

THE BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATOR.
NEHEMIAH.

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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

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NEHEMIAH.

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INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF NEHEMIAH.

THE modern critics are probably right in their conclusion that Ezra and Nehemiah were compiled from memoranda of those two persons, who were Tirshathas, *i.e.*, governors under the Persian kings, and other contemporary historical documents. But their conclusion does no more than confirm the previous opinion on the subject. It is evident that certain sections of the Book of Nehemiah are the personal work of Nehemiah, and if we could think of him as keeping a diary, we should say there were selected pages from his diary. But it is also certain that the literary genius of the compiler of Chronicles and Ezra is strongly marked in the other sections of Nehemiah and in the general setting and arrangement of the whole work. The very retention of the first person in the extracts which he selects is an evidence of the work of this compiler. We may therefore reasonably assume that, while some of the material was the work of Nehemiah, the book, as we have it, shows the editing of Ezra, and was designed by him to form a historical supplement to his larger work.

Thirteen years after the arrival in Jerusalem of the party from Babylon that was led by Ezra, Nehemiah appeared at Jerusalem. On the whole, it seems most probable that Ezra was not in Jerusalem at the time, but returned soon afterwards. Nehemiah came with the authority of Tirshatha, and with a definite purpose, which he judged it prudent to keep secret for a time. The first six chapters contain an account of the circumstances which led to his visiting Jerusalem; the scheme by which he came to know the condition of the city wall, his successful plan for restoring the wall; the resistance he met with, and the skilful way in which he outwitted, and overcame, the national enemies. The seventh chapter is a genealogy after the manner of Ezra, and the materials for it, we can hardly doubt, were furnished by him. From the eighth chapter Ezra is associated with Nehemiah, and the influence of Ezra is especially marked in the chapters from the eighth to the end. There are signs of his characteristic priestly interest, and his fondness for genealogical tables. The point of view in Nehemiah is clearly the same as that we have recognised in Chronicles and Ezra.

THE DATE OF THE WORK, so far as collecting and putting together the sections is concerned, must be the later years of Ezra's life; but the re-editing which put the book into its present form may be dated at least a century later.

We meet with the same difficulty here that we had to consider when dealing with the genealogy from David in the Books of Chronicles. Some names in these genealogical lists come down to a period long posterior to Nehemiah. Jaddua, for instance, was high-priest at least a century later than Nehemiah. But the explanation previously given will apply with equal force to this difficulty.

PERSONAL HISTORY OF NEHEMIAH.—Very little is known of the personal history of Nehemiah, but a very fair estimate of his character may be formed from the

pages of his diary which have been preserved. His office, as cup-bearer at the Persian Court, was an honourable one, and he was evidently held in confidence and esteem by the king. He must have been in a position of wealth and influence. "He was a man of profound piety, connecting everything, great or small, with the will of God." But the interjectional prayers which habitually occur in his diary indicate a somewhat weak self-consciousness. The truly noble man does right in simple loyalty and love, and does not think about its being accepted and rewarded. This indicates the weak side of an otherwise strong and vigorous individuality. "His prudence was equally marked; and there is no better example of dependence on God, united with practical forethought. He was disinterested and unselfish, and there is not the slightest reference to self apart from the common good. . . . He always appeals to the judgment of a merciful God, and that appeal avails against much hard modern criticism which dwells on his alleged asperity, self-confidence, and self-assertion." (*W. B. Pope, D.D.*)

Dean Stanley says: "There is a pathetic cry, again and again repeated throughout this rare autobiographical sketch, hardly found elsewhere in the Hebrew records, which shows the current of his thoughts, as though at every turn he feared that those self-denying, self-forgetting labours might pass away, that his countrymen of the future might be as ungrateful as his countrymen of the present. 'Think upon me, my God, for good.'"

G. Rawlinson writes: "It has been said that in the character of Nehemiah it is almost impossible to detect a single fault. But this praise is a little exaggerated. Nehemiah's nature was strongly emotional, and he did not always control his emotions sufficiently. His 'fiery soul' was sometimes 'roused to burning frenzy.' In these fits of passion, he forgot the calmness and dignified behaviour which befits a governor. He may 'do well to be angry,' but he does ill to be vindictive. And he is a little too self-satisfied and self-complacent. He contrasts with somewhat too evident self-approval his own conduct in his government with that of former governors. And there is a tinge of Pharisaism in some of his prayers."

CONTENTS OF THE BOOK.—The Book of Nehemiah may be roughly divided into three sections. I. Chaps. i.–vii., comprising the narrative of Nehemiah's appointment to office, his rebuilding, in spite of opposition, the walls of Jerusalem, and his purpose of bringing the people to an orderly settlement. II. Chaps. viii.–x. contain an account of certain religious solemnities. III. Chaps. xi.–xiii. are made up of various lists, appointments, and settlements, with a recital of some acts of Nehemiah's administration on resuming his post. (*Ayre.*)

Nehemiah's first administration at Jerusalem lasted twelve years. Then he returned to the Persian Court. After some years, variously estimated from five to nine years, he was permitted to resume his office at Jerusalem, and endeavour to redress the abuses which had grown up during his absence. It is probable that he spent the remainder of his life at Jerusalem, but of his death and burial no record has been preserved. Beyond the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes, to which Nehemiah's own narrative leads us, we have no account of Nehemiah whatever

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NEHEMIAH.

CHAPTER I.

VERS. 1-11. The words of Nehemiah the son of Hachaliah.—*The royal cup-bearer*.—I. LET US NOTICE THE WORDS ALLUDED TO BY NEHEMIAH. They were as follows: "And it came to pass in the month Chisleu, in the twentieth year," &c. 1. You observe that the time and the place of this conversation are given. It was at Shushan or Susa, the winter residence of the King of Persia. 2. There are places and periods that stand out more prominently than others in the history of most of us. "It came to pass in the month Chisleu," &c. 3. The particular matter referred to was a conversation he had with a kinsman of his, and with other co-religionists lately come from Palestine, respecting the state of the Jews there, "and concerning Jerusalem." Nehemiah was not indifferent to his country's condition. It was a twofold question that he put. (1) He wanted to know how it had fared with the Hebrews—"the delivered ones," "the escaped ones." (2) The other aspect of the question here put by Nehemiah has reference to Jerusalem. An exiled Londoner or Parisian's love for London or Paris would not, we may be sure, be deeper, stronger than that which Nehemiah must have had for the promised land, and for "the city, the place of his fathers' sepulchres." As was to be expected, he asked for information "concerning Jerusalem." It has been well said, "No place is so strong, no building so grand, no wall so firm, that sin cannot undermine and overthrow it." Let no man trust in ceremonies, or sacred houses, or sacred traditions, so long as his heart is far from God, and his life is not in accord with His righteous creed. II. LET US NOTICE THE EMOTION OF NEHEMIAH ON HEARING THE TIDINGS ALLUDED TO. "I sat down and wept," he says, "and mourned certain days, and fasted." He also adds, "and prayed before the God of heaven." He wept. Nor was it weak or unmanly for him to do so. "His was the tear most sacred shed for others' pain." To weep at trifles, or at fictitious sorrows, may be effeminate; but 'twas no trifle, no imaginary sorrow, that now drew tears from Nehemiah. 1. His grief was further manifested by lamentation and fasting. 2. It was a profound grief which seized him. 3. It was a somewhat prolonged as well as profound grief. It lasted, at any rate, certain days. 4. It was a patriot's grief. 5. Again, it was a penitent grief. 6. Nehemiah's grief reminds us of another and yet more touching spectacle, the tears which Jesus shed over Jerusalem. "And when He was come near, He beheld the city, and wept over it," &c. III. In the third place, LET US LOOK AT THE PRAYER WHICH NEHEMIAH WAS THUS PROMPTED TO OFFER. Let us learn that the province of prayer is not restricted to things spiritual. It embraces the affairs of everyday life, and all lawful undertakings great and small. (*T. Rowson.*) *The typical patriot*.—Nehemiah the civilian, as contrasted with Ezra the ecclesiastic, is brought before us in this book as the patriot deliverer of his people. I. The typical patriot is PURELY DISINTERESTED IN PRINCIPLE. Personal ambition is sunk in desire for public good. Selfish motives are abandoned for generous impulses. 1. This does not prevent his rising to a position of honour even in an alien country. A good man is valued anywhere. Fidelity to convictions ever commands respect apart from the merit of the convictions themselves. Honour from an alien chief can only be allowed to the true patriot conditionally—(1) That no vital principle is sacrificed. Nehemiah

evidently remained true to his nation and loyal to his God. (2) That it is made subservient to the interests of his people. At Shushan Nehemiah was really serving them better than he could do at Jerusalem until summoned there by Divine Providence. He was learning the principles of government at the centre of the most powerful government in the world. He had immediate access to the monarch himself. 2. He is always ready to surrender personal honour for his people's good—(1) If by so doing he can be of more service to his brethren. Self-sacrifice is the grand test of all pretension. (2) If personal honour be associated with his people's oppression. Learn—1. By obedience we make the most stubborn laws of nature our servants. 2. By patience foes may be transformed into friends. 3. By the discipline of adversity the foundations of prosperity are laid. II. The typical patriot is LARGE-HEARTED IN HIS SYMPATHIES. 1. He manifests a real interest in the condition of his country (ver. 2). The words imply—(1) That Nehemiah was not a passive listener to the rehearsal of his people's affliction. (2) That he entered into particulars and was most minute in his inquiries. They who have no intention of practical sympathy are careful to elicit no tales of sorrow. 2. He takes upon himself the burden of his country's woes (ver. 4). III. The typical patriot RECOGNISES A DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY IN HUMAN AFFAIRS. 1. By accepting the existence and authority of the King of kings. Not only as—(1) A dogma, but also as—(2) A regulative principle. "O Lord God of heaven, the great and terrible God." 2. By regarding Divine aid as superior to all other. (1) As the most powerful that can be obtained. (2) As controlling all other aid. Nehemiah seeks Divine assistance in urging his suit in his approaching interview with the king—(a) That he may reach the monarch's will by the most accessible channel. (b) That he may approach him at the most accessible moment. (c) That he may urge his request in the most prevalent form. 3. By regarding Divine aid as available through prayer. Nehemiah's prayer is one of the model prayers of the Bible, as—(1) Reverent in its attitude towards God (ver. 5). (2) Persistent in pressing its suit (ver. 6). (3) Penitent in its tone and temper (vers. 6, 7). (4) Scriptural in its argument (vers. 8, 9). (5) Childlike in its spirit (vers. 10, 11). (6) Definite in its aim (ver. 11). Learn—1. Nehemiah is a type of Him who "though He was rich, yet for our sakes became poor," &c. 2. Intercessory prayer is the inspiration and the evidence of true patriotism. 3. Divine interposition is the safest to invoke in national crises. (W. H. Booth.) *The pious patriot*:—He was willing, moreover, to make no little sacrifice in the cause of patriotism. Even in asking the king for leave of absence on such a mission, he was probably risking the royal displeasure. No one could well predict how an Oriental despot would be likely to regard such a request. All might depend on the whim or caprice of the moment. That Nehemiah should wish to exchange Susa for Jerusalem—that he should desire to quit, even for a time, the sunlight of the royal presence which was condescending to shine upon him—might possibly be viewed as an insult. The very fact that he was a favourite might only increase the royal irritation. A tyrant likes his pets to appreciate their privileges; and Nehemiah, by asking for leave of absence, might only lose the royal favour and be deposed from his office. Then, again, even if his request should be granted, he would have to sacrifice for a time all the luxury and ease of his present position; he would have to subject himself to toil and danger; he would have to face the arduous journey between Susa and Jerusalem; and then, after arriving in the city of his fathers, he would have to confront the hostility of the surrounding tribes, and might even have to exchange the courtier's robes for the soldier's armour. But all these sacrifices Nehemiah was prepared to make in the cause of patriotism. His court life had not enervated his spirit. An intelligent and manly piety does not destroy or despise any of the natural affections. There is, indeed, a "pietism" which makes light of the ties of home and kindred, which disparages patriotism, as if it were inconsistent with the universal love inspired by the gospel, or which even ventures to taboo politics as a worldly region which a spiritual man ought rather to avoid. Let us beware of this false spirituality. The world of natural human relationships is God's world, and not the devil's; and if the devil has intruded into it, there is all the more need that it should be occupied by the earnest soldiers of God. Pietism may say, "Never mind the condition of the walls of Jerusalem: souls are the grand concern." But, in point of fact, the condition of walls may sometimes affect the condition of souls. Things external often stand in subtle relation to things spiritual. The body influences the mind; and the outward conditions of national existence may stand in the closest connection with the religious life of a people. Besides, it is natural that we should love our own country with a special

affection; and a true religion does not destroy but consecrates all natural attachments. On the other hand, there are many politicians who are no patriots, and there is also a patriotism in which there is no godliness. There are men who take the keenest interest in politics merely because it furnishes an arena for the exercise of their faculties, the display of their talents, and the furtherance of their ambitions. And there are also true patriots—real lovers of their country—who yet never recognise the hand of God in national history, who never think of praying to God in connection with their plans, or of submitting their political projects and methods to the test of His will. Now, if a man's patriotism is his only religion, this is doubtless better than that his "god" should be his "belly," and that he should "glory in his shame." But still, this patriotism in which there is no regard for God is fraught with danger. For the grand and prime demand on every one of us is that we be the servants of the Most High, the soldiers of Christ, the loyal subjects of the Divine kingdom. And then it is our bounden duty to serve God in and through all our natural pursuits, affections, and relationships, and, amongst other things, to bring all our political theories, aims, and methods into the light of Christ and of His Spirit. We want, both in the Church and in the commonwealth, men and women in whom, as in Nehemiah of old, piety and patriotism are blended and intertwined. (*T. C. Finlayson.*) *Divine purposes working through providence:*—

I. HERE IS EMINENT PIETY IN A MOST UNLIKELY PLACE (ver. 1). Palaces are not generally favourable to piety—(1) Because unrestrained liberty usually degenerates into license and lavish luxury into licentiousness. Court morals are proverbially corrupt. (2) Because religion does not flourish amidst human pomp and the outward symbols of pride. A palace is, above all others, a theatre of human exaltation and proud display. (3) Because the commands of a sovereign are liable to clash with the mandates of Jehovah. 2. Piety is not impossible even in a palace—(1) Inasmuch as God will protect them who honour Him. If God has placed His servant in the palace to do His work, He will keep him there until the work is done. (2) Inasmuch as many eminent examples are recorded in Scripture. Not only Nehemiah, but Moses, Joseph, Obadiah, and Daniel. Learn—1. Eminent piety does not depend upon the accidentals of a man's social position. 2. Exalted positions are less desirable than they appear. 3. The most desirable station in life is that in which we can serve God to the best advantage. II. HERE IS AN EVENT APPARENTLY TRIFLING LEADING TO RESULTS OF THE GREATEST MAGNITUDE (ver. 2).

1. The most trivial event may lead to the most momentous issues. The oak is contained in the acorn; the prairie is fired by a spark; a nation is plunged into war as the result of a jest. Many a quiet conversation has led to world-wide revolutions. 2. Nothing is therefore trivial to a wise man. Learn—1. Every detail in a good man's life is part of a Divine plan. 2. To avoid crossing the Divine purpose and thwarting the Divine plan we must do all to the glory of God. III. HERE IS A STARTLING SUMMONS OF A MOST UNEXPECTED CHARACTER. Although no direct appeal was made, Nehemiah as truly heard the Divine call as Samuel the voice in the darkness, or Paul the voice of the vision, "Come over to Macedonia."

1. Here is an appeal for sympathy and help—not the less powerful because indirect. Mute appeals are often the most eloquent. Æschylus appealing for the life of his brother by holding up the stump of the arm he had lost in the service of his country. The high-priest in the holy place sprinkled the blood seven times without speaking. This appeal was—(1) The cry of humanity appealing to human sympathies. (2) The cry of brotherhood appealing to his kinship. (3) The cry of fatherland appealing to his patriotism. (4) The call of God. 2. Here is a summons which involved great sacrifice. Love never counts the cost. Sacrifice is its glory. Sincerity always distinguished from hypocrisy by this test. 3. Here is an unexpected summons promptly obeyed. Learn—1. Life is full of surprises, and the tenure of ease uncertain. 2. The good man is prepared to follow the leadings of providence without hesitation and at any cost. IV. HERE IS A SAVIOUR RAISED UP IN A MOST UNLOOKED-FOR QUARTER. 1. God is ever training His agents for the work which He means them to accomplish. Nehemiah, Joseph, Moses, David, Cyrus, Paul, Luther, Wesley, and many others. 2. At the proper time God will bring His agents into contact with their life-work. 3. The qualifications of God's agents are not always recognised at first. Learn—1. God uses the most unlikely agents. 2. God leads in the most unlooked-for ways. 3. God's redemptive scheme is the most incomprehensible of all mysteries. V. HERE IS A PICTURE OF THE DEMORALISING AND DISMANTLING TENDENCY OF SIN, ALIKE IN CITIES AND IN SOULS. 1. The inhabitants of Jerusalem were demoralised: "In great affliction and reproach." Long captivity

and dependence had enervated them. Powers not used lapse into impotence. Sin cherished withers moral force. 2. The battlements of Jerusalem were dismantled. Thus does sin ever destroy defences and throw down battlements, leaving souls at the mercy of destructive forces which lead to eternal shame. Learn—1. Sin reveals its deadly nature in its direful consequences even in this life. 2. These consequences are designed to act as warnings to unwary souls. 3. They suggest still more awful penalties in that world where judgment is untempered by mercy. (*W. H. Booth.*)

The exile.—Nothing is here said of the parentage or early training of Nehemiah. We may suppose he grew up in a pious home, where daily prayers, and instructions, and acts of godliness were imbued with deep religious feeling. The early days of the future reformer were perhaps spent in listening to the recital of many an endeared memory of the land of Judah, and his young heart was probably taught to beat high with hope of the restoration of his people to their covenant inheritance.

I. THE SITUATION HE OCCUPIED. The palace at Shushan was one of the most magnificent in the ancient world. The site of its ruins has been identified by modern travellers, and here large blocks of marble, with other fragments of splendid edifices, are often dug up—the relics of a grandeur that has long since passed away. The place of his abode offered many attractions to captivate a youthful mind. There were in the streets of that vast city the splendour and bustle of Oriental life. There might seem in all this “lust of the eye and pride of life” ominous danger to youthful piety. But it is a wonderful power, the grace of God in the human heart. It is marvellous in the souls it selects for saving change, in the places where it operates, and in the triumphs it achieves. Often it appears wanting in those who seem most favourably situated for its possession, while it reigns in hearts where it might seem impossible for it to live and grow. And in him God made the palace of a heathen prince the nursery and sanctuary of an eminent servant of His cause. In view of this, let none among us allege that their situation or circumstances render it impracticable for them to cultivate religion or abound in well-doing. Men may rush into temptation in their earthly business, and thereby raise up invincible barriers to the exercise of piety; but God, by His providence, never places any man in a situation where it is impossible for him to love and obey Him. If you are where God has placed you, be sure you may be, and do, what God requires you. In every situation of life there is enough to test the sincerity of faith in things unseen.

II. THE SPIRIT HE DISPLAYED. It was a spirit of tender interest for the good of Jerusalem. The subjects of inquiry show the spirit of the man. He was living in ease and affluence himself, but he could not forget he was “of the stock of Israel,” and he felt, therefore, the prosperity of religion bound up with that feeble remnant. He might have seen couriers arrive at the royal palace from distant regions, bearing tidings of fresh victories gained by Persian armies, and of new countries subjected to the Persian crown, and yet not be greatly moved by the intelligence; but the arrival of these fellow-saints stirred up his spirit within him to inquire concerning the state of the Church in the land of his fathers. Do we not see here that it is the history and condition of the cause of truth on earth which interests the wise and good? They may not, indeed, be unaffected by events which concern the welfare of mankind and illustrate the wisdom of God in His providence; but it is especially the progress of the kingdom of grace that engages the attention of its true subjects. It was a spirit of deep sorrow for the distress of his people in Judah.

III. THE EXERCISES IN WHICH HE ENGAGED. Nehemiah “fasted and prayed.” (*W. Ritchie.*) *The use of a great purpose.*—To a thoughtful mind there is much interest in the contemplation of the circumstances under which the great purpose of a life first rise into distinctness before the mind of one whose energies, henceforth, are to be used for his country and his God, and whose example stands before us as a noble incentive to steadfastness of purpose and courage in the performance of duty. (*Scenes from the Life of Nehemiah.*) *Piety in unexpected places.*—Fine gold has often been found under a barren and unpromising surface. Rare jewels have been found in the crevices of rocks and in the pebbly beds of rivers. Exquisite flowers have peeped forth from the ledge of a stupendous Alpine rock, and have breathed their sweetness amid a wilderness of ice and snow. Palm-trees have lifted up their tall and elegant stems, adorned at the summit with long pendant leaves and enriched with nourishing fruit, in the midst of the sandy desert, and their life has been sustained by a hidden well of springing water at their root. This has often been the case with God’s children—Joseph, Obadiah, saints in Cæsar’s household. Here Nehemiah in the court of one of the most luxurious eastern princes. (*J. M. Randall.*) *Nehemiah and his*

contemporaries :—Nehemiah flourished four centuries before Christ. When consuls and dictators were beginning to play an important part in Roman politics; when Xenophon and Herodotus were historians and Phidias was sculptor; when Euripides, Sophocles, and Aristophanes wrote tragedy and comedy; when Socrates taught philosophy and Pericles was prime minister at Athens; and when the western nations of Europe were sunk in savage barbarism, Nehemiah was the devout cup-bearer at Shushan. We are not told from what tribe he sprang. His grandfather had been taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar; his father was born and educated at Babylon. Probably the beauty of his person and the sweetness of his manners, the extensive range of his intellect, and the integrity of his character, recommended Nehemiah to royal favour. (*Ibid.*) **I asked them concerning the Jews . . . and concerning Jerusalem.**—*Careful inquiry helpful to philanthropic effort* :—Few portions of Scripture set forth more clearly than the Book of Nehemiah the power of one man to do great things for God when God is with him. With an earnest desire to work for God, Nehemiah first sought to gain accurate information, from a reliable source, both as to the need that existed and the nature of the work that had to be done. Careful inquiry respecting the field of any projected effort will often reveal much of which we had previously but little conception. This should not dishearten us, however, for we ought rather to remember that the deeper the darkness and degradation of those whom we seek to reach, the more needful is it to bring them under the enlightening and elevating power of the gospel of Christ. (*W. P. Lockhart.*) *Man's love for the land of his birth* :—Mr. Christie Murray, writing of the old Australian settlers, relates an incident to show how, after a long life of exile, they still pine for home and England. When his ship left Plymouth Sound a good deal of mud adhered to the anchor. After it was dried he broke off a bit, declaring, half in jest and half in earnest, that this piece of English earth should go with him around the world. In Australia he showed it to a white-haired ranchman among the hills. The old man eyed it wistfully. "Give it to me," he said at last. "You will see old England again; I never shall. I would value that bit of earth more than diamonds." Mr. Murray gave it to him, and continued his journey. When he came back, months later, he found that the old man had ridden more than a hundred miles to a settlement to buy a gay little plush stand and a glass case in which to preserve his treasure. De Maistre, describing the hut of the Moravian missionary in the most northern human settlement within the Arctic circle, says that he observed, suspended over the fireplace like a holy relic, a piece of rough, unbarked wood. He looked at it curiously. The Dane touched it with reverence. "It is a bit of the old oak-tree at home," he said, his eyes full of tears. Nothing can be more real than that clinging in the heart of a man to the land of his birth. It may be of all countries in the world the poorest, the least beautiful, the most insignificant. But it is his own, and if he is a genuine man the trifle which tells him of it, though he stands in a king's palace, will speak to him as with the power of his mother's voice. (*Christian Age.*) **The wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire.**—*Walls and gates* :—What, then, are the "walls and gates" of the New Testament? The Church is now catholic, and no longer national. It is not now a civil polity and the necessities of a civil community that determine the nature of these "walls and gates." Yet there are some things of prime importance, like the walls and gates of Jerusalem. I. THE SACRED OBSERVANCE OF THE LORD'S DAY. All history shows that whenever and wherever the Sabbath is overthrown the Church is perilously exposed, not only to decay, but even to extinction. II. A NUMEROUS CONGREGATION OF ATTENDANTS UPON THE ORDINANCES AND WORSHIP OF THE CHURCH. III. SABBATH SCHOOLS ARE "THE GATES" OF OUR JERUSALEM. IV. THE LIBERALITY AND SELF-SACRIFICE OF GOD'S PEOPLE. (*J. A. Lefevre, D.D.*) *Interest in Jerusalem* :—I. THE STORY OF JERUSALEM THROWS LIGHT UPON GOD'S MORAL GOVERNMENT. Great privileges involve great responsibilities. National sin brings national ruin. Nations are rewarded and punished in this world. II. IT IS A MARK OF REAL PIETY TO BE ZEALOUS FOR THE CAUSE AND KINGDOM OF GOD. How bitterly do Christians mourn over the wickedness around them, and the severe conflict they have to maintain in their own breasts. III. EVERY CHRISTIAN HAS, MORE OR LESS, TO TREAD A SOLITARY PATH, AND HIS DEEPEST SORROWS ARE FREQUENTLY THOSE WHICH HE CANNOT COMMUNICATE TO THE NEAREST AND DEAREST ON EARTH. Who would have thought that when his attendance upon the king was over for the day, Nehemiah would hasten to his chamber, weep bitter tears of grief, and mourn and pray? (*J. M. Randall.*) *Jerusalem, the holy*

city :—Thoroughly to realise the sad tidings brought to Nehemiah, we must briefly recall the former history of Jerusalem. No city possesses so deep and thrilling an interest. Other cities may boast of a higher antiquity. Thebes and Nineveh may go back even to the repopling of the world after the deluge. Other cities may claim a broader area, a more numerous population, a more extended commerce. Other cities may claim to be the centres of a far greater earthly dominion than was ever accorded to David. But whether in the past, the present, or the future, there is no interest like that which attaches to the holy city. (*Ibid.*) *Sin ruins a kingdom* :—I. IF THERE BE A MORAL GOVERNOR OF THE UNIVERSE SIN MUST PROVOKE HIM. II. IF SIN PROVOKE GOD HE IS ABLE TO PUNISH IT. III. BODIES OF MEN ARE PUNISHABLE IN THIS WORLD ONLY. IV. THERE IS A TENDENCY IN THE VERY NATURE OF SIN TO INJURE AND RUIN A COUNTRY. V. GOD'S DEALINGS WITH GUILTY NATIONS ARE CONFIRMED BOTH BY HIS WORD AND ALL HUMAN HISTORY. VI. GOD ALWAYS GIVES PREVIOUS INTIMATION OF HIS COMING TO JUDGE A NATION. VII. IF GOD HAS FAVOURED A NATION WITH AN INTIMATION OF HIS WILL, THEIR SINS ARE AGGRAVATED BY MEANS OF THIS LIGHT. VIII. WHEN GOD HAS DISTINGUISHED A PEOPLE BY SINGULAR INSTANCES OF HIS FAVOUR, THAT PEOPLE WILL BE PROPORTIONALLY CRIMINAL UNLESS THEY DISTINGUISH THEMSELVES BY THEIR DEVOTEDNESS TO HIM. IX. WHEN A NATION IS UNDER CORRECTIONS OF THE ALMIGHTY, THEY ARE EMINENTLY SINFUL IF THEY DISREGARD THE TOKENS OF HIS WRATH. X. SHAMELESS SINNING IS A SURE PROOF OF GENERAL CORRUPTION. (*W. Jay.*) *The walls of Jerusalem* :—What do we know of these walls previous to the time of Nehemiah? The city of Jerusalem passed into the hands of the Jews under David. He wrested the rocky stronghold of Zion, which commands Jerusalem, from the Canaanitish tribe of the Jebusites. He made it the capital of his kingdom. To secure his position David threw a wall round the entire city, including the fortress of Zion. In the reign of Solomon (B.C. 1016-976) this wall was greatly strengthened. Very large towers were erected at intervals upon it, and its height was increased. Probably also some outlying parts of the city were now comprised within its circuit. For nearly two centuries this wall remained intact. Jerusalem sustained several sieges; but it was only in the reign of Amaziah, in B.C. 826, that a breach was made in the fortifications. Jehoash, the king of Israel, "brake down the wall of Jerusalem, from the gate of Ephraim to the corner gate, four hundred cubits" (2 Kings xiv. 13). Through this gap in the wall, Josephus tells us, the victorious Jehoash drove his chariot into Jerusalem, leading Amaziah captive with him. Uzziah (B.C. 808) the succeeding king of Judah, was a prosperous and enterprising prince. He occupied himself for a large portion of his life in the improvement of his capital. He repaired the breach made by Jehoash, and built additional towers. Other portions of the walls that had been suffered to fall into decay were renewed. He was an artilleryist; he equipped the walls and their towers with powerful engines for hurling stones and other missiles against besiegers. Jothan, his son (B.C. 756), also strengthened the walls by building new massive towers. The care which had been expended upon the fortifications of the city by successive kings, for so long a period, bore memorable fruit in the reign of Hezekiah. The tide of Assyrian invasion which then swept over Palestine, and which overwhelmed for ever the ten tribes of Israel, met with a check before the fortress of Jerusalem. In prospect of this invasion Hezekiah had repaired the walls wherever they had become dilapidated, and had erected an additional wall. While the city was invested the mysterious plague came upon the camp of the Assyrians, which swept off myriads of them in a single night. They were content to retire (B.C. 710) with a tribute paid by Hezekiah; the city itself, however, remained uncaptured. Manasseh, after his repentance (B.C. 677-642), paid attention to the fortifications of the city. "He did not only," says Josephus, "repair the old walls with great diligence, but added another wall to the former. He built, also, very lofty towers, and the garrisoned places before the city he strengthened not only in other respects, but with provisions of all sorts that they wanted." It was nearly forty years later that the series of calamities commenced which lasted for twenty years, and which culminated in the complete overthrow of this illustrious city. In B.C. 606 Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, entered Jerusalem, and after threatening Jehoiakim, the king, with captivity, left him in possession of his throne. He appeared before the city again nine years later; and Jehoiachin, who had succeeded his father Jehoiakim, surrendered Jerusalem to him with scarcely a struggle. Nebuchadnezzar carried him off with him to Babylon, and placed his uncle Zedekiah upon the throne in Jerusalem. Six years after this Zedekiah rebelled against Babylon, and after a

siege of a year and a half, the severest it had undergone since it had been a Jewish city, a breach was made in the wall of Jerusalem, through which the Babylonian army poured into the city. Zedekiah and most of the people were transferred to Babylon. The royal palace, the temple, and all the principal buildings were burned, and the stately and massive walls were levelled to the ground, their circuit being only traceable by the vast heaps of rubbish left by the devastators. To restore these famous walls, to perform once more the work of David and Solomon and their successors, to reproduce in a few weeks the labour of centuries, this was the task which lay before Nehemiah. But what was their size? What were the particulars of the work undertaken by Nehemiah? The city of Jerusalem is not at the present time a great city. The circumference of the modern walls is two and a half miles; and while the ancient walls would not in many portions coincide with the present, nevertheless the total circuit of the old walls would not greatly differ in length from those of the present time. It has been stated by the eminent architect, Mr. Ferguson, in Dr. Smith's "Dictionary of the Bible," that the area within the old walls was never more than one hundred and eighty acres; and he remarks, by way of comparison, that the building known as the Great Exhibition of 1851 covered eighteen acres, or a tenth part of the area of ancient Jerusalem. From this estimate it will be seen that the city was one of moderate dimensions. We must remember also that here and there portions of the wall were left standing. The foundations, too, would remain, throughout the entire circuit, as they originally were. The object of the invaders would be to render the fortifications incapable of serving any longer as a defence to the inhabitants; and this object would be gained without disturbing the foundations of the walls. The stones and rubble of which they had been built were not carried to a distance, but lay in heaps ready to the hands of the builders. This material would not, however, be available in every case. The limestone around Jerusalem, which was used in the construction of the important buildings, when exposed to fire (as many parts of the wall had been) rapidly disintegrated. It resembled the granite of which Chicago was built, and which crumbled to dust in the great fire which destroyed that city a few years since. This is the point of the taunt uttered by Sanballat (chap. iv. 2): "Will these Jews revive the stones out of the heaps of the rubbish which are burned?" (*A. J. Griffith.*) *City walls important*:—In the solicitude of Nehemiah over the ruined condition of the walls of Jerusalem we have brought into prominence an element in ancient national life which it is useful to understand, and which is the foundation and keystone of Nehemiah's subsequent action. It was the walls that made the nation in those days. The law which then prevailed upon the face of the earth was the law of might. A town of any size was at the mercy of every roving, plundering horde, if it were unfortified. When once it was surrounded with strong walls, it became possible for the citizens to accumulate property, enact laws for the order and well-being of the citizens, and to elect magistrates to carry these laws into effect. With their erection dated the commencement of civic life. Where the city was large, the citizens became a nation. The Babylonian nation, and, earlier, the Ninevite people, meant really the citizens living within the walls of the immense cities—Babylon and Nineveh. The history of Italy in the ninth century of our era illustrates this law of states. The country was overrun by the armies of rival princes, who disputed for the throne of the Lombard kingdom. The Saracens from the opposite shores of Africa were constantly landing upon the coast, and penetrating inland for the purpose of pillage and massacre. In this condition of the country the large cities were compelled again to erect their walls, which had been levelled to the ground by jealous and tyrannical kings. The great Republics of Italy, the cities which afterwards became nations in themselves, Milan, Florence, Pisa, and others, laid in this way the foundation of their subsequent greatness. "From the time," says Sismondi in his "History of the Italian Republics," "when towns were secured by walls, their power rapidly increased; the oppressed from all parts sought refuge in them from the oppressors; they carried with them their industry and arms to protect the walls that defended them. Everywhere they were sure of a good reception, for every city felt it had strength only in proportion to the number of its citizens; each vied with its neighbour in efforts to augment the means of defence and in the reception given to strangers." Of such supreme importance were the fortifications of a city to national life and progress in those ages of disorder. (*Ibid.*) *Protective walls*:—Have you ever seen a hermit crab? Some day, when you are at the seaside, you will see one. It is a crab which has no hard shell of its own, and consequently is

an easy prey for sea-birds. It therefore gets possession of an empty whelk-shell, and lives in the abandoned house of the whelk, barring the door upon itself with the one great claw, which has grown twice the size of the other, apparently for the purpose. But when his crabship grows too big for his shell, it becomes as uncomfortable as a shoe that pinches, and he has to turn out to look for another. Look at him now! He in a great hurry, because he is in danger, and knows it. He wants just what Jerusalem wanted—a wall of stone and lime about him. That is what a shell is—a wall of stone and lime. Sometimes the hermit crab gets eaten up by a gull or skua before he can find another shell to suit him; sometimes he has to turn out the rightful owner from his home in order to get in himself; but he always knows that he needs a defence. It is a simple comparison; but it gives a true idea of the state of the case to say that Jerusalem, without a stone and lime wall, was a hermit crab without a shell, surrounded by Galilean gulls and Samaritan skuas. (*Sunday School.*)

Vers. 4-11. And it came to pass, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept.—*Sad tidings and fruitful grief*:—I. THE OCCASION OF HIS GRIEF. 1. Not personal loss. (1) Men grieve on account of personal loss—failure of business, scarcity of work, pecuniary loss involving personal privation, &c. (2) Men grieve on account of spiritual failure. Neither of these explains the occasion of Nehemiah's grief. 2. But public calamity. (1) He had inquired carefully into the state of God's work. Every good man should thus interest himself in God's work. Men shun this conscientious inquiry for various reasons. (a) Some on account of the peace which ignorance brings. (b) Some dread the painful discoveries which careful inquiry may reveal. (c) Others the sacrifices which such discoveries may demand. (2) He had received sorrowful tidings. To a good man tidings of the Church's desolation are ever sad tidings. (a) It betrays unfaithfulness. A holy and loyal Church cannot be a dishonoured one. The shorn strength, as with Samson, betrays unwatchfulness and worldliness. (b) It furnishes occasion of reproach to the enemies of the Church. II. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF HIS GRIEF. 1. It was profound. 2. It was enduring. 3. It was self-denying. Real heart-pain is always ascetic in its bodily aspect. "And fasted." Observe—(1) Fasting is often associated with profound grief in Scripture (2 Sam. i. 12, xii. 16-21; Psa. xxxv. 13; lxxix. 10; Dan. vi. 8; Jonah iii. 5). It may be the natural attendant of such grief, or the outward symbol of its presence. (2) Fasting is recognised and commended in Scripture as a religious exercise (1 Sam. vii. 6; Jer. xxxvi. 9; Matt. vi. 17; Acts x. 30; 1 Cor. vii. 5). III. THE ISSUE OF HIS GRIEF. "And prayed before the God of heaven." Herein consists the difference between godly and selfish sorrow. The one invariably finds relief in prayer, the other ends in blank despair. 1. Grief is sanctified by prayer. It then becomes sacred, and softens the heart like showers on the thirsty soil. Rebellious grief is hardening in its effect. 2. Grief is relieved by prayer. Lessons—1. Profound grief on behalf of others is perfectly consistent with personal enjoyment of the Divine favour. 2. Godly grief usually precedes gracious visitations. 3. Burdened hearts find best relief in prayer. (*W. H. Booth.*) *The Church and social evils*:—The accurate dates given in this book show that the period of Nehemiah's brooding sorrow lasted four months. The emotions excited in Nehemiah by his countrymen's sorrows suggest some plain lessons for Christian people. I. THE DUTY OF SYMPATHETIC CONTEMPLATION OF SURROUNDING SORROWS. The first condition of sympathy is knowledge; the second is attending to what we know. How demoralising is the thought that many people seem to entertain, that the universe, and hideous vices and sodden immorality, and utter heathenism which are found down among the foundations of every civic community are as indispensable to progress as the noise of the wheels of a train is to its advancement, or as the bilge-water in a wooden ship is to keep its seams tight. Every consideration of communion with and conformity to Jesus Christ, of loyalty to His words, of a true sense of brotherhood, and of lower things—such as self-interest—demands that Christian people shall take to their hearts, in a fashion that Churches have never done yet, "the condition of England question," and shall ask, "Lord, what wouldst Thou have me to do?" II. SUCH A REALISATION OF THE DARK FACTS IS INDISPENSABLE TO ALL TRUE WORK FOR ALLEVIATING THEM. There is no way of helping men, but by bearing what they bear. No man will ever lighten a sorrow of which he has not himself felt the pressure. The Cross of Christ is the pattern for our lives. The "saviours of society" have still in lower fashion to be crucified. No work of any real use will be done except by those

whose hearts have bled with the feeling of the miseries which they set themselves to cure. III. SUCH REALISATION OF SURROUNDING SORROWS WILL DRIVE TO COMMUNION WITH GOD. All true service for the world must begin with close communion with God. The "service of man" is best done when it is the service of God. You will never get the army of workers that is needed to grapple with the facts of our present condition unless you touch the very deepest springs of conduct, and these are to be found in communion with God. All other efforts at alleviate work by those who ignore Christian motive is but surface drainage. Get down to the love of God, and the love of men therefrom, and you have got an artesian well which will bubble up unfailingly. We hear a great deal about a "social gospel." Let us remember that the gospel is social second and individual first. If you get the love of God and obedience to Jesus Christ into a man's heart it will be like putting gas into a balloon—it will go up and the man will get out of the slums fast enough; and he will not be a slave to the vices of the world much longer. It is the work of the Church to carry to the world the only thing that will make men deeply and abidingly happy, because it will make them good. IV. SUCH SYMPATHY SHOULD BE THE PARENT OF A NOBLE SELF-SACRIFICING LIFE. Nehemiah, like Moses, "chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God" and to turn his back on the dazzlements of a court, than to "enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season," while his brethren were suffering. The spirit of this example must still be observed. It is no part of my business to prescribe to you details of duty. It is my business to insist on the principles which must regulate these, and of these principles in application to Christian service there is none more stringent than "I will not offer unto my God burnt offerings of that which doth cost me nothing." (A. MacLaren, D.D.) *Personal interest leading to importunate prayer*:—The story begins with an account of the condition of Jerusalem. At this time the city was in a bad plight—walls broken down, gateways burned with fire, streets deserted and grass grown. The heathen passed by in scornful derision and said, "Is this the city which was called beautiful, the joy of the whole earth?" Only six months go by, and what a wonderful change! The walls are built and the gateways are secure. Instead of a few people with bent heads and sad hearts, there is a great army of workmen. What had happened? Had God sent some prophet into their midst like Elijah, stirring the hearts of the people? or some mother in Israel like Deborah of old? or another warrior like Gideon or David? Less than that, a great deal less than that, as we count things, but more than that, much more than that, as we ought to count things. One man had taken the sorrows of Jerusalem in upon his heart—that was all. One man had taken the sad state of things in upon his heart, and began to sorrow about it, and weep over it, and thought so much about it that it quite spoiled his appetite. He could not rest by day or night, and at last he had to take the burden right in before God and cast it upon Him. That was all. Ah, but that is all that is wanted! The world's salvation rests not upon organisations, upon means, upon preachers, or upon arrangements, but upon deep personal interest—personal interest leading to importunate prayer, and importunate prayer leading to earnest effort. That is the only way in which the Church can ever be victorious, and can ever be saved. The saddest thing to-day is that men are Christians without being Christlike, that men do not take the sins and sorrows of the world in upon their hearts. Now what are the most of us doing? 1. Here is one who has heard these evil tidings of to-day, and of a thousand other ills that afflict and disgrace our land. "It is sad," he says, "very sad indeed; I do wish I could help you. But you see I can do so very little. I will double my subscription for a year; but of course I am not in a position to do anything more. You see I am not a prophet, or then I might go forth and preach to the people. I am not a priest, and must not take upon myself a task which belongs to others. I am not a warrior, and cannot head a host of soldiers, or no doubt I should fight. I don't see that I can do anything." And the man is going away quite satisfied that he at any rate has done his duty. This is the average Christian of the nineteenth century. Now there comes some simple man who lays his hand upon this man's shoulder, and says, "There is one thing we can do; we can pray about it." Then there comes the amiable smile which we keep for weak, well-meaning people—"Of course, my friend; of course. We all do that, you know." And the adversity continues as it always does when we pray without personal interest. 2. Then I think of another who has heard of the sad condition of things, and he says, "Well, I really am very sorry, indeed; yes, quite distressed. You know, I think that there must be a great deal of mismanagement up in Jerusalem somewhere; Ezra cannot be looking after

it as he ought to be; I feel he is wrong altogether; I think it is a disgrace to him. I wonder whether he thinks David would ever have allowed a condition of things like this to come about?" Personal interest leading people to abuse the workers—that is not a very uncommon thing. "It is dreadful, this condition of things in London. But do you think that ministers are doing their duty?" It is so easy, is it not, when we are disappointed and sad, to fling stones at other people? It is such a relief to be able to find fault with somebody else. Then I think this simple man comes up and says, "Do not you think we ought to pray for them? They have got hard work, and it is difficult to get at." "Oh, pray! yes, of course; pray all day, of course." That is a horrible spirit, the spirit that prays as a matter of course, and finds fault with everybody else as a matter of course, too. If you cannot do good, do not go shooting arrows into the hearts of others. I marvel that the great God of heaven has such patience with those people who criticise every method, who find fault with everybody's failure, and who never in their lives lifted a finger to help souls to Christ—personal interest that can only find fault and blame other people, and that kneels down and prays as a matter of course, but neither has heart, nor earnestness, nor expectation in its prayer. 3. I see another type of character, the man who says, "Well, really, it is very sad indeed." He is a man not given much to weeping; he has a tender heart; he is sharp, definite, exact, likes to have things down in black and white—your typical Englishman. "Come here," he says; "now let us just have it down. You tell me that the walls have been broken down: how many yards of wall will you want? It is a very serious matter; we shall want so many loads of stone; and our gateways? yes, burned with fire; yes, and so many loads of timber. We are practical men. It is very sad. How many men have you got up there? You have got twenty men. We shall want a thousand men to build up that city. It cannot be done; it is no good, it cannot be done." Do not you know that man? It is personal interest stopping short of importunate prayer. 4. I think I see another, who has heard of the condition of the poor, and thinks this is a dreadful city, perhaps can think of nothing else; perhaps, like Nehemiah, he feels that relish for appetite is gone; his tears are falling, and he is haunted by the thought of the homeless and outcast ones and hungry little children—Nehemiah weeping and fasting. God loves hearts that fret because of the sins and sorrows around us. God set such store by men who sighed and cried because of the abominations that He sent an angel down from heaven to put a mark upon their foreheads. Do you know what the angel was doing? I think he was taking their measure for their crowns. It is a great thing in the midst of this London to keep alive a tender heart, and if Christ does not give a man a tender heart I question whether that man knows much about the Lord Jesus Christ. But look! fretting will not mend the evil. Earnest personal interest, passing into importunate prayer, will. Nehemiah got as far as fretting, and then he went to God. That is a grand saying of John Wesley's: "I dare no more fret than I would curse or swear." It would make the fortune of life insurance offices if we could hit upon that happy receipt. He that only frets will do much, but he who cannot fret will not do anything. I think a Christian ought to be a man who frets—frets, mark you, until he gets to God, and gets hold of God sufficiently, and feels: "Great Father in heaven, Thou canst remedy these ills, and Thou wilt!" (*Mark Guy Pearse.*) *God provides instruments for His work*:—When God has work to be done He provides suitable instruments and places them in favourable situations to promote His plans. Martin Luther, called to withstand the power of the Papacy, found the God-fearing Elector of Saxony ready to afford him the needed protection, and when the persecuted Waldenses cried for help, Oliver Cromwell so threatened the oppressor that deliverance was wrought. (*W. P. Lockhart.*) *Compassion as a motive power*:—Some men work because they are urged to it by others, some because it is the fashion with professors or with those among whom their lot is cast; but the true workers because, "moved with compassion," they cannot help working. (*Ibid.*) **And fasted.**—**Fastings**:—I. OCCASIONS OF FASTING. 1. Afflictions of the Church (Nehemiah.) 2. National judgments (Joel). 3. Domestic bereavement (David). 4. Imminent danger (Esther). 5. Solemn ordinances (Paul and Barnabas set apart). II. THE DESIGN OF FASTING. III. THE DUTY OF FASTING. 1. Forms part of general principle of self-denial, essential to true discipleship (Luke ix. 23). 2. Implied, and therefore enjoined, by words of Christ (Matt. xvii. 21). IV. THE MANNER AND DEGREE OF FASTING. 1. Sometimes total abstinence from food for a

time (Esther iv. 16). 2. More often abstinence from superfluous food (Dan. x. 8).

