall mention four: 1. Worldly gain. 2. Sensual pleasures. Nothing is more deceptive than the pleasures of the world; and the young have the greatest need to guard against indulging in them. 3. Vain speculation. In every age there have been those who have set up their own feeble reason in opposition to the word of God. We live in a day when knowledge is more extensively diffused, and there is in many, who once lived in ignorance, a thirst for information; and this tends to prepare the way for the increased progress and success of the Gospel. 4. Pharisaic pride. II. REQUIRES A SPIRIT OF FIXED DECISION. 1. It is important in its nature. 2. It is uncompromising in its demands. 3. It is satisfactory in its evidence. 4. It is beneficial in its results. 5. It is urgent in its claims. It is to be done without delay. (*Ebenezer Temple.*) *An undecided character*:—Against this impulse [to act and end suspense] we have the dread of the irrevocable, which often engenders a type of character incapable of prompt and vigorous resolve, except perhaps when surprised into sudden activity. These two opposing motives twine round whatever other motives may be present at the moment when decision is imminent, and tend to precipitate or retard it. The conflict of these motives so far as they alone affect the matter of decision is a conflict as to when it shall occur. One says "now," the other says "not yet." (*James, "Psychology."*) *The call for decision*:—I believe, for my part, that the most of the life of the bulk of men is lived without any adequate exercise of their own deliberate volition and determination. Sadly, too, many of us seem to think that Nansen's way of getting to the North Pole is the best way of getting through the world—to put ourselves into a current and let it carry us. We drift. We do not decide, or, if we do, we let deliberate choice be coerced by inclination, and let wishes put their claws into the scale, and drag it down. Or we allow our environment to settle a large part of our beliefs and of our practices. It must settle a great deal of both for all of us, and none of us can get rid of the pressure of the surrounding atmosphere, but we are meant to be hammers and not anvils; to mould circumstances, not to be battered and moulded by them; to exercise a deliberate choice, and not to be like dead fish in the river, who are carried by the stream, or like derelicts in the Atlantic that go floating about for years, and never reach any port at all, but are caught by the currents, and are slaves of every wind that blows. (*Alexander Maclaren, D.D.*) *Half-purposes hindrances to conversion*:—Another hindrance of conversion is unresolvedness, and half-purposes; when men will hang wavering between God and the world, and though the light be never so clear to convince them, yet they will not be persuaded to resolve. . . . If you would be converted and saved, do not stand wavering, but resolve, and presently turn to God. If it were a doubtful business, I would not persuade you to do it rashly, or if there were any danger to your souls in resolving, then I would say no more. But when it is a case that should be beyond all dispute with men of reason, why should you stand staggering as if it were a doubtful case? What a horrible shame is it to be unresolved whether God or the world should have your hearts? Were it not a disgrace to that man's understanding that were unresolved whether gold or dung were better? Or whether a bed of thorns or a feather bed were the easier? Or whether the sun or a clod of earth were the more light and glorious? It is a far greater shame for a man to be unresolved whether it be God or the world that must make him happy, and that should have his heart, and whether a life of sin or holiness be the better. (*R. Baxter.*)

Ver. 24. **The God that answereth by fire, let him be God.**—"*The God that answereth by fire*":—Here are some lessons suited to all times, certainly not least to our time. The God that answereth by fire. I. THE RELIGION OF GOD MUST BRING THE PROOFS OF ITS DIVINE ORIGIN. Elijah stands as the very type and emblem of the religion of God; it is always in the world as a daring intruder; a stern reformer. Such a disturber of the peace must carry his credentials with him. Look at the very nature of this holy religion. It comes with a demand so lofty, so searching, and yet so humiliating. It tells the man in all the pride of his

intellect that he has no power to see the kingdom of God, until he is born again. 1. Christianity by her very triumphs gives the challenge of the world a greater force and urgency. There are two blessings which Christianity has brought to many lands and is surely bringing to all—liberty and light. The more perfectly men are brought into freedom the more naturally will they ask the ground of claims like these. Because light sets men thinking for themselves, is light therefore an evil? Do not let us talk as if it were in any degree possible. Thank God for light; it is the wise men who, when they find the young Child, shall lay at His feet the costly gifts of gold and myrrh and frankincense. It is the freest men who can render the most worthy because the most willing service. Christianity is lost when it takes to coercion. 2. Every age must have its own proof. The Church cannot inherit the evidences, she must create them. The prophet does not stand and tell the people of the wonders that God has wrought for their fathers in Egypt and the Red Sea. If the Gospel cannot do to-day what it did aforetime, it is a failure. What is it to tell me of Bethesda's ancient fame, if I come and expect no expectant crowd, and no sign of the angel, and no cripples healed, and none laughing in the gladness of new life? I conclude naturally enough that Bethesda is a failure. The only evidence of Christianity that can satisfy me is when it does as much for me as it has ever done for others. If the Church of God do live at all, she lives by the breath of the Almighty. If that inspire her she can do as great wonders as ever. II. THE APPOINTED PROOF. The religion of God has nothing but the fire to mark her off from the false religions of the world. 1. And of the two all the advantage is on the side of Baal. The royal patronage and the popular favour, the priests of Baal and the glittering attractions are with the false god. The priests of Baal had all the further conditions of success. Theirs is the passionate earnestness, the furious persistent prayer, the fierce self-denial, the agony of entreaty. 2. But now comes the time of the man of God. Then forth from the reddened sky there fell the fire of the Lord and consumed the burnt-sacrifice and the wood and the stones, and licked up the water that was in the trench. And when all the people saw it they fell on their faces, and they said, "The Lord, He is the God; the Lord, He is the God." This is ever the proof appointed by God, and this is always the proof accepted by men—the God that answereth by fire. (*M. G. Pearse.*) *Elijah's challenge*:—Moses challenged the necromancers of Egypt, Elijah challenged the priests of Baal, Christ challenges the world. At first the challenge was more strictly physical, now it is intensely spiritual. What religion produces the highest and finest type of character? That is the challenging question! Where, in Christian or in pagan lands, have we the finest men, the purest character, the most sensitive honour? Where are schools, hospitals, asylums, and charities of every kind most abundant? That Christian countries are disgraced by some of the foulest crimes possible in human life, may but show that their very foulness and atrocity never could have been so vividly seen and so cruelly felt but for the enlightenment and culture furnished by Christianity. In any other countries they would have been matters of course; in Christian lands their abomination is seen by the help of Christian light. To-day Christianity appeals not to a few sectarian prophets, or a few bewildered speculators, nor to a few scientists who are wild with boy-like joy because they have found a bird's nest, but have never seen the bird that built it; Christianity makes its appeal to the great, broad heart of human nature, to the common sufferings of the race, to the indestructible sentiments of mankind—to the people first and the prophets next, and calls upon the people in all their multitudinousness to force their mumbling prophets to bring the mumble that chokes their throat to distinct and calculable articulation, and to compare the noise of charlatanism with the music of Divine teaching. In Elijah's day the people said, "It is well spoken," and of Christ it is said, "The common people heard Him gladly." Full opportunity has been given to men to show the worth of their idolatries and superstitions. In this controversy the prophets of Baal had the first chance. Elijah stood back that they might do their best. False religions cannot complain that they have not had field enough.—"There was neither voice, nor any to answer, nor any that regarded" (ver. 29). It is precisely so with every false creed, every false science, every false prophet to-day. There is nothing to show! All effort ends in silence. Prodigious exertions finish in prodigious emptiness. Of every teacher, other than Christian, we ask: Where are the sinners whom you have released from the torment of remorse? Where are the mourners whose tears you have dried? Millions of men praise Christ. Sinners will stand up thick as armies, filling the valleys, thronging the hills, declaring that in Christ

they have found the joy of pardon. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *Altars and altar fires* :— I suppose that the altars built by Elijah and the prophets of Baal would be very much alike. To all outward seeming they were equally promising, and we should have been unable to surmise to which of them the fire would be sent. Anybody can build an altar; we need a God for the creation of a fire! 1. Any one can build an altar; it requires a God to provide the flame. Anybody can build a house; we need the Lord for the creation of a home. A house is an agglomeration of bricks and stones, with an assorted collection of manufactured goods; a home is the abiding-place of ardent affection, of fervent hope, of genial trust. There is many a homeless man who lives in a richly furnished house. There is many a fifteen-pound house in the crowded street which is an illuminated and beautiful home. The sumptuously furnished house may only be an exquisitely sculptured tomb; the scantily furnished house may be the very hearthstone of the eternal God. Now the Christian religion claims to be able to convert houses into homes, to supply the missing fire, and to bring an aspiring flame to the cold and chilling heap. Here, then, are two houses. In both of them there is no love, no joy, no peace, no rest. There is no flame of geniality and radiant hope. Let us bring the Christian religion into one of the houses, and do as you please with the other. In one house the tenants shall all kneel before King Jesus. They shall be one in common purpose, and they shall strive together with common mind and will. What will assuredly happen? With absolute certainty the house will become a home! That is a glorious commonplace in the history of the Christian faith. Where Christ has been enthroned, and every member of the family becomes a worshipper, there steals into the common life a warmth of affection which converts even trivial relationships into radiant kinships. God changes houses into homes; let Him be God! 2. Any one can proclaim a moral ideal; we need the Lord for the creation of moral enthusiasm. But the possession of a moral ideal does not necessarily transfigure the life. A man might draw up, for the guidance of his fellow-men, an exalted code, and yet he may be the most notorious scamp in the city. The erection of moral ideals is the building of an altar. Now we want the flame, the fire of a passionate, moral enthusiasm. Where shall we get the fire? We exalt our moral ideals in the minds of our children, but how shall we get them to love the right, and to fervently aspire after it? The Christian religion claims to answer the question. Here are two lives. In both of them there is knowledge of the moral ideal. In both of them the character is immoral. Let us bring the Christian religion to the one, and you shall do as you please with the other. "He will baptize with the Holy Ghost, and with fire." The issue of fellowship with the Christ is to be the inspiration, whose influence shall be felt like fire. Love becomes a factor in the life, and cold duty becomes a fervent delight. How will you deal with the other man? How will you bring to him the fire? I confess I know no answer. Apart from the Christ, there seems to be no way of bringing fire on to cold altars. 3. Any nation can make legal enactments against crime. We need the law to make men hate it. The only defence against crime is not a punitive law, but a passionate, spiritual recoil. If we would deliver men from sin, we must make them loathe it. Some way or other we must kindle a holy hatred in man, the fire of blazing indignation. There are many men who are kept from crime, who nevertheless do not dislike it. We must make men hate it. How shall we light the fire? Let us turn to the Christ. Let a man love the virtuous, and he will loathe the vicious. 4. Any municipality can coerce men into charity. We need the Lord for the creation of philanthropy. The Poor Law system may compel us into giving, but in the gift there may be nothing of the fervour of a passionate goodwill. How can we get cold charity converted into radiant philanthropy? Who will bring the fire to the frozen altar? There is an old man in the Christian Scriptures who speaks in this wise: "He loved me and gave Himself for me"; "we love, because He first loved us"; "the love of Christ constraineth me." Out of that love for the Master there spring all the beautiful ministries which seek the welfare of our fellow-men. Love for the Lord just blossoms into philanthropy. (*J. H. Jowett, M.A.*) *The fire of the Lord* :—The challenge of Carmel was a challenge of God's. The elect symbol of the God of Israel was fire, and Baal was the heathen God of fire. The prophets of Baal contended that Baal was God, and Elijah, the solitary prophet of the God of Israel, declared that Jehovah was the one and only true God. Such a question cannot be settled by words. The claim to Deity must be established in deeds that only God can do. It is not a matter of argument

but demonstration. The fire was God's sign of acceptance. Perhaps it was by this sign the two first brothers knew that Abel's offering was accepted and Cain's rejected. When Abraham prepared a sacrifice by which the covenant was to be sealed, he watched until the evening, and then the fire of God passed through the divided portions. At the dedication of the Tabernacle "there came fire from before the Lord, and consumed upon the altar the burnt offering and the fat. When the Temple was consecrated we read, "When Solomon had made an end of praying, the fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices." The altar fire was the sign of the Divine Presence. No human hand kindled it. No material fuel replenished it, and yet it burned continually, a visible assurance of Jehovah's presence with His people. In Elijah's day the fire had gone out. The glory of Israel had departed. No man could rekindle it. Neither could any other fire take its place. The carriers of strange fire in the holy place were consumed on the spot. None but God could relight the altar fire. Elijah inaugurated a new order, and this is the reason of his appearance with Moses in the Mount of Transfiguration. By him God relit the sacred fire. Then! When was that? What had made possible that momentous moment? Is it possible to discover the conditions which bring the fire of the Lord? Nothing is lawless. The "then" is indicative of more than time. It marks the moment when the conditions of Divine demonstration were fulfilled. 1. The fire of the Lord came when the cause of Jehovah had reached its lowest point. "Ahab had provoked the Lord God of Israel more than all that were before him." He was the kind of man still much applauded. He established great cities, gathered great wealth, and built a great palace. 2. The fire of the Lord came after the altar had been restored. The fire follows the altar. In itself the altar is nothing. It was built of unhewn stones, unchiselled and unshaped, but it was the place of sacrifice, the centre of fellowship, and the sign of the covenant. When the altar is neglected the fire goes out. Man's work is to repair the altar and provide the offering; God lights the fire. 3. The fire of the Lord came in response to faith and prayer. The faith of Elijah was sublimely heroic. What confidence he had! He could mock their frenzy because he was sure of his triumph. Faith never screams. In quietness and assurance it knows how to wait. How he laughed at difficulties! They might flood the altar and the sacrifice with their cold water till it seemed as if nothing could burn; he knew in whom he had believed. He had faith in God. (*S. Chadwick.*) *The fire of the Lord*:—The great need of the Church in the present day is "the fire of the Lord," the power of the Holy Ghost. We shall do more good in an hour of Pentecostal baptism than in ten years of Church reform, theological strife, doctrinal discussion. God has promised the fire: "I will pour out My Spirit upon all flesh." "Ye shall receive power." Promises never cancelled; Spirit given and never recalled. We need the fire, for the same reason as Elijah, combating error and sin. If we have physical or mental work to do we require physical or mental strength and vigour; spiritual work requires spiritual power. I. WE MUST "ERECT OUR ALTAR" and make the sacrifice before we can have the fire. The sacrifice must be (1) complete, (2) perpetual. All on the altar; all kept there. II. THE SACRIFICE WILL BE ACCEPTED; God will "answer by fire." Consecration is giving ourselves to God to be sanctified, cleansed, and filled with the Spirit. "The altar sanctifies the gift." III. THE EFFECTS OF FIRE ARE THESE. 1. It refines. The Holy Spirit will remove unholiness (Ezek. xxxvi. 25–27). 2. It illuminates. Light is the source of (1) joy and safety. The Holy Ghost, shining in the heart, scatters darkness and gives security. The light of reason is insufficient; it is like the light of the moon, fair, beautiful, but deceptive, unreliable. (2) Activity. When the sun shines upon us we wake to energy and usefulness; baptized with the Holy Ghost we are "zealous of good works." 3. It warms. Light and heat do not necessarily go together, but fire and heat do. If the sun gave light but no heat, the world would be a vast, icy, lifeless mass, nothing but brilliantly-illuminated death. Warmth is necessary to vitality: spiritual life depends upon spiritual heat, which dispels spiritual coldness. 4. It assimilates, transforms, spreads. Fire means power. Fire spreads: when filled with the Spirit our influence will spread, for fire cannot be confined in a narrow little circle when surrounded with inflammable material. Shall we erect our altar to receive the fire? (*Charles Cross.*) *Fire from heaven*:—The ordeal proposed was peculiarly appropriate. Jehovah had often in old times answered by fire. Fire from heaven fell upon the cities of the plain. To Moses too God appeared as a fire that burned, but did not consume. And if Baal was

what his prophets declared him to be, what more reasonable than that he, too, should answer by fire? For he was supposed to be the god of Nature; the fruitfulness of the land was accredited to his bounty, and the thunder and lightning were frequently pointed to as evidences of his power. It was a sad but most suggestive sight. Their numbers were large—four hundred and fifty as against the solitary prophet of Jehovah. Truth does not always rest with majorities. Yea, the real majority is where God is. Then their social influence was great. They held high positions in the Court and throughout the kingdom. Then those men were in earnest. It is the inevitable result in the case of all who come by some other way pleading some other name. Men say, "Earnestness is everything; it matters not what views you hold, so long as you are in earnest." Of what avail, however, is the earnestness of the drowning man who clutches at what he believes to be a solid spar, but is only drifting seaweed? Natural religion, evolved out of the spirit and temper of the age, will always command a large following of thoughtful people, apparently sincere and earnest, and, thanks to the Christian environment of these days, far superior to the worshippers of Baal in morality and uprightness; but in time of need, when death is near, or the heart is breaking beneath some crushing sorrow, the result will be the same, "No voice, nor any to answer." It is not so, however, with those who seek the living God. The testimony of every true believer is this: "It is good for me to draw near to God." But we must draw near in the appointed way. See how careful Elijah was in preparing his sacrifice. He began by repairing the altar that was broken down, building it up with "twelve stones, according to the number of the tribes of Israel." The Established Churchman and the "Free" Churchman must alike build the altar of twelve stones if they really desire fire from heaven. There must be no despising any of whatever church or society who have the Spirit of Christ. The sacrifice was so saturated with water that only fire from heaven could ignite it. Amanda Smith said, some years ago, "When God Almighty does a miracle, He likes to do it handsome." Elijah evidently felt the same. What a lesson, too, for the Church of the constant need of cleansing through the word, and of that separation from an ungodly generation which obedience to God's Word invariably causes. If the water and the trench are lacking in our sacrifice, what wonder if there is no fire from heaven? And when Elijah's faith thus challenged the ear of heaven, there came at once the answer of the Living God. "The fire of the Lord fell." It was a supernatural flame. It came direct from heaven. And so comes the Holy Ghost, the Comforter, into our hearts with a supernatural illumination and Divine enkindling. It came to consume the sacrifice; and to-day the fire of God will consume all that is carnal and evil within us, and cleanse and inspire all that is good and true. It wrought conviction of a kind in the minds of the people. (*F. S. Webster, M.A.*) *The God that answers by fire*:—The utterance of these words marked a great occasion. No criticism of details can annul the essential greatness of the hour when men seek, in the measure of their light, to know and acknowledge God. It is a fateful hour for the seekers themselves, and has, besides, important bearings upon the spiritual progress of the race. The form of the quest in one generation may appear crude to the critics of a later period, but they are poor readers of history who lay very much stress on form. The true student of life will always hasten to discover the soul that lives beneath the form, and to learn the permanent and essential significance of the event. A crude and rudimentary form may enshrine a sublime spirit, while a developed form may possibly enclose no spirit to speak of. It is easy to look down from the embellished eminence of modern knowledge upon the setting up of a fire test on Mount Carmel, for the discernment of the true God. We have advanced beyond the form of this appeal, and have been taught a more excellent way. But a careful study of the inward spirit and meaning of this ancient test may possibly take some of the conceit out of us, and lead us to pray for a double portion of the spirit of the old prophet, in order that we may more worthily animate our superior forms with prophetic power. Beneath the contests with the priests of Baal lay the perennial problem of the human heart. How can God be known? By what means can His presence be recognised in the world? In this great scroll of creation, in which a steady procession of laws and forces are registering their achievements, how shall we recognise the special and personal entry of the Divine Hand? the direct and holy signature of God? The test on Mount Carmel was not arbitrary. The appeal to fire went to the very centre and mystery of material forces. It was the subtlest point to which the material test could be carried. This element of fire was a

profound mystery which seemed to pass inwards and impinge upon the very soul of existence. The test recognised that God held His court in the inner recesses of being and in the temple of uncomprehended mystery. The form was material, though very subtly so, but the underlying conception was spiritual. In the New Testament the form itself is spiritualised, and the true meaning of the ideal of Carmel is conveyed in the words, "He shall baptize you in the Holy Ghost and in fire." I. THE CHALLENGE OF THE TEXT REMINDS US OF THE SUBTLENESS OF GOD'S SELF-MANIFESTATION. The manifestation of the true God must be sought, not in gross, but in the subtlest forms. He is the God that answers by fire. Sift the world of perception and knowledge down to its most ethereal elements, pass through the crude outer crust of things into the inward heart of life, penetrate beneath the surface of existence until you reach its centre of fire, and you will stand where God reveals Himself to the spirits that worship Him. The material perceptions which bulk and obtrude upon our life are but the "outskirts of His ways." The pure manifestation of His presence is in the ethereal and inward energy of fire. The spirit that informed this grand ordeal on Carmel is as evident as it was just. It is an infirmity of the flesh to desire the manifestation of God in crude and obtrusive forms. The spirit and disposition of unbelieving scepticism is specially prone to this egregious infirmity. With the confidence born of fatuous miscomprehension, the sceptic issues the challenge—"If there is a God, why does He not show Himself?" This infirmity finds its unwisest expression in the seats of scepticism, but Christian people also need to be on their guard against it. The pure idea of the self-revealing God is attained only by the inward purification of the soul from the bias of sense. I do not seek to interdict the prayer of faith for material things, or for a moment question the personal intervention of the redeeming God in the material domain. I hold, on the contrary, that such unmistakable intervention is not only recorded in the pages of the sacred Word, but also in the experience of God's saints in all generations. But such intervention is not primary, but secondary; the corollary of the kingdom of love. Let us approach God worthily. He is too great to be for ever crudely advertising His presence on the common hoardings of sense. II. WE ARE LED BY AN OBVIOUS STEP TO RECOGNISE THE NATURALNESS OF GOD'S SELF-MANIFESTATION. His kingdom is not the contradiction of nature, but the glorification of it. His secret glories pour themselves through the channels of being, and diffuse themselves through all the avenues of natural law. In the main He fulfils His glory through the common orbits and courses of created things, charging every shining point of creation with gleams of His spiritual glory. The stars fight for Him without leaving, or halting in, their courses. The heavens declare His glory, and the firmament showeth His handiwork. His lightnings fly very swiftly. His way is in the sea, and His path in the deep waters. He crams the earth with His invisible fires, and kindles in every bush the flame of His presence. In creation and in the history of man He works out His holy purpose by ordered and consistent laws, by gloriously natural processes. "Through the ages one increasing purpose runs." The natural and the spiritual coalesced on Mount Carmel into wedded unity, so that you cannot say where the one ends and the other begins. Miracles are simply natural law written in capital letters. They serve to introduce new epochs, just as capitals are used to announce a new chapter. Let us look reverently for God in the beaten paths of universal law and life, for it is there He will reveal Himself. He will not go back upon the glorious order which He Himself has created and ordained. Learn the essence of the flame that leaps along the lightning's track and the essence of the victorious power which is impelling the human race onward and upward; for they are both one. They are the potency of the God that answers by fire. III. Our thought naturally expands further into THE UNLIMITED FREEDOM OF GOD'S SELF-MANIFESTATION. Who will clip the wings of flame, or make curbs for the secret energies of fire? Who will pluck the ambushed lightnings out of their secret lairs, imprison them one and all behind impassable barriers, and say to the incarcerated legions, "Thus far shall ye go, and no farther"? A planet is fixed in its appointed orbit, and the wandering star is drawn back from its wanderings by invisible chains; but fire has the freedom of the universe, and pours its mysterious force from the centre to the circumference of all created existence. The God that answers by fire is a God whose self-manifesting energy is unlimited and free. Human history illustrates and demonstrates the absolute freedom of God's revelation of Himself to men. In history, as Emerson has well shown, every man is introduced into a universal atmosphere. Here we touch and perceive, and appropriate that which is common

to all humankind. Every man is elected a freeman in the imperial city of history. It knows no class distinctions, no party privileges. What, then, do we find when we come to search in history for the revelation of God to men? What limitations do we discover in the descent of the Divine fire into the lives of men? Has God limited His goings to artificial grooves, and to barriered avenues? Nay, His fires have been kindled on every headland. His Spirit has whispered its flaming secret of truth and love and hope to every nation under the sun. We can see His goings in the history of all nations, and trace the progress of His redeeming work in all generations. He has kindled His holy fires in the hearts of men as far as He has sent His sunlight to bless the face of the earth. Once, indeed, an attempt was made, through lack of knowledge, to make a single nation the one channel of Divine grace, but the barriers were thrown down with a crash which still vibrates in the words, "Is God the God of the Jews only? Nay, but of the Gentiles also." We refer with sorrow, not untinged with indignation, to those who in the present day would audaciously circumscribe the communication of the grace of God, and limit the freedom of the heavenly fire. (*J. Thomas, M.A.*)

Ver. 30. **He repaired the altar of the Lord that was broken down.**—I. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF BROKEN ALTARS. That is a simple line from an old chronicle, but it is the present root of many a pathetic human tragedy. It sets out in terms of quite harmless simplicity an apparently incidental fact; really it unveils the spring of the nation's calamity, and reveals the source of her uttermost disaster. Famine is everywhere. What is the root of this menacing peril, what the cause of this desolating misfortune? The whole answer lies in the broken altar. That little heap of indistinguishable rubbish, those few overturned stones, that desolated shrine—these are the central fact, the key to the situation, the pivot upon which the whole thing turns. The nation has been recreant to the sovereign sanctities, it has outraged life's august supremacies, and at last the inexorable retribution has come, slow but sure-footed Nemesis has overtaken the people; and their pride has been overthrown, their security stripped away, and calamity overwhelmed them. Life is crammed with rich and fruitful symbols. And those few stones, lying in unregarded confusion, are the symbol of a forgotten God. They seem so unimportant, but they are the pathetic mementoes of dead worships, forgotten loyalties, quenched visions, faded raptures, and lifeless loves. That is life's most arrestive pathos, to have known God and to have been intimate with the Eternal, and to have seen the vision splendid fade into the light of common day, and the divinity of heaven degraded into a powerless commonplace. And that soon runs out into every part of our complex lives and touches each least thing with its paralysing and degrading hand. These two things are inexorably fastened together—the famine in the land is the certain consequence of spiritual disloyalty and recreancy. When the soul becomes materialised, its visions are quenched, its raptures die, disintegration inevitably sets in, the descent is begun, which, unless it is arrested, can have but one, and that no uncertain end. Life loses its high incentives, the breath of its most spacious inspirations perishes, the spell of its holiest attractions is broken, bit by bit the glory vanishes from the sky, and quenched stars presage the uttermost dark. And this is no capricious law, which once—but once only—worked itself out to its awful issue, and smote them that disregarded the sanctities with the desolation of devastating famine. This is one of those eternal laws of God's wise government of the world, whereby every outraged piety vindicates its awful holiness and supremacy, and a certain Nemesis is securely fastened to every act of wrong-doing. Spiritual disloyalties degrade physical conditions, and sins of the heart work out their awful issue in plain facts which none can dispute. The punishment may vary, famine or some other scourge of God, but it is never uncertain. And we to-day may be sure that every broken altar in our individual life is mysteriously, but certainly, working to its inevitable close. II. REPAIRING THE ALTAR OF THE LORD. He is the real helper and healer of the people, who can put his finger upon the root of their sorrow, who discovers the cause of their calamity and defeat. It is little good to peddle about the circumference, to remedy this evil, to heal this wound, to satisfy this hunger—all these are but varied forms of a sovereign defect, to find and to heal which is the supreme necessity. Things must be seen in their proper perspective, and dealt with in their imperative sequence, before good can be established and welfare made secure. Some might have said to the prophet, "Why trouble about the altar now? Submit the final issue, decide the great question, then build the altar to the certain God!" But

with a sure instinct he touched the secret of the nation's sorrows—that tiny heap of broken stones is the root of all its disasters. The reconstruction of life must begin at the point of its incipient overthrow. However tired the feet may be, and however painful the journey, men must retrace their steps along the sad way of their disobedience, until they stand at the point of their departure from the precepts of the Lord. They must confront the past with wide-open eyes, see every bit of its disloyalty and tragic failure; the erring of heart as well as of feet; its revolt against high heaven and dissonance with the spirit of goodness. Every bit of stable reconstruction either in personal or national life must go back and begin at the point of departure, it must build on the old foundation when every uncertain stone has been removed; so, and so only, can it hope to be secure. And this old story has a pathetic relevancy to the life of many of us to-day. There was a time when our days were "bound each to each by natural piety." But bit by bit it has all been changed. The circumstances of life have taken on an added pomp, but a glory has faded out of our days, and we sit listening to strains of distant and ever fainter music, and watch the passing of receding angels. Bit by bit the vision faded, the revelation was withdrawn, the glory vanished, the simplicity departed, the pledge was broken, the purity was despoiled, the integrity disintegrated, and with them the radiant angels of joy and peace have withdrawn. That is the degradation that comes of neglect. No rough hands of ours tore stone from stone and piled the shrine with ruins, day by day we swept away its crumbled fragments, until at last it was gone we knew not how. But oh, "the difference to me"! To-day the ruin is not absolute, the Presence has not wholly gone. But there is only one way. The soul's intimacy with Heaven must be re-established. (*G. Beesley Austin.*) *The destruction and restoration of the altar*:—The altar, the sacred possession of all the twelve stones which Elijah rebuilt to represent the whole of Israel. Broken down and deserted. Apply to practical desertion of worship. I. WHEN WORLDLINESS OR ANY OTHER SIN ABSORBS THE SOUL AND PRAYER IS ABANDONED. Scepticism as to reality and answer to prayer allows the fires to go out and the altar to go to decay. When even preaching usurps the place of worship, so monopolising time and attention that worship is reduced to a minimum. II. RESTORATION—EFFECTED BY CALLING TO REPENTANCE, AND VINDICATION OF THE HONOUR OF GOD. Fire must come from heaven to rekindle, and special descent of the Holy Spirit of prayer and supplication will be the answer to diligent seeking. III. RESTORATION OF THE FAMILY ALTAR A SPECIAL DEMAND OF OUR TIME. General decay thereof. Sad results. Blessed effects of restoring. (*Homiletic Review.*) *The altar a necessity*:—An eminent worldling wrote to a learned professor a letter in which he said: "It has been proved in the Colonies that rapid social deterioration follows upon local inability to go to church. If the settlers' 'grant' be so remote that churchgoing becomes an impossibility he gradually ceases to miss it, abandons the weekly burnishing and outside decorum, and the rest rapidly follows." Oliver Wendell Holmes—far from an Evangelical—but a man of keen insight into the human heart says, "I have in the corner of my heart a plant called reverence, which I find needs watering at least once a week." (*H. O. Mackey.*)

Ver. 36. **Elijah the prophet came near, and said, Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel.**—*Elijah's creed*:—Let us consider the creed of this "loftiest, sternest spirit of the true faith," as Dean Stanley called him. We may glean its articles from that prayer made under circumstances which would have tried the soul even of a sterner man than he. Three things may be read in this prayer: 1. A formula—"Jehovah, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Israel." 2. A personal relation between God and the prophet—"Let it be known this day that I am Thy servant." 3. The fulfilment of a Divine purpose through the deeds of the man—"And that I have done all these things at Thy word." Taking the prayer itself as a creed, we see embodied in it the formal, the personal, and the practical elements. Notice, first, that the prophet used a formula to express the foundation of his belief. He may have done it unconsciously, full of the idea for which it had stood now six hundred years. Had he not read it in the Law, heard it from the lips of priest and rabbi, and himself used it times without number? No one supposes that the prophet used the formula lightly or ignorantly. In this we might set him in contrast with ourselves. But no creed is complete which does not involve a personal relation between him who utters it and God. So, in this prayer, the relation between God as Lord and Elijah as prophet is clearly

drawn. God was invoked to prove this very thing. As a servant, Elijah had taken his life in his hand long before. A man tells you he believes in God. Ask him what essential change of character would be produced by his parting with his belief. His servantship had already been proved by his implicit obedience to every command of God. Now he hid by the brook Cherith, and now tarried at Zarephath. A further element of faith involved in this formal supplication is that of co-operative work. In and through His servant God is fulfilling His purposes; "Let it be known that I have done all these things at Thy word." We are not, of course, to make the Lord responsible for everything a good man does. "A perfect trust" does not shield the human agent from the just charge of misdemeanours. Every servant of God does the will of God. He starts or sustains a tendency, works destruction here, rescues life there, goes to the wilderness, returns to the town, is silent now, again thunders forth, as the Spirit wills, to bring to pass the true conception of God working in the world, without ceasing, to establish and maintain righteousness. So the war goes on, and will go on until the whole earth bows down before Him. Now, all this is made extremely simple in the prayer of the prophet: "God is. God has a servant in me. God through me works His will." Let all men believe this, let their belief take hold of their life as it took hold of Elijah's, so that not to believe is death, and a new earth is in process, and the universal reign of Jehovah is visibly begun. What have we more than had Elijah? 1. We have a new insight of the personality of God. Did not Elijah believe in God as a Person? We must insist that he did. But our vision is clearer. He felt the power of the Person in the "still, small voice." That was his gospel. We know it in the conquering soul of the Christ. We behold the glory of the Divine Personality, and through Him know ourselves as individual members of the Divine household. 2. Again, we realise a new order of mercy. Once there was the relentless call for sacrifice. Elijah was an avenger. He could slay hundreds in one act. It would have been impossible for him to conceive of avenging justice turned into mercy. We, on the other hand, hear a voice pleading for infinitely worse offenders, "Father, forgive them." The Divine expiation is sufficient to cover every sinner. It is ours to make the word of deliverance ring around the world, "Come unto Me," and be free from condemnation. 3. Once more, the duty of every man is now more clear than it could have been in Elijah's day. Can any one, it may be asked, understand his duty more perfectly than did the prophet? Still, duty with us takes on the nature of universality and of privilege. (*C. R. Seymour.*) **Let it be known that I have done all these things at Thy word.**—*Elijah's plea:*—I. A FIRM GROUND FOR PRAYER. 1. You are a minister of God, or a worker in the cause of Christ, and you go forth and preach the Gospel with many tears and prayers, and you continue to use all means, such as Christ has ordained: do you say to yourself, "May I expect to have fruit of all this?" Of course you may. You are not sent on a frivolous errand: you are not bidden to sow dead seed that will never spring up. But when that anxiety weighs heavily upon your heart, go you to the mercy-seat with this as one of your arguments, "Lord, I have done according to Thy word." 2. Next. I would apply this teaching to a whole church. I am afraid many churches of Christ are not prospering. The congregations are thin, the church is diminishing, the prayer-meeting scantily attended, spiritual life low. If I can conceive of a church in such a condition which, nevertheless, can say to God, "We have done all these things at Thy word," I should expect to see that church soon revived in answer to prayer. The reason why some churches do not prosper is, because they have not done according to God's word. 3. The same principle may be applied also to any individual believers who are in trouble through having done right. 4. I would like to apply this principle to the seeking sinner. II. SELF-EXAMINATION AS TO WHETHER OR NOT YOU HAVE DONE ALL THESE THINGS AT GOD'S WORD. 1. Let every worker here who has not been successful answer this question—Have you done all these things at God's word? 2. Did you preach it rightly? That is to say, did you state it affectionately, earnestly, clearly, plainly? 3. And another question—Has there been an example to back your teaching? (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Whom to please:*—On a very cold night a gatekeeper at a railway depôt demanded that each passenger show his ticket. Several bitterly complained of the delay and inconvenience. "You are a very unpopular man to-night," said a spectator. "I only care to be popular with one man," he replied, "and that is the superintendent." In the same way Christians should take care that their actions are pleasing to God, and if they have to displease

man, they must remember that "we ought to obey God rather than men." *Obeying implicitly*:—"I have stood," said Mr. Scott, "on the deck of a ship while she was toiling up-stream, with wind and water against her, and I have gone up to the man at the wheel, and said, 'Jack, why don't you ease her off a point or two? You see how it would relieve her.' But the answer was, 'No, I can't luff; that is the point of the compass the captain gave me, and I must keep her to it.' 'But, man,' I remonstrated, 'if you keep her as she is, soon the bulwarks will be stove in, and there is every chance that under this fearful strain she may spring a leak.' 'That is none of my business; it is the captain's look out. All I have to do is to obey his orders,' was the man's answer. The captain, however, understood his business, and we arrived safe in harbour. Sometimes, if we do exactly as Christ commands, it appears as if our business would be ruined, our reputation lost—as if, indeed, we should be totally wrecked. That, however, is the captain's look out. All we have to do is to implicitly obey."

Ver. 39. **All the people . . . said, The Lord, He is the God.**—*Christianity acknowledged supreme*:—In the Introduction to his *Analogy of Religion*, Bishop Butler says: "It has come to pass—I know not how—that Christianity is discovered to be victorious." Why, that was nearly two hundred years ago! I wonder how many books have been written against the Bible since then, and handed up, one after the other, to the cobwebs of the upper shelves in the library, while the old Book still lies before us, saying with a conscious sense of superiority to all the other books—

"Books may come and books may go,
But I go on for ever."

A reformer's temporary successes:—"There was a time, towards the close of the fifteenth century, when the devoted monk and martyr, Savonarola, seemed to have set up the kingdom of Christ in his beloved city of Florence. How he remodelled the Republican government; how he tamed the mischievous boys of the city; how at his bidding the people kindled in the great Piazza, during the Carnival of 1496, the strange Bonfire of Vanities; how the watchword of Florence became, 'Viva Gesù Cristo, nostro Ré'—Long live Jesus Christ, our King: there are few histories like it. It was an Italian theocracy. It was a day of heaven on the earth. 'So much joy was there in all hearts,' one of the chroniclers tells us, 'that the glory of Paradise seemed to have descended to this lower world.' The pity is that the Golden Age of Florence was so transient and brief-lived." (*Sunday School Teacher.*)

Ver. 40. **Take the prophets of Baal; let not one of them escape.**—*The true narrowness*:—Elijah was intolerant—narrow, as some would call it. Dr. Cadman says that some things must be narrow in order to do their work. "You want a narrow edge on your razor. About the broadest thing in the world is the Desert of Sahara." No Christian should attempt a compromise between wrong and right.

Vers. 41–46. **And Elijah said unto Ahab.**—*The conquest of faith*:—This passage:—I. INDICATES THE BENT OF A GOOD MAN'S MIND. Both Ahab and Elijah "went up," but how different their purposes. One "went up" to eat and drink, the other "went up" to pray. One event may produce various impressions on different minds. These different impressions indicate the true character of men. The mind of the ungodly man is bent upon pleasure, the mind of the godly man on prayer. We may learn three things respecting a good man from this event. 1. The good man possesses an earnest spirit. Elijah needed rest. 2. The good man possesses a humble spirit. The victory Elijah had achieved produced an amazing influence on the minds of the spectators. 3. The good man possesses a devout spirit. He retired to pray. "He cast himself upon the earth, and put his face between his knees." II. EXEMPLIFIES THE POWER OF A GOOD MAN'S FAITH. There are three things about Elijah's conduct that claim our attention. 1. His confidence. There were no indications of the approaching storm. The air was calm, and clear, and cloudless. Elijah had faith in God. He remembered Cherith, Zarephath, and Carmel. 2. His patience. Disappointed once, twice, even six times, he sends again. Elijah knew what God had promised He had power to perform. He waited. 3. His perseverance. Elijah had noted the rust-

ling among the trees, but this did not set aside the necessity of prayer. Elijah prayed, continued in prayer. Don't let us be discouraged in our approaches to God. III. RECORDS THE SUCCESS OF A GOOD MAN'S PRAYER. God had given one answer to prayer—fire had fallen from heaven and consumed the prepared sacrifice. Elijah prayed again. Continued mercies necessitate repeated supplication. To-day's prayer will not do for to-morrow's blessing. We know not the nature of Elijah's petition, but we see three advantages accruing therefrom. 1. There is a visible indication of God's purposes. "Behold there ariseth a little cloud out of the sea, like a man's hand." God's children have the earliest intimation of God's purposes. "Like a man's hand." Small beginnings—in literature, science, and religion—often have important and far-reaching results. 2. There is a special warning for the king's preparation. "Go, say unto Ahab." Elijah had predicted that rain should come "according to his word." 3. There is a direct answer to a particular request. Elijah prayed for rain. The blessing was sent "while" he sought it. It was a great rain. IV. REVEALS THE SOURCE OF A GOOD MAN'S STRENGTH. "And the hand of the Lord was on Elijah. Remember what Elijah had done! Think of his weariness and hunger, then picture him, outrunning for twenty miles the fleet steed of Ahab. From this superhuman event let us learn two things. 1. That God imparts strength to the good man for the performance of the most arduous duties. "The hand of the Lord was on Elijah." Man is a poor fragile thing, but God can gird him with infinite strength. God's influences touch the body, the mind, the heart. 2. The resources of infinite strength are within the reach of a good man. What God did for Elijah He can do for the Church—individuals. (*Preacher's Analyst.*) *The prayer of faith:*—On the eastern shore of the Mediterranean Sea and opposite the far-famed town of Acre, on the south side of a beautiful bay, there is a range of mountain-land rising to an elevation of from 1200 to 1500 feet. This range of hills stand out with marked distinctness and forms a very prominent object from the sea and from all the country round about. It is known by the name of Mount Carmel. The view from the summit is very imposing. The tableland on the summit extends inland for some eight or nine miles. It is a locality interesting not simply on its own account, but also from its varied scriptural associations. I. THE PROPHET'S PRAYER. He is bold enough before men, but humble indeed in the presence of God. 1. Look at his posture. He is on his knees with his head bowed downward, so that his forehead touches the ground. This was the attitude assumed in supplication on occasions of special urgency. Standing in prayer was not unusual in ordinary worship (Mark xi. 25; Luke xviii. 13). Attitude in prayer is of small moment in comparison with the spirit of devotion; yet as an outward indication of inward feeling is not altogether unimportant:—(1) Elijah's attitude was the sign of reverence and humility: reverence is conspicuous in the prayers of the most devout. (2) Listen to his petition. We hear not indeed the words, but we know the matter of his prayer. The land was desolate and the people ready to perish for lack of rain. Showers of blessing are wanting for the Church! Oh for the spirit of Elijah. II. THE PROPHET'S FAITH. 1. He expected the rain, although as yet there was no sign of its coming, and it had been withheld for more than three years. He says (ver. 41), "There is a sound of abundance of rain"; but this was as yet only in the word of God's promise. 2. He continued to expect although the fulfilment of the promise was long delayed. He said to his servant seven times:—"Go again." "Go again." It WILL come! God often tries faith and patience by delay. III. THE PROPHET'S SUCCESS. (*Homiletic Magazine.*) *The rain:*—I. THE OBJECT OF HIS FAITH. To procure rain for the parched land. This was the one object upon which his mind was fixed, and which he was stimulated to seek by the promise of God. II. THE MEANS BY WHICH HE SOUGHT THIS OBJECT. "He cast himself down," &c. The attitude of prayer. He might have been tempted to have left God to fulfil His own promise, but He did not. His faith was operative, and led him to pray earnestly for the object upon which it was fixed. True faith will always influence us to labour and to pray for its object. III. THE ENCOURAGEMENT HE RECEIVED. "A sound of abundance of rain." IV. THE DISCOURAGEMENT HE MET WITH. "The servant returned from looking toward the sea and said there is nothing." V. THE PERSEVERANCE HE MANIFESTED. "Go again seven times." VI. THE SUCCESS HE REALISED. "And it came to pass, in the meanwhile, that the heaven was black with clouds and wind, and there was a great rain." Perseverance is still rewarded by success, and by it God's servants still honour Him whom they serve. (*Thomas*

Carr.) *Rain at last* :—There are certain characteristics in Elijah's prayer which we must notice as we pass, because they should form part of all true prayer. I. IT WAS BASED ON THE PROMISE OF GOD. God's promises are given, not to restrain, but to incite to prayer. They show the direction in which we may ask, and the extent to which we may expect an answer. They are the mould into which we may pour our fervid spirits without fear. They are the signed cheque, made payable to order, which we must endorse and present for payment. Though the Bible be crowded with golden promises from board to board, yet will they be inoperative until we turn them into prayer. We are content to pray, though we are as ignorant of the philosophy of the *modus operandi* of prayer, as we are of any natural law. We find it no dreamy reverie or sweet sentimentality, but a practical living force. II. IT WAS DEFINITE. This is where so many prayers fail. They are shot like arrows into the air. They are like letters which require no answer, because they ask for nothing. They are like the firing by artillery in a mimic fight, when only gunpowder is employed. This is why they are so wanting in power and interest. III. IT WAS EARNEST. "Elijah prayed earnestly." This is the testimony of the Holy Spirit, through the Apostle James. It was the effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man, which availeth much. IV. ELIJAH'S PRAYER WAS HUMBLE. "He cast himself down on the ground, and put his face between his knees." We scarcely recognise him, he seems so to have lost his identity. Our only plea with God is the merit and blood of our great High Priest. It becomes us to be humble. V. IT WAS FULL OF EXPECTANT FAITH. "Whatsoever things ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them: and ye shall have them." Faith is the indispensable condition of all true prayer. It is the gift of the Holy Ghost. It thrives by exercise. It grows strong by feeding on the promises: the Word of God is its natural food. It beat strongly in Elijah's heart. VI. IT WAS VERY PERSEVERING. He said to his servant, "Go up now, look toward the sea." And he went up, and looked, and said, "There is nothing." How often have we sent the lad of eager desire to scan the horizon!—and how often has he returned with the answer, There is nothing! There is no tear of penitence in those hard eyes. There is no symptom of amendment in that wild life. There is no sign of deliverance in these sore perplexities. There is nothing. And because there is nothing when we have just begun to pray, we leave off praying. We leave the mountain brow. We do not know that God's answer is even then upon the way. Not so with Elijah. "And he said, Go again seven times." Not unfrequently our Father grants our prayer, and labels the answer for us; but He keeps it back, that we may be led on to a point of intensity, which shall bless our spirits for ever, and from which we shall never recede. VII. AND THE PRAYER WAS ABUNDANTLY ANSWERED. For weeks and months before, the sun had been gathering up from lake and river, from sea and ocean, the drops of mist, drawing them as clouds in coronets of glory around himself; and now the gale was bearing them rapidly towards the thirsty land of Israel. Presently the lad, from his tower of observation, beheld on the horizon a tiny cloud, no bigger than a man's hand, scudding across the sky. No more was needed to convince an Oriental that rain was near. It was, and is, the certain precursor of a sudden hurricane of wind and rain. "More things are wrought by prayer than this world wots of." Why should not we learn and practise his secret? It is certainly within the reach of us all. Then we too might bring from heaven spiritual blessings, which should make the parched places of the church and the world rejoice and blossom as the rose. (*F. B. Meyer, M.A.*) *Elijah an example of the true spirit of prayer* :—I. THE PLACE WHITHER ELIJAH WENT TO SEEK HIM. He ascended to the top of Carmel! Here was a privacy remote from every eye, and well calculated to bring his mind into near and dear communion with God, after the public and awful duties in which he had been engaged—duties equally affecting the honour of Jehovah and the welfare of His people. II. THE PRAYER OF ELIJAH SEEMS TO HAVE BEEN OFFERED UP IN DEEP HUMILITY. He cast himself upon the earth, and put his face between his knees. Lowliness is the very essence of prayer—for what is prayer, except the soul's confession of its unworthiness, its rebellion, its vileness, its helplessness, its merit of God's wrath, arising out of a broken law and a neglect of all the blessings that are centred in Jesus, and that have been offered to and pressed upon its acceptance? III. THE PRAYER OF ELIJAH IS BEAUTIFULLY DISTINGUISHED BY A SPIRIT OF DEEP AND SETTLED EARNESTNESS. We do not hear a word spoken, nothing that interrupts the soul's silent communion with

God. We know not that a tear was shed, we know not that a sigh was uttered; yet have we obviously the supplication of one who wrestled with God, under an almost overwhelming sense of the momentous nature of the petition which he asked at God's hand. IV. HE WRESTLED WITH GOD, AS "ONE WHO WOULD TAKE NO DENIAL." V. ELIJAH, THEN, EXHIBITED A FULL ASSURANCE OF FAITH THAT HIS PETITION WOULD BE GRANTED. VI. ELIJAH EXHIBITED A WAITING SPIRIT OF SUPPLICATION. VII. THE SUPPLICATION OF ELIJAH WAS DISTINGUISHED BY A WATCHFUL STATE OF MIND. VIII. THE PRAYER OF ELIJAH WAS THE PLEADING OF A SPIRIT CAPABLE OF DISCOVERING AN ANSWER WHICH COMMON OBSERVATION COULD NOT DETECT. IX. THE PRAYER OF ELIJAH WAS ONE WHICH SERVED TO STRENGTHEN HIM FOR DUTY. It did not suffice to send his servant, that Ahab might be warned, and proceed on his way. No, the prophet arose from his station and posture of lowliness on Mount Carmel, in joy and comfort, to do Jehovah's bidding, as Jehovah's prophet. "The hand of the Lord was upon Elijah, and he girded up his loins, and ran before Ahab, to the entrance of Jezreel." (*R. P. Buddicom, B.A.*) *Persevering prayer*:—"God's seasons are not at your beck. If the first stroke of the flint doth not bring forth the fire, you must strike again." That is to say, God will hear prayer, but He may not answer it at the time which we in our own minds have appointed; He will reveal Himself to our seeking hearts, but not just when and where we have settled in our own expectations. Hence the need of perseverance and importunity in supplication. In the days of flint and steel and brimstone matches we had to strike and strike again, dozens of times, before we could get a spark to live in the tinder; and we were thankful enough if we succeeded at last. Shall we not be as persevering and hopeful as to heavenly things? We have more certainty of success in this business than we had with our flint and steel, for we have God's promise at our back. Never let us despair. God's time for mercy will come; yea, it has come, if our time for believing has arrived. Ask in faith, nothing wavering; but never cease from petitioning because the king delays to reply. Strike the steel again. Make the sparks fly and have your tinder ready: you will get a light before long. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Prayers for fire and for water*:—The prayer for fire was answered at once; the prayer for water was not. By putting the two instances together we shall see how they explain one another, and what a striking argument for their common probability is established. Notice as the fundamental fact that the prayer for fire was answered instantaneously, and that the prayer for water was not answered until it had been offered seven times. 1. There was an urgency in the one case which there was not in the other. The king was waiting; so were the prophets; so were the people; it is an unprecedented crisis in the history of the nation. In the case of the rain, the prophet was alone; no immediate expectancy on the part of the public was to be answered. 2. We are not to live in the unusual and the exciting, but in the ordinary and regular. It was good for Elijah himself to be taught that he was only a suppliant, not the Lord. God has always been sparing of His exceptional manifestations. Christ was sparing in His miracles: He never did them merely for the sake of doing them. 3. No human imagination would have risked such a conjunction of immediateness and delay as is given in this chapter. Such a contrary act on the part of God is a simple impossibility to the imagination. It amounts to what is called, sometimes foolishly, a discrepancy or contradiction. Yet it is the very law of the mystery of our life! We live it, but dare not imagine it! Great honours are followed by great reverses to keep us sober. Out of this reasoning comes the high probability of the historical and literal truthfulness of the whole narrative. Literary completeness there is none. No attempt is made to satisfy the suggestions of fancy. All tricks of management, all skill in artistic disposal of incident is ignored, and truth is left to attest and vindicate its reality. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *The rustling and the rain*:—The solemn scenes Ahab had just witnessed would, we should think, have made the most flippant thoughtful and earnest; but Ahab is unmoved. "Get thee up, eat and drink," Elijah says to him. That is all he is fit for. He is quite ready for a good banquet; he would be out of his element at a prayer-meeting. In like manner there are some to-day who seem unmoved by any manifestations of Divine power. They pass out of church after listening to a most moving sermon, and merely complain of the length, or criticise the preacher's style. Human nature, even when totally unregenerate, often manifests some traits that are noble and genuine. It is seldom so outrageously carnal and callous as Ahab seemed on this occasion. We turn with relief to Elijah. "There is

a sound of abundance of rain," he had said to Ahab. Perhaps he heard it only with the ear of the spirit by faith. But why should not Elijah also eat and drink? He was exhausted with the labour and strain of the day. Why not be content, now that he has heard the soughing in the trees, and just eat and drink until the rain fall? Because the rustling was not the rain, it was only the precursor of the rain, and a call to prayer. How often we hinder blessing through lack of prayer. We hear the rustling and we take our ease. If we waited without prayer for the fulfilment of the promise, it would seem as if we thought we had a right to the blessing. Once we begin to take our mercies as a matter of course, there is no blessing with them to our souls. So we find two features specially prominent in this prayer of Elijah's—his utter self-abasement before God and his believing perseverance. But why does not the first prayer prevail? It is good that our faith should be tested and our desires proved. It is well, too, that we should be taught our dependence upon God. Perhaps if our prayers were always answered at once we should seem rulers and commanders in the things of God, and forget our subordinate and dependent position. We might even make an idol of prayer, as the Israelites did of the brazen serpent, and look upon our prayers as a charm or divining rod, giving us a legal claim upon the bounty of heaven. (*F. S. Webster, M.A.*) *The coming rain*:—I. THE CAUSE OF THE FAMINE. II. THE CAUSE OF THE RAIN. 1. Primary cause, God's mercy. He seems to catch beforehand the sound of its footsteps (LXX.). But as the punishment was not brought about without the prophet's intervention, so now the rain is to be hastened by his prayers. 2. What we may describe as the instrumental cause was Elijah's fervent supplications. It is the instance of the "effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availing much." "He prayed again, and the heaven gave rain" (Jas. v. 16–18). III. LESSONS. 1. We learn from this lesson that prayer is of avail with regard to outward things. 2. We see clearly that it must be the prayer of faith, and not of human caprice, which is offered. 3. The lesson also warns us that national sins bring down national chastisements. (*W. H. Hutchings, M.A.*)

Vers. 43, 44. **And said to his servant, Go up now, look toward the sea.**—*The servant of Elijah*:—I. THAT TO AIM UPWARDS IN OUR THOUGHTS AND ACTIONS IS THE BEST WAY TO OBTAIN RELIEF IN TIMES OF DANGER OR DIFFICULTY. Elijah went up to the topmost position of Mount Carmel, and he bade his servant go up still higher, to the very peak of the mountain, so as the better to observe the appearances of the sky far and wide. Are we in search of some good? Then let us raise our affections above the unsatisfying, the perishing, the earthly, to the beatific, the eternal, the heavenly; let us scale the heights of our celestial Carmel, and seek for the rain-cloud of promise, by the waters of which a well of water shall be made to spring up in our hearts unto eternal life. II. THAT WE SHOULD NOT PROCRASTINATE IN SPIRITUAL MATTERS. "Go up now," Elijah says to his servant, "Now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation." "What thou doest, do quickly." Indolence cannot win heavenly riches any more than worldly. "Procrastination is the thief of time." The sluggard loses all his to-days in thinking of his to-morrows. To-morrow, in fact, is the watchword of the lazy and the idle. III. THAT THE TRUE SPIRITUAL LIFE CONSISTS OF TWO PARTS, THE ACTIVE AND THE CONTEMPLATIVE. Elijah went up, after his strenuous exertion in his contests with the priests of Baal, to the top of the mountain, and there rested upon the ground with his face between his knees, that is, in prayer or Divine meditation. The servant, too, was to "go up." That necessitated active exertion, and then to "look" over the face of the heaven. That showed the desirability of contemplation. IV. THAT WE MUST NEVER DESPAIR. The servant of Elijah had to go up seven times ere he saw any sign of the coming of the wished-for rain. Let us not then be "weary in well-doing," let us not give way to disappointment if we succeed not at once in our efforts after higher things. To few persons in this life does success come immediately or at one trial. The spider—that, by its frequent efforts to cast its web between two distant points, taught perseverance to the royal Bruce—might also speak to us the lesson to persevere unto the end, to continue in well-doing, to show forth in heavenly things patience and perseverance. V. THAT IN SMALL THINGS, AS WELL AS IN GREAT, WE SHOULD LEARN TO TRACE GOD'S HAND. This little cloud, even at last, was no bigger than a man's hand; yet it was a messenger sent to fulfil God's decree. Many persons are willing enough to recognise God's agency in great events, in national revol-

tions, popular outbreaks, natural disturbances; but are not inclined to see the power of God in lesser matters, in individual trials, in the every-day phenomena of life. VI. THAT WE SHOULD REGARD TEMPORAL MATTERS IN THE LIGHT OF ETERNITY. This servant of Elijah was to look towards the sea. The sea has ever been taken as an emblem of eternity. It was a fitter emblem of eternity in the ancient world than it is in the modern, because the ancients knew little of its depth or its extent, whereas we have mapped out in a great degree both the one and the other. (*R. Young, M.A.*) *Expectant prayers*:—A beautiful little book, *Expectation Corners*, tells of a king who prepared a city for some of his poor subjects. Not far from them were large storehouses, where everything they could need was supplied if they but sent in their requests. But on one condition—they should be on the outlook for the answer, so that when the king's messengers came with the answer to their petitions, they should always be found waiting and ready to receive them. The sad story is told of one desponding one who never expected to get what he asked, because he was too unworthy. One day he was taken to the king's storehouses, and there, to his amazement, he saw, with his address on them, all the packages that had been made up for him, and sent. There was the garment of praise, and the oil of joy, and the eye-salve, and so much more; they had been to his door, but found it closed; he was not on the outlook. From that time on he learnt the lesson Micah would teach us: "I will look to the Lord; I will wait for the God of my salvation; my God will hear me." (*Andrew Murray.*) *Answers to prayer expected*:—There is no sense in always telegraphing to heaven for God to send a cargo of blessing, unless we are at the wharf to unload the vessel when it comes. (*J. Ellis.*) *The weather watcher*:—The Electric Light Company of one of London's districts has a weather watcher who sits all day on the roof in a small glass house. It is his business to keep his eyes open to every sign of change, especially the gathering of clouds causing darkness, as in that case a sudden demand is made for electric lighting all over the district, and this requires a greatly intensified power in the huge generators below. As soon as he sees a great dark cloud travelling Londonwards, he telephones to the engine-room below that additional power will soon be needed, and by the time required it has been generated. Would that God's people everywhere were watchmen who, when they saw the clouds gathering over the church and the world, would turn that into a plea for power—power from God. (*H. O. Mackey.*)

CHAPTER XIX.