V. THE SPIRIT IN WHICH TO FAST. (*Homiletic Commentary.*) *Nehemiah's prayer*:—I. TO GIVE NO PLACE TO DESPAIR, HOWEVER DEEP OR PROLONGED OUR GRIEF. No calamity can be so overwhelming as to block our way to the God before whom Abraham and Daniel, and every devout soul, has bowed in fervent petition for help in dire extremity. God does not forsake or forget the lowliest or weakest or most unworthy. The more we need God—for any reason, our misfortune or our fault—the more reason for our seeking Him, and, in some true sense, the more ready is He to be sought and found. II. WE SHOULD NOT OVERLOOK THE SEVERITIES OF GOD'S CHARACTER OR DEALINGS WHEN APPROACHING HIM WITH PETITIONS. Modern ideas of God's fatherhood tend much to put His sterner attributes out of sight. His unquestionable love seems to preclude severities of character or dealings. But our prophet could unite ideas of God as "great and terrible," and also keeping "covenant and mercy for them that love Him and observe His commandments." By true reasoning we should be wary of views of God which leave out His severity, for there is the side of His character which is the necessary counterpart of love for righteousness and obedience. III. THE IMPORTANCE OF IMPORTUNITY. The prayer of our lesson had lasted for days, attended by fasting. Fasting prepares the way for clear thought and tender feeling. Nehemiah did not say, "God fully understands the situation. I need only refer to it." With familiar urgency he pleads for the "attentive ear" and "open eyes," that God may know his case and care for it. Similar travail of soul has been an element of prevailing prayer in all ages. Why it is necessary we do not fully know. It may be that importunity is the only safe mood to which answers to prayer can be wisely accorded. Without it the desired boon or the answer would not be appreciated. IV. THE FITNESS AND DUTY OF THOROUGH CONFESSION. V. MOSES WAS AN HISTORIC CHARACTER, AND OUR RECORD OF HIM IS TRUSTWORTHY. Nehemiah would not talk with God about a mythical person. VI. NO DEPTH OF FALL OR DISTANCE OF WANDERING CAN INVALIDATE GOD'S COVENANT MERCIES. Though "cast out into the uttermost part of the heaven," their return would be certain if they would but return unto God and keep His commandments. VII. PAST MERCIES AND MIGHTY RESCUES ARE A LOGICAL BASIS OF CONFIDENCE, OF FAITH, AND BOLDNESS OF PETITION. What is the probable logic of the appeal, "Now these are Thy servants and Thy people, whom Thou hast redeemed by Thy great power, and by Thy strong hand"? This, in part: God had made an investment of grace in these children of His adoption; from true economy He would not wish it wasted. Again, the love that sought them in the beginning proceeded from its own internal impulses; such love cannot be easily exhausted. Being a motive unto itself, that motive abides unchanging in character and sufficiency. Again, these subjects of His grace were more needy than ever; any help based upon that need could not be lacking on occasion. All this can be said of individual cases as truly as of Israel. The individual backslider has been "redeemed by great power, and by a strong hand." The heavenly Father began the work with a full knowledge of the weakness of the material and the possibilities of failure. Let the tender conscience, the sensitive honour writhing in the memory of past mercies that have been abused, grow calm and hopeful in the assurance that redeeming grace does not depend upon dates or any conditions, but genuine brokenness of heart and absolute return to obedience. VIII. WE CAN GO TO GOD IN PRAYER, WITH ONLY A DESIRE TO FEAR HIM. IX. PRAYER SHOULD BE PRACTICAL IN ITS OUTLOOK. Communion with God may well have our time and attention for its reflex influence; for the nobler soul-life gained thereby; but Nehemiah counted prayer a practical reliance in achieving business results. He needed and coveted the king's help. His example, in this respect, may well be copied in all our undertakings. God is not an uninterested spectator of our toils or plans. We may come to Him for help where our own strength ceases. (*S. L. B. Spear.*) *Nehemiah's prayer*:—I. One quality which makes Nehemiah's prayer effectual was ITS IMPORTUNITY. Two considerations inspired this—1. He was burdened with a single great desire. Our praying often lacks at this point. We ask amiss because we ask for nothing—in particular. It is the time for devotion, or the place; so we approach the mercy-seat, because we ought to, rather than because we have any pressing need—coming, sometimes, in so vague a way that it might not be easy afterwards to tell just what request had been presented. Nehemiah's prayer did not have such lack. He was in sore trouble. 2. Another element which gave importunity to his prayer was a conviction that this relief could come

only from God. "Give us help from trouble, for vain is the help of man." During the civil war a gentleman from New England, travelling in South America, noticed one day a Spaniard reading a paper, and asked him the news. "The news is," replied the other, "that your government is getting beaten. They have taken to praying, and when people have to call on God for help it shows, evidently, they are in a bad way." That is always the reason why men call on God, because they cannot help themselves. This was what made Nehemiah so much in earnest. Dr. Bushnell remarked once in the Hartford ministers' meeting, "Brethren, the thing which I have to struggle against most in my praying is a spirit of submission. I give up too easily. I want to learn how to plead more as Jacob did, with a determination not to let God go without the blessing." He qualified afterwards his words, explaining true submission, but pressed, in his strong way, the importance of persistency. So Nehemiah prayed, not once, but "without ceasing." He wept and mourned, and fasted "certain days," "day and night."

II. A second quality that made Nehemiah's prayer effectual was ITS SPIRIT OR CONFESSION. He seems to have apprehended, very distinctly, the truth which the Bible urges in many ways, that men must come into right relations with God before they can ask any favour of Him. 1. It was particular. He specified some of the points of his guilt. "We have dealt very corruptly against Thee, and have not kept the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the judgments, which Thou commandest Thy servant Moses." 2. Then his confession was individual. He began with an acknowledgment in behalf of the "children of Israel"; but it occurred to him to bring that nearer home, so he added, "Both I and my father's house have sinned." He was conscious of his own shortcomings. With all his zeal, his loyalty so constant and so brave, he saw that at many points he had failed, and for these shortcomings he asked forgiveness. When David has made his confession that is so particular, "Against Thee, Thee only have I sinned and done this evil in Thy sight"; and so individual, "I acknowledge my transgression"; "Have mercy upon me, O God." III. A third quality that made Nehemiah's prayer effectual was ITS FAITH. Trusting God first in his own behalf for pardon, guidance, strength, he could trust Him in behalf of the nation. He prayed, "Remember, I beseech Thee, the word that Thou commandest." He seemed to know the Divine will by some clear intimation. That appears, at first, to diminish the worth of his example. We say, "Yes, certainly; no wonder he had faith; any one could ask for wonderful blessing if the Lord told him to." But how did God put that purpose into the heart of Nehemiah? by a vision, a voice, some supernatural revelation? There is no intimation of either. It may have been simply by the influence of the Holy Spirit, as we all are moved, through conscience, enlightened by the Word of God. IV. A fourth quality in Nehemiah's prayer which made it effectual was ITS SPIRIT OF GOOD WORKS. When he sat down to pray he did not mean to stay in that attitude. He had in his mind a plan to secure permission to go and build the wall. (*Monday Club Sermons.*)

And prayed before the God of heaven.—*Nehemiah's prayer*:—"This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his trouble!" But if this be true of sorrow on one's own account, how much more surely will God hear the petitioner who pleads for others. For selfishness in prayer is no more comely than anywhere else. This man was a layman. He might easily have shifted the responsibility for the present condition of things upon the priests and Levites, on whom God had particularly devolved the religious interests of Jewry. But laymen then were no more absolved from such responsibility than laymen are in these days. Indeed, some of the affairs of Zion belong distinctively to them. Never yet was Zion safely left to her priests alone. There is always something for Nehemiah to do. The prayer of Nehemiah in this instance is given doubtless for our guidance. It is a model of supplication in many ways. Observe—I. ITS REVERENT SPIRIT. It begins with adoration: "O Jehovah, God of heaven, the great and terrible God, that keepeth covenant and mercy for them that love Him!" In our eagerness to present our requests at the throne of the heavenly grace there is always danger of precipitation. It must not be forgotten that we are approaching the Infinite. Therefore a reverent humility becomes us. II. Nehemiah makes CONFESSION OF HIS SINS: "We have sinned against Thee; both I and my father's house have sinned." This cup-bearer knew that sin lay at the bottom of all Israel's troubles. "Both I and my father's house have sinned." Spurgeon says, "He spelled 'we' with an 'I' in it." His own transgressions and shortcomings loomed up before him. III. HIS CONFIDENCE IN

THE DIVINE WORD. This was the prayer of faith. He casts himself upon the promises of God, which are evermore Yea and Amen. He ventures to particularise: he puts God in remembrance of a certain covenant which He had been pleased to make long before with Moses His servant in behalf of His people. The terms of this covenant are gathered from various passages of ancient Scripture (Lev. xxxvi. 27-45; Deut. xxviii. 45, 67, xxx. 1, 10). A glorious word of promise that for a nation of stiff-necked exiles! And the fact that on the part of the people themselves this covenant had been broken does not prevent Nehemiah from putting God in remembrance of it; for he knows that God is of long suffering and tender mercy. Faith at the mercy-seat conquers all. IV. THE PRAYER OF NEHEMIAH WAS SPECIFIC. It is the part of wisdom to enter upon all enterprises with prayer. A Roman general would not march to battle until he had first offered a sacrifice. A right apprehension of this principle would keep us always in the spirit of prayer, because no man can estimate the importance of any act. The least thing we do may have momentous and eternal issues. V. HIS PRAYER WAS FOLLOWED BY THE USE OF APPROPRIATE MEANS. (*D. J. Burrell, D.D.*) *Nehemiah's prayer*:—Nehemiah was evidently a man of high integrity, as appears from the situation which he held, that of the king's cup-bearer. Only a person who was thoroughly trustworthy would be permitted to occupy such a position, inasmuch as the lives of eastern monarchs were in constant danger from the aspiring courtiers; and as one of the most common methods of causing death, in ancient times, was by mixing some poisonous ingredient with the wine that was drunk, it is quite obvious that no one would be intrusted with the above office in the king's household who was likely to be influenced by the bribes of the king's enemies. But, in addition to his strict integrity, he was a man of sincere and fervent piety. Very frequently did he give himself unto prayer, and it is thus we find him engaged in the present chapter. I. THE OCCASION OF THIS PRAYER. It is stated in the first three verses. "The words of Nehemiah, the son of Hachaliah. And it came to pass," &c. It is said of the Redeemer—"In all their affliction He was afflicted"; and His people are like-minded with Him in this respect. They feel for others. II. THE BEING TO WHOM HIS PRAYER IS ADDRESSED. Those among whom he dwelt were accustomed in their distress to invoke the aid of their heathen deities; but, knowing full well how vain it was to seek relief from such lying vanities, he called upon the God of heaven. In applying to Him he felt assured that he was not praying to a god that could not save. There were two aspects of His glorious character in which he more especially regarded Him. 1. As great and terrible. 2. As faithful and gracious. III. THE PENITENTIAL SPIRIT WHICH IT BREATHES. IV. THE POWERFUL PLEA WHICH IS EMPLOYED. "Remember, I beseech Thee, the word that Thou commandest Thy servant Moses, saying, If ye transgress, I will scatter you abroad among the nations; but if ye return unto Me," &c. "Remember," says the Psalmist, "Thy word unto Thy servant, upon which Thou hast caused me to hope." And this was the argument of Nehemiah; he pleads that God would accomplish what He had formerly declared (Deut. iv. 25-29, xxx. 1-6.) V. THE EARNEST IMPORTUNITY WITH WHICH IT IS PRESENTED. "O Lord, I beseech Thee, let now Thine ear be attentive," &c. (*The Author of "The Footsteps of Jesus."*) *Religiousness of spirit*:—A large part of the greatness of this man lies in the intense religiousness of his spirit. It is this which constitutes his history so very valuable a study to Christian people. There is no reason beyond this why I should select Nehemiah as a subject for the study of this Church, and not Pericles, or Julius Cæsar, or Charlemagne, or Cavour, or any other great statesman or hero who has raised the position of his country to a front rank amongst the nations of the earth. But this advantage does lie in the careful examination of the lives of the great heroes of the Bible and of the Church. Through their history we obtain an insight, not only into the greatness of the human soul, its capacity for conceiving great plans, its energy and resources in carrying them out to a successful and glorious completion, but also into the measure in which the human soul can depend upon Divine help, into the worth of communion with God as a solace in anguish, and as a stimulus to enterprise, and further into the certainty with which God responds to such communion, and administers fortitude, patience, self-control, and other virtues which make the soul of man strong, brave, and triumphant over obstacles. (*A. J. Griffiths.*) *Intelligent faith in prayer*:—Nehemiah's prayer reveals the great thoughts of which God was the subject, and by which he nourished his courage and determination in preparing himself for his great task. For we must ever remember that the result

of our praying—the comfort, or support, or stimulus we receive from the act of prayer—depend not only upon the fact that we do pray, but also and especially upon the clearness and vividness of our conceptions of God. We must be sure that we are not praying to ourselves, or into the air, but into the ear of a God who will hear us, and whom we can move by our entreaty. Intelligent faith—not faith without intelligence, mere blind, superstitious faith—nor intelligence without faith, a hard, dead knowledge—but both together, intelligence and faith, constitute the very soul and life of true prayer. (*Ibid.*) *Prayer and quiet waiting*:—Some when they have prayed think that they must at once begin to act, and if doors are not open, force them open for themselves. Running before they are sent, such persons usually find that failure ensues. Nehemiah, on the contrary, stayed where he was, pursuing his ordinary course in life, and still waiting on the Lord. (*W. P. Lockhart.*) *Constancy in prayer*:—A woman who resided on the seashore in the Isle of Wight thought that she heard, during a terrible storm, a cry for help. She listened and the cry was repeated. She could not be mistaken; between the pauses of the storm there it was, the piercing cry of endangered mariners. She dressed hastily, she roused up the beachmen; the lifeboat was launched, and with the blessing of God the storm-beaten crew were rescued. Again and again must we plead in Christ's name, at the mercy-seat, if we would come off more than conquerors. One brief cry is not sufficient. (*J. M. Randall.*) *Patience required in waiting upon God*:—An eminent minister of Christ was laid aside from his work by severe and prolonged sickness. Sometimes he was almost ready to repine and to faint under his chastisement. One morning after unusual suffering he fell into a sweet sleep, and as he slept, he thought he saw a luminous pillar of graceful proportions rise before him. It was so beautiful that it attracted his eye and fixed his attention. Then he thought he saw letters of gold coming out upon the pillar; at first they were very indistinct, and not a little study was required to decipher them. At last the letters shone out in perfect form and order, and he read "Patience" inscribed upon the column. The effort at attention and the joy of discovery awoke him, and he said, "Patience; yes, Lord, I will be patient, and through grace I will yield myself to Thy disposal." God sometimes exercises the faith of His people by long delay, but patient waiting will be rewarded. (*Ibid.*) *Nehemiah or the characteristics of prayer*:—Nehemiah's spirit of prayer particularly appears—I. IN HIS SYMPATHY AND GRIEF FOR HIS COUNTRY. II. IN HIS DESIRE TO PROMOTE HIS COUNTRY'S GOOD. III. IN CARRYING OUT HIS OBJECT THOUGH RESET WITH GREAT DIFFICULTIES. IV. IN REVIEWING HIS WORKS. (*John Patteson, M.A.*) *A model prayer*:—For matter, this prayer is replete with instruction. Let us observe—I. HOW NEHEMIAH ADDRESSES HIMSELF TO GOD. He calls upon "Jehovah, the God of heaven," infinite, supreme, and everlasting. "Great" in power and dominion, and "terrible" in justice and holiness. And withal as a God who keepeth covenant and mercy. As Bishop Reynolds remarks, "God in creation is God around us; God in providence is God above us; God in the law is God against us; but God in Christ is God for us, God with us, God in us, our all-sufficient portion for ever." II. HOW HUMBLY NEHEMIAH CONFESSES HIS OWN SINS AND THE SINS OF HIS COUNTRY. III. HOW HE PLEADS WITH GOD, WHAT WEIGHTY ARGUMENTS HE EMPLOYS! He lays hold upon God's word. This is a firm rock in a troubled sea (*Deut. xxx. 1-5*). Let us come to God with a promise, and reverently remind Him of His own engagement: "Lord, do as Thou hast said; remember the word unto Thy servant, upon which Thou hast caused me to hope." We shall then realise the consolation, happily expressed by a pious negro who said, when he was asked concerning the abiding peace which he enjoyed, "Massa, me fall flat upon the promise, and me pray straight up." IV. OBSERVE THE PARTICULAR REQUEST WHICH HE MAKES. "Prosper, I pray Thee, Thy servant this day, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man." Its matter is very full: its manner very suggestive. 1. How reverent was Nehemiah before God! How just were his views of the Divine majesty! Shall angels thus humbly prostrate themselves before God? Oh, with what "reverence and godly fear" should sinners come to His footstool. 2. How earnest was his prayer: "I beseech Thee," "hear the prayer of Thy servant which I pray before Thee." Many say their prayers, but do they pray in prayer? Prayer is the expression of want: it is not eloquence, but earnestness; not fine words, but deep feeling. To be effectual it must be fervent. Prayer is incense: but if the fragrance is to ascend before the mercy-seat, it must be kindled by holy fire from the altar. Prayer is an arrow, but if it is to travel far and pierce deep, the bow must be bent, and the string must be tense, else our

prayer shall fall at our feet. "I will not let Thee go except Thou bless me." 3. How constant too was Nehemiah! "Day and night" did he plead. "We ought always to pray, and not to faint." 4. How believing was his supplication! Faith is an important element in prayer; it honours God, it pleads the Saviour's merits, it rests upon the sure promise. Faith laughs at impossibilities, and says it shall be done. 5. How fervent was the charity which dictated this prayer! Nehemiah was a patriot in the best sense of the word. He earnestly desired the welfare of Jerusalem. There was not a particle of selfishness in his prayer. May we not learn to be charitable and large-hearted in our prayers—to intercede for others, our country, and the Church of God, and in this respect to copy the example of Nehemiah? (*J. M. Randall.*)

The great and terrible God, that keepeth covenant and mercy for them that love Him.—*The majesty and mercy of God*:—From this sublime invocation we gather—

I. THAT THERE IS PERFECT HARMONY IN THE ATTRIBUTES OF THE DIVINE NATURE.

II. THAT THE DIVINE ATTRIBUTES ARE EQUALLY ENLISTED IN THE WORK OF HUMAN SALVATION.

III. THAT THE HARMONY OF THE DIVINE NATURE IS THE ONLY TRUE BASIS

OF MORAL GOODNESS. 1. The contemplation of Divine compassion alone tends to

antinomianism. 2. The contemplation of the Divine holiness alone tends to

legalism. Hence spring meritorious works, penances, and self-inflicted flagellations

and other useless tortures. IV. THAT THE HARMONY OF THE DIVINE NATURE FURNISHES

THE ONLY TRUE IDEAL OF MORAL GOODNESS. V. THAT NOTWITHSTANDING THE HARMONY

OF THE DIVINE NATURE, MEN COME INTO CONTACT WITH DIFFERENT ASPECTS OF THAT

NATURE ACCORDING TO THEIR MORAL CONDITION. (*Homiletic Commentary.*) *False*

views of sin and prevailing immorality:—It is to be feared that in our day sin is

often made light of, and false views of sin lie at the root of much of the evil that

we see around us, both in the Church and in the world. Such views are largely

caused by an imperfect apprehension of the righteousness of God, and this in its

turn usually proceeds from a refusal to bow to the authority of His Word. Thus

truths about His judgments are set aside, statements concerning His wrath are

explained away, and His mercy is magnified at the expense of His justice. (*W. P.*

Lockhart.) **And confess the sins of the children of Israel.**—*Sins of a com-*

munity confessed:—Confession of sin is essential to success in prayer. "If I regard

iniquity in my heart the Lord will not hear me." Nehemiah feels that God has

reason to be displeased with His people. They have been guilty of sins of omission

(have not kept) and of commission (transgression). Their privileges have aggra-

vated their guilt: they have sinned against light; the commandments, statutes,

and judgments given by Moses bear witness against them. And Nehemiah is

conscious that he shares their guilt. He has sinned himself; and he has sinned in

their sins. For all of us have a part in the sins of the community. Our influence

helps to mould and shape its life. It is a principle in Chinese law to hold the

relatives of a criminal in some degree responsible for his crime, so that the whole

family is concerned in the conduct of its individual members. That principle is

founded on a true conception which applies in both directions. The community

has a responsibility for its members, each of whom shares a like responsibility for

the life of the community itself. So we need to say "our trespasses," "our debts,"

in our daily prayer. (*S. S. Times.*) *Forgotten sins remembered*:—I. WE ARE ALL

CHARGEABLE WITH FAULTS. II. WE ARE LIABLE TO FORGET OUR FAULTS. Through—

1. Ignorance of the true nature of sin. 2. Self-love. 3. Hurry of business.

4. Elevation in worldly circumstances. III. VARIOUS CIRCUMSTANCES ARE ADAPTED

TO REMIND US OF OUR FAULTS. IV. WHEN WE ARE REMINDED OF OUR FAULTS WE

SHOULD BE READY TO CONFESS THEM. V. CONFESSION OF FAULTS SHOULD ALWAYS BE

ATTENDED WITH REAL AMENDMENT. (*J. Kidd.*)

Ver. 9-11. **But if ye turn to Me, and keep My commandments.**—*The spiritual favourite at the throne of grace*:—"If you turn unto Me, and keep My commandments." There is no promise of mercy but to those that turn. The Scripture is peremptory in denial of mercy to such as go on in their sins. Yet how many are there that bless themselves that it shall go well with them, though they cast off all God's yokes. "If ye turn." The holy man Nehemiah puts God in mind of His promise, and his argument is from the like, and indeed from the less to the greater. Because God would rather of both perform His promises than His threatenings, because mercy is His own proper work. "These are Thy servants." Though sinful servants, yet they are Thy servants. "These are Thy people." Thou hast no other people in the world but these, and "Thou art their God." He pleads from

former favours. "Thou hast redeemed them by Thy great power and strong hand." It is a good argument to plead with God for former favours: because "there is no shadow of change in Him" (James i. 17); He is always like Himself; He is never drawn dry. And it is a great honour to go to Him for new favours upon former, because He hath an infinite supply. We may draw so much from men as they have not afterwards to make good, but we cannot honour God more than to go to Him with a large faith, to fetch large favours from Him. The more He gives, the more He can give, and the more He is willing to give. We may much more take this argument in our mouths, and press the majesty of God. "Thou hast redeemed us," not out of Egypt or Babylon, the land of the north, but "with the blood of Thy Son," from hell and damnation; and therefore Thou canst redeem us from this petty misery, from these enemies. We may allege that grand favour to all other petty redemptions, whatsoever they are. "Let Thine ear be attentive to the prayer of Thy servants." It is a prayer; and Thou art "a God hearing prayer." "They be Thy servants, and Thou regardest Thy servants." Here are but a few petitions in this large request: "remember," "be attentive," and "give me favour." It is an excellent skill and art in prayer to have strong arguments. Then the suit comes off easily, as in Psalm xc. Therefore, it is an excellent thing to study the Scriptures, and to study all the arguments whereby holy men have prevailed with God in Scripture, and to see in what case those arguments were used. It is a pitiful thing now for Christians under the glorious light of the gospel to come to God only with bare, naked petitions and have not reasons to press God out of His own Word. They cannot bind God with His own promise, nor with arguments that He hath been bound with before. "They desire to fear Thy name." Empty relations have no comforts in them: to profess one's self a servant, and not to make it good that he is a servant. We must make good the relation we stand in to God, before we can claim interest in the favour of God by our relation. He goes to make it good that he was the servant of God, not from any outward thing, but from his inward disposition, "the fear of God," which I will not now stand to speak largely of. God requires the heart; and religion is most in managing and turning the affections, for they are the wind that carries the soul to every duty. The devil hath brain enough, he knows enough, more than any of us all. But then he hates God. He hath no love to God, nor no fear of God, but only a slavish fear. He hath not this reverential fear, childlike fear. Therefore let us make it good that we are the servants of God, especially by our affections, and chiefly by this of fear, which is put for all the worship of God. How doth he make it good that he feared the name of God? He makes it good from this, that he had had good desires. "We desire to fear Thy name." First of all, out of this, that this desire to fear the name of God is brought as an argument to prevail in prayer, we may observe that—1. Those that will prevail with God in prayer must look to the bent of their souls for the time to come, and for the present. "Regard Thy servants that desire to fear Thy name." For to come to God without such a frame of soul as this, to desire to please God in all things for the present, and for the time to come, it is to come as God's enemy; and will God regard His enemies? 2. Religion especially is in holy desires. The greatest part of Christianity is to desire to be a sound Christian with all the heart. Why are desires such trials of the truth of grace? Because they are the immediate issues of the soul. Desires and thoughts, and such like, they are produced immediately from the soul, without any help of the body, or without any outward manifestation. They show the temper and frame of the soul. Thereupon God judgeth a man by his desires. But how is the truth of these desires known? I will name a few signs. 1. If they be constant desires and not flashes; for then they come from a new nature. Nature is strong and firm. Art is for a turn to serve a turn. When men personate a thing they do it not long. Creatures that are forced to do so and so they return to their own nature quickly; but when a man doth a thing naturally, he doth it constantly. So, constant desires argue a sanctified frame of soul and a new creature. They argue that the image of God is stamped upon the soul. 2. And likewise, if these desires be hearty, strong desires, and not only strong, but growing desires—desire upon desire, desire fed with desire still, never satisfied till they be satisfied. Strong and growing desires argue the truth of desires; as indeed a child of God hath never grace enough, never faith enough, never love enough, or comfort enough, till he come to heaven. They are growing desires more and more. 3. Again, true desires they are not only of the favour of God, but of graces for the altering of our nature; as Nehemiah here, he desires not the favour of God so much as he desires to fear

God's name. Now when desire is of graces, it is a holy desire. You have not the worst men but would desire, with Balaam, "to die the death of the righteous," &c. (Num. xxiii. 10), that they might enjoy the portion of God's people. But to desire grace, that is opposite to corrupt nature as fire and water, this is an argument of a holy principle of grace in us, whence this desire springs, when we desire that that is a counter poison to corrupt nature that hath an antipathy to corruption.

4. True desire is carried to grace as well as glory, and the desire of heaven itself. A true spirit that is touched with grace, with the Spirit of God, it desireth not heaven itself so much for the glory, and peace, and abundance of all contentments, as it desires it that it is a place where it shall be freed from sin, and where the heart shall be enlarged to love God, to serve God, and to cleave to God for ever, and as it is a condition wherein he shall have the image and resemblance of Jesus Christ perfectly upon his soul.

5. True desires are likewise to the means of salvation, and to the means of salvation as they convey grace, as sincere milk; as you have it, 1 Pet. ii. 2, "As new-born babes, desire the sincere milk of the word." Where a man hath holy desires of any grace, and hath them in truth, he will desire those means whereby those graces may most effectually be wrought in his heart.

Use: The comfortable observation hence is this, that weak Christians that find a debility, and faintness, and feebleness in their performances, hence they may comfort themselves by their desire to fear God, and to worship God, and to serve Him, if their desires be true. The reason why God accepts them is partly because they spring from His own Spirit. These desires they are the breathings of the Spirit. And because they are pointed to heavenward, to show that a man is turned; for it is put here instead of turning, "Turn ye to Me, saith the Lord" (ver. 9); and he answereth here instead of turning, "My desire is to fear Thy name." "And prosper, I pray Thee, Thy servant this day." Now he comes to his petition, "Prosper I pray Thee, Thy servant this day." He doth not capitulate with God for particular matters much—for he knew he had to deal with an all-wise God—but he commends his petition in general. He comes again with his relation of "servant," to teach us always when we come to God to look in what relation we stand to Him, whether we be true servants or no. What work we do for Him, in what reference we do what we do; whether we do it to please Him as servants or no. In all our services we should look to God; for our aim in our works shows what they are, whether they come from servants or no. As the stamp upon a token makes it, if there be a good stamp on it; it is not the matter that makes it current. A stamp on silver makes it current as well as gold, though the metal of gold be better. So when things are done, because God commands them, to please God, as a service to Him, this makes it good that we are servants indeed, that the relation is good. When we go about the service of the Church or country, or place we live in, to think I do God service here, and do it as a service to God, who will be honoured and served in our service to others, herein I am a good servant. "Prosper Thy servant this day." What is included in this word "prosper"? It includes not only success, which is the main upshot of all, but all that tends to good success. In that he saith "Prosper Thy servant," it includes these things. First of all, that in ourselves there is neither direction, nor wisdom, nor ability enough for success. We have not power in ourselves to bring things to a comfortable issue. 2. And then again, to attribute to God all, both wisdom and strength, and goodness, and all. Here is a giving to God the glory of all, when he saith, "Prosper Thy servant this day." 3. Then in the third place, here is a dependence upon God, not only acknowledging these things to be in God, but it implies a dependence upon God for these: "Prosper me, Lord." I cannot prosper myself. 4. Again, in the fourth place, here is a recommendation of all by prayer; a recommendation of his inward dependence upon God for all. Now, Lord, "prosper Thy servant." So that when we come to God for any prosperity and good success, let us remember that we bring self-denial, and an acknowledgment of all excellency to be in God, to guide, and direct, and assist, and bless us. Who can see all circumstances that stand about a business? Who can see all circumstances of time, and place, and persons, that are hindrances or furtherances? It must be an infinite wisdom that must foresee them; man cannot see them. So that unless God in a particular business give success, who is infinitely wise and powerful to remove all hindrances, there will be no success. As it is in the frame of the body, it stands upon many joints; and if any be out of tune, the whole body is sick. And as it is in a clock, all the wheels must be kept clean and in order, so it is in the frame of a business. There must all the wheels be set a-going; if one be hindered, there is a stop in all. It is so with us in the

affairs of this world. When we deal with kings and states, if all the wheels be not kept as they should, there will be no success or prosperity. Nehemiah knew this well enough, "Prosper Thou, therefore." He meant not to be idle when he said this, "Prosper Thou," for he after joined his own diligence and waited. Use: It should teach us to make this use of it, when we deal in any matter, to go to God to prosper it, and give success and direction and assistance and a blessed issue. Let us learn by this a direction to piety and holy walking with God; in all things to pray to God for a blessing. And to that purpose we must be in such a condition of spirit as we may desire God to prosper us; that is, we must not be under the guilt of sin when we come to God to prosper us. And we must be humble. God will not prosper a business till we be humble. Do we think that God will give strength to an ill business? This is to make Him a factor for mischief, for the devil's work. Then come with a purpose to refer all to His service. Lord, if Thou wilt bless me in this business, the strength and encouragement I have by it, I will refer it to Thy further service. "Prosper now Thy servant." What is the reason that God blasts and brings to nothing many excellent endeavours and projects? Men set upon the business of God, and of their callings, in confidence of their wit and pride of their own parts. Men come as gods to a business as if they had no dependence upon Him for wisdom, or direction, or strength. They carry things in a carnal manner, in a human manner, with human spirits. Therefore they never find either success, or not good success. Now when we deal with things in a holy manner, we may, without tempting God, trust Him. "And grant him mercy in the sight of this man." He comes more particularly to this request, "Grant me mercy in the sight of this man." We see that, a king is a great organ or instrument to convey good things from God, the King of kings to men. Therefore he prays that God would give him favour in the sight of the king. For a king is the first wheel that moves all other wheels, and as it were the sun of the commonwealth, or the first mover that moves all inferior orbs. Therefore in heavenly wisdom he desires God to give him favour with him; for if he had that, the king could turn all the inferior orbs to his pleasure. And when God means to do good to a Church or state, He raiseth up "nursing fathers and nursing mothers" (Isa. xlix. 23). A wise and holy prayer! He begins at the head; He goes to the spring of all good. Therefore the observation hence is this, that when we have anything to do with great men, with kings, &c., however, begin with the King of kings, and do all in heaven before we do it in earth; for heaven makes the laws that earth is governed by. Let earth conclude what it will, there will be conclusions in heaven that will overthrow all their conclusions. Therefore in our prayers we should begin with God. And when we have gotten what we would in heaven, it is easy to get in earth. You see what great good a good man may do in a state. "The innocent man delivers the land," as it is in Job xxii. 30. (*R. Sibbes.*) *The prayer of Nehemiah.*—I. GOD HAS HIS SERVANTS IN ALL CONDITIONS AND OCCUPATIONS OF LIFE. We behold Zenas the lawyer, Erastus the chamberlain, Paul the tentmaker, Luke the physician, Zaccheus the publican, Peter the fisherman, Joseph the carpenter, Amos the herdsman, Daniel the minister of state, Nehemiah the cup-bearer—all standing in the same relation, swayed by the same influence. Let it teach us two things. 1. Not to condemn bodies and professions of men indiscriminately. 2. Let us not make our business an excuse for ungodliness. II. IF WE HAVE ACCESS TO SUPERIORS, WE SHOULD USE IT FOR GOOD. Let us remember that we are answerable for all our talents, and one of them is—the influence which in various degrees we have over others. How are we using it? III. THE BEST WAY TO SUCCEED IN ANY ENTERPRISE WITH MEN IS TO COMMEND THE MATTER TO GOD. Our intercourse with God will best prepare us for our dealings with men. It will repress every unhallowed purpose; it will give decision and vigour to good resolutions: it will inspire rectitude and dignity in action; it will enable us to bear disappointment or success. When we have thus commended a concern to God, the mind is set at liberty, and feels satisfaction and composure. When we have thus addressed ourselves to God, difficulties vanish. We know that if the affair be injurious, He can easily hinder it; and if it be good for us, He can as easily promote it. "His kingdom ruleth over all." Every event is under His direction, and every character under His control. Solomon has told us, and not without reason, that "the king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water: He turneth it whithersoever He will." Eastern monarchs were absolute: they consulted nothing but their own pleasure: yet God had them more under His command than the husbandman has a direction of the water in a meadow. There is a twofold dominion which God exercises over the mind of man. The one is by

the agency of His grace. Thus He can enlighten the most ignorant understanding, and subdue the most rebellious will. We see this exemplified in the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, on his way to Damascus. But there is another empire which He exercises over mankind—it is by the agency of His providence. History is full of this. He can give another heart, when He does not give a new one. Where He does not convert He can check. Jacob was convinced of the dominion and influence of God over the affairs, and even the dispositions, of men. IV. HOW NEHEMIAH SPEAKS OF THE GOVERNOR OF ONE HUNDRED AND TWENTY-SEVEN PROVINCES. "This man." Let us not however suppose that Nehemiah "despised dominion," or "spoke evil of dignities." But Nehemiah was now before the God of heaven and earth; and what is the greatest monarch in the world compared with Him? Less than nothing and vanity. This is the way to reduce worldly impressions; the world strikes and conquers you when it meets you absent from God. Bring it into His presence—view it there—and what is it? What are the smiles of men to the favour of God? V. OBSERVE HOW THIS GOOD MAN CHARACTERISES HIMSELF AND HIS BRETHREN. "Thy servants who desire to fear Thy name." Modest, diffident language best becomes us, especially before God. There are many who must derive their satisfaction from their desires, rather than anything else. They cannot say they do fear Him, or love Him, or depend upon Him—but they "desire" to do it. These desires are proofs of something good and pledges of something better. They are evidences of grace and forerunners of glory. Desires are the pulse of the soul, by which we may judge of our spiritual life and health. In some respects they are more decisive than actions. Actions may be counterfeited, desires cannot; we may be forced to act, but not to will. All the desires of the Christian, in proportion to their degree, will necessarily excite him to strive, to wrestle, to fight, and to use all the means which lead to the end he has in view. Desires are nothing without endeavours, Balaam, &c. (*William Jay*.) Now these are Thy servants, and Thy people, whom Thou hast redeemed by Thy great power.—*God's doings in grace are as the links of a chain*:—The whole of God's doings in grace are as the links of a chain, not lying apart, but united together, and the first through an unbroken series leading to the last. Hence Nehemiah finds a plea in what the Lord has done for His people, that He will still show them mercy. (*W. Ritchie*.) *Pleading former favours*:—Plutarch tells us that the Rhodians appealed to the Romans for help, and one suggested that they should plead the good turns they had done for Rome. This was a plea difficult to make strong enough, very liable to be disputed, and not at all likely to influence so great a people as the Romans, who would not readily consider themselves to be debtors to so puny a state as that of Rhodes. The Rhodians were, however, wiser than their counsellor, and took up another line of argument, which was abundantly successful. They pleaded the favours which, in former times the Romans had bestowed upon them, and urged these as a reason why a great nation should not cast off a needy people for whom they had already done so much. Nehemiah here pleads God's former favours to His people. (*Signal*.) **For I was the king's cup-bearer.**—*The king's cup-bearers*:—This is a suggestive text. There is another King, and He, too, speaks of a cup which is His, and a cup which we may bear, not for Him, but from Him to others. "Whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of water only," &c. We are cup-bearers of our King, Jesus. I. CUP-BEARERS OF THE GREAT KING SHOULD REMEMBER WHAT THE CUP CONTAINS. The cup of blessing is communion with Christ. By His Cross He has reconciled the world to God, and now He invites the race to taste and see that the Lord is good. In the East there are various costly drinks. Some were supposed to have a healing, and others a life-preserving, element in them. The world's salvation is in that cup which Christ has filled for the life of the world. II. CUP-BEARERS OF THE KING SHOULD REMEMBER THE LOYAL MANDATE THEY HAVE TO OBEY. "Come" is the first word of Christianity. Come to Christ for life, for ourselves. Its next word is "Go." "Go ye into all the world," &c. If we do not believe in the healing water we shall not give it. Have you ever noticed how heartily people recommend their doctors? During the memorable illness of the Prince of Wales hundreds of people from all parts of the empire forwarded their nostrums for the disease; they felt quite sure that if these special remedies were tried the Prince would recover. Selfishness probably lay at the bottom of some of those recommendations, but in the main these people believed in their prescriptions; they had tried them or seen them tried, and had rejoiced in their success. We must believe, then, before we can give. And then we shall each do it in our own way. 1. Quietly, perhaps, as falls the dew, our

influence will rest on others' hearts. 2. Suggestively, perhaps, by a spirit of reverence and a devout habit of daily walk, which tells of a life hid with Christ in God. 3. Communicatively, perhaps, as when we gather our classes in Sunday school, &c. 4. Distributively, perhaps, by means of the printed page. Every cup that God has placed in our hands—whether filled with wealth or knowledge—we ought to raise to the lips of others. III. CUP-BEARERS OF THE KING SHOULD REMEMBER THE WORK OF THE ENEMIES OF GOD. We are not the only cup-bearers in the world. Other visitants are here with other cups, which seem as if they ought to hold sweet and satisfying waters: pleasure, beauty, ambition, &c. Some of these cups are filled with deadliest poison. The cup of knowledge—degrading literature, the cup of companionship, the cup of pleasure, are often so many cups of poison presented to the young. IV. CUP-BEARERS OF THE KING SHOULD REMEMBER THAT IT IS A POST OF HONOUR. Christians are the representatives of Christ. They are doing what Christ would do if He were here. V. CUP-BEARERS OF THE KING ANTICIPATE THE DAY OF DIVINE REWARD. Let us notice—1. That Christ's rewards are ours now. 2. That the cup-bearer will be rewarded in the redeemed history of those to whom he has borne the living water, and who will welcome him to glory. 3. That the cup-bearer will be welcomed and rewarded also by the King of kings Himself. (*W. M. Statham.*) *The king's cup-bearer*:—I. Now, observe, THIS MUST BE BY DIVINE APPOINTMENT. I presume that this absolute monarch would not have allowed any one to have been cup-bearer to him but the man he approved of; nay, he would give the appointment himself, and insist that it should be so. No man has a right to assume the Christian ministry but by royal appointment. There are thousands of impostors in these days that the King of kings and Lord of lords never appointed to the work. Now this office is one in which both Prince and people are deeply interested. I presume that Nehemiah—and I may turn to him for illustrations as I go on—was concerned, in his official capacity, to present the cup, not only to the prince, but to the people who were guests with the prince. I pass on, just to notice the official responsibility involved in this. A cup-bearer. A very responsible position this. And a cup-bearer must at his peril look well to all that is contained in the cup, as well as to his promptitude in presenting it. So solemn is the responsibility that according to the view we have just taken of the Lord's servants, if there be any foul and poisonous ingredient found in the cup, the blood of the injured person will be required at his hand. Then, if we observe whence this cup-bearer alluded to in the text was taken, I think we shall find a striking correspondence. He was taken from among the captives, by an act of sovereign grace. What say you to this humbling view of the subject? Are you really aware that you were captives, slaves and bondsmen, in the lowest degradation to sin and Satan, when God took possession of you? Now do not talk about your pedigree any more. II. Now let us look at THE UNDERSTANDING THE CUP-BEARER OUGHT TO HAVE OF WHAT THE CUP CONTAINS. This is a matter of vast importance. I shall guess after this manner—that the cup-bearer, in the presence of a Persian monarch, would be required to know that the cup contained approved old wine, of the purest and best character. “But how was he to know that?” Why, by tasting it for himself. “Well, but what would be the effect?” Why, there would be a very cheering effect. All must come from the King's own stores. We must get it from above—from the fulness treasured up in the covenant. Bring me the cup that is full of the atoning blood, pressed from the merits of Christ, acceptable before God, and that the eternal cup-bearer Himself has entered into the King's presence to present before God. III. Now let us look at this cup-bearer, as TAUGHT HOW TO ENTER THE PRESENCE OF THE MONARCH; because this is a very essential part of the business. He must be a living man. It will not do to bring an automaton, much less a putrid corpse; he must be a living man, with the life of God in the soul, whether he be intended for a public pastor or a more private labourer. Then as regards the cleanliness. Oh, how sad that there should be persons pretending to be ministers of Jesus Christ whose lives are impure! And oh, the importance of a steady hand! If the cup be full, and the cup-bearer have a trembling, tottering hand, he is likely to create alarm, at least, as he goes round, and to spill over some of the precious liquor he has to dispense. “What do you mean by this steady hand?” I mean the steadfast confidence of faith. A word more respecting the cup-bearer's qualifications. He must not go to the king vauntingly, “Please, your majesty, see what choice wine I have brought for you”—that would not do at all. Now you know that this must be repeated as often as called for. I presume that Nehemiah was

called for, when he was to bring his majesty the cup. Be sure you are always ready, that whenever you are called for, you may go in, whenever Jehovah-Jesus, the King of kings, summons you. Now this will make the cup-bearer very familiar with his majesty, as well as with his guests. If a man were only admitted once to a large feast, like a hired waiter, and never had anything to say to the company before or after, he could not be supposed to be very familiar with them; but if he is appointed day by day to hand round the same old wine to the same guests, under the same orders, and in the same position, as a graceful cup-bearer, will not he become very familiar? A word more. When the soul has become so familiar with the monarch, has been admitted so frequently into the banqueting-house, and has partaken so freely of this good old wine, his must be an exalted station. (*J. Irons.*) *The king's cup-bearer*.—It is remarkable that Nchemiah performed the great work of his life without receiving any supernatural communication from heaven. Other eminent servants of God, in their labour for the Church of Israel, enjoyed special direction and encouragement from above. Moses heard the voice of God at the bush, and saw His wonders at the Red Sea. Elijah met the Lord in Horeb, and received words of comfort at the brook Cherith. Daniel beheld visions of God in Babylon, and enjoyed the visit of an angel in the hour of his earnest prayer. We have not now inspired prophets among us, to direct us in the trying situations of life. We are appointed to learn duty from studying the Word of God, and considering the operation of His hands. In this dependence on the ordinary means of grace for counsel and help in our way of life, we have Nehemiah for an example of fidelity, of patience, and of wisdom. I. HIS SERVICE. He was "the king's cup-bearer." The monarch whom Nehemiah served in this capacity is generally supposed to have been Artaxerxes Longimanus. Artaxerxes reigned on the throne of Persia forty-one years, from 466-425 B.C. This king had conceded important favours to the Jewish people; and now in the twentieth year of his reign, Nehemiah filled the high office of the king's cup-bearer. It was a situation this of distinguished honour and emolument in the Persian court. It belonged to the person holding it, not only to bear the royal cup to the sovereign on high festivals, but also to introduce all persons who had business to transact into the king's presence. It is a remarkable circumstance that one of the captive people of Judah should be invested with this high dignity in the kingdom of their conquerors. We may regard it as an illustration of God's faithfulness to His promise, and as a testimony to the power of religion in commending its possessors to confidence. Then, while the faithful providence of God is here illustrated, the religion of these Israelites is also signally attested. Their piety must have been instrumental in elevating them to situations of such responsibility and trust. And what is this but an exemplification of the Scripture, "Godliness is profitable for all things, having a promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come." True religion fits its possessors for better performing all the duties of social life; and men find it valuable in the integrity it inspires. Thus was Nehemiah elevated to high office in the Persian court; yet to a man of his lofty principle it was a place of peculiar trial. He was called to serve his royal master in that which is perilous to the character of princes, and to the comfort of all about them. His office was to bring wine before him, and to give it to the king. And who can tell what power for good the pious Israelite thus exerted over the prince whom he served, as well as in the court where he moved as a witness for God. II. HIS SADNESS. It is a mistake to suppose there is any religion in morose or sombre looks. It is true, religion interdicts the frivolous mirth which the world calls pleasure, and it inspires its possessors with a prevailing seriousness of mind. But so far from forbidding any true enjoyment, piety towards God opens the wellspring of all satisfying felicity. Is not this manifest from the blessings it imparts to the soul? While Nehemiah, therefore, here makes mention of his sorrow of spirit, he is careful to note that he had not "been beforetime sad in the king's presence." He owed it in courtesy to his sovereign, and he owed it also in justice to his religion, to stand in his place with a cheerful countenance. But sorrows at time press on the spirit which cannot be concealed; and seasons, too, occur when they should be known to others. Still there was peril in that look of anguish, for no token of grief was allowed in the royal presence. Several reasons may be assigned for this exclusion of all signs of mourning from the royal presence. It is flattering to the vanity of kings to have all looking and acting before them as if the light of their countenance chased away sorrow; and it may therefore be accounted an affront to contravene this fiction of their power. Hence the proverb,

"In the light of the king's countenance is life, and his favour is as a cloud of the latter rain." Then, again, princes and nobles of earth are loath to look on any memento of the evanescence of their grandeur. They are fain to shut out of view sights of sorrow that might send an arrow to their conscience, or constrain them to think of their dying hour. And surely this is the bitterest drop in the cup of the exile and the bondman, to demand from him looks of cheerfulness while his very heart is wrung with anguish. How different it is with our Saviour King! His heart is the seat of compassion for the afflicted, the wellspring of sympathy for the sorrowful in their distress. III. HIS REASONS FOR SORROW. Men are sometimes sad when they cannot give an adequate reason for their sorrow. They perhaps brood over imaginary woes, and sink into melancholy which has no assignable cause; or they fall into distress, the reason of which they dare not allow even to their own hearts. It may be disappointed pride, or vexation at the success of others, that occasions their griefs, and such reasons will not bear to be expressed as the cause of a sorrowful countenance. But the sadness of Nehemiah was a look of sublime sorrow, whose expression was an honour to his heart. Yet we mark his self-possession and wisdom in that trying moment. There is with him no confusion—no undue excitement; he quails not, nor speaks with stammering tongue. He addresses the king with earnest deference, and yet with manly dignity. Having thus conciliated the king's regard, Nehemiah frames his plea for sorrow with consummate skill and delicacy. "Why should not my countenance be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' sepulchres, lieth waste, and the gates thereof are consumed with fire?" This is powerful and effective pleading. He speaks not of Jerusalem as the city of the worship of his God, though this view of it rendered it dearest to his heart, and awakened his deepest sorrow over its desolation. The mention of it, however, in this relation, would either not have affected a heathen prince at all, or it might have aroused his anger to find the temple of God so praised above the altars of his own idols. Neither does Nehemiah speak of Jerusalem as the ancient metropolis of a great nation, the capital of a long line of illustrious kings, though the memory of its past greatness made his bosom swell with grief at its overthrow, and inspired his soul with unquenchable desire for its restoration. Any reference, however, to the history of the fame and power of the city of God might have inflamed the jealousy of the Persian king, and fixed his resolution to leave it in its present ruin. But the human heart naturally softens into tenderness at the graves of the dead, and here the appeal is made to the place of the sepulchres of the departed ancestors of the exile. In these touching and powerful words of Nehemiah we remark the almighty aid God gives His servants in pleading for, and bearing witness to, His cause. The man of God here stood up before the Persian monarch a solitary witness for Divine truth; and the welfare of Judah for ages to come seemed to depend on the manner he would testify for the Lord. But the great Counsellor gives him a mouth and wisdom in this trying hour, that honour his fidelity, and crown his petition with success. It has been so with all faithful witnesses for God in every age. When Luther, at the Diet of Worms, was arraigned before the Papal power, and called to retract the truth of the gospel, it appeared as if the whole cause of the Reformation was suspended on his utterance of "Yes" or "No." But there, too, the Lord stood by him, and enabled him to hold fast the profession of the faith without wavering. So, when our own Knox was required to preach before the lords of the Congregation, amid the wavering zeal of some, and the warping policy of others, the very existence of pure religion in Scotland appeared to depend on the courageous faithfulness with which he should preach the Word. IV. HIS REQUEST TO THE KING. V. HIS PREPARATION FOR DEPARTURE. (W. Ritchie.)

CHAPTER II.

VERS. 1-8. **And it came to pass in the month Nisan.**—*Divine interposition* :—

- I. WAS OPPORTUNE. 1. That God's plans are worked out with the utmost precision.
2. That God often interferes on His people's behalf when they least expect it.
3. That God generally interferes on His people's behalf in their most urgent extremity.
- II. REQUIRED HUMAN CO-OPERATION. III. WAS ACCOMPANIED BY PROVI-

DENTIAL COINCIDENCES. 1. Nehemiah was unusually sad. 2. The king was unusually friendly. 3. The queen also was present. (*Homiletic Commentary.*) *A true patriot* :—"That is only a small part of the gospel which leads a man to ask, "What must I do to be saved?" The glorious gospel of the blessed God goes forth with us interested in everything that concerns us as men—at home, in business, in town, in country, in all national affairs, in the whole world. A Christian may thoughtlessly throw himself into political excitement with no other motive than that of party feeling; but because he is a Christian he will be glad to let the light of God shine in upon his aims and motives, and will be glad to see his duty in the quietness and sacredness of this hour. The Bible, which gives us examples of men in every position where duty leads, has given us amongst its most brilliant and noble characters this of the statesman. If any should think such a position inseparable from ambitious craft and party ends, let them note this fact. Nehemiah is living at the court of the king, occupying a position of high rank, of much influence, of great trust. If the chief thing in life is to take care of one's own ease and luxury, and not to trouble much about the wants and sorrows of other people, then here is a man who has all that heart can wish. There are men, thousands of them, who have no thought or purpose in life beyond themselves. Surely that is to degrade our manhood. But what of any man who should call himself a Christian and yet should live all taken up in himself as if nothing were worth a thought but how he may be as happy as possible on earth—and then happier still in another world? Now to the court where Nehemiah dwells come certain Jews from Jerusalem, and he goes forth to inquire about the state of his countrymen and the beloved city. As a man, as a brother, as a servant of the Living God, he is bound to feel the deepest concern in the welfare of his nation. It is easy enough to think of what Nehemiah might have said, if he had been easy-going and selfish, "I really am sorry, very sorry—but I do not see that I can do anything, you know. It is as much as I can do to look after my own duties here without troubling myself about the affairs of the nation." There are some good people who talk so to-day and think it sounds pious. He might have given them a subscription, say of a guinea. And then he could have turned into the palace thankful not to be mixed up in these worldly matters. Or he might have sipped his wine out of a golden goblet and thought what a pity it was that everybody could not be as comfortable as he was. Well, if he had, you may be sure that neither this Book of God nor any other would have found a place for his name. Or he might have pleaded that he was in a very delicate and responsible position, holding office under the king, and that it would never do for him to get mixed up in these matters. Those good people who separate themselves from the duties of citizenship can find no example in the Scriptures. Of all false notions about regenerating the world, the most utterly false, as well as the laziest, is to think that this is the victory which overcometh the world to run away from it. This Book does not teach that the world is the devil's, and the less we can have to do with it the better. No, indeed! "The earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof." The men of the Bible are not monks and recluses; but they are in the very midst of the world and busied with its affairs. Its prophets and messengers are men whose whole life has to do with the councils of kings, with the ways of cities and courts. Surely it is impossible to think of the religion of Jesus Christ as anything but a profound and eager interest in the welfare of our fellow-men—of their bodies as well as their souls; of their work as well as their worship; of their homes on earth as well as their getting to heaven. Nor have any the right to hold themselves aloof from politics because it is mixed up with party strife. We deplore and condemn the bitterness of party politics—but is there not a great deal of nonsense talked about party politics? How are you going ever to have politics at all without party politics? If you want abuses overthrown, and iniquities set right, and the privileges of the few shared by the many, and abominations like the opium trade swept away, and the great curses of drink and lust and gambling cast out, are we to fold our hands because we are Christians, and let the devil have his own way because these things involve strife! Of course they do, and always will. We must expect opposition, excitement, abuse. The blessed Lord Jesus accepted and discharged the duties of citizenship. Together with His holiness, His meekness, His majesty, there is another grace and virtue—there is in Him a perfect patriotism. "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killest the prophets and stonest them that are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not! Behold your house is left unto you desolate." And this example, sublime it is, is followed closely by the

apostle Paul, whose passionate love to his countrymen prompts that daring utterance (Rom. ix. 1). And now to turn to ourselves. What think you? Can we dare to call ourselves by the name of Jesus Christ and yet be indifferent to the needs, the sorrows, the wants, the burdens of our country? Lastly, see how this brave man served his country. Nehemiah sees that his power to help his country is not mostly in his rank, nor in his influence with royalty; it is in his power to pray. This is the great truth we want to lay hold of. The greatest power to bless this land is in our power to pray for it. Here all are on a level. Women as well as men. We need not wait for Parliament in this matter. Women's rights are as ours at the throne of the heavenly grace. Beginning thus in prayer right speedily a glorious reformation is wrought in the face of plotting foes. In spite of the poverty and fewness of the people the city is rebuilt. So shall the city of God once more be set up in the midst of men, if every Christian man and woman will take in upon their heart the wants, the woes, the wrongs, the sorrows of our land, and will plead with God to send us a parliament that shall seek first in all things His kingdom and its righteousness. (*M. G. Pearse.*) *Religious patriotism exemplified in the history of Nehemiah*.—The patriotism of Nehemiah was based on religion; and hence the interest which he discovered in his far distant but afflicted countrymen, and the sacrifices which he made for their welfare. The love of country, because it is the country of our birth, and of countrymen, is no narrow-minded bigotry, as some shallow infidels in their pretended love of universal mankind have imagined. It is a principle of human nature implanted in our hearts for the wisest purposes. There is a patriotism which is quite selfish in its nature. Their own aggrandisement, or that of their friends and partisans, is the sum and substance of their patriotism. True patriotism, like every other great virtue, must be founded in true religion. Had not Nehemiah been a pious man, and loved the God of his fathers with all his heart, and loved his countrymen because they bore the image of God, he never would have relinquished his high advantages in the palace of Artaxerxes, and sacrificed so largely for their benefit. The true way to love man is to begin by loving God. On hearing of the affliction of his countrymen, who he might have expected by this time would have been in prosperous circumstances, Nehemiah betakes himself to prayer. All this shows Nehemiah's acquaintance with his Bible, and also the warmth of his piety. We might have expected that living at a heathen court, remote from the means of grace, with few to strengthen or encourage him, he, though a good man, would have discovered in his piety the disadvantage of the circumstances in which he had been placed. But no—God can and often does compensate in richer effusions of His grace, for an adverse outward situation. And here let us mark the course which he pursued in seeking to relieve and restore his afflicted countrymen. He did not say, as many would have done, in a proud, vaunting spirit, "I am the king's cup-bearer. Backed by his authority, and armed besides with wealth and power, I will soon reduce Jerusalem and its people to a right condition; I will soon quell all opposition, rebuild the wall, and set up the gates, and make the city glorious as of old." This had been the spirit of man flushed with the pride of power; but he had been taught of God, and so begins with humility and prayer. Let us, and let all, follow his example. All are occasionally in the providence of God required to discharge great duties. Important undertakings, involving the glory of God and the good of others, ever and anon call for our services. How should we engage in them? In a spirit of pride and self-confidence? No. But in a spirit of prayer and penitence. We are apt to despair of an undertaking when it is suspended on the will of man, and he is high above us, and we have ground to apprehend his hostility. Let this encourage us to be much in prayer for a good cause, even where it seems to hang upon the will of man, and that will appear hopelessly opposed. Nehemiah having thus prepared himself by prayer, is not slow in setting out in his work. Here we may notice the prudence and piety of this excellent Jew. He showed prudence in addressing a motive to the mind of the king for his journey, which the monarch could understand and appreciate. He did not ask leave to go to Jerusalem for the sake of his religion, but for the sake of his fathers' sepulchres. This was an argument to which even a heathen would defer. With regard, again, to his piety, he did not only pray to God for counsel before making his request, but he strengthened and emboldened himself by prayer at the very time he stood in the presence of Artaxerxes. And then, after he had been successful in the petition, he did not refer the success to his own wisdom, or to his services as a faithful servant, but to the good hand of God upon him. He arrogated nothing to himself; he ascribed all to

God. How much piety is here, and how beautiful is the union between piety and prudence! Considering the difficulties with which Christians have to struggle, well may the Saviour exhort His followers to be wise as serpents, at the same time that they are harmless as doves. It is worthy of notice, that deeply prayerful and dependent on God as Nehemiah was, he was not unmindful of the duty of using all legitimate means to secure the important object which he had in view. Prayer rightly understood does not destroy the use of means; it only strengthens and regulates its application. Prayer without means, and means without prayer, are equally presumptuous. Duty lies in employing both, but keeping both in their right place. This excellent man now set out on his journey, received the aid of the heathen governors upon the way, and soon reached Jerusalem in safety. With his usual prudence he did not, in the first instance, inform any one—priests, nobles, or rulers—what his intentions were. He wished to see the city with his own eyes, and draw his own conclusions, before acquainting them with the object of his mission. This enabled him to speak from personal observation, and so to speak with greater effect. (*J. G. Lorimer.*) **Why is thy countenance sad?**—*Royal dislike of the sight of suffering*:—A late empress of Russia enacted a severe penalty, if any funeral procession should pass within sight of her palace. A princess of France, on her way to the capital, once ordered all beggars and persons suffering under disease to be removed from the line of her journey that she might not behold them. This Persian monarch notes signs of grief on his faithful servant with signs of displeasure. How different it is with our Saviour King! His heart is the seat of compassion for the afflicted. (*W. Ritchie.*) **So I prayed to the God of heaven.**—*Effective ejaculatory prayer the outcome of the habit of prayer*:—It is he that cultivates the habit of prayer that will seize the fitting opportunity for such ejaculations. Some think because they may pray in any place and at all times that therefore seasons of prayer may be neglected with impunity; but only he who delights in communion with God, and does not omit set times for such communion, finds that when the emergency arises, and but a moment is given, he can pray as truly and with as much calmness as in his own closet. (*W. P. Lockhart.*) **Ejaculatory prayer**:—I. THE NATURE OF EJACULATORY PRAYER. It differs from other kinds of prayer, in that—1. It is dependent upon no place. Prayer is founded upon a full conviction of the natural perfection of God; His omnipresence, omniscience, and omnipotence. On the conviction that the object of prayer is everywhere present, and that we may in every place make known our request. Artisan, merchant, physician can pray wherever they may be. 2. It is dependent on no particular time. 3. It is dependent on no particular occasion. No need to wait for Sabbath or hour of public worship. II. EXAMPLES OF EJACULATORY PRAYER. Abraham's servant (*Gen. xxiv. 12*); Samson (*Judg. xvi. 28*); Stephen (*Acts vii. 59, 60*); Christ on various occasions. III. NECESSARY OCCASIONS FOR EJACULATORY PRAYER. 1. When suddenly called to important and difficult duties. 2. The Sabbath day and the assembly of the faithful. If hearers were more engaged in ejaculatory prayer, ministers would be more successful preachers. 3. The hour of temptation. 4. The hour of sickness. IV. THE ADVANTAGES OF EJACULATORY PRAYER. 1. It maintains an habitual sense of our dependence upon God. 2. It preserves our minds in a proper tone for the various exercises of devotion. 3. It is a powerful preventive against sin. 4. It makes us bold to contend with enemies or difficulties. 5. It quickens our zeal and activity in the cause of God. (*J. A. James.*) **Spiritual recollection**:—This is a remarkable illustration of religious presence of mind. I. THE OUTCOME OF A CONSECRATED LIFE. II. THE RESULT OF LONG HABIT. III. A MARK OF SELF-DISTRUSTING HUMILITY. IV. A SOURCE OF INCALCULABLE BLESSING. (*Homiletic Commentary.*) **Ejaculatory prayer**:—It was—I. SUDDENLY REQUIRED. II. SILENTLY OFFERED. III. SUITABLY ADDRESSED. IV. VERY BRIEF. V. COMPLETELY SUCCESSFUL. (*Ibid.*) **Ejaculatory prayer**:—Nehemiah had made inquiry as to the state of the city of Jerusalem, and the tidings he heard caused him bitter grief. "Why should not my countenance be sad," he said, "when the city, the place of my fathers' sepulchres, lieth waste, and the gates thereof are consumed with fire?" He could not endure that it should be a mere ruinous heap. Laying the matter to heart, he did not begin to speak to other people about what they would do, nor did he draw up a wonderful scheme about what might be done if so many thousand people joined in the enterprise; but it occurred to him that he would do something himself. This is just the way that practical men start a matter. The impractical will plan, arrange, and speculate about what may be done, but the genuine, thorough-going lover of Zion puts this question to himself—"What can you do?"

Coming so far, he resolved to set apart a time for prayer. He never had it off his mind for nearly four months. When he slept he dreamed about Jerusalem. When he woke, the first thought was "Poor Jerusalem!" The man of one thing, you know, is a terrible man; and when one single passion has absorbed the whole of his manhood something will be sure to come of it. Before long Nehemiah had an opportunity. Men of God, if you want to serve God and cannot find the propitious occasion, wait awhile in prayer and your opportunity will break on your path like a sunbeam. There was never a true and valiant heart that failed to find a fitting sphere somewhere or other in His service. That opportunity came, it is true, in a way which he could not have expected. It came through his own sadness of heart. This matter preyed upon his mind till he began to look exceedingly unhappy. But you see when the opportunity did come there was trouble with it, for he says, "I was very sore afraid." You want to serve God, young man; you want to be at work. Perhaps you do not know what that work involves. It is not all pleasure. Thus have we traced Nehemiah up to the particular point where our text concerns him. I. THE FACT THAT NEHEMIAH PRAYED CHALLENGES ATTENTION. He had been asked a question by his sovereign. The proper thing you would suppose was to answer it. Not so. Before he answered he prayed to the God of heaven. I do not suppose the king noticed the pause. Probably the interval was not long enough to be noticed, but it was long enough for God to notice it. We are the more astonished at his praying, because he was so evidently perturbed in mind. When you are fluttered and put out you may forget to pray. Do you not, some of you, account it a valid excuse for omitting your ordinary devotion? At least, if any one had said to you, "You did not pray when you were about that business," you would have replied, "How could I?" So habitually was he in communion with God that as soon as he found himself in a dilemma he flew away to God, just as the dove would fly to hide herself in the clefts of the rock. 1. His prayer was the more remarkable on this occasion, because he must have felt very eager about his object. The king asks him what it is he wants, and his whole heart is set upon building up Jerusalem. Are not you surprised that he did not at once say, "O king, live for ever. I long to build up Jerusalem's walls. Give me all the help thou canst"? But no, eager as he was to pounce upon the desired object, he withdraws his hand until it is said, "So I prayed to the God of heaven." I would that every Christian's heart might have just that holy caution that did not permit him to make such haste as to find ill-speed. 2. It is all the more surprising that he should have deliberately prayed just then, because he had been already praying for the past three or four months concerning the selfsame matter. Some of us would have said, "That is the thing I have been praying for; now all I have got to do is to take it and use it. Why pray any more?" But no, you will always find that the man who has prayed much is the man to pray more. If you are familiar with the mercy-seat you will constantly visit it. 3. One thing more is worth recollecting, namely, that he was in a king's palace, and in the palace of a heathen king, too; and he was in the very act of handing up to the king the goblet of wine. But this devout Israelite, at such a time and in such a place, when he stands at the king's foot to hold up to him the golden goblet, refrains from answering the king's question until first he has prayed to the God of heaven. II. THE MANNER OF THIS PRAYER. 1. It was what we call ejaculatory prayer—prayer which, as it were, hurls a dart and then it is done. It was not the prayer which stands knocking at mercy's door. 2. Notice, how very short it must have been. It was introduced—slipped in, sandwiched in—between the king's question and Nehemiah's answer. 3. We know, also, that it must have been a silent prayer; and not merely silent as to sounds but silent as to any outward signs—perfectly secret. Artaxerxes never knew that Nehemiah prayed, though he stood probably within a yard of him. In the innermost shrine of the temple—in the holy of holies of his own secret soul—there did he pray. It was a prayer on the spot. He did not go to his chamber as Daniel did, and open the window. 4. I have no doubt from the very wording of the text that it was a very intense and direct prayer. That was Nehemiah's favourite name for God—the God of heaven. He knew whom he was praying to. He did not draw a bow at a venture and shoot his prayers anyhow. 5. It was a prayer of a remarkable kind. I know it was so, because Nehemiah never forgot that he did pray it. III. To recommend to you THIS EXCELLENT STYLE OF PRAYING. 1. To deal with this matter practically, then, it is the duty and privilege of every Christian to have set times of prayer. 2. But now, having urged the importance of such habitual piety, I want to impress on you the value of another sort of prayer, namely, the short, brief,

quick, frequent ejaculations of which Nehemiah gives us a specimen. And I recommend this, because it hinders no engagement and occupies no time. It requires you to go to no particular place. No altar, no church, no so-called sacred place is needed, but wherever you are, just such a little prayer as that will reach the ear of God, and win a blessing. Such a prayer as that can be offered anywhere, under any circumstances. The advantage of such a way of praying is that you can pray often and pray always. Such prayer may be suggested by all sorts of surroundings.

3. These prayers are commendable, because they are truly spiritual. This kind of prayer is free from any suspicion that it is prompted by the corrupt motive of being offered to please men. If I see sparks coming out of a chimney I know there is a fire inside somewhere, and ejaculatory prayers are like the sparks that fly from a soul that is filled with burning coals of love to Jesus Christ. Short, ejaculatory prayers are of great use to us. Oftentimes they check us. Bad-tempered people, if you were always to pray just a little before you let angry expressions fly from your lips, why many times you would not say those naughty words at all. The habit of offering these brief prayers would also check your confidence in yourself. It would show your dependence upon God.

4. Besides, they actually bring us blessings from heaven. I believe it is very suitable to some persons of a peculiar temperament who could not pray for a long time to save their lives. Their minds are rapid and quick. But if I must give you a selection of suitable times I should mention such as these. Whenever you have a great joy, cry, "Lord, make this a real blessing to me." Do not exclaim with others, "Am I not a lucky fellow?" but say, "Lord, give me more grace, and more gratitude, now that Thou dost multiply Thy favours." When you have got any arduous undertaking on hand or a heavy piece of business, do not touch it till you have breathed your soul out in a short prayer. When you have a difficulty before you, and you are seriously perplexed, when business has got into a tangle or a confusion which you cannot unravel or arrange, breathe a prayer. Are the children particularly troublesome to you? Do you think that there is a temptation before you? Do you begin to suspect that somebody is plotting against you? Now for a prayer, "Lead me in a plain path, because of mine enemies." Are you at work at the bench, or in a shop, or a warehouse, where lewd conversation and shameful blasphemies assail your ears? Now for a short prayer. Does sin begin to fascinate you? Now for a prayer—a warm, earnest, passionate cry, "Lord, hold Thou me up." And when the shadow of death gathers round you, and strange feelings flush or chill you, and plainly tell that you near the journey's end, then pray. Oh! that is a time for ejaculation. "Hide not Thy face from me, O Lord"; or this, "Be not far from me, O God," will doubtless suit you. "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit," were the thrilling words of Stephen in his extremity. (C. H. Spurgeon.)

Ejaculatory prayer:—Such a sudden uplifting of the soul to God is the most real of all prayers. The man who can thus find God in a moment must be in the habit of frequently resorting to the Divine presence. This ready prayer only springs to the lips of a man who lives in a daily habit of prayer. The deliberate exercises of adoration, confession, and petition prepare for the one sudden ejaculation. There we see the deep river which supplies the sea of devotion from which the momentary prayer is cast up as the spray of a wave. We may compare Nehemiah's two kinds of prayer with our Lord's full and calm intercession in John xvii. and the short, agonised cry from the Cross. (W. F. Adeney, M.A.)

Ejaculatory prayer:—

I. THE PERSON NAMED. 1. As patriot. 2. As statesman. 3. As a man of God. Not guided by the policy of the world. He did nothing without prayer. II. THE OCCASION. A moment needing great wisdom. III. THE LESSON TAUGHT. The great duty of ejaculatory prayer. Various uses: 1. Throws light on such texts as 1 Thess. v. 17 and 1 Cor. x. 31. 2. Comfort in bodily pain (Psa. ciii. 13, cxix. 2). 3. Helps to victory over sin. (Canon Titcomb, M.A.)

Prayer before choosing:—At the outset two things strike us here. 1. A rare opportunity for worldly advancement. Here is a king saying to his cupbearer, "What dost thou want me to do for thee?" What a chance this for any man! Wealth, dignity, influence, all put within his reach, left to depend upon his choice. 2. A rare treatment of such an opportunity. What should we say if our sovereign should speak thus to us? Most would say, "Give us a mansion to live in, lordly estate as our inheritance, dazzling titles and extensive patronage." What said Nehemiah? He paused and reflected, and then he prayed. He would not choose for himself. Man is a choosing creature; his daily life is made up of a series of choices; he has to reject and accept in order to live. I. GOD ALONE KNOWS WHAT IS BEST FOR US. "Who knoweth

what is good for man in this life, all the days of his vain life?" Man is constantly making mistakes in this matter. What he wants and struggles for as a prize sometimes turns out to be one of his sorest calamities. Because Moses looked to heaven in such a case, he chose a life which to unregenerate man would be revolting.

II. GOD ALWAYS DESIRES WHAT IS BEST FOR US. He made us to be happy. That He desires our happiness is clear.—1. From the capacity of enjoyment with which He has endowed us. 2. From the elements of happiness with which the world abounds. 3. From the mission of His only-begotten Son. III. GOD, IN ANSWER TO PRAYER, IS EVER READY TO BESTOW what is best for us. "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you." Conclusion: Let us act ever upon the principle that prayer should precede choice. (*Homilist.*)

The spiritual telegraph:—I. How great is the PRIVILEGE of prayer. Great indeed is the privilege of all this access to the mercy-seat, but how unspeakable is the joy and the consolation of habitual communion with God, and of taking occasion from duties, trials, or mercies, as they follow one another, to lift up the heart in pious ejaculation. The word ejaculation is derived from the Latin "jaculum," an arrow, and suggests the rapidity and earnestness with which such a prayer can be winged up to the God of heaven. We have seen how Nehemiah interposed a prayer of this kind as a devout parenthesis between the king's request and his own reply. And there is no book of Scripture so remarkable for ejaculatory prayer as the Book of Nehemiah. Such an acknowledgment of God in our ways is no hindrance, but rather a mighty help in business. That which calms the mind, fixes the purpose, and strengthens moral principle, must be a great assistance, whether in duty or trial. As Fuller remarks, "Ejaculations take not up any room in the soul. They give liberty of callings, so that at the same instant one may follow his proper vocation. The husbandman may dart forth an ejaculation, and not make a halt the more. The seaman nevertheless steers his ship right in the darkest night. The field wherein the bees feed is no whit the barer for their biting: when they have taken their full repast on flowers or grass, the ox may feed, the sheep fatten on their reversions. The reason is because those little chemists distil only the refined part of the flower, leaving the grosser substance thereof. So ejaculations bind not men to any bodily observance, only busy the spiritual half, which maketh them consistent with the prosecution of any other employment." The rapidity and brevity of ejaculatory prayer has frequently been illustrated by a reference to the electric telegraph, the greatest achievement of modern science. Christ has opened a pathway down which redeeming mercy may flow into the heart of the sinner, and by which the aspirations and longings of that penitent sinner may climb up to his reconciled God and Father. Christians, however, can tell of something quicker far than electricity. Thought, winging its way by prayer, travels instantaneously from the depths of a penitent's need to the height of God's throne in heaven. Who can estimate the distance thus travelled, or the relief thus experienced? The child cries, and the Father answers. The sinner weeps, and the Saviour draws near to wipe away his tears, and to fill him with an overflowing gladness. II. But if the privilege of prayer be great, HOW INTENSELY JOYOUS IS THE ANSWER. Recurring to the narrative, let us observe in the gracious answer to Nehemiah's prayer that delay is not denial. Four weary months passed before Nehemiah had the opportunity of bringing under the king's notice the desolation of Zion. The answer to prayer is as sure as Divine power, faithfulness, and love can make it. The providence of God concurs sweetly with His grace in this answer. The answer, moreover, to Nehemiah's request, through the good hand of his God upon him, was overflowing and abundant. The utmost, probably, that he had anticipated would be a full permission to resign his duties at court, and to go to Jerusalem. But he received much more than this. He had the large-hearted sanction of his master for all his undertakings. He was provided with a cavalry escort, with letters for safe conduct beyond the river, and ample material for his work. Our God is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think. (*J. M. Randall.*)

Ejaculatory prayer in critical junctures:—This kind is a short petition, hurled like a dart at its mark. I. WHEN? In critical junctures. 1. Before choice. 2. Before sudden action. 3. In danger. (*The sinking Peter.*) II. WHY? 1. Because critical junctures admit of no other kind. 2. Because it leads to wisdom (Prov. iii. 6). 3. Because it tranquillises the mind. 4. Because it would prevent sudden action. III. HOW? 1. Do we pray at all? 2. Do we cultivate the spirit of prayer? (1 Thess. v. 17). 3. Do occasions arise for ejaculatory prayer? 4. Would it help us when buying or selling, when making calls and tempted to gossip or tell

"white lies"? (*L. O. Thompson.*) *The praying patriot*:—The true secret of his success was Divine interposition in his behalf. 1. Nehemiah, under God, made the most of this opportunity. He had waited patiently for it; and now, when it came, he did not fail to turn it to the best account. It is not always that this is done. Many, we fear, if they had the chance, would be more ready to injure the servants of Christ than to do them good, and to cripple and damage His cause rather than extend it. And where another spirit prevails, have we not often to mourn over lost opportunities of doing good? or over opportunities of doing good that have been very imperfectly improved? 2. We are reminded that prayer does not supersede efforts in other directions. Nehemiah did not content himself with the thought that he had prayed for Jerusalem, and for its poor inhabitants. He supplemented his praying by using his best endeavours to secure such help as man could render. And did he under-estimate the power of prayer by this procedure? We think not. His conduct showed that he was neither irreligious, on the one hand, nor fanatical on the other. Some objects are best accomplished by prayer alone. Some persons are so placed now that all we can do in their behalf is to pray for them; and some objects are of such a nature that we cannot advance them otherwise than by giving them an interest in our prayers. But, as a rule, we may, and ought, to do something more than this for a good cause. 3. Answers to prayer should be gratefully acknowledged. (*T. Rowson.*) *Ejaculatory prayer*:—In hard havens, so choked up with the envious sands that great ships, drawing many feet of water, cannot come near, lighter and lesser pinnaces may freely and safely arrive. When we are time-bound, place-bound, so that we cannot compose ourselves to make a large, solemn prayer, this is the right instant for ejaculations, whether orally uttered or only poured forth inwardly in the heart. (*A. Fuller.*) *The flame of devotion constant*:—The sacrifices of prayer and praise cannot be always ascending; but the flame of devotion to kindle them, as opportunity may serve, ought never to wax dim. (*Hugh Stowell, M.A.*) *The devotional spirit*:—Of all the habits of the new man, there is none more distinctive, none more conducive to his soul's health and happiness, none more essential to his consistency of conduct and beauty of holiness, than the devotional spirit. (*Ibid.*) *Prayer in few words*:—We make a great many mistakes about prayer; and one of them is that we don't think we have prayed properly unless we have prayed a certain time. But a few moments of real prayer are better than many minutes of only formal prayer. "For my own part," says a friend, "if one may talk of a 'best' in the matter of one's prayers, I find that the best prayers I can make are very short ones indeed. Sometimes they have only one sentence, and they are by no means always said upon my knees. They are offered up while I am walking about, or lying awake at night, or riding in the train." When Bengel, the great commentator, was too weary to pray, all he said was, "Lord, Thou knowest that it is between us to-day as it was yesterday"; and so he went to sleep. A young man, who was worn by sickness and suffering, had only strength to pray in short and broken sentences. His heart was filled with foreboding as Satan whispered that the great God could never listen to such a prayer. Suddenly he came upon these words: "God is in heaven, and thou upon earth, therefore let thy words be few." "Ah!" he said, "I have found a verse written expressly for me. God will accept the few words I can utter; now I will trust and not be afraid." If no man is heard for his much speaking, no man is rejected for his little speaking—if compressed into that little be the earnestness of his heart. (*Signal.*) *Prayer in perplexity*:—A little child, playing with a handful of cords, when they begin to get into a tangle, goes at once to her mother, that her patient fingers may unravel the snarl. How much better this than to pull and tug at the cords till the tangle becomes inextricable! May not many of us learn a lesson from the little child? Would it not be better for us, whenever we find the slightest entanglement in any of our affairs, or the arising of any perplexity, to take it at once to God, that His skilful hands may set it right? *Prayer heard in heaven*:—Ejaculatory prayer is like the rope of a belfry; the bell is in one room, and the end of the rope which sets it a-ringing in another. Perhaps the bell may not be heard in the apartment where the rope is, but it is heard in its own apartment. Moses laid hold of the rope and pulled it hard on the shore of the Red Sea; and though no one heard or knew anything about it in the lower chamber, the bell rang loudly in the upper one. (*Williams of Wern.*) *The swiftness of prayer*:—We may, if we please, have a mail to heaven, conveying in a moment intelligence of our condition and concerns, our wants and our desires, to our God and Father, and bringing back to us a gracious answer, with advice and comfort,

protection and help. Prayer is the swift courier, and sighs are the winged messengers. Doves have been trained to fly from place to place, carrying letters in a little casket fastened to their neck or foot. They are swift of flight; but our prayers and sighs are swifter, for they take but a moment to pass from earth to heaven, and bear the troubles of our heart to the heart of God. (*R. Scriver.*) *Ejaculatory prayer possible to busy people*:—The following extract is from a letter addressed by a poor woman to the editor of the *Banner of Faith*: "Poor women with large families often think they have little time for prayer or praise. As I am a poor woman with a large family, and know the value of prayer and praise, I will tell them how I find time for it. Whilst I am cleaning the house I lift my heart to God and say, 'Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me, for Christ's sake. Amen.' When I am washing the clothes I say, 'Wash me in Thy blood, O Jesus; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.' Then as I get to each of my children's clothes I pray for them separately, not aloud, but in my heart. Again, if I pick up the shirt of one who drinks, I ask God to change his heart, to show him his state in God's sight, and to help him to give up drink and become a sober, godly youth. If I am washing the shirt of another who has a horrid temper, that is a terror to us all, I pray to God to break his stubborn temper, to soften his heart of stone, and give him a heart of flesh. If I am washing anything belonging to a girl who is idle, then I pray God to show her her sin, and change her whole nature, by the Holy Spirit. Yes, I pray for each as I know their need. Then when I am sewing I find lots of time both for prayer and praise. When I light or mend the fire, I say in my heart, 'Kindle, O Lord, a sacred fire in this cold heart of mine.'" (*E. J. Hardy, M.A.*)

Ver. 5. If it please the king, and if thy servant have found favour.—*The man of business*:—Such a man was Nehemiah. His strong practical sagacity is manifest throughout the whole record of his work in Jerusalem. And in his case this business ability was blended with enthusiasm. It is by such men—men combining practical sagacity with noble impulse—that the best work of the world is done. Sometimes we find men of enthusiastic zeal or true piety who have little or no business faculty, who are deficient in powers of observation and management, who lack the tough energy of perseverance, who perhaps scorn tact and prudence, and who have little capability of adapting means to ends. Such men are apt to become either crotchety or fanatical; they waste both time and strength on impracticable schemes; they may have noble aims, but they seek to carry them out by unwise methods; they damage the cause which they have at heart by their own blundering; they isolate themselves from those with whom they ought to work, and alienate those whom they ought to conciliate; they grow impatient of their imperfect instruments and agents; and, failing to realise the best conceivable, they become careless as to realising the best practicable. And, on the other hand, we find men of shrewd sagacity and business ability, of keen observation and ready tact, who lack all the higher inspiration of noble and generous impulse; who are deficient in imagination, affection, and piety; who have no real enthusiasm even in their business; and who carry on their practical work with the successful persistency of a cold, clever, and calculating selfishness. A man of this type might have gone to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem if he had been well paid for the work, and if he had received money with which to hire the labour of the builders; but he would never have gone, like Nehemiah, impelled by the fervours of a pious patriotism, nor could he have roused the people, as Nehemiah did, to voluntary effort and sacrifice. The practical business faculty is a gift of no mean order; but, like all other gifts, it ought to be devoted to the service of God. If a man possesses energy, persistency, tact, quickness in forecasting necessities and results, skill in adapting means to ends, he ought not to regard these powers as mere instruments for the promotion of his own selfish objects. These faculties are part of himself, and he is himself called to live as a servant of God. Then, again, the exclusive development of mere business faculty is attended with the utmost danger. It is, indeed, a faculty for which we may well thank God; but there are other powers of our nature—some of them higher and more important—which ought also to be exercised. The whole spiritual side of our being, looking out on God, on righteousness, and on eternity, calls for cultivation. Nor ought we to neglect the affections and emotions of the heart. Even the culture of the imagination is not to be despised; it furnishes a healthy counterpoise where the practical faculty is keen and strong. If there be no exercise of the imagination, no deepen-

ing of the affections, no quickening of the conscience and the spiritual nature, then a man's practical sagacity may only tend to make him a hard-headed and hard-hearted worldling. His tact will be constantly degenerating into mere manœuvre, *finesse*, and deceit. His power of managing men will lead him to deal with them as tools. He may thus "get on" in the world, as some people count getting on; he may perhaps gather wealth, and leave it behind him to his heirs. But his own nature will deteriorate; it will become narrow, stunted, and impoverished, and he will never do any of the best kind of work in the world, either for God or for mankind. By all means let a man cultivate practical sagacity; but let him take care to consecrate it to God, and to make it the handmaid of aims that shall be worthy of his spiritual nature. We want neither fanatics nor worldlings, neither unpractical dreamers nor mere selfish tacticians; we want men who, like Nehemiah, are open to the promptings of generous impulse and pure enthusiasm, and at the same time can carry out their projects with wise foresight, patient energy, and prudent self-control. (*T. C. Finlayson.*) *The mission of Nehemiah*:—The text harmonises with the historic truth that for every great work there must be an inspired leader. Every great revival has hinged upon the deeds of some one man. The success of Nehemiah depended upon three traits, which must be characteristic of every great leader in human affairs. A lack as to either one of the three would render his undertaking a failure. I. HIS FAITH. There is nothing in this world more sublime than the man of faith, and there is no one more truly ridiculed. Faith, dissatisfied with the present, looks into futurity. The multitudes are content with to-day's attainments. Nehemiah pondered upon the Jerusalem which should be. Plans, at the first, were indistinct. It seemed an impossibility. His were the words of faith and not of sight: "The God of heaven, He will prosper us; therefore we His servants will arise and build." II. HIS SAGACITY. Faith incites to the purest wisdom. The intellect of man is made to be the servant of his faith. His faith was reasonable, yet, after it had become most perfect, in order to attain its object he was compelled to reason out each step of the way. Thus is it many a man works out his prayers. Artaxerxes had chosen a sagacious man for his cup-bearer, and Jehovah said Artaxerxes had chosen wisely. Jehovah needed not only a man of faith, but a shrewd man, to restore Jerusalem to its former greatness. III. HIS COURAGE. Grant him to have been a man of strongest faith, and of shrewdest mind to reason out the successive steps, yet without courage to take each step, he had failed after all. (*Monday Club Sermons.*) *Nehemiah before Artaxerxes*:—And now it was that the man of piety appeared in the man of patriotism; and admirably does Nehemiah stand forth as an example to those who profess to have at heart their country's good, and to be stricken by its calamities. He did not immediately call a meeting of the Jews, to consult what might be done for their afflicted countrymen. He did not gather round him a knot of politicians, that plans might be discussed, and assistance levied. But Nehemiah "sat down, and wept." But Nehemiah did not count his part done when he had thus, in all humility, confessed the sins of his nation, and entreated the interference of God. He was not one of those who substitute prayer for endeavour, though he would not make an endeavour until he had prepared himself by prayer. Fortified through humiliation and supplication, he now sought to take advantage of his position with the king, and, true patriot as he was, to render that position useful to his countrymen. Nehemiah was sore afraid when Artaxerxes, struck with the sorrow depicted on his features, imperiously asked the cause of the too evident grief. It was the moment for which he had wished, yea, for which he had prayed, yet, now that it had come, he felt so deeply what consequences hung upon a word, that he was almost unmanned, and could scarce venture to unburden his heart. The facts are these: the first, that it was as the city of his fathers' sepulchres that Jerusalem excited the solicitude of Nehemiah; the second, that Nehemiah found a moment before answering the king to offer petition to the Almighty. Now Jerusalem had not yet received its most illustrious distinction, forasmuch as "the fulness of time" had not arrived, and therefore there had not yet been transacted within her circuits the wondrous scenes of the redemption of the world. Nevertheless, to every man, especially to a devout Jew, there were already reasons in abundance why thought should turn to Jerusalem, and centre there as on a place of peculiar sanctity and interest. There had a temple been reared, "magnificent" beyond what earth beforetime had seen, rich with the marble and the gold, but richer in the visible tokens of the presence of the universal Lord. There had sacrifices been continually offered, whose efficacy was manifest even to those who discerned not their typical

import, forasmuch as at times they prevailed to the arrest of temporal visitations, and pestilence was dispersed by the smoke of the oblation. There had monarchs reigned of singular and wide-spread renown. Hence, it might easily have been accounted for why Nehemiah should have looked with thrilling interest to Jerusalem. But the observable thing is, that Nehemiah fixes not on any of those obvious reasons when he would explain, or account for, his interest in Jerusalem. Before he offered his silent prayer to God, and afterwards, when he might be supposed to have received fresh wisdom from above, he spake of the city merely as the place of the sepulchres of his fathers, as though no stronger reason could be given why he should wish to rebuild it; none, at least, whose force was more felt by himself, or more likely to be confessed by the king. The language of Nehemiah is too express and too personal to allow of our supposing that he adopted it merely from thinking that it would prevail with Artaxerxes. If we may argue from the expressions of Nehemiah, then, it is a melancholy sight—that of a ruined town, a shattered navy, or a country laid waste by famine and war; but there is a more melancholy sight too, that of a churchyard, where sleeps the dust of our kindred, desecrated and destroyed, whether by violence or neglect. There is something so ungenerous in forgetfulness or contempt of the dead—they cannot speak for themselves; they so seem, in dying, to bequeath their dust to survivors, as though they would give affection something to cherish, and some kind office still to perform. We do not, however, suppose that the strong marks of respect for the dead, which occur so frequently in the Bible, are to be thoroughly accounted for by the workings of human feelings and affections. We must have recourse to the great doctrine of the resurrection of the body if we would fully understand why the dying Joseph “gave commandment concerning his bones,” and Nehemiah offered no description of Jerusalem, but that it was the place of the sepulchres of his fathers. The doctrine of the resurrection throws, as you must all admit, a sacredness round the remains of the dead, because it proves, that, though we have committed the body to the ground, “ashes to ashes, dust to dust,” that body is reserved for noble allotments, destined to reappear in a loftier scene, and discharge more glorious functions. Then the well-kept churchyard, with its various monuments, each inscribed with lines not more laudatory of the past than hopeful of the future, what is it but the public testimony to all that is precious in Christianity, forasmuch as it is the public testimony that the dead shall live again? We are now to detach our minds from Nehemiah pleading for his fathers’ sepulchres, and fix them upon Nehemiah addressing himself to God in ejaculatory prayer. Under how practical and comforting a point of view does this place the truth of the omnipresence of God. Yet, with all its mysteriousness, this is no merely sublime but barren speculation, no subject to exercise the mind rather than benefit the heart. It should minister wondrously to our comfort, to know that, whether we can explain it or not, we are always, so to speak, in contact with God; so that in the crowd and in the solitude, in the retirement of the closet, the bustle of business, and the privacies of home, by day and by night, He is alike close at hand, near enough for every whisper, and plenteous enough for every want. It is not so with a human patron or friend, who, whatever be his power, and his desire to use it on our behalf, cannot always be with us, to observe each necessity, and appoint each supply. It is not indispensable that there should be outward prostration and set supplication. The heart has but to breathe its desire, and God is acquainted with it so soon as formed, and may grant it, if He will, before the tongue could have given it utterance. The man of business, he need not enter on a single undertaking without prayer; the mariner, he need not unfurl a sail without prayer; the traveller, he need not face a danger without prayer; the statesman, he need not engage in a debate without prayer; the invalid, he need not try a remedy without prayer; the accused, he need not meet an accuser without prayer. We may hallow and enlighten everything by prayer, though we seem, and are, engaged from morning to night with secular business, and thronged by eager adherents. We cannot be in a difficulty for which we have not time to ask guidance, in a peril so sudden that we cannot find a guardian, in a spot so remote that we may not people it with supporters. (*H. Melville, B.D.*) **Unto the city of my fathers’ sepulchres.**—*The place of my fathers’ sepulchres:*—Any reference to the history of the fame and power of the city of God might have inflamed the jealousy of the Persian king, and fixed his resolution to leave it in its present ruin. But the human heart naturally softens into tenderness at the graves of the dead. Hence the consummate skill and delicacy with which Nehemiah frames his plea

for sorrow. (*W. Ritchie.*) *Wise musings*:—Men love to think of the honour of their fathers' titles, or of the grandeur of their fathers' habitations. It is wise in us to muse sometimes on the place of our fathers' sepulchres. The graves where they lie are mementoes whither we must follow them, and from their tomb they call us to prepare for entering the narrow house appointed for all living. (*Ibid.*) *God always helps His faithful witnesses*:—In these touching and powerful words we remark the almighty aid God gives His servants in pleading for, and bearing witness to, His cause. He gives Nehemiah mouth and wisdom in this trying hour. It has been so with all faithful witnesses for God in every age. It was so with Luther at the Diet of Worms. (*Ibid.*)