VERS. 3–18. He arose and went for his life.—*The flight into the wilderness*:—This is a sad sequel to the triumph on Mount Carmel. Elijah had forgotten Jezebel. Not present herself on Mount Carmel, she had received with sceptical scorn the reports which had reached her. The fire from heaven she looked upon as a mere conjurer's trick. The rain following the prophet's prayer was a mere coincidence, and, like all others who speak so glibly of coincidences, she never asked what power had made the two events coincide. So she felt utter contempt for the cowards who had stood by while her prophets were butchered by a madman. In a passionate fury she declared that she was no turncoat to forsake the gods of her fathers at the bidding of a wild Bedouin. If no one else had the courage to withstand Elijah, she would do it herself. So the letter was sent which made the prophet flee. Are we not all in danger of repeating Elijah's mistake, and forgetting our chief adversary? We reckon with the opposing forces that we can see, but we forget the unseen array of principalities and powers whose hostility is implacable, who with deadly craft and subtlety wait for our unguarded hours. Elijah, too, had taken his eyes off God. "When he saw that, he arose, and went for his life." It is impossible for us to justify his flight. He acted in a panic. There was no waiting for Divine guidance. Oh, the sad pity of it! A moment's reflection would have changed the whole aspect of affairs. "Fear not, only believe." Jezebel may rage, but Jehovah lives. One such word—a child might have spoken it—and the prophet's faith would have leaped up, his old courage would have returned; and instead of fleeing from Jezreel, he might have driven Jezebel out of the kingdom. But why were his eyes off God?

I think because, though to a certain extent unconsciously, his eyes were upon himself. "It is enough: now, O Lord, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers." Had he thought that he was? Had he been uplifted at the success God had given him? Had he thought that the shouts of the people would end the conflict? We must not judge him unkindly. God's first care was to give him rest and sleep. Overwrought nerves, a tired brain, and physical exhaustion, had much to do with the prophet's fall. The meeting with Ahab; the preparation for the contest; the strain of the conflict itself, with its tremendous output of faith and prayer; the excitement of the grim work of judgment; the fatigue of the long, quick run to Jezreel—had left the prophet in a state of physical tension, which nothing but calm, trustful confidence in God could have endured. Much of the low spirits and unbelief among Christians to-day is the result of rush and overstrain. And after this Elijah was not left without a congenial friend and companion. Elisha was called from the plough to follow him and to minister unto him; for it is not good for man to be alone. Solitude, while a real means of grace, may easily become a means of sore temptation. Just as Queen Eleanor was said to suck the poison from her husband's wounds (thus saving his life), so the sympathy and love of wife or sister or brothers in arms are most effective in removing the sting and virus from life's sorrows and temptations. If Elijah had had Elisha at his right hand, he would not surely have forgotten God. Let us value our Christian fellowship. (*F. S. Webster, M.A.*) *The flight to the wilderness*:—1. We may well learn, from this sad crisis in Elijah's history, the lesson of our own weakness, and our dependence on God's grace. In the Divine life, often the most dangerous and perilous time for the believer, is after a season of great enlargement; when he is saying to himself, "My mountain standeth strong." The spiritual armour is loosely worn;—he gets supine after the flush of victory: the bold, bounding river, that we have just witnessed taking leap after leap in successive cataracts, loses itself in the low, marshy swamps of self-confidence. 2. Beware of taking any step without the Divine sanction. Let us be careful not to follow our own paths; not to take any solemn and important step unless it be divinely owned and recognised. "In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths." "Blessed is the man whose strength is in Thee, in whose heart are Thy ways." 3. Beware of murmuring under trial. Each of us has, or may yet have, his day of trial—sickness, bereavement, crushed hopes, bitter disappointments, crossed wishes—stings and arrows from quarters least expected. How are we to meet them? Are we to give way to peevish, fretful repining? Are we to say, "I am wearied of life. I would I were done with all this wretchedness. What pleasure is existence to this wounded, harassed, smitten spirit?" Nay, take courage. It is not "enough." The Lord has work for you still to do. It is not for you, but for Him, to say, at His own appointed time, as He said to Hezekiah, "Thou shalt die, and not live." If we have ever been guilty of uttering such a rash prayer as that of Elijah—"Take away my life"—let us be thankful God has not given us the fulfilment of our own wish—the ratification of our own desire—and allowed us to die, unmeet and unprepared! (*J. R. Macduff, D.D.*) *Loneliness in religious depression*:—I. RELIGIOUS DEPRESSION FOLLOWING GREAT PUBLIC EXCITEMENT. 1. It is a natural reaction. As a matter of mental and moral law, such depression must follow such excitement. 2. It is a needful discipline. Continual conquests on Carmel would not be good for the prophet's own soul. He must have sometimes more of introspection and self-communing and less of challenge of foes, or of the applause of friends. II. RELIGIOUS DEPRESSION PRODUCING THE FEELING OF UTTER LONELINESS. Under the juniper-tree he longs to sob out his life and afterwards thrice over utters the pathetic "alone, alone, alone." III. RELIGIOUS DEPRESSION CAUSING MISTAKEN VIEWS OF LIFE. He, in his present passing loneliness, had two wrong notions clouding his vision. He thought, first of all, that his life-work had been a failure, whereas he had stirred the religious life of the people to its very centre, and his name ever lives as a symbol of heroic single-handed conflict with evil. 2. And he supposed the generation of godly seers was extinct. This mood of mind often leads men to see failure written on their labours, and to feel the number of the Christly a narrow instead of an ever-widening circle of men and women and children. IV. RELIGIOUS DEPRESSION DIVINELY REMOVED BY FITTING MEANS. Here Elijah was lifted from his depression through the instrumentality—1. Of nature. 2. Of new occupation. There was fresh work to be done. 3. Fresh companionship. An Elisha was waiting for him. 4. Unveiling of forgotten facts. In the existence of the 7000 faithful

men there was a fact of hope and encouragement he had forgotten. So every exiled spirit needs, and, if true to God, has, an Apocalypse. (*U. R. Thomas.*) *How the mighty fell* :—I. HIS PHYSICAL STRENGTH AND NERVOUS ENERGY WERE COMPLETELY OVERTAXED. We are "fearfully and wonderfully made"; and our inner life is very sensitive to our outward conditions. It has been truly said, that the most trivial causes—a heated room, a sunless day, want of exercise, or a northern aspect—will make all the difference between happiness and unhappiness; between faith and doubt; between courage and indecision. Many who send for the religious teacher would be wiser if they sent for their physician. II. HE WAS KEENLY SENSITIVE TO HIS LONELY POSITION. "I only am left." Some men are born to loneliness. It is the penalty of true greatness. At such a time the human spirit is apt to falter, unless it is sustained by an heroic purpose, and by an unfaltering faith. The shadow of that loneliness fell dark on the spirit of our Divine Master Himself when He said: "Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave Me alone; and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me." If our Lord shrank in the penumbra of that great eclipse, it is not wonderful that Elijah cowered in its darksome gloom. III. HE LOOKED AWAY FROM GOD TO CIRCUMSTANCES. Up to that moment Elijah had been animated by a most splendid faith, because he had never lost sight of God. "He endured as seeing Him who is invisible." Faith always thrives when God occupies the whole field of vision. Let us refuse to look at circumstances, though they roll before us as a Red Sea, and howl around us like a storm. Circumstances, natural impossibilities, difficulties, are nothing in the estimation of the soul that is occupied with God. They are as the small dust that settles on a scale, and is not considered in the measurement of weight. O men of God, get you up into the high mountain, from which you may obtain a good view of the glorious Land of Promise; and refuse to have your gaze diverted by men or things below! (*F. B. Meyer, M.A.*) *Elijah in the wilderness* :—I. ELIJAH'S WEAKNESS. 1. He was a man of like passions with us. He failed in the point wherein he was strongest, as Abraham, Moses, Job, Peter, and others have done. 2. He suffered from a terrible reaction. Those who go up go down. 3. He suffered grievous disappointment, for Ahab was still under Jezebel's sway, and she was seeking his life. 4. His wish was folly: "O Lord, take away my life." He fled from death, and yet prayed for death! He was never to die. How unwise are our prayers when our spirits sink. 5. His reason for the wish was untrue. II. GOD'S TENDERNESS TO HIM. 1. He allowed him to sleep. This was better than medicine, or inward rebuke, or spiritual instruction. 2. He fed him with food convenient and miraculously nourishing. 3. He made him perceive angelic care: "An angel touched him." 4. He allowed him to tell his grief (ver. 10). This is often the readiest relief. He stated his case, and in doing so eased his mind. 5. He revealed Himself and His ways. The wind, earthquake, fire, and still small voice were voices from God. 6. He told him good news: "Yet I have left me seven thousand in Israel." His sense of loneliness was thus removed. 7. He gave him more to do—to anoint others, by whom the Lord's purposes of chastisement and instruction should be carried on. Let us learn some useful lessons. 1. It is seldom right to pray to die. We may not destroy our own lives, nor ask the Lord to do so. 2. For the sinner it is never right to seek to die; for death to him is hell! 3. For the saint it is allowable only within bounds. 4. When we do wish to die, the reason must not be impatient, petulant, proud, insolent. 5. We have no idea of what is in store for us in this life. We may yet see the cause prosper and ourselves successful. 6. In any case, let us trust in the Lord and do good, and we need not be afraid. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *The despondent prophet* :—I. THE PROPHET'S DESPONDENCY. 1. Its intensity. For the time his depression seems almost overwhelming. Why this: that we must not expect that the sincerest piety, or the highest service for God, will preclude the possibility of our being bowed down beneath the burden of depression and discouragement. It may consist with genuine religiousness to be so circumstanced. Those children of God, in old time, whose faith rose to the loftiest altitudes, and whose courage paled not before the extremest perils, knew well the painfulness of such experience. It is well for us to bear in mind that the ground of spiritual security is distinct and separate from any state of mere feeling. Frames are uncertain, fluctuating, affected by innumerable causes over which our control is but limited, and must not, therefore, be made to determine character, standing, safety before God. The heart may sink when the soul's grasp is the strongest. 2. The causes of the prophet's despondency. People forget the closeness of the connection that subsists between their material and

their spiritual part, and often connect with an imagined wrong condition of the latter, what more properly belongs to a morbid or deranged state of the former. They send for the minister, when they ought to send for the physician. They charge upon the mind a fault that really attaches to the body. Not even religion can cure some persons of melancholy; they are gloomy or pensive by natural temperament, and must await the resurrection-morn to be made otherwise. 3. Its effects upon his conduct. It had led him from the scene of actual service, bold and faithful testimony, earnest confronting of Jehovah's foes, to hide himself in wilderness solitudes. II. GOD'S METHOD OF RELIEF. 1. God recruits his exhausted strength by a timely supply of sustenance. 2. But observe, again, in God's method of relief, that He rouses His servant to exertion. Having afforded Him needful refreshment and repose, He gives him work to do; He bids him journey to the distant Mount of Horeb. 3. God's method of relief includes a manifestation of Himself in glory and grace. The journey to Horeb was not its own end. Elijah was brought thither that he might commune with Deity. 4. In God's method of relief there was a correction of the prophet's misjudgment, as to the effects of his own labours, and the cause of truth. He had thought that he had "laboured in vain, and spent his strength for nought, and in vain." (*C. M. Merry.*) *Elijah's depression*:—The best of men have their defects, but do not despise them on that account; just as we don't despise a mountain because there are rifts in its side, or the sun because there are spots on its face. I. SOME OF THE CAUSES OF ELIJAH'S DEPRESSION. 1. Physical weakness. 2. Rampant wickedness. 3. Want of occupation. 4. The apparent failure of his mission. II. WHAT LESSONS SHOULD THIS SUBJECT TEACH US? 1. That great men are subject to sudden changes in their mental moods. 2. That these seasons of depression do not unchristianise a man. John Bunyan tells us that the pilgrims were as surely progressing towards the Celestial City, when climbing the hill Difficulty, passing through the valley of Humiliation, and engaged in a hand-to-hand encounter with Apollyon, as when transported with the visions of the Delectable Mountains, fanned with the balmy breezes, and regaled with the fragrant odours of the land of Beulah, where the sun always shines. "If needs be," says Peter, "ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations. 3. That God comes to the succour of His servants in seasons of depression. 4. Severe trials are fruitful of good to God's people. 5. That labour is an essential condition of enjoyment. (*H. Woodcock.*) *Avoiding the shadows*:—I looked from my window this morning across the fields. I noticed a dwelling-house whose roof was exposed to the early and cheerful sun. There had been a storm in the night, and snow covered the roof. In an hour the warmth of the sun had melted it, save where the shadow of the chimney fell. That long, dark shade kept firm grasp of the iciness. It gave me a morning lesson, like a text from Scripture. The ice of our lives lingers only where the shadow is. If we have no Christly warmth, it is because we live in the dark. If our love is chilled and our nature sluggish, there is something between us and the light. What then? We must go forth from shadows. The sun shines and its beams are full of life. If we walk in this life the ice will melt, and instead of deathly conditions, we shall become rivers of living water. Christ is the Sun. Shadows do not belong to us. They savour of death. The one aim of God is to make us children of life and light; then follows holy fellowship and hallowed communion. (*A. Caldwell.*) *Discouragement*:—I remember a good many years ago I got very much depressed because the Lord, I thought, hadn't blessed my ministry. I was cast down, and used to talk discouragingly of what was being done. There was not any life in my ministry, and this went on for three months. One Monday, when I was in the valley, and very much cast down, I met a friend who was on the hilltop and exceedingly elated. He said he had had a grand Sunday; what had I? "Oh!" I said, "I had not a good one." "Much power?" "No. What did you preach about?" "Oh, I preached about Noah." I said, "How did you get on?" "Oh, grandly. Did you ever study up Noah?" I said I thought I knew all about Noah, for there are only a few verses about him. "Oh, if you haven't studied up Noah you ought to do it. He's a wonderful character." After he left I got out my Bible, and read all I could find about Noah, and while I was reading this thought came to me: Here is this man who was a preacher of righteousness for one hundred and twenty years, and yet never had a convert outside his own family. I went to the prayer-meeting after that; and there was a man, who had just come from a town in Illinois, who spoke of one hundred young

converts. "Why," I said, "what would Noah have said if he had one hundred converts, and yet Noah didn't get discouraged!" Then a man right close to me got up, and he was trembling. "My friend," he said, "I wish you would pray for me." I said to myself: "What would Noah have given if he had heard that during those one hundred and twenty years, and yet he never heard the voice of an inquirer—not one. Still, he didn't get discouraged." (*D. L. Moody.*)

Ver. 4. **It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life.**—*Elijah's singular request:*—These words every way are remarkable. They proceed from a certain state of the mind, which is not common. The words are remarkable, considering the person who uttered them. They were uttered by the bold and brilliant Elijah. If we consider further the time the words were uttered, they are equally remarkable. It was just after the extraordinary manifestation of Carmel. One would have thought, after such a manifestation of the Divine presence and decided triumph, that he never would have been so shorn of courage, and cast down into such deep depression. These words, though spoken in ancient days, and come down to us through many ages; yet they contain certain pictures in human thought and feeling, which are found more or less everywhere. They are true expressions of the human soul in certain conditions, and our business here will be to mention some of the things which are common to all ages, and more or less to all people. I. THE SOUL'S SIGH IN THE SEARCH AFTER SOLITUDE. Sometime or other all sigh for solitude; you cannot destroy the feeling, it is planted deeply in the human soul. There are certain circumstances in life which develop this feeling, until it becomes strong and all-powerful, governing the whole soul. It is possible to allow this sentiment to grow wild and overleap its natural limit; but in itself, and within its proper limit, it is right and necessary. Before men can be strong they must be much with God and themselves; before they can be rich and mature, they will have to live much in the garden of their mind to weed and manure it. The conditions under which solitude is sought are various. 1. The soul seeks solitude in the pangs of disappointment. We are born to disappointments—all meet them, only some are more sensitive to their point and bitterness than others. We are often either too confiding, or lofty in our wish, or sanguine in our expectation, that disappointments cannot but come. They come from foes and friends—from prosperity and adversity. 2. The soul often sighs for the solitary in life, when deeply convinced of the vanity and falsehood of society; when the soul sees and feels the faults and follies of the world, it often feels a wish to live in some place where they are not seen or heard. 3. The absence of congenial society not unfrequently turns the face of the soul towards solitude. There may be times when our companions are too numerous, as well as too few. The soul wishes to shake itself from them and be free, and often goes beyond civilisation for this freedom it longs for so anxiously. This is often the case from superior refinement, advanced piety, nobler aspirations than those of neighbours and friends. 4. The soul often sighs for the solitude in life under the influence of religious feeling. The danger is for the thing that is right in itself to become a blind sentimentality. 5. The soul is apt, in a condition of great sorrow, to sigh after solitude. 6. This feeling may and sometimes does proceed from a morbid state of mind. II. THE SOUL'S TIME OF DESPONDENT DEPRESSION. There is a shade sometime or other to cross every flowery bed, and a gloom to cover every sunny path. There are occasions in the history of most men when life, the most precious and the first to be desired, is a burden. In this state of the soul all power of enjoyment is gone, and all power and courage have taken their departure. The horizon of the soul is obscured with darkness, so that there is neither beauty nor prospect in view anywhere. 1. Sometimes this state of despondent depression comes upon the soul from a sense of its own sinfulness. 2. The thought of our own individual insignificancy has a tendency to the same result. 3. The conscious vanity of the surroundings of our present existence is another depressing element in life. 4. The darkness and uncertainty surrounding human life has a tendency to make us despondent. The simplest things are lost in mystery; the clearest things are covered with uncertainty. 5. Failure in realising our noblest plans and most cherished wishes is another depressing element which often presses us below the level of right standing. 6. The ills that men are subject to is another frequent means of human depression. III. THE SOUL'S DEPRECIATION OF ITSELF. Some people constantly depreciate themselves, and they are thought sincere and humble persons, whereas it may be nothing more than a habit, or worse, an

affected self-depreciation, that others may have occasion and scope to raise them on high. 1. A sense of self-depreciation takes hold of the mind when it is filled with the conception of the Divine Majesty and His presence. 2. The feeling of self-depreciation pervades the soul in the presence or recollection of some higher examples in matters of life and ambition. An artist of sensitive appreciation of superiority in the presence of a genuine piece of art depreciates to the dust his own performances. A poet with a true poetic sense, when he reads or hears some grand poetry like *Paradise Lost*, feels very low in his own view. So is it in other things in life. 3. The same feeling takes hold of the mind of man often when comparing himself with the material universe and its different creations in his outward form and physical capacities. 4. This sentiment also proceeds frequently from a review of the past conduct of one's own life. 5. Self-depreciation is often the depressed language of the soul, when persecuted and cast out of society. 6. Once more, when the ills and miseries of life are calmly and seriously viewed, we ourselves being subjects of the same, the little we have done, or can do to diminish them, tends to self-depreciation. IV. THE SOUL'S WEARINESS OF LIFE, and its special desire to be released from its burden. In many cases life is a burden, but it is a rare thing, nevertheless, to wish to get rid of the burden by being relieved of life. There are cases where it appears almost natural and religious for men to wish to die, which appear almost beyond the suspicion of wrong. 1. When a person thinks that his work is done in this life, and he cannot be of much use any longer. 2. When an individual becomes helpless, and requires the time and attention of others to attend to him, he feels he is in the way, and cannot compensate for the least done to him. 3. When, by his close communion with the Divine and the heavenly, the soul is more at home from the world than in it. 4. When it is submitted, as in the case of Elijah, to the hand and will of God. (*T. Hughes.*) *The Order of the Juniper tree* :—Some while ago in passing through Edinburgh we noticed the procession of a friendly society whose banner declared it to belong to the Order of the Juniper tree. Many of us belong to that order, and it may prove useful to consider the suggestive contrast established by these two texts. In the one, the prophet sinks in despair; in the other, he is carried triumphantly into heaven. What has this to do with us? It presents in a dramatic form the experience of God's people in all ages. I. The sharp contrast in these texts is worthy of being remembered in DAYS OF WORLDLY ADVERSITY. Times of misfortune and disaster not uncommonly induce the mood expressed in the first text. Having suffered the wreck of our circumstances, schemes, happiness, and hopes, we court the shade of the juniper tree and pour out bitter lamentations. What is there to live for? We are failures, and the sooner we are out of the way the better. 1. It is only through discipline that we are fit for glorification. Cars of fire, horses of fire, a path beyond the stars, luminous diadems! we are presumptuous enough to think that at any time we are ready for these. But we are not ready. The perfection that qualifies for high places comes only through some form of suffering. 2. Only God knows when we are fit for glorification. "It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life." Are we sure about this enough? When you chastise a child, you find that his opinion and yours vary considerably as to what is enough. II. We may remember the strong contrast of these texts IN DAYS OF SPIRITUAL DESPONDENCY. Times of deep depression come in our spiritual history. Wesley's new life began in glorious experiences in Aldersgate Street, yet within a year of these glowing feelings we find that he suffered sad relapses into darkness and doubt; he even wrote, "I am not a Christian now." We feel worsted in the spiritual conflict, losing confidence and hope. These sad days of humiliation and despondency need not be lost upon us. They bring home the lesson of our personal unworthiness and helplessness. "I am not better than my fathers." III. We may remember the strong contrast of our texts IN DAYS WHEN WE ARE DISAPPOINTED BY THE RESULTS OF OUR EVANGELICAL WORK. Elijah was smitten with despair about God's cause. The scornful, scorching words of the wicked and wrathful queen unmanned him. All his grand hopes for his nation and race were to expire at the juniper tree. And very often do the strongest and best of men entertain similar misgivings. Yet Elijah was wrong. God works strangely, He works silently, He works slowly, but He works surely. The funeral was not to be that of Elijah. The one thing we must resolve upon is not to reason and question, but confidently to follow out all the lines and leadings of God in spiritual life and evangelical toil. It is the fashion with some modern novelists to finish their stories in the most

atheistic and despairing manner—the mystery and struggle of life ending in unconsoled sorrows, unrequited sacrifices, uncompensated wrongs, unanswered prayers and strivings; the palpable moral of such treatment being that there is no law, government, or purpose in human life. We know otherwise. We believe in the programme of God, so wise, so true, so good; and in our best moments we are confident that His programme cannot fail. (*W. L. Watkinson.*)

Ver. 5. **As he lay and slept under a juniper tree, then an angel touched him.**—*Loving-kindness better than life*:—We have, in this incident, four thoughts of the love of God. I. GOD'S LOVE IN ITS CONSTANCY. It is a fact which we all admit; but which we seldom realise in the moments of depression and darkness to which we are all exposed. It is not difficult to believe that God loves us, when we go with the multitude to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise, and stand in the inner sunlit circle; but it is hard to believe that He feels as much love for us when, exiled by our sin to the land of Jordan and of the Hermonites, our soul is cast down within us, and deep calls to deep, as His waves and billows surge around. It is not difficult to believe that God loves us when, like Elijah at Cherith and on Carmel, we do His commandments, hearkening unto the voice of His word; but it is not so easy when, like Elijah in the desert, we lie stranded, or, as dismasted and rudderless vessels, roll in the trough of the waves. It is not difficult to believe in God's love when with Peter we stand on the mount of glory, and, in the rapture of joy, propose to share a tabernacle with Christ evermore; but it is well-nigh impossible when, with the same Apostle, we deny our Master with oaths, and are abashed by a look in which grief masters reproach. Yet we must learn to know and believe the constancy of the love of God. II. GOD'S LOVE MANIFESTED IN SPECIAL TENDERNESS BECAUSE OF SPECIAL SIN. Where ordinary methods will not avail, God will employ extraordinary ones. There is one memorable instance of this, which has afforded comfort and hope to multitudes who have sinned as Peter did, and who will bless God for ever for the record of the Master's dealings with His truant servant. The Lord sent a general message to all His disciples to meet Him in Galilee. But He felt that Peter would hardly dare to class himself with the rest; and so He sent to him a special message, saying: "Go tell My disciples, and Peter." It is thus that Jesus is working still throughout the circles of His disciples. III. GOD'S LOVE IN ITS UNWEARIED CARE. None of us can measure the powers of endurance in the love of God. It never tires. It fainteth not, neither is weary. It does not fail, nor is it discouraged. It bears all things; believes all things; hopes all things; endures all things. It clings about its object with a Divine tenacity, until the darkness and wandering are succeeded by the blessedness of former days. It watches over us during the hours of our insensibility to its presence; touching us ever and anon; speaking to us; and summoning us to arise to a nobler, better life, more worthy of ourselves, more glorifying to Him. IV. GOD'S LOVE ANTICIPATING COMING NEED. This always stands out as one of the most wonderful passages in the prophet's history. We can understand God giving him, instead of a long discourse, a good meal and sleep, as the best means of recruiting his spent powers. This is what we should have expected of One who knows our frame and remembers that we are dust, and who pities us as a father pitieth his children. But it is very wonderful that God should provision His servant for the long journey that lay before him: "Arise and eat; because the journey is too great for thee." (*F. B. Meyer, B.A.*)

Ver. 7. **Arise and eat, because the journey is too great for thee.**—*The weary child*:—1. Now, what is all this but the Lord nursing His own child? Elijah has come to one of those crises which occur in every one's life, when he stands in need of special tending and treatment; and the Father which is in Heaven is giving them. He is giving them none the less truly, that at the stage of our text it is the bodily condition of Elijah with which the Lord is dealing, and nothing higher or further. It was mostly this which was wrong just then, and it is this therefore that the Lord proceeds first of all to put right. But while the text thus speaks to us of the pity of God, and tells us how wide-winged and close-brooding it is, the text also points us to wise methods of dealing with ourselves in like circumstances. The Great Physician may well leave something of our restorations to be wrought by self-treatment when He has indicated the course which that treatment ought to take. Now, the body has its own share, and not

a small one, even in our spiritual history. Our dejection and melancholy, our very unbelief, have frequently no higher or more mysterious source than the disturbance of this material machine of nerves and muscles through which the spirit deals with the outer world. For the sake of our souls themselves, therefore, those conditions of body which tell back unhappily upon the spirit ought, where they are preventable or removable, to be prevented or removed. Dejection is no virtue, but a weakness and humiliation. 2. When the Lord was comforting Elijah in that lonely place one day's journey south of Beersheba, there was being transacted there a living parable of things that lie within the higher sphere of purely spiritual experience. Every Christian of us has his journey before him. Every Christian of us has his weariness not far off within him. Every Christian of us has his Lord's provision brought to his bolster, with the kindly call, "Arise and eat, because the journey is too great for thee." The Lord knoweth right well how great it is, and He knoweth well how great our weariness at any time is. 3. You are thinking of seasons of spiritual recruiting more special still than any I have named. One more interval passes, and you are purposing again to sit down together to commemorate the accomplishment, in sacrificial blood, of the most wondrous journey that was ever travelled by human foot in this sorely travelled world. For, to be like us, to understand us and to save us, He would have His mortal journey too; and it was "great," and often He was weary, and often He was refreshed. With thoughts of that journey filling His own heart, and wishing that they may fill your own, He is summoning you again to sit down with Himself, and to nourish your flagging graces by more touching fellowship with Himself, over the emblems of the love which has made you to be His. (*J. A. Kerr Bain, M.A.*) *Heart-weariness in the journey of life:*—1. The first remark which I would make concerning this heart-weariness in the journey of life is that it does not necessarily betoken any estrangement from God. It is, indeed, true that life naturally becomes "flat, stale, and unprofitable" to the sated worldling. But it is also true that moods of depression and despondency come even to the most pious souls, and are sometimes even associated with a sorrow born of sympathy with the mind of God. 2. The second remark which I would make regarding this spiritual fatigue is that it is often due, in large measure, to physical causes. And this fact ought to teach us two lessons. The first is a lesson of sympathetic forbearance. The young ought to make large allowance for the aged, and the strong for the weak. And the second lesson is one of physical prudence. Seeing that the connection between the body and the spirit is so close and subtle, it is our duty to keep our bodies as healthy as we possibly can. The laws of health are the laws of God. 3. We ought to welcome and avail ourselves of those messengers whom God sends to revive and help us in the journey of life. But there are other messengers and ministries—more homely and familiar—which may be even as angels of God to help us when our hearts are worn and weary. Sometimes the words of a well-known hymn, sung in the house of prayer, will cheer our drooping spirits and put new life into our steps. There are also pleasures of literature in general which are not to be despised; many an old man and many an invalid could tell us that their books do much to lighten for them the burden of their infirmities. Music, too, gives its own peculiar refreshment. Science, and poetry, and art, and humour, and the relaxation afforded by simple, innocent pleasures—why should we despise such things as these in their true and proper place? Love is a great freshener of human life. So long as we are really useful and helpful to those whom we love, life cannot altogether lose its zest. 4. I remark that God has miraculously provided for us all a special food for the sustenance and refreshment of our souls. Christ is "the Bread of Life which came down from heaven." (*T. Campbell Finlayson, D.D.*) *Juniper trees:*—In experiences of weariness and discouragement and times of despair, when it seems to us that we are of no use in the world, and are doing nothing in the world, or only blundering and doing harm in the world, there come the juniper tree and the angel; God puts rest-places in our lives; God gives us angels' food and tells us that in the strength of that food we are to rise up and go on our journey. I want you to look with me for a few moments this morning at some of these rest-places, some of these juniper trees of life. 1. And first I put sleep, because God put it first. When Elijah was tired and despairing and discouraged, God put him to sleep. Sometimes the most religious service a man can render himself or the world is to go to sleep. But how many busy people think really the time spent in sleep is wasted! They begrudge all the time that is spent asleep. But the Lord God so made us that we need to put one-third of our time in sleep. And He

knew what He was about. Thanks to God for sleep, that is itself a symbol of death; sleep, that is the promise of a new awakening, and so gives us the suggestion of that great awakening when we shall rise refreshed and invigorated for the eternal day! The father takes the tired child in his arms and rocks him into unconsciousness of all the sin and sorrow and weariness and burden of life. Do not think of it as wasted time! Do not think of it as something lost out of life! Take it as God means we shall—as God's great gift. 2. Next to sleep I put amusement as one of God's juniper trees and as a part of God's angelic food. You remember the three things which the Book of Proverbs says about merriment, which is the lightest form of amusement: first, that a merry heart is a continual feast; second, that a merry heart maketh a glad countenance; and, thirdly, that a merry heart doeth good like a medicine. The merry heart cheers the heart and so makes the face radiant, and, because the face is radiant, therefore the merry soul imparts radiance to others. Merriment, amusement, laughter, just having a good time, is one of God's juniper trees that He plants for us, and when we are discouraged and distressed He means that we shall take advantage of it. 3. The home is one of God's juniper trees. We are all conscious, I am sure, that woman's sphere, whatever that flexible globe may be, is getting bigger and bigger; women are going into all sorts of industrial activities, and giving men pretty hard work by competition; into all sorts of charitable activities, which men are quite ready to leave to the women altogether. Now, on the whole, this is a distinct advance. The larger life of woman is something to be welcomed and to be rejoiced in; and yet, like every increasing growth, it has its perils also. It does sometimes threaten to impair the usefulness of the home. In the Divine order men are the soldiers; the battle of life ought to be done by the men. 4. The Church ought to be a juniper tree and a resting-place. Dr. Parkhurst has said, "The Church is not the minister's field, but the minister's force." The Church ought to be not merely a working Church, but a rest-giving Church also; and when men and women come to the Church, they ought to be able to find there some angels' food, some real rest, some inspiration that will send them back into life with new vigour for their new toils. The Sabbath chimes ring no sweeter song than this, "Come unto Me, and rest!" 5. And then there is the quiet hour. At Wellesley College, in Massachusetts—a young ladies' college—there are twenty minutes reserved in every day for a quiet hour. During that twenty minutes every young lady is expected to be in her room; there is to be no passing through the halls; there is to be no life of conversation, no laughter. What the young lady does in her room is between herself, her own conscience, and her God. She may read, she may study, she may pray, she may think, she may do what she likes; only she must not disturb other pupils in other rooms. For twenty minutes a quiet time. We ought to have our quiet hour; at least, we will say, our quiet quarter of an hour. (*Lyman Abbott, D.D.*) **The journey is too great for thee.**—*The journey of life:*—In regard to the journey of life God says, "It is too great for thee." It is beyond thy natural powers. Thou needest supernatural strength to enable thee to accomplish it. Men are slow to admit their weakness, especially when they are young and inexperienced. They are full of courage, and they are terrified neither by desert nor by mountain. It is well to begin life in this high spirit. Every young man needs a little of the dare-devil disposition in order to distinguish himself. Courage is a magnificent quality. But men are always chastened by experience. Many an Alpine climber has started up a high mountain with sublime confidence in his skill of foot and in his powers of endurance. But when he reached a certain height his nerve failed. The journey was too great for him. The text has been illustrated by ten thousand men. Livingstone consecrated himself to African exploration. He performed two journeys, but the third was too great for him. His health failed. Two of his servants deserted him, and they took with them his medicine chest. "I never dreamed," he wrote, "that I should lose my precious quinine." One of the last entries in his journal was: "I am pale, bloodless, and weak from bleeding profusely ever since the 31st of March last. An artery gives off a copious stream, and takes away my strength; oh how I long to be permitted by the Over Power to finish my work!" When he could work no longer, he was carried on a frame of wood with some grass and a blanket upon it. And when he could endure to be carried no further, his faithful servants built him a little hut, and in that rude structure he died. He was a great traveller. He contributed much to our knowledge of Central Africa. The coloured races owe him a mighty debt of gratitude. He was one of the bravest of Christian men. But the journey of African exploration was too great for him. Arctic exploration, again, has had

an intense fascination for navigators, sea rovers, and scientific men. Time would fail us to tell of all the brave men, from Frobisher to Franklin, and from Franklin to Lieutenant Greeley, who have penetrated into the regions of ice. Some have returned to tell the tale of their experience, and others have been frozen to death. But they have not succeeded in reaching the North Pole. The secret still remains to tempt the heroism of the men of the future. For the navigators of all nations the journey of Arctic exploration has been too great. In 1870 the late Napoleon of France declared war against William of Germany. Germany was united, and under the leadership of Protestant Prussia she was destined to change the balance of power in Europe. Napoleon was afraid, and resolved to fight in the hope that he would conquer and retain the leadership of Europe himself. The issue proved, however, that he had sadly miscalculated his strength. In a few weeks he had to lay down his sword at the feet of the German Emperor. The journey of aggressive warfare was too great for him. 1. Take the Christian life. During the last ten years there has been a revival of evangelism. By a variety of methods the ungodly have been reached, and thousands have been brought into the Church. I rejoice in this fact with all my heart. But the Churches have not been strengthened by these accessions as some of us hoped they would be. Popular missons attract the weaker members of the community. These people are feeble in original temperament, and some of them have made themselves utterly weak by the evil habits which they have pursued. The journey of the Christian life is too great for people who pursue such habits as these. 2. Take ministerial life. Here is a minister. He entered the sacred profession while he was yet young. He had a keen sense of responsibility, and he was very susceptible in regard to external discipline; and these two things kept him right for ten or fifteen years. After that he allowed his spiritual life to go down, and then his constitutional weakness began to show itself. An intellectual tendency led him astray. In the end he resigned the ministry. He looked back from the Gospel plough, and since then he has not been fit for the kingdom of God. The journey of ministerial life was too great for him. 3. Take the enthusiast. He is sanguine in regard to everything fresh. If any new form of religious activity is started he is fascinated by it at once. But after a time he loses his interest in it. The journey of an unbroken Christian devotion is too great for the spasmodic enthusiastic. 4. Take the practical Christian life. Individual effort is at a discount. Organised effort is the order of the day. Men have the notion that they can do but little unless they act in a crowd and make a display. Some day there will be a reaction in favour of quiet, instructive, and individual modes of service, and the sooner it comes the better. But we must not wait for ideal conditions in which to do our duty. Men will associate, and we must learn to act in association. We have a multiplicity of organisations, and we must help to work them. The temper of the age is practical, and we must sympathise with it. We must serve Christ in the social ways and habits of the generation. We shall do it at some sacrifice of our views and feelings, but we must bear that for Christ's sake. (*T. Allen.*) *God's considerateness of our frailty*:—Careless and cruel drivers often load their horses beyond their strength, and the poor creature tugs and pulls until he drops. Daring and foolish engineers will put too much pressure on their boilers, or try to force more power from an engine than it can provide. But our Master guarantees that tasks shall be balanced with the precise strength we possess. He knoweth our frame: He remembereth that we are but dust. He knows the exact pressure we can stand. He knows the utmost load we can lift. He is a faithful Creator, because an abiding Sustainer. (*Helps for Speakers.*)

Ver. 8. And went in the strength of that meal forty days.—*Elijah's repast*:—I. THE PROPHET'S REPAST. 1. The sacramental feast is alike simple and plain. 2. Yet is this a mysterious repast. II. THE PECULIAR UNWORTHINESS OF THE PROPHET ON THIS OCCASION. 1. The Lord's Supper is a repast prepared for sinners! 2. True, they must be penitent, broken-hearted sinners. 3. It is for the weary, burthened, troubled servants of Jesus. III. THE GREAT BENEFIT WHICH THE PROPHET DERIVED FROM THIS REPAST, ALTHOUGH HE WAS SO UNWORTHY. 1. Spiritual benefits are not necessarily so attached to the Christian feast. (*F. Close, M.A.*) *Thoughts on life*:—This incident suggests three things. I. AN UNDESIRABLE POSSIBILITY IN HUMAN LIFE. The fact that a man lived forty days and forty nights without food, certainly impresses us with the possibility of his being kept in existence without food for ever. The possibility is obvious. But such a state would clearly be very undesirable. Were men to

continue here without food, a disastrous inactivity would ensue. Want of food keeps the world in action, keeps the limbs and faculties of men going. What would life be without action? a weak and worthless thing. II. THE SUPPORTING ELEMENT OF ALL LIFE. What is it that kept Elijah alive without food? The will of God, nothing else; and this is that which supports all created existences every mom nt. "Man cannot live by bread alone." God's will can starve men with bread, and sustain them without it. It is He, not material substances, not food, that sustains life. He may do it with means, or without means, according to His pleasure. Let us not trust in means or secondary causes, but in Him who is the "Fountain of Life." III. THE DIVINE CARE OF A GODLY LIFE. That God takes care of His people individually is (1) Accordant with reason; (2) taught by Scripture; (3) attested by the experience of the good. (*Homilist.*)

Vers. 9–12. **And he came thither into a cave.**—*God manifesting Himself to man:*—We may learn three things from the passage before us. I. GOD INVESTIGATES THE MOTIVES THAT GOVERN HUMAN CONDUCT. "The word of the Lord came to him, and said unto him, What doest thou here, Elijah?" 1. When God investigates the motives that governs human conduct He comes near to man. "The word of the Lord came to Elijah." 2. When God investigates the motives that govern human conduct He interrogates man. "What doest thou here, Elijah?" (1) Life is a state of servitude. "What doest thou?" Man must serve. (2) Life necessitates personal service. "What doest thou?" (3) Life contains special spheres of service. "What doest thou here?" II. HUMAN CONDUCT IS AFFECTED BY THE RELIGIOUS LIFE OF THE COMMUNITY. Three things affected the conduct of Elijah. 1. God's covenant had been forsaken. 2. God's altars had been destroyed. 3. God's servants had been slain. III. GOD CONTROLS HUMAN CONDUCT BY THE MOST GENTLE AGENCIES. 1. Great achievements are accomplished in nature by gentle agencies. 2. Great achievements are accomplished in grace by gentle agencies. (1) God works upon the understanding by gentle agencies. The Gospel is "a still small voice; but the power of God unto salvation to every one," &c. 2. God subdues the restive will by gentle agencies. The life of Christ was "a still small voice." And Christ said, "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will," &c. 3. God renews the polluted heart by gentle agencies. The Holy Spirit is "a still small voice." (*Preacher's Analyst.*) What doest thou here, Elijah?—*The responsibility of man as an agent:*—The master-thought contained in this question seems to be man's responsibility. "What doest thou here?" I am thy Lord and Master—thou hast no right here without consulting Me. I demand reason for thy conduct. I. THE FACT THAT MAN HAS ALL THE PRIMARY CONDITIONS OF RESPONSIBILITY. Were the question put—What must any creature possess in order to render him accountable to God for his actions? Our answer would be, a threefold capability: a capability to understand, obey, and transgress the Divine will. If a creature has not the first—the power to understand what his Maker requires of him, he could not in equity be held responsible for not rendering it. II. THAT MAN HAS A DEEP CONSCIOUSNESS OF HIS RESPONSIBILITY. III. TO THE FACT THAT SOCIETY DEALS EVERYWHERE WITH MEN AS RESPONSIBLE. A locomotive rolls its crushing weight over a man and kills him; a billow dashes against a frail barque and buries all on board in the mighty abyss; or a wild beast tears to pieces a human being; has society the same feelings towards that engine, that raging billow, or beast, as it has towards that man that has just murdered his brother? No, there are in the last case, as in none of the rest, popular denunciation and vengeance. It is felt that justice has been outraged, and that the destroyer is to be dealt with as a criminal. All the arrangements of society are based upon the principle that its members are responsible. IV. TO THE FACT THAT THE BIBLE EVERYWHERE TEACHES IT. It is implied in all its appeals to the undecided. "Choose ye this day whom ye will serve." It is implied in its allegations against the sinner. "Ye will not come unto Me, that ye might have life." It is implied in its representation of the judgment-day. "God shall bring every idle word into judgment." "Be not deceived, God is not mocked; whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap." Indeed, the very existence of the Bible implies it. (*Homilist.*) *A question from God:*—We may consider this question as addressed to the following cases: I. TO THE DECEIVER IN THE CAVE OF HYPOCRISY. God asks the deceiver in the cave of hypocrisy, "What doest thou here?" Deceiving, you say, deceiving and being deceived—deceiving whom? Not a devil; for every devil who knows the man who is a hypocrite,

knows that he is a hypocrite. Whom? Not an angel; for every angel who knows the deceiver at all, knows that he is a deceiver. Not the Holy Spirit; for He strives with the man even in this his hypocrisy. Not the Saviour; for He searches the heart. Not the Father of spirits; for He has even foreknown the career of the hypocrite. Deceiving, you say, for how long? At longest only through a few brief years, and then the revelation! Deceiving, and for what? What profit is there of deception and hypocrisy? The man who openly saith, "I am an atheist—I am a deist—I am a sceptic—I have no religion," is a far better man than he who, with unbelief at heart, makes a profession of Christianity. "What doest thou here?" saith God to the deceiver in the cave of hypocrisy. II. God addresses this question TO THE NOTABLE SINNER IN THE CAVE OF SUPPOSED SECRECY. Few notable transgressors sin openly. There is something mean about sin. You see men sneak into the haunts of vice. They go when they think that the darkness covers them. Here! God saith, here! And you a husband! Here! God saith, at the threshold of these places, and you a father! Here! God saith, and you betrothed to unpolluted virtue, and to unsuspecting love! Here! risking money that a diligent and careful father has provided for you! Here! spending the patrimony which has been left you by a devoted and loving mother! Here! Men and brethren, you talk of secrecy, there is no such thing as secrecy. It never has been; and it never can be. The notable sinner in the cave of his supposed secrecy is recognised by God, who calls to him, and speaks of him by name. "What doest thou here, Elijah?" III. "What doest thou here?" God saith TO THE PENITENT SINNER IN THE CAVE OF DESPAIR. What art thou doing? Despair cannot secure pardon. Despair cannot bring peace. Despair cannot purify the heart. Despair will not pray. Despair can find no promise. And, what is more, despair, in the heart of a penitent sinner, hath neither warrant nor justification. IV. "What doest thou here?" GOD SAITH TO THE CONVERTED MAN IN THE CAVE OF NON-CONFESSION. Here is a man walking in the counsel of the ungodly; a man standing in the way of sinners; a man sitting in the seat of the scornful. He becomes converted: but he is yoked with unbelievers; he is connected with unrighteousness—with unrighteousness in his business—unrighteousness in his recreations—unrighteousness in his connections and friendships. And God saith to him, "Come out from among them, and be ye separate, and touch not the unclean thing." V. To THE GODLY, IN THE CAVE OF LUXURIOUS RETIREMENT AND EASY SECLUSION, God addresses the same question. VI. HE SPEAKS ALSO TO THE GODLY IN THE CAVE OF MISANTHROPY AND DISGUST. There is a cave Adullam—an old resort for religious people, and it has been well kept up. There is such a cave near every Church of God; and thither the contented with themselves, and the discontented with everybody else, have constantly resorted. (*S. Martin.*) *A call to self-knowledge*:—Every wise master mariner wants to know at sea just where his ship is, just what his longitude and latitude are. Years ago, when I was crossing the Atlantic Ocean, we had a long spell of bad foggy weather. For several days and nights neither sun nor stars had been visible. We had been sailing by dead reckoning, and did not know where we were exactly. One night while I was on deck, there was a sudden rift in the clouds, and the North Star shone out. Word was sent at once to the captain, and I remember how the captain fairly laid himself across the compass, and took an observation of that star, because he wanted to know just where he was. Every wise man wants to know where he stands physically, whether he has a sound heart and sound lungs. He may find out his physical condition is not as good as he boped, but if his physical condition is bad, he wants to know it, so that he can guard against the dangers he might plunge into. Many a man lies in the grave to-night because be had a weak heart and didn't know it. It is very important in all the affairs of this world, that we know just where we are, but it is infinitely more important that we know where we are in the affairs of eternity. (*Thomas Spurgeon.*) *Elijah in the cave*:—This strange narrative serves to illustrate the following things:—I. THE FALLIBILITY OF AN EMINENT SAINT. Elijah was undoubtedly an eminent saint. His teachings, miracles, prayers, and the testimony of God's word show this. But he was not perfect, and the fact of his fleeing to the cave shows this. Why did he retire to solitude? 1. The want of success. We are not judges of success. Nor is success the right rule of life. 2. The corruptness of his times. The very reason why he of all men should be out in public life. 3. The fear of persecution. II. THE MINUTENESS OF GOD'S PROVIDENCE. God knew where he was. 1. God knows everything about the individual man. Jacob at Bethel, Jonah on the

sea, Moses at Midian, John in Patmos, and now Elijah in the cave. 2. God demands from individual man an account of himself. "What doest thou here?" (1) Thou art a reasonable being, and must have reasons for thy conduct. What are they? (2) Thou art a moral being, and art responsible to Me for thy conduct. Providence has to do with the most minute as well as the most vast. III. THE ORDER OF DIVINE PROCEDURE. This terrible manifestation came first. Then came the "still small voice." 1. This is a type of God's dispensations with the race at large. First came the terrible, and then the more pacific. Judaism is the terrible—Christianity the mild. "Ye are not come to the mount that might be touched," &c. 2. This is a type of God's dealing with His people individually. There must first come the storm, earthquake, and fire of moral conviction; and then the "still small voice," &c. IV. THE FORCE OF PACIFIC AGENCY. 1. The pacific is most manifestly Divine. "The Lord was not in the wind," &c. But He was in the "still small voice." God is a "God of peace." Nature shows this. Storms are exceptions. The history of Christ shows this. "He did not cause His voice to be heard," &c. The influence of His Gospel shows this. 2. The pacific is most morally effective. Neither the thunders of civil law, nor the fulminations of a heartless declaimer, can touch the soul. Nothing can travel to her seat but the gentle message of the truth in love. "Thy gentleness hath made me great." (*Homilist.*)

Ver. 10. I have been very jealous for the Lord God of Hosts.—*Impatience of results*:—In moments of depression the wisest may fall into it, but it is nevertheless a mistake, as the following observations by Dr. Storrs suggest: "I do not see the cathedral as yet, when I go into the confused quarry-yard and see there the half-wrought stones, the clumsy blocks that are by and by to be decorated capitals. But when at last they are finished in form and brought together, the mighty building rises in the air, an ever-enduring psalm in rock. I do not see the picture yet, when I look upon the palette, with its blotches and stains and lumps of colour. By and by, when the skilful brush of the painter has distributed those colours, I see the radiant beauty of the Madonna, the pathos of the Magdalene. I do not see yet the perfect kingdom of God upon the earth, but I see the colours which are to blend in it. I see the already half-chiselled rock out of which it shall be wrought, and I am not going to despond now, when so much already has been accomplished." I, even I only, am left.—*God's cure for depression*:—That is how God encouraged a brave worker in his moment of depression. The signs of the time were ominous. Ahab sat upon the throne, with an unscrupulous and powerful queen by his side. A corrupt court had produced a corrupt nation. Israel had denied her high and singular election, and had vaunted her infidelity in the face of Heaven. No wonder the prophet seeks the end of his pathetic and apparently ineffective ministry. "I, even I only, am left." But he was mistaken. There was more goodness in the nation than he perceived. God's reply was, "I have left Me seven thousand in Israel." A needed word this for workers in every age, perhaps never more needed than to-day. This is a great age for publicity. Our work is done on the platform as never before. In politics, in social reform, in philanthropy, we estimate our strength by the number who join our processions and attend our demonstrations. It can scarcely be said of organised religion, "It does not cry, nor lift up, nor cause its voice to be heard in the street." But let us not imagine that spiritual religion is confined to that which parades itself before the public eye, nor try to estimate Christian progress by a Church census. God's work goes on when the prophet has ceased to preach, and retires in deep despondency from the world. "I have left Me seven thousand." In face of all the scandal which disgraced Italy and the Church in the fifteenth century, Savonarola could still point to a living witness to the Divine power which might be constantly seen in the lives of humble disciples. Contemporary with our English Restoration, with all its abominations, we find Herbert, Vaughan, Crashaw, Milton, and some of the sweetest spiritual singers God has given to our nation. It is easy to see the power of the Baalim in England to-day—the practical denial of God found in high places; the corruption and fraud which now and again manifest their deep-seated power in the commercial world; the selfishness, the heartlessness, of many of our pleasures and pursuits; the timidity, the wrongful compromise, the inconsistencies of the churches and churchgoers. These things, alas, are very obvious. What then! God preserves His remnant, and never forgets the seven thousand. Virtue is not so sensational as vice, nor does it attract the same

attention, but it is stronger and more substantial. London should not be judged by Piccadilly at night. Out of sight of the casual visitor you have the purity and peace of thousands of homes where parents live and pray, and where brothers and sisters learn the joy of mutual help. Goodness appears in unexpected places. Heartened by this, each soul is to return to the duty of the moment. "Go thou thy way." The seven thousand belong to God—duty belongs to us. In the presence of the powerful Baalim I can do the duty that lies next to me. We may not be able to shatter the idol to pieces in the Senate, or the market-place, but we can now shatter its power within our own lives. None the less, remember that our own loyalty to God will help others, though we may be unconscious of this. Seven thousand hearts were encouraged by that brave stand upon Carmel, but Elijah knew nothing of it. Our cities to-day frequently draw their water from distant lakes. In deep underground channels the precious stream is conveyed to rise in our homes. Elijah conceived himself as a solitary lake "embosomed among the hills." But out from him proceeded streams of living waters which cleansed and refreshed human hearts in distant places. Loyalty to God does not cease with itself; it finds an indestructible ally within every soul. A brave stand for the right frequently brings those to decision who were halting between two opinions, while it rebukes the evil and heartens the good. (*Trevor H. Davies.*) *The strength and weakness of human sympathy* :—This was the darkest hour in the prophet's history, and this a sad revelation of the weakness to be found in a character possessing so many elements of strength. There are two truths we propose to illustrate here. I. THE BLESSEDNESS OF HUMAN SYMPATHY. God has not designed that we should live alone. He gathers men into families. He collects His people into churches that they may afford mutual help, take their respective parts in a common work, and together share a common reward. He requires that we all be as links in this grand chain of love, adding some strength to it, and yet receiving strength from it in our turn. II. THE LIMITS OF HUMAN SYMPATHY. Though its power to aid and comfort be great, there are bounds to its influence. It is only within a certain range, and that range comparatively narrow, that it can carry on its ministry of love. There is a vast region of spiritual experiences, some bright and joyous, but more of the sad and sombre character, closely fenced against it by barriers which it can never pass. Emphatically is it true that there is a bitterness which each heart must taste for itself, and that it has joys with which no stranger can intermeddle. 1. More particularly, we observe life's most serious perplexities must generally be solved by ourselves. 2. Again, life's severest conflicts must be fought by ourselves. Another man's temptations are not mine—another man's doubts are not mine—another man's perplexities are not mine—and therefore independently I must stand and struggle. 3. So with the heaviest sorrows we have to endure. They are those which no friend, however beloved, can fully understand or share. 4. So in some of life's greatest works, we have to stand alone. The world has always been slow to recognise her best benefactors, and even the men who by their discoveries in science have contributed most to the advance of civilisation and the increase of wealth, have generally had a solitary and toilsome, often a dangerous path to tread, their teachings distrusted, their aims described as utopian, themselves despised as foolish visionaries. (*J. G. Rogers, B.A.*) *Alone, yet not alone* :—Behold a real and a right bravery. In the British Museum I saw the MS. of a letter from General Gordon to his sister, dated Khartoum, February 27th, 1884—"I have sent Stewart off to scour the river White Nile, and another expedition to push back rebels on the Blue Nile. With Stewart has gone Power, the British consul and *Times* correspondent; so I am left alone in the vast palace, but not alone, for I feel great confidence in my Saviour's presence. I trust and stay myself in the fact that not one sparrow falls to the ground without our Lord's permission; also that enough for the day is the evil. All things are ruled by Him for His glory, and it is rebellion to murmur against His will." A real bravery springs out of oneness with God. Do we not all need that sort of courage for this new year?