Ver. 7. *If it please the king, let letters be given me.*—*Religious prudence*:—I. THAT PRUDENT FORETHOUGHT IS ESSENTIAL TO SUCCESS IN SPIRITUAL AS IN SECULAR ENTERPRISES (Psa. cxii. 5; Prov. xi. 29, xii. 23, xiv. 15; Luke xiv. 28). II. THAT PRUDENT FORETHOUGHT IS NOT OPPOSED, BUT HELPFUL, TO SPIRITUAL FAITH. 1. It furnishes a rational basis for expecting success. 2. It acts upon the supposition that mental powers were given to be employed in the service of God. 3. It takes no step without seeking Divine guidance and approval. (*Homiletic Commentary.*) *Common sense in religious work*:—When we go about the Lord's work, we must not leave our wits behind us, or forget the principles of business and the rules of daily life. Neither should we ignore difficulties or suppose that they will disappear before some miracle-working power. Although depending solely on the Lord, we need not denude ourselves of judgment and common sense. (*W. P. Lockhart.*) *Prayer and common sense*:—So I stood and "prayed unto the God of heaven—then I asked the king to give me letters." This is the true model of prayer—to pray to the King of kings and then to accept the ordinary appointments of life; to invoke Omnipotence, and then to use your senses. Have you been praying? Did you sit in your chair and pray that you might be able at the end of the week to make both ends meet, and then fall asleep until the time came, and wake up to find that both ends did not meet? That was not prayer at all. I will pray God to help me to pay every debt I owe, to overcome every difficulty in my way. Now, having said my prayer, let me go out and do it. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

Ver. 8. *And the king granted me, according to the good hand of my God upon me.*—*The power of God in the individual Christian*:—The secret of success is to have God with us, and what we want in our day is not more machinery or new methods of work, but more of the power of God in individual Christians. Nehemiah, in his prolonged prayerfulness, shows us how this power is to be obtained, for it is when we know God in His fulness and have enlightened communion with the Lord, that we are fitted to become "workers together with Him." (*W. P. Lockhart.*) *God's hand*:—I. A SPIRIT OF DEPENDENCE. There breathes forth a feeling of insignificance. The speaker feels scarcely able to trust himself. 1. Man's technical skill. Having arrived at so high a standard in design, construction, and art, we are very apt to think very highly of ourselves. We gaze on the railway, the steam-engine, the ocean-steamer, the tunnel under the hills, and the canal through the land, and fancy we can do anything. 2. Man's natural conceit. There is a great tendency to think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think. Satan employs this tendency to induce man to lift up his hand against God. II. A SPIRIT OF TRUST. This spirit of reliance will save us from many trials. It will prevent—1. Anxious care. If we leave our concerns in God's hand, we shall not be careful and cumbered about many things. It will prevent—2. Worldly-mindedness of disposition. The spirit that leaves its cares in God's hand will leave its joys there also. 3. All bitterness of sorrow. (*Homilist.*) *The recognition of God*:—He recognised God in all. Not to his favourable circumstances, nor to the opportunity of presenting his petition, nor to the good mood the monarch was in, nor to all of these combined, did he ascribe his success. Secondary causes would not explain the result; it must be traced to its true source—God and God alone must have all the glory. (*W. P. Lockhart.*)

Vers. 9–20. *Then I came to the governors beyond the river.*—*The initial stages of a great reformation*:—Great reformations often have an insignificant commencement and are slow in developing their true proportions. Reformation work—I. REQUIRES A VIGOROUS LEADER. II. SHOULD NOT BE UNDERTAKEN WITHOUT A DELIBERATE ESTIMATE OF ITS MAGNITUDE AND DIFFICULTY. III. IN ITS INITIAL STAGES IS

ALMOST CERTAIN TO PROVOKE OPPOSITION. IV. CANNOT BE CARRIED ON WITHOUT MUTUAL CO-OPERATION. V. CANNOT SUCCEED WITHOUT THE DIVINE BLESSING. (*Homiletic Commentary.*) **And gave them the king's letters.**—*The king's letters*:—Here is a beautiful picture of the Christian evangelist. When he goes abroad he has no introduction of himself to make—he simply delivers the King's letters. When the preacher appears in the pulpit, all he has to do is to give the people the King's letters; when the student bends his head over his desk in the study, it is only that he may study what is written in the letters of the King. The moment we begin to write letters of commendation for ourselves, we become as other men; our distinctiveness as ambassadors is lost. The King's letters are full of light and love. They are addressed to every man. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) **When Sanballat the Horonite . . . it grieved them exceedingly.**—*Secret jealousy*:—There is jealousy—I. TYRANNICAL IN ITS SPIRIT. II. ANTI-RELIGIOUS IN ITS ATTITUDE. III. COVETOUSLY SELFISH IN ITS MOTIVES. IV. SELF-TORTURING IN ITS EFFECTS. (*Homiletic Commentary.*)

Ver. 11. So I came to Jerusalem, and was there three days.—*Days of quiet*:—Some workers of the present day would have sent round the bellman and summoned the leading inhabitants to a preliminary convention within half an hour of their arrival; but there was no such unbelieving hurry-scurry with Nehemiah, and therefore three days were allowed to elapse. It was necessary to recover from the fatigue of the journey. He who is the God of our bodies as well as of our souls knows full well the limit of our powers, and would not have us outrage physical laws, even in seeking to do Him honour. These three days may have been needful also for further prayer and waiting upon God. It may have been also that God would not have him begin work under mere natural impulse or human excitement. Hence the need of three days of quiet. Men under excitement can do wonderful things, whether in storming a redoubt or in conducting what in modern times is called a "mission"; but God does not want His work done under excitement. Calm and quiet of soul are more favourable to that true reliance upon Him which gives Him all the glory and seeks none for ourselves. (*W. P. Lockhart.*) *The wisdom of waiting*:—This interval would no doubt be occupied in reflecting on the difficulties of his enterprise—in maturing his course of procedure. Besides, he was probably in doubt how to proceed, till God revealed to him His will; and for this he needed to make his requests known to Him in prayer. This is ever the discipline of a religious life. A pious writer remarks, "I need just as much patience to wait as the lamp needs oil, till the day break, and the shadows flee away." (*W. Ritchie.*) *Preparatory retirement*:—God's servants frequently thus retired for deliberation before entering upon arduous tasks. Moses, Paul, Christ Himself. Nehemiah's retirement—I. Gave him time to LOOK ROUND. II. Gave him time to LOOK FORWARD. III. Gave him time to LOOK WITHIN. IV. Gave him time to LOOK UPWARD. (*Homiletic Commentary.*)

Vers. 12-20. And I arose in the night.—*Nehemiah, the model worker*:—I. HE WORKS THOUGHTFULLY. Before he commences this tremendous task he spends some time in deliberation. Who can tell the thoughts of Nehemiah as he moved amidst the ruins of Jerusalem this night? Jerusalem was the home of his fathers, the centre of his most hallowed associations. Before we undertake a work we should gauge its magnitude and become convinced of its practicability (Luke xiv. 28-30). Men, from the impulse of the hour, put their hand to undertakings which they have never given themselves time to understand, and for which they are not fitted; and hence, when the excitement is over, they abandon the work in disappointment, if not in disgust. II. HE WORKS INDEPENDENTLY. "I arose in the night, I and some few men with me, neither told I any man what my God had put in my heart to do at Jerusalem." It is not thus that we are wont to act in this age. There are but few men who would take up any great work, and set about it themselves, without seeking the sympathy and counsel of their fellow-men. If we have some work which presses on us as a duty of general importance, almost the first thing we do is to call our friends together, get their sanction, and form a committee to aid us in carrying it out. We, in these days, work by organisations. Our individuality in work is scarcely seen or felt. We are the limbs of societies, wheels in organisations. What we want is more individualism in action, more of the independent man, and less of the society. Two things will show the importance of this. 1. The opinions of others cannot determine our duty. Duty is between us and God. It is something

that is perfectly independent of men's thoughts. 2. The opinions of others may embarrass us in duty. Duty generally comes to us in very legible writing, wants no interpreter, speaks to us in a very distinct voice. Amid the din of human opinion there is danger of its losing its voice. Let us, therefore, cultivate the habit of acting independently; not proudly, not despising the opinions of others, or refusing their co-operation, but working ever from the force of our own convictions.

III. HE WORKED INFLUENTIALLY. The next chapter shows that, under his influence, all classes, male and female, set to work in right earnest. 1. The people saw that he understood the matter. They recognised in him at once a man who knew what he was about, a man of intellectual grasp and might. 2. The people saw that he was thoroughly in earnest. What he said he meant. IV. HE WORKED HEROICALLY. 1. Look at the sacrifices he made. 2. Look at the enemies he encountered. He had, at least, three desperate enemies (ver. 19)—Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem. These men showed their opposition—(1) By ridicule (ver. 19, chap. iv. 3). (2) By indignation (chap iv. 7). 3. The labour he effected. He finished the work in fifty-two days, notwithstanding all the difficulties that seemed insurmountable. He overcame the enemies who were malignant, he triumphed over all.

V. HE WORKED RELIGIOUSLY. "Then I told them of the hand of my God which was upon me," &c. (vers. 18–20). 1. His impulses to act he ascribed to God. 2. His rule of action he derived from Him (ver. 18). 3. His sacrifices in the work he made for Him (chap v. 15). 4. The spirit with which he performed his work was that of dependence upon Him (chap. iv. 9–12). This religion is the philosophy of his power. He felt himself the messenger and the servant of God. (*Homilist.*)

Preparation before work:—We often undertake one thing and another, both in our spiritual and temporal life, without preparation; and for the want of this, failure ensues. Before Dr. Nansen, the Norwegian, started on his Polar expedition, he slept under his silk tent for the double purpose of testing it and acclimatising himself. Other members of the expedition slept in the open air covered with the wolf-skins they were taking out with them. A very famous writer, in order to secure as good a description of a thunderstorm as possible, took up his position during six such storms on the top of a cathedral tower, getting himself drenched to the skin each time. It is not only the doing of a thing, but the preparation for doing it, which in many cases issues in success. No time spent in preparation for what is worth doing is lost. (*Signal.*)

Purposes not to be prematurely divulged:—The purposes of ruling spirits are sometimes so grand and daring in their character as to be incapable of deriving support from other minds; and were they to be prematurely divulged, they would be ruined in their execution. Lord Clive was wont to say that he never called a council of war but once, and if he had acted on the advice given, the battle of Plessey would not have been fought, and India would have been lost to the British Empire. (*W. Ritchie.*)

A time for silence:—Learn—Good intentions are best kept secret.—I. UNTIL THEY ARE ASCERTAINED TO BE PRACTICABLE. II. UNTIL THEY CAN BE CARRIED OUT WITH DECISIVE ENERGY. III. FROM THOSE WHO ARE LIKELY TO OPPOSE THEM. IV. UNTIL THE CO-OPERATION ESSENTIAL TO SUCCESS CAN BE RELIED ON. (*Homiletic Commentary.*)

The Divine visit to the soul:—In this visit of generous sorrow to a scene of temple desolation we are reminded of the first approach of the Holy Spirit in mercy to our ruined souls. (*W. Ritchie.*)

Personal exploration:—Take your own measure of the destitution of the world. Every Christian man should go about in the world, so far as he is able to do so, by the aid of reports—to take his own measure of the situation—steal out by night and see what the devil has done with this human nature of ours, and he should say, "God helping me, I will do my utmost to undo this mischief and to repair the shattered house of the Lord." (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

The midnight horseman:—I. My subject impresses me with the idea WHAT AN INTENSE THING IS ATTACHMENT TO THE HOUSE OF GOD. It is through the spectacles of this scene that we discover the ardent attachment of Nehemiah for that sacred Jerusalem which in all ages has been the type of the Church of God, our Jerusalem, which we love just as much as Nehemiah loved his Jerusalem. What Jerusalem was to Nehemiah the house of God is to you. Infidels may scoff at the Church as an obsolete affair, as a relic of the dark ages, as a convention of goody-goody people, but all the impression they have ever made on your mind against the Church of God is absolutely nothing. You would make more sacrifices for it to-day than for any other institution, and if it were needful, you would die in its defence. II. THE RUINS MUST BE EXPLORED BEFORE THE WORK OF RECONSTRUCTION CAN BEGIN. The reason that so many people in this day, apparently converted, do not remain con-

verted, is because they did not first explore the ruin of their own heart. There was a superstructure of religion built on a substratum of unrepented sins. The trouble with a good deal of modern theology is that, instead of building on the right foundation, it builds on *débris* of an unregenerated nature. They attempt to rebuild Jerusalem before, in the midnight of conviction, they have seen the ghastliness of the ruin. A dentist said to me a few days ago, "Does that hurt?" I replied, "Of course it hurts. It is in your business as in my profession—we have to hurt before we can help; we have to explore and dig away before we can put in the gold." You will never understand redemption until you understand ruin. A man comes to me to talk about religion. The first question I ask him is, "Do you feel yourself to be a sinner?" If he says, "Well, I—yes," the hesitancy makes me feel that the man wants a ride on Nehemiah's horse by midnight through the ruins—in at the gate of his affections, out at the gate of his will, by the dragon well; and before he has got through with that midnight ride he will drop the reins on the horse's neck, and he will take his right hand and smite on his heart, and say, "God be merciful to me, a sinner!"

III. My subject gives me a SPECIMEN OF BUSY AND TRIUMPHANT SADNESS. If there was any man in the world who had a right to mope and give up everything as lost, it was Nehemiah. You say, "He was a cup-bearer in the palace of Shushan, and it was a grand place." So it was. But you know very well that fine architecture will not put down home-sickness. Although he had a grief so intense that it excited the commiseration of the king, yet he rouses himself up to rebuild the city. He gets his permission of absence; he gets his passports, he hastens away to Jerusalem. By night he rides through the ruins; he arouses the piety and patriotism of the people, and in less than two months Jerusalem was rebuilt. That's what I call busy and triumphant sadness. The whole temptation is with you, when you have trouble, to do just the opposite to the behaviour of Nehemiah, and that is to give up. You say, "I have lost my child, and can never smile again." You say, "I have lost my property, and I can never repair my fortunes." You say, "I have fallen into sin, and I can never start again for a new life." If Satan can make you form that resolution, and make you keep it, he has ruined you. Trouble is not sent to crush you, but to arouse you, to animate you, to propel you. Oh, that the Lord God of Nehemiah would arouse up all broken-hearted people to rebuild. Whipped, betrayed, shipwrecked, imprisoned, Paul went right on. I knew a mother who buried her babe on Friday, and on the Sabbath appeared in the house of God, and said, "Give me a class; give me a Sabbath-school class. I have no child now left me, and I would like to have a class of little children. Give me really poor children. Give me a class off the back street." That is beautiful. That is triumphant sadness. (*T. De Witt Talmage.*)

An inspiration for workers:—It was like the magic horn that awoke the inmates of the enchanted castle. The spell was broken. The torpor of the Jews gave place to hope and energy. Nehemiah brought with him no new labourers; but he brought what was better, the one essential requisite for every great enterprise—an inspiration. This is the one supreme need at present. (*W. F. Adeney, M.A.*)

Nehemiah's appeal:—I. THE APPEAL TO THE INHABITANTS OF JERUSALEM. The distress under which the city was then groaning was the result—1. Of the opposition of enemies. 2. The indifference of friends. II. THE INVITATION IN CONNECTION WITH THE APPEAL. It was an invitation—1. To laborious and self-denying exertion. 2. To immediate exertion. 3. To individual, to combined, to persevering exertion. III. THE CONSIDERATIONS BY WHICH THE INVITATION IS ENFORCED. 1. He appeals to their sense of shame. 2. He notices the encouragement which was afforded them by God. 3. He appeals to the encouraging circumstances of the times. IV. THE EFFECT WHICH ALL THIS HAD UPON THE MINDS OF THE PEOPLE. 1. It raised their enthusiasm. 2. It led them to exertion. 3. It led to mutual excitement and co-operation. 4. It led to final success. (*W. Orme.*)

The call to build:—I. A TYPE OF ALL GOD'S TRUE REPAIRERS. Think of our English Church alone. Ridley at Cambridge, musing in his walks over St. Paul's Epistles; Wesley in days when our pulpits were too much filled with "apes of Epictetus," brooding over the gospel of grace and the sweetness of the name of Jesus; Simeon, maturing the views which stirred so many stagnant parishes, and gave a fresh spring to missionary work; in the last few years Aitken, often spending six hours in prayer within his church upon the Cornish cliff, and then going out with his soul on fire to speak to sinners of redeeming love—what are these and many others but Christian Nehemiahs? Such men began with prayer their survey in solitude and silence of the wall which was broken down. They ended by crying with a voice that went forth with the

winds, and entered with the power of God into hundreds of spirits—"Come and let us build up the wall of Jerusalem." II. LESSONS FOR ALL SUCH REPAIRERS. 1. The builders worked under arms. Those who at this crisis would do a real work of spiritual restoration in the English Church, must "every one have his sword girded by his side," and "so build." Those who seek three great ends—a more reverent worship, a ministry fuller of individual consolation, and a tenderer devotion—must, even while they build, be equipped and vigilant against a hostile influence. (1) They must guard against a Romanising ritual, and, I will add, a sentimental ritualism. (2) They should be vigilant to resist other and far subtler invasions of principles hostile to the spirit of the English Reformation. (a) We are often told that we must have among us habitual private confession, and absolution, and systematic spiritual guidance. I hold with Mason, who says, "We have not only a public absolution in our Church, but a private one also, for there are many who want particular comfort. And therefore we use a private absolution in the visitation of the sick, and so often as the broken hearts and wounded consciences of particular persons do require it." But if any desire to go further—to change confession from a medicine for the morbid into a good for all—they are aiming at that which the genius of Teutonic Christianity, the character of the English people, and of the English Reformation, render an impossibility. (b) A second point, in which our builders need to wear the sword while they repair the wall, concerns the form of the devotions which they may introduce or recommend. Let me instance that of which so much has lately been heard—the worship of the Sacred Heart. 2. The builders worked under the harmonious co-operation of priesthood and laity. Ezra and Nehemiah combined in the restoration. (*Abp. Alexander.*) *A desolate city*:—A desolate city tells a tale of past greatness, past resources, past life. Who can look upon the nations of China and India and not mourn over their moral and spiritual desolation? There are God's gifts in abundance, but superstition reigns supreme. The teeming millions are in a state of moral ruin. Shall we not feel compassion for them? Let us arise and restore the breaches made by sin, Satan, and superstition. (*J. M. Randall.*) *The ruins of Jerusalem*:—Nehemiah is for us an example. Like him, we would build again the walls of Jerusalem. I. LET US SEE IN WHAT WAY OUR SITUATION RECALLS TO US THE TIMES OF NEHEMIAH. 1. Jerusalem, for us, is the Church. I use the word in the wide and yet exact sense that the Scripture does. The Church, according to the expression of Paul, is the spiritual house of God, built upon the foundation of apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner-stone. The Church, according to the expression of Peter, is that building to which we ought to belong as living stones in order to be a spiritual house, a holy priesthood. The Church is that family whose members are known to God alone; it is that great city of souls of which our various Churches are but imperfect realisations. If the house in which we have grown up is dear to us above all, what then will be the Church, especially when it has transmitted to us with the treasures of the gospel examples of heroic fidelity? Let us then love the Church we belong to—love it more than others; it is our right, it is our duty; but above this, let us maintain the grand reality which is called the universal Church, and which must be to us an object of faith. 2. "The wall of Jerusalem is broken down," said the fugitives to Nehemiah. Is not this the message that many voices bring to us to-day from all parts of Christendom? The Protestant Church has been surprised. Protected heretofore by the rampart of the authority of the Scriptures which the Reformation had built up, and behind which, no doubt, were sheltered many intestine struggles, it was unanimous in rushing to the breach when it was necessary to defend its liberty against Catholicism, its faith in the God of revelation against infidelity. To-day that rampart has been forced; criticism has penetrated into the place like a vast and impetuous torrent. The authenticity of the sacred books, facts, and doctrines, all have been shaken; and, after having denied the reality of a supernatural revelation, it sees itself outstripped by a philosophy which, enlarging the breach which it has forced open, destroys even the religious sentiment itself, well knowing that nothing will have been accomplished so long as the voice within the recesses of the human soul, which calls for succour and pardon from the living God, has not been stifled. II. LET US NOW SEE WHAT HIS EXAMPLE OUGHT TO TEACH US. Notice—1. His sorrow. Do you understand such sorrow as Nehemiah's? Do you know what it is to groan as he did over the desolation of Jerusalem? Our age has signalised sorrow; its poets have sung of the secret melancholy of the soul with a vivid emotion; but in the sadness which inspects itself, which analyses itself with complacent curiosity, which exhibits itself to the world, what egotism is there,

what bitter pride or trivial vanity! How rare is sorrow for the cause of God. Curious about everything, even of evil, diverted by everything, distracted from the one thing needful, we are hardly able to comprehend the sorrow of an Elijah making lament over erring Israel, of a Nehemiah shedding heartfelt tears over the ruins of Jerusalem, or a Paul full of holy bitterness in the presence of Athenian idolatry, of a Calvin consumed with sadness at the sight of the persecuted Churches.

2. His spirit of sacrifice. Nehemiah does more than lament. He acts, and to act he knows how to sacrifice all. To the peace which he enjoys he prefers the dangers of a struggle without a truce; to the brilliant future which awaits him, the reproach of his people. It is this spirit which always distinguishes those who wish to serve God here below. In every age they must be separated from the world. I have seen, in another denomination, young men and maidens, at the age when life promised them its enchantments, giving all up, even their very name, putting on the serge or the cassock, and for ever enlisting themselves in the service of the poor, in school or hospital. We like an easy religion. They alone are able and worthy to raise the walls of Jerusalem who, as Nehemiah, will know how to sacrifice all for God.

3. His earnestness in the work he has undertaken. Notice here the greatness of his faith, as measured by the paucity of his resources and by the vast obstacles which he encounters. Possibly more than one person in this assembly has felt his zeal paralysed by the spectacle of the Church, by the smallness of our resources compared with the vastness of the obstacles! You also, like Nehemiah, have passed dark nights in which you have reviewed one after another all the ruins which our century piles up. Old beliefs, holy, venerated traditions, which mingle in a far-off recollection with the prayers of the cradle, scouted, abandoned to the derision of the multitude! Have you not seen in those souls which are dear to you the hopes and consolations of the gospel wear away one by one? Have you not heard from lips which once prayed as yours the cold denials of a pitiless criticism? Once they heard, when beholding the skies, the song of worlds praising their creator God; now they catch nothing more than the inevitable evolution of an eternal mechanism. Once it was Providence, without whose permission not a sparrow falls to the ground, and who counts our tears; now it is man, who stands solitary in face of the cold immensities of space, where God is no more. Alas! before such ruins I understand how the heart shudders. But it is the very magnificence of these ruins that fills us with hope. Between the living God of Christianity and the nullity of fatalism there is nothing which remains standing; not one system which keeps together even sufficient stones to build a piece of wall or a shelter. Now humanity does not live upon nothing. It sins, it suffers, it dies; it has need of pardon, of consolation, of hope; and if, before those supreme questions which we can shun to-day, but which will return to-morrow, science must confess its entire ignorance; if, to the spirit which has a thirst for the absolute, to the heart which has a thirst for love, to the conscience which has a thirst for righteousness, it replies, "Leave those reveries; I acknowledge nothing but what I touch and what I see"; if such are its latest words, as we are given to understand, humanity must go away elsewhere to seek for repose, peace, certitude. May it then find opened before it the Jerusalem of the living God! Come then, I say to you, come, and let us raise again the wall of Jerusalem, that we be no more a reproach. To the work, in days of difficulty; to the work, notwithstanding the want of success. "O God," said a great Christian, "success is Thine affair; as for me, give me obedience." (*E. Bersier, D.D.*)

And they said, Let us rise up and build.—*Prepared hearts*:—There are moments when human hearts are so prepared by God that great truths require only to be addressed to them to meet an immediate reception. They are as the paper made ready by the photographer for receiving the impress of a likeness; the object has only to be presented before it in a proper light, when it takes on its exact image. It was so in this instance with these men of Judah. They readily responded to Nehemiah's appeal. (*W. Ritchie.*)

Enthusiasm:—The power of enthusiasm, the worth of an enthusiastic man, is the lesson here impressed upon our minds. 1. Nehemiah comes all on fire for his undertaking. He is not only enthusiastic, but wise. Enthusiasm without forethought is blind force. It is like the ocean foaming away its power in battle with an iron-bound coast. United with prudence it is like the stream of a broad, deep river fertilising the soil, bearing on its breast the ships of merchants, giving an impulse to industry, to enterprise, and to the spirit of adventure and discovery. 2. Christianity is a feeble power if it is not enthusiastic. It is the amazing spectacle of the great Redeemer of the world laying down His life for the world

which has created the Church, and which is the life and energy of her every message and mission. 3. Enthusiasm is the need of the Church of God. Hearts with fire, souls with passion glowing within them. Before such men the mountain becomes a plain, the rough places smooth, the impossible possible. It is humanity's true cleansing stream and motive power. The enthusiasm of Christ is for us all the safeguard of conduct, the mightiest inspiration to a holy and useful life. (*A. J. Griffith.*) *Leaders wanted:*—Often what people are waiting for is simply a leader—a man of courage, energy, and hopefulness, who can stimulate their zeal by the contagion of his own, and who, at the same time, has practical ability to marshal their powers and to organise and direct their resources. Such a man was Nehemiah. (*T. Campbell Finlayson.*) *The strength of unity*—I. CONSISTS IN ITS POWER TO PROTECT INDIVIDUAL WORKERS AGAINST DISCOURAGEMENT. 1. Isolated workers are always liable to depression. 2. Mutual sympathy and conference relieve mental strain, and renew exhausted energy. II. CONSISTS IN ITS POWER OF RESISTING COMBINED OPPOSITION FROM WITHOUT. III. CONSISTS IN ITS POWER TO COPE WITH THE INHERENT DIFFICULTIES OF THE WORK, WHICH OTHERWISE WOULD BE INSURMOUNTABLE. (*Homiletic Commentary.*) *The rebuilding of Jerusalem:*—I remember a saying of Edward Irving's which proved a guiding light to so great a man as Frederick Maurice, when he was in doubt and darkness. It was this: "The Old Testament is the dictionary of the New!" We can use the Old Testament reverently as such to-day, and may find the meaning and motive of modern service in this story of earlier days. Let us try to look, then, under the surface and see—I. THE NATURE OF THIS WORK—the rebuilding of Jerusalem. 1. It was for religious ends that it was undertaken. Babylon and Shushan were noble cities; but the work of erecting others like them would not have inspired Nehemiah with this self-sacrificing fervour. Some cities are the creatures of commerce, and grow, as London grows, by the numbers who come to it for work or speculation; and then they decay, as many a city has done, because the highway to the sea gets closed up by the mass of matter poured down by the river and silted up by the tides. Other cities are planted by a conqueror for military purposes, to dominate some disaffected district, or to guard a threatened frontier—as Metz was fortified in modern days, and as most Roman towns were erected in our own country. But Jerusalem was not a military centre; it was on no great highway, and its site would have been ill chosen for commercial enterprise. That city was pre-eminently a sacred city, containing a temple whose ritual enshrined truths which the world could not have done without. If you read the subsequent history of this rebuilding you will see the uses to which the city was put directly it was safe against attack. And those were the purposes the builders contemplated. The law of God was read to the people by Ezra; the Feast of Tabernacles was kept, as it had not been for many a year; the Day of Atonement was solemnly observed; and the former covenant with Jehovah was renewed. And then righteous laws were enforced, and justice was done to all the people. This teaches us that all our undertakings, as God's people—even though they are as material as building a city or enlarging a church—are to be begun and carried on with such ends in view. 2. Again, the good work these Jews had to do was amid the ruins of what had been noble. Every dislodged stone, every chiselled capital, every broken pillar, every charred fragment of carved woodwork was an evidence of the beauty and glory which had been. Ruins! we Christian workers see them everywhere. Heathen sacrifices and penances—what are these but the fragments, the dimly-remembered traditions, of a nobler faith? And inspiring utterances from the lips and pens of great thinkers, who doubt or deny the existence of God, are only the shattered columns which tell us of what has been given of God, though now marred by human folly. Aye, and in the Church are ruins of theological systems which once imperfectly set forth the Divine ideal, now broken up, not to be destroyed, but to be rebuilt in statelier and nobler forms. And, sadder far, we see around us ruins of manhood, ruins of womanhood, ruins of childhood, faces besotted by drink, bodies debased by impurity, living temples defiled and desecrated, till the very angels might weep over them. God help us to do a little upbuilding, and give us grace to this end to undertake the lowliest work. 3. Such labour is called for by God. II. THE ADVANTAGES OF SUCH WORK. 1. Its tendency is to increase strength. I have seen some Churches ruined by rust, through lying by like a disused plough in fallow ground; but I never saw (or heard of) one broken down by overwork. So long as there is a spirit of enterprise, a longing to do greater things—not from a desire for self-glorification, but from a sincere wish

to advance the cause of the Master—so long there is life, and life which becomes more abundant. Use develops and improves living things and living gifts always. There is more muscle in the ironworker than in the student; more keenness of sight in the Highland gillie than in the shopman; more intellectual power in the student than in the ploughman—because in each the gift has been developed by exercise. Let a Church transmute its feeling of love for the brethren into actual service for the poor, and its love will abound yet more and more. 2. Its tendency is to make more real fellowship among the workers. III. THE SPIRIT IN WHICH ALL WORK FOR GOD SHOULD BE UNDERTAKEN. 1. In the spirit of earnestness. How seldom we pause to ask, “Is this the best I can do?” Is this “the most I can afford”? Nehemiah sacrificed ease and wealth, but our Lord sacrificed Himself; and in the presence of Christ’s Cross how poor our offerings and services seem! Yet men who do not profess what we do sometimes put us to shame. Did you read, in your newspaper, about that terrible accident at the Clifton Colliery, near Manchester, whereby about one hundred and fifty men and boys lost their lives? It seemed going down to certain death to descend the shaft; yet when there was a call for volunteers there was eager competition for the honour of risking life to save the men entombed below. And one of the men down there at the time—Thomas Worrall, the surviving underlooker—knocked to the ground by the force of the explosion, recovered consciousness only to devote himself to the guidance and the deliverance of the frightened men and lads about him; and when he reached the main shaft he sent up all the injured, and then the uninjured, himself remaining in danger till the last. In another part of the pit was a fireman, George Hickson, whose duty it was to manipulate the signals between the bottom of the shaft and the engine-house above. He stood there at the post of duty, refusing to leave, whatever happened; for he was the appointed means of communication between the rescuers up in light and those to be rescued down in darkness. We admire and praise the earnestness and devotion of such heroes in humble life; but should we not emulate them if we profess to be the disciples of Him who gave His life for the world? Standing as we do, like that poor collier, between the living and the dead, the mediators—holding God with the hand of faith, and holding man with the hand of love—let us realise our responsibility and be true to our duty. 2. In the spirit of hopefulness. 3. In the spirit of prayerfulness. (A. Rowland, LL.B., B.A.) They laughed us to scorn.—*Derision*:—A poor, godly man was the subject of much profane ridicule amongst his neighbours. On being asked if these persecutions did not sometimes make him ready to give up his profession of religion, he replied, “No. I recollect that our minister once said in his sermon, that if we were so foolish as to permit such people to laugh us out of our religion, till at last we dropped into hell, they could not laugh us out again.” *Fortified against derision*:—Admiral Colpoys relates that when he first left his lodgings to join his ship as a midshipman, his landlady presented him with a Bible and a guinea, saying, “God bless you, and prosper you my lad; and as long as you live never suffer yourself to be laughed out of your money or your prayers.” This advice he carefully followed through life. *Open derision*:—The sin of mocking—

I. WEAKENS EVERY VIRTUOUS RESTRAINT. II. STRENGTHENS VICIOUS PROPENSITIES. III. GIVES GREAT ADVANTAGE TO YOUR WORST ENEMIES. IV. EXPOSES TO PECULIAR MARKS OF GOD’S DISPLEASURE (2 Kings ii. 23). V. TERMINATES IN REMEDILESS WOE (Isa. lxi. 3, 4; Prov. i. 25, 26). (J. Kidd.) *Ridicule confronted*:—There are some natures—and these by no means the most ignoble—that are peculiarly sensitive to ridicule. They could meet a blow better than a sneer, and would rather be persecuted than despised. If we hold certain views on political questions, let us, indeed, make sure that we are holding them on good grounds; but let us not give them up, or be ashamed of them, merely because we may be sneered at as being “behind the age.” There is an intellectual self-conceit which shelters its own ignorance behind the authority of great names, and all but exhausts its own shallow powers in flippant sarcasm and clever scorn. Or, again, if we take an interest in Christian missions, or try to teach a few children in a Sunday-school, or aim at lifting some of our companions into a more thoughtful life, let us not give up our endeavours merely because some Sanballat or Tobiah may jeer at us. If our work is one which the God of heaven is likely to smile upon and prosper, we can afford to despise all this foolish scorn. Or, again, if we are seeking to build up our own character into true godliness, let us learn to confront all ridicule with calmness. (T. Campbell Finlayson.) The God of heaven, He will prosper us.—*Confidence in God an incentive to work*:—Because—I. IT SUGGESTS ALMIGHTY PROTECTION. II. IT SUGGESTS

PROVIDENTIAL DIRECTION. III. IT SUGGESTS DIVINE BENEDICTION. IV. IT ANTICIPATES ULTIMATE SUCCESS. (*Homiletic Commentary.*) *Signs of prosperity*:—We are not called to build a wall; but to raise something more noble than that. We are called of God to go and search amongst the rubbish of our poor fallen humanity, and find our precious stones that shall be polished after the similitude of a palace. We are called to build a city of living stones that shall be a habitation of God through the Spirit. The times in which we are doing this are no whit better than they were in Nehemiah's day. The men who scoffed in that day sent their spirit flitting through the ages, and in their children they scoff still. I hear them sneer, and say, "What are these poor people trying to do? Do they presume to tread upon our domain, and think of building on our ruins? Why, if a fox comes against their work it will fall." Well, what is our answer? "The God of heaven, He will prosper us." I. SIGNS OF PROSPERITY. 1. A bold independence of the world. 2. A total dependence upon God. 3. A third sign of prosperity is the spirit and power of prayer in a Church. This is the great secret of her strength and success, and the power that moves all her machinery. My little child wants to know what makes the hands of my watch go round and tell me the time. I explain the power of the spring, and assure her that is the secret of the hands going round. I want to know the secret of so much prosperity in some Churches. I see it is there in abundance, and wonder if the secret is in the learning and eloquence of the preacher, or the wealth of the deacons, or the respectability of the congregation. I have found out the secret. There is a crowd of earnest men, and in the crowd the spirit and power of prayer. 4. When the work of conversion goes on in the congregation. II. THE SOURCE OF PROSPERITY. III. THE CERTAINTY OF PROSPERITY. (*W. Cuff.*) *The worker's watchword*:—I. THE HONOURABLE NAME NEHEMIAH APPROPRIATES TO HIMSELF AND TO HIS FELLOW-LABOURERS: a servant of God. To know God is the highest aim of science; to be like God, the highest ideal of humanity; to serve God, the joy of angels. A child of God is a more precious designation than that of servant of God. Yet there is a resemblance between them, for true liberty, greatness, salvation consists in this—serving God. II. THE HOLY PURPOSE Nehemiah had before him. "We will rise and build." The true servant of God must be building the house of God. 1. In his own heart. 2. In his home. 3. In society. 4. In the state. 5. In the Church. 6. In the world. III. HIS SEVERE STRIFE. His work does not prosper without conflict. The world and the kingdom of God are as opposed to one another as the Samaritans and Jews were of old. Ethics they hold to be of value still, but care nothing for the revelation of the saving grace of God to sinful men. IV. THE TRUE SUPPORT. V. A CONSCIOUS FIDELITY. Nehemiah was conscious of his own fidelity. The Lord still knows those who preserve their fidelity. For their fidelity they are responsible, not for the results. VI. A GLORIOUS TRIUMPH. The Lord causes the work to succeed. If we build and trust, pray and work, the like success will be ours. (*J. J. Van Oosterzee.*) *A well-grounded resolution*:—I. THE ANSWER TO THE ADVERSARIES. II. THE CONFIDENCE EXPRESSED. III. THE RESOLUTION TO WORK. (*J. Wells.*) *Nehemiah's answer to his reproachful adversaries*:—I. THE SUBJECT-MATTER OF NEHEMIAH'S ANSWER AND WHAT IT TEACHES us. It reminds us—1. Whence all true prosperity and success in the Lord's work are to be looked for and obtained. "Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it; except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain." "Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit saith the Lord." It is "God that giveth the increase." What the Word of God thus plainly teaches, providence abundantly illustrates, and human experience amply confirms. 2. That this ought to have the effect of stirring us up to earnest united exertion, and of keeping us ever actively engaged in the Lord's service. II. THE SPIRIT IN WHICH THIS ANSWER WAS MADE. 1. It was made in a strong, unwavering confidence in God, with the humble assurance of Divine help and success in the work. 2. It was the spirit of enlightened zeal for the cause of God and the Divine glory. 3. It was the spirit of fearless determination to prosecute the work on which he was entering at all hazards. 4. It was one of self-denying patriotism. Conclusion: We ought to cultivate the spirit and imitate the example of Nehemiah—1. In the work of our own individual salvation. 2. In furthering the interests of the Redeemer's kingdom in the world. (*J. Sturrock.*) *Inspiring mottoes for Christian workers*:—There was an excellent missionary who, from his conversion to his death, adopted three texts as his daily mottoes. 1. Personal hope: "Looking unto Jesus." 2. Personal strength: "My grace is sufficient for thee." 3. Personal service: "Whose I am, and whom I serve." (*J. M. Randall.*)

CHAPTER III.