Vers. 11-21. And He said, Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the Lord.—*Elijah's vision* :—I. THE MAN HIMSELF. A great craggy soul that towers above the men of his age—his head wreathed in the glories of heaven. But though standing out from the age in which he lives as one of God's Elect—yet a man with a human heart capable of rejoicing and despondency even as others. II. HIS DREAD MISSION. To be the agent of Divine judgments. He was filled with

righteous indignation at seeing the old worship of his country—the trust in the one living God—superseded by a religion which was but a form of paganism. And the God of Israel, who was a jealous God—jealous of the affections of His people being turned aside to another—empowered the prophet to do the terrible work of destruction. III. THE VISION OF GOD. When Elijah had done the terrible deed of blood, the reaction of spirit was so great, the dejection so overwhelming, that he was glad to get away from all society into a desert place to pray that he might die. Elijah's anger had been the flaming forth of deep passionate love. The love of God sometimes flames forth in flashes of anger which make the very earth to reel and stagger. What is God's justice but His love flashing out in angry retribution? Never argue, as so many do, that because God is love, therefore He will not punish sin. Learn—1. That in terrible crises of life the faithful man may look for some special vision of God. 2. To distinguish between blind zeal which destroys, and intelligent zeal which edifies. 3. That while the might of Jehovah is used to crush wrong, the voice of love is needful to build up men in righteousness. (*R. Thomas, M.A.*) *Upon the mount*:—1. The Lord came to him there with a searching question. Every word went home to him with rebuke. "What doest thou here, Elijah?" This is a time for action, the work of reformation is only begun; the elders of Israel must be encouraged and led in their protest against the State idolatry. Thou art a man of action; what doest thou, the champion of Mount Carmel, the protagonist in this holy war, thou Elijah, whose name declares that the Lord is thy Strength? What doest thou here, hiding in this gloomy cave far away from the scattered flock who sorely need thy watchful care? Elijah shrinks from a direct reply. Self is still uppermost in his thoughts. He almost boasts of his loyalty to God. He deeply laments the infidelity and apostasy of the nation, and he complains that his own life is in danger. His eyes are still on himself. But Elijah is concerned for himself, and thinks his valiant championship of God's cause should have received different recognition. Child of God, never pity yourself; pity others. All heaven cares for thee; it is wrong to have any care for yourself. 2. After the searching question came a solemn command. God said, "Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the Lord." 3. After the solemn command came a Divine manifestation, a marvellous display of the majesty and power of God. And in the pains God took with His moody servant, moving all creation, as it were, to teach him lessons, we learn how very dear to God Elijah was. The barrier of resentment and self-justification was swept away. Elijah wrapped his face in his mantle, and stood before the Lord. It was a parable, surely, of the variety of Divine operations. And just as hurricane and earthquake prepared the way, making the still small voice the more impressive and subduing, so Elijah's ministry had done its work. He had been sent with famine and fire and sword; and now all Israel was awakened, and the more ready to hearken to the "still small voice." 4. But after the Divine manifestation came the Divine commission. God had more work for Elijah to do. He was not to be cast aside or superseded. He was to be strengthened and cheered by the companionship of Elisha; but Elijah was still to be God's honoured servant, God's chosen messenger. It would, indeed, have been a grievous thing if a sudden failure of faith should have disqualified him for future service. God still had confidence in Elijah. (*F. S. Webster, M.A.*) *Some mistakes regarding the earthquake*:—The earthquake has shaken the Queen City of the South, and given Charleston ashes for her beauty. 1. As a scientific fact, there is no more of God, His wisdom, power, or purpose, displayed in an earthquake than there is in the quiet growth of the grass in our door-yard; no more of God in the cyclone than in the perfumed breath of the flowers; no more of God in the conflagration kindled by the lightning or the volcano than in the glow of animal heat in our bodies. The steady, hardly audible, ticking of a watch reveals as much of the intelligence and purpose of its artificer as does the striking of the clock upon the steeple bell; and these alarming things in nature are but the louder striking of the mechanism of the universe. Great minds show their greatness by recognising the great in little things, recognising God in the commonplace things of daily observation. Sir David Brewster raised his hands and cried: "Great God! how marvellous are Thy works!" when he studied a tiny bit of animated matter. A distinguished naturalist wrote over his study door: "Be reverent, for God is here." Jesus illustrated the Divine Providence, not by world-shaking events, but by the clothing of the lily and the floating wing of the sparrow. 2. It is a mistake to imagine that there are any deeper lessons of man's impotence and dependence

to be learned from these astounding things than ought to be learned from every-day occurrences. Fifty men were killed by the earthquake; but as many die every night in this city without the slightest tremor being observed in the earth's surface until their survivors dig their graves. Some millions of dollars worth of property was shaken down by the mysterious visitant; but the common law of decay is all the time shaking our habitations back again to original dust. 3. It is a mistake to imagine that men will lay these lessons more to heart, and seek more persistently the favour of God, because His more astounding judgments are abroad in the land. The inhabitants of Naples are not the less worldly and thoughtless because Vesuvius keeps its flag of smoke all the time flying over the city, and so frequently awakens them by the lava-burst flashing its glare through their windows. Though she sits on the quivering edge of destruction, and her children play on the mounds of buried Pompeii and Herculaneum, Naples is one of the most godless haunts on the face of the earth. The Eastern Mediterranean is on the great earthquake belt. Its islands and shores are torn by convulsions, many of them having occurred within historic times, and not a few of them within the memory of the present generation. Yet this has always been the belt of human corruption. Antioch and Cyprus, earthquake centres, were the seats of the most abominable paganism and immorality. There is an Eastern proverb: "God comes to us without bell." The deepest Divine impressions are those which are made silently upon the heart, not by wind, nor earthquake, nor fire, but by the "still small voice" of His spirit. These startling events can do no more than arrest our attention momentarily. They are like a hand touching us to awaken, but whether we are bettered or not depends upon our laying the lesson to heart, hearing within the soul the spiritual voice. Do you remember how beautifully St. Augustine speaks of God's talking with the human soul—an exquisite description of the "still small voice"? He and Monica were communing together about spiritual things—"We were saying to ourselves then: If the tumult of the flesh were hushed, hushed the images of earth, and waters and air, hushed also the poles of heaven, yea, the very soul hushed to herself . . . hushed all dreams and imaginary revelations, every tongue and every sign . . . and He alone should speak . . . if we might hear His word, not through any tongue of flesh, nor angel's voice, nor sound of thunder, nor in dark riddle of similitude . . . but might hear His very self . . . were not this to enter into the joy of the Lord?" (*Homiletic Review.*) *The disclosure on the mount:*—We may learn from this incident: I. THAT MEN ARE NOT BROUGHT TO ACKNOWLEDGE GOD MERELY BY OUTWARD MANIFESTATIONS OF POWER OR GREATNESS. Elijah needed this lesson. He looked to the appearance on Carmel to bring the Israelites to renounce their idolatry, and to bow to the authority of Jehovah; and because they did not he was disappointed, and his heart failed him. By what he saw at Horeb he would be convinced that outward demonstrations of power or glory were not sufficient to lead men to repentance. Our Lord, in the days of His flesh, constantly met with those who sought signs and wonders as the only means of producing faith. And the same feeling is still shown by men in the importance they attach to some outward circumstances for producing repentance—calamity, bereavement, affliction. II. THAT OUTWARD CIRCUMSTANCES MAY BE HELPFUL IN BRINGING MEN TO ACKNOWLEDGE GOD. While some depend too much upon the outward and circumstantial, others go to the opposite extreme, and ignore them altogether in the work of God, whereas they have a place in that work. Calamity or affliction may not produce repentance, but they tend to subdue the spirit, and make it more susceptible to the work of God. They break up the fallow ground, and prepare it for the seed of truth. III. THAT TRUE REPENTANCE IS PRODUCED BY THE VOICE OF GOD. It was when Elijah heard the "still small voice" that he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out, and stood at the entrance of the cave. IV. THAT CHRISTIAN WORK IS NEEDFUL TO SPIRITUAL HEALTH. Elijah was commanded to return to the wilderness of Damascus, and to do the work assigned him. He obeyed, and we never read of him wandering away again. Many Christians get low-spirited, and wander into forbidden paths, because of inactivity. Earnest work for God would restore and preserve them. (*The Study and the Pulpit.*) *Elijah at Horeb:*—I. THE TRUEST REVELATION OF GOD TO MAN IS A SIMPLE ONE. Whirlwind, earthquake, and fire did not seem to greatly move the prophet. The solitary voice, still and small, with nothing bewildering about it, invited attention to the speaker and the message. It is a mistake which men often make that they look more confidently for revelations of God in large things than in small. For illustrations

of the workings of the Divine Providence, they take whole epochs of history. They use a system of numeration in which dynasties and nations are the digits. They trace the slow processes by which some monstrous wrong is at last brought to extinction, or some great truth is finally established in sovereignty, and they say, see how evidently God directs the affairs of the world. To our Lord, a dead sparrow by the roadside meant quite as much, for He said: "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and not one of them falleth to the ground without your Father." It is not possible for all men to be profound students; but all men profoundly need that God should stand revealed to them, not after protracted investigation, and once or twice in a lifetime, but every day, and in each new emergency of experience; and just that is possible to them, because, to right-seeing men, God is discernible in items as well as aggregates. II. THE TRUEST REVELATION OF GOD TO MAN IS AN INTELLIGIBLE ONE. The prophet on Horeb might have been in doubt as to the full significance of the wonders with which God prefaced His presence: the "still small voice," speaking in intelligible phrase, could not be misunderstood. It was entirely reasonable that, when the revelation assumed that form, the prophet should bow in reverence and recognise the true presence of God. That there is a manifestation of God in the physical universe is true, but the revelation of Him is largely incidental. There is no evidence that God built this fine frame of nature simply or mostly to instruct men as to His character and will. It has other uses. A house incidentally expresses the tastes and wishes of its builder; but it was not built for that purpose, but to provide a family with a home. And therefore, and further, the teachings of nature in regard to God are vague and general. The truest revelation of God in regard to His character and will, is His purposed revelation—the intelligible Scriptures, given for the sole end of making men wise spiritually. III. THE TRUEST REVELATION OF GOD TO MAN IS OFTEN, IF NOT ALWAYS, A PERSONAL ONE. The whirlwind and earthquake and fire did not seem charged with any special message to the prophet; but the voice said, "What doest thou here, Elijah?" It was personality addressing personality, and the prophet recognised the words as proceeding out of the mouth of God. IV. THE TRUEST REVELATION OF GOD TO MAN IS A PRACTICAL ONE. "What doest thou here, Elijah?" was the burden of the "still small voice." It was a charge that the prophet was away from duty, and an urgency for him to resume his deserted place. There is something of instruction in the Gospel, but more of incitement. It comes to sinful men, and says, Repent; to doubting men, and says, Believe; to serving men, and says, Run, strive, fight. There are no bowers of ease for idle men in this book; no cradles of inaction where they may rock and dream; no empty chambers where they may spin their gossamer webs of speculation. To every man, this Scripture comes with its call to immediate and earnest action. (*Monday Club.*) *God's manifestation to Elijah at Horeb*:—We learn here—I. THAT THE DIVINE WORKING IN NATURE IS INTENDED BY GOD TO PREPARE MEN FOR A HIGHER REVELATION. This was the intention of the miracles of Christ. II. WHEN MEN REVERENTIALLY LISTEN TO THE LOWER FORMS OF TEACHING, GOD GIVES THEM THE HIGHER REVELATION. Nicodemus allowed the teaching of Christ in His miracles to bring conviction of His Divine mission to his heart (John iii. 2); how willingly the Saviour led him into the deeper mysteries of His kingdom (ver. 16). III. THAT ALTHOUGH THE PHYSICAL POWER OF GOD IS STRONG ENOUGH TO TERRIFY MEN INTO SUBMISSION, HE WILL HAVE THEM BROUGHT TO OBEDIENCE BY MORAL SUASION. The prophet longed for the eternal overthrow of the forces of evil, by what we may call God's physical omnipotence. (*Outlines from Sermons by a London Minister.*)

Ver. 12. **A still small voice.**—*The still small voice*:—I. This vision ought to teach us that GOD IS OFTEN MORE REALLY PRESENT IN LITTLE THINGS AND IN QUIET AND UNOSTENTATIOUS AGENCIES THAN IN THINGS THAT SEEM TO US GREAT, AND AGENCIES THAT WE THINK THE MOST IMPRESSIVE. We are apt to look for God in the storm, the earthquake, and the fire, and to overlook God in the still small voices of nature. But God is not more in the forked lightning that rends the rock than in the sunbeam that plays with the rippling wave; He is not more in the roaring cataract than in the silent dewdrop; He is not more in the spangled heavens, whose clustered stars attract our gaze, than in the tiny flower whose unprotected beauty we trample beneath our feet. God is not more in the great events of nations than in the smallest incidents in the lives of individuals. He who counts the stars also numbers the hairs of our heads. Indeed, the most powerful agencies in nature are generally the most silent in their operation, and often

work in the deepest obscurity. But this is especially true in relation to God Himself. He is the greatest agent, and yet He works in the deepest obscurity. There is a sense in which He does everything, and yet He does it so silently and secretly that there are those who say He does nothing, that in fact there is no God. As in the natural, so in the spiritual world, the strongest forces are the least seen. "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh or whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit." There is not always the most good being done where there is the most noise. "Verily Thou art a God that hidest Thyself, O God, the God of Israel." He does not come out and sound a trumpet before Him when He is about to do a great and good work. The agencies that are even now doing the most good in society are not the most ostentatious and self-asserting. It is not by parliaments and armies and police that the commonwealth is maintained and peace preserved. A stronger force than all these is the leaven of religious life which quietly operates in families. II. THIS VISION IS AN EXAMPLE OF THE WAY IN WHICH GOD VERY GENERALLY REVEALS HIMSELF TO MEN. He sends messengers to prepare His way. These messengers are fitted to arrest and arouse our attention, and then He Himself comes and speaks to us in "a still small voice." He said, "Go forth," &c. (vers. 11, 12). These things are an allegory and example of God's dealings. He sent the law and the prophets with all their thunderings and earthquakes to prepare the way for the Gospel. 1. He often sends to us the whirlwind of adversity. 2. God sent an earthquake. This may represent events in providence still more severe, such as bereavement, which swallowed up out of sight objects dearer to you than property, the desire of the eyes and the living treasures of the loving heart. 3. God sent a fire. That fire may aptly represent personal affliction. This is often likened to a furnace: it consumes the health, and often brings eternity nearer to us than does even the death of a friend. 4. Then comes the "still small voice." This is pre-eminently the Voice of God. The other dispensations are only intended to prepare the way for this Voice. God does not inflict or grieve us because He takes pleasure in doing it, but because He wishes to speak to us, and we will not listen till we are thus arrested. The silvery tones of God's voice are constantly heard by those whose ears are inclined to hear. III. THIS VISION CONTAINS AN EXAMPLE OF THE MESSAGE WHICH GOD IS CONSTANTLY ADDRESSING TO MEN. 1. It is a word of rebuke for forsaking Him: "What doest thou here, Elijah?" This is the question which you address to a man who is out of his proper place—What are you doing here? 2. This word of rebuke is also addressed to the backslider. God says to him, What are you doing here?—in sin, among husks and swine, after having eaten of the hidden manna, and been in fellowship with God and Christ and the excellent of the earth, and the powers of the world to come. 3. This word of rebuke is also addressed to the Christian who has forsaken the post of duty. 4. The message also contains a word of exhortation: "Go, return." This is what God says to the sinner: "Return—return unto Me, and I will return unto you." (*A. Clark.*) *The still small voice:*—There are some important truths taught us by the account of the Lord's dealings with Elijah—truths worthy of a prayerful perusal. I. THE ATTRACTIONS OF THE GOSPEL ARE FAR MORE POWERFUL TO SAVE THAN THE INTIMIDATIONS OF THE LAW. This is a lesson which the display of God's majesty and the subsequent effect of His mildness were intended to teach. I do not read of any impressions being produced upon the mind of the prophet by the convulsions of nature, though I can quite suppose that his very blood chilled at the awe-inspiring scene he witnessed. But I find that when the "still small voice" fell upon his ear, he was smitten to the heart and humbled at Jehovah's feet. The terrible phenomena illustrated the giving of the Law; the gentle voice the giving of the Gospel. The Law was given amid thunder and fire and earthquake; the Gospel fell from the hallowed lips of the loving Son of God. The Law threatens; the Gospel invites. The Law wounds; the Gospel heals. The one speaks of death; the other points to life. The one lays on us burdens grievous to be borne; the other calls us to duties delightful to fulfil. The one holds out penalty and the lash; the other recompense and love. II. THE "STILL SMALL VOICE" AND ITS EFFECTS ON ELIJAH MAY BE REGARDED AS SHOWING THAT GOD WORKS MOST SUCCESSFULLY BY QUIET AND INVISIBLE AGENCIES. This is a truth daily proved to us in the natural world. There the Almighty mutely elevates His mountains, excavates His valleys, levels His plains, dimples the bosom of expansive seas, gives beauty to the heavens, guides worlds in their orbits, tints His flowers with beauteous hues, and makes His fruit nectarious. No man hears a sound or sees

a motion where the Great Architect is carrying out some of His gigantic plans. How gently falls the dew, how silently travels the sunbeam, how noiseless is electricity in its movements. But what effective agencies are these! How the face of nature is gladdened and rendered fruitful by them! 1. The "still small voice" of the Holy Spirit has effected wonders. Coming to us as the Spirit of Truth, the Holy Ghost holds up before us in the written and preached word our full-length portraiture, and then unfolds to our gaze the wondrous beauties of the God-Man. 2. The "still small voice" of conscience often speaks to us. Its utterance is not audible to the outward ear, yet the stoutest hearts have quailed before it. Men who have stood unmoved before the thunderings of adversity and the whirlwind of persecution, have succumbed to the whisperings of this inward monitor. 3. God makes great use of the "still small voice" of individual influence. We have lived with some who have let their light shine before men, and that light has shone upon our hearts, revealing to us the deformity and death within. (*J. H. Hitchens.*) *The still small voice:*—Feeble minds attain their petty ends with much noise and exertion; the Infinite Mind delights in accomplishing the greatest results silently, and through the operation of small causes; and the most satisfactory proofs of the presence of God are found in the "still small voice" with which he speaks to us. 1. It is so in the natural world. We see God as Elijah did, rending the mountains with His mighty wind; we hear His voice in the thunder, the earthquake, and the storm; but what is the effect of all these terrible manifestations of His attributes compared with that of the "still small voice," which reaches us from every part of His works? Very frequently will it be discovered, that such terrifying manifestations of the God of nature result in no lasting moral good; while that "still small voice," which speaks to us in every smiling exhibition of His benevolence on earth, and from every bright world above us, almost compels us to adore, and causes our affections to come forth as Elijah came forth from the cave, and bend in humble reverence before a present God. 2. And again we may see our text illustrated in the providences of God. When we witness any sudden stroke of bereavement; when we see a family or an individual visited by some signal calamity, some awful and overwhelming blow, we are apt to say to ourselves, "Surely such a warning will not be in vain." But is it not often in vain? After waiting some time, do we not find that the momentary terror and agitation of the blow have all subsided; and that the greater the calamity, the deeper apparently is the stupidity of those on whom it is sent, after it has gone by? 3. And thus it is, again, in the spiritual world. John the Baptist wrought no miracles, but all men came to him; our Saviour performed so many mighty works that nearly every inhabitant of Judæa might have seen some of them, and yet to human apprehension the result was less successful. It is not unlikely that a single sermon of St. Peter, on the day of Pentecost, because attended with the Spirit's influence, may have made more converts than all the mighty works which our Saviour performed. Miracles are addressed to the understanding. They do not affect the heart; and it is the heart that needs to be moved; it is the conscience which must be awakened, before there can be any moral reformation. (*W. H. Lewis, D.D.*) *The power of quiet forces:*—1. Materialism and spirituality are ever at war, ever have been. The claims of the first, that the outward and visible only—that which we can see, feel, and touch—or which the chemist, the microscopist, or the physicist can examine and analyse, alone is worthy to be considered or to be classed as knowledge, has many sincere advocates. Those who believe that at the back of all natural phenomena there is a realm of spiritual life, just as real, just as tangible to the higher sense, and who maintain that this, too, is knowledge, albeit personal—are a large, shall we say a growing army? Spiritual things are spiritually discerned; hence the impossibility of convincing a materialist of these things. But there is a materialism not dogmatic, but real, with which we are surrounded all the time. We are in touch with it everywhere. If affects us unconsciously. We cannot rid ourselves of it. This can be recognised in our religious lives oftener than we are ready to admit. Our activities take upon themselves many materialistic forms, many useful, some questionable, and we can scarcely find time to sit down to listen for the "still small voice." We are labouring at a disadvantage. Our inheritance, our environments do not aid us, and the life we ordinarily live places us not upon vantage-ground, but where constant effort and watchfulness are necessary to avoid wrong conclusions. 2. All the great questions of reform vary but little in aim. The divergence is not the result of the want of a purpose in any one direction, so much as an intelligent insight into the causes which produce our

moral disturbances. Public sentiment is ready to denounce the want of virtue or principle. Rumour is ready to carry on its steady current the moral carrion, until the putrefying mass contaminates and destroys the social order of society, and yet the cause of much of our evil is not understood nor disturbed. Christian and moralist alike forget their reason and good common sense in the excitement, and become like the lake when disturbed by a storm. Its quiet waters are ruffled and active. Its waves are high and powerful, and bear upon their crown the dignified crest of matured agitation. The elements frighten us, and we tremble with fear. But what of the storm? Need the farmers and other people upon the lake's shore deceive themselves that the waters of the lake are rising? Need they seek other habitations lest the water become so high that their farms and houses be overflowed by the great increase of water? No, no. Very soon the storm subsides. The bosom of the lake wears its usual peaceful calm. The clouds are parted, and God smiles through the warm, bright light, saying, "Peace, be still." The leaven of the Gospel which raises "three measures of meal" is a quiet, insinuating power. True reforms never come in any other way. It takes time and the warm, healthy glow of united Christian hearts in society to aid it in raising the life to a place of spiritual existence. 3. The silent voice which speaks to our hearts, speaks in a language which commands our respect. We may not be able to give the thought in words. We are all sensible of deeper mysteries than our understanding can solve. The strongest convictions of life have sprung from these deeper sentiments of the soul. They furnish us food for reflection, and give us the fuel which warms the heart to an energy that will not be quieted. The noisy demonstrations of life pass by us unnoticed, and we fear them not; but a silent voice awakens us. We are all attention, our hearts tremble with fear or joy. The steady onward strides of all the great forces of life are never heralded before their coming, saying, Behold, I come! They are not seen but known by that which they do, and others praise them. Strong life is quiet and modest, dignified and powerful. Light and heat, electricity, and many other agencies for good or for evil, as the circumstances may make them, work silently in the secret chambers of nature. God has made man not only in His moral image, but nature and man strongest when seemingly silent and composed. There is a dignity in the thought of such a life. There is an inexpressible awe in the presence of such a God who in the secret chambers of an eternity silently makes known to the life within us His will. 4. We leave very much of our religious faith behind us when we resort to physical rather than moral force in our work. It is then the command for solicitude is, "You must," "You shall," when the silent and all-potent influences of moral power should win. When the Church of Christ had assumed strong organisation and exercised great temporal power, as in the Dark Ages, it was because she had lost the moral force which an all-pervading spirituality furnishes. "It is not by might, nor by power, but by My spirit, saith the Lord." 5. How ready are we, as we see the weakness of the Church—her lack of success in winning many from sin—to flee to the cave of despair, as did the prophet Elijah, and thus in the confines of natural resources try to protect ourselves. This is one of the grievous mistakes of the people of God. Men are hidden in their professions, in their business, in their selfish pursuits, and seem not to have the moral courage or inclination to stand erect as men of God, saying, "Judge ye, my God is Jehovah." They are not unlike the prophet Elijah in the cave, and when the Lord says unto the soul thus neglecting God's altars, when the Lord speaks unto the man or woman who thus neglects the ordinances of God's house, the Church, the prayer meeting, the family altar, the answer comes as of old, "I have been very jealous for the Lord God of hosts: for the children of Israel have forsaken Thy covenant, thrown down Thine altars, and slain Thy prophets, and I, even I only, am left"! 6. The influences which are potent in lifting from the pit to a life of godliness are not noisy or demonstrative, but silent and insinuating. All true reforms commence in the heart of mankind, and are significant in that they are spiritual, rather than materialistic. Like the air by which we are warmed when chilled, we are bathed in it, and infused with a new life ere we are aware of it. Even so God comes to you and me in the silent influences of life. (*J. M. La Bach.*)

Christianity—a voice:—I. CHRISTIANITY IS A VOICE—not only a book, but also a voice. Other religions have books: Mahometanism has a book, and a grand old book it is too, called the Koran. Some of its stories are equal in beauty to the stories of the Book of Genesis, but Mahometanism has no voice. Mahomet is dead, and his voice is silent in the tomb. Hinduism has books, and interesting books they are too, called the Veda and Shaster. They are full of hymns and

precepts, some of them equal in purity and spirituality to some of the Old Testament Psalms and Proverbs, but Hinduism has no voice. The great prophets of Hinduism, who thought out the books, are dead, and their voices are heard no more. Christianity also has a book. It is more beautiful than the Koran, and more poetic and spiritual than the Veda or Shaster. But the book of Christianity is also a voice. The Prophet of Christianity is not dead. Christ is alive, and fills all the words of the Bible with a living voice. He speaks again, through His spirit, the very words which He spoke when on earth. Herein is the great difference between the Bible and every other book. The voice of Christianity is a revealing voice. God is not to be seen, only heard. "No man hath seen God at any time; the Only-begotten Son which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him." And He declares Him still. As one said: "When we look, with the eye of faith, on Christ in history we behold only the man, but we hear the God." The man only is visible, but the invisible God speaks. God is not seen in the world of matter, but He is heard. II. CHRISTIANITY IS A SMALL VOICE. Would it not be better were it a large voice filling the world with its melody, and captivating every ear with its charming music? It appears so; but when we study the subject closer we find that what appears to be a disadvantage is a very great blessing. 1. A voice for the weakest. It is a small voice, that the human ear may be able to take it in as a whole. One of the loudest noises that art can produce is the report of cannon as it discharges its perilous contents into the air, but the human ear is too small to take it in as a whole; only a small portion of the sound enters our ears as it passes by through the air. One of the loudest sounds Nature can produce is that of a thunder-clap, rending the air with its sound and echo, but only a small part of it reaches our ears, carried by the air wavelets. There are sounds too great and awful for the human ear to take them in as a whole. The voice that man can take in must be small. The voice of Christianity has been ordained small by God that the weak, small human ear may take it all in. 2. The voice of Christianity is ordained small in order that other voices may be employed to re-echo it, in preaching and living it. And as they reproduce it they are transformed into the same melodious quality. III. CHRISTIANITY IS A STILL VOICE, or, according to the Welsh translation, which undoubtedly is better here, Christianity is a silent voice. It is a voice; it is silence—contradiction in terms, but not in the truths themselves. It is a voice to some; it is silence to others. It is a voice to the ear of faith, but it is silence to the ear of unbelief. It is a voice to the children of God, but it is silence to the children of the devil. There is a music in this world that no one can hear except those who have had their spiritual ears opened by Divine grace. The people of the world boast of the music of the opera and theatre, but they have not yet heard the conductor of heaven's choir giving the keynote to the saints upon earth. The world has not yet heard the sweetest music—the voice of Him who made the storm to sleep by His "Peace, be still." We must have our spiritual ears opened by Christ; then we shall hear His voice. The voice of the Opener of our spiritual ears will be the first we hear, and ever will be the sweetest. The sweetest voice on earth is the voice of Christ to the saints. 1. It is a silent voice, that God may be able to tell the secret of His kingdom to His children, so that the devil, who is at the elbow, cannot hear it. God has secrets to impart to His people which no one is to hear. 2. Christianity is a silent voice, that the weak and the painful and the dying may listen to it without being hurt. There are events in human life when the voice of the world and society are too loud and harsh for us to listen to it without being pained. As I was walking, a few years ago, over the streets of Cardiff I noticed that a part of the street was covered over with chaff four or five inches deep. I stood wondering what it was good for. Failing to solve the mystery I ventured to ask a policeman, who was standing by, what was the meaning of the chaff-covered street. "In that house," said he, pointing to the other side, "there is a young woman twenty-one years of age, in the last stage of consumption, and she cannot bear the noise of the traps and footsteps going over the street, so they have covered the street with chaff that the vehicles and people may pass by in silence." I saw through the mystery of the chaff-covered street at once. The noise of trade was too loud and harsh for the consumptive young woman to listen to it without being pained; her dying ear could not bear it. But there is a voice so still and sweet that the dying young woman could listen to with pleasure—the "still small voice" of Divine love. (*R. Williams.*) *God's whisper:*—I. WHAT MEANING THIS PARABLE HAD FOR ELIJAH. 1. It seems to me, first of all, that the Lord would teach him that, though disappointed, he might still live

to purpose, and do good work for God. 2. God would have His servant understand that He is not straitened for means, and methods, and instruments. Not by a continuation of Carmel's triumphs, but by other and simpler means God would carry out His programme. 3. Jehovah would have Elijah remember that his example had accomplished more than he had supposed. II. BUT THIS PARABLE, SURELY, HAS A BEARING TOWARDS OURSELVES. 1. There is this truth, amongst others, that God employs unexpected means. 2. The folly of relying on outward appearances. Displays of power are not to be encouraged or rejoiced in. Eloquence, and style, and culture have all their place. The great forces of nature are silent. 3. God sometimes delays, but makes Himself manifest eventually. 4. Mercy is more potent than judgment. (*T. Spurgeon.*) *The still small voice* :—1. This "still small voice," for us, is both conscience and Jesus. It is Jesus, acting by His wisdom, and His truth, and His courtesy, and His gentleness, and righteousness, and holiness, on our conscience. And the "still small voice" of affection says, "Great is intellect; glorious is the pursuit of truth, knowledge, discovery; glorious the application of these things in what we call art! Glorious all that. More beautiful still, more truly human is the love of a sister for her brother, the love of a mother for her child. Love is more beautiful than even thought, glorious as thought is." Does conscience tell us that this God watches over us, that He acts according to laws? But those laws are much more manifold than we suspect, much more complicated than we suspect. It is a west wind blowing, with, I believe, a little south in it. Do you think that is an accident? It is all the result of law, laws and influences—antecedents, we may call them—that have been at work for four thousand and more years before to-day. It is very difficult to ascertain all those laws; nay, it is humanly possible and impracticable. But God has all those antecedents in His hand. To speak it reverently, think it reverently, that Great Mechanic has but to touch some of those remote and complicated links in the chain of antecedents, or cause and effect, if you like so to call them; has but to touch some of the higher, more remote, less visible, less conspicuous, less ascertainable links in the chain of antecedents, and it is changed; and you shall have, not the west or the south-west, but a northerly or an easterly wind. Does conscience speak to us of this Great Being, and of Him as shown to us in Jesus Christ, infinitely and humanely caring for us, and watching over us. 2. This voice was to Elijah articulate. "What doest thou here, Elijah?" "Go, return," says this voice; "go, return on thy way to the wilderness of Damascus." Strange prophet, this Elijah. Strange history, very often overlooked and not noticed at all. Go back! where to? To Jerusalem? No. Go back! where to? To the sacred cities of Israel's kingdom? No. Where to? To the wilderness. Another wilderness; not this southern one, but far off beyond thine own Gilead, north of that, east of that, go away to that wilderness, that belongs to Damascus, the chief city of the Syrian, the Gentile uncircumcised. Ah, think you God cares not for the uncircumcised, the Syrian, as well as for the Jew? (*J. Macnaught.*) *The still small voice* :—We have to consider how God dealt with His dispirited and truant child. I. GOD SPAKE TO HIM. In some darksome cave, among those rent precipices, Elijah lodged; and, as he waited, in lonely musings, the fire burned in his soul. But he had not long to wait. "Behold, the word of the Lord came unto him." That word had often come to him before. It had come to him at Thisbe. It had come to him in Samaria, after he had given his first message to Ahab. It had come to him when Cherith was dry. It had come to summon him from the solitudes of Zarephath to the stir of active life. And now it found him out, and came to him again. There is no spot on earth so lonely, no cave so deep and dark, that the word of the Lord cannot discover and come to us. "What doest thou here, Elijah?" How often is that question put still! When a Christian worker, sorely needed, deserts his post, because of some unforeseen difficulty, or to secure selfish gratification and ease; to that couch of indolence, or to that forest glade where soft breezes blow, the question comes, "What doest thou here?" When one endowed with great faculties digs a hole in the earth, and buries the God-entrusted talent, standing idle all the day long among the loungers in the market-place, again must the inquiry ring out, "What doest thou here?" Life is the time for doing. The world is a great workshop, in which there is no room for drones. God Himself worketh as the great Master-builder. There is plenty to do. Evil to put down; good to build up; doubters to be directed; prodigals to be won back; sinners to be sought. "What doest thou here?" Up, Christians, leave your caves, and do! Do not do in order to

be saved; but being saved, do! II. GOD TAUGHT HIM BY A BEAUTIFUL NATURAL PARABLE. But in this natural parable God seemed to say: "My child, thou hast been looking for Me to answer thy prayers with striking signs and wonders; and because these have not been given in a marked and permanent form, thou hast thought Me heedless and inactive. But I am not always to be found in these great visible movements; I love to work gently, softly, and unperceived; I have been working so; I am working so still; and there are in Israel, as the results of My quiet gentle ministry, 'seven thousand, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him.'" Yes, and was not the gentle ministry of Elisha, succeeding the stormy career of his great predecessor, like the "still small voice" after the wind, the earthquake, and the fire? And is it not probable that more real good was effected by his unobtrusive life and miracles, than was even wrought by the splendid deeds of Elijah? We often fall into similar mistakes. When we wish to promote a revival, we seek to secure large crowds, much evident impression, powerful preachers; influences comparable to the wind, the earthquake, and the fire. When these are present, we account that we are secure of having the presence and power of God. His Spirit descends as the dove, whose wings make no tremor in the still air. Let us take heart! God may not be working as we expect; but He is working. If not in the wind, yet in the zephyr. If not in the earthquake, yet in the heart-break. If not in the fire, yet in the warmth of summer. If not in thunder, yet in the "still small voice." If not in crowds, yet in lonely hearts; in silent tears; in the broken sobs of penitents; and in multitudes, who, like the seven thousand of Israel, are unknown as disciples. (*F. B. Meyer, B.A.*) *A more excellent way*:—We find instructive parallels in the lives of Moses and John the Baptist; or, if we prefer a modern instance, think of Frederick Robertson, one day preaching to a crowded church in Brighton, the next day grovelling on his study floor. It is only to the noblest natures that such dejection is possible. And yet, such despondency was wrong. It was unjust to God. Elijah's despondency was unjust to the past. "I am not better than my fathers!" I have failed, so did they! Why labour any longer? Why tax the overwearied brain? Why continue the unavailing struggle? Is it worth while to toil like this? Are those for whom I labour worth it all? So we repine, so we despond. And yet the kingdom of God is coming amongst us, and the day of the Lord draws nigh. But it concerns us most of all to know, not the grandeur of this scene, but its real meaning. What is the truth at the back of this story, and how shall we translate it into plain words? What is the real meaning of these experiences? It seems to me that Elijah gained, through them, three things. 1. First, he gained new views of God. The prophet had made a mistake. He supposed that the fire of Carmel was the only symbol by which God could make Himself known, that earthquake and thunder and storms were the expression of His essential nature. Elijah had tried to bend the stubborn wills of men by methods of force. He never thought of any other way. He magnified God's strictness with a zeal he would not own. But in the solitude and silence of Horeb, he learned the gentleness of God. 2. He gained, in the second place, new views of his work. "What doest thou here?" The cruelty of Jezebel, the apostasy of Israel, the failure of past efforts, the uncertainty of the future—none of these, nor all of them together, were sufficient to justify Elijah in abandoning his duty. God gave His servant a glimpse of the work yet to be done. 3. Above all, Elijah learned at Horeb a new method of appeal. The method of coercion had failed, the method of wonder had failed. There was a better way. Force, threats, denunciations will never avail. Men cannot be frightened into goodness. But where thunder-and-lightning methods have failed, the gradual, silent, pervasive influence of the faithful seven thousand may succeed. (*A. Moorhouse, M.A.*) *The power of silent influence*:—I. IT IS A POWER WHICH GOD USUALLY EMPLOYS TO ACCOMPLISH HIS WORK. 1. In the government of the material world. How noisel ssly does He work the great machinery of nature! There is not a sound to be heard. Poets talk of the "music of the spheres"; but it is a music that has never fallen on their ears. 2. In the dispensation of Providence. We sometimes imagine we hear nothing but the stormy wind, or the terrible earthquake, levelling to the ground all our hopes. The fire of Divine disapprobation seems to rage most fiercely, and we feel ready to perish. But these are not the chief agents employed by our Father in the dispensation of His Providence. "After the fire a still small voice." 3. In the renovation of the soul. "The wind, the

earthquake, and the fire," may be used as preparatory means to the great work of conversion. The influence of the Spirit on the heart is secret, silent, and effective. II. IT IS A POWER THAT IS PRODUCTIVE OF THE GREATEST GOOD. It is folly to think that because an influence is silent it cannot be effective. 1. It awakens thought. The wind, the earthquake, the fire, sometimes disturb the slumbers of a soul in sin. 2. It operates on the heart. The noisy tempest may affect the passions, stir up the animal feelings; but it cannot reach the sinner's heart. 3. It regulates the actions. The very power that impresses the heart, will also mould and shape the actions of life. It is often remarked that "example is more powerful than precept." The reason of this is evident. III. IT IS A POWER THAT IS LASTING IN ITS EFFECTS. Why is the power of silent influence so durable? 1. It is emblematic of the Divine presence. God was not in the awful tempest which preceded the "still small voice." 2. It becomes a living element in the new character. The believer in Christ is a new creature. (*J. H. Hughes.*) *God heard in the still small voice*:—I. WHEN GOD COMES TO REPROVE MEN FOR THEIR SINS, HE USUALLY MANIFESTS HIMSELF TO THEM, or addresses them, not by His works, either of creation or providence, but by a "still small voice." Thus it was in the instance before us. You have all known something of the force of the winds; you have felt your habitations tremble before the fury of the blast. And not a few of you have witnessed more terrible proofs of its power on the ocean. You have seen the billows raised into mountains, and lashed into foam. You have felt the labouring vessel reel under you, while tossed by a tempest which seemed sufficient to rend the mountains, and break in pieces the rocks; and you have seen the tempest become a calm. But, as it respected you, God was not in the wind, nor in the calm which succeeded. You saw His hand, you heard His voice in neither. If you then heard Him in anything, it was in a "still small voice" within you. Further, the globe which we inhabit, though not this particular part of it, has often been convulsed by the most terrible and desolating earthquakes. Even some parts of New England have been agitated in a degree sufficient to excite distressing apprehensions. But have the nations thus visited found God in the earthquake? Did our fathers find Him there as an instructor and reprover? Far from it. Never have the survivors been reformed by such events. The earthquakes in New England did, indeed, occasion a kind of religious panic. A writer, who was then one of the ministers of Boston, informs us, that immediately after the great earthquake, as it was called, a great number of his flock came and expressed a wish to unite themselves with the church. But on conversing with them he could find no evidence of improvement in their religious views or feelings, no convictions of their own sinfulness; nothing, in short, but a kind of superstitious fear, occasioned by a belief that the end of the world was at hand. All their replies proved that they had not found God in the earthquake. The same may be said of other means. Ministers may give voice and utterance to the Bible, which is the Word of God. Like James and John, they may be "sons of thunder" to impenitent sinners. They may pour forth a tempest of impassioned, eloquent declamation. Nothing effectual can be done unless God be there, unless He speaks with His "still small voice." II. THAT WHEN GOD SPEAKS TO MEN WITH THIS VOICE, HE SPEAKS TO THEM PERSONALLY, or does, as it were, call them by name. This He did in the case before us. He addressed the prophet by his name, Elijah. III. THAT, WHEN GOD SPEAKS TO MEN IN THIS "STILL SMALL VOICE," HE USUALLY BEGINS BY TURNING THEIR ATTENTION UPON THEMSELVES, THEIR CONDUCT, AND SITUATION. He said to the prophet, "What doest thou here, Elijah?" a question which was most admirably adapted to convince, reprove, and humble him. (*E. Payson, D.D.*) *The still small voice*:—The once triumphant spokesman of the Lord has temporarily lost his exuberant faith, and is sunk in dark despair. I am free to confess that I obtain a little comfort even from the prophet's grief. There is something in human nature which makes us feel more akin to men who occasionally suffer defeat. When the Apostle Peter is very bold, daring even death in the presence of the great ones of the earth, he appears very remote to the child of hesitancy and doubt; but in the hour of Peter's weakness, when he shrinks from the foes that beset him, he becomes one of the common crowd. His impulsiveness makes even his martyrdom human. Paul's feelings of wretchedness lend humanness even to his ecstasies, and his unspeakable visions do not lie in lands too remote. Now think of this mighty symbolism being portrayed before the despondent prophet. What would be its significance? Its significance was this, and he learned the lesson: comparative impotence may roar

in the guise of tempest and fire; Almightiness may move in whispers. Feebleness hides in the apparently overwhelming; Almightiness hides in apparent impotence. God was in the weak thing! Elijah left the mount with his conceptions entirely changed. I think I can see him descending from the place of apocalypse with this thought filling his life: "The wind is against me, and the earthquake, and the fire, but what of that? The breathing is with me, and the immeasurable voice of God is in the wind." It is well for us to remember that the seemingly feeble, if the ghostly voice be in it, is transcendently more powerful than the massed battalions of the ungodly. When I had written these words I looked upon my study walls, and saw Munkacsy's great picture, "Christ before Pilate." There is a vast, howling, brutal mob, the very incarnation of brutal and irresistible force. It seems as though the violent crowd can carry all before it. Standing before the surging, shouting throng is the meek figure of the Master! It seems as though one hand out of the violent mob could crush Him like a moth! And yet we now know that in that silent Figure there dwelt the secret of Almightiness, and the Lord was not in the mob. Some time ago I was in Stirling Castle, and the guide pointed out to me the field of Bannockburn, and revelled in his description of the bloody fray. I turned from the contemplation of material strife, and I saw John Knox's pulpit! I allowed the two symbols to confront each other, and they enshrined for me the teaching given to Elijah in the days of old. The ghostly power suggested by the pulpit was of infinitely greater import than the carnal power suggested by the battlefield. I remember one day passing along the road, by the far-stretching works of Messrs. Armstrong, that vast manufactory of destructive armaments. I was almost awed by the massiveness of the equipment, and by the terrific issues of their work. Near by I saw a little Methodist chapel; it could have been put in a small corner of Armstrong's works, but it became to me the symbol of the enduring and the eternal! The ghostly breathing was in the plain little edifice, and the creations of its ministries will be found when the bristling armaments have crumbled into dust. Never let us count heads, but let us make sure of God. One man with God is in the majority. The man on the side of the "still small voice" must become at last overwhelming. One man in a workshop, surrounded by jeering and sneering mates, moving in an environment altogether invincible to grace, will most assuredly conquer if he has the companionship of the Holy Ghost. A working man said to me a little while ago, speaking of the uncongenial character of his workshop, "I must get out of it!" I told him I was not so sure about that. I told him that he had chosen Elijah's way out of the difficulty. I urged him to believe in the sovereignty of the Almighty, and to remain faithful unto the end. We can wear down the stoutest antagonist. Our contention may be as silent as time, but it will be as invincible. (*J. H. Jowett, M.A.*) *The still small voice*:—By communion with God must be understood a sense of His presence, which fills consciousness with a living moral force equal to the work of regeneration. When it is said that God was not in the storm, the earthquake, or the fire, we understand that such manifestations of God did not commend themselves to the judgment of Elijah, as likely to effect the changes he prayed for. Then God came nearer, and spoke to him as "friend to friend," which brought the assurance that the human heart can be reached effectually without the terrors of Sinai, or the destruction of the prophets of Baal. The regeneration of man is essentially moral, which can only be accomplished by moral means—means that will bring God's "still small voice" into the soul. I. AN ANSWER TO THE EVER-RECURRING DEMAND OF THE CHURCH FOR THE MARVELLOUS. "What sign showest thou?" is the oft-repeated question. II. AN ANSWER TO THE MATERIALISTIC TENDENCY OF THE AGE. A large class of educated people contend that the works of nature afford a sufficient scope for the human mind. Religious exercises, say they, as observed in saying prayers, singing hymns, listening to sermons, and building churches, abstract the mind from the wonders of the universe. There never was a greater mistake. How can the voice of God in the soul hinder the contemplation of His works? III. AN ANSWER TO THE DISTRACTED SAINT. Elijah was in need of a special communication from his God. The earthquake, the storm, and the fire failed to calm his fear. The voice came to strengthen his faith. (*T. Davis, M.A.*) *Quiet churches*:—It is a common error to suppose that a church is dead because it is not making a noise. Some people would keep up a continued round of tea-meetings, bazaars, Dorcases, holiday-makings, and trumpet-blowings, and advertise the same as signs of spiritual life. Some in-

judicious man once drew a distinction between perspiration and inspiration. He must have had his eye upon the people in question. Spiritual life is generally quiet. There may be periods of intense excitement, but they cannot last. We should remember that the river is not deepest where it is noisiest. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *Through storm to calm*:—There are some spirits which must go through a discipline analogous to that sustained by Elijah. The storm struggle must precede the "still small voice." There are minds which must be convulsed with doubt before they can repose in faith. There are hearts which must be broken with disappointment before they can rise into hope. Blessed is the man who, when the tempest has spent its fury, recognises his Father's voice in its undertone, and bares his head and bows his knee as Elijah did. To such spirits it seems as if God had said: "In the still sunshine and ordinary ways of life you cannot meet Me; but, like Job, in the desolation of the tempest you will see My form and hear My voice, and know that your Redeemer liveth." (*F. W. Robertson.*)

Ver. 15. And the Lord said unto him, Go, return.—"*Go, return*":—It is a very solemn thought, that one sin may for ever, so far as this world is concerned, wreck our usefulness. It is not always so. Sometimes—as in the case of the Apostle Peter—the Lord graciously restores, and re-commissions for His work, the one who might have been counted unfit ever again to engage in it. "Feed My sheep. Feed My lambs." But against this one case we may put three others, in each of which it would seem as if the sentry angel, who forbade the return of our parents to Paradise, were stationed with strict injunctions to forbid any return to the former position of noble service. The first case is that of Moses; the meekest of men; the servant of the Lord; the foster-nurse of the Jewish nation, whose intercessions saved them again and again from destruction. Yet because he spake unadvisedly with his lips, and smote the rock twice, in unbelief and passion, he was compelled to bear the awful sentence: "Because ye believed Me not, to sanctify Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them." The second case is that of Saul, the first ill-fated King of Israel, whose reign opened so auspiciously, as a morning without clouds, but who soon brought upon himself the sentence of deposition. Yet it was only for one single act. Alarmed at Samuel's long delay, and at the scattering of the people, he intruded rashly into a province from which he was expressly excluded, and offered the sacrifice with which the Israelites were wont to prepare for battle. The third case is that of Elijah. He was never reinstated in quite the position which he had occupied before his fatal flight. True, he was bidden to return on his way, and work was indicated for him to do. But that work was the anointing of three men, who were to share amongst them the ministry which he might have fulfilled if only he had been true to his opportunities and faithful to his God. God's work must go on; if not by us, then, through our failures, by others brought in to supply our place. "Go, return on thy way to the wilderness of Damascus," &c. I. THE VARIETY OF GOD'S INSTRUMENTS. Hazael, King of Syria; Jehu, the rude captain; and Elisha, the young farmer. It is remarkable how God accomplishes His purposes through men who only think of working their own wild way. Their sin is not diminished or condoned because they are executing the designs of Heaven; it still stands out in all its malignant deformity. And yet, though they are held accountable for the evil, it is none the less evident that they do whatsoever God's hand and God's counsel determined before to be done. Joseph comforted his brethren, after his father's death, by telling them that though they thought evil against him, God meant it unto good, to save much people alive. II. NO ONE CAN ENTIRELY ESCAPE FROM GOD'S PERSONAL DEALINGS. God's nets are not all constructed with the same meshes. Men may escape through some of them; but they cannot escape through all. If they elude the Gospel ministry, they will be caught by some earnest worker, apt at personal dealing. If they manage to evade all contact with the living voice, they may yet be reached by the printed page. If they evade all religious literature, they may still be the sudden subjects of the strivings of the Spirit. "Him that escapeth the sword of Hazael shall Jehu slay; and him that escapeth from the sword of Jehu shall Elisha slay." III. GOD NEVER OVERLOOKS ONE OF HIS OWN. Elijah thought that he alone was left as a lover and worshipper of God. It was a great mistake. God had many hidden ones. "Yet I have left Me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth

which hath not kissed him." We know nothing of their names or history. They were probably unknown in camp or court—obscure, simple-hearted, and humble. Their only testimony was one long refusal to the solicitations of the foul rites of idolatry. They groaned and wept in secret; and spake often one to another, while the Lord hearkened and heard. But they were all known to God, and enrolled amongst His jewels, and counted as a shepherd tells his sheep. He cared for them with an infinite solicitude; and it was for their sake that He raised up the good and gentle Elisha to carry on the nurture and discipline of their souls. (*F. B. Meyer, B.A.*) *Return to duty*:—I. 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. II. Another feeling Elijah had, in leaving his cave, must have been A LIVELY SENSE AND APPREHENSION OF GOD'S GREAT MERCY. What, in the re rospect of the recent wondrous manifestation, would more especially linger in the prophet's recollection? Not the wind, not the earthquake, not the fire; but the "still small voice." III. We may suppose another feeling entertained by Elijah in departing from his cave and returning through the wilderness, would be, A FIXED PURPOSE AND RESOLUTION OF NEW AND MORE DEVOTED OBEDIENCE. 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. (*J. R. Macduff, D.D.*)

Ver. 18. **Yet I have left Me seven thousand in Israel.**—*The unknown quantity*:—We cannot know what a man is merely by what he does. He may be a painter showing to us his pictures; that sight gives no idea as to whether he is inwardly beautiful. He may be a tradesman with whom we deal; that does not tell us whether he is occupying himself with his Lord's talents until He come. He may be a mechanic who executes some manual labour for us; that does not signify if he is labouring for the meat which perisheth, and also for that which endureth unto everlasting life. We need to get more than a man's doings to enable us to perceive what he is. We must learn what his real thoughts are. "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he." We must be able to form clear ideas of what he likes and dislikes; what he finds fault with in others, and would fain accomplish by them. In just such a condition we are as regards our knowledge of God. His works in nature do not inform us of what He is. I. THIS UNKNOWN QUANTITY IS A PROVISION MADE BY GOD'S SECRET OPERATIONS. "I have left," or as we read in the Epistle to the Romans, "I have reserved to Myself seven thousand." The Lord thus affirms that their existence in Israel was due to His own arrangements, that He was carrying out His purposes by other methods than that which He had consigned to Elijah, and independently of him. The secret of the Lord's operations may well put shame upon the course taken by so many who profess to be His appointed servants, setting themselves up as judges, and condemning to uncovenanted mercies—which mean too often unpitying wishes produced by the spite of bigoted hearts—those who do not agree with them. II. THIS UNKNOWN QUANTITY IS AN OBJECT OF CONSTANT INSPECTION BY GOD. He knows when and where their knees are bent; when and where their lips are shaped for a kiss. He sees what resolutions they have made, and that those resolutions have not been broken. All and every one in particular are designated by His testimony as His elected people, even though never ranked with the professed upholders of His kingdom. III. THIS UNKNOWN QUANTITY ENCOURAGES UNDEFINED HOPES AS TO THE WIDE RANGE OVER WHICH LOYALTY TO GOD EXTENDS. God wants faithful servants far more than prophets, apostles, preachers can. The desire for the extension of His kingdom, which moulds their prayers and efforts, their complaints and despondency, is a desire which is only a minute output from His measureless yearning. They see Him making the Gospel His power to the salvation of men, of whom they had lost hope. Slaves, criminals, cannibals, philosophers lifted up with pride, and ignorant men dogmatic in their ignorance; men and women, over whom the fetid vapours of fleshly lusts hung darkly, and little children, scarcely able to tell that evil soils them, have each and all become known as unyielding props in the earthly house of the Lord. What ground is available for doubting that He has raised many more with His wonder-working grace than have come into our notice? 1. An impulse to continuous service of the Lord.

2. The guidance for each soul. It is found in the words of Jesus when answering the question, "Lord, are there few that be saved?" He made no attempt at a reply; He sent the questioners into their own consciences, with the injunction, "Strive to enter in at the strait gate." (*D. G. Watt, M.A.*) *The seven thousand*:—I. We may learn from this declaration of God to Elijah, in reply to his complaint, NEVER TO TAKE TOO GLOOMY OR DESPONDING A VIEW OF THE POSITION AND PROSPECTS OF THE CHURCH. However reduced in number and influence and piety the Church of God apparently may become;—however feeble the spark, it cannot be quenched;—it cannot die. The true Israel often and again have been reduced to the lowest ebb;—the bush burning with fire ready to be consumed; but the living God was in the bush, and defied the destroying flames. II. Arising from the lesson just drawn, and suggested by it, we may further learn to BEWARE OF HARSH JUDGMENTS ON OUR FELLOW-MEN AND FELLOW-CHRISTIANS. There was unwarrantable self-sufficiency in Elijah—so boldly averring, "I, even I only, am left!" It was not for him ("the man of like passions") to make so sweeping and unqualified an assertion—repudiating the faith of others, and feeling so confident of his own. The worst phase which self-righteousness can assume, is when we constitute ourselves religious censors; and on the ground of some supposed superior sanctity say, with supercilious air, "Stand back, for I am holier than thou." Elijah's feeling has developed itself in modern times in denominational exclusiveness;—sect unchurching sect. One saying, "I alone am left." I alone am "the Church," because of apostolic descent and sacramental efficacy. Another, "I only am left," for congregations around me are asleep, and mine only has undergone revival and awakening. Nay, nay; hush these censorious thoughts and hasty party judgments. "Who art thou that judgest another?" Who art thou so ready to spy out the mote in thy brother's eye, and seest not the beam in thine own? There has ever been, and ever shall be, "a hidden Church." "The kingdom of God cometh not with observation." There is often pure gold in the coarsest-looking ore;—there is often the rarest pebble in the most rugged rock;—there are often the loveliest flowers in the most tangled brake or remotest dell. III. Let us gather yet another lesson from this comforting assurance of God to Elijah—THE INFLUENTIAL POWER OF A GREAT EXAMPLE. Elijah's feeling was, that he was alone; that he had toiled, and witnessed, and suffered in vain; that in vain he had uttered his high behests; borne publicly his testimony to the living Jehovah; lived his life of faith, and self-denial, and prayer. His saddening thought was, that he was now going to end a useless, fruitless, purposeless existence; that, for all he had done in the cause of Divine truth, he might still have been roaming a freebooter, or pasturing his flocks as a shepherd in his native Gilead. "Nay," says God, to this mighty harvest-man, "seven thousand souls have been reaped mainly by thy sickle." Wherever there are brave, bold, honest, upright, God-loving hearts in this world, there is sure to emanate a silent, it may be, but yet a vast influence for good. "No man liveth to himself." What may not a word do!—a solemn advice!—a needed caution! (*J. R. Macduff, D.D.*) *Hidden saintship*:—A consistent saint of God—What do we mean by the word "saint"? All who are set aside for the Master's use, who are sanctified and strengthened by His grace to serve Him, are His saints. What is that life? I. IT IS A LIFE OF WHICH THE ROOT IS HIDDEN, THOUGH ITS FRUITS, AT LEAST IN PART, MAY BE SEEN. II. SAINTSHIP IS NOURISHED MOST IN TIMES OF DEPRESSION AND OF AFFLICTION. It is of such a time that God is here speaking: "I have seven thousand which have not bowed the knee to Baal." (*W. Denton, M.A.*) *The faithful seven thousand*:—We learn from these words—I. THAT MEN MAY BE OFTEN DECEIVED WITH REGARD TO THE STRENGTH OF GOD'S CHURCH. Many have possessed a similar feeling to that expressed by Elijah. They have looked upon the prevalence of sin, in all ranks and conditions of life; they have looked upon the widespread indifference to religion, and that too in the midst of religious privilege and effort; and at such a sight their hearts have failed them; they have thought that the people of God were very few, and they have been tempted to think that their efforts to increase the number were vain and useless, and under such temptation many have relinquished their work. II. THAT GOD HAS A PERFECT KNOWLEDGE OF HIS OWN PEOPLE. The children of God may be unable to recognise each other, especially in times of persecution, which may restrain men from making an open avowal of their faith. And even in ordinary times there are many who may not feel called upon to make this avowal, so that their relation to God remains unknown to those around them.

But God sees and knows them. III. THAT GOD CAN KEEP HIS PEOPLE AMID THE MOST WIDESPREAD SIN AND EVIL. It is not without reason that Christian people fear for themselves and for others when sin and evil abound, and when temptations are numerous and powerful. They know their own weakness, and they know, too, how many have fallen in the conflict with sin. IV. THAT MEN SHOULD BE FAITHFUL TO THEIR DUTY, AND LEAVE RESULTS WITH GOD. (*T. Cain.*) *God's hidden ones* :—"A gardener knoweth what roots are in the ground long before they appear, and what flowers they will produce." Look over the garden in winter, and you will not know that there is any preparation for spring; but the gardener sees in his mind's eye—here a circle of golden cups, as if set out for a royal banquet, and there a cluster of snow-white beauties, drooping with excess of modest purity. His eye knows where the daffodils and anemones lie asleep, waiting to rise in all their loveliness; and he has learned the secret of the primroses and the violets, who wait in ambush till the first warm breath of spring shall bid them reveal themselves. Even thus doth the Lord know His hidden ones long before the day of their manifestation with Him. He sees His Church before His ministers see it, and declares concerning heathen Corinth, "I have much people in this city." (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Christians unknown to the world* :—There are stars set in the heavens by the hand of God, whose light has never reached the eye of man; gems lie deposited in the earth, that have never yet been discovered by the research of man; flowers which have grown in blushing beauty before the sun, that have never been seen by the florist; so there may be Christians made such by God, who are hidden from the knowledge and eye of the world. (*R. Venting.*)

Vers. 19–21. **And found Elisha.** —*The husbandman of Abel-meholah* :—I. A MARKED CHARACTERISTIC OF ELISHA WAS, CONTENTMENT WITH HIS POSITION AND WILLINGNESS TO FULFIL ITS DUTIES, HOWEVER HUMBLE. How few, possessed of gifts, are willing to wait the call of God; how few, even without gifts, or else who imagine they have gifts, are willing to wait! It seems to be forgotten that incapacity to serve God in "a few things," is evidence of inability to serve Him in many, and he who cannot make it possible to be faithful in little, may never be entrusted with that which is great. There is a vast difference between worship and service. We serve God in our own houses, having worshipped Him in His house. Service is work, and work for Him where He places us, not where we place ourselves. If we cannot or do not serve God in the humble place and in the daily duties which He has assigned to us, assuredly we never can nor will serve Him in any other place or circumstances. II. EQUALLY MARKED WAS ELISHA'S READINESS TO HEAR THE CALL OF GOD. It is dangerous either to go 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, nor 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. III. ANOTHER FEATURE IN THIS NARRATIVE IS ELISHA'S PERSONAL WILLINGNESS TO FOLLOW THE CALL OF GOD TO ITS UTMOST CONSEQUENCES. (*A. Edersheim, M.A., D.D.*) *Abel-meholah* :—There is much in this history to give us encouragement and direction. Let us linger a while to gather up its lessons. 1. Observe, then, in the first place, the care exercised by God in securing a constant succession of teachers for His people. He is always independent of any individual man. Jesus has declared that the gates of the grave shall not prevail against His Church; and just as, here, Elisha was ready to take Elijah's place, it will commonly be found that when one servant of the Master is removed from earth, or is sent to another field of labour, there has been, all unconsciously to himself perhaps, and to those around him, another led, through a course of training, to take the post which has been vacated. 2. Observe, in the second place, here, the honour which God puts upon industry in one's common daily work. Elisha was not called while he was engaged at his private devotions, though, judging of his character from the ready response which he made at this time, we are warranted in saying that his closet would not be neglected; but it was while he was following the plough that Elijah came upon him, and threw his mantle over him. God would thus teach us that we must not neglect our daily business, and that His rich blessing will descend upon us while we are serving Him, whether that service be of a specially devotional sort or of a more common and ordinary description. 3. Observe, in the third place, that special training is needed for

special work. We saw that, for the stern duties which Elijah had to discharge, he was particularly fitted by the solitude of his early life, and the rugged grandeur of the scenes in the midst of which he dwelt. Elisha, on the other hand, was trained for the more peaceful and gentle ministry on which he was sent, by the home-life of his father's house, and the quiet influences of agricultural pursuits. Like many another minister, his first college was his home; and there, as we are warranted in believing, from the readiness with which they gave him up to his new work, his parents trained him in the nurture of the Lord. But this was not the whole of Elisha's training. For seven years after the incidents which we have been considering, he was the companion and friend of Elijah; and so he was under the best of preparatory influences for his work. 4. Observe, in the fourth place, that God finds use for the distinct individualities of His servants. There are "diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit." All God's ministers are not made after the same pattern. There are individual features of character and disposition, as distinctive of each as are the outlines of the face of each. John is quite different from Peter, and Paul is distinct from both. What a contrast do we find between Elijah and Elisha! 5. Once more: the conduct of Elisha here furnishes us with a beautiful example of the spirit and manner in which we should respond to the call of the Lord Jesus Christ. If we have rightly represented his views as to the meaning of the act performed by Elijah on him, Elisha must have fully counted the cost of the step which he was about to take in responding to Jehovah's call. He knew that he must leave his home. He knew, also, that with an Ahab on the throne, a Jezebel in the palace, and an idolatrous population scattered over the country, the duties of the prophetical office would be not only onerous, but dangerous. Yet he conferred not with flesh and blood, but promptly and decidedly arose and went after Elijah. Now, so it ought to be with us and Christ. (*W. M. Taylor, D.D.*) *The call of Elisha*:—We think of the call of Elisha. He was a farmer of Abel-meholah, in the plain of Jordan. His father's name (it is all we know of him) was Shaphat—"the judge." I. THE DIVINE CALL FOUND HIM BUSY AT HIS EMPLOYMENT. Our Saviour called into the apostolate industrious, and not idle, men. Matthew from the custom-house; Peter, Andrew, John, and James from their work as fishermen; and Nathanael from the great spiritual labour of earnest prayer beneath the fig-tree; and Paul from his intended murderous industry as he toiled towards Damascus. It is so in the Old Testament. Moses was keeping Jethro's flock when from the bush burning, unburnt, there sounded the irresistible voice that sent him into one of the most illustrious pages of all history. The call came to Gideon when he was threshing wheat; to David, watching his father's sheep; to Amos, tending cattle; to Elisha, following the plough. There was a rude sagacity in that famous king who chased in his homely wanderings the idle loungers from the street with "Away, sirrah, and take to some work!" who encouraged the stall-women to have busy hands while waiting for custom, in a compulsory fashion, indeed; and if they would not be encouraged by his desire packed them and their stalls away. He would avoid everywhere the various and widespreading evils of indolence. II. THE DIVINE CALL WAS UNEXPECTED BY HIM. He was sought; he did not seek. God saw him in the rural obscurity, and challenged him forth into the national recognition and service. What had been his ambition—what the animating hope of his life? He feared God above many, and doubtless desired to be a considerate master, dutiful son, true friend, the comforter of those cast down, a light at home and in the neighbouring village. And to think of English instances. How unlikely that a Huntingdonshire farmer would become England's noblest monarch, though without the crown, which he, indeed, could well dispense with. Or in a more recent day, how unlikely that a young English carpenter would become the apostle of the Southern Seas, or that a young Scottish gardener would become the apostle of Southern Africa. Thus God pours contempt upon human judgment, "that, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord." III. THE CALL WAS ONE TO SELF-SACRIFICE AND PERIL. It is clear from the narrative that Elisha was in easy circumstances. He had servants and much cattle; he was heir to these at any rate. A quiet, pleasant country life was his—with the great miracle of nature ever before his eyes—labour in the open field under the blue of heaven, yet "a life that led melodious days." A serene man this—moving amid serene surroundings, looking with contemplative mind upon the lapse of seasons, the faces of familiar men, and the sacred scrolls of Hebrew Scripture. Brethren, our call to Christ and Christian service involves some sacrifice. With reiterated emphasis Christ says that. He has not painted His kingdom in the colours of

fancy. He tells of cross as well as crown; of "much tribulation" as well as eternal throne. IV. THE CALL WAS ACCEPTABLE TO ELISHA. Having cast his mantle upon Elisha, Elijah hastened on his way. He paused not to expound the call; expositions were to follow. He would compel no man into perilous companionship with himself. On he went, and the wondering herdsmen watched. And startled Elisha—for the thing had been done suddenly—recovers himself. V. ELISHA'S ACCEPTANCE OF THE CALL WAS CELEBRATED BY A FEAST. The event was worthy of celebration. Honour, with whatever peril, had come to him, and brighter than any crown. The man kindled. He was aglow to be gone. He was henceforth to hold another plough. He left all—native village, friends, patrimony, parents. With their kiss and blessing, the feast ended. And comes no call to us? —to Christ, and then to Christian service? Let us accept it, and then angels will "begin to be merry," with a joy never to end! O heavenly celebration! (*G. T. Coster.*) *Called*:—From the moment the mantle fell upon him everything was changed. 1. The new life was one of devotion to Elijah. Elisha might have said, "To me to live is E ijah." Years afterwards he was known by this title, "Elisha, that poured water on the hands of Elijah." And you are called to a life of devotion to the Lord Jesus. Christ is to be the centre of your life. The call comes all the more urgently because of the dismay and despair in which the present century opened. "Arise and live for Jesus; be whole-hearted to make Jesus King." 2. The new life was one of separation. He could not cleave to Elijah without leaving the old home. New interests arose; new duties occupied his time; new desires and ambitions filled his heart. The old life had to be left behind; he was completely drawn away from it. And so it is with every true follower of Christ. Nearness to Christ brings about separation from the world. The new interests and occupations crowd out the old, just as the young green leaves of spring push from the branches the dead leaves that had held on through all the winter storms. 3. The new life was, at the beginning, full of hardship and peril. Elisha shared in Elijah's exile. His master was a marked man and a fugitive. The prophet's mantle was no robe of state. None but Baal's priests were received at court in those days. Elijah had none of the privileges and protection which a Christian government affords to God's servants in England. And for us, too, though we live in better days, there is the cross. It is still true; "Whoso doth not bear his cross and come after Me, he cannot be My disciple." Even to-day, you can evade your cross only by denying your Lord. We cannot live for ease and riches and pleasure if we follow Christ. 4. And the new life was one of special privilege and power. That mantle was a sign of both. So is it with all who accept Christ's mantle. You shall see God face to face, and share His secrets, standing always in His presence-chamber, so that you do not fear the wrath of men. (*F. S. Webster, M.A.*) *A young man's call*:—All the circumstances connected with the call of Elisha, and Elisha's answer to the call, would indicate that the young fellow was very familiar with Elijah and with his ways. The circumstances connected with Elisha's call are exceedingly picturesque and interesting. Elijah does not stop to talk. Instead, passing near the youth, he takes his prophet's mantle from his shoulders and throws it about the shoulders of the astonished Elisha, and strides onward without a word. Now Elisha had evidently had long talks with Elijah about this matter, and he knew what that mantle meant. He knew just as well as if Elijah had talked with him for an hour that it meant God's call to him, to give up his present order of life and go forth with Elijah, to share his work and also to share his danger. Elijah appreciates the situation, and he says, "Go back again: for what have I done to thee?" Canon Liddon says this ought to be rendered, "Go, return: for how great a thing have I done unto thee!" That is, Elijah assents to his going to bid his people farewell, but impresses on his mind that he should speedily return, since a great privilege and a high honour have been conferred on him by the call of God. The leave-taking is very beautiful and very significant. Several lessons of great significance may be drawn from this beautiful story. 1. First, the precious privilege of Elijah in being permitted to be the instrument in God's hand of calling so splendid a man as Elisha into the Lord's work. Elijah would never have been able to do this if he had not been a good man. Elisha felt this influence. It was not so much what Elijah said, nor yet what he did, but constant prayer and communion with God, fellowship with the Unseen, maintained about Elijah a spiritual atmosphere that had something of heaven in it. Elisha could not have described it, but he felt it, and when he was with Elijah, God and goodness and heaven

were things the most real in the world, to please God seemed to be the only good, and to grieve the heart of God by disobedience seemed to be life's only real danger. 2. We have here illustrated the right way to receive and answer the call of God. Elisha responds promptly. He runs after Elijah. He feels there is no time to lose. Elijah goes with a swift, long stride, and will soon be out of the field. If he lets him pass away unheeded he may lose the opportunity for ever, and so he runs after the prophet and assures him of his acceptance. Not only that, but he proceeds to burn all his bridges behind him. No, he makes it just as public as he can. He kills his yoke of oxen, and burns up his plough, and makes a feast of farewell, and boldly proclaims to all his neighbours that he has been called of God, and that he is going away with Elijah in answer to that call. And I say to every unconverted man or woman here, That is the only safe or wise course. God calls you to accept salvation through Jesus Christ and to serve Christ in your daily life. (*L. A. Banks, D.D.*) *The call of Elisha* :—I. Among other practical lessons suggested by the calling of Elisha, let us note THE VARIETY OF CHARACTER AMONG GOD'S SERVANTS. Never were there two individuals more opposite than these two lights of this age in Israel,—alike in training and in mental temperament. 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. And there are the same remarkable, the same beautiful diversities, to this hour, in the Church of Christ. Luther and Knox—the Elijahs of their times,—had their vocation in preparing the way for the Zwinglis and Melanchthons—the gentler messengers of peace ;—blasting the rocks,—digging out the rough, unshapely, unhewn block,—to put it into the hands of these more refined sculptors to polish into shape and beauty. II. We may gather, as a second lesson, THE HONOUR GOD PUTS ON THE ORDINARY SECULAR OCCUPATIONS OF LIFE. Elisha is found,—not engaged in temple worship in Jerusalem or Samaria, not even in meditation and prayer in the retirement of his father's dwelling, but at his plough—driving before him his team of oxen. This is another of the reiterated lessons in Scripture as to the dignity and sacredness of labour, and the Divine recognition of it. III. Once more—observe, in the case of Elisha and his parents, THE SPIRIT OF JOYFUL SELF-SACRIFICE MANIFESTED AT THE CALL OF DUTY. Great, undoubtedly, as was the honour of becoming the consecrated prophet of God ;—we cannot think of his acceptance of the high office, without, at the same time, having suggested the idea of self-renunciation. What a lesson for us, this abnegation of self for God and duty. What have we surrendered of our worldly ease, our pleasures, our money, our children, our advantages, for Him and His cause ? What have we done to disarm the power of besetting sins,— by cutting off, like Elisha, the occasion of them,—saying, " Let oxen, implements, tackling, all go, and perish in the flames, if they rob our hearts of Christ, or Christ of our hearts " ? Matthew locked the door of his tollhouse behind him : he would never enter it again. The magicians of Ephesus burnt their magical books that they might never more incur the risk of being involved in their sorceries. (*J. R. Macduff, D.D.*) Elijah passed by him, and cast his mantle upon him.—*Christian influences* :—I. HOW GOD CALLS HIS WORKERS. When in the seventeenth century one of the famous Cambridge Platonists, as they were called, passed to his rest, his sorrowful disciples exclaimed in the very words of Elisha to Elijah, " My father, my father, the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof ! " thus expressing their sense of loss to that communion of the strength which marked their master's character. Again and again has God raised up men who, like these Cambridge Platonists, have reverenced the Divine gift of reason as well as of revelation, who, whilst they have stood aloof from Church parties and politics, have striven to teach and to show the character of God the Father, the example of God the Son, the love and fellowship of God the Holy Spirit, men who have felt sure that no long roll of years, no fresh discoveries of science could teach for the moment such a truth as this : " Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." II. THE INFLUENCE OF GOOD LIVES. But, further, the call of Elisha came to him, as it came to Matthew, in his ordinary work, in his farm and in his merchandise, and he was, let us remember, no longer the same man after it as he was before it. III. SILENT MISSIONARIES. But again, when Elijah passed by Elisha it was certainly a personal influence, but it was also, so far as we know, and as it has

been more than once noted, it was also a silent influence. And thus the action of the prophet at least suggests to us the consideration of that silent, impressive, testing influence by which we are all so closely surrounded. What a remarkable influence, for instance, attaches to that book so famous in the last century, and so popular then in England and America, Law's *Serious Call*. What a proof of the unfailing influence which attaches to the outpouring of a saintly and devout soul is furnished by the mere fact that William Wilberforce, John Wesley, Samuel Johnson all referred to that one book as the origin of their first serious impressions upon religion. IV. THE INFLUENCE OF GOOD BOOKS. We come to the impressions which I doubt not have come to us all in some way or other from the perusal of a popular biography, from a brief memoir in the newspaper, from our favourite books of devotion. We may indeed be thankful for these many silent influences. They may be doing, surely are doing, God's work in the world. Our eyes have long been fixed, and in the face of recent events with fresh interest and fresh wonder, upon that marvellous people of the East, the Japanese. A short time ago an enterprising firm of publishers in Japan determined to issue a series of historical biographies. The first was the life of Confucius, the second that of Buddha, the third that of Jesus of Nazareth. The biography of our Lord was edited by a young Japanese student, not himself a Christian, who wrote it simply as it stood in the Gospels without offering any opinion of his own as to its truth or falsehood. In a few weeks the whole of the first edition of that book was exhausted. Here, again, was a silent influence penetrating where the living voice of the missionary has never been heard to the quickening intellect and touching the heart. Can we doubt it that God the Holy Ghost, through the book, leads many to inquire whence hath this Man wisdom, whence the wondrous works? (*R. J. Knowling, D.D.*) *Human friendship*:—The voice in the cave of Horeb said many things; but it said one thing which, to my mind, was specially helpful to the future development of Elijah—it directed him where to find a human friend. If there was one thing Elijah needed to mellow him it was that. He seems never to have felt the influence of home ties. His life throughout had been one of war, of public commotion, of political and religious strife. Superiors he had, inferiors he had, but he had hitherto possessed no equal. There had been none to take his hand and say, "We are brothers." A man in such a position is in want of one half of life's music. When the voice sent him to Elisha, it sent him to a new school. (*George Matheson.*)

CHAPTER XX.

VER. 11. **Let not him that girdeth on his harness boast himself as he that putteth it off.**—*Girding on the harness*:—I. AS TO THE JUSTICE AND RECTITUDE OF OUR PLANS. It may give us with effect this plain teaching: that we ought to undertake nothing on our own responsibility which we cannot justify and defend. This great Syrian king is engaged in a wrong thing. He has no right to be here at the gates of Samaria—no more right than a man would have to thunder at his neighbour's door, and demand his neighbour's property. It may sometimes, for a wider good, be right to subdue a nation by force, and to annex it or absorb it. But this is not to be done simply at the prompting of ambition or tyrannical self-will. Reason sufficient must be given for it. An old author says, commenting on this passage, "Thus a great dog worrieth a less, only because he is bigger and stronger"; this, however, is hardly just to the great dog, which very seldom, in point of fact, does worry the less without considerable provocation. The point for us as individuals is: that rectitude should lie at the basis of all our express undertakings. There are many things in which we must act, but with greatly qualified and modified responsibility; and some of the finest questions in our moral life, and the most difficult of clear settlement, arise in connection with joint action. The servant is not the keeper of the master's conscience, although, of course, he is bound to keep his own, and never do what would be to him a wrong thing. The single member of a company, or government, or society, cannot be expected to charge himself with more than his own share of the joint responsibility, and must yield to the will or the majority for the accomplishments of

common ends, or must withdraw. If each individual will must rule in everything, there could be no joint action. But all this makes it the more needful that in those matters in which our responsibility is sole, the things which we ourselves expressly initiate, control, or conduct, rightness should be the foundation and the prevailing element. We ought to be able to say concerning our schemes, plans, or endeavours: "This thing is the fruit of my thought, and I can justify it. This thing I have initiated, and I mean, if God will, to finish it, for it is right. This is the fulfilment of my heart's desire, and I am thankful for it." Live so, and you will not ever be in Ben-hadad's evil case. II. A SPIRIT OF MODESTY, AND SELF-DISTRUST, AND FEAR. If at all times it be right and becoming in us to clothe ourselves with humility, surely that robe is particularly seemly at the beginning of our undertakings! We are dependent creatures, and when we are beginning what will require from us a great amount of strength, it is meet that we should look towards the Fountain-head of all the strengths. The mere "harness" of life is heavy to many a one. It is not always an easy matter to keep going on even from day to day—watching and waiting, and working by turns! Up at the hour, after a restful or a sleepless night! Ready at call during all the day! decisive in judgment at the opportune moment! Patient and disappointment or delays! And then to be ready to-morrow—and to-morrow—to go through the same strain of service! "Time and chance happeneth to all men." Life is full of cross-currents, and cross-roads, and cross-purposes; the unexpected is often that which comes. The looked-for is that which is delayed; and the right thing is broken to pieces; and the wrong thing holds on its way! III. But this kind of reflection may easily be pushed too far, so as to PARALYSE THE VERY NERVES OF ACTION IN A MAN, and hinder him, in fact, from ever girding on harness at all. Looking too much on the chances and uncertainties of life, one may come to the conclusion—and especially if he be of an unambitious, or indolent, or selfish habit—"Well, it hardly seems worth while to gird on the harness at all in anything that we can help. If all things happen alike to all—if chance is mistress of practical life—if capricious elements may control, direct, or thwart the purposes we form, and the plans we seek to effectuate—then we had better do nothing, or as little as we may—just enough to get quietly and not ignobly through. To sail right over the sea of life and battle with the storms may be a good thing to those who desire it—to those who are fitted for it. But if one can go coasting to the same destination, always taking the harbours and sheltered places when the storms arise, that will be better. At least, it will be better for us." No, no; this will not do. This is to restrict and degrade life, or at least to keep it from rising; and it has been made to rise. Gird on "the harness." Have something on hand worth doing; it is not to be believed that you can find nothing calling for and justifying your exertion. If it is not more, it will be less; and less may be done with so much zest and vigour, that it will seem more, and will really be more. Let us ask now if it be possible for any one to come to this modest, self-distrustful, resigned, and yet resolute state of mind about temporal things, about worldly chances, and fortunes, and family cares, who does not look at all beyond these things, and above them, to a higher world of duty and faith? No, it is not possible. Unless we have regard to the higher things we cannot walk steadily among the lower. Vessels larger and smaller are every day leaving England for east and west, north and south. Would you say to the captain of one of these: "Now, you must attend to your own business. Do not trouble yourself with things too high for you—with magnetic poles, and heavenly bodies—look simply to your ship and get her quick to port"? Yes, but how could he, without chart or compass, or sight of sun or star? The higher always rules the lower; the most stupid, mechanical people in the world cannot do the commonest work, without trusting, although perhaps quite unconsciously and ignorantly, to the great certainties of the heavens, to the things which are stable as the throne of God. (*A. Raleigh, D.D.*) *Putting on the armour*:—I. THE GENERAL VIEW OF LIFE THAT IS IMPLIED IN THIS SAYING. There is nothing that the bulk of people are more unwilling to do than steadily to think about what life is as a whole, and in its deepest aspects is. And that disinclination is strong, as I suppose, in the average young man or young woman. That comes, plainly enough, from the very blessings of your stage of life. Physical, unworn health, a blessed inexperience of failures and limitations, the sense of undeveloped power within you, the natural buoyancy of early days, all tend to make you rather live by impulse than by reflection. There are some of us to whom, so far as we have thought at all, life

presents itself mainly as a shop, a place where we are to buy and sell, and get gain, and use our evenings, after the day's work is over, for such recreation as suits us. But whilst there are many other noble metaphors under which we can set forth the essential character of this mysterious, tremendous life of ours, I do not know that there is one that ought to appal slumbering heroism, which lies in every human soul, and the enthusiasms which unless you in your youth cherish you will be beggared indeed in your manhood, than this picture of my text suggests. After all, life is meant to be one long conflict. Even upon the lower levels of life that is so. No man learns a science or a trade without having to fight for it. But high above these lower levels there is the one on which we all are called to walk—the high level of duty—and no man does what his conscience tells him, or refrains from that which his conscience sternly forbids, without having to fight for it. We are in the lists compelled to draw the sword. You are a soldier, whether you will or not, and life is a fight, whether you understand the conditions or no. II. NOTE THE BOASTFUL TEMPER WHICH IS SURE TO BE BEATEN. No doubt there is something inspiring in the spectacle of the young warrior standing there, chafing at the lists, eagerly pulling on his gauntlets, and fitting on his helmet, and longing to be in the thick of the fight. No doubt, there is something in your early days which makes such buoyant hopes and anticipations of success natural, and which gives you, as a great gift, that expectation of victory. So I ask, have you ever estimated, are you now estimating rightly, what it is that you have to fight for? To make yourselves pure, wise, strong, self-governing, Christlike men, such as God would have you to be. That is not a small thing for a man to set himself to do. Have you considered the forces that are arrayed against you? "What act is all its thought had been?" Hand and brain are never paired. There is always a gap between the conception and its realisation. The painter stands before his canvas, and, while others may see beauty in it, he only sees what a small fragment of the radiant vision that floated before his eye his hand has been able to preserve. Have you realised how different it is to dream things and to do them? In our dreams we are, as it were, working *in vacuo*. When we come to acts, the atmosphere has a resistance. It is easy to imagine ourselves victorious in circumstances where things are all going rightly, and are blending according to our own desires, but when we come to the grim world, where there are things that resist, and people are not plastic, it is a very different matter. I suppose that our colleges are full of students who are going to far outstrip their professors, that every life-school has a dozen lads who have just begun to handle easel and brush, that are going to put Raphael in the shade. I suppose that every lawyer's office has a budding Lord Chancellor or two in it. All us old people, whose deficiencies and limitations you see so clearly, had the same dreams, impossible as it may appear to you, fifty years ago. We were going to be the men, and wisdom was going to die with us, and you see what we have made of it. You will not do much better. Have you ever taken stock honestly of your own resources? You are not old enough to remember, as some of us do, the delirious enthusiasm with which, in the last Franco-German war, the emperor and the troops left Paris, and how, as the trains steamed out of the station, shouts were raised, "À Berlin!" Ay! and they never got further than Sedan, and there an emperor and an army were captured. Go into the fight bragging and you will come out of it beaten. III. NOTE THE CONFIDENCE WHICH IS NOT BOASTING. If there is nothing more to be said about the fight than has been already said, that is the conclusion. "Let us eat and drink," not only for to-morrow we die, but "for to-day we are sure to be beaten." But I have only been speaking about this self-distrust as preliminary to what is the main thing that I desire to urge upon you now, and it is this: You do not need to be beaten. There is no room for boasting, but there is room for absolute confidence. "Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." That was not the boast of a man putting on the harness, but the calm utterance of the conquering Christ when He was putting it off. He has conquered that you may conquer. There is possible a triumph which is not boasting for him who puts off the harness. The war-worn soldier has little heart for boasting, but he may be able to say, "I have not been beaten." The best of us, when we come to the end, will have to recognise in retrospect failures, deficiencies, palterings with evil, yieldings to temptation, sins of many sorts, that will take all boasting out of our heads. But, whilst that is so, there is sometimes granted to the man that has been faithful in his adherence to Jesus Christ a gleam of sunshine at eventide which foretells Heaven's welcome and "well done"

before it is uttered. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*) *Confirmation*:—Such was the reply of Ahab, King of Israel, to the vain-glorious boast of Ben hadad, King of Syria: "The gods do so unto me, and more also, if the dust of Samaria shall suffice for handfuls for all the people that follow me." "Tell him," Ahab said, "Let not him that girdeth on his harness"—that is, his armour—"boast himself as he that putteth it off." And the result, as you will see from the history, was, that Ben-hadad suffered two disgraceful and disastrous defeats, and was compelled to sue for mercy from the king whom he had so insolently challenged. Ahab's reply, however, was simply a proverb—a homely, pithy proverb of the day, admitting of a thousand applications. 1. There is a certain self-confidence, which is natural to youth, and which sits not ungracefully upon it. It has been cleverly said, "that conceit is a young man's capital." A young man has to learn by actual trial what he can do, and what he cannot do; and he requires a certain amount of self-confidence to give him the necessary courage to experiment with his untried powers, until he knows what direction they must take. As Carlyle says, in his quaint forcible way, "The painfullest feeling is that of your own feebleness: ever, as Milton says, to be weak is the true misery. And yet of your strength there is and can be no clear feeling, save by what you have prospered in, by what you have done. Between vague wavering capability and fixed indubitable performance, what a difference! A certain inarticulate self-consciousness dwells dimly in us; which only our works can render articulate and decisively discernible. Our works are the mirror wherein the spirit first sees its natural lineaments. Hence, too, the folly of that impossible precept, Know thyself; till it be translated into this partially possible one, Know what thou canst work at." For the same reason, youth is the time of criticism. We all know how unsparingly, how unmercifully, the young criticise the proceedings of their elders. The excuse for it is, that they are trying to see or feel their way to action; and they have a keen eye, therefore, and a sharp tongue, for the actions of those around them, upon whom the weight of the world's work is for the time being falling. As they get under the yoke themselves, this criticising, censorious temper will leave them. 2. One of the great poets of Greece has a saying to the effect, that the reverses of life are sometimes so terrible, that it is impossible to pronounce upon any life, in the way of estimate of its happiness or its misery, until the end is reached. History, both sacred and profane, enforces this lesson with a thousand examples testifying to its truth. Even the noblest lives are often crossed and barred with bands of shadow, nay, of darkness. Think of Abraham; think of David; each falling, in a moment of weakness and temptation, to a point of shame and infamy, in which the true self was lost in the false. And when we pass from the pages of the Bible to the pages of common history, or to our own experience of life, it may well exclude all boasting to mark how hard the actors in life's busy and varied scene have ever found, and do still find, it to maintain a uniformly lofty level of thought and speech and action. Think of the great Frenchman, Bossuet; of our own great Englishman, Bacon. When such men go wrong, men so gifted and so good, we may well tremble for ourselves. Some of us, who are getting on in life, know what it is, perhaps, to come across letters of twenty or thirty or forty years ago, written by ourselves, or by dear friends and relatives, at a time when our own lives were entirely unformed, and when what was then our future was, in anticipation, as little like as it could well be to what has since become our past. Each stage of life shades, as a general rule, by such imperceptible degrees into the next stage, that it needs an experience of this kind to bring home to our minds the strange uncertainty and the curious waywardness of the future, which lies before the young. 3. Very different views may be taken, and, as a matter of fact, are taken, upon the subject of the ordinance of confirmation. We all know that it is not a sacrament, not an ordinance of Christ's own appointment, but, simply, an ecclesiastical ordinance; and, as such, one that must justify itself by actual trial. I am asking you, in the interest of the young, to consider the initial principles, which they ought to take with them into the conduct of life. And I value confirmation for this, more than for anything else, that it explains so clearly what those principles are, and brings them home to us so forcibly. It should never be forgotten that confirmation loses the greatest part of its meaning if it is postponed until late on in life. It was intended to meet the young at the very threshold of adult life; just when the first "years of discretion" were beginning to come, freighted with many an anxious thought, to them. And whenever in after years such thoughts come to us, it is well for

us to go back to our confirmation, and to welcome its deep yet simple teaching upon the great ruling principles of the conduct of life. Again and again we ask ourselves, not merely at the outset of mature life, but in its onward course, "What am I to God? What am I to the world of men around me?" Let us think for a moment what solid and direct answers the ordinance of confirmation returns to these momentous questions. Our answer, if we will but think of our confirmation and its meaning, is ready at once: "I am the child of God; I am a member of the one great household and family of God; I have a work to do in the world for God, a place to fill, to His glory, and to the good of my fellow-men, who are all co-members with me in the same great wor d-wide and time-wide family and household." Time-wide and world-wide, do I say? Nay, rather eternity itself is the true measure of this universal family of God, whose sacred bond death itself is powerless to dissolve. 4. More particularly I would commend to you, one and all, the thoughts which confirmation teaches us to associate with our work in life and our place in life. Both in the Old Testament and in the New, we find the imposition of hands closely connected with a consecration to a particular work, or office, or function. (*D. J. Vaughan, M.A.*) *Girding on the harness*:—I. THERE IS IN THOSE WHO NEWLY PUT ON THEIR ARMOUR A GREAT TENDENCY TO BOAST. 1. This is not at all remarkable, because, first, it is the nature of all men more or less to boast. Human nature is both poor and proud. 2. Those who gird on the harness are the more apt to be proud, because they often mistake their intentions for accomplishments. 3. It sometimes happens to the young beginner that he mistakes the formation of his ideal for the attainment of it. He has sketched on paper the figure that is to be wrought out of the block of marble. There it is. Will not that make a beautiful statue? Already he congratulates himself that it stands before him on its pedestal. But it is a very different thing—the forming the idea in one's mind and the realising of it. 4. Boasting in putting on the harness sometimes arises from the notion that we shall avoid the faults of others. We ought to do so, and we think we shall. 5. We also forget when we start in the battle of life that there is a great deal in novelty, and that novelty wears off. II. THOSE WHO PUT ON THE HARNESS HAVE GOOD REASON TO REFRAIN FROM BOASTING. 1. They have good reason not to boast if they remember what the very harness, or armour, itself is meant for. What do you want armour for at all? Because you are weak; because you are in danger. 2. Again, it will be well to refrain from boasting, for your harness which you are putting on is meant for use. You are not dressing yourself out that you may be a thing of beauty. 3. You must not boast, again, because if you look at your harness you will see that it has joints in it. You think your armour fits so well, do you? Ah, so thought that man who, nevertheless, died by an arrow which found its way into his heart between the joints of his array. 4. You ought not to boast of your harness, because there are suits of armour which are good for nothing. There is armour about in the world, and some of it the brightest that was ever seen, which is utterly worthless. 5. We should not boast when we put on our armour, because, after all, armour and weapons are of little use except to strong men. The old coats of mail were so heavy that they needed a man of a strong constitution even to wear them, much more to fight in them. It was not the armour that was wanted so much as the strong man who could sit upright under the weight. Think, too, of the sword, the great two-handed sword which the old warriors used; we have looked at one, and said, "Is that the sword with which battles were won?" Yes, sir, but you want to see the arm which wielded it, or you see nothing. 6. We may not boast in our harness, because if it be of the right sort, and if it be well jointed, yet we have received it as a gift of charity. Most valiant warrior, not one single ring of your mail is your own. O Sir Knight with the red cross, no part of your array belongs to you by any rights but those of free gift. The infinite charity of God has given you all you have. III. HE WHO GIRDS ON HIS HARNESS HAS SOMETHING ELSE TO DO BESIDES BOASTING. 1. You have, first, to see that you get all the pieces of your armour on. Look ye well to it that ye "take to yourselves the whole armour of God." 2. Young warrior, beginning with so much hope, I can recommend you to spend your time in gratitude. Bless God for making you what you are, for calling you out from a sinful world, for making you a soldier of the Cross. Boasting is excluded, for grace reigns. 3. You want every hour for prayer. If ever we ought to pray it surely is when we are newly entered upon the Christian life. 4. Remember, young soldier, that you are bound to use your time in learning obedience, looking to your Captain and Commander,

as the handmaid looks to her mistress. 5. You have no space for boasting, for your fullest attention will be wanted to maintain watchfulness. You have just put on your harness. The devil will speedily discover that! He will pay his respects to you very soon! As soon as he sees a new soldier of the Cross enlisted, he takes a fresh arrow from his quiver, makes it sharp, dips it in gall, and fits it to his string. "I will try this youngster," saith he, and before long a fiery dart flies noiseless through the air. 6. The young warr or may not boast, for he will want all the faith he has, and all the strength of God also, to keep him from despondency. IV. THOSE WHO GIRD ON THE HARNESS CERTAINLY OUGHT NOT TO GLORY, FOR THOSE WHO ARE PUTTING IT OFF FIND NOTHING TO BOAST OF. The Christian man never ungirds his harness in this life; still we may say that the brother is putting it off when there is but a step betwixt him and death in the course of nature. Now, how do you find Christians of that kind when you have attended their dying beds, if you have had the privilege of doing so? Did you ever find a Christ an stayed up with pillows in his bed boasting of what he had done? When Augustus, the Roman emperor, was dying, he asked those who were around him whether he had acted well his part; and they said, "Yes." Then he said, "Clap me as I go off the stage." Did you ever hear a Christian say that? I remember Addison, about whose Christianity little can be said, asked others to "come and see how a Christian could die," but it was a very unchristian thing to do, for forgiven sinners should never make exhibitions of themselves in that fashion. Certainly I never saw dying Christians boastful. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *The war of life*:—These are the words of Ahab, and, so far as we know, the only wise thing he ever spoke. The saying was probably not his own, but a proverb common in his time. As a warning to Ben-hadad the words proved true, but Ahab's own conduct in going up to Ramoth-Gilead where he perished, showed a strange forgetfulness of his own saying. I. WE HAVE ALL A BATTLE TO FIGHT. We all know what is meant by "the battle of life," but that of the Christian is inward and spiritual—a battle within a battle. Conversion to Christ brings at once peace and warfare. Our peace with God means war with the world, the devil, and the flesh. II. WE HAVE ALL "A HARNESS" TO PUT ON. As the enemies we fight are spiritual so must be our armour. Some prefer an ostentatious profession, pride of intellect, and the weapons of human learning and science "falsely so called," but experience proves their insufficiency. The Divine armour must be "put on," we must take hold and keep hold of it, otherwise it is of no avail. III. WE HAVE ALL A LESSON OF HUMILITY AND PATIENCE TO LEARN IN CONNECTION WITH THIS WARFARE. Young converts are apt to think they have gained the victory when they are only commencing the conflict. They are in danger from a mistaken idea of the liveliness of their religious feelings, from an imperfect knowledge of the deceitfulness of their own hearts, and from a limited perception of where their great strength lies. We must learn to depend less and less on ourselves and more and more on Christ. (*David MacEwan, D.D.*) *Ben-hadad: Boastful beginnings and bitter endings*:—I. A GOOD START DOES NOT GUARANTEE A RIGHT ENDING. The good start is not to be despised, but it is not everything. There are many who, out of defeat, have carved victory. Those very men might have been ruined by premature success, or might have fostered an overweening confidence which would have been disastrous. Those who are conquered by first repulses are weak, but those who gird on their harness again and again, who clutch the sword all the more grimly as they are crowded upon by numbers, are among the noblest of earth's sons. Without boasting they dare to go down to the battle to brave death; yea, and to drive it into the enemy's ranks. When returned they ungird themselves, they rest and recount their dangers with humility. Ben-hadad found that to boast and begin was not everything. Yet we find many to-day who think that if they can only make a start in anything they will be sure to succeed. They boast of what they will do and can do. Again, a man thinks that if he can only get a start in business he is sure to make it pay. Hence, he may borrow money at a high rate of interest, may incur heavy responsibilities by the purchase of goods, in fitting up of premises, in advertising, in engaging assistance, and he feels sure that customers will patronise him. We see the same thing illustrated in the spiritual sphere as well as the commercial. What sort of armour are you buckling on? What principles are you taking with you? Are you going in your own strength into the battle of life? Such questions we might ask. You have girded on the harness. You intend to make the best of life. You have no desire to find yourself crushed and

defeated. You say you will not be beaten, that however others may have missed their mark, you mean to gain a real success. Well, and what shall be the character of the success. Shall it be transient or permanent; worldly or spiritual? Will you simply live for self and the present, or for truth, righteousness, Christ and eternity? II. IN EVERY UNDERTAKING THERE ARE UNANTICIPATED DIFFICULTIES OFTEN MILITATING AGAINST SUCCESS. In striving for a livelihood there are difficulties. Others crowd us out. Fortune is no kind mistress tumbling always her gifts unearned into the lap of the indolent and thoughtless. Competency is not generally gained without assiduity and care. Honour comes not naturally to the unprincipled, nor do laurels usually deck the brows of the lazy. Eminence is not reached by the emasculate. A general wins not the battle, saves not his country, without some risk and difficul'y. Long voyages, toilsome marches over dreary desert, or rocky mountains, harassing dangers, shortness of provisions, the attacks of disease, the desertion of the trusted, the changing of plans, sharp conflicts and heavy losses, lie in his path and must be taken into account. III. OUR GREATEST DIFFICULTY IN THE BATTLE OF LIFE MAY COME FROM SOME LITTLE THING WHICH IS ACCOUNTED AS UNWORTHY OF NOTICE. Some trifling bit of steel is loose, or buckle unfastened. It is said that the Germans beat the French in their last campaign because the soldiers were better shod. The heavy boots of the Germans protected the men, enabling them to bear the cold and wet better and to march longer. This was not all, but it was one of the things that had not been calculated upon by their opponents. So our defeat in life and failure in spiritual steadfastness may come from some apparently trifling cause, something we even affect to despise. The temptations that beset us may be apparently trifling, but they may nevertheless cause our ruin. IV. THE GREATEST DANGERS IN THE BATTLE OF LIFE ARE OFTEN THE SUBTLEST AND MOST CUNNINGLY CONCEALED. Young Christians are sometimes deceived because at this day it seems much easier to be a Christian than it was formerly. True, no dungeon yawns now for the persecuted; no Smithfield smokes now for the saintly; no cold act of uniformity drives to foreign inhospitable climes, or Armada invades our liberties. Other means are taken to check vital Christianity. It is sometimes strangled by proprieties and slain by prosperity. Christians are not now so anxious as formerly to keep far off from the practices of the world. In many things they act very questionably. Like children, who seem to delight in walking along the side of a precipice and seeing who can go nearest the dangerous edge without slipping over, so many Christians walk as near to the customs of the world as they can without, as they think, endangering their salvation. This practice spreads. Its effect is most prejudicial. When the late American war was raging, I was told, by one who had had to endure the horrors of a frightful military prison, that canisters filled with fragments of clothing taken from the bodies of those who had died of yellow-fever or of small-pox were shot into the camp, in the hope that some fragment might spread infection to the enemies' ranks. Whether there be any truth in the report or not, at any rate it illustrates the fact that there are many subtle temptations that are thrown into our souls that enervate and hinder our final triumph much more surely than those that are open. Hence our need to remember that it is not the guiding and starting but the ending and "putting off" that is of the highest importance. V. The warning given to Ben-hadad is as applicable to THOSE WHO HAVE LIVED CONSISTENTLY FOR YEARS as to the young men just starting. If we have fought through a long day unwounded, we must not be elated. The arrow might lay us low even as the battle is just closing. Many a soldier has perished by strong shots fired after the bugle of the enemy has sounded a retreat. So it might be with some who seem strongest in Christian faith. VI. THE SPIRIT OF BOASTFULNESS IS DANGEROUSLY LIABLE TO GROW UPON THOSE WHO INDULGE IT. Ben-hadad's first invasion had but a poor ending, spite of his boasting. He who had been flushed with past successes, who with his generals and men were given up to revelry and drunkenness, had to flee. While all are carousing in their tents, Israelitish hosts are dashing into the battle and dealing deadly blows on the helmets of their adversaries. Even with this check to his boasting, Ben-hadad learned nothing. On the contrary, he only needed revenge and repeated the following year his invasion. Again he was repulsed. Again he had to flee. Look to the ending then. Pleasures, business, life must end. We must all put off the harness of this mortal life. Oh that we may put on immortality! Believe in Him, trust in His sacrifices, trust in His love, His help, and His presence. Begin life with Him and end it with Him. Charge any sin or temptation that besets

you with the same earnestness that the Scots Greys showed when they dashed against the columns of Napoleon the First, making him exclaim, "How terrible are these Greys!" Let there be no hesitancy in our blow when we strike at any sin in ourselves or the world. Then, when as good soldiers we reach the city of our God, we shall have a welcome that will make us forget every weary march, every painful wound, and every bitter sorrow. (*Fredk. Hastings.*) *Overrating oneself*:—All up and down history we see such too early boasting. Soult, the Marshal of France, was so certain that he would conquer that he had a proclamation printed, announcing himself King of Portugal, and had a grand feast prepared for four o'clock that afternoon, but before that hour he fled in ignominious defeat, and Wellington, of the conquering host, sat down at four o'clock at the very banquet the Marshal of France had ordered for himself. Charles v. invaded France, and was so sure of the conquest that he requested Paul Jovius, the historian, to gather together a large amount of paper on which to write the story of his many victories, but disease and famine seized upon his troops, and he retreated in dismay. Dr. Pendleton and Mr. Saunders were talking in the time of persecution under Queen Mary. Saunders was trembling and afraid, but Pendleton said: "What! Man, there is much more cause for me to fear than you. You are small, and I have a large bodily frame, but you will see the last piece of this flesh consumed to ashes before I ever forsake Jesus Christ and His truth, which I have professed." Not long after, Saunders, the faint-hearted, gave up his life for Christ's sake, while Pendle on, who had talked so big, played coward and gave up religion when the test came. Wilberforce did not tell what he was going to do with the slave trade; but how much he accomplished is suggested by Lord Brougham's remark concerning him after his decease: "He went to heaven with eight hundred thousand broken fetters in his hands." Some one, trying to dissuade Napoleon from his invasion of Russia, said, "Man proposes, but God disposes." Napoleon replied, "I propose and I dispose." But you remember Moscow and ninety-five thousand corpses in the snow-banks. The only kind of boasting that prospers was that of Paul, who cried out, "I glory in the cross of Christ"; and that of John Newton, who declared, "I am not what I ought to be; I am not what I wish to be; I am not what I hope to be, but by the grace of God I am not what I was." (*T. De Witt Talmage.*)