VERS. 1-32. Then Eliashib the high priest rose up with his brethren.—The builders at work :—Unity in diversity seems to be the principle on which God works both in the natural and spiritual world—a truth which is capable of almost endless illustration. I. We see it, for instance, in an **INDIVIDUAL CHURCH**. What a variety of mental constitution and habits of thought; what difference in training, in education, and, consequently, in apprehension of spiritual things, and also in time, opportunity and social influence, among individual members. Yet where there is the quickening breath of the Spirit of God, there will be unity in the work while there is diversity in the operations. Thus one man is called to preach, another to take charge of the finances; while each takes his own part and seeks by God's help to discharge his individual responsibility, there must be a chord of sympathy between all the workers, for they "are members one of another." II. The same is true of the **DIFFERENT SECTIONS INTO WHICH THE CHURCH OF CHRIST IS STILL UNHAPPILY DIVIDED**. III. We may go farther and apply this truth to the **MANY EFFORTS THAT ARE NOW BEING PUT FORTH ALL OVER THE WORLD**. Among the nations of Europe there are zealous workers, and we must bear them up before God in believing prayer. They are working on the same wall, though on different parts of it. And there are indirect workers, too, whom we must not fail to recognise. The philanthropist, the temperance reformer, those engaged in educational, charitable, and other movements which tend to benefit the masses of the people—they also are engaged in building the wall. We must enlarge our sympathies and rejoice in every man who seeks to do honest work for God. We must not forget, however, that while there was oneness in the work, there was individuality in its different parts. The work being great, it was subdivided, and each man had a special portion allotted to him, generally that which lay nearest to his own dwelling. There is work there if he will only look for it under the guidance of God's Spirit. About twenty years ago a youth in whose heart lay the fervent desire to preach to the heathen, stood in a crowded assembly listening to a popular preacher. "You think," said the speaker, "of a group of blacks gathered under the wide-spreading banian tree, and you imagine how you could discourse to them of the wondrous love of Christ. Ah! my brother, begin at home; try it in the streets of London first." It was a word in season; the young man began to build over against his house; God blessed him to the conversion of hundreds of souls, and He is blessing him still. In Christian work, too, we may see that the selfish instinct is recognised—not the selfishness which robs God and glorifies self, but that which leads a worker to be interested in his own department of work as he can be in no other. In this sense there is a selfishness which is not sinful, and which we may almost say is not selfish. If kept in due subordination to thoughts of the oneness of the work, it is commendable and ought to be cultivated. How often in conversation with a brother worker have we failed to gain his close attention while we spoke to him of our work or the work of other brethren! But when we asked about his congregation, his mission-room, or his Sunday or ragged school, what a change! His tongue was loosed, and his whole face glowed with animation as he told us how the Lord was helping and blessing him. It is both natural and right that it should be so. He is building before his own door, and while not ignoring others, he thinks of the work over against his house as he can of no other part of the wall. His heart is specially there. From the portions of work allotted to the individual citizens, we may learn also the importance of concentration in Christian effort. Had a man put a brick here, and a daub of mortar there, and laid a beam yonder, the wall would have made but slow progress; but as one man built before his own door, and another before his, and so on all round the city, the attention and energy of each were concentrated upon his special portion, and the wall rapidly approached completion. Now, concentration is an important principle in Christian work as well as in the building of a wall, and if we look back on the history of the Church, we shall find that the greatest results have been achieved by men who have continuously bent their energies towards a given point. It is the fashion in our day rather to decry "men of one idea." This fashion is much promoted by men of no idea, who are jealous of brethren more fortunate than themselves. This principle is important in reference not only to the object of life, but to the sphere of labour. It is of greater consequence to do one thing well than many things indifferently. Diffusion seems to be the aim of many workers in this restless age, and breadth rather than depth is characteristic of their

efforts. (*W. P. Lockhart.*) *The repairer of the breach*:—I. THE BUILDERS. The patriots have expressed their purpose to build the wall, and they proceed immediately to carry this good resolution into effect. We know nothing in all history like the scene here portrayed. We have read, indeed, of ancient Rome, when burned by fire, being rebuilt by her citizens; but these were still rich and powerful. We have heard, too, of ancient Carthage, when almost razed to the ground by foreign invaders, being repaired and fortified by the patriots of the nation; but these were yet numerous and wealthy. We know nothing, however, like this in the annals of the world, where the small remnant of the captives of Judah, with simple trust in God, set themselves to rebuild their fallen capital, while they were few in numbers, poor in resources, and surrounded with hosts of enemies frowning on their enterprise.

1. They were all Israelites in the land of Judah. In the book of Ezra we learn that aliens from the commonwealth of Israel were not permitted to join in rebuilding the temple, even though for sinister ends they proffered their services. They could not enter with spirit into the undertaking, and the labour of the hand was not accepted when unaccompanied with the love of the heart. And it is the spiritual Israel still who can labour in promoting Christ's cause and truth in the earth. They alone can effectually advance religion who love and exemplify it. They alone can truly know the truth so as to speak it and spread it. It is a profound observation of Pascal, "that natural things must be known to be loved, but Divine things must be loved in order to be known." Saving truth is not discerned by the mere power of natural reason, or through the acquirements of human learning; it can be perceived only through the illumination of the Holy Ghost. Believers of the word of salvation can alone declare that word with living power. It is a feeble, as well as a heartless thing, for a man to speak truth for the faith of others, that he does not believe in his own soul. It is in vain to expect earnest effort for the conversion of souls from those who have no mercy on themselves, and who have never repented of their own sins.

2. They were of diversified stations and gifts. It deserves remark, that those mentioned here not only gave contributions in money, that the work might advance, but they laboured by personal effort in the building of the wall. This is worthy of high praise, as showing a heart for the good cause, and wisdom in advancing it. Money can, no doubt, do much to procure or sustain effort in promoting the work of God; but there is a power in living activity, in the warm sympathy, in the personal influence, of the present believer helping forward a religious enterprise, that donations of gold can never secure. It is, hence, to the honour of those saints of Judah that they not merely gave their money, but they gave themselves, in life, in love, to labour with their hands in this work of God for building their city walls. In the narrative of these diversified personal efforts we observe—(1) The priests and Levites joined in the work. "Then Eliashib the high priest rose up with his brethren the priests, and they builded the sheep gate" (ver. 1). And "after him repaired the Levites" (ver. 17). But the lowliest act done for the cause of God receives glory from its connection with Him; and the ministers of the sanctuary should be foremost in effort to build up the cause of truth in the earth. (2) The governor and nobles laboured at the wall. There is, indeed, one notable exception to this patrician work. Respecting the nobles of the Takaites it is said, "But their nobles put not their necks to the work of their Lord" (ver. 5). (3) The daughters of Judah shared this honourable toil. "Shallum, the ruler of the half part of Jerusalem, repaired, he and his daughters" (ver. 12). (4) The young united in this sacred employment. "And Hanun the sixth son of Zalaph, repaired another piece" (ver. 30). Youth are often tempted to think religion a gloomy thing, and that to embrace it in their early years would be to lose all the pleasures of life.

3. The builders here belonged to different parts of the Holy Land. They were there from Jericho, and Gibeon, and Keilah, and Mizpah, and Tekoa. These were not men of Jerusalem, but they loved the public interests of religion connected with the city of God, and, as true Israelites, they laboured for its restoration. The extension, the purity, the revival of the Church in every part of the world, is the common cause of all who name the name of Christ. Christians, then, should never be so absorbed with their own party interests as to forget the great cause of His glory, and the good of man. If they really love the Lord Jesus their regard for His honour must be tested by their active effort to overthrow the reign of sin, and advance the empire of righteousness.

II. THE PROGRESS OF THE WORK. In the call of Divine judgment for the overthrow of the city God commanded, "Begin at My sanctuary"; and so we remark, this work of restoration commences beside the temple, proceeds north, and westward, till it completes the circuit of the

wall. "The priests built the sheep gate, and they sanctified it, and set up the doors of it." Through it the sacrifices were brought into the holy place, and the patriots first repaired it, that they might defend the house of God from all assaults or danger. They were the ministers of religion that performed this part of the work, and they thus teach their brethren that everything connected with Divine worship is to be guarded with religious care. From them, too, we learn that our first concern in all reform, as well as in the activities of life, should be for the safety and prosperity of the Church of God. But if the Church of Christ is dear to the hearts of her members, and is prosperous through their works of faith, the cause of humanity and of truth is secure in the earth. The work here was carried on by the labourers where each of them was most deeply interested. It is recorded of several of the householders of Jerusalem that "he repaired over against his house" (ver. 23), and respecting one who seems to have been only a lodger, it is said, "he repaired over against his chamber" (ver. 30). Labour near their respective dwellings was most convenient for the persons engaged, and it was necessary for their own safety that the wall there should not be broken down. Religion ever appeals to the instinct of self-love, and the strength of domestic affection in the human heart, to animate zeal for its advancement. Christian parent! your own children are dear to you, and you are appointed to labour and pray for their salvation. Christian philanthropist! your own country is the object of your love, and you are required to give your foremost endeavours for the religious welfare of your brethren, your kinsmen according to the flesh. This work, moreover, was prosecuted with varied zeal. The enterprise required co-operation of effort; and we find sometimes two persons united in setting up one gate. There was need, too, for diversity of zeal, for while one part had only to be repaired, another had to be entirely rebuilt; but the diversity of grace demanded was perseveringly displayed. To the honour of one we read, "Baruch earnestly repaired" (ver. 20), as if his diligence was such as to be manifest to all beholders. To the praise of others, we are given to understand that when they had raised up one part they proceeded to restore another. "Meremoth," and the "Tekoites" (vers. 21, 27), after finishing the work first allotted to them, undertook a second portion of labour, as if they felt there should be no remission from toil so long as any part of Jerusalem remained broken down.

III. THE OPPOSITION OF ENEMIES. It is not good that the spiritual life should flow on without trial, or that a great work should progress without admonition of its constant dependence on God. Long seasons of repose or prosperity are apt to produce self-complacency in the heart; God therefore subjects His servants to humbling reverses, and pours them from vessel to vessel, lest they should be settled on their lees. In the performance of a good work the encounter of difficulties is salutary, and it is permitted in profound wisdom. He that sits in the seat of the scornful seldom needs to sit long there alone. Here we observe the leading mocker is soon joined by a humble imitator, in the same strain of ridicule at the works of earnest piety. "Now Tobiah the Ammonite was by him, and he said, Even that which they build, if a fox go up, he shall even break down their stone wall." And so it has been in all ages. The most solemn scenes and venerable characters, the greatest actions and the grandest enterprises, have encountered the derision of bad men, sitting in the seat of the scorner. The leading infidel of the Continent in the close of last century vented his malicious jests at the sublime verities of the Christian faith, and sneered at the redemption of the world by the blood of God's Son. Thus, too, the profane wits of the time laughed to scorn the commencement of the great enterprise of modern missions to the heathen, and derided the proposal to convert the world to the Christian faith, while only a few pounds were as yet in the treasury, and some illiterate artisans were consecrated the apostles of the gospel to India. All such mockers overlook this one thing, that the cause of truth has God for its author, and therefore faith in effort for its advancement rests on Omnipotence for success. It requires but little talent to raise a laugh against the affections and works of piety.

IV. THE DEVOTION OF JUDAH UNDER NEHEMIAH. In narrating the zeal of the builders, Nehemiah makes no mention of his own great service in the common cause. He was the soul of the whole undertaking—planning, animating, and sustaining it, at every point; yet he never once refers to himself among those whose names are recorded with honour. In the outset of the enterprise, while it still prospers, this truly great man narrates the progress of the work in the third person, as if he had had no share in the honourable toil. But so soon as difficulties occur, the style of the history is changed, and he takes his place under the term "we," among the sufferers for the cause of truth. It is a beautiful example of

modesty and humility to all the servants of God. Nehemiah in this hour of trial displays great forbearance under wrong. The proud scorn he encountered might have provoked his resentment to inflict punishment on its despicable authors. He was high in favour with the king, and it would probably have been easy for him to obtain power to chastise these adversaries of his country; but he is as distinguished for patience as for courage. There is not a Christian that suffers reproach in serving Christ, but the Lord feels it as done to Himself; and unless mercy is asked to pardon the affront, it will be visited with the wrath of the Lamb for evermore.

V. THE ZEAL OF THE PEOPLE FOR THE COMPLETION OF THE WORK. Derision and discouragement drive multitudes from the support of a good cause. Many have begun to run well in their religious course. How many, too, are frightened away from a good work by the sneers and opposition directed against those who are zealous in its promotion. They believe the enterprise to be right in itself, they are persuaded it is fraught with blessings to men; but they cannot bear the jests or banter which open adherence to it entails. (*W. Ritchie.*) *Honourable mention*:—It was natural that the Pasha should thus make "honourable mention" of those who came to the front, and threw their energies into this patriotic work. Nehemiah was doubtless anxious to hand down to posterity the names of all who were leaders in the movement; he did not wish to take to himself the whole credit of the work; we may be sure that he wrote down this register of names with both pleasure and pride. We find that priests, rulers, merchants, and tradesmen all took a share in this enterprise; and, where the work of the Lord is concerned, it is only becoming that there should be this unity of spirit and division of labour. Often, in our modern Christian Churches, too much is left to the ministers of religion; and sometimes one man is expected to do a work which ought to be shared by a whole congregation. The merchant and tradesman will sometimes plead the engrossing claims of business or the pressure of "bad times" as a reason for holding aloof from the varied efforts of Christian benevolence; and it is to be feared also that some of our modern aristocrats are prevented by the haughty and foolish pride of rank from throwing their energies and influence into the activities of the Christian Church. (*T. C. Finlayson.*) *A godly ancestry*:—To us Nehemiah's catalogue of the builders may now seem to be little more than a dry register of names. But it is not difficult to imagine how interesting it may have been for generations after it was written. As Jerusalem began to grow again in power and splendour, men would scan with eager interest the list of those who had engaged in such a brave and self-denying work. We can imagine how, centuries later, the eye of some young boy might kindle with pride and enthusiasm when he read here, in one of the sacred books, the name of some ancestor of his own, who had nobly borne his part in building up the walls of Jerusalem. It is a grand thing to come of a patriotic or godly lineage. (*Ibid.*) *At work*:—Words have given place to deeds. I. In looking over this list of workers we are struck with the fact that THEY ARE DRAWN FROM ALL CLASSES OF SOCIETY. 1. The priests took a prominent part in this work. "Then Eliashib the high priest rose up with his brethren the priests, and they builded the sheep-gate." We fear that, as respects the high priest, what he did in this way was not a work of love. Some years afterwards, much to Nehemiah's regret, this same Eliashib acted a very unworthy and unpatriotic part: and we suspect it was more for the sake of appearances than from any real wish to promote the success of the enterprise that he was found among the builders mentioned in this chapter. Again, it was quite right the priest should be active on this occasion, for it was owing in a great measure to their unfaithfulness—to the unfaithfulness, that is, of the priesthood prior to the time of the Babylonian captivity, that the city was laid in ruins. In Jeremiah we read, "The priests said not, Where is the Lord? and they that handle the law knew Me not; the pastors also transgressed against Me, and the prophets prophesied by Baal, and walked after things that do not profit." 2. The rulers, too, or princes of the house of Israel, took a leading part in repairing the wall, and, as in the case of the priests, it was proper they should; for their misconduct, their evil practices, had contributed greatly to bring about the downfall of the city (*Micah iii. 9, 12*). The advantages of co-operation were thus secured. By means of this combination the work was done quickly, simultaneously, and economically. Here, certainly, was a remarkable spectacle: all classes of the community concentrating their energies on a common object. Difference of opinion and rivalries might exist among them, but for the nonce these were sunk in the achievement of a purpose dear to every patriotic heart. II. THAT THE WORK REFERRED TO WAS UNDERTAKEN BY PARTIES FROM VARIOUS LOCALITIES, AND NOT BY THE CITIZENS OF THE CAPITAL

ALONE. Thus we read, "And next unto him builded the men of Jericho." The Tekoites are also named, and the men of Gibeon and of Mizpah, and the inhabitants of Zanoah, and the rulers of Bethhaccerem—these and others from places round about are represented as co-operating with the residents of the city in repairing the wall. It was a work of national importance, and as such it was regarded by those just named. III. On further examining this register we find INCIDENTAL REFERENCES in it that should not be overlooked. 1. The first of these I will name relates to the aristocracy of Tekoah, and is evidently not intended to be complimentary to them. The Tekoites, as a people, were not backward, "but their nobles put not their necks to the work of their Lord." They dishonoured themselves by standing aloof as they did at this crisis. Their conduct, it is true, might have been worse. If they were not active in it, we cannot say of them that they were active in their opposition to it. You have known persons not content with a passive attitude towards what is good. What restless—yea, raging opponents Christianity in its early days had to encounter! 2. In striking contrast to the supineness of the nobles of Tekoah was the conduct of Baruch the son of Zabbai. Nehemiah says of him that he "earnestly repaired" his section of the wall. He specially commends the zeal of Baruch. Luther, Wesley, Whitfield, these also are names with which, among other high qualities, will ever be associated an unflagging zeal, as attested by their more abundant labours. Did the keen glance of Nehemiah note the zeal of Baruch? and shall the eye of God pass over unnoticed one earnest worker for Him anywhere, or at any time? 3. The third and last incidental reference to which I shall call your attention informs us that there were those engaged in this wall-building whom we should hardly have expected to find thus employed. At ver. 12 we read, "And next unto him repaired Shallum the son of Halohesh, the ruler of the half part of Jerusalem, he and his daughters." All honour to them. We think of others of their sex who have toiled right worthily, and in some instances heroically, in the service of Christ. The case of Sister Dora of the Walsall Cottage Hospital occurs to us. We think too of some who are thus labouring to-day; ladies by birth and education who have consecrated their property and their lives to the Lord, for whose dear sake they shrink not from menial tasks, and repulsive ministries, and risks and dangers, to face which requires a loftier courage than nerves the soldier for the battlefield. (*T. Rowson.*)

Individual labours:—The workman is always the world's true nobleman. To pay others to do some portion of our work for us does not absolve us from the duty of personal labour. Every merchant knows that for him to pay a manager and a staff of clerks to conduct his business, while he himself goes away into the country to live and enjoy himself, means, in nine cases out of ten, the decline of his receipts, the breaking up of his trade connection, and presently, the ruin of his business. Every lady knows that to engage servants is not sufficient to secure the order and wholesomeness of her rooms, the regularity of meals in the house, nor the comfort of her husband, herself, and her children. The master, the mistress, must themselves think, and plan, and labour. In Church-work the same law is in force to its utmost jot and tittle. (*A. G. Griffith.*)

Life's masonry:—More than one figure in Scripture represents the work of life as a building (1 Pet. ii. 4, 5; Matt. xvi. 18; 1 Cor. iii. 10-15). I. EVERY ONE TO CONTRIBUTE HIS LIFE-TOIL TO THE BUILDING UP OF THE CITY OF GOD. II. EVERY MAN HAS HIS OWN APPOINTED SPHERE AND KIND OF WORK. 1. Every one must find his own task. 2. Every one must be content with his own task. III. EVERY MAN CONTRIBUTES BUT A FRAGMENT TO THE GREAT WHOLE. IV. EVERY MAN TO WORK IN HARMONIOUS AIM WITH HIS FELLOW-BUILDERS. V. THE UNITED WORK IS SUPERINTENDED BY THE GREAT ARCHITECT. 1. He only understands the whole of the great intricate plan of life. 2. He is near us with directions. 3. Let the thought, "Thou God seest me," animate us at our toil. (*Homiletic Commentary.*)

A suggestive Church record:—I. THE POTENCY OF PERSONAL INFLUENCE. Nehemiah created a spirit of enthusiasm which set all this train of exertion in motion. II. THE FORCE OF EXAMPLE. The priests took the lead in the common labour. III. ADVANTAGES OF SYSTEMATIC ORGANISATION. Each volunteer made responsible for some limited portion of work. IV. THE GIGANTIC RESULT ACHIEVABLE BY INDIVIDUAL ACTION. Like coral insects at work, the multitude of builders each did his part of the whole. V. THE DIVERSITY OF DISPOSITION REVEALED BY THE GREAT EMERGENCY. 1. Enthusiastic work. 2. Refusal to put the neck to the yoke. VI. THE CONSENTANEITY OF PURPOSE AND EFFORT WHICH A GREAT EMERGENCY DEMANDS AND IS CALCULATED TO BRING ABOUT. VII. THE DIVERSITY OF GIFTS WHICH A GREAT EMERGENCY CALLS INTO REQUISITION. (*Ibid.*) *Associated*

labour :—A single bee, with all its industry, energy, and innumerable journeys it has to perform, will not collect more than a teaspoonful of honey in a single season, and yet the total weight of honey taken from a single hive is often from sixty to one hundred pounds. A very profitable lesson to mankind of what may arise from associated labour. (*Scientific Illustrations, &c.*) *The building of the wall* :—*Learn*—I. THAT WHILE GOD GRANTS SUCCESS TO EARNEST EFFORT, THAT VERY SUCCESS WILL OFTEN AROUSE OPPOSITION. II. OPPOSITION TO EARNEST WORK GENERALLY COMES FROM “THE MIXED MULTITUDE” WHO HOVER ROUND THE TRUE PEOPLE OF GOD. III. WHAT ONE MAN DARE NOT DO ALONE, HE IS EMBOLEDENED TO DO BY ASSOCIATION WITH OTHERS; and often men of diverse opinions and tastes are banded together to oppose God’s work, their only bond of union being a desire to have it stopped. IV. TIMID AND FEARFUL ONES THERE ARE IN EVERY COMMUNITY WHOSE HEARTS READILY FAIL THEM, and who often think that the good cause is about to be worsted. V. IN ALMOST EVERY CHRISTIAN CHURCH THE ANDOUR OF THE FEW IS MORE OR LESS DAMPED BY THE APATHY OF THE MANY. VI. WE MUST WATCH AS WELL AS PRAY. A Russian proverb says, “When in a storm, pray to God and row to the shore.” VII. THE ONENESS OF THE WORKERS, AND THAT THEY SHOULD ENCOURAGE EACH OTHER WHEN BESET BY FRIEND OR FOE. VIII. STEADY AND PERSISTENT WORK TELLS BEST IN THE LONG RUN. IX. THAT EVEN IN THE MIDST OF ARDUOUS LABOUR FOR THE LORD, THE DECENCIES AND PROPRIETIES OF LIFE ARE IN NO WISE OVERLOOKED. (*W. P. Lockhart.*) *Ministers should be leaders* :—The ministers of Christ must not only give good exhortation to their flocks, but also put their own shoulder to the work. Example is mightier than precept. The roads in the Ban de la Roche were soon levelled and put in order when the good pastor Oberlin set the example of manual toil to his parishioners. (*J. M. Randall.*) *Merchant workers* :—In our own country, the names of Henry Thornton, Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton, Sir Francis Crossley, and Samuel Budget, will occur to many. Our merchants and tradesmen have indeed glorious opportunities for extending the Redeemer’s name, if they had but a mind to the work. (*Ibid.*) And next unto him builded the men of Jericho.—*System and detail in work* :—A great work—I. CAN ONLY BE PLANNED BY A GREAT MIND. II. CAN ONLY BE CARRIED OUT BY A DIVISION OF LABOUR. III. CAN ONLY BE ACCOMPLISHED BY ATTENTION TO DETAILS. “Bars and locks.” IV. BRINGS OUT SPECIAL ADAPTATIONS. V. MUST HAVE REGARD TO PRACTICAL UTILITY. The fish-gate as necessary as the repairing of temple wall. VI. MUST BE INSPIRED BY A LOFTY PURPOSE. VII. MUST LOOK ON TO THE FUTURE. It must have in it the element of permanence. (*Homiletic Commentary.*)

Ver. 8. And they fortified Jerusalem unto the broad wall.—*The broad wall* :—I. THE SEPARATION OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD FROM THE WORLD IS LIKE THAT BROAD WALL SURROUNDING JERUSALEM. An actual separation is made by grace, is carried on in the work of sanctification, and will be completed in that day when the saints shall be caught up together with the Lord in the air. 1. Christians should maintain a broad wall of separation between themselves and the world. The distinction ought not to be one of dress or of speech, the separation ought to be moral and spiritual. (1) A Christian ought to be more scrupulous than other men in his dealings. He must never swerve from the path of integrity. He should be one whose word is his bond, and who having once pledged his word, sweareth to his own hurt and changeth not. (2) The Christian should be distinguished by his pleasures. We are not quite ourselves, perhaps, in our daily toil, where our pursuits are rather dictated by necessity than by choice, but our pleasures and pastimes give evidence of what our heart is and where it is. (3) Such separation should be carried into everything which affects the Christian. When a stranger comes into our house it should be so ordered that he can clearly perceive that we have a respect unto Him that is invisible, and that we desire to live and move in the light of God’s countenance. (4) This broad wall should be most conspicuous in the spirit of our mind. There should be about a Christian always the air of one who has his shoes on his feet, his loins girded, and his staff in his hand—away, away to a better land. 2. Reasons why this wall should be very broad. (1) If you are sincere in your profession, there is a very broad distinction between you and unconverted people. (2) Remember that our Lord Jesus Christ had a broad wall between Him and the ungodly. (3) A broad wall of separation is abundantly good for yourselves. When a Christian gives way to the world’s custom he never feels profited thereby. Ask a fish to spend an hour on dry land, and I think did he comply the fish would find that it was not much to its benefit, for it would be out of its element. And it

is so with Christians in communion with sinners. (4) To keep up the broad wall of separation is to do most good to the world. A Christian loses his strength the moment he departs from his integrity. Although the world may openly denounce the rigid Puritan, it secretly admires him. You young man in the shop—you young woman in the workroom—if you keep yourselves to yourselves in Christ's name, chaste and pure for Jesus, not laughing at jests which should make you blush; not mixing up with pastimes that are suspicious; but being tenderly jealous of your conscience at all times, then your company in the midst of others shall be as though an angel shook his wings, and they will say, "Refrain from this or that just now, for So-and-so is there." They will fear you in a certain sense; they will admire you in secret; and who can tell but they, at last, may come to imitate you? II. THE BROAD WALL ROUND JERUSALEM INDICATED SAFETY. The Christian is surrounded by the broad wall—1. Of God's power. 2. Of God's love. 3. Of God's law and justice. 4. Of God's immutability. 5. Of the work of the Holy Spirit. 6. Almost every doctrine of grace affords us a broad wall, a mighty bulwark, a grand munition of defence. III. THIS BROAD WALL SUGGESTS ENJOYMENT. These walls were used as promenades, and were utilised—1. For rest from toil. 2. For communion. 3. For prospects and outlooks. (C. H. Spurgeon.)

Ver 10. **Even over against his house.**—*Repairing the house*:—We are all temples, buildings of the living God, and some of us are sadly out of repair; some among us have fallen into absolute ruin. Our bodies, instead of being the sanctuary of the Holy Spirit, are inhabited by evil lusts, cruel tempers, foul passions. Others, although not in such a sad case, are yet grievously out of repair. There is much in their lives which needs altering, mending. Our own carelessness and neglect have allowed our lives to fall into decay, and the rubbish to accumulate. A restored congregation is ever more important than the restored fabric of the church. Let Nehemiah teach us how these repairs can best be carried out. 1. In the first place, before he undertook the work at all, Nehemiah prayed unto the God of heaven—"Lord, undertake for me." "Unless the Lord build the house, their labour is but lost that build it." We must ask God to restore in us all that the fraud and malice of the devil have decayed in us. 2. The next thing which Nehemiah did, after praying to God, was to set to work, and to set others to work, at repairs. Work and prayer must go together; pray most earnestly, work with a will. 3. Nehemiah made each worker wear a sword by his side, because of the enemies around them who would try to hinder them. That teaches us that whatever our work may be, we must have our religion with us. We must have the sword of the Spirit beside us. Our enemies—the world, the flesh, and the devil—are sure to attack us, and woe unto us if we are unarmed! There was a drummer-boy in the great American war who lost his Bible, a book which he valued above all things. So he set to work to repair his loss as far as possible. He remembered many texts which he had learnt at Sunday-school, and these he wrote on the parchment of his drum. Thus, on the march, in the field of battle, or wherever he did his work, God's Word was before his eyes. Like Nehemiah's builders, he had the sword by his side. Before the work of repairs actually began, Nehemiah made a careful examination of the state of the ruins, that he might know exactly what was wanted. Let us survey the ruins, the breaches in the walls, the rubbish that has accumulated, the weak points in the building. And where shall we begin? 1. For the most part, he set each of his workers to repair "over against his own house." In trying to repair the mistakes and faults and failures of our lives, let us begin over against our own house. Let us survey the ruins there, not those of our neighbour. Mending our own ways is the surest and best plan to fit us to help others to repair theirs. Let us look boldly into the neglected corners of our life, and see what repairs are needed. 2. Let us examine the ruins again; is there no need of repairs in our business life? Is our way of doing our work, whatever it is, quite satisfactory, quite true, and honest, and straightforward? 3. Then is there no need of repairs in the home circle, remembering that we must begin over against our own house? The children are often unruly, selfish, troublesome. The servants are frequently a source of discomfort. One husband sees much need of repairs in his wife. The wife says the same of the husband. Well, let us begin over against our own house. Are we doing our best to set a good example in the family? 4. Is there no need of repairs in our praying? I think many of us feel that our prayers are sometimes neglected, often hurried, formal, cold, unreal. Then there is Bible-reading. Some of us neglect this altogether, others read without interest or under-

standing. Is there not something to be mended here? (*H. J. Wilmot-Buxton, M.A.*) *Building over against one's own house*:—This suggests—I. THE CARE OF ONE'S OWN SOUL. Is it saved? Is it prospering? II. A DEEP INTEREST IN THE SPIRITUAL WELFARE OF THOSE WHO LIVE UNDER THE SAME ROOF. III. LABOUR FOR THE SALVATION OF ALL WHO IN THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD ARE BROUGHT INTO CLOSE OR FREQUENT RELATIONS WITH US. (*W. P. Lockhart.*) *Work at each door*:—The principle on which a great part of the work was done is indicated in several places in this chapter. Charles Reade says: "This may seem a small thing to busy readers, but it was a master stroke of genius. Not only was it a grand division of labour, but it animated the work with a noble emulation and a personal pride." Nehemiah made use of a method which is generally regarded as an outgrowth of our modern civilisation, and anticipated the managers of our great industries in the use of the principle of division of labour, which in our day is carried to so great a length. Every man over against his own house is the principle that should be applied in all work for the moral and spiritual elevation of the community in which we live. I. THERE IS WORK TO BE DONE AT OUR VERY DOORS. There is still plenty of work to be done in our own hearts. The best wall we can build for the protection of our own homes is the structure of a Christlike life. It is as real a defence to our homes to have them surrounded by pure-hearted men and women as was to Jerusalem the wall that Nehemiah raised. The reason that so many missionaries send their children is not always for the sake of the superior education to be had in our schools, but oftener, perhaps, because it would not be safe to allow their children to grow up in the midst of the moral miasma of a heathen land. In the ruined characters and worse than wasted lives of many of the men and women among whom we live, we see the broken wall, and the work of repair consists in the efforts we make to Christianise them. Here there is work at every one's door. II. EACH MAN IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE BIT OF WORK THAT LIES NEAREST TO HIS OWN HOUSE. A minister is placed over a congregation, not to do the people's work for them, but to induce each of them to do the work that God has laid at the door for each to do. I know a successful minister who attributes much of his success to the fact that he will not do anything himself that he can get one of his people to do. (*A. Soutar, M.A.*)

Ver. 12. *He and his daughters.*—*Worthy women*:—We know not how these ladies wrought; probably it was not in a way of manual labour, but rather by words of kindness and acts of consideration towards the builders. We need not tarry to show how worthily the women of England fulfil their mission in the sweet offices of charity. Some of them make the noblest sacrifices from love to their Redeemer. A poor woman sought admission to one of our great missionary meetings in Exeter Hall. The young man who acted as porter demanded her ticket. "I have none," was the reply; "I cannot afford to subscribe." "You cannot enter without a ticket," was the curt rejoinder. "I think, sir," said the widow, "that I have given more than ever you have to the society; I have given an only son, and he is now labouring for your society in India." The widow was cheerfully admitted on this statement. (*J. M. Randall.*) *Family zeal*:—I. NOTABLE WOMEN. 1. Within the circle of Biblical story. 2. In history. II. WOMAN'S INFLUENCE. 1. For evil. Jezebel; Solomon's wives; devotees of fashion, &c. 2. For good. (*Homiletic Commentary.*)

Ver. 15. *By the king's garden.*—*The king's garden*:—There are six of these "king's gardens" to which I shall conduct you, but we shall not have time to tarry in more than one of them. I. The garden of PARADISE, which was situate in the midst of Eden. II. The garden of GETHSEMANE. III. The garden of THE BURIAL AND THE RESURRECTION. IV. The garden of the HUMAN HEART. The heart is meant to be a garden for God. By nature it scarcely deserves the name; it is rather a tangled wilderness of all manner of noisome things. What must be done to this neglected garden? The rough plough of conviction must be dragged through it. The spade of trouble must break up the surface, and smash in pieces the clods, and kill the weeds. Into this prepared soil the Holy Spirit must put in the seeds of faith, and love and hope, and patience and perseverance, and zeal. Then there must be drained out of us much superfluity of naughtiness and excess of carnal confidence, or our heart will be a cold swamp, a worthless plant-killing bog. And in addition to all this, there must be constant hoeing and raking and digging. After a garden is made, the flower-beds are never left long alone; if they were left to themselves they would soon breed weeds again, and return to the old confusion. So

with the garden of the heart, cleansing and pruning must be done every day, and God must do it through ourselves, and we must do it through constant examination and repentance. V. The garden of THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH. Follow me in each word of the text. 1. What is it? A garden. So it is called in the book of Solomon's Song. Many thoughts are gathered in that one metaphor like bees in a hive. (1) It implies separation. I earnestly desire to see the wall of separation between the Church and the world made broader and stronger. Christians should always wear their regimentals as Christ's soldiers. They are to go forth without the camp bearing His reproach. "Be not conformed to this world." (2) It is a place of order. You do not, when you go into a garden, find the plants arranged anyhow, but the wise gardener arranges them according to their tints and hues, so that in the midst of summer the garden shall look like a rainbow that has been broken to pieces and let down upon the earth. Let us all try to maintain order in all things as the servants of Christ. We seek not the order which consists in all sleeping in their places, like corpses in the catacombs, but we desire the order which finds all working in their places for the common cause of the Lord Jesus. (3) A garden is a place of beauty. Such should the Christian Church be. If there be no holiness, no love, no zeal, no prayerfulness outside in the world, yet you should see these things in the Church. (4) It is a place of growth. (5) It is a place of retirement. When a man is in his garden, he does not expect to see all his customers walking down between the beds to do business with him. So the Lord Jesus would have us reserve the Church to be a place in which He can manifest Himself to us as He doth not to the world. 2. Whose is it? It is the King's garden. He chose it for Himself. He bought it. What a nobility this gives to Christ's Church? 3. What does it need? (1) It requires labour. In every Church there should be—(a) Planters. I had a letter last week from a young woman. She says she has been here for two years, that she has been very anxious about her soul, and she has often wished that somebody would speak to her, but nobody has done so. Somebody has been negligent, very negligent. We want planters who can get the young slips and put them where they will grow. (b) Some to watch over those who are planted. (c) Some to collect the straggling. (d) Some to burn up the rubbish and sweep up the leaves. In the best Church there will always be some falling leaves. Whenever a brother sees any mischief he ought to sweep it up and say nothing about it. Whenever you find that such and such a brother is going a little amiss, talk to him quietly; do not spread it all over the Church and make jealousies and suspicions. Pick up the leaf and destroy it. When a brother member has offended you, so that you feel vexed, forgive him. If every one would seek to make peace, there never could be much accumulation of discord in the King's garden to annoy Him. (2) It wants new plants. (3) It wants rain and sunshine; the dew of the Holy Spirit and the sunshine of the Divine favour. 4. What does it produce? "Herein is My Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit." VI. The garden of the PARADISE ABOVE (Rev. xxii. 1-5). (C. H. Spurgeon.) *The garden of the heart:*—Very often when I am going through a garden I come to some little bit marked off from the rest by a stick or a row of stones, and some lad or some little maiden comes running up; "This is my garden," they say, "my very own, to do whatever I like with." Now each of us has a garden, our very own, and yet it ought to be, and must be, the King's garden. It is the garden of the heart. I should like you to remember THAT GARDENS ARE MADE OUT OF WASTE PLACES. We want our heart to be nice and kind, and like a king's garden ought to be; and we look at the brambles and the waste places, and fear sometimes that it never can be made into a garden. "I never shall be good," you say; "I never shall be like so-and-so." When I was a little boy I learnt drawing, and one day when I had tried again and again, and couldn't do it right, I flung down the pencil and said angrily, "I never shall be able to draw." The master was a very kind and a very wise man. He laughed pleasantly, and said, "Come—never is a long time. I couldn't draw any better than you can when I was your age." That put new life into me. He who could draw anything with his pencil, and could make it exactly right with just a touch—to think that once he could not draw any better than I could! I went at it again then, and never felt inclined to give up afterwards. And so with all good people that ever lived—their hearts were wild and waste before they became the King's garden. II. BEFORE THE KING CAN MAKE A GARDEN HE MUST OWN THE LAND. Jesus says to us, "My son, give Me thine heart." He wants the heart, not because it is a garden, but that He may make a King's garden of it. III. IT MUST BE CLEARED AND PLANTED. "Ah," you say, "this is hard work." The

weeds will grow so fast when you've pulled them up. But suppose you could get some one to come and change the ground, so that instead of bringing forth weeds it should bring forth flowers and fruits. That is just what we can do. Jesus has come on purpose to create clean hearts. IV. WE HAVE TO KEEP THIS GARDEN FOR THE KING. 1. We must plant it well. "The seed is the Word of God." 2. We must water it twice a day, and prayer is the watering. 3. We must watch against enemies. When I was a boy we used to set little heaps of "grains" to attract the slugs and snails, and then creep out at night with a lantern and take these mischievous creatures, that otherwise would have spoiled all the fruit and many of the flowers. Take care of these, of habits that spoil all the fruit; of little neglects and forgetfulnesses that ruin the King's garden. The peach-trees and plum-trees have a matting or net hung in front of them—in winter to keep off the frosts, or in summer to keep off the busy birds. We must be watchful against all things that hurt the King's garden. We must be on our guard against bad companions, bad books, and bad influences of all kinds, and also of hasty words, thoughtless ways, and little harmful thoughts and feelings. V. IF IT BE THE KING'S GARDEN THE KING HIMSELF WILL COME TO IT. Cyrus used to say, "I take so much interest in my garden because I have planted every plant, and have sown every seed in it." So it is that Jesus loves His garden. He turned it from a waste into a garden, and has sown the good seed and planted the trees. I have heard of a poor man who lived in a very poor cottage far away from everybody else. One day somebody called to see him and said, "My friend, you must be very lonely here." "Lonely!" he replied, "ah, so I might be, but Jesus is such blessed company!" He had been walking in the King's garden with the King, and this made him so happy. (*Mark Guy Pearse.*)

Ver. 28. **From above the horse gate repaired the priests, every one over against his house.**—*How to sweeten the life of great cities:*—I take these words mainly as suggesting some thoughts applicable to the duties of Christian people in view of the spiritual wants of our great cities. Consider—I. **THE RUINS THAT NEED REPAIR.** If I dwell rather upon the dark side than on the bright side of city life, I shall not be understood as forgetting that the very causes which intensify the evil of a great city quicken the good—the friction of multitudes, and the impetus given thereby to all kinds of mental activity. Most of us have got so familiarised with the evils that stare us in the face every time we go out upon the pavement, that we have come to think of them as inseparable from our modern life, like the noise of a carriage wheel from its rotation. And is it so, then? Must it be that the shining structure of our modern society, like an old Mexican temple, must be built upon a layer of living men flung in for a foundation? If it be so, then I venture to say that to a very large extent progress is a delusion, and that the simple life of agricultural communities is better than this unwholesome aggregation of men. The beginning of Nehemiah's work of repair was that sad midnight ride round the ruined walls. So there is a solemn obligation laid upon Christian people to acquaint themselves with the awful facts, and then to meditate upon them, till Christlike compassion, pressing against the flood-gates of the heart, flings them open, and lets out a stream of helpful pity and saving deeds (Prov. xxiv. 11, 12). II. **THE RUIN IS TO BE REPAIRED MAINLY BY THE OLD GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST.** Far be it from me to put remedies against each other. The causes are complicated, and the cure must be as complicated as the causes. Intemperance has to be fought by the distinct preaching of abstinence, and by the invoking of legislative restrictions upon the traffic. Wretched homes have to be dealt with by sanitary reform. Art and music, pictures and window gardening, &c., will lend their aid to soften and refine. I say, God speed to all these, but I believe that I shall best serve my generation by trying to get men to love and fear Jesus Christ the Saviour. This will produce new tastes and new inclinations, which will reform, sweeten, and purify faster than anything else does. III. **THIS REMEDY IS TO BE APPLIED BY THE INDIVIDUAL ACTION OF CHRISTIAN MEN AND WOMEN ON THE PEOPLE NEAREST THEM.** If you want to do people good you must pay the price for it. That price is personal sacrifice and effort. A loving heart and a sympathetic word, the exhibition of Christian life and conduct, the fact of going down into the midst of evil, are the old-fashioned and only magnets by which men are drawn to purer and higher life. That is God's way of saving the world—by the action of single souls on single souls. "The priests repaired every one over against his own house." Possession involves responsibility. We get the grace for ourselves that we may pass it on. "God hath shined into our hearts, that we may give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus

Christ." There is nothing so mighty as the confession of personal experience. If, like Andrew, you have found the Messiah, you can say so. All can preach who can say, "We have found the Christ." The existence of a Church in which the workers are as numerous as the Christians ought to be something more than an Utopian dream. There are people in your houses, people that sit by you in your counting-house, on your college benches, who work by your side in mill or factory or warehouse, who cross your path in a hundred ways, and God has given them to you that you may bring them to Him. Oh! if you lived nearer Christ, you would catch the sacred fire from Him, and like a bit of cold iron lying beside a magnet, touching Him, you would yourselves become magnetic, and draw men out of their evil and up to God. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*) *Personal revival sought*:—Once upon a time many Christians gathered to pray for a revival in the great city in which they lived. For a week they prayed, "O Lord, revive the city!" but the heavens were as brass. For some weeks they continued to pray almost as broadly and indefinitely, until one friend, who felt the need of individual quickening, exclaimed, "O Lord, revive Thy work in my heart! O Lord, revive me!" There was a general breaking at the conclusion of this prayer. Personal revival was sought and vouchsafed, and the work soon became widespread and deep. A Baptist Church in New York once sought for the gracious influences of the Holy Spirit, but there was no consciousness of response or blessing till a coloured brother, devout and earnest, respected and beloved by all, got down upon his knees, and, with choked utterance, prayed in the language of the 51st Psalm.

CHAPTER IV.

VERS. 1-4. But it came to pass, that when Sanballat heard that we builded the wall, he was wroth.—*Sanballat: a study in party spirit*:—You must clearly understand, to begin with, that Samaria was already, even in that early day, the deadly rival of Jerusalem; and also that Sanballat was the governor of Samaria. And Sanballat was a man of this kind, that he was not content with doing his very best to make Samaria both prosperous and powerful, but he must also do his very best to keep Jerusalem downtrodden and destroyed. And thus it was that, when Sanballat heard that Nehemiah had come from Shushan with a commission from Artaxerxes to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, the exasperating news drove Sanballat absolutely beside himself. And thus it is that such a large part of Nehemiah's autobiography is taken up with Sanballat's diabolical plots and conspiracies both to murder Nehemiah and to destroy the new Jerusalem. We see in Sanballat an outstanding instance of the sleepless malice of all unprincipled party spirit. 1. Now, in the first place, diabolically wicked as party spirit too often becomes, this must be clearly understood about party spirit, that, after all, it is but the excess, and the perversion, and the depravity of an originally natural and a perfectly proper principle in our hearts. It was of God, and it was of human nature as God had made it, that Sanballat should love and serve Samaria best; and that Nehemiah should love and serve Jerusalem best. And all party spirit among ourselves also, at its beginning, is but our natural and dutiful love for our own land, and for our own city, and for our own Church, and for those who think with us, and work with us, and love us. 2. But then, when it comes to its worst, as it too often does come, party spirit is the complete destruction both of truth and of love. The truth is hateful to the out-and-out partisan. We all know that in ourselves. As many lies as you like, but not the truth. It exasperates us to hear it. You are henceforth our enemy if you will insist on speaking it. It is not truth that divides us up into such opposed parties as we see all around us in Church and State, it is far more lies. It is not principle once in ten times. Nine times out of ten it is pure party spirit. And I cling to that bad spirit, and to all its works, as if it were my life. I feel unhappy when you tell me the truth, if it is good truth, about my rival. And where truth is hated in that way love can have no possible home. Truth is love in the mind, just as love is truth in the heart. Trample on the one and you crush the other to death. Now the full-blown party spirit is utter poison to the spirit of love as well as to the spirit of truth. Love suffereth long, and is kind; love rejoiceth not in iniquity, &c. But party spirit is the clean contradiction of all that.