Ver. 17. **And the young men of the princes of the provinces went out first.**—*Young men encouraged to band together for the holy war*:—I. THE MIGHTY ENEMIES TO BE OPPOSED. II. THE GLORIOUS MONARCH UNDER WHOM WE FIGHT. III. THE INSTRUMENTS EMPLOYED ON THIS OCCASION IN HIS SERVICE. "The young men of the princes of the provinces." Such it was, that God selected on this occasion, that His hand might be more clearly revealed. Thus the faith of His people was called forth and exercised; thus bold zeal in His cause would be encouraged. Nor is it only in the history of Israel, that young men have been employed. There have, in our own country and in our own Church, been in past days associations of young men, that have been eminently blessed of God. The societies for the reformation of manners originated with young men; and from 1668, for nearly a century, their associated efforts greatly blessed our country. Vice was discouraged and put down; and innumerable books of piety, circulated by the young men of that period, produced a great reformation of morals, especially in the city of London, but which spread also through other parts of the country. IV. THE VICTORY OBTAINED. (*E. Bickersteth, M.A.*) *Step in anywhere*:—During a great battle, a recruit who had lost his company in the tumult of strife, approached the general in command, and timidly asked where he should "step in." "Step in?" thundered the general. "Step in anywhere; there's fighting all along the line." A heavy piece of machinery was being moved into a building by means of a block and tackle. Suddenly one of the ropes parted, and the machine began to slide backward. The two men who had charge of the work sprang to stay its progress. "Give us a lift!" one of them shouted to a bystander. "Where shall I take hold?" asked the man thus addressed, unmindful of the fact that there was not a second to lose. "Grab hold anywhere!" yelled the mover. It may be that we are in a field where we are unaccustomed to work, and are timidly asking where we shall "step in." We may find our answer in the words, "Step in anywhere; there's fighting all along the line." Are you waiting to be called into some special Church work? "Step in anywhere." If you are willing, you can be used. This is not the time to pick and choose as to what work

we shall do. The need is so great, the force against us so strong, that only one duty awaits the Christian disciple—to "take hold anywhere." (*Signal.*)

Vers. 22. 23. Go, strengthen thyself.—*Made strong for life's battle*:—Israel had just been at war with Syria, and had come off victorious. Naturally they were feeling very happy and triumphant and were congratulating themselves on their success. Then it was that God sent His prophet to the King of Israel with this sobering message. It was a call to wisdom. The king was reminded that life before him was a struggle, and that because he had won this victory he was not to take it for granted that he could live carelessly as though he had no enemies. A still greater struggle was ahead of him, and unless he strengthened himself by careful preparation he was sure to meet with defeat. Our theme is very plain. This is a message which God sends to every man and woman to-day. It should come to Christians with great emphasis. Perhaps you have had spiritual victory. God has been giving you gracious blessings. Nevertheless, I would come to you as God's messenger and say to you in the midst of your congratulation, "Go, strengthen thyself, and mark, and see what thou doest: for on a day when you are not looking for it, at a time when you are least expecting it, Satan will come against you, and unless you have made yourself strong in the strength of God you will be overcome." God had given David many victories. But it was after all that, after David had congratulated himself a thousand times on the victories which God had given him, that Satan came against him with a new temptation, a temptation unexpected and insidious, which led him into a sin so terrible that he came near losing his soul. It was after Peter had had many victories and many marks of the signal favour and love of Jesus Christ; after he had been on the Mount of Transfiguration and had been permitted to look on the inner glory of the Son of God; after he had been chosen to go into the Garden of Gethsemane and witness the supreme agony of the atoning love; after he had sworn that though all men should forsake Jesus he would remain faithful; it was after all this that Peter, assaulted unexpectedly by Satan, was overcome and denied his Lord. Now these Syrians were idolaters and had no real conception of the true God in whom was the only strength of Israel. The officers of the King of Syria thought they had found a solution of the problem as to why Israel was able constantly to defeat them, although they had the superior numbers. They said to the King of Syria, "Their gods are gods of the hills; therefore they were stronger than we; but let us fight against them in the plain, and surely we shall be stronger than they." Let us see how that turned out. You see that, after all, the only thing Israel could do to prepare for the fight against the overwhelming numbers of the Syrians was to strengthen themselves in God. So long as they obeyed God, and had Him for their friend, they were stronger than all that could come against them. But without God they were weak and helpless and easily overthrown and destroyed. There is but one way to intrench yourself in the strength of God, and that is by repentance and obedience. We cannot fight God; we cannot make compromises with God; there is just one way open—we can surrender unconditionally at the mercy-seat. (*L. A. Banks, D.D.*) *The source of strength*:—It is said of Pitt that "he breathed his own lofty spirit into his country. No man ever entered his room who did not feel himself a braver man when he came out than when he went in." How much more true, and in the very highest sense, is this of our inspiring Lord. Fellowship with Him makes the timid strong, the fearful brave, the tempted mighty to resist. (*Helps to Speakers.*)

Vers. 27. And the children of Israel pitched before them like two little flocks of kids.—*The coming religion*:—1. With thirty-three kings intoxicated in one tent this chapter opens. They were allies plotting for the overthrow of the Lord's Israel. You know that if a lion roar a flock of kids will shiver and huddle together. One lion could conquer a thousand kids. The fact that throughout Christendom there are hundreds of printing-houses printing the word of God without the omission of a chapter or a verse, proves that the Bible is popular; and the fact that there are more being printed in this decade than any other decade proves that the Bible is increasing in popularity. I go through the court-rooms of the country; wherever I find a judge's bench or a clerk's desk I find the Bible. By what other book would they take solemn oath? What is very apt to be among the bride's presents? The Bible. What is very apt to be put in the trunk of the young man when he starts for city life? The Bible. Voltaire

predicted that the Bible during the nineteenth century would become an obsolete book. Well, we are pretty nearly through the nineteenth century, the Bible is not obsolete yet; there is not much prospect of its becoming obsolete; but I have to tell you that the very room in which Voltaire wrote that prediction, some time ago, was crowded from floor to ceiling with Bibles for Switzerland. 2. Our antagonists say that Christianity is falling back in the fact that infidelity is bolder now and more blatant than it ever was. I deny the statement. Infidelity is not near so bold now as it was in the days of our fathers and grandfathers. There were times in this country when men who were openly and above board infidel and antagonistic to Christianity could be elected to high office. Now let some man wishing high position in the State proclaim himself the foe of Christianity and an infidel, how many States of the Union would he carry? How many counties? Infidelity in this day is not half so bold as it used to be. If it comes now it is apt to come under the disguise of rhetoric or moral sentimentality. Do you suppose such things could be enacted now as were enacted in the days of Robespierre, when the wife of one of the prominent citizens was elected to be goddess, and she was carried in a golden chair to a cathedral, and the people bowed down to her as a Divine being, and burned incense before her, she to take the place of the Bible, and of Christianity, and of the Lord Almighty? And while that ceremony was going on in the cathedral, in the chapels, and in the corridors adjoining the cathedral, scenes of drunkenness and debauchery and obscenity were enacted such as the world had never seen. Could such a thing as that transpire now? No, sirs. The police would swoop on it, whether in Paris or New York. Infidelity is not half as bold now as it used to be. 3. But, say our antagonists, Christianity is falling back because science, its chief enemy, is triumphing over it. Now, I deny that there is any war between science and revelation. There is not a fact in science that may not be made to harmonise with the statements of the Bible. Joseph Henry, the leading scientist of America, better known and honoured in the royal societies transatlantic than any other American, lived and died a believer in the religion of Jesus Christ. He knew, Joseph Henry knew, all the facts of geology, and yet believed the Book of Genesis. He knew all the facts of astronomy, and yet believed the Book of Joshua, the sun and moon standing still. Joseph Henry knew all the anatomy of man and fish, and yet believed the Book of Jonah. If the scientists of the day were all agreed, and they came up with solid front to attack our Christianity, perhaps they might make some impression upon it; but they are not agreed. Agassiz saw what we all see, that there are men who talk very wisely who know but very little, and that just as soon as a young scientist finds out the difference between the feelers of a wasp and the horns of a beetle, he begins to patronise the Almighty, and go about talking about culture as though it were spelled c-u-l-c-h-a-r—culchar! 4. But my subject shall no longer be defensive; it must be aggressive. I must show you that instead of Christianity falling back, it is on the march, and that the coming religion of the world is to be the religion of the Lord Jesus Christ ten thousand times intensified. It is to take possession of everything—of all laws, all manners, all customs, all cities, all nations. It is going to be so mighty, as compared with what it has been, so much more mighty, that it will seem almost like a new religion. I adopt this theory because Christianity has gone on straight ahead, notwithstanding all the bombardment, and infidelity has not destroyed a church, or crippled a minister, or rooted out one verse of the Bible, and now their ammunition seems to be pretty much exhausted. They cannot get anything new against Christianity, and if Christianity has gone on under the bombardment of centuries, and still continues to advance, may we not conclude that, as the powder and shot of the other side seem to be exhausted, Christianity is going on with more rapid stride? Beside that the rising generation are being saturated with Gospel truth as no other generation by these international series of Sunday-school lessons. Formerly the children were expected to nibble at the little infantile Scripture stories, but now they are taken from Genesis to Revelation, the strongest minds of the country explaining the lessons to the teachers, and the teachers explaining them to the classes, and we are going to have in this country five million youth forestalled for Christianity. Hear it! Hear it! Beside that you must have noticed, if you have talked on these great themes, that they are finding out that while science is grand in secular directions, worldly philosophy grand in secular directions, they cannot give any comfort to a soul in trouble. Talking with men on steamboats and in rail-cars, I find they are coming

back to the comfort of the Gospel. They say, "Somehow human science don't comfort me when I have any trouble, and I must try something else"; and they are trying the Gospel. There is another reason why I believe that the religion of Jesus Christ is going to conquer the world, and that is, the Bible in fifty different places sets forth the idea that Emmanuel is to take possession of this whole world. If He is going to conquer the "whole world," that means also this country, the greater including the less. (*T. De Witt Talmage, D.D.*)

Vers. 28–30. **Because the Syrians have said, The Lord is the God of the hills.** —*God of the hills and God of the valleys* :—I. WE MAY LIMIT THE LORD BY MISTRUSTING THE SUCCESS OF HIS CAUSE. The temptation is at times heavy upon us to think that the Gospel cannot conquer the world, that the truth of Jesus cannot spread in the midst of the thick darkness which surrounds us, that the good old cause is falling into a desperate condition, and that, mayhap, the victory we have looked for will not come after all. Here let us convict ourselves of having thought God to be the God of the hills and not the God of the valleys, for we have generally based our fears upon our perception that the front of the battle has changed. II. WE MAY COMMIT THE SIN OF SYRIA BY DOUBTING THE HELP WHICH THE LORD WILL RENDER TO US. Sometimes we are brought into sore trouble, and then we imagine that the Lord will not help us as he helped the old saints, of whom we read in the Bible. We can believe all about Abraham and Moses and David, but we question whether the Lord will help us. We look at those men as the great hills, and we regard ourselves as the valleys, and we dare not hope that the Lord will deal with us as He did with His servants in the days of yore. Now, is not this making God to be a local God, think you? Ought we not to have the same faith in God as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had? I have even known Christians say, "I cannot go to God about my trials, they are so ordinary and commonplace. I can pray about spiritual things, but may I pray about temporals? I can take my sins and burdens of serious care to Him, but may I pray about little domestic troubles?" How can you ask that question? He tells you the hairs of your head are all numbered: those are not spiritual things surely. You are told to cast all your care on Him. He is the God of the hills of the higher spiritual interests of His children, and is He not the God of the valleys of their hourly troubles? Does He not bid us ask Him to give us day by day our daily bread? III. IT IS VERY EASY TO FALL INTO THIS SIN BY COMPARING AND CONTRASTING THE EXPERIENCES OF OURSELVES AND OTHERS. The thoughtful soul may often hear the rustle of the skirts of Jehovah's garments in the stillness of those lone hills. God is in rugged souls, in the ravines of a broken heart, and in the caves of dread despair: He overrules the whirlwind of temptation and the tempests of satanic blasphemy, and anon He is seen in the bow of hope and the sunshine of full assurance. The Lord is in every heroic struggle against sin, and in that eager clinging to His word which is seen in so many tempted souls. Yet men judge their fellows and say, "The Lord cannot be there," even where He is most mightily. On the other hand, I have known persons fashioned in this rough mould look down on the gentle, quiet life of the useful, less thoughtful, and perhaps less intelligent Christian, who is like the valley, and they have said, "Lord, what shall this man do? He does not sympathise with my soul troubles, he has had little or no law work, he does not understand my grand conceptions of truth, he enters not into the deep things of God." Remember that this may be true, and yet the brother may be a far better man than you are. IV. A VERY COMMON SHAPE OF THIS SIN IS LIMITING THE POWER OF THE GOSPEL. I have known you limit the power of the Gospel by supposing that it will only save certain sinners. You heard of a great drunkard who was converted, of a swearer who turned to God, and you said to yourself, "I do not wish to be a drunkard or a swearer, but I have seen many of that sort of people saved, and I, who have led a moral life, have not been renewed in heart: it makes me envy them." Why should not you also obtain salvation? Is Jesus the Saviour of open and gross sinners and not of the more secret offenders? V. WE CAN, AFTER THE FASHION OF SYRIA, LIMIT THE POWER OF GOD BY NOT EXPECTING HIS DIVINE AID TO BE GIVEN TO US IN HIS SERVICE. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *A mistaken inference* :— I. THE WORDS MAY BE USED IN A CYNICAL SENSE. I refer to the spirit of those who imagine that religion has no real hold, and will win no real victories, apart from certain favouring facts, certain propitious agencies, helpful as the hills were to Israel. They think it is the creature of environment, the product of place.

Detach it from that environment, transplant it from that place, and its power and reality will vanish. You find a sneer of the kind on the lips of two classes—those who wish to break down religion as a faith, and those who wish to break it down as a practice. Or, to put it otherwise, you find it in those who would have you careless of belief, and those who would have you careless of conduct. Let us descend from the highlands of prejudice, and take our stand on the lowlands of reason, the arena of impar ial logic, the fields of honest and unfettered debate, and see what the issue will be. Your conception of God is a phantom of the mountains; bring it to the clear air and the dry light of the plains, test it by the rules of a sound philosophy, look at it with the eyes of an enlightened intelligence, and phantomlike, it wi l vanish away. What is this but a reproduction of the words of the Syrians, expounded and applied as modern cynicism knows how: "The Lord is a God of the hills, and not a God of the valleys"? So, too, with the other class I spoke of, those who endeavour to rob you of character. Sad that there should be such. And wherever they do exist, they speak and act with the same idea, that the religion they assail is a matter of circumstance. It is to be explained, they tell us, by the oversight of watchful eyes, the rule of firm hands, the influences of the fear of punishment and the hope of reward, the discipline and attachments of home. Yet, but let the life be cut loose from all this, away from a father's authority, away from a mother's solicitude, away from a minister's advice, away from the whole set of circumstances that make purity and probity, temperance and truthfulness, matters of everyday counsel and everyday practice, and see what its principles are worth. The man may retain his character so long as he lives on the heights, but once let him join us on the plains, on the platform of a wider existence, amidst the elbow-room of a freer sphere, he will yield, take his swing, and comport himself just like the rest of us. Such is the assertion of the cynic, thinking religion the outcome of locality, and Providence the genius of place. II. AGAIN, THE WORDS MAY BE USED IN A SUPERSTITIOUS SENSE. We are to speak of its falseness now when applied to religious worship, associated as that worship often is with certain fixed and unbending conditions that are hurtful to the health and hostile to the spontaneity of the "life indeed." Of course, the tendency that I speak of finds its crowning type in the ritualist. As much as any one, the ritualist attempts to limit God, tying the operations of His grace to given and definite places, given and definite agencies, given and definite channels. And yet the superstitious spirit may exist, the spirit that attaches undue importance to places, associations, and forms. Not, of course, that places and associations are without their value in worship. They have their own impressiveness, their own significance, their own power to stimulate and help. But when all has been said, we are not to set limits to God. He who is the God of the hills, with their majesty, their variety, and their poetic associations, is also the God of the valleys, with their tameness, monotone, and commonplace features. And when He keeps you down in the valleys, be sure He can meet you there, in the homeliest religious services, in the humblest religious fellowship; and not only there, but amidst the dullest and most prosaic routines of everyday worldly life, till the fireside, the shop, the counting-room, the mart, become for those who wait and who watch for Him a very Bethel, a house of God, the gate of heaven. III. THESE WORDS MAY BE TAKEN AS DESCRIPTIVE OF A WORLDLY SPIRIT—a spirit of worldly compliance and worldly compromise. Passing at this point from the subject of God's help and worship to the subject of God's claims, we find a tendency that is just the opposite of the one we have now been speaking of. In that case the error was that of over-separation in religious matters; in this case the error is that of over-concession—concession to the time-spirit, concession to the place-spirit. "Your God is a God of the hills; He vanishes when the hills are left, and the valleys take their place." How often does the cynic's taunt find colour and excuse in the professing Christian's conduct! Some people do speak and act as if the authority of God were a matter of locality, and as if the leaving of the locality meant the leaving, or at any rate, the lowering, of the authority. I take the case of professing Christians in their seasons of recreation—let us say during foreign travel. Do not some put off their home religion with the same regularity with which they put off their home broadcloth, and put on a tourist religion with the same sense of release with which they put on their tourist tweeds? The thought might be carried further. Is not this at the root of a good deal of the unrest that is otherwise puzzling to see? Children discontented in happy homes, apprentices discontented with kind employers, servants dis-

contented in comfortable places, young men and young women discontented with evangelical ministries and a watchful and attentive Church fellowship, all on the outlook for change, where to the outward observation there does not seem much reason for change: how shall we explain it? Sometimes, I fear, in this very way. The atmosphere of restriction does not suit such. They want to be surrounded with a slacker personal oversight, a lower local tone. They want to break free from religious restraints; and in breaking free from religious restraints they imagine they get quit of religious obligations. You do not get quit of them. Right is right, and wrong is wrong, whatsoever be the circumstances, whatsoever the customs, whatsoever the observation. IV. THESE WORDS, TOO, MAY BE TAKEN AS DESCRIPTIVE OF A RATIONALISING SPIRIT. Here we pass from God's help, worship, and claims to the subject of His truth. And what is the error to be noticed here? Just the error we have been endeavouring to trace all along, the error of those who set bounds to God. We believe, do we not? that the Gospel is universal. We believe that as it is universal in intention, it is universal in fitness. We believe that both in precept and in promise it is the power of God to every one that believeth. But there are those who deny this. They deny it on the grounds of capacity, deny it on the grounds of race. And it is interesting to notice that this rationalising spirit we speak of, in limiting the adaptability of the Christian religion, limits it from two different standpoints, for two different reasons. Some object to the Christian faith as being too elementary, characterised by elementary conditions, suitable to an elementary stage. The God of the Christians, they say, may serve for the simple, the inexperienced, the emotional—women with their capacity of belief, children with their childish dreams. But He will not serve for others—the scientist with his love of truth, the artist with his love of beauty, the artisan with his love of independence. Others, again, speak of the Christian faith as a something that is too advanced, at any rate for certain circumstances and certain classes. The God of the Christians, they say, may serve for the cultivated and progressive, those whose minds have been opened, and whose consciences have been trained. But He is altogether too exalted in His standard, too strict in His principles, and too exacting in His demands, for the common and unenlightened, the barbarous and embruted. What is the notion of both classes but the notion of a limited God—a God, as some say, for the hills, a God, as others say, for the valleys, yet in each case a God that is less than universal, a God who is bounded in His presence, bounded in His power, and bounded in His claims? We hold by a higher idea. We cling to a nobler and more inspiring faith. We believe that the God of the Bible is the God of the hills and the valleys alike, wheresoever His religion has had full play. (*W. A. Gray.*) *The universal God*:—This was the profound mistake which the Syrian soldiers made. We fear that the whole world is making the same mistake. What, if on inquiry it should be proved that we have a partial religion, a religion useful here but useless there, an admirable contemplation for Sunday, but a grievous burden for Monday? What if we practically reverse the Syrian conception, and say that the Lord is God of the valleys but not God of the hills? That we want Him in dark and dangerous places, but we can fight for ourselves in open places and on the tops of the breezy hills? 1. There are those who confine Him to the hills of speculation, but exclude Him from the valleys of daily life. They are the intellectual patrons and flatterers of God. He is too great to be realised. He is the Supreme Thought, the Infinite Conception, the Unconditioned Absolute, and various other magnificent inanities. According to their view, He cannot be brought down to daily experience, or take any immediate part in the common progress of life. He is grand, but useless. He is glorious, but unapproachable. His sanctuary is on hills that cannot be climbed, or in clouds that cannot be entered; but He has no agency in the valleys. 2. Then there are those who recognise God in the valleys of trouble, but ignore Him on the hills of strength and joy. They call Him in professionally. He is kept for the hour of distress. They use religion as a night-bell which they can pull in times of exigency. 3. It is the very glory of religion in its most intelligent conception that it comprehends and blesses the whole life. What is this life for which any religion that is true has to provide? It is no easy riddle. It is easy enough to invent a theory or an outfit for one side of it; but we want a doctrine that will involve and ennoble its entirety. What is this life? What is its origin? Look at the impulses which excite it; add up into some nameable total the forces which operate upon it; and bring under one law the ambitions which lure

or goad it into its most daring activities. Here is a hunger which no bread can satisfy. Here is an imagination which conquers the visible and longs to penetrate the unseen. In the breast is an eager suppliant that will not be forbidden to pray. And what is the hereafter of this multiplied life? Does it go out like a spark? The false religion is God of the hill but not God of the valleys. The superficial theory is excellent in fine weather, but useless in foul. It is pleasant in prosperity, it is helpless in adversity. It can swell our laughter, it cannot dry our tears. This is the proof of the true religion—that it encompasses with infinite sufficiency the whole life, is equally strong at every point. It can run with the footmen; it can keep pace with the horses; and it can subdue into peace the swellings of Jordan. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

Ver. 33. **Now the men did diligently observe whether anything would come from him, and did hastily catch it.**—*Observing the king's word*:—I. IT IS A PITY THAT AWAKENED SINNERS DO NOT COPY THE EXAMPLE OF THESE MEN. 1. There is far too little of diligent observance of what God says in His word. 2. The same thing ought to be done when you are hearing the Gospel preached; for God has been pleased, in order that His truth may be brought home to your hearts, to choose certain of His servants to speak His word; and, so far as they speak in accordance with His mind and will, they speak for God to you. 3. Then, again, while there is too little of diligent observation of what God has said, there is also far too little of hastily catching at the word. II. IT IS VERY STRANGE THAT SINNERS ACT THUS, FOR IT IS NOT CONSISTENT WITH THE USUAL WAYS OF MANKIND. 1. We have a proverb which says that "drowning men catch at straws." So they do; and when a man is in peril, he will usually grasp at anything that seems to offer him a hope of escape. How is it, then, that, with a Bible full of promises, and a Gospel full of encouragements, the mass of people with troubled consciences do not at once catch at what God says? There is another proverb of ours which says that "the wish is father to the thought." Sometimes, a man wishes for a thing so long that, at last, he believes it is really his; but how strange it is that, in spiritual things, men wish, and wish, and wish,—or say that they do,—and yet they do not believe that it is as they wish! The more they wish, the further they seem to be from the blessing they desire to possess. 2. This is the more strange, too, because you can continually see how sinners catch at everything else. See how they cling to their own righteousness. A thousand tons of it are not worth a farthing; it is neither fit for the land nor yet for the dunghill, yet they prize it as if it was a heap of diamonds. See what confidence many put in utterly worthless forms and ceremonies. III. WHEN WE ARE DEALING WITH GOD, THERE IS VERY MUCH TO CATCH AT. Many years ago, when I was in great distress of soul, and could not find Christ for a long while, I would have been glad if I had heard anybody speak about how much there is for a troubled soul to catch at. Perhaps I did hear something about it; but, if so, I did not catch at it, though I think I should have done so if it had really been made plain and clear to me. Until God the Holy Ghost enlightens the soul, the truth may be put very plainly, but we do not see it. I will try, now, to set it before any one here who is willing to catch at it. 1. Now, poor troubled soul, if it had been God's purpose to destroy you,—if He never intended to hear your prayers—if He never meant to save you—let me ask you, very earnestly—Why did He give you the Bible? I want you to catch at this thought. 2. Again, why has God raised up a ministry, and given you the opportunity of listening to it? Why are you continually being warned to flee from the wrath to come? Why are you constantly being instructed in the truths of the Gospel? 3. I remind you also that you are still on praying ground. 4. See, next, if you cannot catch at this great truth—God has given Jesus Christ to die for sinners. You are a sinner, so catch at this glorious fact: "He gave Himself for our sins." 5. There is another truth that I think some of you might catch at; it is this one: "God now commandeth all men everywhere to repent." This was the message that our Lord Jesus Christ Himself preached, "Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." 6. Then, again, what can be the meaning of that other command, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved," except that if, as a guilty sinner, I come and trust in Christ, I shall be saved? It is even so; indeed, I am saved as soon as ever I do believe in Jesus. IV. THERE IS MUCH GREATER ENCOURAGEMENT FOR YOU, AND FOR ME, THAN THERE WAS FOR THESE MESSENGERS FROM BEN-HADAD. 1. For, first, suppose Ahab did utter a hopeful word, he was very deceitful. 2. Then, again, when

those men listened to Ahab, he might have uttered a friendly word without meaning it. 3. These messengers from Ben-hadad said that the Kings of Israel were merciful kings; and we know that God is much more merciful than they were, for "His mercy endureth for ever." 4. Those messengers from Ben-hadad might have believed better of Ahab than would have been true, but you cannot believe better of God than will be true. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Lying at the catch*:—Sinner, whoever thou art coming to Christ, believe it, thou wilt not injure Christ at all, if, as Ben-hadad's servants served Ahab, thou shalt catch Him at His word. "The men did diligently observe whether anything would come from him," to wit, any word of grace, "and did hastily catch it." And it happened that Ahab had called Ben-hadad his brother. The men replied, therefore, Thy "brother Benhadad": catching him at his word. Sinner, coming sinner, serve Jesus Christ thus, and He will take it kindly at thy hands. When He in His argument called the Canaanitish woman "dog," she catched Him at it, and said, "Truth, Lord, yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master's table." I say she catched Him thus in His words, and He took it kindly, saying, "O woman, great is thy faith; be it unto thee as thou wilt." Catch Him, coming sinner, catch Him in His words; surely He will take it kindly, and will not be offended at thee. (*J. Bunyan.*)

Ver. 40. As thy servant was busy here and there, he was gone.—*Lost opportunities*:—Ahab had a chance of doing God's will; he neglected to use it, and judgment descended upon him. I. WE HAVE EACH AND ALL SOMETHING TO DO FOR GOD'S GLORY. 1. In the case before us Ahab should have destroyed Ben-hadad. We ought to outlive all evil—to overthrow all that opposes the spread of truth and righteousness. 2. God's glory would have been manifest in the destruction of the Syrian king. That glory is revealed in a yet greater degree when souls are saved, and in this we may be instrumental. 3. What, "Am I my brother's keeper?" Even so, it devolves upon you to do all you can to save those who are unsaved. This work for God's glory can only be performed by adaptability in teaching—the exercise of a loving spirit—earnest prayer—a humble dependence on the Divine power. II. WE TOO OFTEN NEGLECT TO EMBRACE THE OPPORTUNITIES PRESENTED. The prophet, in his parable, said, that while he was busy here and there, his prisoner had escaped; that was the excuse he made. Christian people often make excuses for not doing their duty, here is one. 1. I am too timid. I can't speak to my children, to my servants, to strangers about their souls, and their duty to the Great Creator. Why can't you? You can talk to them about their bodies and temporal things. Why not about Divine? 2. It is not my business. Whose then? Ministers are paid to do this work, and they ought not to trouble us. So, then, if you knew a man had poisoned himself, you would not try to save him (although you knew well enough what to do), all you would say would be "Go to the doctor." 3. I am too much engaged. And, perhaps, there never was an age in which men are so busy as they are to-day. "Express speed" is far too slow. Men must beat the lightning, or at least equal it. They are "too busy" to give a little time to the consideration of the best means for spiritual work; "too busy" to engage in that work themselves; and what does it all mean? III. OPPORTUNITIES ONCE LOST NEVER RETURN. "Opportunity for doing good is like a favouring breeze springing up around a sailing vessel. If the sails be all set, the ship is wafted onward to its port; but if the sailors are not there, the breeze may die away; and when they would go they cannot, and their vessel stands as idle as a painted ship upon a painted ocean." Think for a moment of the opportunities each has neglected; let the thought stimulate you to improve the present. IV. ALL SUCH NEGLECTED OPPORTUNITIES WILL HAVE TO BE ACCOUNTED FOR. (*A. F. Barfield.*) *Gone. Gone for ever*:—This story was originally told in order to touch the conscience of King Ahab, who had allowed Ben-hadad, King of Syria, to escape when Providence had put the cruel monarch into his hand on purpose that he might receive his doom. Ahab is no more, but this Scripture is not, therefore, like a spent shell—there is truth and power in it yet. Its teaching is applicable to us also. I. THE OBLIGATION which the text suggests, that we may solemnly own that we are under a higher obligation still. This man being engaged in warfare, was bound to obey the orders of his superior officer; that officer put into his custody a prisoner, saying, "Keep this man," and from that moment he was under an obligation from which nothing could free him. 1. That we are bound to serve

God is clear, because we derive our being from Him. 2. It was for this end that the Almighty made us, and for nothing short of this, that we might glorify God and enjoy Him for ever. 3. To the service of God a thousand voices call us all. 4. A great argument for our obligation to glorify God is found in the fact that in this service men find their highest honour and their truest happiness. 5. Let this, also, never be far from our memories, that there is a day coming when we must all of us give an account of our lives, and the account will be based upon this inquiry—How have we served and glorified God? II. A CONFESSION: "He was gone." The man was under obligation to take care of his prisoner, but he had to confess that he was gone. 1. We have lost many opportunities for serving God which arise out of the periods of life. I hope you will not have to say, "My childhood is gone; I cannot praise Jesus with a girl's voice or a boy's tongue now, for my childhood passed away in disobedience and folly. You cannot talk to your son now, as you might have done when you could take the fair-haired boy upon your knee and kiss him and tell him of Jesus. 2. Another form of regret may arise out of the changes of our circumstances. A man had once considerable wealth, but a turn of Providence has made him poor: it is a very unhappy thing if he has to confess, "I did not use my substance for God when I had it. I was an unfaithful steward, and wasted my Master's goods, and now I am no longer trusted by Him, my property is gone." Another may have possessed considerable ability of mind, but through sickness or declining vigour he may not be able now to do what he once did. 3. As time has gone so also have many persons gone to whom we might have been useful. 4. Sometimes, however, the confession of the thing gone concerns noble ideas and resolves. You had great conceptions, and if they had but been embodied in action something good would have come of them; but where are the ideas now? Were they not smothered in their birth? 5. And there may be some from whom a vast wealth of opportunity has passed away. They have been blessed with great means and large substance, and if these had been laid out for Jesus Christ year after year many a lagging agency would have been quickened, and many a holy enterprise which has had to be suspended for want of means might have gone on gloriously. III. THE EXCUSE which was made—"As thy servant was busy here and there, he was gone." 1. The excuse is, "I was so busy"; which, first of all, is no excuse, because a soldier has no business to have any business but that which his commander allots to him. 2. When the man said he was "busy here and there," he cut away the only excuse he could have had, because that showed he had ability. 3. Then, again, what he had done was evidently done to please himself. He was "busy here and there." IV. THE UNALTERABLE FACT. "While I was busy here and there, he was gone." Could you not seize him again? "No, he is gone." Is there no making-up for past neglect? No recapturing the missing one? No, he is gone, clean gone. 1. With the time, remember, your life has gone, and there is no living it over again. 2. Remember, also, that future diligence will not be able to recover wasted time. I suppose Luther was past forty before he began his life-work, and yet he accomplished a splendid result for Christ; but even Luther could not get back his years of unregeneracy and superstition. Time is on the wing; use it now. Do not loiter, for thou canst pluck no feather from the wing of time to make it loiter too. It flies, and if thou wouldst use it, use it now. Arouse thyself, and sleep no longer. If thou wouldst indeed be true to God who made thee and to Christ who bought thee with His precious blood, use thyself now to the fullest conceivable extent for the glory of thy Lord and Master. What shall we do? Le us all fly to Jesus, who can forgive the guilt of the past. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *The opportunity which escaped*:—Ahab had been faithless to his trust. He had had the opportunity to crush out the enemy of Israel, but he had let him live for his own selfish purpose, and in sentencing the pretended soldier who had been faithless he was in reality uttering sentence against himself. It is my purpose to compare the opportunities of life to a prisoner given to us to keep, in which if we are faithful to our trust we shall secure eternal promotion and blessing; and if we are careless and indifferent and neglectful, our opportunities will all escape and leave us poverty-stricken indeed. Every period of life has its special opportunity, which if not used at that time escapes for ever. It can never be recaptured. Youth has opportunities peculiar to itself; it is like the spring-time in nature. If a farmer lets spring-time escape him, and leave his fields unploughed and his gardens unplanted, however remorseful he may be about it he cannot capture that opportunity after spring-time has passed. Youth is like that—a time

for sowing, a time when the mind readily grasps its lessons, and seizes with firm hold upon new truths; it is the time when we make most of our friends, and when the affections have the strong grip that hold for ever. It is a terrible thing to let youth go by and not become a Christian. To return to the parable of which our text is a part, one would suppose that a man having been put in charge of a prisoner to keep, with so terrible a warning that his life depended upon his being faithful to his trust, would have seen to it that the man did not escape. But when we compare it to our own lives, we can see how easy it was for the man to become careless, and to be taken up with other things which may have amounted to very little indeed, but which took his mind off the matter of greatest importance to him and thus endangered his life. The story is told of Henry IV. of France, that he asked the Duke of Alva if he had observed the eclipses happening in that year. He replied that he had so much business on earth that he had no leisure to look up to heaven. What sad folly it is for men born with the possibility of immortal joy to so bend themselves towards the earth and so set their hearts on the things of this world as scarcely to cast a look to the things belonging to the world to come. How much wiser was Zeuxis, the famous painter of his day, who, when somebody observed that he was very slow at his work, and let no painting of his go abroad into the world to be seen of men until he had tried it in every light and given it long consideration to see if he could find any fault in it, replied to an inquiry as to his conduct, "I am long in doing what I take in hand because what I paint I paint for eternity." So what we do has to stand the test of eternity. If it is rubbish, it will be burned up in the judgment fires. An old historian tells us that Alexander the Great, being much taken with the witty answers of Diogenes, bade him ask what he would and he should have it. The philosopher demanded the least proportion of immortality. "That is not my gift," said Alexander. "No?" asked Diogenes. "Then why doth Alexander take such pains to conquer the world, when he cannot assure himself of one moment to enjoy it?" What the cynic said to this great conqueror might well be said to every man who is giving himself so earnestly to the business of this world that he is running the risk of losing the infinitely greater values of eternity. Comparatively few men and women deliberately set out to make great fortunes, or to win for themselves great worldly triumph at the cost of their spiritual welfare. The great majority who are fatally deceived by the enemy of their souls are seduced into evil ways and into fatal neglect by the desire for the simplest physical pleasures and adornment. There is only one way to make sure of your salvation, and that is to improve the present opportunity and thus make certain that it will not escape. A friend of mine overheard one young girl saying to another in the saddest tone, thinking about her friend: "I think she regretted it afterwards; she said it should be different next time. But then," with a little sigh, "so many things haven't any next time." If it should happen to be that way with you that there should be no "next time," with the offer of mercy to your soul, I want to so speak and so do my duty by you that I shall not be responsible for your failure to gain heaven. (*L. A. Banks, D.D.*) *A lost opportunity*:—The parables of the New Testament are so speakingly real, so beautiful in their conception, and so manifestly the touches of a Master-hand, that we are liable to overlook—if not, indeed, to neglect—the minor parables of the Old Testament. And yet these minor parables, like the minor prophets and poets, possess—especially for the student of literature—a charm and fascination peculiarly their own. They are not wanting either in colour or finish, but are, in fact, bits of beautiful workmanship well worth framing and hanging up in honoured places of the mind and memory. Amusingly quaint, touchingly tender, they belong in a conspicuous degree to the hoary past, more so even than do the allegories of the Great Teacher Himself. In one particular, however, they closely resemble His, they never fail to hit the target of their aim. Now, our text is taken from one of these minor parables and in its aim it resembles Nathan's. The teaching here is that Ahab had a fine opportunity of serving God and his country, but he threw it away and it did not return. Let us discuss together this subject of opportunities—more especially lost opportunities. 1. And, first, this word opportunity springs from an old root signifying "at port," or "in the harbour," suggestive of the well-known and oft-repeated lines:—

> There is a tide in the affairs of men,
> Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune.

Thus we think of the trader watching the market, ready to pounce upon every opportunity that presents itself, so that he may turn it to gold: ready to snatch every chance of striking a good bargain, and thereby winning success. Indeed, it would appear—as a suggestive writer has remarked—"as though it were a part of the Divine discipline to put large opportunities in men's way, and leave it with themselves whether they will use or neglect them. There is no coercion to compel us to turn them to account, and the wheels of time shall not be reversed to bring them back once they are gone. If we neglect them we shall be permanent losers in this life; how much more in the next we cannot say." True it is, however, that thousands fail in life through neglect of such chances, and through want of energy and enterprise, so that when the Blucher of opportunity presents itself, they have not "pluck" enough to arise and charge, and so win their Waterloo. There are great national opportunities which present themselves once or twice in the lifetime of a country or community and never come again. Such an opportunity the Church of Rome had when some of her most noble and faithful sons and servants pointed out, before it was too late, the sins and excesses which led to the Reformation. Such an opportunity old Jerusalem had nineteen centuries ago; but she spurned it, rejected it, and finally quenched it in the blood of the innocent. "And when He drew nigh, He saw the city and wept over it, saying, If thou hadst known in this day, even thou, the things which belong unto peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes." 2. But, in the second place, there are opportunities which belong to certain periods of life. Saith Seneca: "Time is the only thing in which it is a virtue to be covetous, and for this reason, that it is the only thing that can never be recovered. Lost riches may be regained by patience and industry; forgotten knowledge may by hard work be conjured back again into the brain; departed health may return through the skill of the healer; the consistency of many years may blanch again the sullied snow of character; but time once gone is gone for ever." Now if this be true with regard to the physical and mental—how much more with regard to the moral and the spiritual? Says the poet: "Heaven lies near us in our infancy." The heart has not become stained and soiled; the conscience has not become seared and hardened through the deceitfulness of sin; the moral faculties have not become blunted and atrophied through bad habits, but on the contrary, the whole being is fresh and hopeful and buoyant. 3. Let us consider next our opportunities of usefulness. Take the home, for example; what a splendid chance it presents to Christian parents of influencing their children goodwards at the very gateway of life! If you have neglected to do this, then you have missed a great opportunity, and one that will never again present itself under the same favourable conditions. So, again, with regard to servants. Now, as a Christian master or mistress, God has placed within your reach a fine opportunity of doing real home mission work, and so cause your servants for ever to bless the day when they came to reside under your roof. And to a certain extent the same thing holds good with regard to visitors. When Lord Peterborough lodged with Fénelon for a season, he said, on leaving, "After this I shall be a Christian in spite of myself." Oh, there is a day coming when these lost opportunities will appear in a clearer light, and with more terrible and startling distinctness; when the opportunity of years ago—calling us to the service of others, and to the service of our Master, Christ, will again reappear, and, like the Hebrew seer, take up its parable against us: "Because I have called, and ye refused," &c. "Consequences are unpitying." So, then, as we have opportunity, let us work that which is good toward all men, and especially toward them that are of the household of the faith. (*J. Dymond.*)

Busy here and there:—In this parable we find a man busy about everything, but at the cost of neglecting his duty. There are plenty of men who are very busy in the world, but who never do their duty. They are not idle: some people are too idle to do anything; but those of whom I now speak are not idle. They are always on the move, and are busily engaged at different things; but they never keep to the same things long. They do not seem to have any aim in life. It is not enough for us to be always doing. What God requires of us is, just to do what He wants us to do. We have to learn, first of all, what God would have us do, and then do it. Now here is one man who attaches the greatest importance to making his fortune, to heaping together money. He makes provision for the few years that he has to spend here; but for meeting his God, and for rendering an account of the way in which he has lived and served his Lord and Master, he has made no provision. Well, that is a man who is busy here and there, but who nevertheless misses the one great duty which, above every other, he has to per-

form. Now I want you children, not only to be busy, but always to have an aim in life, and that aim to glorify God. We glorify Him by living just as He would have us live. Christ Himself has given us an example. The great thing is to give Jesus the first place in our hearts and lives, and never do anything that is not well-pleasing to Him. (*D. Davies.*) *Lost opportunities* :—I. THE TRUST OF OUR TIME. Each new day that dawns upon us, each hour that rests with us in its rapid flight, each of the moments which together make up the sum total of our existence, each of these is a trust, not to be used at our mere caprice, not to be cherished or lost just as the passing fancy takes us. Each day, each hour is golden with possibilities of good; of good for ourselves, of self-discipline, of self-culture, of deepening spirituality, of a nearer vision of God; of good for others, of gentle words and kindly deeds, of some task begun for the blessing of our fellows, of some seed sown which shall ripen at last to a harvest of beneficent achievement. And if the parts of our life are thus a trust, what shall we say of life itself in its entirety? What tremendous possibilities of weal or woe are bound up in the small compass of a single life! But if this be true, as it is, of the life that is bound within the two shores of birth and death, what shall we say of the trust of the soul itself—the soul whose unending life reaches far on into the unknown eternity beyond the grave—the soul, that spark flashed forth from the fire of Eternal Being, ray of light let down to earth from the Central Sun of Universal Existence? Oh, what a trust is this! II. THE FAILURE OF THE TRUST. "As thy servant was busy here and there, and he was gone." "He was gone," what a sad story these words suggest; a charge neglected, a duty unfulfilled, a bitter loss sustained, a dire doom incurred. "It is gone," what a suggestion of inconsolable regret there is in these words. Some trusts once gone may be recovered: lost health may be restored, friends alienated may be won back again: but in life there are some utterly irreparable failures. A young man grieves the fond heart of a loving mother by carelessness or sin; he wanders away, perhaps, into other lands, and by silence and neglect breaks the tender heart he has so deeply shadowed; and then, perhaps, he comes to himself, and he says, "I'll go home, and make up for my hard neglect by special tenderness and care"; and when he gets home he finds that she is gone; that there is now no chance for his late atonement. III. THE EXCUSE FOR FAILURE. "Thy servant was busy here and there, and it was gone." Now, mark you, the excuse was not, "Thy servant was busy." That would have been in one sense a justifiable plea, and not a lame excuse. For life, for the best and the noblest, is always a busy thing. We are in a busy world. Around us we hear on every side the breaking of the unresting waves of human industry and human toil. It is plain that the having been busy is not the excuse that we have to consider. Now notice what the excuse really was. "Thy servant was busy here and there." I think that this being busy here and there may fairly be taken to mean that desultory and utterly unsatisfactory kind of being busy in which so many waste their days and miss their chances of good; the busy idleness of the restless child, not the busy industry of the thoughtful and high-purposed man. Now is it not just this serious trifling, this spending of our energies on lesser and lower objects, and so withdrawing them from higher and truer and more lasting occupations—is it not just this that will account for half the failures of life? The two great wants in this habit of life are the want of a continuous purpose and of a true and worthy object—a purpose that shall bind all our multiplied actions into one, and so give to our energies and our life that true unity in which alone lies strength; an object great enough and good enough to lend inspiration to flagging energies, and attractiveness to the most trivial tasks needed for its achievement. And this, in the saddest sense of all, is the excuse that will make thousands at the last miss utterly their chances of eternal life. Of those who make what Dante calls "the great refusal"; of those who fail to accept the offers of salvation held out to them in the Gospel of Christ, there are not many, I fancy, who do so deliberately and of set purpose. (*Canon O'Meare.*) *The value of opportunity, and our obligation to improve it* :—How much wisdom was there in the charge of Pythagoras to his disciples: "Be mindful of opportunities"! We live in a world where all are busy. Many busy for themselves; many for the Church. All around us in nature is busy—full of action. All in commerce and life says—"Do something, do it." And in one sense all mankind do something, but many are busy without an object, a rule, or a motive, and consequently without a beneficial result. Their actions are made up by a collection of shreds and patches; they move in a circle, busy in moving, but arrive at the point whence

they started—no progress, no attainment, no benefit is visible. Activity is the law or the habit of the human mind, and never is mind easy but as it is in action; but without a suitable motive, rule, and end, can no degree of activity be of real benefit. I. OPPORTUNITIES GENERALLY. 1. Opportunity is in some cases unmistakable; it presents itself and presses on us so plainly, that we must be blind if we will not see it, deaf if we will not hear it, dead if we will not regard it. It lies in our path, and we must push it out of our way, or pass over it to escape. If, however, it is not in our way, we should seek it. If the door is not open, we must open it. Where opportunity cannot be found, it must be made. What must be done can be done. Impossibilities are not insurmountable in real duties to God, to ourselves, or for others. It is admirable to see how a persevering mind creates opportunities, and lamentable to see how the timid pass them by. II. I shall now give these remarks A PRACTICAL BEARING. It is important to inquire—For what purpose did God create me? What is life? It is not a dream of pleasure, or it would not be a passage through a vale of tears. It is not a whirl of business, or it would have been lengthened, and not doomed to loss and disappointment, to the most devoted men of trade. God's end is more worthy of Himself; He has blessed you with such faculties for a great end, or, as John Howe says, "It would be like clothing a man in purple to send him to feed swine." Are all our faculties given to us to be employed on the wisdom which is "earthly, sensual, devilish," or for business or pleasure, or the honour which cometh from man? No, but for God, for gaining and enjoying heaven. Let us notice a few causes which operate to the neglect of what would ensure man's everlasting salvation. 1. Actual idleness—some are literally slumberers, nothing rouses them—"A little more sleep, a little more slumber," is all they utter. 2. Inconsiderateness is another cause—such are not careful or wise to use the power or cultivate the habit of reflection. 3. Frivolity of mind. Many are turned away from seeking salvation by what is as insignificant as the chirping of a grasshopper. 4. But not less fatal than these is that ruiner of thousands—procrastination. There is a world of importance in the monosyllable "now." Fortunes, blessings, and souls without number have been lost for want of minding this word "now." Duties cannot clash. God does not require two things which are opposed to each other of any man, at any time; but the language of God to you at this moment is this—"Now is THE accepted time," that is, the best opportunity. Some continue during the whole of life, from the dawn of reason to the feebleness and inactivity of its closing hours. "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do," oh, living man! "do it with thy might"—do it, "for there is no device in the grave"—do it, for thither thou goest, and all your opportunity is confined to this world. True, there may be posthumous good, as seen in legacies and founded institutions, and books which survivors may not suffer to be lost when we are gone; but these things, so far as we are concerned in them, are done in this world. 2. Youth is the prime and flower of opportunity. Youth! Many of you hear and feel it to be the season of joy. Yes, it is best for piety too. Unencumbered by the cares of a master or father, your time is at your own disposal. Oh, now seek salvation. Suffer not the season of youth to pass, lest you in age say, I have lost my opportunity and cannot seek salvation now. Seek it with earnestness. 3. Health is an important opportunity to do good to others. What can an invalid do compared with the healthy? Such may do something. I would not add to their affliction by suggesting they cannot. God does not add to their sorrow by discharging them from all opportunity to do good. (*J. A. James.*) *The parable of the wounded prophet:*—I. THE VERY REMARKABLE CONDITION NECESSARY TO THIS PARABLE. II. THE SIGNIFICATION OF THE PARABLE. It is not very clear in all its details, but "so much is indisputable, that the young man who had gone out into the battle is the representative of Ahab, and the man entrusted to his keeping, but allowed to escape through carelessness is the representative of Ben-hadad." "Israel had just endured a hard, bloody fight, and had carried off the promised victory; but now, in the person of Ben-hadad, it had let the arch-enemy, whom God had given into their hands, go free and unpunished." It is especially to be noted that as the man in the parable is represented as having a prisoner entrusted to his care by another, so Ben-hadad had been given into Ahab's hand by God as His prisoner. God was captain, Ahab only keeper. 1. The overthrow of kings and rulers proceeds from the Divine hand, and is often necessary for the preservation of those whom they rule. 2. That when God gives men power over others, it is at their peril if they do not use it according to His will. For man to

deliver whom God condemns is to affect to be more merciful than God. To question the decision of a human judge is to cast a doubt upon either his ability or his character. "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" Shall criminal reverse the sentence of another with impunity? 3. Weakness of purpose and lack of character may be mistaken for generosity. A man who uses money for the benefit of others which has been entrusted to his care by his master, is not generous, but dishonest. God gave Ahab place and power to use in His service; to employ them for other purposes was to rob God. 4. Those who are displeased at the truth of God are on the high road to ruin. The sentence which Ahab passed upon the man of God was soon executed upon himself. Those who reject the remedy which would heal their disease must not complain if they have to suffer from the consequences. The truth is intended to lead to repentance. 5. Those who are ruled by the Word of God will sometimes have to suffer temporal pain for obeying it. The servant of God will sometimes find himself, like the prophet who spoke the parable, wounded "by" or "in the Word of the Lord." (*Outlines from Sermons by a London Minister.*) *Inconsiderately busy*:—The parable which touched the heart of the discontented king was meant for us. We are anxious about too many things, and while we are busy here and there, lo, the principal thing is gone. We live in a hurrying age. We ask questions and are in too much of a hurry to wait for an answer. In religious service from soul to soul nothing counts like personality. A Christ undertakes the reformation of a planet. It is a task to quail the stoutest heart, but He never hurries. His calm is ever unruffled. And when we come to think it over and count it up, we find that Jesus Christ did more work than any man who ever lived upon this earth. Science is not the enemy, but the ally of religion. Theologians are beginning to apply the methods of science to their department of knowledge. Beyond science and beyond theology is the heart of consecration for his fellow-men, which he who would do the work assigned him must have; without which, like the man who was "busy here and there," one will lose the whole object of his life. We ught, moreover, to see that the things that we do are worth the doing. The man in our story missed the relative importance of the things he had to do. What is the one thing we are to do above all others? To him who is busy in money-getting, to the lawyer, whose sole thought in this world is the law, to the doctor, who thinks little beyond his patients and their medicines, to each one wholly absorbed in his worldly occupation comes the voice while he is "busy here and there," and the man, like the king, is heavy and displeased. (*G. Hodges, D.D.*) *Losses arising from absorption in business*:—We are so "busy here and there"—busy in commerce, in letters, in politics, in domestic, social, and ecclesiastical matters, that things, oftentimes invaluable, pass away from us without our knowing it. I. MEANS OF IMPROVEMENT PASS AWAY FROM MEN IN THIS WAY. Whilst men are "busy here and there," (1) religious services have come and gone, (2) Christian ministers have appeared and departed, (3) soul-rousing books are come from the press, and run through their edition unobserved; they are dead to everything but their business. II. OPPORTUNITIES FOR USEFULNESS PASS AWAY FROM MEN IN THIS WAY. The father is so absorbed in his business, that he neglects the spiritual culture of his children, and they reach a stage of depravity without his knowing it. Whilst men are busy, those around them who need their instruction drop into their graves, and pass beyond their reach. How many merchants in London, professing Christianity, carry on their daily avocations in the city with a soul so absorbed in their business, that they are unconscious of the thousand sinning, wretched, and dying spirits that teem around their warehouse. III. THE DAYS OF GRACE PASS AWAY FROM MEN IN THIS WAY. Through this absorbing spirit of business, men lose their years without knowing it—feel themselves old and grey-headed before they are aware. This subject serves to impress us: 1. With the fact that man has evidently fallen. It can never be that the human soul, with its moral sensibilities, its noble faculties, its fountain of affection, was made to be thus engrossed with the material concerns of a few short years. No, we have fallen. This subject serves to impress us: 2. With the fact that change is a resistless law of life. It matters not whether we are busy or asleep, change proceeds in its resistless march. While we are "busy here and there," men are dying, the outward scenes of life are changing, our own life is decaying, our end is approaching. We may be so busy on the shore as to think of nothing but the few shells we are gathering, but the billows are rolling on, and will bury us and our business soon. This subject serves to impress us: 3. With the fact that a

religious life is a wise life. A religious life is a life that subordinates the body to the soul, matter to mind, business to virtue, time to eternity, all to God. "Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all to the glory of God." (*Homilist.*)

CHAPTER XXI.

VERS. 2–16. **Give me thy vineyard, that I may have it for a garden of herbs.**—*Ahab's garden of herbs*:—Walking in the garden, what do we see? 1. Covetousness. God's brand is upon covetousness. Contentment is a Christian duty. Not sinful is the desire for comfort, for sufficiency; it is the inordinate desire that is sinful. Does the prosperity of another pain us? Do we desire for ourselves that which belongs to another? Then we are breaking the commandment —"Thou shall not covet." 2. Covetousness disappointed. Ahab has met with an unexpected master. The hand of sycophancy had been wont to obey him—to hasten at his word, to answer to the silent solicitation of his eye. But here is a man that denies him, who has a denial from the word of the Lord. Let us beware. This sin is under the special reprobation of God. It was the sin in Eden, and by which Eden was lost. It was the sin of Achan. It was the sin of Gehazi. It was the sin which has branded out of use among names the name of Judas. Was Ahab disappointed? Alas, for him! 3. We see his covetousness successful. He gets what he desires. Jezebel finds her husband, and learning the cause of his depression sneers with imperious scorn upon him. "What is done by another for us is done by ourselves." Are we willing to profit by the dishonesty or hard dealing of others? Then you are not clean of their sin. Adam plucked not the fruit of the tree, though "he did eat" (Gen. iii. 6) of it; yet upon him as well as upon the woman came the curse of the Almighty. Jezebel's sin was Ahab's; he winked at its enactment, and took of its guilt-gotten spoil. If we wittingly profit by others' sins, we must share in their condemnation too. 4. Covetousness detected and doomed. Ahab walking in that vineyard—his at last—meets "an hairy man, girt with a girdle of leather about his loins." It is Elijah the Tishbite. If there was one man in the whole world he had rather not have met it was Elijah. But there he is! his unquailing eye troubling him—detected king—to the deepest depths of his weak, wicked soul. Elijah is the king! Ahab cowers before him. He is found out. And the prophet, the truest, though sternest friend that he has ever had, Ahab esteems an enemy. Is the lighthouse on its wave-washed, rocky ledge the mariner's enemy, because it tells through the black and stormy night of the wrecking perils that lurk around the shore? Because it tells of danger, shall it be hated and assailed with angry epithets by those who sail the sea? (*G. T. Coster.*) *Naboth's vineyard and Ahab's covetousness*:—The visitor to Potsdam in Prussia, from the terrace of the palace of Sans-Souci sees near at hand a gigantic windmill, the most conspicuous object in the landscape. He wonders that the bold miller should have dared to build so near. But on inquiry he learns that the mill was there before the palace. In it several generations of the same family had ground their grist and gathered their wealth ere the attention of the Prussian kings was directed to the town as a place of residence. When palace after palace arose, and the king came to see, behold! here was this ugly windmill beating the air almost on the very border of his splendid gardens. Then Frederic the Great did what Ahab did in this Bible story. He tried to buy the mill. And the miller answered almost exactly as Naboth answered. The king raised his offer again and again, and ended by getting angry. The miller met the royal threats by an appeal to the court judges in Berlin. The judges supported him against the king; the mill went on grinding its corn; and to this day its great fans are whirled by every passing breeze. The whole nation has come to regard the mill at Potsdam as a symbol of the peace and prosperity of the poor under Prussian institutions. It has recently come into the possession of the royal family, but only with the proud consent, at last, of the descendants of the original owners. The world has got ahead. So far as concerns men who bear public rule and are subjected to the judgment of society, Ahabs must now be sought in darkest Africa or in equally benighted regions. Would that the spirit of Ahab were equally

remote from all of us in our private lives and characters! Many of us, perhaps all, are too covetous, grasping, childish, weak in yielding to sin, even as was Israel's king. I. THE COURSE OF TEMPTATION. It may seem to the casual reader that there was nothing wrong in Ahab's desire, or in the way in which he sought to gain it. So far as its terms were concerned, he proposed a strictly honourable bargain. The offer was even generous. Naboth might choose a better vineyard, or have cash. No hardship was involved except in respect to Naboth's principles and sentiments. But it was just here that the bargain failed, as it deserved to. That Naboth merely loved the place would have been enough. Objects of affection are often beyond price. He did not want either the money or a better vineyard. The reason for his declining the bargain was deeper. Such a sale was an offence against the religious and statute law of Israel. It was carefully prescribed that inherited land should remain in the tribe where it was first owned. On this account a daughter to whom an inheritance fell was forbidden to marry outside her tribe. The theory was that the land all belonged to God, and that He had parcelled it out as He wished it to remain. Now the king must have known this law; it is a stretch of charity to suppose that he did not. His proposal, therefore, showed a thorough lack of principle, a wicked contempt for the Mosaic code. Jezebel was virtually ruler of the realm. She said, "Dost thou now govern the kingdom of Israel? . . . I will give thee the vineyard of Naboth." So Lady Macbeth drives her husband on to the murder of Duncan. She mocks his halting courage; she provides suggestion and plan; she does all, except strike the murderous blow. She says to him at first—

> "He that's coming
> Must be provided for; and you shall put
> This night's great business into my despatch."

"If we should fail," objects Macbeth.

> "We fail!
> But screw your courage to the sticking place,
> And we'll not fail,"

she answers. And after it is done, and he refuses to return to put the evidence of guilt upon the sleeping and drugged servants, she exclaims—

> "Infirm of purpose!
> Give me the daggers."

Ahab is weaker than Macbeth, though not so wicked; but Jezebel and Lady Macbeth are not far apart. When woman goes into crime, she often plunges to the extreme quicker than man. Jezebel said, "I will give thee Naboth's vineyard." There are few events in a man's life that stand alone. Every special sin has its long preparation. The avalanche in Switzerland rushes down at last; but what of the melting snows all through the spring and summer, until every waterdrop has done its work and washed away the last pebble that supported the hanging mass of earth and ice? The lightning-flash is sudden; but what of the hidden electric forces that have been gathering in the atmosphere all through the heated months, so that at last the bolt must leap from the cloud to meet the discharge from the earth? So morally. Ahab started wrong, as he knew. It was not a question of one sin, but of sin. He would have his Zidonian wife, though it meant Baal-worship. His good resolutions failed one by one. When at last he coveted the vineyard, his evil genius was at hand as ever, and he let her go on to the end of the transaction. Through years he had been laying the fatal train that was to shatter his kingdom and seal his doom. Who can tell just what moment of an evil course will bring the sinner to his abyss? After the first step every step is a peril. Even quiet consent, passive yielding, is fatal. The only safety is in prompt, manly, uncompromising conversion—turning away from sin for ever. II. GOD'S PATIENCE. Ahab's rebellion had been long and obstinate: an alien marriage; adopted idolatry; persecutions for conscience' sake; open disobedience in war; and now covetousness, leading him to break the most sacred obligations, and add robbery and murder to the list of his crimes. He had had many warnings from God. This triple crime of impiety, robbery, and murder settled the matter. God's word comes to Elijah, and Elijah comes to Ahab. The time had come for Ahab to receive a harder lesson than ever before. The prophet spoke Jehovah's decree, as Ahab's own signet had

given authority to kill Naboth. As Naboth had died, so should Ahab die. As Naboth's family had been cut off, so should Ahab's race disappear. The awful curse brought him to his senses and to his knees. He rent his clothes, put sackcloth upon his flesh, fasted, lay in sackcloth, and went softly. God is always patient. We sin; He pleads and waits. We go on grasping after what is not our own: let my will, not Thine, be done, is the prayer offered by every deed. God warns, instructs, shows us in a thousand ways that His will is right, and that it is in the very nature of things our destruction if we oppose it. He tempts us with every promise, and shows us the fair destiny awaiting those who love truth and are obedient to Him. At last some evil comes to us from our wrongdoing, and we are unfeignedly sorry; but it is more the sorrow of a frightened than of a truly penitent soul. But the Divine heart is yet patient. The story of God's patience with Ahab is wonderful, but it is the story of His patience with most of us. We, too, are covetous to the last degree. My comfort, my pleasure, my wealth, my home, my loves, my will,—all these will I have, though at the expense of every other man's comfort, pleasure, wealth, home, loves, and will. And to this desperate covetousness of ours God matches His infinite self-sacrifice. III. THE CURSE UPON AHAB FELL AT LAST. Sin must meet its doom. Brief and selfish repentance is not enough. If sin is not slain, it will slay. God's patience after all has its conditions. Years pass by, Ahab still living. At last he undertakes a war, and is slain in battle. Whether soon or late, the soul that sinneth it shall die. It stands written that though the heavens pass away, the word of the Lord shall not pass away. It is the final verdict: "He that seeketh his life shall lose it." IV. WHAT OF NABOTH AND HIS SONS? They were good men, so far as we are told, yet they died miserably. They were victims of injustice and cruelty, their very piety hastening their end and making them martyrs. Are we to conclude from this that what we have said concerning the doom of sin is untrue? Shall we draw the inference that the good and the bad are treated alike, so that there is no profit in godliness? It would be unfortunate to turn away from our lesson with this question unanswered. (*G. E. Merrill.*) *In Naboth's vineyard*:—Ahab has received scant justice at the hands of the Biblical historians, and the popular estimate of his character is scarcely fair. We never think of him except as contrasted with Elijah, or as dominated by the fiendish Jezebel. Yet he had his good points. He was a courageous soldier, a capable ruler, a far-seeing statesman. He never intended to renounce the worship of Jehovah—the names of his children are sufficient evidence of that. He thought it was possible to serve Jehovah and Baal, and perhaps those who denounce him most are not entirely guiltless of trying to serve two masters. If it had not been for the influence of his wife, he would have been a better man after what took place on Mount Carmel. But that was seven years ago, and in the meantime he had twice defeated a dangerous enemy and rolled back the tide of foreign invasion. He had won for his kingdom peace and prosperity, and for himself considerable wealth. He was free now to establish his own house, to adorn his beautiful palace in Samaria, and his country house in Jezreel, eight miles away. 1. Notice the danger of undisciplined desire. This chapter enforces, in concrete form, the exhortation of our Lord, "Take heed and beware of covetousness." It was a subject on which He had a great deal to say, and His warning was never more needed than now. This passion for getting, this longing for a little more than we have, this worship of Mammon—it is not peculiar to millionaires. Poor men sometimes forget that a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth. 2. Notice the peril of self-deception. There is many a man who lacks the pluck to do a wrong thing himself, but is willing to acquiesce if others do it. He is willing enough to reap the benefits of wrong-doing, and to shirk his share of the responsibility. It is notorious that a committee, or a limited company, will do what an individual would shrink from doing, and each member tries to thrust the responsibility for it on others. A professional man will sometimes do, according to professional etiquette, what he would scorn to do as an individual. A tradesman, otherwise honest, will stoop to the tricks of the trade. How easy it is to delude oneself by thinking that, because there is no actual personal wrong-doing, there is therefore no responsibility. Ahab thought this thing had been taken out of his hands. Yet he was responsible, and he knew it. The fiction by which he deceived himself was exposed in a moment by the short, sharp words of Elijah. But notice the amazing cleverness of Jezebel's scheme. "When a wicked thing is cleverly done, half

the world is disposed to condone its wickedness." Many a sinner deceives his own soul by calling a wicked thing smart. But when conscience wakes, it calls our sins by their right names! In this case, all the legal proprieties were observed. A letter was written in Ahab's name, sealed with the royal seal. Nobody suspected Jezebel's part in the affair, except a few subservient nobles who could be trusted to keep their secret. It is not difficult to reconstruct the conversation: "That churl Naboth, who refused to sell his little vineyard, has been found guilty of treason. He and his sons are dead, and the vineyard is yours—legally and inalienably yours—and yours for nothing!" It was very clever! Ahab was willing to pay a fair price, but he saved money on that transaction. He got that vineyard cheap! But did he? It is possible to buy a thing at the lowest market price, and yet pay very dear for it! That which a man gets by tampering with his own conscience is dear, whatever the selling price. The money price one pays for a thing is not always the measure of what it costs. Here is a man who is congratulating himself on a particularly smart bargain; but what if he has paid down for it his own good name and his peace of mind and the welfare of his family! Is it worth the price? And whether a man gain a kitchen garden or the whole world, what does it profit him if he lose his own soul? So Ahab rose up to go down to his vineyard. He rode in state the journey of eight miles to Jezreel. Two young cavalry officers rode behind. One of them, Jehu, had good reason afterwards to remember all that happened that fateful day! All the way, Ahab was congratulating himself that he had such a clever wife, and thinking what a pleasure this would be to his children afterwards! He could not entirely silence his misgivings. He could not forget that to gain his ends he had wronged a true-hearted man, a neighbour and a subject. "Wronged" was the word which his lips formed. The word in his thoughts was "killed." Conscience will call things by their right names! But he told himself, if he had done a shady thing, or allowed it to be done, it was really in the interests of his wife and family. Self-deceit will carry us great lengths! How many a rogue has silenced his conscience "in the interests of his family"! (*A. Moorhouse, M.A.*) *Naboth's vineyard*:—It has been pointed out many times that of all the Ten Commandments it is the last one which is the most searching because the most spiritual and the nearest to the new law of the Sermon on the Mount. I say this was a searching, spiritual commandment, for it dealt with the inward soul of a man, his private thoughts and feelings and desires. For these, says the Tenth Commandment—and not merely for your actual deeds—you are answerable to God. "Thou shalt not covet." 1. God's way is to strike sin in the germ: to kill, as it were, the very bacillus of the disease. Man loves to dally with evil suggestion, to play with unclean thoughts, to toy with unchaste or dishonourable desires; to entertain these while outwardly he is respectable and honoured by society. There is something to him fascinating in this bargain, by which he consents to outward respectability at the price of inward licence. But as verily as the uncleanness of the water bears evidence that the spring has been fouled, an evil life is born from an evil heart. That is the source of the mischief. 2. Ahab played with fire. He had wronged Naboth already in his heart; it was a little thing that he should go further and wrong him in fact. There are sinners and sinners. There is a covetousness that hides defeat in assumed smiles, with deadly malice and envy smouldering within. And there is a covetousness less formidable and more contemptible, that pouts and fumes and frets and sulks. The latter kind was Ahab's. 3. I think it very likely that Ahab was not meditating any serious misconduct; but he was preparing his own heart, drying it of all true manly feeling, so that it was like prepared tinder for any spark of temptation. There are hundreds of our fellowmen and women outwardly respectable and innocent as yet of gross sin who are in danger just because their heart is in a similar condition. A chance spark, a whispered suggestion, a rash impulse will suffice to precipitate a course of action which can only bring ruin and overwhelming shame. The heart is dry to the roots; no sap of honour, and manly feeling, and love of justice penetrates and invigorates them. They have allowed their hearts to wither. 4. Now while Ahab's heart lies there like so much prepared tinder, enter the temptress, with a due supply of sparks cunningly contrived for the purpose of an explosion. "And Jezebel his wife said unto him." The most deadly weapons are made of the finest steel. Jezebel's character was strong, firm, unmalleable; a diamond heart, cold, passionless, cruel, hard as steel, sharp as a dagger's edge. The words had not left Ahab's lips a moment before her

plan was made. Treachery and murder came as natural to her as breathing. Lady Macbeth only did the deed of death when her husband's courage failed. Jezebel did not dream of entrusting the task to her husband, for whom she had probably a very just contempt. She herself laid the train and fired it that was to send Naboth into eternity and give the vineyard to Ahab. 5. So the little sin of covetousness has found its reward. The coveted object is obtained—Ahab was in the hands of evil. He had placed himself there: and, like every man or woman who consents to sin, he was no longer his own master. If he had been a giant instead of the weak creature he was he could not have stayed the course of this crime. (*C. S. Horne, M.A.*) *Naboth's vineyard*:—1. We sometimes hear that Ahab was a covetous man: are we quite sure that the charge is just and that it can be substantiated? Do we not sometimes too narrowly interpret the word covetousness? It is generally at least limited to money. But the term "covetous" may apply to a much larger set of circumstances, and describe quite another set of impulses and desires. We may even be covetous of personal appearance; of popular fame, such as is enjoyed by other men; we may be covetous in every direction which implies the gratification of our own wishes; and yet with regard to the mere matter of money we may be almost liberal. Sometimes when covetousness takes this other turn we describe it by the narrower word envy; we say we envy the personal appearance of some, we envy the greatness and the public standing of others. But under all this envy is covetousness. Envy is in a sense but a symptom: covetousness is the vital and devouring disease. Under this interpretation of the term, therefore, it is not unfit or unjust to describe Ahab as a covetous man. Look at his dissatisfaction with circumstances. He wishes to have "a garden of herbs." That is all! The great Alexander could not rest in his palace at Babylon because he could not get ivy to grow in his garden. What was Babylon, or all Assyria, in view of the fact that this childish king could not cause ivy to grow in the palace gardens? Ahab lived in the very narrowest kind of circumstances; as a little man, he lived in little things, and because those things were not all to his mind it was impossible for him to be restful or noble or really good. Once let the mind become dissatisfied with some trifling circumstance, and that fly spoils the whole pot of ointment. Once get the notion that the house is too small, and then morning, noon, and night you never see a picture that is in it, or acknowledge the comfort of one corner in all the little habitation: the one thing that is present in the mind throughout all the weary hours is that the house is too small. If we live in circumstances, we shall be the sport of events; we shall be without dignity, without calmness, without reality and solidity of character; let us, therefore, betake ourselves into inner thoughts, into spirituality of life, into the soul's true character, into the very sanctuary of God: there we shall have truth and light and peace. 2. Then notice in Ahab a childish servility to circumstances (ver. 4). Yet he was the King of Israel in Samaria! He was in reality a man who could give law, whose very look was a commandment, and the uplifting of his hand could move an army. Now we see him surely at his least. So we do, but not at his worst. All this must have an explanation. We cannot imagine that the man is so simply childish and foolish as this incident alone would describe him. Behind all this childishness there is an explanation. What is it? We find it in ver. 25:—"But 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." That explains the whole mystery. But this is an affair which does not take place in the open market or in the open daylight. But the compact is made in darkness, in silence, in out-of-the-way places. Now we understand King Ahab better. We thought him but little, frivolous of mind, childish and petty, without a man's worthy ambition; but now we see that all this was but symptomatic, an outward sign, pointing, when rightly followed, to an inward and mortal corruption. 3. Now let us look at the case of Naboth and the position which he occupied in this matter. Naboth possessed the vineyard Ahab is said to have coveted. Naboth said, "The Lord forbid" (ver. 3). He made a religious question of it. Why did he invoke the Eternal Name, and stand back as if an offence had been offered to his faith? The terms were commercial, the terms were not unreasonable, the approach was courteous, the ground given for the approach was not an unnatural ground,—why did Naboth stand back as if his religion had been shocked? The answer is in Num. xxxvi. 7. Ahab was taught that there was a man in Samaria who valued the inheritance which had been handed down to him. Have

we no inheritance handed down to us—no book of revelation, no day of rest, no flag of liberty, no password of common trust? So Ahab lay down upon his bed, turned away his face, and would eat no bread. But there is a way of accomplishing mean desires. Take heart! there is a way of possessing oneself of almost whatever one desires. There is always some Merlin who will bring every Uther-Pendragon what he longs to have; there is always some Lady Macbeth who will show the thane how to become king. There is always a way to be bad! The gate of hell stands wide open, or if apparently half-closed a touch will make it fly back, and the road is broad that leadeth to destruction. Jezebel said she would find the garden or vineyard for her husband. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *The story of Naboth's vineyard*:—1. There is a strange fascination in sin. This man looks at this thing; turns it over in his mind; says how nice it would be; and at last the thing gets entire hold of him. He ought at first to have said, "No, that is beyond my power; that is forbidden." Instead, he plays with the thing, and nurses it, and it becomes his master. And just as a bird might be seen trying to escape, and yet is chained to the spot, the secret is discovered after a while in the approach of the serpent, sure and slow, with its eyes fixed on its prey, and held by its cruel glance; so it is with sin: there is a fascination in it. You look at it, you get your eyes fixed upon its eyes; you can break away if you have the will to do it, and the good sense, by God's providence, to do it; if you have not felt the full force of its fascination. But if you loiter where its influence can be felt more and more on you, presently it becomes your master, and you go to the evil thing, and bring the stain on your soul. Is it not so? The doctor, though he may carry his life in his hand, must go where the small-pox or deadly fevers are raging, but the man who has no work and no cure for the evil is a madman, and not a hero, if he goes needlessly into an atmosphere laden with infection. It is the old soldier who has been in many a battle, and carries the scars of many an engagement, who shelters himself till the moment comes for the decisive charge. He is not afraid of lying down. It is the raw recruit, who has never smelt powder, and who has never had a scratch on him, who dare not be suspected of being afraid. And believe me, young men, it is not a courageous thing to go needlessly into danger of a moral character. 2. Yes, there is this fascination in sin, but see what it brings us to, and the degradation it brings with it. "He laid him down on his bed, and turned away his face, and would eat no bread." Poor fellow! Yes, but that is what sin always does to men; it eats the heart out of their manliness. If a man wants to be strong to meet sorrow he must keep himself well in hand, and, by the grace of God, learn to control his appetites and desires, so that circumstances and possessions and pleasures shall always be his servants, never his master. I have seen in this city an old man beggared in a day, by no fault of his own, but through the wrong-doing and the misfortunes of others; a man who had maintained a stainless character, and a prominent position in all good works; and I saw him, not whining because he had lost his money, and asking all the world to come and see how sorely he had been dealt with, but bravely shaking off from himself the ruins of his fallen fortunes, and going out to win another fortune in his old age, if that were God's will, or to do without one, if that were God's will; but keeping a good conscience and a brave heart, and a face with the light of God upon it, so that he could look any brother-man in the face with self-respect. And I tell you the man who is to be ready to do that sort of thing, and go through that sort of experience, is not the man who has always been wanting the softest bed and the warmest corner, the easiest path and the best dinner, whose one great thought is, how can I make myself as comfortable as possible in the world. No, the man who is to be brave to meet his own misfortunes when they come—and to all they will come, sooner or later—is the man who has not been continually thinking about himself, but who has let his heart go out to his fellow-men and towards the great Father, God, who tells us we ought to consider all men as our brothers. If you want to have the manliness taken out of your heart live for selfish aims and objects. 3. And then see, too, another way in which sin degrades a man; how it overturns all his mental conceptions, and even darkens and destroys the sensitiveness of his conscience. Ahab is lying there on his divan, and Jezebel comes to him. One can almost fancy one sees him and her together, and she is saying to him, What is the matter? And he tells her this doleful story, how he wanted the vineyard, and could not get it. Jezebel's lip turns with scorn as she looks down at him, and says, "Dost thou now govern the kingdom of Israel? Are you lying here

because you cannot get that nice toy? What is the good of being king if you are going to take No for an answer, if you cannot have your own way. Arise, and eat bread, and let thine heart be merry; I will give thee the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite." When Jezebel said that Ahab knew she meant mischief. If he had been a true man and a true king, he would have said to her, "Though you are queen, it is at your peril if you touch a hair of his head; he is within the rights of this land. Dare not touch him, for every subject's rights and safety are sacred in my eyes." But the poor, mean-spirited wretch, degraded by his own follies, lies there, and lets his wife go and contrive the wickedness for which he has not the wit or courage. And all the time. I have no doubt, like other men in similar positions, Ahab was making to himself all kinds of excuses: "Well, I don't know what she is going to do; perhaps she is only going to offer him a little more money, or appeal to his respect for the king. At all events, it is not my business; I have not asked her to interfere, and so I shall not trouble about it. I shall let her do just what she will." Yes, that "let alone" policy which is so popular in many quarters, was admirably illustrated by Ahab on this occasion. And I have no doubt that to a certain extent that kind of reasoning was sufficient to drug his conscience to sleep, at least for the time being. And there are constantly men who are acting on that principle. Men used to say, "Oh, certainly I never bribed any elector"; but when an election was coming on they would pay five hundred pounds to the credit of their agent, and ask no questions about it. There are men to-day in London who would say, "Of course I did not sell three penn'orth of gin over a counter to a poor, bloated, degraded woman." No, but they take three times as much rent for a house because it has got a licence than they could get if it hadn't any. Men say, "I did not tell that lie, or set that slander in circulation." No, but they suggested it quite delicately, and "hoping it would go no further," and so the carrion scent was awakened, and all followed that they thought might be expected to follow. Many of these people fancy that God's eyes are closed, or that God does not know what is going on in the world, and that in some way or other they have been able to cheat the Omniscient! They cannot feel, and are not aware of the true nature of the life they are living and the deeds they are doing. Just as the slaves when they were flogged, after the first few blows felt very little, because the nerves of the back had been lacerated; so the consciences of these men have been cut, lashed, and injured till their sensitiveness is gone out of them, and men have lost the faculty of quickly detecting wrong, and knowing what is right. Can there possibly be a deeper degradation for a man? She came back to Ahab, and said, "Naboth is dead." So the conscience of Ahab will let him at once rise with new eagerness to go and take possession of his treasure. Away he goes from the palace, promising himself many a pleasant hour in the cool shade of the vineyard. Yes, yes, there is disappointment in sin. God does not let men get the good out of it that they thought. God does not let them enjoy it as keenly as they expected. And this is one of the great proofs of God's love, that He will not let men sin easily and comfortably. We sometimes say it is hard work to get to heaven. That is true enough. But we may almost say it is as hard work for many men to get to hell. If they will be lost they have to break through many a barrier which the love of God built in their way; and not till they have forced their way through these barriers can they be cast into the outer darkness, which they rush to encounter. How good it is that God will not let men sin easily! Some Elijah will stand in the gateway of the vineyard. Here is a man who has gone away from home; perhaps he is a young man, and in the very midst of some sinful revelry, where the air is thick with curses, where the atmosphere is as the atmosphere of hell, suddenly, as though the heavens parted, and the breath of heaven's own atmosphere were thrust into the midst of that vile scene, there comes to him a thought of his mother, of the pure blessed home that he left years ago. No law of association will account for that. There was nothing in the associations of the place to make him think that thought at that time, but the exact opposite. Surely the blessed Spirit of God sent that thought just there in order that that man might meet his Elijah at the gate of the vineyard. Another man is trying to get away from the impressions of his better days. As he passes hurriedly along, perhaps on a Sabbath day like this, some door opens, and some wave of sound comes out from the worshipping congregation. Memories are at once set at work to carry him back to his purer days. God has sent some Elijah to meet him at the gate of the vineyard. Oh, blessed be God, for the love that will not let us slip easily

into hell! And then one cannot help seeing the doom of sin. There is a sort of awful dramatic propriety about this doom: "In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick thy blood." (*T. B. Stephenson, D.D., LL.D.*) *Voices from Naboth's vineyard*:—There are many voices addressed to us from Naboth's vineyard. I. BEWARE OF COVETOUSNESS. That vineyard has its counterpart in the case and conduct of many still. Covetousness may assume a thousand camelon hues and phases, but these all resolve themselves into a sinful craving after something other than what we have. Covetousness of means—a grasping after more material wealth; the race for riches. Covetousness of place—aspiring after other positions in life than those which Providence has assigned us;—not because they are better—but because they are other than our present God-appointed lot—invested with an imaginary superiority. And 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. The old story, which every schoolboy knows, is a faithful picture of human nature. It was Alexander, not defeated, but victorious—Alexander, not the lord of one kingdom, but the sovereign of the world, who wept unsatisfied tears. How many there are, surrounded with all possible affluence and comfort, who put a life-thorn in their side by 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! Seek to suppress these unworthy envious longings. "For which things' sake," says the apostle (and among "these things" is covetousness), "the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience." Covetousness, God makes a synonym for idolatry. He classes the covetous in the same category with the worshippers of stocks and stones. "Be content with such things as ye have." II. KEEP OUT OF THE WAY OF TEMPTATION. 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." 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. How many have bartered their peace of conscience for veriest trifles:—sold a richer inheritance than Esau's birthright for a mess of earthly pottage! And once the first fatal step is taken, it cannot be so easily undone. Once the blot on fair character is made, the stain is not so easily erased. III. BE SURE YOUR SIN WILL FIND YOU OUT. Ahab and Jezebel, as we have seen, had managed to a wish 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. And are the principles of God's moral government different now? It is true, indeed, that the present economy deals not so exclusively as the old in temporal retribution. Sinners now have before them the surer and more terrible recompense and vengeance of a world to come. But not unfrequently here also, retribution still follows, and sooner or later overtakes, the defiant transgressor. 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 defied 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?" (*J. R. Macduff, D.D.*) "*Our desires may undo us*":—1. There is no more striking illustration of this proverb than that supplied in the sacred story of King Ahab and Naboth of Jezreel. It is a curse of undisciplined desire that it never has enough. It has been asked, "When is a man rich enough?" and it has been answered, "When he has a little more than he has." A little more just to make an even sum, to secure this profitable investment, to finish this building, to make a complete ring-fence around this property, to gratify this harmless fad or to please some friend's taste—just a little more, and I shall be content, and then I will rest and be thankful. But undisciplined desire never comes to the resting-place, because such desire always increases with every new accession. 2. Undisciplined desire is never reasonable. All considerations of fairness and justice, of right and wrong, of doing "to others what we would they should do to us," must give way to this masterful desire. 3. But a man with a great passion of desire seldom hesitates long to use any means, however unlawful, to gain his object. He either clears the path himself, or, if too weak and cowardly to work with his own hands, he finds some strong and unscrupulous instrument. 4. But when such a man as Ahab gains his heart's desire, is he satisfied with his possessions? Said Jezebel, "Arise, take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite." Did he find the vineyard as large as it had appeared through the halo of his glowing hopes? Would it really make a satisfactory garden of herbs? Most of us have learned that there are two ways of looking through a telescope. One removes a near object far away, but it hides the blemishes; the other brings the object near, but it reveals all the blemishes. Possession exposes everything. And if the desire has been unreasonable and passionate, and especially if the conscience of the possessor is aroused to condemn the means used, there is left only a miserable sense of disappointment. When men use unlawful means to gain their desires, they must face all the consequences. In what beautiful contrast appears the testimony of St. Paul! "I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therein to be content. . . . In all things have I learned the secret both to be filled and to be hungry, both to abound and to be in want. I can do all things in Him that strengtheneth me." (*Thomas Wilde.*) *Mastery of self*:—Sir Richard Grenville said of Thomas Stukeley, "He was a knight who wanted but one step to greatness, and that was, that in his excessive hurry to rule other people, he forgot to rule himself." The true victor is he who leads his own captivity captive, is master of his own heart by giving it over to the Master Himself. Until the kingdom that has been divided is united, how can it conquer its foes? *The discontented man*:—A contented man may have enough, but a discontented man never can; his heart is like the Slough of Despond into which thousands of waggon loads of the best material were cast, and yet the slough did swallow up all, and was none the better. Discontent is a bottomless bog into which if one world were cast it would quiver and heave for another. A discontented man dooms himself to the direst form of poverty, yea, he makes himself so great a pauper that the revenues of empires could not enrich him. Are you impatient in your present position? Believe me that, as George Herbert said of revenues in times gone by, "He that cannot live on twenty pounds a year cannot live on forty"; so may I say: he who is not

contented in his present position will not be contented in another though it bring him double possessions. When the vulture of dissatisfaction has once fixed its talons in the breast it will not cease to tear at your vitals. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

Ver. 3. The Lord forbid that I should give the inheritance of my fathers unto thee.—*The reply of Naboth, and its lessons* :—I. THE REPLY OF NABOTH. 1. It first assures us that he is a conscientious man, and a worshipper of Jehovah. No; but from a conviction of his duty to God as the Supreme Lawgiver: and, therefore, rather than offend Him, or violate His will, he would incur the anger and vengeful power of Ahab. 2. Hence the moral heroism of the reply—similar to that which distinguished the answer of the apostles, in after history, when forbidden by the magistrates to preach in the name of Jesus. These brave men recognised the Divine authority; and, basing their publication upon its evidence, they were ready to undergo any persecution, any torture, any death, rather than disobey God. And it was according to this spirit that Naboth uttered the words to Ahab. 3. In this reply of Naboth, there is also the recognition of an old fundamental law, unrepealed, among the Hebrews, respecting landed property: and this recognition stands out in direct opposition to the loose practices of Ahab, the priests, and all the followers of Baal. II. ITS LESSONS. 1. The great value which every professing Christian ought to set upon his inheritance, as purchased for him, and handed down to him by Christ, and that no man ought to part with it through the force of temptation. 2. We learn furthermore from the reply of Naboth the great importance of decision of character, or as it is directed towards a right purpose. 3. Naboth openly avowed his belief in God and His laws before Ahab, and a nation given up to idolatry. And thus we are taught not to be ashamed of confessing our faith in Christ. (*W. D. Horwood.*)

Ver. 4. And Ahab came into his house heavy and displeased.—*Temper—a deadly sin* :—In other and less dignified words, Ahab, when he could not get his own way, went to bed in a sulk. I take it that all those who have tried even to be close students of human nature are agreed that life as a rule suffers most, not from the heroic sin or from the deep passion, but from little mean and contemptible sins. These sins are like the grit in the eye—they incense and inflame until it happens that a great and noble faculty can be used no more. And I am going to suggest to this audience that the harmony of life, whether it be of the family life or of the social life of any people, suffers most from two classes of people—the cross-grained man and the shrew. These people are ready, as you know, to take umbrage at the faintest slight, even of a fancied kind, to indul e ill-humour over something that was never intended to be even a contradiction of their views: and when not venting their venom and their spite publicly, they are commonly to be found grumbling in a corner; and if not openly growling, then they are secretly sulking and nourishing their temper. Now, will you bear with me while I say a word about the description itself, because there is a lesson which I think we might learn even from the word. The word "temper," as you know, is one of the English words which have gradually come to have a bad sense. It meant in its original "to moderate or to modify what was unduly harsh or violent," and in that sense, of course, the word has been frequently used. I found, for instance, a quotation out of one of the early English poets, in which he said that the function of the woman was to temper man—that is, not to put him into a temper, but to modify his naturally harsh, sour, and severe disposition—a function that everybody here will agree woman, as a rule, discharges. The word temper, indeed, is used very commonly for either of two purposes; either to describe a calm, serene, and gracious nature, or else to describe a hasty, fiery, and ill-conditioned nature. But when my dictionary was consulted it told me this: that the good use of the word has, in process of years, become obsolete, and that if the word temper is now used by itself, it can always be trusted to have the bad significance. So that I call you to witness it comes to this: that if you want to speak of good temper you must call it good; but if you want to speak of bad temper you can simply describe it as temper, and everybody will know what you mean. I want to ask you that you will distinguish it from what we call passion. Passion. it is quite true, is often guilty of great and terrible crimes, crimes which arise from the fact that a great quality has become the master instead of being the servant of man. But in bad temper there is nothing so great or dignified or strong as passion. Temper thrives on trivialities. There is no detail so silly, no pretext so trumpery, but it will give

the reins to the man of temper. Passion is the sublime; temper is really ridiculous save only for this, that the things it does and the misery it causes would turn all our laughter into tears. To take—for I am anxious that you should continue your analysis—another distinction that will occur to you between the two. Passion is always occasional, it is volcanic, it is soon over. It is like the thunderstorm. It bursts and breaks; then the sky clears blue and genial and warm. But it is always the tendency of temper to be chronic and normal, and it corresponds to what we constantly describe as a certain cross-grained and ill-conditioned nature. Yes, passion is volcanic, but passion knows how to forgive and to forget. But temper is not like that. It keeps all its bitterness within. It nourishes its grudges, it cherishes its slights, it broods over its fancied wrongs. I was wondering how I could best illustrate this part of what I am trying to say, and a comparison occurred to me between two kings of your English history—the one whom I always think of as one of the greatest kings who ever wore the British crown, the first Edward, a man of passion, deeply beloved, and even adored by his people; the man of the passionate pilgrimage, which was to be the evidence of his grief for his wife, to whom Charing Cross is the monument even to-night—a man of volcanic humour, with floods of tears for the evil deeds his passion wrought, and of whom Mr. J. R. Green tells the thrilling and touching story, how he summoned his subjects to Westminster Hall, and when he faced them could not speak to them, but simply buried his face in his hands and burst into tears before them all, and then asked forgiveness for wrongs that he had done. That was the passionate man. I contrast with him the king of temper, John, who never rose to a single great thought or a single great deed, but who after all won the loathing and contempt of his subjects, because Dante's hazy smoke was always in his heart—morbid, sullen, spiteful, malicious. And now that brings me very naturally to the discussion of the text which I have taken, and the narrative to which it refers, a quotation that is familiar to you all. You know that it introduces us to one of the most cold-blooded and gruesome crimes of which history contains any record. The real instigator of that crime, and the executor of the deed was Jezebel. But terrible as Jezebel's temper is represented here, I venture to say that to every self-respecting mind the character of Ahab is more loathsome and more contemptible. Jezebel did the thing. Ahab was only the weak confederate of his unscrupulous and bold wife, with her heart of marble. And yet think of it, analyse the scene. Does it not remain, as I say, that Jezebel with all her crimes and her blood-stained hands could even extort the measure of admiration when you consider her spirit, her intrepidity, and her initiative, and realise that if these qualities had been devoted to something worthy of them, she would have been a great woman. But about Ahab there is nothing great; there is everything that is contemptible—nothing more heroic than a fit of temper. I have no doubt that his servants went away and said it was an attack of the liver, and that he would shortly be all right. But Jezebel knew him better. She knew that it was black venom, and spite, and malice, and that if he was to get better and recover these must have their vent. And so she did what he wanted to do, but hadn't the courage to do. That is your whole story in a nutshell. "And what is its moral?" you say. "It is so horrible it has no moral for us." I am not so sure of that. Its moral is this, I take it, that to a man thus evilly conditioned, the natural disposition is to every sorry and cruel suggestion that may come to him from any quarter. For there he is naturally disposed to think the worst of people and to do them ill. Ah, yes; and if it had not ended except in evil word it had been bad enough, for if I may in an aside I would say this: temper has always found its readiest weapon in the tongue, and who in this building can estimate the evil and the injury that has been done when the tongue has lain at the disposition of temper. Ah, but is it not true to say that it is possible for you and me, while we analyse the temper and desire that God's love will soften and sweeten the heart—is it not possible, for us to feel some genuine sorrow for them? For, after all, remember that nobody else is made quite so unhappy and so miserable as they make themselves. There they are; they are unwelcome guests at every festival, and I fancy that at last they come to know that people anticipate their advent with apprehension and look upon their backs with relief. They are the frost on every budding happiness, the skeleton that sits at every feast. The cross-grained man and the common scold or shrew isolate themselves from humanity, cut themselves off from the genial and generous debt of life. Their heart becomes like the North Pole—absolutely locked in impenetrable ice. "And is there no cure?"

Oh yes, there is something. The mind that was in Christ Jesus, can it be communicated, or can it not? Is Christianity true when it says: "He will give you His Spirit, He will make you like Himself"? Is it true or is it not? Some of you here to-night, are you doomed and destined to bear to your grave this burden of which I have been speaking, or is there One whose hands can unloose the thongs and set you free? I know that I am right in what I say. Why, there are friends known to you, and to dwell in their company is gradually to feel dissolve and decay within you your bitter thoughts, and your heart come cordially into sympathy with their genial and generous spirit. That is a great thing; but, oh, men and women, to company with Jesus Christ, to live in His presence, beneath His redeeming touch and influence, that is, indeed, to say good-bye to the bitterness of the heart, that is to receive His sweetness into this bitter-thoughted mind and soul, that is to be mellowed for His harvesting, made ripe and gracious fruit for His hands to gather. That is my gospel. Jesus Christ can cure. (*C. S. Horne, M.A.*)

Ver. 5. **Why is thy spirit so sad, that thou eatest no bread?**—*A cure for the dumps*:—The witty Sydney Smith once said, "Never give way to melancholy, for if you do, it will encroach upon you like an overflowing river and overwhelm you." He added he had given twenty-four precautions to a lady of melancholy disposition to keep her from being sad. One of the things he recommended was to keep a bright fire in her room. Another of Sydney Smith's remedies for low spirits was to think over all the pleasant things you can remember. A third receipt was, always to keep a box of sugar-plums on the mantelpiece. Some of you would object to a sugar-plum when you go to a friend's house, but at any rate, it would please the giver for you to accept it, and for myself I may say that it would give me pleasure to receive it. Another remedy for despondency prescribed by the humorous Canon was, to always have the kettle simmering on the hob. These of course are little things, but they have their influence. These fits of sadness and melancholy make good things appear bad, and they so disturb the balance of our reason as to cause us to imagine that even loving friends dislike us. Shakespeare puts into the mouth of the masterpiece of his creative genius, Hamlet, this excellent description of the feelings of people, who are in the dumps:—"This goodly frame, the earth, seems to me a barren promontory; while that most excellent canopy, the air, look you; that great overhanging sky, that majestic roof, fretted with golden fire,—why! it appears no other thing to me than a foul and pestilent congregation of vapours." When the "lumbermen" are floating great logs of wood down the river St. Lawrence, past the city of Quebec, from the interior of Canada—those great logs which are brought to Liverpool and along our canals and railways to be cut up in the saw-mills—it sometimes happens that one of these great logs from being in the river for more than one season, gets its millions of pores filled with water, when it becomes what is called "water-logged." The log then sinks, through the water having got into its heart. Likewise, there are men and women who, while they are being carried along the stream of life, get so saturated with its cares and troubles that they sink; they are "trouble-logged," and sometimes they die of what is called a broken heart. I think it is in our power to prevent people getting "trouble-logged" and sinking helplessly in the Slough of Despond. Cervantes, the finest writer of humour that Spain has produced, whose works raised a smile on people's faces when they read or heard about them, was one of the saddest of men, his features having the marks of perpetual gloom upon them. Molière, the greatest master of humorous writing in France, looked as if his face had been made ugly with disappointment and grief; while Foote, one of our most comic English writers and actors died of a broken heart. We all get at times into this hypochondriac way—We all get into the dumps at times, feeling as if there were no God. The victims of this mental disease of "low spirits" go through the world as if they were forsaken orphans, without a penny or a friend. There is the instance of Ahab, who had everything that a despotic king could desire, but he was not satisfied. In many cases our troubles and disappointments arise from our own fault. This seems to have been the case with Jacob. Few Scripture characters had more trouble or were oftener sad than Jacob, who said that all the days of his life had been evil, and that his children would bring down his grey hairs in sorrow to the grave. In modern times, few men have excited more morbid and undeserved sympathy than the poet, Lord Byron, who was often in the dumps. He inherited a passionate and proud nature, but

his greatest trouble seems to have been his unfortunate club-foot, which he could neither hide nor put out of remembrance. This and his dissipation made his nature gloomy. Hear his words—

Melancholy
Sits on me as a cloud along the sky,
Which will not let the sunbeams through, nor yet
Descend in rain and end; but spreads itself
'Twixt heaven and earth, like envy between man
And man—and is an everlasting mist.