8. By the just and righteous ordination of Almighty God all our sins carry their own punishment immediately and inseparably with them. And party spirit, being such a wicked spirit, it infallibly inflicts a very swift and a very severe punishment on the man who entertains it. You know yourselves how party spirit hardens your heart, and narrows, and imprisons, and impoverishes your mind. You must all know how party spirit poisons your feelings, and fills you with antipathy at men you never saw, as well as at men all around you who never hurt a hair of your head, and would not if they could. 4. Another Divine punishment of party spirit is seen in the way that it provokes retaliation, and thus reproduces and perpetuates itself till the iniquity of the fathers is visited upon the children to the third and fourth generation of them that hate the truth and murder love. And, inheriting no little good from our contending forefathers, we have inherited too many of their injuries, and retaliations, and antipathies, and alienations also. And the worst of it is that we look on it as true patriotism, and the perfection of religious principle, to keep up and perpetuate all those ancient misunderstandings, and injuries, and recriminations, and alienations. 5. Who, then, is a wise man, and endowed with wisdom among you? Who would fain be such a man? Who would behave to his rivals and enemies, not as Nehemiah, good man though he was, behaved to the Samaritans, but as Jesus Christ behaved to them? Who, in one word, would escape the sin, and the misery, and the long-lasting mischief of party spirit? Butler has an inimitable way of saying some of his very best and very deepest things. And here is one of his great sayings that has helped me more in this matter than I can tell you. "Let us remember," he says, "that we differ as much from other men as they differ from us." What a lamp to our feet is that sentence as we go through this world! And then, when at any time, and towards any party, or towards any person whatsoever, you find in yourself that you are growing in love, and in peace, and in patience, and in toleration, and in goodwill, and in good wishes, acknowledge it to yourself; see it, understand it, and confess it. Do not be afraid to admit it, for that is God within your heart. That is the Divine Nature—that is the Holy Ghost. Just go on in that Spirit, and ere ever you are aware you will be caught up and taken home to that Holy Land where there is neither Jerusalem nor Samaria. There will be no party spirit there. There will be no controversy there. (*A. Whyte, D.D.*) **What do these feeble Jews?**—*Feeble agencies not to be despised*:—When we behold a wide, turf-covered expanse, we should remember that its smoothness, on which so much of its beauty depends, is mainly due to all the inequalities having been slowly levelled by worms. It is a marvellous reflection that the whole of the superficial mould over any such expanse has passed, and will pass again, every few years, through the bodies of worms. The plough is one of the most ancient and most valuable of man's inventions; but long before he existed the land was, in fact, regularly ploughed by earth-worms. It may be doubted whether there are any other animals which have played so important a part in the history of the world as have these lowly organised creatures. Some other animal, however, still more lowly organised—namely, corals, have done far more conspicuous work in having constructed innumerable reefs and islands in the great oceans; but these are almost confined to the tropical zones. (*Charles Darwin.*) *Intrinsic energy not to be gauged by magnitude*:—Remember that lofty trees grow from diminutive seeds; copious rivers flow from small fountains; slender wires often sustain ponderous weights; injury to the smallest nerves may occasion the most agonising sensation; the derangement of the least wheel or pivot may render useless the greatest machine of which it is a part; an immense crop of errors may spring from the least root of falsehood; a glorious intellectual light may be kindled by the minutest spark of truth; and every principle is more diffusive and operative by reason of its intrinsic energy than of its magnitude. (*J. Gregory.*) *Censure should not interfere with duty*:—Be not diverted from your duty by any idle reflections the silly world may make on you, for their censures are not in your power, and consequently should be no part of your concern. (*Epictetus.*) *Fool's-bolts should be disregarded*:—What action was ever so good, or so completely done, as to be well taken on all hands? It concerns every wise Christian to settle his heart in a resolved confidence of his own holy and just grounds, and then to go on in a constant course of his well-warranted judgment and practice, with a careless disregard of those fool's-bolts which will be sure to be shot at him, which way soever he goes. (*Ep. Hall.*) *Petty criticism should be disregarded*:—It is often more difficult to endure the stinging of insects than to face the gravest perils. Explorers in tropical

countries find these tiny, noxious creatures much more destructive of their peace and comfort than the larger and more deadly animals which sometimes beset them. Many a man faces courageously a grave peril who becomes a coward when a set of petty annoyances have worn his nerves out and irritated him to the point of loss of self-control. Every man who attempts an independent course of life, whether of thought, habit, or action, finds himself beset by a cloud of petty critics, who are, for the most part, without malice, but whose stings, inspired by ignorance, are quite as hard to bear as they would be if inspired by hate. The misrepresentations and misconceptions which good men suffer are a part of the pathos of life. The real answer to criticism is a man's life and work. A busy man has no time to stop and meet his critics in detail; he must do his work, and let that be his answer to criticism. (*Christian Age*.)

Ver. 6. **So we built the wall.**—*Fellowship in Christian service*:—1. They built it notwithstanding sneers. "What do these feeble Jews?" Sanballat said. All the Sanballats are not dead yet. Often, when you would attempt some new or difficult work for Christ, there are a good many modern Sanballats ready to stand about and say, "You can't do anything; you are not strong enough; you are not experienced enough; you haven't money enough; the idea of your attempting such a thing!" 2. They built the wall, notwithstanding active opposition. They kept right on steadily building. Said the great William Carey—who wrought such wonders, and against such opposition, in modern missions—to his son Eustace, "Eustace, if they say I am a genius, it is not true; but if they say I can plod, that is true. Yes, I can plod, I can plod." And a plodding persistence, in the face of almost any opposition, is sure at last to triumph. 3. They built the wall, notwithstanding despairing friends. I have been reading how General Washington, only a little time before the battle of Yorktown, was in the very darkest time of the long, hard struggle. Friends on every side were despairingly saying, "You can't do it; you might just as well give up." But the great Washington would not let himself despair. Whoever else might, he would not. He would keep at it; and, keeping at it, notwithstanding the despair of friends, a nation's independence was achieved at Yorktown. 4. They built the wall by prayer. I asked Mr. Spurgeon once how he prayed. He answered, "I go to the Bible and find a promise applicable to my need, then I reverently plead that promise before the Lord, asking Him to keep it for Jesus' sake; and I believe God will, and He does." That is the prayer of faith—the prayer of great grip on the Divine promise. 5. They built the wall by working together. Did you notice that "we"? "So 'we' built the wall," our Scripture says. Even one is worth something, but two are worth more, and many striving together are worth immeasurably more. Associate others with yourself, or yourself with others. It was because the Rough Riders rushed up the heights of San Juan together, and because the coloured regiments rushed up together, and together with them they were enabled to plant Old Glory on the summit. Fellowship is better than individualism in all noble service. 6. They built the wall by willingness on the part of each to do whatever he could. Sometimes they bore burdens; sometimes they grasped swords and spears; sometimes they stood sentinel. There was no selfish picking and choosing. There was no mean declaring "I will do this, but I won't do that." Each one was ready to do any thing; the thing which seemed just then the thing best to be done. It is no wonder that the wall went steadily and triumphantly up. 7. They built the wall by courageous trust in God. Said Nehemiah, "Be not afraid of them; remember the Lord." (*W. Hoyt, D.D.*) **For the people had a mind to work.**—*Conditions of success in Christian work*:—The chief characteristics displayed by Nehemiah and his fellow-citizens in prosecuting their work were—1. Earnestness. Earnestness is an important factor in all Christian work and consists—(1) In a thorough persuasion of the truth of the message we make known—the efficacy of the remedy we convey to men. (2) A deep sense of the value of those we seek to save. (3) An intense conviction that it is God's work and not our own we are seeking to do. 2. Persistency. 3. Union. 4. Courage. 5. Prayerfulness. Summing up these characteristics, we may say to the Christian worker, "Add to your work earnestness, and to earnestness persistency, and to persistency union, and to union wisdom, and to wisdom courage, and to courage prayer"; "for if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. i. 8). (*W. P. Lockhart*.) **A mind to work**:—This implies—

I. A RECOGNITION OF THE DUTY OF WORK. II. A RECOGNITION OF THE PRIVILEGE OF WORK. III. AN EARNEST SYMPATHY WITH, AND LONGING FOR, THE RESULTS OF WORK. (*The Church.*) *A mind to work* :—I. THE WORK. Circumstances have changed, and the methods are altered, but the work is the same. You are entitled to ask me, "What are we to do?" 1. Bear the insignia of your religion before the world. Let all men know that you are the followers of Christ. 2. Maintain His public worship. 3. Christianise the world. II. THE MIND. This implies—1. Readiness. 2. Heartiness. 3. Cheerfulness. 4. Thoroughness amid discouragement and opposition. (*T. Davies, M.A.*) *A mind to work* :—I. THE WORK THE JEWS HAD TO PERFORM. The work they had undertaken was one in which it was natural to suppose they felt the deepest possible interest. It will be admitted that the work they had undertaken was a great work. Then as to the magnitude of the work, it is indescribable—it is, in a word, to seek the present and eternal salvation of a guilty, ruined, and perishing world. Nor must good men lose sight of the fact, that this glorious work is to be accomplished, not by miracle, nor by a Divine power or agency in the abstract, but by the feeble, and of itself powerless, instrumentality of Christian men, as accompanied with the sanctifying and saving influences of the Holy Spirit of God. II. THE OBSTACLES WHICH, IN THE PROSECUTION OF THEIR WORK, THE JEWS HAD TO ENCOUNTER. The Church, then, must never forget that her adversaries are both numerous and powerful. But have not the Church's greatest difficulties often proved her greatest blessings? It has led the Lord's people both to see and to feel more of their dependence upon Him. III. THE SPIRIT IN WHICH THE JEWS CARRIED ON THEIR WORK. They had their minds, that is to say, their souls, in it, and they were determined to accomplish it. They loved their Master, their work, and each other. IV. THE SUCCESS OF WHICH THEIR LABOUR WAS PRODUCTIVE. 1. Are there any of us who are engaged in the Lord's service, but whose hearts are not in it? 2. Are there any who have no disposition to labour for the Lord Jesus Christ? (*Essex Remembrancer.*) *A mind to work* :—We have here—I. CO-OPERATION. "The people had a mind to work." Nehemiah was, of course, the ruling spirit. He was only one man, but he was one of those men who count for thousands. He was one of those men who not only embody but create the spirit of an age and lead it on to victory. He was only one man, but in this world men have not to be counted but weighed; and it is when men are weighed—weighed as to their intellect, their convictions, their courage, their principles, their self-denial—that it is seen that one man is not as good as another. All the great epochs of the world have gathered around one man, just as the restoration gathered around Nehemiah, and so filled his soul that the electric power of his patriotic purpose enkindled the hearts of the people with a flame that never expired till the work was done. Then as ever, it was seen that the world's work must be done by a combination of men who toil with the brain and who toil with the hands. Nehemiah was architect, clerk of the works, diplomatist, general, all in one. But he could have done nothing unless he had been able to secure the co-operation of the people. There is here a lesson on the value and the necessity of co-operation in work for Christ. Success in war is due to two principles—the one is divide your enemy, and the other is unite yourselves. On these two conditions success is certain. Real and vital co-operation in Church work will be equally successful. There may be a Church and no co-operation. It may be a mass, but not a body. Many individual men do far more than a society, because the individual men work, and the society does not, but thinks that it has fulfilled all its duty when it has appointed a committee, with its usual complement of officers. You would think that an army had strangely misconceived its mission if because it saw its staff-officers it lay down and left the fortunes of battle to be settled by them. But this is just what is done by societies which devolve on committees the whole work. II. CHEERFUL RESOLUTION. There is a great deal of work done in our world, and has always been, in which there has been no mind at all, either in the shape of intelligence or goodwill. I suppose that some of the greatest structures of the world were so built—the Pyramids, the great aqueducts of Rome and the Coliseum. The slaves had not a mind to work, but had an eye to the rod of the taskmaster. You will search this book in vain for the trace of a taskmaster. They had a mind to work, and not to criticise or cavil. This is a suggestive warning to all such characters in our day. Many have a mind only to think, and not to work. You ask them to come and set their shoulder to the wheel, but they prefer to spend their time in solving, so far as they can, sundry theological or religious riddles. If by their thinking they accomplished anything, then they might think on, but they are like a corn-mill, the

stones of which are perpetually revolving, but there is no corn between them, and so they only grind themselves. More doubts are removed and more difficulties are solved by working than by thinking. "If any man will do the will of God," &c. Some people have a mind to speak, but not to work. Speech is good enough in its place. The end of all talk should be action. As a rule most work is done where there is least noise. When a machine goes noiselessly, it means that the friction is reduced to the smallest possible quantity, and that the force is not wasted on the process, but comes out in the accomplished work. At the building of Babel there was far more noise than at the building of the temple, but the temple was the successful work. Their heart was in their work, and by their heart we mean chiefly their purpose and their cheerfulness. He that works without a will is nothing better than a machine, and may be worse. When people have a mind to work there will be no unseemly ambitions, no quarrels for posts of honour. The man who can lighten labour with a song is likely to be a good worker. He will be like a soldier, who marches best to the rhythmic throb of the drum, and to the sounds of inspiring music. As to Christian work, none can be entitled to such a name unless it be cheerful. God loveth, we are told, not a giver, but a "cheerful" giver. If we show mercy we are to show it cheerfully. We are to serve the Lord with gladness. We are to come into His presence with songs. Saints are to be joyful in the Lord.

III. WORK CROWNED WITH SUCCESS. (*Enoch Mellor, D.D.*) *The secret of success in the work of the Lord*.—I. THAT WE HAVE A GREAT AND AN IMPORTANT WORK DEVOLVING UPON US: to aid in raising the world from the ruins of the fall, and restoring it to something of its former order and beauty, that the Lord may dwell among us. This work has been committed to the Church. It is her high commission. This work must commence with our own hearts. II. THAT THIS WORK MUST BE ENGAGED IN WITH CONSECRATED ZEAL AND ACTIVITY. III. THE DILIGENT USE OF ALL APPOINTED MEANS. Nehemiah having set his heart upon his work, judiciously employed every means calculated to promote it. 1. Let us stimulate each other to engage vigorously and unitedly in this work. Generally speaking, there is only a small fraction of every Church that engages actively in the great purposes of religion. 2. Having brought all the truly pious up to a proper point, we should then address ourselves, every one to his proper sphere of labour. IV. THAT IN THE USE OF MEANS THE WORK MUST BE FOLLOWED UP WITH FORTITUDE AND PERSEVERANCE. Such was the perseverance of the Jews in rebuilding the walls, that they never pulled off their clothes, except for the means of cleanliness, during the whole of the work; but continued night and day working. There was no time for delay or indulgence. V. THAT TO INSURE THE SUCCESSFUL ISSUE OF THE WORK, THERE MUST BE AN ENTIRE DEPENDENCE ON THE BLESSING OF GOD. Here was the grand secret of Nehemiah's success. He first sought Divine direction, then employed the means, and then implored the Divine blessing. In no other way can we account for the rapid progress of the work, and its successful issue in so short a time. (*G. Richards.*) *Rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem*.—Consider—I. THE PERSONS BY WHOM THE WORK WAS MAINLY PERFORMED. II. THE SPIRIT IN WHICH IT WAS ACCOMPLISHED. In a great multitude of instances the work of conversion or reform is begun too near the surface. You ask the hand to work, and what is wanting is the mind to work. What we want is, not a new power but a new disposition, to have the mind newly cast in the image and character of God. It is in vain to change the hand of the watch if the mainspring is defective; it is in vain to heal the muscle or the sinew if there is no life's blood in the heart; it is in vain to mould the mere image of a man if the spirit of life is not communicated. All these typify the man without the mind, without the will. (*J. W. Cunningham, A.M.*) *Advance in solid column to Christian work*.—When General Grant was in front of Richmond, and his army had been repulsed in the Wilderness, he called together his co-commanders and held a council, and asked them what they thought he had better do. There were General Sherman and General Howard, now leading generals, and all thought he had better retreat. He heard them through, and then broke up the council of war and sent them back to their headquarters; but before morning an orderly came round with a despatch from the General directing an advance in solid column on the enemy at daylight. That was what took Richmond and broke down the rebellion in our country. Christians, let us advance in solid column against the enemy; let us lift high the standard, and in the name of our God let us lift up our voice, and let us work together, shoulder to shoulder, and keep our eye single to the honour and glory of Christ. (*D. L. Moody.*) *Absorbing work is successful*.—A gentleman who recently visited Mr. Edison's great laboratory, at Menlo Park, and whose

son was about to enter upon business life, asked the Professor to give him a motto for his boy, so that he might remember it as a guide and stimulus in after-life. Mr. Edison laughed a little at the novel request, and then said, "Well, I'll give him this—tell him never to look at the clock!" Which means this—that the man who succeeds to-day is not the man who does just what he has contracted to do and no more, but the man who throws his heart into his work, feels a genuine interest in it, and does not grumble if he has to work ten minutes after office hours. *Putting heart into work*:—An employer, pointing to two men working side by side in his shop, said, "Though I pay them the same wages, one of them is worth twice as much to me as the other, because he puts his heart into everything that he does. He is interested. He is always anxious to do his best. His neighbour, on the contrary, thinks only of his wages. He will shirk whenever he thinks that he can do so and not be found out. I cannot trust him. I have to watch him closely, or he will send out work that is imperfect, and will injure the reputation of the shop." "Well, what does the man you commend gain by putting his heart in it, if you pay the same wages?" "Nothing at present except the satisfaction one feels in trying to do his duty."

Vers. 7-18. But it came to pass, that when Sanballat, and Tobiah, and the Arabians, and the Ammonites, and the Ashdodites, heard that the walls . . . conspired all of them together.—*Foes of the faith*:—It is well we should know our enemies, and then we can better resist them. I. THINK OF THOSE FOES OF THE FAITH Nehemiah had to withstand. 1. There was Noadiah the prophetess. She would have put Nehemiah "in fear." She used a sacred position and the name of God to check the efforts of a good man. Noadiah could threaten, instil doubts, and arouse dread. The Church to-day lacks courage. Too many Noadiahs are prophesying evil things, and leading others to believe that Christian missions, Christian social efforts, Christian gospel preaching, and Christian hopes of the final triumph of truth are only doomed to disappointment, but the Noadiahs are often wrong. Pessimists, philosophical or ecclesiastical, are all the prey of paralysis. 2. Then there was Shemaiah (chap. vi. 10), who was "shut in the temple." He pretended that great danger approached. He sought to allure the Reformer into a state of inactivity. He said: "Let us shut the doors of the temple, for they will come and slay thee; yea, in the night they will come and slay thee." However, Shemaiah had his price. He had been "hired." Money dictated his actions as it does that of many mercenary hinderers of the truth, especially the men who say, "We exist for the benefit of the people." 3. Then there was Sanballat the Horonite. He was a most dangerous enemy. He had a position at Samaria, the nearest strong city. He had special influence also with the garrison. Of him it is said, "Sanballat was very wroth, and took great indignation, and mocked the Jews and spake before his brethren (relations), and the army of Samaria." He said, "What do those feeble Jews? Will they sacrifice? Will they make an end in a day? Will they revive the stones out of the heaps of rubbish that are burned?" He raged. His anger was like Nebuchadnezzar's furnace, heated seven times hotter than usual. It was like the fires of the Inquisition that did put out evangelical truth throughout Spain, and nearly through France. Sanballat was most irritating to Nehemiah, for he taunted him bitterly. He sought in every way to check the work by abuse of the courageous leader. Sanballat, indeed, was a bitter east wind. 4. Tobiah, who lived at Ammon, was another enemy. He had power over a province. He had probably reached his post by flattering when a slave in the imperial court. Nehemiah calls him the slave (chap. ii. 19) (where servant should be rendered slave). He was a sprung-up, conceited opponent of the truth. He assumed that wisdom would die with him. This Tobiah was acquainted with the internal state of Jerusalem, and had shown contempt for the efforts of Nehemiah. He said, "Even that which they build, if a fox go up, he shall even break down their stone wall" (chap. iv. 3). He ridiculed their aims, and kept up a constant intrigue with those within who were disaffected (chap. vi. 17). This man, even after the temple was finished and the walls built, managed to establish himself in the sacred place itself, because he had relationship with the chief priest (chap. xiii. 8). This man may represent those who are traitorous betrayers, and who now cast ridicule upon the truth, or on efforts after the truth—those who, pretending to help Protestant truth, are its betrayers. 5. Another enemy was Geshem or Gashmu an Arabian (chap. vi. 6). Geshem and Gashmu seem to have been identical. He was an Ishmaelite. He was a wild, characterless man—

"an idle chatterer." He had nothing to lose and everything to gain by opposition. He brought false charges against Nehemiah as one who only wished to set up a sovereignty, and to be independent of the central power at Susa (chap. vi. 6). Most dangerous of all enemies was this Geshem, or Gashmu, for he could insinuate that mean motives were the spring of holy efforts. He was a whisperer. Oh, how very many Gashmus there are even now! They are of no importance, save that they can spread reports, and do much damage. Gashmus will say that they pretend to be anxious about the cause of God, when they are only anxious to gratify their own ambition. Or Gashmu will say that Christians only desire advance in material prosperity. The Gashmus are too indifferent to understand the enthusiasm of Christians. 6. Noadiah, Shemaiah, Sanballat, Tobiah, and Gashmu were united. They were cunning and cruel. They had allies within Jerusalem. Some were half-hearted. Individually we have traitorous tendencies to indifference and ease in our souls. We have many enemies whom we find represented by the Ammonites and Arabians. They are such as these—doubts as to whether we are converted, or unbelief as to Christ's acceptance of us, or superstitious and self-righteous leanings, seductions of the world, of pleasure, of wealth, of fame, desire to have the good opinion of the world, desire to be known rather as "good fellows" than good Christians. To be without temptation would be to be without that element that goes to form character. "Better have the devil's war than have the devil's peace."

II. Nehemiah teaches us HOW TO RESIST THE ENEMIES OF THE TRUTH. 1. He resisted by establishing sentinels, setting the watch to give warning; he resisted by placing weapons into the hands of all. Our weapons of defence are God's commands, God's promises, God's love. Nehemiah resisted by teaching the people to keep behind their defences. We, when assaults on our faith or temptations come, should get behind the walls, should keep within conscience—keep within the Word. 2. Nehemiah resisted his foes by pressing all into service. "None were despised." 3. Nehemiah resisted his foes by inspiring his people with confidence in God. God is mightier than our foes. 4. Nehemiah resisted also by insisting that there should be no parleying with the enemy. "Answer him not again." He resisted by leading the people to be as unrestful in toil as unceasing in outlook. "They laboured, and half of them held the spears from the rising of the morning till the stars appeared" (chap. iv. 21). He inspired his followers with courage, saying, "Be not afraid of them. Remember the Lord, great and terrible, and fight for your brethren, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your houses." And again, "Our God shall fight for us" (chap. iv. 14, 20). Words these worthy to be the battle-cry of the Church. Moreover, Nehemiah resisted best by setting an example of courage. "Should such a man as I flee?" All Christian life should be courageous. Shall we, in view of the value of our souls, yield to evil? The more we work for Christ and watch against evil, the stronger we shall become. Soldiers are not kept idle while in garrison; work of some kind is always found for them. If unemployed they would soon become flabby, weak, and without muscle. There is ever something in Christian life to develop the watchful and the heroic. Persistency prevailed. We are told that "when his enemies heard of the fact that the wall was finished they were much cast down in their own eyes" (chap. vi. 16). Walls had risen which they could not batter. Crestfallen, the enemies had to depart. Chroniclers might have said of them, as it was written of Charles VIII. of France, and his expedition against Naples, "They came into the field like thunder, and went out like a soft shower." So went away, in the time of Nehemiah, the enemies of God's struggling Church. "God brought their counsel to nought." (*F. Hastings.*)

And to hinder it.—The builders interrupted:—I. THE WORK NEHEMIAH WAS COMMISSIONED TO DO. II. HOW NEHEMIAH'S WORK WAS HINDERED. 1. By ridicule. 2. By weariness (ver. 10). 3. By fearfulness (ver. 12). Many now feel that there is danger in building the walls of Zion. (1) In social life. (2) In politics. (3) In business. 4. By bribery. No other cause so weakens the Church as defection in her own membership. **III. THE MEASURES BY WHICH NEHEMIAH ACCOMPLISHED HIS WORK.** 1. Prayer. 2. Sagacious efforts. 3. Singleness of aim. Nothing could divert him. 4. Enthusiasm. Zeal in one heart sets other hearts burning. There is a suggestive legend of the venerable Bede which tells us that when he was old, with eyesight almost gone, one of his scholars led him to a heap of stones, and told him they were people; this was enough. The aged servant was true to his commission. With fiery tongue he preached the gospel. He ended as usual with the doxology, "To whom be glory through all the ages." Then from that heap of stones a voice rose, "Amen venerabilis Bede!"

True zeal springs not from impulse, but from conviction. 5. His securing the co-operation of the people. "Every one to his work." When Wesley was asked the secret of his success, he replied, "To my voice in the pulpit on the Sabbath the people add a thousand echoes during the week." (*Monday Club Sermons.*)

Hinderers.—Nehemiah had enemies and hinderers in his great undertaking. I. Those who said, "YE SHALL NOT DO IT." Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem, &c. These are the least to be dreaded. II. Those who said, "YOU OUGHT NOT TO DO IT." Those were the Jews who dwelt by these Samaritans. They were near neighbours to them; so near as to be influenced by their threats and their derision. This was a danger far more serious than that which came directly to the good governor from the wicked Sanballat. The solicitation of friends was far more likely to weaken his forces than the intimidation of foes. This would tend to consolidate the people for defence, while that would draw them off little by little, a few to this village and a few to that, until a considerable part of them would be found to have melted away. The pleas of friendship are stronger than the threats of enmity. This kindly interest shown in their welfare, this fear in their behalf, and the possible need of them at home—these were strong inducements to them to desert and go back to their various villages. This is a plea, too, which can be repeated many times. So while the threats are recorded as repeated twice, this call to return to those who loved them was made in one form or another as many as ten times. Let the Church of Christ and let the Christian man beware of these friendly voices which urge them to withdraw from the service on which they have entered, or from some special part of it, because it may involve some danger or some sacrifice. It is those who live near the enemy who reinforce his threats with their friendly entreaties; who add to their "You shall not do it," their own "Please do not do it." Especially if we are in any way building the walls of Jerusalem, helping the cause of God and His kingdom, we will be wise to beware of the call of those we have just left to enter on this service when they say, "Ye must return to us." III. Those who said, "WE CANNOT DO IT." This was the most pressing peril that could befall Nehemiah and his mission. A deserter is more demoralising than a dozen foes. One taken from the helpers and added to the hinderers makes a difference of at least two. Their complaint is twofold. 1. They find that their strength has given out. 2. That there is much "rubbish," in the midst of which they had to build. Out of the past city came the obstacles to the building of the future city. Some of the worst hindrances to the accomplishment of our work as Christians and as Christian Churches are those whose origin is in our own past selves, lives, habits—the rubbish which has fallen from the neglected walls of our own living. For the future, daily penitence and prayer will prevent the accumulation of so much rubbish that we cannot build. (*George M. Boynton.*)

Rebuilding the wall.—The enemies of the Jews felt that the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem was a menace to their own welfare and local supremacy. They must arrest it. I. THEY TRIED LAUGHTER. God's people at work on the walls of Zion are continually told that it is no use, they shall have their labour for their pains. A hundred years ago William Carey was dubbed "the consecrated cobbler" for proposing the evangelisation of India, but to-day all Christendom delights to do him honour. God crowns the heroism that can face an epithet. All efforts at political and social betterment are met in the same manner. The same is true of the rebuilding of personal character. It is hard work to rebuild the walls of manhood out of the rubbish-heaps of mislived years while old comrades stand by pointing their fingers and cracking jokes, but by God's grace it can be done. II. THEIR OPPOSITION ASSUMED THE FORM OF THREATENING (chap. ii. 19). A good work is always in the realm of danger, because it is in the nature of *lèse majesté*—rebellion against the prince of this world. A reformer never goes scot-free. Loss of business or social standing, ostracism, political decapitation, are some of the penalties which a true man is ever called upon to confront in the discharge of duty. III. THEY PROPOSED A COMPROMISE (chap. vi. 2). Duty knows no compromise. The only way to serve God is unreservedly. The only way to avoid evil is not to tamper with it. The apparently innocent diversions of Vanity Fair gave the Pilgrim more trouble than all the giants and lions along his way. Diluted theology and limp morals will sap the vitality of the most vigorous man or Church. Right is right; to dilute it makes it wrong. Truth is truth; to adulterate it makes it error. Duty is duty; to alloy it with disobedience makes it sin. Conclusion: Observe how these efforts were met. 1. By prayer. John Knox is said to have bedewed the walls of his closet with his tears of supplication. George Washington

was glad to profess his dependence upon God. Abraham Lincoln, when asked if he was accustomed to pray, answered, "The man who would assume to perform the duties of the Presidency without seeking Divine guidance must be a blockhead." No man can ever afford to spend a prayerless day. 2. A watch was set. The countersign was given; it was the same that long afterwards rang from the lips of the Roundheads in their struggle for English freedom, "God with us" (ver. 20). The authorship of the famous maxim, "Trust in God and keep your powder dry," may be traced to Nehemiah. No enterprise fails that is backed by faith and works. 3. Nehemiah and his men kept on working. Prayer, vigilance, and patient continuance in well-doing can work wonders. (*D. J. Burrell, D.D.*) *The soldier builders*:—I. COMBINATION OF PRAYER AND WATCHFULNESS. II. COMBINATION OF PRECEPT AND EXAMPLE (VERS. 14, 15, 18.) III. EVERY BUILDER WAS ALSO A SOLDIER. IV. A MUTUAL CO-OPERATION WENT HAND IN HAND WITH PERSONAL WORK AND RESPONSIBILITY. (*J. M. Randall.*) *A bold and united front to the enemy*:—It was therefore necessary to present a bold and united front to the enemy, and to be soldiers as well as builders; and it was only by similar zeal, diligence, and unity that they could hope, under the blessing of God, to encircle Jerusalem with walls and bulwarks. Nelson, the day before the battle of Trafalgar, took Collingwood and Rotherham, who were at variance, to the spot where they could see the fleet opposed to them. "Yonder," said he, "are your enemies; shake hands and be friends like good Englishmen." Let Christians learn to cultivate unity in spirit, and as far as possible unity in action. Let us ascend from the minor specialities in which we differ, the narrowness and jealousy of sect and party, to the grand platform of truth, wherein we are all agreed. (*Ibid.*)

Ver. 9. **We made our prayer unto our God, and set a watch.**—*Watch and pray*:—I. THE DUTY OF PRAYER. 1. Prayer implies trust. 2. It implies acknowledged weakness. 3. It realises Divine power. Hence in the Christian life that man is only safe, prosperous, or happy who is constantly on his knees. II. ACTIVE VIGILANCE AND DUTY. God's help is not intended to favour indolence, but to encourage exertion. The husbandman knows that God gives the increase, and therefore ploughs and sows. A man may talk, says Jay, about casting his care upon God, and may sing "Jehovah-Jireh" with all his energy as long as he pleases, but if he is idle, dissolute, foolish, he only tempts God, not trusts Him, for if a man will not work neither shall he eat. We have to carry on a greater work than Nehemiah. An enemy is endeavouring to prevent us building our eternal habitations, to hinder our work of preparation for heaven. Let us give our mental, moral, intellectual ability to working out our own salvation, knowing that God worketh in us to will and to do. (*Homilist.*) *Piety and prudence*:—I. THE APPEAL OF THE CHURCH OF GOD. 1. Recognising their weakness and dependence, they prayed unto God. 2. In spite of discouragements these men prayed. "Nevertheless." 3. They must have been encouraged by remembering what relation God sustained towards them. "Our God." 4. They united in supplication. II. THE RELIANCE OF THE CHURCH UPON ITSELF. "Set a watch." 1. There are enemies all around us. 2. God will not do for us what we can do for ourselves. 3. Our enemies are vigilant and untiring. 4. Our enemies conspire together. There is an unholy alliance of the forces of evil. (*The Study.*) *The union of prayer and watchfulness*:—This union is equally pleasing and profitable. It keeps our devotion from growing up into rank enthusiasm, and our diligence from sinking into the wisdom of the world which is foolishness with God. The life of the Christian is held forth as that of a warfare. What, then, can be more reasonable than to betake ourselves to prayer and vigilance? I. LET US MAKE OUR PRAYER TO GOD. 1. It is recommended by God Himself—"Call upon Me in the day of trouble," &c. 2. The very exercise of prayer is useful. 3. Prayer is the forming of a confederacy with God. II. SET A WATCH, BECAUSE OF OUR ENEMIES, NIGHT AND DAY. 1. Impress your minds with a sense of your danger. 2. Study your constitutional weakness and failings. 3. Observe how you have already been foiled or ensnared. 4. Guard against the beginnings of sin. 5. Avoid the occasions of sin. Nothing is more dangerous than idleness. Our idle days, says Henry, are the devil's busy ones. Stagnant waters breed thousands of noxious insects; but this is not the case with living water. (*William Jay.*) *The model of a Christian warrior*:—I. HIS PRAYERFULNESS. II. HIS WATCHFULNESS. Watchfulness without prayer is presumptuous pride, but prayer without watchfulness is presumptuous sloth. Confidence in the help of God must not prevent the use of all proper means for safety and

deliverance. God promised Paul the lives of all on board the ship in which he sailed; but they were to use the means of safety. "Some on boards, and some on broken pieces of the ship; and so it come to pass that they escaped all safe to land." While the Christian is surrounded with a powerful conspiracy of all the principalities of evil, he should aim at a military discipline of his heart and his thoughts. His conscience, like the trumpeter at Nehemiah's side, should be always awake.

III. HIS INDUSTRY. IV. HIS EXALTED COURAGE, ASSOCIATED WITH A HOLY CAUTION. V. HIS CHEERFULNESS IN THE PERFORMANCE OF HIS ARDUOUS DUTIES. (R. P. Buddicom.)

Nehemiah's devotion:—The hardest devotion is the healthiest. The devotion of the cloister is for the most part like the ghastly light that hovers over decomposition and decay; the devotion which characterises the diligent, spiritually-minded man of business resembles the star which shines on in the storm as in the calm—when the sky is clouded as when it is serene. (*Ibid.*)

Praying and doing:—I. PRAYING IS THE MOST IMPORTANT STEP OF LIFE. If a bad man would be good, the first step should be that of prayer. And our last breath when we leave this earth for the other world is prayer. II. If our prayers are to bless us, we must PRAY EARNESTLY. III. MOREOVER, WHEN WE PRAY WE ARE NOT TO NEGLECT THE MEANS OF MAKING OUR PRAYER EFFECTUAL. We are to do as Nehemiah did—pray to God, and set a watch. I am not afraid of thieves; but while I pray to God to let His angels encamp about my house and guard it, I do not expect the angels to come into my lobbies and lock the doors. I can do that. While we pray we are not to neglect any means at our hands for doing the work for which we pray. In the same way, a working man who earns a couple of pounds a week may pray, "O Lord, provide for me, and keep me from debt." It is right thus to pray, but then let not the working man neglect the means which are in his power to fulfil the prayer; let him put by two or three shillings a week to provide for any time of need. Some people seem to think that religion is a kind of spiritual charm, like the horse-shoe that our superstitious forefathers nailed behind the front door to keep out the "bogies." They think that religion is for them to say prayers and go to church, and then God will keep them from hell. Oh, no. IV. While we pray for success, let us take heed to WATCH FOR OPPORTUNITIES OF DOING GOOD. A wealthy farmer, whose haystacks were numerous, and whose barns were full of corn, on reading in the newspapers about the great distress in the time of the cotton famine, prayed earnestly at the family altar that the poor might be fed and clothed, but he did not send any donation to the fund, and the next Sunday he uttered the same prayer. On the way to church the little son said, "Father, I wish I had your corn." "Why, my boy, what would you do with it?" "Father, I would give it to the hungry people for bread." It is no use praying that the hungry may be fed if you will not help to feed them from your full cupboard. The purpose of prayer is—asking God to give you power to do good, and then seeking opportunities to exert that power. (W. Birch.)

The two guards, praying and watching:—In the text I see two guards. I. First guard, PRAYER. 1. It was a prayer that meant business. 2. It was a prayer that overcame difficulties. 3. It was a prayer that came before anything else. 4. It was a prayer that was continued. 5. It was a prayer that was home-made. 6. It was a prayer that went to the home of prayer. 7. It was a prayer saturated with faith. II. Second guard, WATCHFULNESS. This setting of a watch was—1. A work appointed. 2. A work carefully done. 3. A work continued. 4. A work quickened by knowledge. (1) We ought to set a watch against the enemies of our holy faith. (2) We must set a watch against our personal adversaries. (a) Ungodly relatives. Be patient, gentle, loving towards them. Do nothing that will give them occasion to blaspheme. (b) The evil tendencies of our corrupt nature. (3) We must watch against the beginning of sin. (4) Watch for what God has to say to you. 5. Watch for yourself when you see another fall, lest you should fall in the same place. III. I finish by PUTTING THE TWO GUARDS TOGETHER. Neither is sufficient alone. (C. H. Spurgeon.)

Watchfulness needed:—An old writer, speaking of men as stewards of God, urges upon them as wise traders and servants to look to themselves carefully, and take care of four houses which are under their charge. 1. Their warehouse, or heart and memory, wherein they should store up precious things, holy affections, grateful remembrances, &c. 2. Their workhouse, or their actions, wherein they retail to others, for God's glory, the grace entrusted to them. 3. Their clock-house—their speech—which must always, like a well-tuned bell, speak the truth accurately; and meaning also their observance of time, redeeming it by promptly doing the duties

of every hour. 4. Their counting-house, or their conscience, which is to be scrupulously kept, and no false reckonings allowed, lest we deceive our own souls. (J. M. Randall.)

Watchfulness and prayer:—A believer's watchfulness is like that of a soldier. A sentinel posted on the walls, when he discerns a hostile party advancing, does not attempt to make head against them himself, but informs his commanding officer of the enemy's approach, and leaves him to take the proper measures against the foe. So the Christian does not attempt to fight temptations in his own strength: his watchfulness lies in observing its approach, and in telling God of it by prayer. (W. Mason.)

At rest, but ready:—At Christmas-time soldiers are in the habit of decorating their barrack-rooms, and are fond of putting mottoes cut out of gilt paper amongst the holly on their whitewashed walls. Last year I noticed in one room these two. Over the door there was, "At peace, but still on guard"; and in another place, "At rest, but ready." Are not these equally applicable to spiritual life? If we have left our sins at the foot of the Cross, we should be at peace and rest, but on our guard against temptation, watching for the coming of the Lord. (The Quiver.)

And there is much rubbish.—*The hindrances of rubbish*:—I. THAT THERE IS TOO MUCH "RUBBISH" IN THE FULCRUM. Carlyle, in giving a whimsical instance of the importance attached to etiquette at the Court of Louis XVI., while the infuriated mob were demanding entrance to his private apartments, compares it to the house-cricket still chirping amid the pealing of the trumpet of doom. And so, too, when the ambassador for Christ doles out to souls perishing for the Bread of Life the vain speculations of metaphysics and philosophy, he ought to be held accountable for the spiritual slumber which such narcotics are certain to produce. II. Another reason why the walls of the spiritual Jerusalem are not built up with more rapidity is because of the "RUBBISH" ABOUT THE FONT. The minds of multitudes are bewildered and turned aside from the pursuit of the one thing needful by unprofitable discussions concerning the modes of baptism and the disposition to magnify unimportant things into essentials. III. The heaps of "RUBBISH" ABOUT THE LORD'S TABLE is another reason why the walls of the spiritual Jerusalem are built up so slowly. IV. Then there is the "RUBBISH" OF FLIMSY EXCUSES WHICH BLOCKS UP THE PATH OF LIFE. (J. N. Norton.)

Removing rubbish:—The ancient Jerusalem was but an imperfect type of the true city of God, which through the ages prophets have panted for and poets have sung, a city of truth, and righteousness and love; of liberty, equality, and fraternity, in a far fuller sense of the words than Rousseau dreamed of. For ages men have been building against opposition malignant and persistent, and with sure if slow progress. And we are building to-day. In a moment of pause we look round and still we say, "There is much rubbish." What rubbish do you meet with.—I. IN ENGLISH LAW. II. IN ENGLISH SOCIETY. III. IN ENGLISH LIFE. IV. IN CHURCH LIFE. V. IN OUR LIBRARIES. VI. IN NEWSPAPERS AND MAGAZINES. VII. IN OUR MINDS. VIII. IN OUR HEARTS. (David Brook, M.A.)

Rubbish:—We have to build the wall of the Church for God, but we cannot build it, for there is so much rubbish in our way. This is true—I. OF THE BUILDING OF THE CHURCH, WHICH IS THE JERUSALEM OF GOD. 1. When the apostles began to build for God, there lay before them towering heaps of rubbish. (1) Rabbinical. (2) Pagan. (3) Philosophical. 2. Soon after apostolic times came the old Roman rubbish. 3. At present there is still much rubbish coming from the world, the flesh, and the devil. II. THIS IS EQUALLY TRUE OF THE TEMPLE OF GOD, WHICH IS TO BE BUILT IN EACH ONE OF OUR HEARTS. There is oftentimes in Christian people the old rubbish—1. Of legal thought, of legal acting, of legal fearing. 2. Of old habits. 3. Of worldly associations. 4. Lofty thoughts of ourselves, engendered by worldly prosperity and spiritual acquisitions. (C. H. Spurgeon.)

Rubbish:—But in our text we read of an unexpected difficulty pleaded by the men of Judah—a weary, trying, and depressing task, entailing much toil and little show of progress. So in the Christian's inner life; there lies in his way a heap of broken resolutions, of former good intentions never carried out; a ponderous mass of indolent excuses for doing nothing; a rubbish pile of petty procrastinations, promising that some day we will improve, but putting off that day from time to time! It does indeed need Divine help and aid to summon up energy and to commence, beginning at once, that arduous work of removing the rubbish and ruins and starting afresh. So, also, those who would do good to others, who would rebuild God's Zion and populate the kingdom of Christ with souls, must expect to find in their way a heavy and inert mass of ignorance, apathy, and opposition. We shall find at first disappointments and

failures heaped up high in our path, but, like the faithful men of Jerusalem of old, let our answer be, "We will rise up and build," and the encouraging voice of the true Nehemiah, the real Restorer of the Heavenly Zion, will greet us with the promise, "The God of heaven will prosper" you! (*W. Hardman, LL.D.*)

Ver. 11. **And our adversaries said, They shall not know.**—*The craft and cruelty of the Church's adversaries*:—I. A STRONG COMBINATION AGAINST THE CHURCH OF GOD. II. A WICKED DESIGN THEY WERE COMBINED IN. III. A BLOODY MEANS PROPOUNDED. IV. A SUBTLE WAY PROJECTED FOR THE AFFECTING OF THIS. (*Matthew Newcomen.*) *Satanic subtlety*:—I. In this serpentine, crafty, and malicious dealing of these wicked men appeareth THE OLD SERPENTINE NATURE AND MALICE OF SATAN. II. The next property of the serpent that appeareth in them is that THEY MERCILESSLY WOULD MURDER THEM WHEN THEY HAD ONCE THUS SUDDENLY INVADDED THEM. III. The last property of Satan appeareth here in these wicked men, IN THAT THEY WOULD OLADLY OVERTHROW THIS BUILDING OF JERUSALEM, THAT IT SHOULD NEVER BE THOUGHT OF ANY MORE. (*Bp. Pilkington.*)

Ver. 14. **Remember the Lord, which is great.**—*The power of memory*:—Consider—I. THE POWER OF MEMORY. II. THE APPLICATION OF THE TEXT TO OURSELVES. 1. Parents should remember that God regards them as stewards, to whom are committed the care, the instruction, and the discipline of their offspring. 2. Children should remember that forgetfulness of the claims of home, of a father, of a mother, is a forgetfulness of God. 3. Employers should "remember the Lord" in the example which He furnishes of gentleness, patience, kindness, forbearance, and deep humility. 4. Servants should "remember the Lord," that He "took upon Him the form of a servant." Conclusion: Remember the promises He has made, the deliverances He has wrought, the blessings He has conferred, the invitations He has given, and the relations He now fills. Remember Him—in calamity to trust Him, in prosperity to praise Him, in danger to call upon Him, in difficulty to expect His interference. Remember Him, for it is your duty, it is your privilege. Remember Him, for He never forgets you. (*W. Horwood.*) *God is on the field*:—Always believe that God is on your side. "He is on the field when most invisible." In one of the great continental cities the regalia are not kept behind iron bars as in the Tower of London, but lie upon an open table. It might appear an easy thing for some thief to snatch a diamond or a jewel from the glittering array, and yet no man dare put out his hand to take one, for that table is charged with electricity, and woe to the person who touches it. The protection is complete; you cannot see it, but there it is. Only live in daily—hourly communion with Christ. Don't break the spiritual connection, and you are as safe from Satan and sin as the jewels from the devices of the thief. Greater is He that is for us than all enemies that can be against us. (*E. Abbott.*)

Ver. 15. **Every one unto his work.**—*Specialty of work for each man*:—There is something beautiful to me in the thought that there is a specialty of work for each man. In work, as in character, disposition, history, and destiny, there is a specialty; and when the Church arises to the New Jerusalem, it will not be to sit there as one vast photographic likeness, nor shall one be able to say of its members, "I have heard their history," when the story of one has been told. The history of the Church will be made up of individual histories; and each one shall possess its own peculiar interest. Your history will be none the less interesting when mine has been told, nor mine when you have related yours. Your head and heart will not be as mine, nor mine as yours; we shall not be mere fragments of a universal Church; but we shall be fully, roundly, and conspicuously ourselves, in the Church of which we make a whole, and perfect, and unexampled individual. (*H. W. Beecher.*) *Every man at his place*:—In that fearful national catastrophe which befell England, i.e., the loss of the ironclad *Victoria*, the staunch steadfastness of our British sailors was grandly illustrated. When the crash came, instead of a wild rush on deck of all below, every man remained true to his post. All knew that a serious collision had occurred, yet the most perfect order was maintained. The engineers kept their eyes on the indicator and moved their levers as directed, in spite of the fact that their lives were in imminent danger. Even when it was seen that the vessel was settling down, and all were called on deck, the men ranged themselves in line, and the order, "Right about face," was obeyed, though while

in the act the vessel heeled over, and all were precipitated into the sea. *Our personal duty*:—The only way to regenerate the world is to do the duty which lies nearest to us, and not to hunt after grand, far-fetched ones for ourselves. If each drop of rain chose where it should fall, God's showers would not fall as they do now on the evil and the good alike. (*Charles Kingsley*.) *Our own duty to be attended to*:—There is a story with which many of the present generation have been made familiar in our reading books which has an important application to Christian life. The story is that a German, with an ear sensitive to music, one day entered a church, and, being distressed by the discords of the singing, put his fingers in his ears; but there penetrated through them a single clear, rich soprano, singing in such perfect tune, that he was moved to listen. The singer never faltered because of the jarring notes, nor increased the volume of her voice to drown them. She kept steadily on till one after another came into accord with her sweet tones, till she brought the entire body of singers into harmony.

Vers. 17, 18. **Every one with one of his hands wrought in the work, and with the other hand held a weapon.**—*The work and warfare of life*:—Life is work, and life is warfare; and these are ever commingled. Our text is but an epitome and sample of that larger and longer work which fills the broad area of all human history. I. **THIS LIFE IS TO MEN A SCENE OF TOIL.** "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread" is the universal and unchanging law of human life. Inaction is no blessing. The spirit of man stagnates and sickens under it, and it issues in a weariness which is worse than the fatigues of labour. Activity is needful to the true enjoyment of life. Adam was not inactive in paradise (*Gen. ii. 15*). Heaven is a rest, but not a rest of indolence. There "His servants do serve Him." The true labour of life involves self-denial, apprehension, patience, fatigue, disappointment. Every man has a work that is specific and peculiar to him. The great Taskmaster never set two of His creatures the same task. Amid much general sameness, there is the strictest individuality. Life's work is twofold. 1. The secular department. How great is the number of human avocations! And in each of these avocations what a number of workers! And each one has a task given him to do which is as distinct as himself, which no one can do but he, and which is defined by his circumstances, his relations and his endowments. 2. The spiritual department. The work of the soul and of eternity; the end of which is—"to glorify God and enjoy Him for ever." II. **THIS LIFE IS ALSO A SCENE OF CONFLICT.** We have to fight—1. Against ourselves. As internal wars are ever fiercest and most painful, so the battle-ground of a Christian's own heart is that on which he is called to wage the severest fight and win the hardest victory. We have to overcome our sluggishness, our unbelief, our sensuality, our concupiscence, the heavy clog of sense, and the fierce impulse of corruption. 2. Against men. This enemy is called the world. And by it we mean that vast mass of maxims, opinions, beliefs, pursuits, ways, habits, opposed to the mind and service of God, which characterise human society. 3. Against spirits. The devil and his angels, numerous, powerful, malignant (*Eph. vi. 12*). (*R. A. Hallam, D.D.*) *Construction and contention*:—We have here illustrated two principles—I. **CONSTRUCTION.** Each of us is put into the world to be a builder, and himself is the building. Each separate disciple is a "habitation of God, through the Spirit." If your faith, your work, your prayers, your watchfulness shall ever succeed in edifying you into anything like a completed Christian, your character will be an edifice where God's glory will be more distinctly manifest than it is over any altar, where His praise will resound more acceptably than from the grandest organ, and where His truth is more effectually preached than from the most eloquent pulpit of any cathedral in the world. 1. Because character is a building it is not therefore to be understood that there is no need in the Christian life for an instant change, or conversion. That comes before the building can be begun to any purpose, or on any right plan. All must be sound at the base. If any man should try to build on a false foundation his work would come to nought. No outside clamps would hold it up. Except ye be converted, ye cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven. 2. We must not take the impression that the formation of Christian character consists in putting pieces of moral propriety together—a patchwork of merits without any all-controlling Divine principle. In all buildings there must be one "design," an organising principle held clearly in the builder's mind. In the structure of character this organising principle is the inworking life of Christ. It is the will of God. The spiritual laws are just as necessary, in order to success in a righteous life, as the mechanical laws

in order to architectural success. The first of those laws is that God is the centre and object of all religious affections; the second, that Jesus is the way to the Father. Hence—self-renunciation—yielding the heart—submission to the Heavenly Will is the inmost necessity of a Christian character. To the question how we shall build character fair and strong, the answer is—"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ." Into every particle of life must run this secret power of the Holy Christ—like the builder's invisible design spreading through all the beams and braces and apartments of the house, or else it will be no "habitation of the Spirit." Christian character means a righteous will, a purpose consecrated to God, and acting in all well-doing for man. You may grow in character by doing, thinking, and feeling more vigorously for God and your brother-man. Construction, then, is the multiplying of that inward spiritual energy out of which right outward deeds will be sure to come. It is replenishing the stock of life in the heart. It is making conscience quick, watchful, unbending. It is cultivating loyalty to the voice of God in the soul. It is the increase of humility, sincerity, temperance, integrity, patience, sweetness of temper, submission, benevolence. Additions to these, by whatever means, by Bible and prayer, and sacrament and labour, by the study of them in the lives of heroic saints, are the positive building of character.

II. CONTENTION. In the positive process of achieving good, hindrances are met. It has been said, "There is nothing real or useful that is not a seat of war." Take construction without resistance. If I ignore the fact of sin and forget temptations and simply go on cultivating good, as if there were no opposite, presently I shall find these sins are making assaults on me from behind: my work will be undermined, my pious pains spoilt; I shall be no true builder. On the other hand, take resistance without construction. This will produce a hard, censorious, belligerent type of piety. The sword will crowd out the gentle arts of peace. It makes soldiers against Satan, but not tillers of the soil of God. We become clever disputants, but not good, trusting, patient, loving, holy men and women. Looking out so sharply for the Ammonites and Ashdodites the walls do not go up. We want the watchful eye of the old anchorite, without his austerity. We want the practical activity of the modern reformer without his blindness to the personal foes in his own heart. We want one hand for service, one for battle; when this is understood Christ's Church will be filled with consistent believers and fearless soldiers. (*Bp. Huntington.*) *The sword and the trowel:*—The stirring incident suggests lessons to the workers in God's cause to-day.

I. THE CHURCH OF GOD HAS STILL A GREAT WORK TO DO FOR THE SALVATION OF THE WORLD. The walls of many a Jerusalem are down and need building up. Injustice, oppression, and wrong are found in many places.

II. How is THE CHURCH TO ACCOMPLISH ALL THIS WORK? Consider the people named in the text.

1. They had a wise and skilful leader. It is said that Alexander the Great was strolling among the tents of his soldiers on the eve of some great battle. Hearing some of his men engaged in conversation in one of the tents, he stopped to listen. The men were losing courage and heart, and said so. As they deplored their insufficiency for the task of the morrow, he slipped up to the door of the tent, and swinging back the canvas, said, "Remember that Alexander is with you." Nehemiah told the people of a greater than Alexander. In all aggressive movements there must be aggressive leaders.
2. All the people were willing to help. The danger in these days is to leave the work to a few, to recognised leaders and officers. This is always foolish; in the Church of God it is fatal.
3. Each one had a work and did it. God has a piece of work for each one of us to do. Some have to stand in the front; others have to stand in the rear. Some work in the blaze of day, and others work out of sight. I sometimes admire the bridges which cross the Thames. As I have sailed under them, I have thought about the divers who had to work below the surface of the water to lay the foundation of some of the strong work which carries the weight of the whole. The work these divers did out of sight was all-important. If they had done it badly the whole would have suffered in consequence. It may be so with our work.
4. They did the work in dependence upon God. They did their secular work in a religious spirit. (*C. Leach, D.D.*) *The work of a Christian:*—This is well set forth by the occupations of a builder and a soldier.

1. There are heaps of rubbish to be removed. There must be a true repentance, a confessing and forsaking of sin.
2. Foundations deep and strong must be laid. Christ the one Foundation.
3. The wall must be carried up, little by little, &c. There must be a growing up into Christ, an advance in grace day by day.
4. This must be done according to the settled plan, by rule and square. Our rule is the written Word.
5. The Christian

has to carry on his work in troublous times. He must stand bravely at his post, like a sentinel on watch. He must stand where his Captain has placed him. Obedience to Christ is the glory of the Christian soldier. We must believe where we cannot see, and trust where we cannot trace. The end will justify all His dealings with us and by us. In the Peninsular War, the captain of a division was placed by Wellington at a point remote from the field where a battle was about to be fought. He was expressly ordered to remain there, and on no account to quit his post. When the battle was raging fiercely the captain could no longer endure the inaction of his position, and so left it and joined in the fight. The enemy were driven from the field, and fled in the very direction that Wellington had anticipated, and where the captain with his men had been posted. The general felt confident that their flight would be cut off; but great was his anger when he found that his orders had been disobeyed, and the post vacated. It is said that he never again employed the captain in any important affair, and that the latter died of a broken heart through the loss of his reputation as a soldier. (*J. M. Randall.*)

Vers. 19, 20. **The work is great . . . and we are separated upon the wall.**—*The common work of the Master*:—In time of war you visit the camp. There is flying from the flagpole in the sun the stars and stripes. You look upon the men in their scattered avocations. A few men are playing, a few men are cleaning their guns, a few men are cooking, here and there a sentry is pacing back and forth, some men are lying on the grass asleep, there is no common life, there seems to be no common purpose, there appears to be no common endeavour, or action. But suddenly the bugle sounds the call, or the drum its roll, and instantly the men spring to their feet, drop their cards, awake from their slumber, leave their cooking utensils, and stand ready to meet the enemy, ready to do the bidding of their commander. Deep down in their hearts there is a common purpose, and that flag that floats at the topmost pole and over their camp indicates what that purpose is. So Christians are to gather in the name of Christ—you, merchant—you, lawyer—you, physician—you, minister—you, teacher—you, parent, each in your several place, each doing your several work. Whenever the drum shall beat its roll-call, you are to be ready, not merely to do your own work, but to stand shoulder to shoulder in serried ranks, to do the common work of the Master, in fulfilment of the common aim which has really united you. (*Lyman Abbott.*)

Ver. 20. **So we laboured in the work.**—*Perseverance*:—The builders not only began well, but they persevered to the end of their work. Perseverance is a great element of success. It was George Stephenson's motto, "Persevere"; and the celebrated mathematician, Arago, tells us that his master in mathematics gave a word of advice which he found in the binding of one of his text-books. Puzzled and discouraged by the difficulties he met with in his early studies, he was almost ready to give up the pursuit. Some words which he found on the waste leaf used to stiffen the cover of his paper-bound text-book caught his eye, and interested him. It proved to be a short letter from D'Alembert to a young person disheartened, like himself, by the difficulties of mathematical study, and who had written to him for counsel. "Go on, go on, sir," was the counsel which D'Alembert gave him. "The difficulties you meet will resolve themselves as you advance." This maxim followed out made him one of the greatest astronomers of his day. And Christians must persevere in the work of God. (*J. M. Randall.*) *Perseverance*:—A Christian negro was once asked the meaning of perseverance, and he said, "Massa, me think it mean hang on, hold fast, and no let go." And when some one questioned John Wesley on the remarkable success of his followers, "Sir," he said, "they are all at it, and always at it." (*Ibid.*)

Ver. 23. **None of us put off our clothes, saving that every one put them off for washing.**—*The necessary and the unnecessary*:—Some people waste all their energy in putting off and on their clothes: their whole life is a question of clothes; they cannot do anything until their clothes are right. Nehemiah showed how he distinguished between the necessary and the unnecessary. We must attend to health if we are to attend to successful toil. Time is not wasted that is spent in obeying the laws of life. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

CHAPTER V.

VERS. 1-18. *And there was a great cry of the people.—The friend of the poor :—*

I. THE COMPLAINT OF THE POOR. It is sometimes alleged the poor have a morbid disposition to complain of their indigence and sufferings; and this may be true of certain classes of them. The ignorant and vicious, the idle and intemperate, are prone to bewail their hardships in querulous words. They complain bitterly of the miseries of their lot, and perhaps charge those with having a hard heart who do not give them the relief they desire. They try thus to excite the pity of the benevolent, or to extort the gifts of charity which they do not deserve. But it is altogether different with the industrious and pious poor. The poor of the children of Judah are manifestly brought to the very extremity of suffering before they disclose their sorrowful circumstances; and when they are compelled to make them known, it is in language remarkable for dignified sobriety and true pathos. The complaint of these poor Israelites unveils their varied load of sorrow. 1. Some complained of the extent of their necessities. "We, our sons, and our daughters, are many: therefore we take up corn for them, that we may eat, and live." The calls of hunger were many; the means of supply, on their own inheritance, were small; and they required to purchase corn for bread from others. Their straits, too, were increased by the present dearth. It is one of the many glories of the religion of the Bible that it makes a benevolent care of the poor a paramount duty in all who have it in their power to relieve their necessities, and enforces this duty by threatenings for its neglect, and by promises of reward for its observance. 2. Some of the poor here also complain of the severity of public burdens. They were still subject to the Persian king, and to secure the continuance of his favour to Jerusalem they had made every possible effort to pay his tribute. Their more wealthy countrymen met this tax without abridging their home comforts, but the burden was heavy on the poor. 3. The sorrows of the poor were in this case deepened by the thought that they were occasioned by the ungenerous conduct of their own brethren. "Yet now our flesh is as the flesh of our brethren, our children as their children: and, lo, we bring into bondage our sons and our daughters to be servants, neither is it in our power to redeem them." They possessed a common relation to the covenant inheritance. They had left the land of their exile animated with the same faith, and embarked in the same enterprise. Many of them had quitted comforts in that foreign land, out of love to Jerusalem, and were now enduring the first trials of returned captives. They had laboured, too, by their united endeavours, to restore the city of their fathers, instead of seeking every man his own things in the care of his patrimonial inheritance. It might have been expected that, thus labouring for a common object, they would have shared a common sympathy, and been free from the grasp of selfishness. 4. How mysterious are sufferings like these, especially of the poor people of God engaged in His service. We do not wonder that those Jews who remained in the land of idols, after they were free to return to Judah, might suffer adversity. They despised the Lord's goodness in offering deliverance from exile, and preferred ease in a strange country to spiritual blessings in the holy land. It is not wonderful though they might be visited with trials in providence, and be made to read their sin in their suffering. But here those endure affliction who willingly left the land of the heathen, and they are involved in deep trouble while doing a service to the city of God. Shall we think that they disprove either the wisdom or goodness of God's providence to His people? Do they not rather show His thoughts to be far above our thoughts, and His procedure in carrying out His great plan to be too high for us to understand? Do they not clearly indicate that He tries the faith of His servants in the very moment of accepting their love, and rewards their affection, not in the comforts of earth, but in the glories of immortality? It is thus that the world in which we dwell is still a place of weeping, where the poor and needy pour out their tears in floods. Thousands of righteous ones languish in poverty, or are persecuted for their fidelity to the truth of God.

II. NEHEMIAH'S EXPOSTULATION WITH THE NOBLES. The promptitude with which he listens to the complaint of the poor does honour to his heart, and the courage with which he proceeds to redress their wrongs sheds a lustre on the justice of his administration. The cry of the lowly for relief from distress or opposition is often disregarded, yea, proves the occasion of augmenting their misery. And in his very first step for reform of these abuses in Judah he evinces again the seli-

reliance of a great mind. "Then," says he, "I consulted with myself." To this, indeed, he was shut up by his peculiar and trying circumstances. 1. He "rebuked the nobles, and the rulers, and said unto them, Ye exact usury, every one of his brother." To see the full force of this charge, it must be borne in mind that the Israelites were forbidden in the law of Moses to lend money to the poor on interest. With strangers, or perhaps with the rich, they might trade in this way; but this is the law interdicting such a practice with their poor brethren:—"If thou lend money to any of My people that is poor by thee, thou shalt not be to him an usurer, neither shalt thou lay upon him usury." This, then, is a grave charge against the nobles of violating the Divine law; and it falls on ears not accustomed to such plain words. Men of rank and affluence seldom hear this language of remonstrance addressed to them, and they can ill bear such reflections on their honour. But no earthly station exempts wrong-doers from just reproof; and Nehemiah's zeal for God, as well as his love to His people, inspires him with faithfulness. True kindness to them, not less than compassion for the lowly objects of their exactions, prompted his faithful expostulation. The reproof here was administered with firmness, yet it was accompanied with the prudence of wisdom, adopting a course fitted to fortify remonstrance, and to secure its desired effect. "I set," says he, "a great assembly against them." What was the object of this concourse? We cannot suppose that the servant of God intended, through this means, to overawe the nobles by numbers, or to constrain them to a decision contrary to reason. He appears rather to have convened this assembly to allow the free expression of sentiment on the evil complained of, and to bring all under the salutary influence of public opinion. In no free community can public opinion be set at defiance with either justice or safety. It may, indeed, be sometimes corrupted by designing men, and it may for a season be swayed by impulses perilous to the common-weal. It requires, then, to be corrected and regulated by the power of truth. But a healthful public opinion, wisely formed, rightly guided, freely expressed, is the bulwark of national liberty, and an essential condition of the progress of mankind. 2. Nehemiah addressed to the rulers of Judah persuasive argument. The arguments he employed are threefold. He first of all pleads the efforts already made to redeem Judah from captivity. And on this ground he asks if it is right they should be again sold into bondage. "We after our ability have redeemed our brethren the Jews, who were sold unto the heathen; and will ye even sell your brethren?" This appeal reminds believers in Christ of their duty, not to come again into bondage to sin. "Stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made you free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage." Nehemiah, moreover, pleads the exposure of the common cause to the reproach of the enemy as a reason for the nobles ceasing their oppression. "Also I said, It is not good that ye do: ought ye not to walk in the fear of our God because of the reproach of the heathen our enemies?" This is a powerful argument for watchfulness and consistency in all who love Zion. Many are jealous for their own reputation, and quick to wipe off any reproach from themselves, while they have little care for the honour of God. Nehemiah, once more, appeals to his own conduct as an example of a generous spirit to his poor brethren. He, too, might have exacted money and corn, but he freely surrendered his private rights for the sake of the public good. It is not in a boastful spirit that he thus refers to himself and the course of self-denial he pursued. Perhaps, also, he wishes to suggest that he gained far more in enjoyment than he gave up in substance. The powerful and persuasive appeal was crowned with complete success. The result of this appeal also proves the power of religious motive in remedying social evils. These often grow and spread in face of all arguments deduced from considerations of humanity and justice. But here, in Jerusalem, religion pours the oil of love on the troubled waters; she addresses a winning appeal to open hearts, and at once the grasp of oppression is relaxed. If any great social evils are allowed to prevail where religion is professed, it is only by neglecting or denying its power. Christianity will either destroy every iniquity that abounds in a land, or itself will decline and depart from a people who will not hear its voice, to break off their sins by righteousness. III. NEHEMIAH'S TESTIMONY TO HIS OWN DISINTERESTED CONDUCT. (*W. Ritchie.*) *Brave compassion:*—Now Nehemiah, as we have seen, was a business man—a man of great energy and prudence; and it would not have been strange if he had postponed the consideration of the complaints thus brought before him. He might naturally enough have been afraid lest, by now finding fault with the nobles and rulers, he should alienate them from himself, and thus hinder the completion of his great

enterprise. And so he might have said to these poor people, "You see that my hands are full of work; I cannot attend to this matter now—one thing at a time. No doubt you have a grievance, but let us get the walls finished first, and then I will see what can be done." It is thus that many men of business act in daily life. Their very energy leads them to brush aside everything that threatens to interfere with their present work. They cannot bear interruptions, and are so eagerly bent on reaching their end that they cannot pause to do good on their way. But Nehemiah was more than a mere man of business; he was a man with a tender heart. (*T. C. Finlayson.*) *A great schism averted*:—I. THAT SOCIAL INJUSTICE MAY EXIST EVEN AMONGST FELLOW-WORKERS IN A GREAT AND GOOD CAUSE. II. THAT SOCIAL INJUSTICE, IF NOT CORRECTED, WILL UNDERMINE THE STABILITY OF ANY CAUSE, HOWEVER RIGHTEOUS. III. THAT SOCIAL INJUSTICE SHOULD BE REGARDED BY ALL GOOD MEN WITH FEELINGS OF RIGHTEOUS INDIGNATION. IV. THAT SOCIAL INJUSTICE, WHENEVER DISCOVERED, SHOULD BE CALMLY, YET PROMPTLY, DEALT WITH. V. THAT CONCILIATORY APPEALS ARE SOMETIMES MORE EFFICACIOUS THAN COERCIVE MEASURES IN DEALING WITH SOCIAL INJUSTICE. (*Homiletic Commentary.*) *The accusing cry of humanity*:—I. THE UNENDING STRUGGLE. Wealth and poverty, knowledge and ignorance, brain and brawn, capital and labour—when in all ages have not these come into collision? II. ELEMENTS OF BITTERNESS IN THIS STRUGGLE. 1. On the side of the oppressors there is power (*ver. 7*). 2. The oppressed are the brethren of the oppressors. 3. They were engaged in a common cause. III. LIGHT IN DARKNESS. 1. Christ came to proclaim the brotherhood of humanity. 2. Signs of the times. The teacher is abroad. Society is tending towards redress. (*Ibid.*)

Vers. 3-5. *We have mortgaged our lands.*—*The miseries of debt*:—I. MENTAL UNREST. II. SOCIAL DEGRADATION. III. FAMILY RUIN. IV. A DISREGARD OF A DIVINE COMMAND: "Thou shalt not steal." Application—1. Christians should set the world an example. 2. Watch the beginnings of extravagance. 3. In small things as well as in greater act on Christian principle. (*Ibid.*) *The blessing and curse of mortgages*:—The history of the mortgage would be the history of the domestic, social, financial, political, and ecclesiastical progress of all ages. It will be useful if I can intelligently and practically speak of the mortgage as a blessing and as a curse. There is much absurd and wholesale denunciation of borrowing money. If I should request all those who have never asked a loan to rise, there would not out of this audience be one get up unless it were some one who had acted so badly at the start that he knew no one would trust him. At the inception of nearly all enterprises, great or small, a loan is necessary. Years ago an Irishman landed with fifty cents in his pocket on the Battery, asked the loan of one dollar from an entire stranger, and now is among the New York princes. A mortgage is merely borrowed strength of others to help us in crises of individual or national life on the promise that we will pay them for the help rendered. But what is true in secularities is more true in ecclesiastical affairs. If churches had not been built till all the money could be raised, tens of thousands of our best churches would never have been built, and millions of those who are now Christians on earth or saints in heaven would never have been comforted or saved. The old Collins's line of steamers went into bankruptcy, but that does not change the fact that they transported hundreds of passengers in safety across the sea; and if all the churches in Christendom to-morrow went down under the thump of the sheriff's hammer, that would not hinder the fact that they have already transported thousands into the kingdom, and have done a stupendous good that all earth and hell can never undo. All consider it right to borrow for a secular institution. Is it not right to borrow for a religious? It is safer to borrow for the Church than for any other institution, because other institutions die, but a Church seldom. When the Israelites of my text wanted to rebuild their homes, and wanted to borrow money for that purpose, the mortgagers did well to let them have it, though I wish they had not asked twelve per cent. But after a while the mortgage spoken of in the text ceased to be a blessing, and became a plague. It had helped them through a domestic and ecclesiastical crisis, but now they could carry it no longer, and they cried out for rescue. If a blessing lies too long, it gets to be a curse. At the first moment the farmer can get the mortgage off his farm, and the merchant the mortgage off his merchandise, and the citizen the mortgage off his home, and the charitable institution the mortgage off its asylum, and the religious society the mortgage off its church, they had better do it. I have heard people argue the advantage of individual debts and national debts and Church debts; but I could

not, while the argument was going on, control my risibilities. It is said that such debts keep the individual and the Church and the State busy trying to pay them. No doubt of it. So rheumatism keeps the patient busy with arnica, and neuralgia keeps the patient busy with hartshorn, and the cough with lozenges, and the toothache with lotions; but that is no argument in favour of rheumatism, or neuralgia, or coughs, or toothache. Better, if possible, get rid of these things, and be busy with something else. (*T. De Witt Talmage.*)

Ver. 7. **Then I consulted with myself.**—*Precipitate anger avoided*:—But, though very angry, he nevertheless “consulted with himself.” Even righteous indignation is often too precipitate in its expression, and vents itself in a fuming and storming which does little or no good. But the fervid feeling of Nehemiah was blended with practical wisdom. He took counsel with himself as to what was best to be done. (*T. C. Finlayson.*) **And I set a great assembly against them.**—*An assembly convoked against sinners*:—I wish to show impenitent sinners how great an assembly may be set against them. That so large a majority of mankind are on the side of irreligion, tends powerfully to preserve a majority on that side, for a large proportion of the youth in each successive generation will enlist under the banner of the strongest party. The same circumstance operates to weaken the force and prevent the success of those means and arguments which God employs for the conversion of sinners. When the man who neglects religion looks around him and sees wealth, rank, power, and influence all ranged on his side, he secretly says, “I must be right, I must be safe. If I fare as well as the great mass of my fellow-creatures, I shall fare well enough.” This being the case, it is important that sinners should be made to see what a great assembly may be set against them. Among those who are against them, we mention—I. **THE GOOD MEN NOW IN THE WORLD.** God has not a servant, Jesus Christ has not a friend on earth who is not against you. Their example is against you, their testimony is against you. II. **ALL THE GOOD MEN WHO HAVE EVER LIVED IN THE WORLD,** the spirits of just men made perfect. III. **ALL THE WRITERS OF THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS.** With one voice they cry, “Woe to the wicked! it shall be ill with him, for the reward of his hands shall be given him.” IV. **THE HOLY ANGELS.** V. **THE LORD JESUS CHRIST.** Every doctrine which He promulgated, every precept which He enjoined, every threatening which He uttered, every action of his life, is against you. Christ meets all the impenitent, and says, “Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.” He meets the unbelieving, and says, “He that believeth not shall be damned.” He meets all the unholy, and says, “Without holiness no man shall see the Lord.” He meets all the unregenerate, and exclaims, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye be born again, ye cannot enter the kingdom of heaven.” VI. **GOD THE FATHER.** (*E. Payson, D.D.*) *Witnesses against you*:—Some persons are deaf to the voice of justice until it is repeated loudly by thousands of their fellow-men. The silent voice of principle and right they will not hear, and the gentle rebuke of some one faithful friend they will despise; but when righteousness enlists public opinion on its side, when many are seen to be its advocates, then these very persons will show that they have relics of conscience left, and they yield to right demands because they see them not only to be just, but to be popular. This is the main point with those of the feebler sort, and we turn the scale if, like Nehemiah, we “set a great assembly against them.” I set a great assembly against—I. **THE UNCONVERTED.** 1. The great assembly of all the godly that are upon the earth. They all testify against you. (1) By their consistent life. (2) By their joy in God. (3) By their very horror at your sin. They cannot bear to think of that which awaits you. Holy Whitfield, when he began to touch upon that subject, would, with the tears streaming down his cheeks, cry, “The wrath to come! the wrath to come!” It was too much for him. He could not repeat those words and there cease. 2. All the inspired writers of the Bible. 3. The departed saints. 4. The whole company of the angels. 5. God Himself. “The face of the Lord is against them that do evil, to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth.” 6. Jesus Christ, the Son of God. II. **THOSE WHO SAY THAT SIN IS A VERY PLEASANT AND PROFITABLE THING.** Oh, what an assembly it would be if I could bring up from the hospitals the wretches who are suffering an earthly hell from their sins! Go over the casual ward, enter the union-house, spend an evening in a low lodging-house, and sit down and hear the tales of sons of ministers, of sons of gentlemen, of sons of noblemen, of men that once were merchants, traders, lawyers, doctors, who have brought themselves down by nothing else than their own extrava-

gance and sin to eat the bread of pauperism. III. THOSE WHO SAY THAT TRUE RELIGION MAKES PEOPLE MISERABLE. I have suffered as much of bodily pain as most here present, and I know also about as much depression of spirit at times as any one; but my Master's service is a blessed service, and faith in Him makes my soul leap for joy. I would not change with the most healthy man, or the most wealthy man, or the most learned man, or the most eminent man in all the world, if I had to give up my faith in Jesus Christ. It is a blessed thing to be a Christian and all God's people will tell you so. By the living saints that do rejoice, and by the dying saints who die without a fear, I set an assembly against the man who dares slander true religion by saying that it does not make men happy. (C. H. Spurgeon.)

Ver. 9. **Ought ye not to walk in the fear of our God, because of the reproach of the heathen our enemies?**—*Jealousy for the honour of God*:—There was much good sense and Christian wisdom in the reply which was once given to a dignitary of our Church by a simple rural pastor. The latter had said to the former, "If you act so, what will the people say?" The reply was, "Do you care what the people say?" The rejoinder of the plain man was, "I care as little as any man what the people say; but I care a great deal what the people have a right to say." How just the distinction! Human opinion ought to have no weight with us when it contravenes duty; but it ought to weigh much with us when we incur its censure by the violation of duty. The ungodly will judge chiefly of Christianity by those who profess it, and be largely won or scandalised by the manner in which it is adorned or disgraced by them. (Hugh Stowell, M.A.)

Ver. 10. **Let us leave off this usury.**—*Wise rebuke*:—He did not stand on a pedestal and look down on them with scorn and contempt; he rather placed himself alongside of the offenders, that he might lift them to a higher level. Let us learn from this beautiful example how best to rebuke and restore an erring brother or sister. (W. P. Lockhart.)

Ver. 15. **But so did not I, because of the fear of God.**—*A motto for a manly life*:—I. THE SELF-REGULATIVE POWER OF A MANLY MOTIVE. "The fear of God"; "the love of Christ"; "religious principle"; "conscience"; "the sense of duty"; "the instinct of right," are all variations of expressions of the same motive. II. THE COURAGE TO BE SINGULAR IS HERE IMPLIED. III. APPLICATIONS OF THIS PRINCIPLE TO THE COMMONPLACE LIFE OF ALL MEN. 1. To himself a man must say, "No!" 2. To the world a man must say "No!" 3. This is the motto for youth. IV. THE SIMPLICITY AND DIRECTNESS OF THIS LIFE-MOTTO. V. THIS MOTTO IS OUR GUIDE IN DOUBTFUL MATTERS. (Homiletic Commentary.) *The fear of the Lord*:—I. WHOLE-SOME SELF-RESTRAINT. There is always a temptation to run with the multitude. It was particularly so with Nehemiah. 1. His superiors were evil. A man is fain to follow his employers or masters. 2. His surroundings were evil. A person gets his tone from his surroundings. 3. His temptations were to evil. He would have gained the applause of his fellows by sinning. 4. He was singular in his convictions, also almost alone in an idolatrous land. II. AN ALL-POWERFUL MOTIVE. "Because of the fear of the Lord." All the more powerful because unseen—the mightiest forces are those the eye cannot trace. The fear of the Lord is—1. A safe guide. It is sure to be right. 2. A powerful incentive. He has power to cast into hell, and He will reward. 3. A plain directive. The wayfaring man, though a fool, shall not err therein. Men who are independent in their purpose of rectitude are earth's true nobility. Learn to stand alone for the cause of truth. (Homilist.) *Nehemiah's master principle*:—The religion of the Bible is not a sickly plant which requires the forcing-house to keep it alive. It is a hardy tree which flourishes best in the open field. The servant of God anywhere is the servant of God everywhere. Few notions have done more mischief than the imagination that godliness belongs to the closet and sanctuary, the cloister and the cell, and that it is too ethereal to be interfused into the occupations of secular life. To refute such fallacies nothing is more effectual than holy example. Example shows what can be done, and at the same time points out the way in which it may be accomplished. For those occupied in the busy pursuits of the world there is no more appropriate example in the Scriptures than that of Nehemiah. I. HIS RULING MOTIVE. The whole tenor of his conversation bespoke the supremacy of the fear of God in his soul. This chapter contains an impressive exercise of this principle. Of those returned from

the captivity, many were destitute and distressed; their poverty made them a prey to their richer brethren. Nehemiah's predecessors were most rigorous in their exactions, and failed to let mercy temper justice. Nehemiah, on the contrary, not only refrained from oppression, but did not even require his dues. Had he not disclosed the principle which actuated him, we might have filled up the blank in this way: Because of the promptings of generosity; or because of my high sense of honour; or because of the patriotism that fired my breast; or because of the compassion which melted my heart. Thus, however, spake not Nehemiah, but he said, "So did not I, because of the fear of God." This gave the character of godliness to his conduct; this transmuted what would otherwise have been no better than fair tinsel into the fine gold of the sanctuary.

II. THE NATURE OF THE FEAR OF GOD. The fear of God in the Old Testament is equivalent to the love of God in the New. The former indicates the severer aspect of the one economy as compared with the more gracious aspect of the other. What viewed in one light is love viewed in another is godly fear. They are but different aspects of the same principle. If there be genuine love of God, there cannot fail to be a holy fear of offending Him. This fear is therefore the beginning of wisdom; the guardian of holiness; the seal of adoption. What need there is for this principle to pervade the mercantile world! Examined in the light of Scripture, the morals of that world, even in our own favoured land, would be found to be fearfully faulty. Along with much that is honourable and of good report among our merchant princes, if you penetrate into the recesses of commerce, you will frequently detect a low and shifting standard of equity—you will discover that a thousand practices are connived at and pass current in business which when in the balances of the sanctuary are found utterly wanting.

III. THE SALUTARY EFFECTS OF THE FEAR OF GOD. It gives to mercantile morality—

1. Intrinsic worth. 2. Strength. 3. Stability. 4. Universality.

(1) Taking the morality of the commercial world at the highest, how much of it is genuine? If men are upright in their dealings merely because they have a conviction that honesty is the best policy, and that fairness will answer better than fraud, or if they act justly simply from a sense of honour or from a pride which raises them above being guilty of a low and disgraceful transaction; or if they do right because they instinctively recoil from all that is base and equivocal, from whatever would degrade and disturb their mind, then all their imposing array of mercantile virtues are after all of the earth earthy, hollow at the core and unprofitable in the sight of God. It is the fear of God alone which can impart to mercantile morality its intrinsic worth.

(2) Even the virtuous qualities which exalt men in the commercial world must lack reality and consistency when they rest on a lower ground. Hence it is no uncommon thing to find a man who was at one period distinguished for honour and integrity at another period making utter shipwreck of character; whilst his barque glided along in smooth water and his sails were filled with prosperous gales, he steered an undeviating course, but when storms arose and his vessel drifted among quicksands and shallows, he soon abandoned the compass of honesty and yielded himself to the force of the current. His rectitude was the creature of circumstance: sustained by success, with success it fell. Fragile at best are the virtues which spring from the unregenerated heart.

(3) The energy of this principle will exert a strength and universality of influence which nothing else can command. God being everywhere, the man who fears Him will fear Him everywhere. It is impossible to delineate fully the breadth and expansiveness of this principle of action. It will go with a man into the little as well as the great, into the hidden as well as the open; it will tell upon him with equal force whether others dissent from or concur in his course of conduct. It will elevate him to freedom and independence of character. He will not be like the sundial, useless save in the light; but he will be like the timepiece, which keeps the tenor of its way alike in the shade as in the sunshine. The saint, like the sunflower, owns the centre of attraction when clouded as well as when clear.

(a) It will keep a man undefiled amid the defilements of public life like the pure stream that is said to pass through the salt lake and yet retain its freshness. It is a safeguard against the tone, the spirit, and the practices of business, and it will prevent compliance with the expedients, manœuvres, and subterfuges of trade.

(b) A trying ordeal for a godly tradesman is to be reputed soft and behind the age because he will not overreach his neighbour. When he sees competitors prospering by doubtful expedients, or hears them glorying in their equivocal gains, his reflection and joy will be, "So did not I, because of the fear of God."

(c) It will restrain from the unhallowed indulgences of worldlings.

(d) It will guard against the desecration and profanation of the ordinances of the Lord's

Day. (*Hugh Stowell, M.A.*) *Uprightness in dealing*:—If you wish to apply a touchstone to character, take this as the most searching—the exercise of those graces which a man is most tempted to neglect, and the eschewal of those iniquities which a man is most tempted to indulge. He who can stand this test is sterling in the sight of God. Consider—I. SOME GREAT PRINCIPLES WHICH OUGHT TO OBTAIN IN ALL MERCANTILE TRANSACTIONS. 1. A Christian tradesman ought to love his neighbour as himself. 2. "Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them." This is a code of morals condensed into a sentence. 3. You must be faithful in the little, even as in the great. II. SOME OF THE LESS OBVIOUS DEVIATIONS FROM THESE PRINCIPLES WHICH PASS CURRENT IN THE MERCANTILE WORLD. 1. How common is it for men to defraud society by idleness and self-indulgence! 2. By selfish extravagance, or rash speculations, what numbers subject themselves to liabilities which their resources do not warrant, or plunge into debts which they have no prospect of discharging! 3. How diversified the deceptions practised in trade for the purpose of taking advantage of the purchaser! (*Ibid.*) *The fear of God*:—A few principles, realised in the heart, will generate this blessed fear. Let us consider—I. God's majesty, and this will provoke the fear of REVERENCE. II. God's providence, and this will induce a fear of DEPENDENCE. III. Our advantages, and this will induce a fear of DIFFIDENCE. IV. Our obligations, and this will induce a fear of GRATITUDE AND LOVE. (*J. M. Randall.*) *The fear of God a real principle of life*:—It puts a difference between the world and the servant of God—I. As it regards CHOICE. II. As to SERVICE. III. As to WORSHIP. IV. As to AFFLICTION. The worldly man will fret and murmur; not so the godly. V. As to THE PRACTICAL CONDUCT OF DAILY LIFE. (*Ibid.*) *So did not I*:—I. Let me put the main principle that lies here in these words: NOTHING WILL GO RIGHT UNLESS YOU DARE TO BE SINGULAR. "So did not I." Howsoever common the practice, howsoever innocent and recognised the source of gain, the multitude that approved it, and adopted it, was nothing to me. Everything will be wrong where a man has not learnt the great art of saying, "No." Resolute non-compliance with common practice should be exercised—I. In the field of opinion. If we are building on traditional opinion, we have really no foundation at all. Unless the word received from others has been verified by ourselves and changed, as it were, into part of our own being, we may befooled ourselves with creeds and professions to which we fancy that we adhere, but we have no belief whatsoever. 2. In the daily conduct of life. There are many beckoning hands and enticing voices that seek to draw us away. Sturdy resistance is necessary—(1) From the very make of our own natures. There is a host of inclinations and desires in every man which will hurry him to destruction unless he has a strong hand on the brake. "God gave them to thee under lock and key," and it is at our peril that we let them have sway. (2) From the order of things in which we dwell. We are set in the midst of a world full of things which are both attractive and bad, and which are sternly prohibited and lovingly forbidden by God. And if you go careering among the flowers and fruits that grow around you in the life that is opening to you, like town children turned loose for a day in the woods, picking whatever is bright, and tasting whatever looks as if it would be sweet, you will poison yourselves with nightshade and hemlock. (3) From the fact that every one of us is thrown more or less closely into contact with people who themselves are living as they should not, and who would fain drag us after them. For us all, then, in every period of life, the necessity is the same. We must learn to say, "No." Like Joseph, like Daniel, like the three Hebrew youths, like Nehemiah, we must dare, if need be, to be singular. (4) Non-resistance or compliance is in itself weak and unworthy. What a shame it is that a man possessed of that awful power which, within limits and subject to conditions, God has given him, of shaping and determining his character, should let himself be shaped and determined by the mere pressure of circumstances and accidental associations! What a shame it is that a man should have no more volition in what he does and in what he refrains from than one of those gelatinous creatures that float about in the ocean, which have to move wherever the current takes them, though it be to cast them on the rocky shore with an ebbing tide. That "circumstances make character" should have its vindication in the actual lives of the great bulk of men is only another proof of the weakness and depravity of humanity, in which the will is paralysed, and the conscious choice is so seldom exercised, and a man lets the world do what it likes with him. (5) Vigorous non-compliance with the temptations that are around us is enforced by the remembrance of what a poor excuse for wrong-doing they will be

found to be at last. II. CONSIDER THAT YOU CANNOT RESIST THE EVIL AROUND YOU UNLESS YOU GIVE YOURSELVES TO GOD. No man will ever for a lifetime resist and repel the domination of evil unless he is girded about with the purity of Jesus Christ, as an atmosphere in which all poisonous things fade and die, and through which no temptation can force its way. The only means for steadfast resistance is a steadfast faith in Jesus as our Saviour. 1. In Christ we have an all-sufficient pattern. The one command which contains the whole of Christian duty, the whole law of moral perfectness attainable by man, is—"Be ye imitators of God, as beloved children, and walk as Christ walked." 2. That fear of God which is all transfused and mingled with the love of Him, gives us next an all-powerful motive. Love delights to please; fear dreads to disobey. 3. The fear of God strengthens us for resistance, because it gives us an omnipotent power within ourselves whereby we resist. "The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death." (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*) *Resistance to evil*:—Nehemiah is an illustrious example of a courage that is within reach of us all, a courage that dares to be true when truth is unpopular, and to do that which is right when right is scorned. Like some unfailing river which defies the heat and the drought of the longest summer because its sources lie on the margin of perpetual snow, this courage in its noblest form is independent of circumstances because it has its spring in the presence of God. I. WHY SHOULD WE DARE TO STAND ALONE, and to say to evil, "So will not I"? 1. Because in the end it is the safest course. Life is a probation and an education. None of us can escape temptation. It moulds and tests our character and fits us for service. There are but two courses open—complacency or resistance. Many a man makes shipwreck on the very verge of manhood for the want of courage to say, "No," and of the resolution to stand alone. 2. It is the manliest course. What do we think of one out on a wide sea in an open boat who, when the storm gathers and the waves run high, drops his oars, fastens up his helm and lets himself drift. He is the brave man who, undaunted by the dark sky and the angry waves, toils at the oar and makes for the land. And he who, caught by sudden and sharp temptation, allows himself to drift helplessly with the tide, excites only scorn and compassion, while he who, like Nehemiah, faces the temptation in the strength of God, and cries, "So will not I," is a true man, a real hero, and a worthy follower of Jesus Christ. 3. It is the wisest course. We escape thereby the consequences of sin, and the very temptation we resist becomes the means of strengthening our character. II. THE SECRET OF THIS COURAGE: "So did not I, BECAUSE OF THE FEAR OF GOD." In the realisation of the Divine presence Bishop Latimer forgot his fear of the King of England, and spoke brave and strong and faithful words of warning and remonstrance. In the fear of God lived Lord Lawrence, the great British Pro-Consul as he has been called, who saved India in the day of mutiny, and his marble in Westminster Abbey tells us "He feared man so little because he feared God so much." (*F. J. Chavasse.*) *Singularity*:—1. Our text contains the regulative spring of a noble life. The words mean most to the young. Will the coming generation prefer conscience and convenience and make God the pole-star of their life? Every one of us is important to God, and the consciousness of this is the parent of virtue and the inspiration of heroism. God wants us. When Augustine was in disquiet of mind, he said, "Soul, what aileth thee?" And he seemed to hear a Divine voice within answer, "Look above." Turning upward and noting the stars looking down on him, he said, "Stars, can you tell me the meaning of my unrest?" And the stars whispered, "Look above." Remembering the angel-hosts of God marshalled for service or watchfulness, Augustine cried, "Ministers of God, can ye minister to a restless mind?" And they chanted, "Look above." "Maker of all things," said the reverent though unabashed inquirer, "tell me the meaning of this unsatisfiedness?" And God responded, "I have made thee for Myself, and thy soul can find no rest till it find rest in Me." When Samuel Webster was asked, as he sat at dinner, what was the most formative influence that entered his life, he replied, "The greatest influence that ever touched my life was the sense of my responsibility to God." 2. Doing right means sometimes being unfashionable. A business man died the other day. Writing to his travellers, he was accustomed to add a sentence like "Go straight." He knew that both right and wrong doing were contagious. Dr. Bushnell said to a young man who was consulting him as to the calling he should pursue, "Grasp the handle of your being." Your taste or fitness is as a handle to your faculties. Find your course and go right ahead in the teeth of opposition, in spite of the stings of sarcasm or the bitterness of temporary forsakenness. Remember Him who said, "I

am alone; and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me." 3. The power of numbers is magical, and we are so often bidden to do as others do. Said an avowed and educated infidel to a Christian apologist. "Let the final issue be what it may, the majority is against you, and I go with the majority." But the world has not always been saved by majorities. Reformers, statesmen, saints, singers, prophets, priests, believers in God and duty—these have been the saviours of society. 4. It is a moment of moral victory when a young man dares to say, "I cannot afford it." 5. A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of things that he possesseth, nor in the outward success of his noblest efforts; it does consist in his harmony of conscience with the fear of God, in the peace that is born of obedience. Whitfield and a companion were much annoyed one night by a set of gamblers in a room adjoining that in which they slept. Their clamour and their horrid blasphemy so excited Whitfield that he could not rest. "I will go and reprove their wickedness," said he. His companion remonstrated in vain. His words of reproof were apparently powerless. His companion asked him, "What did you gain by it?" "A soft pillow," he said, and soon fell asleep. Duty looks upward; duty implies God. Jesus Christ incarnated duty. Duty is the minister of heaven. This prayer was found in the desk of a schoolboy after his death: "O God, give me courage to fear none but Thee." (*John H. Goodman.*) *The fear of God*:—I. WHAT IT IS TO FEAR GOD.