Why should we punish ourselves because we cannot have what others have, and which instead of being a blessing might prove a curse? Why should we torment ourselves because somebody else has obtained what we wanted? Addison has beautifully described in an allegory the foolish way in which people are disappointed because their life is one of obscurity. He says, "There was one day a drop of rain fell from a cloud into the ocean, and the drop of water bitterly complained and was sad of heart because it thought it was annihilated in the mighty expanse of the sea. But it dropped down into the open mouth of an oyster, where, in process of time, it was transformed and became a pearl, which at the present day is the ornament of the crown of the Persian monarch." This little fable teaches us not to repine at our lot. Though you may be feeble and humble as compared with other people, though you may not be beautiful or wealthy, and think yours is a disappointed lot, yet, like that drop of water, our God is preparing you to be an adornment of heaven. Do not therefore be cast down, or let your heart be grieved by any discouragement of birth or fortune in this life. (*W. Birch.*) *Nemesis of a selfish life*:—A man who lives entirely for himself becomes at last obnoxious to himself. I believe it is the very law of God that self-centeredness ends in self-nauseousness. There is no weariness like the weariness of a man who is wearied of himself, and that is the awful Nemesis which follows the selfish life. (*J. H. Jowett.*) *The tyranny of self*:—There can be no real happiness in the heart, where self is enthroned. If you would have peace, you must seize, bind, and never again let loose, for self is the cruellest tyrant, the deepest shadow, and the blackest blot that darkens life. To be rid of the despot, you must begin by placing others first in all your thoughts and actions; at this the coward drops his head; he hates another to be first. Next, give him no thought or consideration at all, and though at this neglect he cry out piteously, heed him not, for now is the time to bind him hard and fast with the cords of forgetfulness; then cast him far behind, and be careful to allow neither the call of pain nor pleasure to entice you into loosening one jot or tittle of his bonds, or, once set free, the monster will rise again, hydraheaded, and, towering above all else, enfold and crush you within his clutches, until you are no more free, but a slave, bound hand and foot, in the deadly meshes of over-mastering self. (*Great Thoughts.*)

Ver. 7. **I will give thee the vineyard of Naboth.**—*Wifely ambition, good and bad*:—How important that every wife have her ambition an elevated, righteous, and divinely approved ambition! And here let me say that what I am most anxious for is that woman, not waiting for the rights denied her or postponed, should promptly and decisively employ the rights she already has in possession. Some say she will be in a fair way to get all her rights when she gets the right to the ballot-box. I do not know that it would change anything for the better. But let every wife, not waiting for the vote she may never get, or, getting it, find it outbalanced by some other vote not fit to be cast, arise now in the might of the Eternal God and wield the power of a sanctified wifely ambition for a good approximating the infinite. No one can so inspire a man to noble purposes as a noble woman, and no one so thoroughly degrade a man as a wife of unworthy tendencies. While in my text we have illustration of wifely ambition employed in the wrong direction, in society and history are instances of wifely ambition triumphant in right directions. All that was worth admiration in the character of Henry VI. was a reflection of the heroics of his wife Margaret. William, Prince of Orange, was restored to the right path by the grand qualities of his wife Mary. Justinian, the Roman Emperor confesses that his wise laws were the suggestion of his wife Theodora. Andrew Jackson, the warrior and President, had his mightiest reinforcement in his plain wife, whose inartistic attire was the amusement of the elegant circles in which she was invited. Washington, who broke the

chain that held America in foreign vassalage, wore for forty years a chain around his own neck, that chain holding the miniature likeness of her who had been his greatest inspiration, whether among the snows at Valley Forge or the honours of the Presidential chair. Pliny's pen was driven through all its poetic and historical dominions by his wife, Calpurnia, who sang his stanzas to the sound of flute, and sat among audiences enraptured at her husband's genius, herself the most enraptured. Pericles said he got all his eloquence and statesmanship from his wife. When the wife of Grotius rescued him from long imprisonment at Lovestein by means of a bookcase that went in and out, carrying his books to and fro, in which he was one day transported, hidden amid the folios; and the women of besieged Würzburg, getting permission from the victorious army to take with them so much of their valuables as they could carry, under cover of the promise shouldered and took with them, as the most important valuables, their husbands—both achievements in a literal way illustrated what thousands of times has been done in a figurative way, namely, that wifely ambition has been the salvation of men. De Tocqueville, whose writings will be potential and quoted while the world lasts, ascribes his successes to his wife, and says: "Of all the blessings which God has given to me, the greatest of all in my eyes is to have lighted on Maria Motley." Martin Luther says of his wife, "I would not exchange my poverty with her for all the riches of Crœsus without her." Isabella of Spain, by her superior faith in Columbus, put into the hand of Ferdinand, her husband, America. John Adams, President of the United States, said of his wife: "She never by word or look discouraged me from running all hazards for the salvation of my country's liberties." A whole cemetery of monumental inscriptions will not do a wife so much good after she has quit the world as one plain sentence like that which Tom Hood wrote to his living wife when he said: "I never was anything till I knew you." O woman, what is your wifely ambition, noble or ignoble? Is it high social position? That will then probably direct your husband, and he will climb and scramble and slip and fall and rise and tumble, and on what level, or in what depth, or on what height he will, after a while, be found, I cannot even guess. The contest for social position is the most unsatisfactory contest in all the world, because it is so uncertain about your getting it, and so insecure a possession after you have obtained it, and so unsatisfactory even if you keep it. The whisk of a lady's fan may blow it out. The growl of one "bear," or the bellowing of one "bull" on Wall Street, may scatter it. Some of us could tell of what influence upon us has been a wifely ambition consecrated to righteousness. A man is no better than his wife will let him be. O wives, swing your sceptres of wifely influence for God and good homes! Do not urge your husbands to annex Naboth's vineyard to your palace of success, whether right or wrong, lest the dogs that come out to destroy Naboth come out also to devour you. Righteousness will pay best in life, will pay best in death, will pay best in judgment, will pay best through all eternity. In our effort to have the mother of every household appreciate her influence over her children, we are apt to forget the wife's influence over the husband. In many households the influence upon the husband is the only home influence. In a great multitude of the best and most important and most talented families of the earth there have been no descendants. Multitudes of the finest families of the earth are extinct. As though they had done enough for the world by their genius or wit or patriotism or invention or consecration, God withdrew them. In multitudes of cases all woman's opportunity for usefulness is with her contemporaries. How important that it be an improved opportunity! While the French warriors on their way to Rheims had about concluded to give up attacking the castle at Troyes, because it was so heavily garrisoned, Joan of Arc entered the room and told them they would be inside the castle in three days. "We would willingly wait six days," said one of the leaders. "Six!" she cried out, "you shall be in it to-morrow," and, under her leadership, on the morrow they entered. On a smaller scale, every man has garrisons to subdue and obstacles to level, and every wife may be an inspired Joan of Arc to her husband. What a noble, wifely ambition, the determination, God helping, to accompany her companion across the stormy sea of this life and together gain the wharf of the Celestial City! Coax him along with you! You cannot drive him there. You cannot nag him there; but you can coax him there. That is God's plan. He coaxes us all the way—coaxes us out of our sins, coaxes us to accept pardon, coaxes us to heaven. If we reach that blessed place, it will be through a prolonged and Divine coaxing. (*T. De Witt Talmage, D.D.*)

Wives who mar their husbands:—By the fate of Ahab, whose wife induced him to steal; by the fate of Macbeth, whose wife pushed him into massacre; by the fate of James Ferguson, the philosopher, whose wife entered the room while he was lecturing and wilfully upset his astronomical apparatus, so that he turned to the audience and said: "Ladies and gentlemen, I have the misfortune to be married to this woman"; by the fate of Bulwer, the novelist, whose wife's temper was so incompatible that he furnished her a beautiful house near London, and withdrew from her company; by the fate of John Milton, who married a termagant after he was blind, and when somebody called her a rose, the poet said, "I am no judge of colours, but I may be so, for I feel the thorns daily"—by all these scenes of disquietude and domestic calamity, we implore you to be cautious and prayerful before you enter upon the connubial state, which decides whether a man shall have two heavens or two hells, a heaven here and a heaven there, or a hell now and a hell hereafter. (*Ibid.*)

Vers. 17–19. **And the word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite.**—*Elijah's mission of judgment*:—We bend our attention exclusively on the part played by Elijah amid these terrible transactions. I. HE WAS CALLED BACK TO SERVICE. How many years had elapsed since last the word of the Lord had come to Elijah, we do not know. Perhaps five or six. All this while he must have waited wistfully for the well-known accents of that voice, longing to hear it once again. Hours, and even years, of silence are full of golden opportunities for the servants of God. In such cases, our conscience does not condemn us or accuse us with any sufficient reason arising from ourselves. Our simple duty, then, is to keep clean, and filled, and ready; standing on the shelf, meet for the Master's use; sure that we serve if we only stand and wait; and knowing that He will accept, and reward, the willingness for the deed. "Nevertheless, thou didst well, in that it was in thine heart." II. ELIJAH WAS NOT DISOBEDIENT. Once before, when his presence was urgently required, he had arisen to flee for his life. But there was no vacillation, no cowardice now. His old heroic faith had revived in him again. His spirit had regained its wonted posture in the presence of Jehovah. His nature had returned to its equipose in the will of God. III. HE WAS ACTING AS AN INCARNATE CONSCIENCE. Naboth was out of the way; and Ahab may have solaced himself, as weak people do still, with the idea that he was not his murderer. How could he be? He had been perfectly quiescent. He had simply put his face to the wall and done nothing. Often a man, who dares not do a disgraceful act himself, calls a subordinate to his side, and says: "Such a thing needs doing; I wish you would see to it. Use any of my appliances you will; only do not trouble me further about it—and of course you had better not do anything wrong." In God's sight that man is held responsible for whatever evil is done by his tool in the execution of his commission. The blame is laid on the shoulders of the principal; and it will be more tolerable for the subordinate than for him in the day of judgment. Further than that, but on the line of the same principle, if an employer of labour, by paying an inadequate and unjust wage, tempts his employés to supplement their scanty pittance by dishonest or unholy methods, he is held responsible, in the sight of Heaven, for the evil which he might have prevented, if he had not been wilfully and criminally indifferent. It is sometimes the duty of a servant of God fearlessly to rebuke sinners who think their high position a licence to evil-doing, and a screen from rebuke. And let all such remember that acts of high-handed sin often seem at first to prosper. IV. HE WAS HATED FOR THE TRUTH'S SAKE. "And Ahab said to Elijah, Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?" Though the king knew it not, Elijah was his best friend; Jezebel his direst foe. But sin distorts everything. It is like the grey dawn which so obscures the most familiar objects that men mistake friends for foes, and foes for friends: as in the old story, the frenzied King of Wales slew the faithful hound that had saved his child from death. Many a time have men repeated the error of the disciples, who mistook Jesus for an evil spirit, and cried out for fear. V. HE WAS A TRUE PROPHET. Each of the woes which Elijah foretold came true. Ahab postponed their fulfilment, by a partial repentance, for some three years; but, at the end of tha time, he went back to his evil ways, and every item was literally fulfilled. But as we close this tragic episode in his career, we rejoice to learn that he was reinstated in the favour of God; and stamped again with the Divine imprimatur of trustworthiness and truth. (*F. B. Meyer, B.A.*)

Ver. 20. Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?—*Ahab and Elijah:*—The keynote of Elijah's character is force—the force of righteousness. The New Testament, you remember, talks about the "power of Elias." The outward appearance of the man corresponds to his function and his character. The whole of his career is marked by this one thing—the strength of a righteous man. And then, on the other hand, this Ahab; the keynote of his character is the weakness of wickedness, and the wickedness of weakness. 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. But my business now is rather with the consequences of this apparently successful sin, than with what went before it. The king gets the crime done, shuffles it off himself on to the shoulders of his ready tools in the little village, goes down to get his toy, and gets it—but he gets Elijah along with it, which was more than he reckoned on. I. PLEASURE WON BY SIN IS PEACE LOST. Action and reaction, as the mechanicians tell us, are equal and contrary. The more violent the blow with which we strike upon the forbidden pleasure, the further back the rebound after the stroke. When sin tempts—when there hangs glittering before a man the golden fruit that he knows he ought not to touch—then, amidst the noise of passion or the sophistry of desire, conscience is silenced for a little while. Conscience and consequence are alike lost sight of. Like a mad bull, the man that is tempted lowers his head and shuts his eyes, and rushes right on. The moment that the sin is done, that moment the passion or desire which tempted to it is satiated, and ceases to exist for the time. It is gone as a motive. Like some savage beast, being fed full, it lies down to sleep. There is a vacuum left in the heart, the noise is stilled, and then—and then—conscience begins to speak. Now, you will say that all that is true in regard to the grosser forms of transgression, but that it is not true in regard to the less vulgar and sensual kinds of crime. Of course it is most markedly observable with regard to the coarsest kind of sins; but it is as true, though perhaps not in the same degree—not in the same prominent, manifest way at any rate—in regard to every sin that a man does. There is never an evil thing which—knowing it to be evil—we commit, which does not rise up to testify against us. As surely as to-night's debauch is followed by to-morrow's headache; so surely—each after its kind, and each in its own region—every sin lodges in the human heart the seed of a quick-springing punishment, yea, is its own punishment. When we come to grasp the sweet thing that we have been tempted to seize, there is a serpent that starts up amongst all the flowers. When the evil act is done—opposite of the prophet's roll—it is sweet in the lips, but oh! it is bitter afterwards. "At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder!" The silence of a seared conscience is not peace. For peace you want something more than that a conscience shall be dumb. For peace you want something more than that you shall be able to live without the daily sense and sting of sin. You want not only the negative absence of pain, but the positive presence of a tranquillising guest in your heart—that conscience of yours testifying with you, blessing you in its witness, and shedding abroad rest and comfort. II. SIN IS BLIND TO ITS TRUE FRIENDS AND ITS REAL FOES. "Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?" Elijah was the best friend he had in his kingdom. And that Jezebel there, the wife of his bosom, whom he loved and thanked for this thing, she was the worst foe that hell could have sen him. Ay, and so it is always. The faithful rebuker, the merciful inflictor of pain, is the truest friend of the wrong doer. The worst enemy of the sinful heart is the voice that either tempts it into sin, or lulls it into self-complacency. III. THE SIN WHICH MISTAKES THE FRIENDLY APPEAL FOR AN ENEMY, LAYS UP FOR ITSELF A TERRIBLE RETRIBUTION. Elijah comes here and prophesies the fall of Ahab. The next peal, the next flash, fulfil the prediction. There, where he did the wrong, he died. In Jezreel, Ahab died. In Jezreel, Jezebel died. That plain was the battlefield for the subsequent discomfiture of Israel. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*) *Success that fails:*—Ahab went out to take possession of a garden of herbs, and there he stands face to face with righteousness, face to face with honour, face to face with judgment. Now take the vineyard! He cannot! An hour since the sun shone upon it, and now it is black as if it were part of the midnight which has gathered in judgment. There is a success which is failure. We cannot take some prizes. Elijah will not allow us! When we see him we would that a way might open under our feet that we might flee and escape the judgment of his silent look. If any man is about to take unholy prizes, let him remember

that he will be met on the road by the spirit of judgment and by the spirit of righteousness. If any man is attempting to scheme for some little addition to his position or fortune, in the heart of which scheme there is injustice, untruthfulness, covetousness, or a wrong spirit, let him know that he may even kill Naboth, but cannot enter into Naboth's vineyard. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *The tragedy of Jezreel* :—When a man gives way to lust and coveting, does not struggle against them, a tempter is sure to be at hand to put him on gratifying them one way or another. 1. "Be sure," said Moses to the Reubenites, "your sin will find you out" (Num. xxxii. 23). What an exemplification here! how literally was Elijah's denunciation fulfilled! Yes, and history and human experience are ever bearing witness to this, that sin finds out the sinner; and that, not simply in punishment following sin, but in the sin becoming its own means of detection and punishment —in a certain correlation of sin and its penalty. "Thine own wickedness," &c. (Jer. ii. 19). "Be not deceived, God is not mocked," &c. (Gal. vi. 7). "Whoso breaketh a hedge," &c. (Eccles. x. 8). 2. Success in wrong-doing the sinner's loss. Better indeed had it been for Ahab if Jezebel's scheme had failed. Men often fret and fume if thwarted in attaining some coveted object, yet may it have been their mercy to be so thwarted. It is Divine goodness which again and again hedges up our way, and providentially coerces us. To be given up to the devices and desires of our own hearts is the sorest of judgments. 3. The fatal mistake of resenting righteous rebuke. Terrible was Ahab's mistake in calling Elijah his enemy. That uncompromising rebuker, his truest friend, would he only have listened to him instead of yielding to the siren seductions of Jezebel. (*A. R. Symonds, M.A.*) *Blind to one's own guilt* :—1. That which first of all blinded Ahab more or less to the true character and extent of his responsibility for the death of Naboth was the force of desire. A single desire long dwelt upon, cherished, and indulged, has a blinding power which cannot easily be exaggerated. Ahab had long looked wistfully from his villa across the moat of Jezreel at the vineyard of Naboth. There it lay, beautiful in itself, most desirable as an appendage to the royal property. Without it the summer villa was obviously incomplete, and each visit to Jezreel would have strengthened the king's wish to possess it. It was not that he enjoyed to baulk a great man's wishes in the spirit of that rough and surly independence which is sometimes fostered by the near neighbourhood of a Court; it was not that he was governed by a natural sentiment common in all ages and civilisations against parting with an old family property; it was that the sacred law did not permit the exchange or the sale. With a view to maintaining the original distribution of landed property among the tribes, and of preventing the accumulation of large landed estates in a few hands, the Mosaic law forbade the alienation of lands or families holding them; and especially it forbade the transfer from one tribe to another. And this is the meaning of Naboth's exclamation, "The Lord forbid it me that I should give the inheritance of my fathers unto thee." Desire is not always wrong in its early stages, and so long as it is under control of principle it is a motive, a useful motive power in human life. But when it finds itself in conflict with the rights of other men, and, above all, in conflict with the laws and with the rights of God, it must be suppressed unless it is to lead to crime. When Naboth declined to sell or to exchange his vineyard, Ahab ought to have ceased to desire it. Ahab went back to his palace baulked of his desire by the conscientious resistance of Naboth. The impulsive force in life is not thought, nor will, but desire. Thought sees its object; will gives orders with a view to attain it; but without desire thought is powerless, and will, in the operative sense, does not exist. Desire is to the human soul what gravitation is to the heavenly bodies. Ascertain the object of a man's desire, and you know the direction in which his soul is moving; ascertain the strength of a man's desire, and you know the rapidity of the soul's movement. In St. Augustine's memorable words, "Whithersoever I am carried forward it is desire that carries me." *Quocumque feror amore feror.* If the supreme object of desire is God, then desire becomes the grace of charity, and carries the soul onwards and upwards to the true source of its existence. If the supreme object of desire be something earthly, some person, some possession, then desire becomes what Scripture calls concupiscence, and carries the soul downwards—downwards to those regions in which the soul is buried and stifled by matter and sense. Concupiscence is desire diverted from its true object—God—and centred upon some created object which perverts and degrades it; and concupiscence grows by self-indulgence; it may very easily pass a point at which it can be no longer controlled, it may absorb as into a practically resistless

current all the other interests and movements of the soul; it may concentrate with an all-increasing importunity the whole body and stock of feeling and passion upon some trifling object upon which, for the moment, it is bent, and which, by absorbing it, blinds it—blinds it utterly to the true proportions and value of things —to the true meaning and import of action. So it was with Pharaoh when he set out in the pursuit of Israel; so it was with the vain and miserable Haman when he set his heart on exterminating the Jews; so it was with Ahab. 2. And a second cause, which could have blinded Ahab to the true character of his responsibility for the murder of Naboth, was the ascendant influence and prominent agency of his queen, Jezebel. Ahab could not have enjoyed the results of Jezebel's achievement, and decline to accept responsibility for it; yet, no doubt, he was more than willing to do this, more than willing to believe that matters had drifted somehow into other hands than his, and that the upshot, regrettable, no doubt, in one sense, but in another not altogether unwelcome, was beyond his control. It is to-day, as of old, that false conscience constantly endeavours to divest itself of responsibility for what has been done through others, or for what others had been allowed by us to do. This is the origin of that saying, "Corporations have no conscience." The fact is that every individual member of a corporation gets too easily into the habit of thinking that all, or some of the other members are really answerable for the acts of the whole, and that each merely acquiesces in what the others decide or do. But then, if everybody thinks this, where, meanwhile, does the real responsibility reside?—it must be somewhere, it cannot evaporate altogether. In very large bodies of men acting together, the responsibility is divided into very small portions of unequal magnitude; this is the case with nations and with churches, but responsibility is not destroyed by being thus distributed; while, on the other hand, the smaller the corporation the greater the responsibility of each one of its members. Thus the responsibility of each member of the British legislature for the well-being of the country is vastly greater than that of each Englishman who possesses a vote, and that of each member of the Cabinet is vastly greater than that of each member of Parliament. Ahab and Jezebel were at this time, practically speaking, the governing corporation in Israel, but Ahab could not shift his responsibility on Jezebel. 3. And the third screen which would have blinded Ahab to the real state of the case was the perfection of the legal form which had characterised the proceedings. When Jezebel wrote to the magistrates of Jezreel she had been very careful indeed about legal propriety. She wrote in the king's name; she signed the letter with the king's seal, which would have borne the king's signature, and this, when stamped on the writing, made the actual signature unnecessary. Thus the letter had nothing less than the character of a royal command, and was addressed to the persons at Jezreel with whom the administration of justice properly lay—the elders and notables, the local magistracy. Law is a great and sacred thing. It is nothing less than a shadow upon earth of the justice of God. The forms which surround it, the rules which give it the dignity and honour which belong to its representatives, are the outworks of a thing itself entitled to our reverence. But when the machinery of law is tampered with, as was, no doubt, the case by Jezebel, when a false witness or a biased judge contributes to a result which, if legal, is not also moral, then law is like an engine off the rails—its remaining force is the exact measure of its capacity for mischief and for wrong, then, indeed, if ever, *Summum jus, summa injuria*. Naboth's trial and execution was, in truth, one of the earliest recorded samples in the world's history of that dreadful outrage against God and man—a judicial murder. When the sword of justice smites down innocence and becomes the instrument of crime, the whole spirit and drift of law is abandoned, its language and its usages survive, and, as in Ahab's case, they form a screen between a guilty conscience and the stern reality. Of the authors and abettors of such deeds as this, it was said in an earlier age, "They will not be learned nor understand, but walk on still in darkness: all the foundations of the earth are out of course." The foundations are out of course! Yes, that is the effect bad law makes in many a case where consciences, the deepest and most precious things in the moral and social life of man, are ruined. Propriety of outward form in the condemnation of Naboth is the measure of the miserable self-deceit of Ahab. 1. Let us carry away two lessons, if no more. The first to keep all forms of desire well under control—under the control of conscience illuminated by principle, illuminated by faith. Some measure of desire is necessary for exertion; but the fewer wants we have the freer men we are, and the freer we are the happier we are. The one direction in which

desire may be safely unchecked is heavenward. Safety lies in taking and keeping it well in hand, and in doing this betimes. 2. And, secondly, for us Christians the event or the man who discovers us to ourselves should be held to be not our enemy, but our friend. (*Canon Liddon, D.D.*)

Ver. 25. But there was none like unto Ahab, which did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the Lord.—*Ahab*:—I. AN ILLUSTRATION OF THE DEPTHS OF HUMAN DEPRAVITY. 1. Ahab's pre-eminence in sin (xvi. 30). There had been many instances of wickedness decked with the robes of royalty; but there was none like Ahab. 2. Ahab's bargain with hell. He stands before us as a self-sold slave of the devil. Ahab sold himself! What a bargain! 3. The daring character of Ahab's wickedness. "In the sight of the Lord." Most strive to work wickedness under the covert of darkness—under the shades of night, or wearing the hypocrite's mask. Not so Ahab. II. AN EVIDENCE OF THE UNMANLY SERVILITY OF EVIL. "Whom Jezebel his wife stirred up." This Syrian princess, whom Ahab had married, was a woman of the most consummate subtlety, duplicity, and cruelty. III. A PROOF OF THE MAGNITUDE OF THE DIVINE MERCY. Great was the long-suffering of God in permitting Ahab to reign so long (2 Pet. iii. 9). Great, too, was His mercy in regarding the humiliation of this guilty man (ver. 29), *i.e.*, the destruction of his posterity (Ps. lxxxvi. 15). "God gives no repulse" (says Bengel), "when He gives good things: He neither upbraids us with our past folly and unworthiness, nor with future abuse of His goodness." IV. THE EVANESCENT NATURE OF MERELY SELFISH PENITENCE. Ahab appeared by his fasting and humiliation to return to God; but his goodness proved "like the morning cloud." He soon cast off the yoke of the Divine authority, and "returned to his wallowing in the mire." In this he is the type of multitudes, who in their affliction say, "Come, and let us return unto the Lord"; but bring forth no "fruits meet for repentance." (*Patrick Morrison.*)

Ver. 27. And it came to pass, when Ahab heard those words, that he rent his clothes.—*Ahab's repentance*:—I. HOW AHAB'S REPENTANCE WAS CALLED FORTH. A threefold crime is here laid to the charge of the King of Israel: that he had provoked God to anger—that he had made Israel to sin—and that he had sold himself to work wickedness in the sight of the Lord. It was for this cause that the sword of the Almighty had been whetted for the destruction of himself and his house. It is a common proverb that "Every man has his price"; that there is something for which every one will be found willing to sell himself. These are words of very awful import, and yet they are but too true concerning every natural man. The children of this world, proud as they are of themselves, may always be bought with one temptation or another: honours, profits, pleasures of one class or another, will induce them to debase themselves more and more. The idol to which Ahab sacrificed was his affection for Jezebel. His own will, his honour, his peace of conscience, the salvation of his soul, the favour of God—all that he had or hoped for, was laid at this idol's feet. Would that he were singular in such infatuation; or only one of a few! But alas, it is common in every age. Let any one ask himself, why he is an unbeliever; why he despises the people of God; why he serves the world and the devil, and endeavours to stifle every good conviction. What an accursed alliance, though it be under the sacred name of friendship itself, must that be, which is connected with enmity against God! II. WHAT KIND OF REPENTANCE IT WAS. This mourning of the King of Samaria was real as far as it went. The wretched outward dress in which he appeared was a true expression of his inward temper and state of mind. Still, much was wanting in his repentance to render it a repentance unto life and salvation. It was not a mourning like that of the woman that was a sinner at the feet of Jesus, like that of the thief on the cross, or that of the poor publican. Ahab's repentance was utterly destitute of love; and it is love which hallows all our acts and deeds, and gives them a real value. Now, when a sinner has, with heartfelt seriousness, pronounced sentence against himself before the throne of God, he has begun to die to the law. For here is an end of his supposed self-righteousness, and of his own supposed ability. But that true repentance, which the Scripture calls a godly sorrow, and a repentance which needeth not to be repented of, does not as yet necessarily exist. This is but, as it were, dying before the Divine holiness; as we see was the case of St. Paul, in Rom. vii.: "When the commandment came, sin revived, and I died. And the commandment, which was ordained to life, I found

to be unto death." Now, this glorious and happy death comes by "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus" (Rom. viii. 2). And this law is no other than the Gospel; whereby alone it is that true, divine, and saving repentance is called forth. III. WHAT WERE ITS CONSEQUENCES. 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 exemption 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. (*F. W. Krummacher, D.D.*) *Repentance of Ahab*:—I. A PERSON WHOSE HEART IS UNCHANGED, AND WHO IS TOTALLY DESTITUTE OF REAL PIETY, MAY PERFORM MANY OUTWARD RELIGIOUS DUTIES, AND HAVE INWARD SENTIMENTS AND AFFECTIONS, SOMEWHAT RESEMBLING THE CHRISTIAN GRACES. II. HOW POWERFUL IS THE WORD OF GOD, WHICH CAN HUMBLE THE HAUGHTIEST OPPRESSORS, AND MAKE THE MOST HARDENED OF MORTALS TREMBLE. III. SIN IS ALWAYS SUCCEEDED BY SORROW AND REMORSE. (*H. Kollock, D.D.*) *Ahab*:—In the context we have three subjects worthy of attention. 1. A fiendishly greedy soul. 2. A truly heroic soul. 3. A morally alarmed soul. In this incident we discover three things. I. THE WORTHLESSNESS OF A PARTIAL REFORMATION. II. THE MIGHTY FORCE OF DIVINE TRUTH. III. THE SELF-FRUSTRATING POWER OF SIN. (*Homilist.*) *Ahab's sin and repentance*:—There is much in this old chronicle of sin and doom which it may profit us to ponder. Let me try to bring out of it some present-day lessons of warning and admonition. I. HAPPINESS CONSISTS, NOT IN HAVING, BUT IN BEING. How many even to-day are letting their lives be darkened because some Naboth denies them a vineyard, or some Mordecai will not salute them! They forget that, even if they had the things which they so long for, happiness would be as far from them as ever, and some new object would take the place of their old grievance. They do lack one thing. But that one thing is not external to them, but within them. They lack a new heart, and until they get that they can have no abiding satisfaction. "Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again." II. THE EVIL OF UNHALLOWED ALLIANCES. 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. III. THE PERVERSION WHICH AN EVIL HEART MAKES OF RELIGIOUS KNOWLEDGE. The Spaniards have a proverb somewhat to this effect, "When the serpent straightens himself, it is that he may go into his hole." So when the unscrupulous suddenly manifest some punctilious regard for legal forms or for religious observances, you may be sure that they are after mischief. Some of the blackest crimes that have ever been committed have been perpetrated through the forms of law, or under the colour of religion. Is it not true that "the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked"? and are we forcibly impressed with the fact that no one is so daringly defiant in wickedness as he who knows the truth and disregards it? Mere knowledge never yet saved any one from ruin; for, if the heart be perverted, everything that enters the head is only made subservient to its iniquity. Your educated villains are all the more dangerous because of their education; and among godless men they are the most to be dreaded who have an intelligent acquaintance with the Word of God. IV. THE PRICE WHICH WE HAVE TO PAY FOR SIN. What weighty words are these of Elijah to Ahab, "Thou hast sold thyself to work evil in the sight of the Lord"! 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. V. THE CURSE WHICH ATTENDS ILL-GOTTEN GAINS. The gains of ungodliness are weighted with the curse of God; and, sooner or later, that will be made apparent. 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 mission 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." VI. THE TENDERNESS OF GOD TOWARD THE PENITENT. 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. If God were so considerate of Ahab, the idolater, the murderer, the thief, will He not regard thee, O thou tearful one! who art bemoaning the number and aggravation of thy sins? Go, then, to Him; and let this be thine encouragement. (*W. M. Taylor, D.D.*) *Ahab's repentance, and punishment deferred*:—I. THE REPENTANCE OF AHAB was awakened by the fearful prediction of coming vengeance, which Elijah delivered at the moment when he had taken possession of Naboth's vineyard. Mark the power of the Divine word. Is it not "like as a fire, saith the Lord; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces"? In the moment of Ahab's humiliation, his remorse was sincere; *i.e.*, his conscience was roused, his fears excited, his sense of God's justice real, and his desire for pardon unfeigned. II. AHAB'S PUNISHMENT WAS SUSPENDED IN HIS OWN DAYS. "Because he humbleth himself before Me, I will not bring the evil in his days." How can this be? 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, notwithstanding our manifold transgressions, is an evidence of this certain truth. And what is the practical result, arising from this combined view of God's mercy and truth? Assuredly, it will cause the contrite to hope, and the careless to fear. The one will recognise, in the sorest visitations that befall him, the hand of a gracious Father who chastens that He may bless; and whose afflictions are strewed upon the path of life, like the arrows of Jonathan before David, not for destruction, but for warning. The other will as surely perceive, that God's word shall not return unto him void; and, that, if it work not his conversion, it must be his condemnation. The threatenings which are revealed, that the sinner may repent, will remain, if he do not repent, to proclaim his fall. III. THE THREATENED EVIL, WHICH WAS SUSPENDED IN THE DAYS OF AHAB, SHOULD, IN HIS SON'S DAYS, BE BROUGHT UPON HIS HOUSE. And here we cannot but call to mind the fact, that, whatever be the difficulties, connected with the view which is here presented to us, of God's moral government, or however weakly we may succeed in explaining them; it is, still, the government of God, of Him who is righteous in all His ways, and holy in all His works. The matter of fact, in the history before us, came to pass, as it is here predicted. Evil was brought upon Ahab's house, in his son's days. Ahaziah, his first successor, soon perished. The next, Jehoram, fell by the arm of Jehu, in the very portion of Naboth's field. The seventy sons in Jezreel, were also slain, in obedience to the commands of Jehu, which he sent to the elders of that city; and, last of all, the same anointed captain, "slew all that remained of the house of Ahab in Jezreel, and all his great men, and all his kinsfolk, and his priests, until he left him none remaining." Now, if we examine the sacred narrative which relates these events, we shall find that all these descendants of Ahab walked in his evil ways, and wrought evil in the sight of the Lord. It was not the innocent, then, suffering for the guilty; but the guilty reaping the harvest of his own guilt. And since "known unto God are all his works before the beginning of the world," the whole of this train of wickedness was known likewise,—itself, its causes, and its consequences,—that long process stretching out, from year to year, and from generation to generation,—whose separate and disjointed portions, only, can be discerned by moral intellect,—but the whole of which was, alike, and at the same moment, present to the Eternal Mind. It is difficult for us, in forming our estimate of actions, to preserve this distinction between the occasion which leads to an event, and its immediate effective cause; but a distinction there is, and must be remembered. When a criminal is convicted at the tribunal of an earthly judge, the law, and they who administer it, are the instrumental causes of inflicting the sentence; but the crime committed is the immediate cause which deserves it. We do not confound these things, in our estimate of the dealings between man and man: let us not confound them, therefore, when we are contemplating the revealed dispensations of God to man.

But may we not be permitted, in some degree, to trace the course of the Divine counsels, in the present instance? The punishment of Ahab's descendants, we know to have been inflicted under a theocracy, which employed temporal rewards, and temporal punishments, as the instruments of its government. Now, what instrument could be more powerful, in such a case, than the prospect of misery, about to fall upon the children of the sinner, as well as upon himself? His own licentious and hardened passions might make a man insensible to the fear of temporal evil befalling himself; but, when he was assured, as he could not fail to be, by the moral law of Moses, that Divine wrath would visit his iniquity, upon his "children, unto the third and fourth generation," every instinctive feeling of parental kindness and affection would be enlisted on the side of duty, and act as a restraint upon the unruly will. (*J. S. M. Anderson, M.A.*)

CHAPTER XXII.

VERS. 2-50. **Jehoshaphat the King of Judah.**—*Character of Jehoshaphat:*—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. 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 (ver. 3). The 17th 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 19th and 20th chapters prove the continuance of these excellent dispositions, even after that most sad and untoward occurrence. Such a prince, we might naturally imagine, opposed to all corruption in the worship of God, would be especially studious to keep himself and his people separate from the heathenism and idolatry of the adjoining kingdom of Israel. He could have no sympathy with the spirit which animated that kingdom under the auspices of the infamous Jezebel—no toleration for the abuses which prevailed after she had secured the open establishment of the very worst form of paganism. Yet, strange to tell, the besetting sin of this good man was a tendency to connect himself with idolaters. The single fault charged against this godly prince is his frequent alliance with his ungodly neighbours. Thus, in the first place, Jehoshaphat consented to a treaty of marriage, probably at the beginning of his reign (2 Chron. xviii. 1). 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. Then, secondly, Jehoshaphat twice joined in a league of war with the King of Israel; first, in the expedition against Syria which we have been considering; and again, shortly after an attack upon the Moabites (2 Kings iii. 7). Lastly, in the third place, Jehoshaphat consented, though reluctantly, in the close of his reign, to a commercial alliance of his people with the ten tribes. 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 fondness for the crime, or by complacency in the criminal. 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. For this end, let us consider the relative situation of the two kingdoms of Judah and Israel, and the feelings which their respective kings, with their subjects, mutually cherished towards one another. The first effect of Jeroboam's revolt with the ten tribes from the house of David, was a bitter and irreconcilable hostility between the two rival kingdoms of the ten, and of the two tribes. And, as if to widen and perpetuate the breach, each party in turn had recourse to the expedient of calling in foreign aid against the other. At the instigation probably of Jeroboam, Shishak, King of Egypt, who had formerly been his patron and protector, invaded Judah. And again, by way of retaliation, the King of Judah soon after invited the Syrians to ravage the territory of the hostile kingdom of Israel (2 Chron. xii. and xvi.). In course of time, however,

when a generation or two passed away, something like a change, or a tendency to approximation, began to appear. The feelings of hostility had in some degree subsided, the memory of former union had revived, and the idea might again not unnaturally suggest itself to a wise and patriotic statesman, of consolidating once more into a powerful empire communities which, although recently estranged, had yet a common origin, a common history, a common name, and, till lately, a common faith,—whose old recollections and associations were all in common. The manifest folly, too, of exposing themselves, by intestine division, to foreign invasion, and even employing foreigners against each other, might prompt the desire of bringing the kingdoms to act harmoniously together, whether in peace or in war. Such might very reasonably be the views of an able, enlightened, and conscientious sovereign, pursuing simply, in a sense, the good of his country; and such, probably, were the views of Jehoshaphat. His favourite aim and design seems to have been, to conciliate the king and people of Israel; at least, he was always ready to listen to any proposals of conciliation. Nay, we may believe that this good man proposed, by the course which he adopted, to leaven them with the spirit of a better faith, and ultimately bring them back again to the legitimate dominion of the house of David, and the pure worship of the God of their fathers. If so, his object was certainly not unlawful; but in the pursuit of it, he was tempted to an unlawful compromise of principle. 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 other men's iniquities. And is not this the very sin of many good and serious Christians, who manifest to the world, its follies and its vices, a certain mild and tolerant spirit, and are disposed to treat the men of the world with a sort of easy and indulgent complacency; justifying or excusing such concessions to themselves by the fond persuasion, that they are but seeking, or at least that they are promoting, the world's reformation? No doubt, it is your duty to conciliate all men, if you can; but there is such a thing as conciliating, and conciliating, and conciliating, till you conciliate away all the distinctive characteristics of your faith. 1. Thus, as to the first point, Jehoshaphat, when he consented to an alliance with the King of Israel, no doubt contemplated the possibility of doing him some good. Such was his hope. How in point of fact was it realised? He has descended from his footing of unquestioned and uncompromised integrity, and involved himself irretrievably in the very course he should be rebuking. And so it must ever be. The very first step a good man takes from the eminence on which he stands apart, as the friend of God and the unflinching enemy of all ungodliness in the world, he compromises his authority, his influence, his right and power of bold remonstrance and unsparing testimony against the corrupt lusts and the angry passions of men. He gives up the point of principle, and as to any resistance that he may make in details, men see not what there is left to fight for. Is not this the natural, the necessary result of such a conciliatory course? If you condescend to flatter men in their vanities, will they listen to you when you gravely reprehend their sins? No; they will laugh you to scorn. If you countenance them in the beginning of their excess, will they patiently bear your authoritative denunciation of its end? No; they will contemptuously reject it as a fond folly, or indignantly resent it as an insult. If you go with them one mile, may they not almost expect you to go two?—at least, you have no right to take it very much amiss if they go the two miles themselves. 2. But, in the second place, Jehoshaphat not only failed to arrest Ahab in his sinful course—he was himself involved in its sinfulness. Instead of reclaiming this wicked prince, he was himself betrayed into a participation in his wickedness—he joined him in his unholy expedition. And be sure, we say to all professing Christians, that you too, if you try thus artfully to gain the advantage over the world, will find the world too much for you. For Satan, the god of this world, is far more than a match for you in this game of craft, and compromise, and conciliation. Beware how you step out of your own proper sphere, as a separate and peculiar people. Then go not along with them at all—no, not a single step: for a single step implies tampering, in so far, with your religious and conscientious scruples; and when these are once weakly or wilfully compromised, Satan's battle is gained. The rest is all a question of time and of degree. Stand fast, then, in your liberty. "All things are lawful unto you, but all things are not expedient." Be not yourselves "brought under the power of any"; and consider what may "edify" the Church and glorify God (1 Cor. vi. 12 and x. 23). Stand fast in your integrity,

3. For, thirdly, see what hazard Jehoshaphat ran. Not only did he sin with Ahab, but he was on the point of perishing with him in his sin. The King of Judah was saved himself, as by fire; but his ally, his confederate, was lost. And had he no hand, had he no concern, in the loss? Had he honestly remonstrated with him? Had he fearlessly protested against him, and sharply rebuked and withstood him? Oh! such wounds would have been kind and precious. But he had been too merciful; he had been pitiful, falsely pitiful,—what a thought is this, that, in making flattering advances to sinners, and dealing smoothly with their sins, you not only endanger your own peace, but you accelerate and promote their ruin! You may save yourselves by tardy yet timely repentance; you may extricate yourselves ere it be too late;—but can you save, can you extricate those whom your example has encouraged, or your presence has authorised? (*R. S. Candlish, D.D.*) The King of Israel.—*The character of Ahab*:—I. THE KING'S WILFUL PURPOSE (vers. 1-6). Ahab's purpose is announced in the beginning of the chapter. We find him, after three years of peace, preparing to attack the Syrians. The Syrian king, whom Ahab had treated with such ill-timed lenity, and with whom he had made so sinful a compromise, has, as might have been anticipated, failed to fulfil the stipulated terms of ransom, and to restore the cities of Israel. Ahab, provoked at his own simplicity in having suffered so favourable an opportunity to slip, through his fond trust in the honour of a perfidious prince, and stung by the recollection of the prophet's rebuke, conceives the design of retrieving his error, and compelling the fulfilment of the treaty, on the faith of which he had been weakly persuaded to liberate the enemy whom God had doomed. In this Ahab acts under the impulse of resentment and ambition. He burns with the desire of avenging a personal wrong and insult, rather than of fulfilling the decree of God. Had he consulted the will of God, he must have seen and felt that it was now too late for him to take the step proposed. He had let the time go past. When God gave him victory, and assured him of power over his enemy, then he should have used his opportunity. This he had failed to do; and for his failure he had been reproved by God, and warned by the prophet that his people and his life were forfeited. Certainly Ahab should have been the very last person to think of rousing and provoking the very foe who, by the Divine sentence and by his own compromise, had gained so sad and signal an advantage over him. But instead of following so wise a course, Ahab blindly rushes into the opposite extreme from his former fault; and because before he has been blamed for not going far enough, with God on his side, he is provoked to go too far now, though God has declared against him. He is not without his reasons, and they are very plausible reasons, to justify the step proposed. 1. In the first place, it is in itself an act of patriotism and of piety; at least it looks very like it, and may easily be so represented. 2. Secondly, it has received the countenance of a friend (ver. 4). And that friend is not a wicked man, but one fearing God, and acknowledged by God as righteous. 3. And, thirdly, it has obtained the sanction of four hundred prophets (ver. 6). And these are not prophets of Baal. Looking, then, at the act itself as an act of patriotic and pious zeal, encouraged by the consent of his friend and the concurrence of the prophets, Ahab, we may think, might well be misled. And we might pity and excuse him too, as one misled, did we not see him so willing to be so. Is he not all the while deceiving himself, and that too almost wilfully and consciously? O beware, ye pilgrims in an evil world, ye soldiers in an arduous fight, beware of your own rash wilfulness, of the weakness of compliant friends, and of the flattering counsels of evil men and seducers, who in the last times—in the last and critical stage of individual experience, as well as of the world's history—are sure to wax worse and worse! There is no design, no device, no desire of your hearts, which you may not find some specious arguments to justify, some friends to countenance, ay, and some prophets, too, to sanction. II. THE LORD'S GRACIOUS OPPOSITION (vers. 7-23). The King of Israel is satisfied with the oracular answer of the prophets. Not so, however, the King of Judah. He suspects something wrong, missing probably among the four hundred some one of whom he has heard. This Micaiah is supposed to be the prophet who reproved Ahab formerly, on the occasion of his compromise with the Syrian king; and it was probably his boldness on that occasion that caused him to be imprisoned. And is not this the spirit in which good advice is too often asked, and the word of God consulted,—when it is too late,—when a man's mind is already all but made up? You go when your conscience will not otherwise let you alone, or when

the remonstrances of pious friends trouble you; you go to some man of God, to God Himself, by prayer and the searching of His word:—for what? what is it that you want?—light for duty, however self-denying? or light to justify your doubtful course? He stands before the princes, undaunted by their royal state. First of all, he rebukes the prejudice of Ahab, by seeming to flatter it (ver. 15). The irony conveys a cutting reproof, and a merited one; and with this the holy prophet might have left the prince to believe his own and his flatterers' lie. But the mercy of God and the sin of Ahab are to be yet more signally brought out. Even to the last, in judgment God remembers mercy. The very scene of judgment which the prophet discloses does not imply any fixed and irrevocable design of wrath against Ahab;—with such a design, indeed, the disclosure of the scene would be incompatible and inconsistent. The sentence of final infatuation does not come without previous intimation. However you may be deceived, or may be deceiving yourselves, is there not a voice of truth, or a prophetic warning, which you feel might keep you right—if you were but willing to be kept right? III. THE ISSUE OF THE CONTEST (vers. 29–38). And here, in the first place, let the expedient by which Ahab consults his own safety be observed. For he does not feel entirely comfortable and secure; he cannot rid himself of the uneasy apprehension which the prophet's word has suggested. There is danger. 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). And what are we to expect but that, false to his God, a man will be false to his friend also. Let none trust the fidelity of him who is not faithful to his best, his kindest, his most generous benefactor,—his Saviour, his God. Consult your own conscience. 1. Beware of the beginning of Ahab's evil course—his fatal compromise with the enemy of his peace. See that you enter into no terms with any sin, and that you be not hardened through its deceitfulness. When God in Christ gives you the victory, delivering you from condemnation by His free grace, and upholding you by His free Spirit; when, justified and accepted in the Beloved, you see every sin of yours prostrate beneath your feet, stripped of all its power to slay or to enslave you—be sure that you make thorough work in following out the advantage you have gained—that you listen to no plausible proposals of concession—that you suffer no iniquity to escape—that you mortify every lust. 2. Beware of provoking a slumbering foe. If there be any enemy of your peace to whom, by former compliances or concessions, you have given an advantage over you, beware of invading his territories again. Be on your guard against the very first beginnings of evil—of any evil especially that you have ever, in all your past lives, tolerated, or flattered, or fondled in your bosoms, when you should have been nailing it, without pity, to your Saviour's cross. 3. Beware of the deceitfulness of sin. The wiles of the devil are not unknown to you. In a doubtful case, where you are hesitating, it is easy for him to insinuate and suggest reasons enough to make the worse appear the better cause. Generally you may detect his sophistry by its complex character. Truth is simple; the word of God is plain. 4. Beware of being hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. Beware of a judicial hardening of your hearts, or of your being given over to believe a lie. (*Ibid.*)

Ver. 3. **Ramoth in Gilead is ours, and we be still, and take it not out of the hand of the King of Syria?**—*Unpossessed possessions*:—I. WHAT IS OURS AND NOT OURS. Every Christian man has large tracts of unannexed territory, unattained possibilities, unenjoyed blessings, things that are his and yet not his. How much more of God you and I have a right to than we have the possession of! The ocean is ours, but only the little pailful that we carry away home to our own houses is of use to us. 1. How much inward peace is ours? It is meant that there should never pass across a Christian's soul more than a ripple of agitation, which may indeed ruffle and curl the surface, but deep down there should be the tranquillity of the fathomless ocean, unbroken by any tempests and yet not stagnant because there is a vital current that runs through it, and every drop is being drawn upward to the surface and the sunlight. There may be a peace in our hearts deep as our lives; a tranquillity which may be superficially disturbed, but is never thoroughly, and down to the depths, broken. 2. What "heights"—for Ramoth means "high places"—what heights of consecration there are which are ours according to the Divine purpose and according to the fulness of God's

gift! It is meant, and it is possible, and it is within the reach of every Christian soul, that he or she should live, day by day, in the continual and utter surrender of himself or herself to the will of God, and should say, "I do the little I can do, and leave the rest with Thee"; and should say again, "All is right that seems most wrong if it be His sweet will." 3. What noble possibilities of service, what power in the world is bestowed on Christ's people! "All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth," says He. "And He breathed on them, and said, 'As My Father hath sent Me, even so send I you.'" The Divine gift to the Christian community, and to the individuals that compose it—for there are no gifts given to the community but to the individuals that make it up—is of fulness, of power for all their work. II. OUR STRANGE CONTENTMENT IN IMPERFECT POSSESSION. Is not that condition of passive acquiescence in their small present attainments, and of careless indifference to the great stretch of the unattained, the characteristic of the mass of professing Christians? They have got a foothold on a new continent, and their possession of it is like the world's knowledge of the map of Africa when we were children, which had a settlement dotted here and there along the coast, and all the broad regions of the interior undreamed of. The settlers huddle together upon the fringe of barren sand by the salt water, and never dream of pressing forward into the heart of the land. And so too many of us are content with what we have got, a little bit of God, when we might have Him all; a settlement on the fringe and edge of the land, when we might traverse the whole length of it; and behold! it is all ours. III. THE EFFORT THAT IS NEEDED TO MAKE OUR OWN OURS. "We be still, and take it not out of the hands of the King of Syria." Then these things that are ours, by God's gift, by Christ's purchase, by the Spirit's influence, will need our effort to secure them. And that is no contradiction, nor any paradox. God does exactly in the same way with regard to a great many of His natural gifts which He does with regard to His spiritual ones. He gives them to us, but we hold them on this tenure, that we put forth our best efforts to get and to keep them. His giving them does not set aside our taking. And we Christian people have an endless prospect of that sort stretching before us. Oh, if we looked at it oftener, "having respect unto the recompense of the reward," we should find it easier to dash at any Ramoth-Gilead, and get it out of the hands of the strongest of the enemies that may bar our way to it. Let us familiarise ourselves with the thought of our present imperfection, and of our future, and of the possibilities which may become actualities even here and now; and let us not fitfully use what power we have, but make the best of what graces are ours, and enjoy and expatiate on the spiritual blessings of peace and rest which Christ has already given to us. "To him that hath shall be given." And the surest way to lose what we have is to neglect the increasing of it. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*) *Privileges unenjoyed*:—A young fellow was in the habit of visiting the house of a rather wealthy lady. He never got beyond the drawing-room, where he was received and entertained. The drawing-room looked into the vinery, but the door between them was always closed, and evidently looked. In after days he was adopted into the family, and became heir to the house and estates. The friend who told me the story said to him, when hearing of his adoption: "And what was the first thing you did when you entered the house as heir?" He replied: "I opened the door into the vinery, and I went and cut down a cluster of grapes." When I heard the story I could not but think of our inheritance in Christ Jesus our Lord. We have a right to go to the vineyard and to eat of the King's grapes. How few of us exercise our privileges! How poor we are, when we might be passing rich! We live as though we were strangers and sojourners instead of sons. We move about our estates like visitors; we do not open the doors and the gates, and stride about like the lord and heir. (*Hartley Aspen.*) *Possessions unenjoyed*:—A Scotch laird, who shortly after arriving at his majority set out for the Continent, having ascended a certain mountain in the south of Italy, famous for the magnificent prospect which is enjoyed from the summit, struck with its beauty, inquired of the guide who accompanied him if there was anything in Europe equal to what he now beheld. "I have heard," replied the guide, "that this prospect is excelled by only one." "And where is that one?" eagerly demanded the traveller. "In the kingdom of Scotland," said the guide. "Indeed," said the view-hunter, "in what part?" "From the top of a hill named ——," was the reply. "Why," exclaimed the traveller, "that is on my own estate; and I have never been there." *Unappropriated blessings*:—Niagara

has for ages been flowing, a mighty force in the world. Yet it is only just being utilised as a motive power. And by tunnelling off but a portion, they have such a mighty power that it is almost impossible to estimate it. Electricity is to be supplied to cities, some far distant, from its motive power, and mills and works for miles are to be worked by it. So in Christ is untold wealth, power, love, waiting to be appropriated. Let us not pass by these gifts through our unbelief. (*The Christian World.*)

Ver. 5. **Enquire, I pray thee, at the word of the Lord to-day.**—*Appeal to the prophets in time of crisis*:—It has been noted, that in ancient Grecian national affairs, when all theories that are called practical break down, it is the once-despised and suspected philosophers that come into strange public importance. If an important embassy to a hostile nation is to be sent, it is to Xenocrates that they entrust it, though the man was never seen in the assembly. If Antigonus wants a safe officer to hold the Accorrinthus, he chooses Perscus the Stoic. When Alexander in his despair at the murder of Clitus sits in dust and ashes, and will not eat or drink, they send two philosophers to bring him to reason. The men whose lives are devoted to thought are now regarded as peace-makers and politicians above the ordinary level.

Ver. 8. **There is yet one man, Micaiah the son of Imlah.**—*Loyalty to truth*:—In all the course of my acquaintance with Sir Robert Peel, I never knew a man in whose truth and justice I had a more lively confidence. In the whole course of my communication with him, I never knew an instance in which he did not show the strongest attachment to truth, and I never saw, in the whole course of my life, the smallest reason for suspecting that he stated anything which he did not firmly believe to be the fact. (*The Duke of Wellington.*) *Micaiah prophesying evil*:—I. YOU ARE IN DANGER OF COMMITTING AHAB'S FOLLY, IN THE CHOICE OF YOUR ACQUAINTANCES AND FRIENDS. You find some ready to give you countenance, by their example and conversation, in all the evil which your heart desires; willing, whatever be your besetting sin, to help you in excusing it to your conscience; forward, however unholy be your enterprise, to say with the false prophets of Samaria, "Go up; for the Lord shall deliver it into the hand of the king" (ver. 6). There are others who warn you of evil, who recommend you to desist from sinful courses, whose very example is a reproof to you, though their tongue be silent; Now which sort of friends do you most highly esteem? II. A LIVELY WARNING AGAINST THE UNWISE CONDUCT OF MANY PERSONS IN THE CHOICE OF THEIR RELIGION. But be ye well assured, that one kind of religion only can be right; and that this must be one which prophesieth evil concerning you, which tells you that you are lost if you sin, and which bids you seek for heaven, not by show of piety, not by dissension one with another, not by resorting to images, and saints, and masses; but by secret wrestling with your own desires, by fervent spiritual prayer, and by painful denial of yourselves, in the faith and by the strength of Jesus Christ your Saviour. III. TO PROFESS THE RIGHT FAITH IS ONE THING; TO APPLY IT RIGHTLY IN OUR PRACTICE IS ANOTHER. It may be you fall not into the error of running after false systems of faith, and yet regard not as you ought to do the prophets of the truth. And into this error you may fall, either in regard to the public preaching, or to the private exhortations, of the ministers of religion. "He doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil," is a reflection with which you often probably return home from church. (*C. Girdlestone, M.A.*) *Standing alone*:—When Archbishop Abbot was visited by one of James I.'s emissaries, who came to persuade him to do evil to please the court, he stood boldly in defiance of the royal request, and asked: "Shall I, to please King James, and to shelter and satisfy his vile favourites, shall I send my soul to hell? No, I will not do it!" So he stood alone in that unholy court, and sought to be true to the King of kings. The price for becoming traitor to God is too great for us to afford (*H. O. Mackey*). I hate him, for he doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil.—*The hated prophet of evil*:—I. A GUILTY CONSCIENCE MAKES MEN FEAR THE TRUTH. And yet, how senseless and impolitic is this! Whatever the reality of things may be, is it not better that we should know it, rather than live in a fool's paradise of flattering self-delusions, crying, "Peace, peace," when there is no peace? It was a wise and noble spirit that said, "I will seek after the truth, by which no man was ever injured." We have mastered one of the grandest

lessons of life when we have learnt to welcome the truth from whatever quarter it may come. II. FEAR OF TRUTH MAY OFTEN DEVELOP INTO PERSONAL HATE OF HIM WHO IS THE MESSENGER AND MINISTER OF IT. "I hate him; for he doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil." There is nothing strange in this. A very subtle connection exists between the conditions of mind here indicated. Fear leads to hate, and is itself a form of hate. The feeling of aversion is readily transferred from the thing dreaded to him who is the means of bringing it upon us; and when a man hates the light, he is not likely to have much love for the human medium through whom it shines. III. DIVINE LAWS AND PURPOSES ARE SURELY ACCOMPLISHED, IN SPITE OF HUMAN FEAR AND HATE. The "lying spirit" in the pretended prophets may utter its persuasive flatteries (ver. 22); Zedekiah may add violence to falsity (ver. 24); Micaiah may be imprisoned and fed with "the bread and water of affliction" (ver. 27),—but the fatal decree has gone forth, and must be fulfilled. The king shall return no more from Ramoth-Gilead. (*J. Waite, B.A.*) *Hostility to truth lies in the will*:—Many an objector to Christianity in our day, if he said out what he really thinks, would say, "I disbelieve Christianity. because it does not prophesy good concerning me, but evil; it makes such serious demands, it sets up so high a standard, it implies that so much I say and do is a great mistake that I must away with it. I cannot do and be what it enjoins without doing violence to my inclinations, to my fixed habits of life and thought." This, before his conversion, was the case with the great Augustine. Augustine tells us in his *Confessions* how completely he was enchained by his passions, and how, after he had become intellectually satisfied of the truth of the creed of the Christian Church, he was held back from conversion by the fear that he would have to give up so much to which he was attached. In the end, we know, through God's grace he broke his chains—those chains which held poor Ahab captive. In such cases lasting self-deceit is only too easy. Men treat what is only a warp of the will as if it were a difficulty of the understanding, while the real agent—ought I not to say the real culprit?—is almost always the will. The will sees religion advancing to claim the allegiance of the will, it sees that to admit this claim will oblige it to forego much, and to do much that is unwelcome to flesh and blood, and so it makes an effort to clog or to hinder the direct action of the understanding. Its public language is, "I cannot accept religion because it makes this or that assertion, which to my mind is open to historical or philosophical or moral objections of a decisive character"; but, if it saw deeper into itself, it would say, "I dislike this creed, for it doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil, while I continue to live as I do." (*Canon Liddon.*) *An unpleasant view blocked up*:—"It was an old joke against Lord Islay, who formerly lived at Hounslow, that ordering his gardener to cut an avenue to open a view, the landscape disclosed a gibbet with a thief on it; and several members of the Campbell family having died with their shoes on, the prospect awoke such ominous and unpleasant reminiscences that Lord Islay instantly ordered the avenue to be closed up again with a clump of thick Scotch firs." The amusing incident has a moral side of it. Certain doctrines of the Gospel bear very heavily upon proud human nature, and therefore many are determined to block up the view which they open up. Curiosity impelled them to hear, but perceiving that the truth condemns them they wish to hear no more. The preacher's teaching would be all very well, but it brings sin to remembrance and reveals the hell which will follow it, and therefore the self-convicted hearer cannot abide it. It is, however, no joke to block up our view of eternity. The gibbet is there even if the sinner refuses to see it. (*Sword and Trowel.*) *Preachers for the times*:—The class of sermons which, according to Mr. Gladstone, is most needed, is the class one of which so offended Lord Melbourne long ago. He was one day seen coming from a church in the country in a great fume. Meeting a friend, he exclaimed, "It is too bad! I have always been a supporter of the Church, and I have always upheld the clergy. But it is really too bad to have to listen to a sermon like that we have had this morning. Why, the preacher actually insisted upon applying religion to a man's private life!" (*Quiver.*) *Truth most required*:—The truth which a man or a generation requires most is the truth which he or they like least; and the true Christian teacher's adaptation of his message will consist quite as much in opposing the desires and contradicting the lies, as in seeking to meet the felt wants of the world. Nauseous medicines or sharp lancets are adapted to the sick man quite as truly as pleasant food and soothing ointment. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*) *Aim in preaching*:—A sailor just off to a whaling expedition asked where he could hear a good sermon. On his

return from the church his friend asked him, "How did you like the sermon?" "Not much, it was like a ship leaving for the whale fishing; everything shipshape; anchors, cordage, sails, and provisions all right, but there were no harpoons on board." *Dislike to the preacher*:—One excuse a man makes for not heeding the message is, "I did not like the man himself; I did not like the minister; I did not like the man who blew the trumpet, I had a personal dislike to him, and so I did not take any notice of what the trumpet said." Verily, God will say to thee at the last, "Thou fool, what hadst thou to do with that man; to his own master he stands or falls; thy business was with thyself." What would you think of a man? A man has fallen overboard from a ship, and when he is drowning some sailor throws him a rope, and there it is. "Well," he says, "in the first place, I do not like that rope; I do not think the rope was made at the best manufactory; there is some tar on it, too; I do not like it; and in the next place, I do not like that sailor that threw the rope over; I do not like the look of him at all," and then comes a gurgle and a groan, and down he is at the bottom of the sea; and when he was drowned, they said that it served him right. On his own head be his blood. And so shall it be with you at the last. You are so busy with criticising the minister and his style, and his doctrine, that your own soul perishes. Remember you may get into hell by criticism, but you will never criticise your soul out of it. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

Vers. 13, 14. Behold now, the words of the prophets declare good unto the king with one mouth.—*Prophets of smooth speech*:—I. A CERTAIN FEAR OF GOD IS MADE TO SERVE THE SELFISH ENDS OF WORLDLY MEN. Here is a wicked king, a pervert from the true faith, a patron of idolatry, a man whose actions were only evil continually, a man buckling on his armour for an unnecessary war, yet a man who will not move until he gets a sign that the gods will take his part. Ahab is a religious man, although a man of sin—a man who has his priests and prophets as well as his warriors, and who in doing wrong likes to fortify himself by the assurance that the heavens are on his side. "Shall I go against Ramoth-Gilead to battle, or shall I forbear?" said the king. In form that was an inquiry; in reality it was an attempt to blend religion with worldly designs, that thus he might the better compass their fulfilment. There is much of this incongruous mixture in the conduct of ungodly men among us now. There are few persons so worldly but that they have a vein of the religious running through them; and generally they are shrewd enough to somehow turn this element to their own advantage. Many persons going to church on Sunday is done to keep their conscience quiet through the week of questionable conduct. Religion is to some a refuge from uncomfortable thoughts, and as much a means of keeping a man in face with himself as with his neighbours. It is oftentimes a valuable auxiliary to a worldling's temporal progress, winning him the good opinion of his fellows as well as furnishing a basis of self-confidence. II. THE WIDE PREVALENCE OF THE DEMAND FOR SMOOTH-SPEAKING PROPHETS. Ahab said to his assembled seers, "Shall I go, or shall I forbear?" There is always a demand for prophets who tell us what we like. There is a good deal of satisfaction to the man who all the week long is driving doubtful bargains, indulging in sharp practices, and living by the world's smart maxims rather than the principles of Scripture—it is most gratifying to such a person when he comes to church to find a man in the pulpit who dwells only on the brighter side of human conduct, who seldom mentions people's sins, who is too polite to speak of hell, and who in general seems in favour of a "downgrade" in morals as well as in theology. And this demand is always followed by an adequate supply. If the pew clamours for smooth-tongued prophets it will not have to wait many Sundays before one mounts the pulpit. The Christian Church has never been without such men. As a rule, they abound. III. HOWEVER MUCH SMOOTH-SPEAKING MAY ABOUND, WE CAN NEVER GET AWAY ENTIRELY FROM THE INTERMINGLED VOICE OF TRUTH. Micaiah was not at first summoned into the royal presence. No; Ahab knew he had a rasping voice and an awkward honesty about him which would ill harmonise with the general concurrence he expected. But somehow Micaiah was fated to appear. This world of ours has never lacked true prophets, as it has never wanted false ones. Even in the most unfriendly times there have been more of them than the prophets themselves have thought. And, somehow, as in this case, bad men are obliged to hear the prophet of the Lord sometimes. The jarring note will break in upon the smooth current of man-pleasing doctrine. Despite men's evasions, the

rousing voice makes itself heard above the sibilations of your religious parasites and syoophants; the pure light flashes convincingly into the dark places of the corrupt heart; and the word of the Lord moves right royally over men's cowering souls and crooked lives. In the providence of God it is always ordered that the truth shall speak to evil men, "whether they will hear or whether they will forbear." If it speaks but seldom it makes up for it by compensating emphasis. (*J. J. Ingram.*) *Enmity to truth*:—I. A MAN MAY DELIBERATELY SET HIMSELF AGAINST GOD. This may appear an improbable thing, as there must be an apprehension that the only clear issue to such conduct is the defeat of the man, and the triumph of God. II. A MAN MAY TURN THE FAITHFULNESS OF GOD INTO A PERSONAL GRIEVANCE. This evidently Ahab did; and also the men of Christ's day, who, resenting the plainness of His speech, became His bitter adversaries. To be reproved when wrong is meditated or pursued should be regarded as an advantage. Warning is an indication of interest in one's well-being when uttered by a friend, and ought never to be thought of other than as a kindness. III. A MAN MAY COME TO REGARD WHAT IS TRUTH AS EVIL INSTEAD OF ITS BEING GOOD. A man must have had his way for a long time before such a verdict may be announced; but selfishness is not long indulged before he is upon this track. IV. A MAN MAY NEVER BE TAUGHT BY EXPERIENCE, BUT EVER RUSH ON TO DESTRUCTION, WELL KNOWING WHAT IS BEFORE HIM. It was so with Ahab. No amount of teaching or experience—and his life had not been without instruction—sufficed to turn him from his set purpose and awaken him to the danger in which by his conduct he was placed. (*Homiletic Magazine.*) *Resisting conviction*:—John Wesley tells us in his famous *Journal* that when he was about twenty-two, before he knew by joyous experience the salvation of God, he read Thomas à Kempis' *Christian Pattern*, and he began "to see that true religion was seated in the heart, and that God's law extended to all our thoughts, as well as words and actions." He says with brave frankness, "I was, however, very angry with Kempis for being so strict!" This is an illuminating sentence. The sense of guilt recoils in anger from that which exposes our sin.

Ver. 19. I saw the Lord sitting on His throne.—*Council in heaven*:—We read elsewhere of "war in heaven." The text suggests a different subject, apparently connected with it, namely, "council in heaven." Micaiah describes what he saw as a vision. We are presented with one of the most imposing descriptions of the heavenly conclave which Holy Scripture contains. It is one of those rare occasions when we are permitted to learn how in the councils of heaven the things of our earth are ordered. Men are unwilling to believe a Providence; they trace out cause and effect, and this they deem sufficient. The text shows that "cause and effect" indeed are but the results of God's decree, and it teaches us how He directs also even individual circumstances. In this way it may be a natural effect of a natural cause which shall bring a plague within a certain city or village, and yet God shall direct who shall fall by it, and who escape. The cause of death may be natural; the individual application is providential. You, then, are the subjects of Satan's malignity, of the love of God, and of the wonder and ministrations of angels! It may be, that at this very hour a council is proceeding in heaven which may secure blessings of the highest order for you or for our land. Not impossible but that our arch-enemy too yet presents himself in that blessed assembly, and pointing to the many national sins of our country, or to our individual transgressions, may be prompt with a slander, followed by the suggestion, "I will go and deceive them yet more, and so I will destroy them entirely!" St. Paul meant something when he spake of wrestling not so much "against flesh and blood" as "against principalities and powers, and spiritual wickedness in high places." (*G. Venables.*) *A prophet's vision and a king's blindness* (with ver. 8):—Now in these two utterances, spoken by Ahab on the one hand and by Micaiah on the other, you see the cause of the difference between the two men. One man has a clear vision that leads to goodness, to pure life, to holy character, and to undying courage; the other man is blinded by his sins so that his vision is darkened, and he goes from folly to folly until he ends his life in shame and ignominy, because he hates the truth and will not hear it nor heed it. Here are some very important lessons for us as Christians. I. The duties of life will not all be pleasant. We shall sometimes be required to do very unpleasant things; but if, like this brave prophet, we have a clear vision of the Lord on His throne, and recognise that God has the first claim to our service, then we shall be able to do unpleasant duties in

a brave and cheerful spirit, because we are pleasing God. 2. We are only fitted to do Christian work in the right spirit when, like Micaiah, we seek to please the Lord, having Him always before our eyes. I have noticed that when I have witnessed the falling away in service on the part of a Christian it has almost universally come from a lessening of true devotion. A man ceases to pray with regularity; he becomes absorbed in business or pleasure; sets his mind on material things, until his thought is taken away from God. He does not see the Lord, and so he becomes indifferent to earnest Christian effort. 3. The man who looks upon the Lord as his God, his Heavenly Father, his Saviour, will feel that earthly affairs are of very small moment compared to the importance of spiritual victories. He will feel that it is infinitely more important to be good than it is to be rich. The man who has looked upon the face of God in loving reverence before he goes forth to his work in the morning will not be a fit subject to delude into taking bribes, or into receiving fraudulent money either in business or in politics. 4. He who sees the Lord in daily communion finds God a present help in every time of trouble. (*L. A. Banks, D.D.*)

Ver. 27. Put this fellow in the prison.—*Persecuting the truth-teller:*—One evening, at a small literary gathering, a lady, famous for her "muslin theology," was bewailing the wickedness of the Jews in not receiving our Saviour, and ended a diatribe by expressing regret that He had not appeared in our own time. "How delighted," said she, "we should all be to throw our doors open to Him, and listen to His Divine precepts! Don't you think so, Mr. Carlyle?" The sturdy philosopher thus appealed to, said, in his broad Scotch, "No, madam, I don't. I think that, had He come very fashionably dressed, with plenty of money, and preaching doctrines palatable to the higher orders, I might have had the honour of receiving from you a card of invitation, on the back of which would be written, 'To meet our Saviour'; but if He had come uttering His sublime precepts, and denouncing the Pharisees, and associating with publicans and lower orders, as He did, you would have treated Him much as the Jews did, and would have cried out, 'Take Him to Newgate and hang Him!'" *Imprisoned conscience:*—Do we not all know that honest friends have sometimes fallen out of favour, perhaps with ourselves, because they have persistently kept telling us what our consciences and common sense knew to be true, that if we go on that road we shall be suffocated in a bog? A man makes up his mind to a course of conduct. He has a shrewd suspicion that his honest friend will condemn, and that the condemnation will be right. What does he do, therefore? He never tells his friend, and if, by chance, that friend may say what was expected of him, he gets angry with his adviser and goes his road. I suppose we all know what it is to treat our consciences in the style in which Ahab treated Micaiah. We do not listen to them because we know what they will say before they have said it. And we call ourselves sensible people! Martin Luther once said: "It is neither safe nor wise to do anything against conscience." But Ahab puts Micaiah in prison, and we shut up our consciences in a dungeon, and put a gag in their mouths, and a muffler over the gag, that we may hear them say no word, because we know what we are doing, and we are doggedly determined to do, is wrong. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*)

Ver. 34. A certain man drew a bow at a venture.—*Providence in accidents:*—I. THE LORD'S HAND IS CONCERNED IN THOSE EVENTS WHICH HAVE THE APPEARANCE OF BEING WHOLLY ACCIDENTAL, AND OF HAPPENING BY CHANCE OR LUCK. The man who drew the bow by which the King of Israel received his death, drew it, as our text says, "at a venture." He took no aim whatever. Men talk of chance, and luck, and fate, and accident, as if there was not a God that ruled the world. And some even pretend to think that it is doing a kind of dishonour to the Lord to suppose that He interferes in the events of life, beyond, perhaps, a mere general oversight or superintendence. But what says the Scripture? What says the Lord Himself of His own doings and appointments? He tells us that His hand is everywhere. He tells us that not a sparrow falleth to the ground without Him—that when "the lot is cast into the lap," yet "the whole disposal thereof is of Him." II. GOD IS TRUE TO HIS OWN THREATENINGS. Look back into the former verses of this chapter, and you will find King Ahab was expressly warned of God that he should fall at Ramoth-Gilead, and that he should not return at all in peace. Men may "encourage themselves in an evil matter"; they may go on still in evil courses, with a most assured persuasion that their sins shall be unpunished;

but true, nevertheless, is that word of the Lord which He hath spoken—"The wages of sin is death." "God shall shoot at them with an arrow; suddenly shall they be wounded." III. THAT THERE IS NO FENCING OURSELVES AGAINST THE STROKE OF GOD BY ANY EFFORTS OR DEVICES OF OUR OWN. Ahab, seeming, as he did, to hold God's threatenings cheap, yet had some apprehensions notwithstanding. "He who made you can make His weapon to approach unto you." and that all self-defences are in vain! There is a spiritual arrow, very strong and sharp, which may be called "the arrow of conviction," and which consists in the bringing home a sense of guilt and danger to the sinner's conscience. Let us consider such a case as this—a case where the arrow of conviction has come home to a man's heart through the power of the Holy Ghost. The spiritual wound which this poor sinner has received is grievous. Blessed be God! it is not like that of Ahab, hopeless and incurable. There is "balm in Gilead," and there is "a Physician there." That very Lord who made the preaching of His law so sharp and piercing—who made the arrow of conviction strike so deep, can heal as well as wound. He hath provided in His gospel a cure for the transgression of His law. "To bind up the broken-hearted," to provide a precious remedy for dying sinners, was the errand of the Son of God when He visited our world. (*A. Roberts, M.A.*) *A bow at a venture*:—I. WHERE ALL IS VENTURE MEN ACT AS IF ALL WERE CERTAIN. Strong probability is not certainty. 1. No parent is certain that his child shall live to need the education he gives it. 2. No working man is certain that he shall require the provision he has made for "a rainy day." 3. No merchant is certain of reaching that "wealth with honour" for which he toils. Yet the parent, the working man, and the merchant act as reasonable and responsible agents. Still, we have no certainty as to the result of any act viewed apart from its moral element. Thus viewed, however, all is certainty. II. WHERE ALL IS CERTAIN MEN ACT AS IF ALL WERE VENTURE. 1. As a man sows morally, so shall he also reap; not necessarily from his fellow-men, but from God, in the harvest field of his own soul, etc. Experience, etc. 2. The most wicked deed ever perpetrated was first a thought. The accumulative force of moral evil is a certainty. Yet men lust as if lust would never bring forth; and covet as if covetousness never issued in actual theft, etc. 3. The Gospel is a certainty alike in its promises and its threatenings. III. DEDUCE SOME PRACTICAL LESSONS. 1. Be not afraid to "draw a bow at a venture" for the sake of Christ. 2. Be careful of all bows at a venture which are not for Christ's sake. (*The Study.*) *Venture in Christian work*:—There is one recent example, vouched for by Miss Pratt of the Bible School, Yokohama. During the Chino-Japanese war a train-load of soldiers was passing the village of Suzakawa, and one of them tossed a copy of the Japanese gospels into the open window of a house. Through that single book, the owner of the house and his whole family have become Christians. (*T. H. Darlow.*) The joints of the harness.—*Joints of the harness*:—We have here suggested the strength and the weakness of our defensive spiritual armour. We do not now refer to what St. Paul meant by "the whole armour of God," so much as to a humanly framed defensive system of rules and principles and habits which is necessary to protect us during this exposed earthly life. I. WE MAY ARM OURSELVES AGAINST THE WORLD BY PLACING RESTRICTIONS UPON OUR INTERCOURSE WITH ITS SOCIAL LIFE. If specially susceptible to worldly influences, we may wisely make it a rule to keep absolutely clear from all its pleasant things in which any temptation can lurk; or we may allow ourselves some degree of liberty, which, however, we restrict by some rule or clearly drawn line beyond which we will not go. This is good defensive armour, but it will not make us invulnerable. No formal, outward separation from the world can absolutely shut out the spirit of the world. The armour of our restrictions may keep out the world bodily, so to speak; but the very trust we place in such armour may open the way for some arrow from the bow of the archer. II. WE MAY ARM OURSELVES AGAINST THE WORLDLY INFLUENCES WHICH TOUCH US THROUGH OUR NECESSARY INTERCOURSE WITH THE WORLD—as, for instance, in our business relations with men—by joining regularly in religious services and Christian work. In business hours our life is on the open ground, where we are exposed to every temptation. But in the sanctuary of God what can harm us? It is surely from the standpoint of the sanctuary that we get our true ideals of life's duties and aims, and that all the weak things about us are seen. It is there that faith can see and realise Divine things most clearly, and heaven seems so near, and the things of earth so small and poor. But religious services and activities will not necessarily make us safe.

The archer is subtle, and has many devices. III. WE MAY FURTHER DEFEND OURSELVES BY AN ARMOUR OF RELIGIOUS HABITS. There is great strength and protection in habits as distinguished from fitful, varying acts. Let us keep our armour of defence as perfect as we can. Do not undervalue it because it is dangerous to overvalue it. Let the sense of weakness make us humble and watchful. Let us remember that there are places, books, company, and habits which should be labelled "dangerous." The wise man will not court danger, but will flee from it. (*Thomas Wilde.*)

Ver. 37. So the king died.—*The end of Ahab*:—1. Observe the madness of Ahab's policy, and note how often it is the policy which we ourselves are tempted to pursue. We suppose that if we do not consult the Bible we may take licence to do what seems good in our own eyes, and we imagine that by ignoring the Bible we have divested it of authority. We flatter ourselves that if we do not listen to an exposition of the Divine Word we shall be judged according to the light we have, forgetting the solemn law that it is not according to the light we have that we are to be judged, but according to the light we might have if we put ourselves in right relations to the opportunities created for us by Divine providence. What is this ostrich policy, but one that ought to be condemned by our sense as well as shrunk from by our piety? Our duty under all critical circumstances is to go to the truth-teller, and to get at the reality of things at all costs. Where the truth-teller disturbs our peace and disappoints our ambition, we ought to learn that it is precisely at that point that we have to become self-rectifying. The truth-teller is only powerful in proportion as he tells the truth; officially, he is nothing; his power is simply the measure of his righteousness. 2. Is it possible that there can be found any solitary man who dare oppose such unanimous testimony and complete enthusiasm? The messenger who was sent to call Micaiah was evidently a man of considerate feeling who wished the prophet well. Seeing that the words of the prophets had all declared good unto the king with one mouth, the messenger wished that Micaiah should for once agree with the other prophets and please the king by leaving undisturbed their emphatic and unanimous counsel. Thus the voice of persuasion was brought to bear upon Micaiah, and that voice is always the most difficult to resist. Micaiah lived in God, for God, and had nothing of his own to calculate or consider. Until preachers realise this same spiritual independence, they will be attempting to accommodate themselves to the spirit of the times, and even the strongest of them may be betrayed into connivances and compromises fatal to personal integrity and to the claims of truth. 3. Now came the critical moment. Now it was to be seen whether Micaiah was to be promoted to honour, or thrust away in contempt and wrath. It is easy to read of the recurrence of such moments, but difficult to realise them in their agony. The martyrs must never be forgotten. Dark will be the day in the history of any nation when the men who shed their blood that truth might be told and honour might be vindicated, are no longer held in remembrance. In vain do we bring forth from our hidden treasure the coins of ancient times, the robes worn in high antiquity by kings and priests, the rusty armour of warriors, if there is no longer in our heart the tenderest recollection of the men who wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented, that they might save the torch of truth from extinction and the standard of honour from overthrow. 4. Away the kings have gone, and instead of relying upon the word of the Lord, or taking refuge in the sanctuary of great principles, they invent little tricks for the surprise and dismay of the enemy. The King of Israel disguised himself, and Jehoshaphat made himself as the king of Israel, but all their inventions came to nothing. So will perish all the enemies of the Lord. Differences of merely accidental detail there will always be, but no honour can mark the death of those who have gone contrary to the will of heaven, and taken counsel of their own imagination. How long shall the lesson of history be wasted upon us? How long will men delude themselves with the mad infatuation that they can fight against God and prosper? (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

Ver. 48. Jehoshaphat made ships of Tarshish.—*The shipwreck at Ezion-geber*:—I. THIS LAMENTABLE DISASTER TO KING JEHOSHAPHAT'S SHIPPING. The Red Sea is a long and comparatively narrow sheet of water, running in a north-westerly direction from the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean. Its extreme length, from the Strait of Babel Mandeb to the Isthmus of Suez, is over 1400 miles, but at the

northern end it divides into two arms somewhat like the letter Y, which enclose between them the peninsula of Mount Sinai. The left, or western arm, and the larger of the two, is that with which we are best acquainted, and is called the Gulf of Suez; the right arm runs in a north-easterly direction for upwards of 100 miles, and is known as the Gulf of Akabah. At the head of this latter gulf is the site of the ancient Ezion-geber. II. THE CAUSE OF THIS DISASTER. It was a judgment from heaven. III. THE LESSON WHICH IT TEACHES. 1. Do not choose your associates amongst those who fear not the Lord. The ill-matched fleet was hardly launched when disaster came, and the very house of God was made an "Ezion-geber." 2. It is always safest to keep under Christian influences. A man is rarely better than the company he keeps. Ungodliness is infectious: better strengthen what is good in you than put it in peril. Never make a friend of one who would destroy your faith; "go not in the way of evil men." True sympathy of hearts is the golden bond of friendship. 3. The lesson of the text bears upon all business alliances. You will do well even to sacrifice a measure of financial interest and worldly prospect rather than be associated in business with a man who is out of all sympathy with you in religion. (*J. T. Davidson, D.D.*) *The peril of all mercantile enterprises apart from religious principle*:—I. COVETOUSNESS MAY LEAD US INTO FORMING FORBIDDEN ALLIANCES AND ENTERING UPON UNWARRANTED SPECULATIVE ADVENTURES. There can be no doubt that an inordinate thirst for gold tempted Jehoshaphat into this ill-fated project; for we read that he had already "riches and honour in abundance." To obtain riches, indeed, there are no dangers men will not risk, no toils they will not undergo, no perils they will not brave. How often does it happen that a man of considerable capital, from the desire to make much more, enters into partnership in some promising speculation with persons of no piety, though professing godliness himself, and constructs his schemes, and lays his plans, all upon their principles, entirely forgetful that without the blessing of Heaven they can never prosper, and that the blessing of Heaven can never rest upon an enterprise in which the requirements of Heaven are disregarded. God has distinctly declared, that "a companion of fools shall be broken"; and has warned us, that if sinners entice, saying, "Cast in thy lot among us; let us all have one purse; we shall find all precious substance; we shall fill our houses with spoil," we consent not, lest, sharing in the sinner's godless schemes, we share in the sinner's disastrous overthrow, and reap a righteous recompense, if not in actual bankruptcy, in the wreck and ruin of our most costly equipments. Many, we are aware, are the plausible pleas and excuses which may be urged by the man of merchandise, and the adventurous moneymaker, who is greedy of gain, in justification of his joint-stock schemes, and unions of interests in speculative enterprises with men who have not the love of God in their hearts, nor "the fear of God before their eyes." II. THE PERIL THERE IS TO THE PEOPLE OF GOD IN ALL MERCANTILE ENTERPRISES APART FROM RELIGIOUS PRINCIPLE. Be assured, that all alliances with the enemies of God, whether they be in the matter of marriage, where gold is often more looked to than goodness, or whether they be in the partnerships of business, or in the undertakings of speculative enterprise; or again, whether they be for the purpose of political party, to prop up a ministry, and to gain strength, as is supposed, to a government, they will assuredly, sooner or later, bring down disaster in the desolating hurricane of Heaven's displeasure. Over and over again have we seen all such combinations broken up, and scattered to the winds, evincing, that whatever is imagined to be strong through wickedness shall be made contemptible for its weakness. No union can be strong in which God and truth are not the uniting links. Or, to take another case: when oft-occurring calamities lessen the resources of some wealthy company, and a firm in which all men placed unquestioning confidence is overtaken by the desolating tempests of misfortune upon misfortune, and their ships, which were heretofore to be found on every sea, trading for gold, are scattered and wrecked, and bankruptcy is declared, and creditors look blank with astonishment, is there not often reason to believe that the Nolus of the mischief was some ungodly partner, who, because he was thought to be powerful, was taken into the body, without any regard being had to his religious principles. It is only when such alliances are knowingly made that they can, perhaps, be considered criminal. But is there no enterprise upon which man may enter, worthy of his immortal energies, and in which there is no danger of indulging a destructive covetousness, nor of being stricken down by any desolating disaster. Ah! yes; there is a "merchandise that is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof

than fine gold"; and for this ye need not voyage to the land of Ophir. Jesus Christ says to you, "I counsel thee to buy of Me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich"—rich in justifying righteousness, rich in the gift of faith, rich in sanctifying influences, rich in moral graces, rich in meekness for glory. Heavenly "wisdom cannot be valued with the gold of Ophir, with the precious onyx or the sapphire." (*S. Jenner, M.A.*) *The broken ships*:—Three places are mentioned in our text: Ophir, Tarshish, and Ezion-geber. The first tells us of gold to be got; the second of ships built in which to carry it; while the third speaks of the broken ships and the failure. I. OPHIR, REPRESENTING THE DESIRE. Where Ophir was we do not know with certainty; probably in Arabia or India. It was a district noted for wealth, for Solomon's fleet used to go to Ophir every third year to bring back gold, ivory, and apes. And Jehoshaphat deems his happiness incomplete; he must have the blessings of Ophir added. He has a throne, but he must have gold. He has a crown of precious jewels, won by David from the King of Ammon, but he must have gold; and he tries to get it. And was there any great sin or harm in that? If there was, then alas for us! for there are very few of us who would not like to fasten our boat to one of Jehoshaphat's ships, and follow in his wake to a prize so rich and tempting. We should be quite ready to grant Jehoshaphat "liberty to tow" if he would only throw out his hawser to us. And is this desire for gain wrong? Is it inconsistent with a Christian profession? or injurious to a Christian life? One thing is sure, it is a universal and instinctive desire. Go where you will, you find men hurrying and striving; trapping the furs of the North, gathering the fruits of the South; with careful, plodding industry seeking the treasures of the mine, or the soil, or the sea. Scripture does not condemn the business. It commends it. It approves of doing with our might whatever our hands may find to do. It says the man who is "diligent in business shall stand before kings; he shall not stand before mean men." It rebukes sloth as well as too much sleep, as it says: "Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise." And what is it keeps these myriad wheels revolving? that makes the world so busy, saving men from an indolence that would be fatal to all the virtues? It is this same desire for gain, the wish to better one's circumstances. Go then to Ophir if you will, and if you can. Be diligent. Leave no stone unturned that lies in your path. Increase your substance; but remember to minister to Christ of that substance. II. TARSHISH, AND THE DESIGN. Tashish was a busy emporium. Tarshish is still a busy place, and shipbuilders are many. Thought is busy drawing out her plans, putting plank to plank. And when our preparation is complete, we launch our little craft, sending it afloat among that fleet of ventures which every day goes steering out into the deep. And as we launch our ventures, what hope, what exhilaration, what self-congratulation, as we set the ribbons streaming, and flags fluttering, and wine dashing on the prow! How early in life we begin our shipbuilding! Even in boyhood our hearts and hopes are away in the future. We are building our phantom ships with shadowy sails; and, standing on our shadowy deck, how near the shores of Ophir are! We can almost touch them! Others, many others, have failed, but success to us is certain; at least it seems so to us, for boyhood's vision is chromatic, it likes to conjure up images. Now most of us have lived some time in Tarshish; and somewhere on the great deep of commercial life our ships are afloat to-day. Some are ordinary merchantmen, whose sails catch the trade winds, and whose voyages are somewhat slow. Some are a more colossal craft, a kind of steamer; your venture is among the manufactures, with its larger capital and its quicker returns. And some have neither of these; so they launch their little row-boat, and, trusting to the skill and strength of their two hands, they hope for a cargo, though it be but a small one. And so Tarshish is left behind: Ezion-geber comes in sight. II. EZION-GEBER, AND THE DISAPPOINTMENT. This was a city on the shore of the Red Sea, used by Solomon as a naval station, and as his seaside place of residence. Now in our trading we like to give Ezion-geber a wide berth. We must pass by it, for there is no way of reaching Ophir but by Ezion-geber. There is no success, but we must venture something to gain it; there is no prize, but lies behind some hazard. And how many of our ships have gone aground, and gone to pieces! Some have returned, laden with a heavy, precious freight; but how many are now overdue, how many lost! More ships reach Ezion-geber than reach Ophir. What mean these broken ships? 1. Some are broken because they were built of light, flimsy material. The strongest lasts the longest. A bubble is easily blown; it as easily bursts. And some men are always floating bubbles. The gains of

ordinary, legitimate trade are safe, but slow; too slow for those who are making haste to be rich. So they go into speculation. Here is a scheme that looks fair enough: it is to do wonders. The prospectus is a perfect kaleidoscope; look into it and you see gold, silver, pearls, villas, carriages, and all kinds of beautiful things! And the bait takes. Without stopping to make inquiries as to the concern,—whether there is anything substantial to back it, whether or not the names are painted figure-heads,—they put their all in the venture. Soon their ship is broken, and they wring their hands in bitter disappointment. But it was their own fault. Their ship had no framework of solid timber. It was a paste-board ship, with a thick coating of paint. Such people deserve to have broken ships. They did not call in a surveyor, they trusted to a chance. 2. Again, some ships are broken because built of unsound timber. How many have gone down to an unmarked ocean-grave because of rotten planks! And many a vessel is built of worthless timber: men put into them planks worm-eaten, sin-eaten. Can you expect these to succeed? Can you bring home health and happiness in schemes that will not stand the light of the Word, or the survey of conscience? Put sin into anything, and you put weakness in it. Put sin into it, and you nail a curse to it. There is no real gain from injustice or fraud. 3. But our ships are often broken because God breaks them. We put no green wood into our ships; nothing but careful, long-seasoned thought. We called in prudence and skill to draw out the plans, and to superintend the building. We kept a good "look-out" at the prow; we watched the winds and currents, and took frequent soundings. Yet we failed; our plans miscarried; our well-equipped vessel ran aground at Ezion-geber. Why is this? why does God give us now success, and then failure? why these frequent and sometimes bitter disappointments? Perhaps it may be to teach us wisdom in our partnerships. 1. Even in business it is not best to be yoked together with unbelievers. A twin-ship may ride the sea more steadily, and perhaps carry heavier cargoes; but if the prows do not point the same way, if you have two sets of charts, and two compasses that do not agree, your craft may be where the Alexandrian corn-ship was—in the place where two seas meet, the fore part fast on the rocks, and the hinder part broken by the violence of the waves. 2. Again, they are broken in order to teach us humility. If every plan of ours succeeded, we should be in danger; we should become vain, perhaps boastful; like Nebuchadnezzar, chanting praises to ourselves, how our own hand has gotten this wealth. And so He disappoints us. 3. Or God breaks them because He sees we have enough already. Possibly larger wealth might only bring a barrenness of soul: for it is the tendency of increasing wealth to damp and dwarf the spiritual life. Its increasing cares push out holy thoughts; mind and heart are more and more given to "earthly things," until the whole life becomes metallic, and religion is simply a creed, or a caricature. In going over the Alps you leave first the secluded valley. Here everything is rich; nature is at her best, covering the fields with corn, and the hillsides with the vines. You ascend, and the vines leave you. It is the walnut or the oak that shades your path, and tinkling bells of goats and kine fall musically upon your ear. Higher, and vegetation gets more scant; and instead of the broad leaves of the valley you have the n eedle-like leaves of the pine and fir. Still higher, and you touch the snows. All is bare and treeless. No fruit, no corn can ripen, for winter claims all the seasons here. And how much is that like many lives! Down in the humbler, lowlier days there was a wealth of heart, though there was poverty of purse. The life was clothed with a beautiful foliage. Sympathies were generous and swift. Hands, feet, and lips offered a glad though a lowly service. But fortune favoured them, wealth poured in upon them. Personal service became more rare, they learned to pay for substitutes, and to serve God by proxy. Rising financially and socially, they declined spiritually. And what are they to-day? Icy Alpine peaks, frowning out of their perpetual cloud, driving the song-birds away, and making the venturesome traveller who calls for a subscription shiver with frost. 4. Or God breaks our ships that we may lean more upon Himself. Our losses after all often prove our truest, richest gains. Our night of failure and disappointment brings the calmer morning, and as we sit down at the Master's feet, gazing in wonder and love upon Him, and taking from His hands the Divine bread, our "hard toiling" and empty nets are forgotten! Let the Lord give us as many failures as He will, so long as He gives us Himself. On the bare, bleak rocks of Ezion-geber if He be with us, we shall say: "Master, it is good to be here. It is better here with Thee than at Ophir without Thee." Nay, let the Lord break all our plans, dash upon the rocks

all our prospects, all our earthly hopes; what matter it, if only we get "safe to land!" "Fear not," sang the Roman sailor to his boat, "thou carriest Cæsar and his fortunes." So let the storm beat, rocks threaten as they may, we still can sing: "Bear up, O heart! Thou carriest, not Cæsar, but Cæsar's King—the Christ, the perfect Man, the Living God." (*H. Burton, M.A.*) *Jehoshaphat's wrecked ships*:—This subject has especial pertinence to business men. I. WHERE ONE GOOD MAN MAY SUCCEED ANOTHER MAY FAIL. Solomon had done the very thing that Jehoshaphat proposed. What Solomon did prosperously Jehoshaphat vainly attempted. Why was this? The thing itself was right. God would not have one nation isolated from another. He would have unbrotherliness broken down, and men learn in the barter of commerce that "none of us liveth to himself." Countries differ in their productions, and each can furnish something to the wardrobe, table, or adornment of the rest. The merchant has no philanthropy, perhaps, moving him to his commercial ventures, but every ship in the foreign market and bearing its honest freightage to our own is a herald of Him who came to proclaim "goodwill to men." Industry is provoked, and that is good; the poor are helped into comfort, the international sentiment is strengthened, the war demon is fettered, and the separated parts of the earth are united by mutual dependence and blessing. No one land is made for itself alone. II. JEHOSHAPHAT'S SHIPS WERE BROKEN TO SEPARATE HIM FROM A SINFUL PARTNERSHIP. Thus was ended his alliance with an idolater. Very stringent was God's word against such a union. And now, the work broken, God's rod expounded the word. And in the clearer, wider times of Christianity, can we be careless about our partnerships? If wrong for a king to join in shipbuilding and a commercial venture with a worshipper of idols, can it be right in us, of choice, to yoke with the wicked in the pursuits of business? Is it not written by Paul, "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers." Difficulties meet us here, as where, indeed, do they not in the Divine life? Narrow is the way now as ever. A workman may have comrades as spiritually distant from him—more spiritually distant than the sundered poles. What is that Christian man to do? To cut himself adrift from his occupation there because of those ungodly men around him? What is the Christian merchant to do who has an unchristian partner in his firm? Must that partnership be dissolved? How easily can questions accumulate upon us! And what shall we say? We can but lay down principles to be applied to the individual case by Bible-enlightened conscience. Any business, any business transaction which cannot be undertaken as beneath God's eye should not be undertaken by God's children. For a Christian man to choose association, partnership with immoral men is presumption. He may do good, but how much more likely to receive harm? He is but one, and his judgment may be overruled by the verdict of others. Is God only for the Sabbath and sanctuary, the religious meeting, and the dying hour? He is to be acknowledged in all our ways. Business is to be transacted in His fear. We may be united to practices as well as individuals, and these, though familiar by habit, may be a damage to the soul. Good political economy may be very bad Christianity. Any infraction of the royal law is that, whoever may be guilty of it. III. JEHOSHAPHAT'S SHIPS WERE BROKEN TO GOOD PURPOSE. The ships were built at Ezion-geber, and there were they wrecked. A great loss this; all the outlay and the golden hopes scattered in broken planks and beams and drift-wood upon the seashore. But God was in this thing. "The Lord hath broken thy works," said the prophet to the king. The storm had done, as the Lord would have it, double duty—had broken the merchantmen and Jehoshaphat's alliance with his heathen neighbour. The loss might have been greater. Troubles are mercies if they have with us similar result. Better that a man's possessions go down like a house of cards than that he go down into spiritual destruction. Better that a man's projects be broken up like those ancient Jewish ships, than that he made shipwreck of faith and a pure conscience. Oh, many a man has wrung his hands amid the shattered prosperity of life, and he has cried, "I am ruined," while the clear-eyed angels have been celebrating his deliverance from the maelström that sucks down into hell. Welcome such losses! Blessed be such calamities! Let them be sudden and violent! Shall the passenger sleeping in his cabin complain because the captain has roughly aroused him to the fact that the vessel is in the swift, fierce hands of the fire demon rushing from stem to stern? Better so aroused than to sleep till escape is impossible. That can be no real calamity which wakes a man to the peril of his soul, and flings him on a huge wave up upon the Rock of Ages. A ship was settling down into the sea. Oh, the horror

in every eye! "Then shrieked the timid, and stood still the brave!" But lo, a vessel of rescue drew near, and through speaking-trumpet the captain cried, as boats were launched for their succour, "Come all on board with me!" To us comes in sight a shining barque: angels man it, and heavenly breezes waft it, and lo! the Captain cries, "My name is Jesus, My ship salvation, My haven heaven. Come all on board with Me!" How wise to heed that voice! (*G. T. Coster.*) *The lessons of adversity*:—We have read of a ship departing from one of the New England ports in the early period of the colony: she never reached her destination; she was never heard of afterwards. The narrative went on to say that one pleasant summer afternoon, long after, the New England people were standing by the sea when they saw a vessel approach the shore which they knew by its build and rigging to be the very missing ship. It drew nearer and nearer until every line of rigging was visible, and even the faces of those on board. Then suddenly the vision faded, the sails dissolved in cloud, the spars were lost in the mist-lines of the sky, the hull disappeared beneath the waters, the spectre-barque was no more. So years ago we made great ventures, cherished great hopes, but to-day we know how many of these schemes have been dashed, and the ships we sent forth with so much pride and joy are now melting away into nothingness, like the apparitional ship of the legend. Our dreams of prosperity have proved nothing more than dreams; our fond hopes have been confounded. The ships of Jehoshaphat were not lost without a reason; neither are ours, and we ought humbly to learn the lessons of adversity. I. WE VIEW OUR WRECKED HOPES IN THE LIGHT OF REBUKE. Our misfortune may be a rebuke for some immoral principle that has found expression in our life. I believe that there never was a period in the history of the world when morality was recognised in trade as fully as it is to-day; but this granted, there is plenty of immorality existent there still—much that is dishonest, unfair, selfish. The immorality of trade accounts for many a stagnation, many a crisis, many a black Friday. Our wrecked ships ought to call attention to the principles on which we have sailed them, and if we find that we have entered into immoral partnerships, brought into our business equivocal principles, made guilty concessions for the sake of realising some coveted gain or pleasure, we need not wonder that our ships have been broken, and we must be careful that the bitterest tears we shed over them are tears of penitence. Our misfortune may be a rebuke to the godless temper in which we have conducted our business. God stands at the back of the natural world and the commercial world, acting with infinite freedom throughout. There is a long chain of things, causes, forces, but the last link of the chain is in the hand of God. Let us accept these catastrophies as rebukes for our lack of religious thought and feeling in practical life. Our misfortunes are blessed if they show us our errors and sins, and lead us into truer pathways. There is no more awful thing in life than for a man to succeed in immoral and godless ways; any blasting wind is good that saves us from that. Thank God for disaster if it only opens our eyes and saves our soul. II. WE MAY VIEW OUR WRECKED SHIPS IN THE LIGHT OF MERCY. We often see men tried by success, and they fail under the trial ignominiously. God knows what each of His children can and ought to bear, and He will not subject us to any unfitting or excessive ordeal. If your ships had brought the treasure you hoped for, you would have lived in a larger house, you would have ridden instead of walking as you do now, a great many more people would have known you than know you now, you would have sat with Dives instead of being the near neighbour of Lazarus. III. WE MAY VIEW OUR WRECKED SHIPS IN THE LIGHT OF DISCIPLINE. If we do not regard the frustration of our hopes as aiming immediately at the salvation of our soul, we may certainly regard such disasters as designed to effect the development and enrichment of our soul. And is not this development and enrichment of the soul the grand end of life? [illegible] prize of existence the crown of personal and immoral righteousness? God perfects His people in very different ways; some through wealth, some through want, making both in the end equally complete. The mountains of the earth are all glorious, but, like the stars of the sky, they differ in glory. Up to a certain point life is a course of victory and ever-increasing volume of power and success; then, again, it is a story of frustration and failure; one voyage the ships bring the gold, the next they are broken. But let us be sure that in this way God designs to give us the fulness of perfection. The scientists tell us that during the great southern Glacial Period many southern plants were driven to northerly climates, and then again the glaciation of the northern hemisphere drove northern plants to southerly climates; and so on the Organ mountains of Brazil both

Arctic and Antarctic plants are found commingled in strange brotherhood, testifying to the alternate glaciation of the two hemispheres. Brethren, as by the world's changing climate the flowers of the two hemispheres have been assembled on these Brazilian mountains, mingling their divergent beauty and sweetness, so God, by alternations of health and sickness, success and failure, joy and sorrow, brings together in the character of His children all the bright graces of the moral universe. IV. WE MAY VIEW OUR WRECKED SHIPS IN THE LIGHT OF PROPHECY. They may remind us of the coming day when all our gold ships will go down in Jordan's tide, leaving not a floating s ar for us to gather. Keep that before you. Some Colonial writer objecting to Chinese immigration, says, "The Chinaman thinks more of a splendid coffin than he does of an upright life." What a strange charge to bring against a Chinaman! Do not many Englishmen think more of a purple coffin than they do of a noble life? Let us not live for a splendid coffin, but for a splendid character. Let us live that we may be true and pure. Whatever this world has given us, it will soon demand from us, just as the waves of the sea suck back the glittering shells with which they first strewed the shore. Do not sail your soul in your ships. Lay up treasure where moth and rust do not corrupt. (*W. L. Watkinson.*)

Ver. 52. Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin.—*Jeroboam*:—We have here—I. A BAD MAN. 1. He was low in origin. Son of one of Solomon's servants, whom the king, finding industrious, made a ruler. His evil character soon became manifest. 2. He formed the ambitious design of usurping the throne. When his design was discovered, he fled to Egypt. 3. At Solomon's death he returned to Jerusalem, proclaimed himself king, and was followed by the ten tribes. 4. He was, notwithstanding, a mighty man of valour. We have—II. A BAD MAN RAISED UP BY GOD FOR A SPECIFIC PURPOSE. This purpose was the fulfilment of the curse pronounced on David. Some of God's most powerful agents are the wicked. The grandest of His designs have been accomplished by the vilest of the earth. III. AN INSTRUMENT OF GOD USING HIS POSITION FOR EVIL. "The son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin." This is the description always given to him afterwards. There is no more terrible epithet to be applied to man. Fearful is the condition of him who steps up to the height of his ambition on the blood of immortal souls. IV. A CRAFTY, WISE MAN PROFITING BY THE FOLLY OF ANOTHER. Rehoboam and Jeroboam were both bad, but Rehoboam lacked the craft and skill of his enemy. Had Rehoboam taken the advice of the wise man, he might have held his position and his kingdom. He missed his chance, and Jeroboam seized the opportunity. It is the tide taken at the turn that enables the wise to surmount all difficulties. (*Homilist.*) *The extent of man's responsibility for the sins of his neighbour*:—I. WITH RESPECT TO PARENTS. In the workings of God's providence it shall be so arranged that wicked parents shall entail on their children the consequences of their sins. We see that it is the Divine economy that parents are, in a great measure, accountable for the sins of their children. In a physical sense we have this truth daily proved before our eyes; for we see the sad effects of disease haunting, as it were, a family in consequence of the dissipation and wickedness of a father or mother. We likewise see children reduced to poverty, and thrown amid various temptations which, so to speak, do not properly belong to them—would not have been theirs, that is, but for the evil course of parents, who by extravagance, or worse, have made beggars of their children. Apply it now practically to the courses of business and pleasure, and see where your duty lies. In respect of business, it is clear that no parent must follow any unlawful calling, because by this he is at all times setting before his children the examples of open wickedness. But he must also see that, in choosing an occupation or business for his children, he choose one not only lawful in itself, but which will not be the means of tempting the child to commit wickedness. You are responsible to God for the education of your children. If they grow up ignorant, who can be to blame but yourselves? And you are responsible too for the right education of your children; not merely that they shall be taught the simple rudiments of everyday instruction, but that they be taught the "beginning of wisdom," which is "the fear of the Lord." You are commanded in God's Word to bring them up in "the nurture and admonition of the Lord." Then, again, in respect of pleasure, who but you are answerable that you provide for your children proper amusements? If you lead worldly lives, and lead your children into all kinds of evil gaiety and dissipation, whe

is answerable? The providing of lawful amusements for young people—lawful, that is, according to the Word of God—is a most important part of education; for every one knows the soul-destroying evils which result from wrong amusements. II. MASTERS. The responsibility of the servant is very great that he obey his master; but, of course, the responsibility of the master towards the servant is of a higher degree, because authority is his; and it is in his power to use his influence for good or evil. The servant is bidden to obey the master in all things lawful. But servants are not always judges of what is lawful, and what not. Masters have it in their power, with the greater number of their servants, to make them do what is wrong. Then with respect to pleasure. Surely a master is most responsible that his servants do not with his knowledge indulge in any unlawful amusements. The servant under his roof is a part and parcel of his family; and, while it is his duty to say with Joshua, "As for me and my house we will serve the Lord," he must take care that the Sabbath is not broken by his servants taking unlawful pleasure on that day, any more than by doing their business. III. AND NOW, APPLY THIS SUBJECT TO SUPERIORS. If one man by his influence, or his authority, of whatever kind it may be, throws an obstruction in the heavenward way of his neighbour, leads him astray by temptation, or deceives him by his conduct, or compels him to do what is wrong, he then surely is in that most fearful position of the man by whom an offence has come to his neighbour, and against whom the woe of God is denounced. If in matters of business we in any way cause others to do what is wrong; if by our example we indirectly make them commit sin, or by our precept say that in business honesty and truth are of little or no consequence, or by our authority we make those under us tell lies for our advantage, or do what is dishonest, we then put stumbling-blocks in our neighbours' way, and the woe of the Almighty is hanging over our heads. (*R. H. Davis.*)

END OF FIRST KINGS.