1. In general it is a passion of the soul whereby a man doth flee from imminent evil. 2. In particular it is—(1) Servile. (2) Filial. II. THAT A MAN WHO FEARS GOD WILL NOT DO AS OTHERS DO. 1. In the matter of their choice (Matt. xiv. 7, 8; Heb. xi. 25). 2. In the matter of their worship (Josh. xxiv. 15). 3. In their business calling. 4. In what they are entrusted with. 5. In their refreshments. 6. In their afflictions. 7. In their right and propriety. Lot would not let Abraham have his right, though it was his right, yet Abraham, because he feared God and for peace sake, gives up his right. III. WHAT IS THERE IN THIS FEAR OF GOD THAT SHOULD BALANCE THE SOUL, AND CAUSE IT NOT TO DO AS OTHERS DO. A man that fears the Lord—1. Has different ends from others. 2. Has a tenderer conscience. 3. Has different restraints. IV. WHAT IS THE ISSUE AND CONSEQUENCE OF THE FEAR OF THE LORD? 1. God deals well with the man who fears Him (Psa. i.; cxii. 6-8). 2. God will delight in him. Conclusion: If you would fear the Lord in truth—1. Be humbled for the want of it. 2. Ask God to fulfil His promise, "I will put My fear into their hearts." 3. Observe what that is that is nearest and dearest to you, and give it up. 4. Worship God according to His own appointment. 5. Take heed of sinning when you have the opportunity. 6. Labour to strengthen your love to God. 7. Live much in and study much upon dependence wholly upon God. If a man be upon a high tower, and another holds him from falling by the hand only, he will certainly be very fearful of offending him that holds him so. 8. Use the world as not abusing it. Deal with men as in the presence of God. 9. Labour after more communion with Him. We used to say, "Too much familiarity breeds contempt"; but here it is not so, for by familiarity and communion with God we shall have more sweetness and more delight in His ways, more strength in His service, more comfort in our afflictions. (*W. Bridge.*) *The fear of God the touchstone*:—

I. THAT IN THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION IT IS THE MOTIVE THAT GIVES WORTH TO THE ACTION. II. Nehemiah here ascribes his own conduct to the motive from which EVERY ACTION MUST SPRING THAT OBTAINS THE APPROVAL OF GOD. He might have displayed the same absence of self on quite a different principle. 1. Patriotism. 2. Desire for popularity. But his refusal of the emoluments of office was "because of the fear of God." This is a kind of summary of character which includes the various features of spiritual excellence. It is a Divinely implanted principle which makes Christ the motive and God the end of every particular of conduct. The man that fears God labours to act up to the measure of the revelation with which he is favoured; to appropriate the privileges, to act upon the motives, and to perform the duties of the dispensation beneath which he is placed. A fear such as this cannot subsist unless there be a consciousness that "now are we the sons of God." It may have been through "the terror of the Lord" that we were first brought to serious thoughts, earnest resolutions, and fervent supplications, yet when we have felt somewhat of the consciousness of danger there will be a thousandfold more motive to us to strive after holiness, in the love and grace exhibited on Calvary. III. SOME PROMINENT INSTANCES OF THIS GENERAL TRUTH. No action can be approved in God's sight which may not be traced to His fear. 1. Attention to the outward duties and forms of religion may arise from, the custom of society, the mere force of habit, compliance with the wishes of friends, or the desire of setting an example to others,

without there being the slightest vestige of vital Christianity. 2. When we tell the man of high morals and unflinching integrity and high generosity, but who is a stranger to Christ, that he can no more be saved in his present condition than one of the worst profligacy, we are not representing morality, integrity, and generosity as things to be dispensed with by the inheritor of the kingdom of heaven; we are simply affirming that they are of worth only as fruit of a Divinely implanted principle, and that if they have any other origin, they may indeed be beneficial to society, but they cannot promote salvation. Who knows not that there is in many men a kind of philosophical sense of the beauty and dignity of virtue, a native repugnance to what is gross and dishonourable, and a fine sympathy with suffering, which will go far to the producing what is regarded as exemplary in character, although there may be at the same time an utter ignorance, and even contempt, of the doctrines of Christianity? We must begood on good principles. (*Henry Melvill, B.D.*)

Principle:—I. THE GUIDING PRINCIPLE OF NEHEMIAH'S CONDUCT—THE FEAR OF GOD.

1. The fear of God, as a principle of action, is at once simple and potent. Look at the machinery in some of your mills. You have there a forest of shafts, an army of wheels, a perfect maze of cunningly invented instruments requisite for carrying out the various processes of manufacture. But how simple and how mighty the power which moves and controls the whole machinery—the power of steam! How immensely superior to any other motive power as yet brought into general use! What steam is in this relation, so is the fear of God to morals. The religious principle in its influence on this complicate mechanism termed man, and on these intricate and bewildering human affairs, has a simple efficacy not only unsurpassed, but with which no other principle can vie. 2. The superiority of this principle appears also in its wide-reaching sphere of action. This sphere comprises everything great and small that relates to human conduct. It embraces life in all its aspects. We cannot thus speak of other principles of action which men acknowledge. Take public opinion, for instance. If it be this which influences us in the course we pursue our morality may prove a very precarious thing. A life regulated by the opinion of one's fellow-creatures is likely to be well-ordered only so far, and for so long, as it shall be under the public eye; whereas the fear of God affects us as truly in the gloom of night as in the brightness of meridian day; affects us as really when remote from the city's hum and the crowded mart as it would in the midst of them; affects us as powerfully in mountain solitudes and on watery wastes as when the gaze of assembled thousands is upon us. "The morality," says a writer previously quoted, "the morality that is based upon self-interest or the opinion of men, will not endure the severest tests. For what if a man should be beset by a temptation so great as to buy over his supposed self-interest, and render it in his view more profitable to defraud than to be honest?" II. THE OPERATION OF THIS PRINCIPLE AS SEEN IN THE CHAPTER BEFORE US. It impelled Nehemiah to rectify abuses. Nehemiah discharged a disagreeable duty with all fidelity. "I rebuked the nobles, and the rulers, and said unto them," &c. Hitherto the fear of God has acted on Nehemiah as an impelling principle. We come now to the incident with which the text stands immediately connected, and we see the operation of this principle as a restraining force. "So did not I, because of the fear of God." It held Nehemiah in check. (*T. Robson.*)

An ancient Nonconformist:—The words that I have read are a little fragment of his autobiography which deal with a prosaic enough matter, but carry in them large principles. When he was appointed governor of the little colony of returned exiles in Palestine, he found that his predecessors, like Turkish pashas and Chinese mandarins to-day, were in the habit of "squeezing" the people of their government, and that they requisitioned sufficient supplies of provisions to keep the governor's table well spread. It was the custom. Nobody would have wondered if Nehemiah had conformed to it; but he felt that he must have his hands clean. His religion went down into the little duties of common life, and imposed upon him a standard far above the maxims that were prevalent round about him. I. THE ATTITUDE TO PREVALENT PRACTICES. That non-compliance with customary maxims and practices is the beginning, or, at least, one of the foundation-stones, of all nobleness and strength, of all blessedness and power. Of course, it is utterly impossible for a man to denude himself of the influences that are brought to bear upon him by the circumstances in which he lives, and the trend of opinion, and the maxims and practices of the world, in the corner, and at the time, in which his lot is cast. But, on the other hand, be sure of this, that unless you are in a very deep and not at all in a technical sense of the word "Nonconformists," you will come to no good. It is so easy to

do as others do; partly because of laziness, partly because of cowardice, partly because of the instinctive imitation which is in us all. Men are gregarious. A great many of us adopt our creeds and opinions, and shape our lives, for no better reason than because people around us are thinking in a certain direction, and living in a certain way. Now, I ask you to take this plain principle of the necessity of non-compliance and apply it all round the circumference of your lives. Apply it to your opinions. There is no tyranny like the tyranny of a majority in a democratic country like ours. "What everybody says"—perhaps—"is true." What most people say, at any given time, is very likely to be false. Truth has always lived with minorities. If you have honestly thought out the subject to the best of your ability, and have come to conclusions diverse from those which men like me hold dearer than their lives, that is another matter. But I know that very widely there is spread the fashion of unbelief. So many influential men, leaders of opinion, teachers and preachers, are giving up the old-fashioned, evangelical faith, that it takes a strong man to say that he sticks by it. It is a poor reason to give for your attitude, that unbelief is in the air, and nobody believes those old doctrines now. An iceberg lowers the temperature all round it, and the iceberg of unbelief is amongst us to-day, and it has chilled a great many people who could not tell why they have lost the fervour of their faith. On the other hand, let me remind you that a mere traditional religion, which is only orthodox because other people are, and has not verified its beliefs by personal experience, is quite as deleterious as an imitative unbelief. It is no excuse for shady practices in your trade to say, "It is the custom of the trade; and everybody does it." Nehemiah might have said: "There never was a governor yet but took his forty shekels a day's worth"—about £1,800 of our money—"of provisions from these poor people, and I am not going to give it up because of a scruple. It is the custom, and because it is the custom I can do it." "Oh," but you say, "that involves loss." Very likely! Nehemiah was a poorer man because he fed all these one hundred and fifty Jews at his table, but he did not mind that. It may involve loss, but you will keep God, and that is gain. Do not be tempted to follow that multitude to do evil. Unless you are prepared to say "No!" to a great deal that will be pushed into your face in this great city, as sure as you are living you will make shipwreck of your lives. II. THE MOTIVE THAT IMPELS TO THIS STURDY NON-COMPLIANCE. Now, my point is this, that Jesus Christ requires from each of us that we shall abstain, restrict ourselves, refuse to do a great many things that are being done round us. I need not remind you of how continually He spoke about taking up the cross. I need not do more than just remind you of His parable of the two ways, "Enter ye in at the strait gate, for strait is the gate." Just because there are so many people on the path suspect it, and expect that the path with fewer travellers is probably the better and the higher. But to pass from that, what did Jesus Christ mean by His continual contrast between His disciples and the world? Society is not organised on Christian principles; we all know that. And until it is, if a man is going to be a Christian he must not conform to the world. "Know ye not that whosoever is a friend of the world is an enemy of God?" I would press upon you that our Christianity is nothing unless it leads us to a standard, and a course of conduct in conformity with that standard which will be in diametrical opposition to a great deal of what is patted on the back, and petted and praised by society. Now, there is an easy-going kind of Christianity which does not recognise that, and which is in great favour with many people to-day; and is called "liberality" and "breadth," and "conciliating and commending Christianity to outsiders," and I know not what besides. Well, Christ's words seem to me to come down like a hammer upon that sort of thing. Society does not think much of these trimmers. It may dislike an out-and-out Christian, but it knows him when it sees him, and it has a kind of hostile respect for him which the other people will never get. III. THE POWER WHICH ENABLES US TO EXERCISE IT. "The fear of God," or, taking the New Testament equivalent, "the love of Christ," makes it possible for a man, with all his weakness and dependence on surroundings, with all his instinctive desire to be like the folk that are near him, to take that brave attitude, and to refuse to be one of the crowd that runs after evil and lies. Christ will enable you to take this necessary attitude because, in Himself He gives you the example which it is always safe to follow. The instinct of invitation is planted in us for a good end, and because it is in us examples of nobility appeal to us. He makes it possible for us, because we have the strongest possible motive for the life that He prescribes. As the Apostle puts it, "Ye are bought with a price, be not the servants of men." There is

nothing that will so deliver us from the tyranny of majorities, and of what we call general opinion and ordinary custom, as to feel that we belong to Him because He died for us. Jesus Christ being our Redeemer is our Judge, and moment by moment He is estimating our conduct, and judging our actions as they are done. The servant of Christ is the master of all men. "All things are yours, whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas—all are yours, and ye are Christ's." (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*) *Fear expels fear*.—How often we see fear expel fear. The fear of being burnt will nerve a woman to let herself down by a water-pipe from the upper storeys of a house in flames. The fear of losing her young will inspire the timid bird to throw herself before the steps of a man, attracting his notice from them to herself. Oh! for that Divine habit of soul which so conceives of the majesty, and power, and love of God, that it does not sin against Him, but would rather brave a world in arms than bring a shadow over His face. (*F. B. Meyer.*) *The Christian in commerce*.—It is a noble sight to see a man, moved simply by religious considerations, departing from customs sanctioned by society; going against the tide of opinion and practice; foregoing worldly profits; deaf to the pleas that satisfy the multitude, meekly asserting a spiritual independence; silently rebuking the sinfulness and servility of the times; only careful of acquitting himself to God, and realising his ideal of moral integrity. He is like a spring in an arid desert. He is like a star shining brightly amid dark clouds. Our subject is, "The Christian in commerce." The Christian tradesman must assume the attitude of Nehemiah. His principles must take the form of reform and opposition. Consider—I. WHAT CHRISTIANITY REQUIRES OF A MAN IN HIS DEALINGS WITH HIS FELLOW-MEN. 1. The most rigid adherence to the principles of moral integrity in commerce. (1) Truth. This is the basis of all intercourse; society would be impossible without it. Truth is a most comprehensive virtue. It takes in far more than the literal statement of the fact. It condemns—(a) All positive misrepresentations. (b) All the arts by which one thing is palmed off for another. (c) All deficient scales and measures. (d) All pretences, when unfounded, of special bargains, &c. (e) All promises which cannot be or are not meant to be kept. And on the part of the purchaser it condemns all pretences—(a) That what is wanted is not wanted. (b) That it has been purchased more cheaply elsewhere. (c) That it is very inferior to what it really is. "It is naught, it is naught, saith the buyer, but when he is gone his way he boasteth." (2) Honesty. This involves the meeting of all equitable claims, the fulfilment of all engagements voluntarily undertaken or assumed, the most rigid respect for the rights of property. 2. The exercise of love and kindness in commerce. This will preserve from exclusive dealing, &c. 3. That a man should preserve his soul in peace and patience in commerce. 4. That commerce should be consecrated and elevated by the spirit of holiness. II. WHY THIS CONDUCT IS NECESSARY IN COMMERCE. 1. Commerce is a most important part of our life. 2. Commerce is a most influential part of our life. 3. Commercial holiness is imperatively required by the character and temper of the times. (*A. J. Morris.*)

Ver. 16. Neither bought we any land.—*Nehemiah an example of unworldliness of mind*.—The people of God maintain a certain unearthly peculiarity throughout all their relationship to earth; they do not become assimilated to the crowd through which they hold the tenor of their way. Like that limpid stream of which we are told that, entering a salt and bituminous lake, it clears its way through the uncongenial waters, untainted and uncommingled, so that it issues forth below as pure as when it entered, so the current of God's people, passing through the dead sea of this world, does not blend with its waters, but speeds on undefiled to the clear ocean in heaven. Consider how this unworldly spirit will tell on your every-day course. I. IT WILL RESTRAIN YOU FROM INTIMACY, THOUGH YOU CANNOT AVOID INTERCOURSE, WITH THE UNGODLY. II. YOU WILL BE DISTINGUISHED FROM THE WORLD BY THE MODERATION WITH WHICH YOU WILL FORM YOUR PLANS AND PROSECUTE YOUR UNDERTAKINGS. III. YOU WILL SHOW "ANOTHER SPIRIT" IN THE FRIENDSHIPS WHICH YOU FORM AND THE ASSOCIATIONS WHICH YOU CHOOSE. IV. YOU WILL BE RESTRAINED FROM THAT GREEDINESS OF GAIN WHICH, MORE THAN EVER, CHARACTERISES THE WORLD IN THIS PRESENT AGE. V. YOU WILL HAVE A LARGE AND OPEN HAND FOR THE CLAIMS OF GOD, THE SERVICE OF HIS CHURCH, AND FOR THE RELIEF OF THE POOR AND NEEDY (*Hugh Stowell, M.A.*)

Ver. 19. Think upon me, my God.—*The saint's support*.—I. THE PERSON

PETITIONED. 1. General title: "God." 2. Special relation: "My." II. THE POINT PRAYED FOR. Lessons: 1. God the support of His saints. 2. Peculiar God to believer: "My." 3. God hath remembrancers. 4. God is soonest drawn to His own. 5. Prayer proper for one's own good. 6. Works may be pleaded before God. 7. Man's works are the rule of God's reward. 8. Everything well done shall be rewarded. 9. Good done to God's people is most acceptable. (*Wm. Gouge.*) *The remembrance of good deeds a pillow of rest for a good man:—I. LIFE'S REVIEW WILL BE A REVIEW OF THE WHOLE OF LIFE. II. LIFE'S REWARD WILL BE RENDERED ACCORDING TO ITS DEEDS. (Homiletic Commentary.)*

CHAPTER VI.

VERS. 1-19. Now it came to pass, when Sanballat.—*The witness to the truth:—*
 I. HIS TRIAL, FROM THE STRATAOEMS OF ENEMIES. The circumstances of his trial were peculiar. Faith and prayer and pains had now achieved great things in Jerusalem. For many days the patriots had persevered, with unremitting toil, to rebuild the wall. And now their enterprise was ready to be crowned with triumphant success. This, to them, was a time of joyous anticipation, mingled, no doubt, with solicitude, lest their work should be marred on the very eve of completion. But to the enemies of Zion it was a moment of vexation and dismay. "They heard," says Nehemiah, "that I had builded the wall, and that there was no breach left therein." In spite of their vaunting words and feeble arms the good work had advanced, and, unless they could instantly crush it, they plainly saw that all would be lost. Yet what shall they do to arrest the sacred enterprise? They have tried mockery already, but have found, to their chagrin, that these men of Judah will not be driven by ridicule from what, to them, is a work of conscience and religion. They have, moreover, attempted force; but they have learned, to their dismay, that the Israelites are ready to resist unto blood the invasion of their liberty to serve God in the city called by His name. Foiled, therefore, in these modes of attack, they are compelled to resort to stratagem in order, if possible, to gain their wicked purpose. This desperation of the enemies of Judah is just a picture of the rage of the great adversary at the progress of the Church and the growing sanctification of each believer in Christ. More than once in the history of the Church's advance has the devil come down in "great wrath, because he knoweth he hath but a short time." But trials in the religious life often prove the occasion of higher manifestations of mercy than could have been experienced without them. Trial, therefore, here comes to Nehemiah; and what is the form in which it assails him? 1. He is first tried by the wiles of enemies to draw him from his work and involve him in danger. As if for the purpose of consultation, they sent unto him, saying, "Come, let us meet together in some one of the villages in the plain of Ono." The object of these crafty foes was to get possession of the person of Nehemiah; and in all probability to take away his life. But the noble Israelite answered after this manner, "I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down: why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you?" Who can but admire the wisdom and fortitude of the servant of God in this hour of trial? Is not this a grand example to imitate in Christ's service and our own salvation? Our life on earth is so transient, and our work for eternity so arduous, that we have no time to waste. "This I say, then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh." 2. Further, Nehemiah is tried by the false accusations of enemies, designed to undermine his character. "Sanballat sent his servant the fifth time with an open letter in his hand." And why was the letter sent "open"? It was no doubt intended to give all the people opportunity to know its contents, that their jealousy might be aroused at the alleged ambitious aims of their leader, or their fears be excited of incurring the wrath of the king by continuing their work; but it was meant, moreover, thus to offer an insult to Nehemiah. It might have been thought that a life singularly blameless and disinterested as his would have been exempt from reproach. But who may expect to be free from the assaults of malice and envy, since the Son of God, the holy, harmless, undefiled One, did not escape the shafts of calumny? And so here, one of the lowliest and most upright of good men is falsely accused of ambition and rebellion. How striking an instance is this

of misrepresentation and craft in the enemies of truth to thwart a servant of God in a Divine work. It often happens, as here, that the sacred form of friendship is assumed to seduce the children of faith into a betrayal of their trust; and they who would draw them aside from duty pretend a regard to their welfare. Yet under the guise of affection there lurks a deadly hostility that seeks only their hurt and the ruin of their good name. II. HIS TESTIMONY TO THE TRUTH. Men in high place are little to be envied. They are often exposed to special dangers, both in principle and person. He bears testimony to the truth by fidelity to his trust in midst of imminent danger. He was fortified by a good conscience, while beset with wiles and accusations; and he possessed his soul in patience through the hour of trial. He looks on the field of danger with the eye of an eagle, and walks over it with the heart of a lion. He combines a clear perception of the plots of the enemy with a heroic courage to confront all their power. How quickly the adversary shifts his method of assault! and the good soldier must alter his manner of repulse in order to overcome. The enemies of Nehemiah here follow the same crafty course. They found they could not draw him into the country for counsel, and now they seek to drive him into the temple for safety. This was a mean as well as a wicked device of the heathen; but it is melancholy to reflect that men were found in Judah base enough to abet their machinations. It was not among the common people that the treacherous spirit appeared, but among the professed prophets and messengers of God. Noble things are always most vile when they become corrupt; and in this case these so-called ambassadors of heaven debase their high vocation by lending all its influence to the work of the enemies of religion. But these arts, employed to intimidate and seduce Nehemiah, were all in vain. He bore testimony to the truth by steadfast adherence to duty, even in face of threatened death. Much as he may value life, and wish to preserve it till the work is done which is so dear to his heart, yet he loves God and a good conscience far more. This is a noble example for our imitation. What faithful care does this man of God exercise to prove all things, and to hold fast that which is good! III. HIS TRIUMPH OVER ALL OPPOSITION. It is instructive to remark the means by which Nehemiah achieved this victory. He was first of all careful to ascertain facts, and to detect the plots of enemies through all the mazes of their falsehood. For this purpose he gave his mind to weigh evidence, to examine character, to balance circumstances, that he might arrive at the truth. But we note, as his chief means of success, effectual fervent prayer to God. His labours were now crowned with triumphant success. "So," he writes, "the wall was finished in the twenty and fifth day of the month Elul, in fifty and two days." This was the hour of Israel's triumph, and of their enemies' humiliation. "And it came to pass, that when all our enemies heard thereof, and all the heathen that were about us saw these things, they were much cast down in their own eyes." They were much cast down, as persons who have staked their full strength and reputation on a bad end, and yet have utterly failed in its attainment. They suffered the humiliation of those who boast of their power, put it forth to the utmost, and, after all, feel themselves completely defeated by the people whose might they had despised. It is not given to all witnesses for God to bear testimony for Him amid great works and conflicts like these; but He appoints each of us our duty here to stand by His truth, and to contend earnestly for the faith against all assaults on it. The dominant forms of opposition to Bible truth in these days are unbelief, or error in creed, and worldliness, or error in conduct; and in face of both God calls us to be witnesses for His cause. Whenever you profess your faith in the Bible, the whole Bible, as the Word of God, your creed is pronounced antiquated, and regarded with wonder or an ill-dissembled sneer. Yet all is surrendered if the integrity, the infallibility, the inspiration of the whole Bible is given up. (*W. Ritchie.*) *Nehemiah's heroism:*—Well, to come to the history, when Nehemiah was coming to an end, and thought he had got through all his difficulties, Sanballat and the others came wheedling and coaxing, and they said, "Come, Nehemiah, let us meet together in one of the villages in the plain of Ono." And they sent messengers four times to try, if they could, to prevent the thorough fulfilment and accomplishing of God's work and Nehemiah's design. Anything they would do, the enemies of Nehemiah, as our enemies also would do, to diminish our zeal for God and truth and righteousness. Thus we might paraphrase the arguments used, "Now, Nehemiah, you really are a most excellent man, and, though we say it ourselves, we too are excellent men; and if we can only just meet together in a quiet little spot, we shall soon settle everything. You see, Nehemiah, we have misunderstood one another—a very common thing among good people. You

thought we were against you, but there never was a greater mistake. We were misrepresented. Come now, and let us shake hands; and when we have looked into each other's faces, we shall discover amidst apparent diversity of purpose that our hearts, our aims, were really one, that we are seeking the same object." After such fashion, we can imagine they thought to draw Nehemiah from his purpose. "But they thought to do me mischief," says Nehemiah. Nehemiah says, "Why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you?" And you will find the more you buckle to God's work—that is to say, to strive to be first of all a sterling, righteous man in lip and life, in thought, in word, and deed—and the more you try to recover the blight and disaster in London or round about you, the more you will find opposition of different kinds, and perhaps to-day the secret, sly, and cunning opposition which is to be dreaded far more than the open, the overt. I wonder how many invitations you will get to parties this week? because I want you to work for God in this coming ten days' mission. Very likely never so many as this week. "We have a nice little party this week. Come down; don't be righteous overmuch. Don't spoil yourself, and take all the pleasure out of life." Let us make up our mind and heart to work, work, work. "Why should I let the work cease, and come down to you?" Let them answer that. Why should God's work cease while I leave it, and come down to you; so as to weaken my interest in God's work, and hinder my pace in the actual doing of God's work? Here is the test and touchstone. How do these things tell upon the work? Do they lower my temperature, and take away my energies from God's work? Then they are of the devil; and to see that is to be kept right. From Nehemiah's answer (ver. 3) we see the great blessing of having pure motives and clean hands. Oh, for this whole-heartedness in the cause of God! Nehemiah said, "I will not cease doing the work, for I am sure it is not for my own personal ends, it is not for my own aggrandisement, my own vainglory. There are no such things as thou sayest, but thou feignest them out of thine own heart." They shot sore at poor Nehemiah, when they said, "Nehemiah, it is your own glory that leads you on in this work, not zeal for God." And don't think Nehemiah did not feel this; that message came with a thump to him. And what preserved him? His integrity and innocence. He could lift up his voice, and say, "It is a lie; it is not true. Do as you like! Say what you like! I know whom I am serving. You may try all manner of means, but you will never shake me from this, that God has sent me here, given me this work to do; and in His name I give myself to it, with singleness of heart and effort." If God promote you, and make you prominent in His work, remember it is He who does it; and you must stay at your post, do your day's work and leave your reputation in the hands of the Lord. Then comes another temptation (ver. 10). I think this man, this Shemaiah, was a man who had a particular reputation for wisdom and prudence. "Oh, Nehemiah!" he would say, "now you are wrong. You will allow me to speak plainly with you. No one rejoiced more than I did when you came from Persia, and I rejoice to see what is going on at Jerusalem. But the position is far different from what you think. And I have been here longer than you; and I know the currents of thought and feeling, which you don't know anything about. And, believe me, that sometimes the roundabout road is the nearest; and sometimes to go straight tramping on, you know, is the way never to reach what you want. You are carrying things, they think, with too high a hand. But if you would take time, stop, and let things blow over a little, you will get it done far more easily. Believe me, Nehemiah, I know the temper of this people" (and here he spoke truly), "and I tell you they are against you, and are going to seek your life. Now let us meet together in the temple, and let us shut the doors of the temple: for they will come and slay thee." And Nehemiah said to him, "Should such a man as I flee?" He virtually stood up and said, "What, Nehemiah fleeing after all he has gone through! Get thee behind me, Satan! Thou savourest not of the things that be of God, but those that be of men." The same temptation came to the greater than Nehemiah, to the greatest Worker that ever God sent to work and to "pray for the peace of Jerusalem," even the Lord Jesus Christ. And as with the Master, so with the servant. The servant will be tempted and seduced in every way, that the work may cease, that the temperature, the heat of our zeal may go down, and the worse may appear the better reason, and carry us away from our post. Some men go to the temple, but to them it is simply a coward's castle. This is about all that God gets from some of us. We go sneaking into our churches on the Sunday, but not to do God's work. God pity you! You never stand up for Him out there on

London wall. Exactly! Well, this invitation from Shemaiah to go into the temple was not good enough for Nehemiah—and he was about as devout a man as most of us. He was a man who feared God with all his heart, didn't he? But they were going to make the temple a coward's castle. Listen! I will bring it nearer to us. There is some young fellow here hard beset with his surroundings. You are set there on that commercial bit of the wall, to be true, to be honest, to unfurl the flag there, and to work with and for God there. And the battle is thickening, and coming to you in your business; the devil as an angel of light is trying to get you to leave your work and go and study for the ministry! Go into the temple to save your life. It was that kind of thing that was happening to the early Church. Men and women were going to leave the conflict and struggle, to run away into cloisters and convents, with their "dim, religious light." And so you would go and shut yourself up, and give yourself up to a life of contemplation, you say. It is a delusion; it won't do. Let us see how Nehemiah acted when asked to go into the temple. He would have been spoiled if he had yielded to that temptation. He no doubt loved the house of God, the worship of God as we do. We love all its regular services. How sweet it is to us to meet together, to hold communion, to join in our solemn feasts and hymns of love and praise! But that is on Sabbath days. And the end for which we meet is to strengthen us for the work of testifying for God and Christ. What is that? I think I see Nehemiah with his note-book in his hand after the work was all finished, and he is turning over and going through in his mind all that he had done and suffered. And he is thinking over it all, and wondering what made all the opposition to the building of these walls. "I never could rightly understand," he would say, "why that was such a tough job, and why there were continually things coming against my legs to trip me up from unexpected quarters. I felt some one was not fighting fair, that the enemy had got into our own camp and was fighting against me unfairly." And it was the mother-in-law that was the whole secret. They—families of God's people and their enemies—were married and intermarried with each other; and so they had their grappling-irons on the Israelitish vessel. And they pulled the vessel close by this intermarriage relationship, and they got on board, and could not be kept off. By this marriage relationship Tobiah had got in with the very chief of them, and so struck hard and constantly at Nehemiah. And it was through this marriage relationship they tried to get at Nehemiah and pull him down, and thus cause God's work to cease. Says Christ, "I am not come to send peace, but a sword; to set the father against the son, and the daughter against the mother, and the mother-in-law against the daughter-in-law: and a man's foes shall be those of his own household." Indeed, you will oftentimes be fairly perplexed. You say, "I feel the devil at my elbow, and he is whispering in my ear with my own flesh and blood, and would overcome me unless I set watch with vigilance." This same thing is working to-day. Now, for example, I know a young fellow, he started with great vigour in the cause of God, he started with great vigour to build the wall, especially to build the total abstinence wall. But by and by he married a daughter of a wine merchant, and that brought the building to a stop. Yes. He says now he thinks there are a great many excellent people among the brewers. Was not that the kind of thing they said to Nehemiah? "Moreover, they reported Tobiah's good deeds," and they said this and that about him. Very innocent-looking things may seduce you and take the backbone out of you. Once upon a time your friends called you old-fashioned and Puritanical. But lately you got married, and that has brought you into close contact with a class of people with whom you had little or no dealings before. You had nothing in common. And to make a long story short you were at the theatre the other evening—with your mother-in-law. She has soon called you in off the wall! Everything is altered now. And instead of your going over to carry war into the enemy's camp, they have come unto you, and have overcome you; and you have purred like a pussy-cat where before you were bold and outspoken: and the reason is the marriage, the mother-in-law; and the marrow of principle is being thereby sucked out of some of you. You need to be spoken to, and I would that my words were like fire, and would burn. Oh! that some of you would come back to your earlier faith, enthusiasm in God's work, and the blood-heat of your early zeal. For now you are as namby-pamby as the devil could wish. "I used to think," says another, "very harshly of those who didn't hold my views. But now I have learnt to be charitable. I have discovered that many things which I thought were essential are only accidental." Softly, my friend: 'twas the mother-in-law made the discovery. You have gone off on that charitable dodge. Ah,

God's Word has an eye in every direction. "Also they reported his good deeds before me," and as good as said, "We know Tobiah; and, Nehemiah, you are wrong about him altogether. He is an excellent man, and he gave five shillings to this, he gave ten shillings to that; and he is a wonderful fellow altogether. He is wonderfully like yourself." Really it is such a pity that two such good men should not meet together and shake hands. But they never could, and Nehemiah kept his hands behind his back and said, "I choose my own company. I know the hands of these fellows too well." (*John McNeill.*) *Persistence*:—We have here persistency of opposition, persistency of endeavour. I. THIS PRINCIPLE OF PERSISTENCY IS ILLUSTRATED IN ALL THE CIRCLE OF NATURE AND LIFE. 1. Everywhere there is exhibition of hostile force. All natural forces, all life, all energy creep to their goal as the wave creeps to the shore after many a rebuff, and after many a spurning. 2. It is so with man in all social life. 3. The Bible represents all moral victory as against deep and persistent hostility. II. THIS PRINCIPLE OF PERSISTENCY IS ILLUSTRATED IN THE GENERAL HISTORY OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD. III. THE SAME PRINCIPLE IS ILLUSTRATED IN INDIVIDUAL SALVATION AND WORK. (*Homiletic Commentary.*) *Hindrances*:—How strange it is that no good work can be attempted without exciting opposition, and the better the work the more intense its hindrances! No beneficent measure has ever been propounded without obstacles being put in its way, oftentimes by the very people it is intended to benefit. The promulgation of Christianity is a notable example. Some of the means of hindrance are—I. THE RESTLESS ACTIVITY OF EVIL. Sin is essentially aggressive. It cannot let well alone. II. THE JEALOUSY OF THE UNRIGHTEOUS. They cannot bear to see anything prosper in which they are not the leaders. They will never attempt any good work, but when they see it in progress they would hinder and destroy. III. THE VINDICTIVE SPIRIT OF SATAN. (*Homilist.*)

Ver. 3. A great work.—*A great work*:—A story is told of an old man who lived long ago. A friend asked him the cause of his complaints, since in the evening he so often complained of great weariness and pain. "Alas," answered he, "I have every day so much to do: I have two falcons to tame, two hares to keep from running away, two hawks to manage, a serpent to confine, a lion to chain, and a sick man to tend and wait upon." "Why, this is only folly," said the friend; "no man has all these things to do at once." "Yes indeed," he answered, "it is with me as I have said. The two falcons are my two eyes, which I must diligently guard, lest something should please them which may be hurtful to my salvation; the two hares are my feet, which I must hold back lest they should run after evil objects, and walk in the ways of sin; the two hawks are my two hands, which I must train and keep to work, in order that I may be able to provide for myself and for my brethren who are in need; the serpent is my tongue, which I must always keep in with a bridle, lest it should speak anything unseemly; the lion is my heart, with which I have to maintain a continual fight in order that vanity and pride may not fill it, but that the grace of God may dwell and work there; the sick man is my body, which is ever needing my watchfulness and care. All this daily wears out my strength." The friend listened with wonder, and then said, "Dear brother, if all men laboured and struggled after this manner, the times would be better, and more according to the will of God." (*J. M. Randall.*) *Determination of purpose*:—The ancient Greeks had an aphorism which is worthy of remembrance: "He is formidable who does one thing." A man must have a fixed design, or he will not have a steady course. As the instrument tuned to no key-note, so is the man whose spirit is strung to no commanding aim. In vain does the vessel launch forth from the harbour if she have no haven for which to steer and no helm by which to shape her voyage. Take a just view of your life, and all is but dung and dross in comparison with your final acceptance with God. This is the object, the one object which you must enterprise, prosecute, and secure. What a work is before us! (*Hugh Stowell, M.A.*) *A great work in the face of strong antagonism*:—The Christian has a great work to do for himself, working out under gospel influences his own salvation with fear and trembling. It is great in regard of others. We are not merely children of God going home to glory; but we are fellow-workers with God—keepers of beacons to imperilled mariners in a dark night of storms—oarsmen of a lifeboat out on the wild ocean saving drowning souls from destruction. Yea, we have a great work in regard of our glorious God and Saviour. We may not understand it, yet we are assured by God Himself of the truth that more than in all His works of creation and providence is there manifes-

tation made of His manifold wisdom in this work of salvation. Every soul saved on earth by our human instrumentality is a radiant diadem in the many crowns of Jesus. Moreover, like Nehemiah, we are doing this great work in the face of strong antagonisms, and against the insidious opposition of enemies striving to hinder us. Alas! how many are the Sanballats and Tobiahs of the world! I am not railing at the world itself, for it is a good world for Christian work—a world whereof we are to make the most; and the pleasures and honours and riches of it, when accepted as gifts of God and used for His glory, are among our mighty means of grace, whereby our own souls may be edified and Christ's kingdom enlarged. I am thinking now of the world as used by Satan to hinder Christian work—those scornful words or seductive arts of temptation, and, I repeat, they are many. Pleasure comes to the scene of Christian labour with all-bewitching beauty and bewildering blandishments, and she pleads for sensual indulgence, and would draw the worker for Christ forth and down to the fair plains of Ono. Avarice comes with jewels of great price, and keys offering coffers of untold wealth in the stronghold of Mammon. Ambition comes, in the pomp and glory of an archangel, fallen from heaven, and points to a perspective of surpassing splendour, with shining palms and triumphal processions, outflashing diadems and uprising throne. With these and many other specious beguilements come the great adversaries of the soul and the Church. They plead with the Christian worker as he builds the walls of Zion, crying eloquently and earnestly, "Oh, come down and meet us in some plain of Ono!" And to all this our reply should be just that of Nehemiah, "I am doing a great work, and I cannot come down." Oh, fellow-worker with God in this glorious salvation, take to your heart as the inspiration of your lives this strong argument; rise to a comprehension of the magnificent part you are acting in the face of the universe; of the vastness of the issues you are working out for God! Say to the assailing tempter, "Let me alone. I am working—working. I am working out my own destiny. I am striving for a guerdon in the skies grander than the Conqueror's. I am working for others—for the beloved of my own household—my child, my parent, my brother, my friend. Oh, do not hinder me! I am working for a world—a world for which the Son of God bled in the garden—died on the Cross! See! see! that world rolls like a shattered wreck on the stormy seas of time, and I am keeping the beacon aflame! Oh, hinder me not! Nay, more, I am working for Jehovah—that God who, when I was lost, sent His own Son to save me." (T. L. Cuyler.)

Nehemiah, the model man of business.—In studying Nehemiah as a man of business we notice—I. He was a model of EARNESTNESS. II. He was a model of UNSELFISHNESS. III. He was a model of FAITHFULNESS. IV. He was a model of PRAYER. (R. Newton, D.D.)

A good man in a great work.—This narrative illustrates—I. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF A GREAT WORK. It has—1. A high purpose. It was—2. Beset with difficulties. A true work will have generally to surmount—(1) Men's scorn. (2) External hindrances. II. THE TEMPTATIONS THAT BESET A GREAT WORK. 1. Temptations from armed enemies. 2. Temptations from professed friends. III. THE SPIRIT OF A TRUE WORKER. There will be—1. Prayer for the work. 2. Earnest prosecution of it. 3. Resistance of all temptations to leave it. (Urijah R. Thomas.)

The great work.—We learn from these words—I. THAT NEHEMIAH WAS "DOING A GREAT WORK." II. THAT THERE WERE THOSE WHO ENDEAVOURED TO HINDER HIM. III. THAT THE MAGNITUDE OF THE WORK REQUIRED THAT HE SHOULD NOT CEASE OR ALLOW HIMSELF TO BE HINDERED FROM PROSECUTING IT. IV. We may learn from the context that NEHEMIAH SUCCEEDED IN ACCOMPLISHING THE WORK BY PRAYER AND PAINSTAKING DILIGENCE. (James Shore, M.A.)

The great work.—I. THAT THE WORK OF RELIGION IN GENERAL IS A GREAT WORK. This will appear when we contemplate it as being—1. God's work. It originated with God; its foundations were laid in heaven; it emanated from the throne of the Eternal; it is the product of infinite wisdom, love, and truth. It bears on its countenance the image of its immaculate Author, and it is every way worthy of its great Original. Unmistakable traces and manifestations of its Divinity are seen in the loftiness of its character, in the purity of its principles, and in the efficiency and permanency of its influences. Nothing is worth the name of greatness compared with the system God has devised to heal the sorrows and cleanse the pollutions of the soul. And is there not a glory and majesty about it immeasurably great? God appears great in the works of creation. If, then, God is so great throughout the wide range of creation, how great must He be in restoring man to His favour, in giving life, vigour, and beauty to souls once dead in trespasses and sins! That religion is a great work is evident—2. From the importance attached

to it in the Bible. The Bible, God's holy book, is pregnant with it, its glory and beauty being reflected from every page. This book was written expressly to portray religion, its doctrines, principles, and duties. Let the question be settled in our minds—religion is the "principal thing"; it is emphatically the world's great blessing; so the sacred penmen estimate it. They speak of it as "God's salvation"; as the "great salvation"; as the "pearl of great price"; as the "one thing needful"; as the "good part"; the "more excellent way"; "the bread of life"; and "life eternal." That religion is a great work is evident from—3. The qualifications necessary to engage in it. A high state of intellect is not essential to it. The most gigantic intellect is no qualification for God's service, if not renewed and sanctified by the Holy Ghost. The qualifications necessary to engage in this work must have their seat in the heart rather than in the head. Right moral emotions cannot be dispensed with. 4. That religion is a great work appears from its blessed results on human character and conduct. The history of the past in relation to God's work unfolds a series of wonderful achievements and glorious results. Its widespread influence amongst the various nations and tribes of men has told a marvellous tale. II. THE GOOD MAN IS ENGAGED IN THIS WORK. This expression denotes—1. Decision of character. In a world like ours fixedness of purpose is invaluable, whether it relate to the active duties of every-day life or to the more lofty and ennobling duties of religion. It is essential to success. The man whose movements are changeable, and who is never steady to one point or purpose, brings nothing to a good issue. What a paralysing influence indecision has upon the soul in relation to religion! Men dream and talk about their future course of action, and yet they are never found at the starting-point. They are decided for the future, but not for the present. The diligent man says, "I am doing a great work"; I am in it; it forms part and parcel of my very being." The Scriptures furnish us with specimens of the decision we plead for. We see it in Joshua, when he says, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." So, too, David said, "O God, my heart is fixed"; "I have chosen the way of truth." 2. Labour. "I am doing a great work." Religion is essentially active; it has no sympathy with sloth and inactivity. III. THE SPIRIT OF PERSEVERANCE IS REQUIRED IN THIS WORK. The good man engaged in this work cannot come down, because—1. The work requires close and constant application. To acquire anything like an approach to perfection or completeness in religion is no easy task. The world, with its blandishments, its false maxims, and glittering snares, says, "Come down." The flesh, naturally in favour of indulgence and ease, and opposed to self-denial, joins in the cry, and says, "Come down." Satan, whose malice breaks out more bitterly as he sees the wall rising higher, repeats the order, "Come down." Thus every new stone added to the building is the subject of dispute. The builder cannot leave his work, because—2. Shame and misery would be the result. A more pitiful sight than that of a good man "cast down from his excellency" is certainly not to be found. My reason, my judgment, my conscience, all concur with the inspired admonition, "Stand fast, therefore, in the liberty wherewith Christ has made you free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage." IV. "WHY SHOULD THE WORK CEASE, WHILST I LEAVE IT, AND COME DOWN TO YOU?" We must not suppose that God's work would entirely cease, even though a thousand such men as Nehemiah were to desert it. 1. All the infidelity and wickedness of men cannot stop this work. Observe, finally, that—2. Were it possible that His work should cease, it would be the greatest calamity the world ever knew. (*A. Twiss.*) *The pre-eminence of God's work*:—I. God's work is STILL A GREAT WORK. It resolves itself into two parts—1. Work in relation to one's self—faith in the Redeemer, progressive holiness and final glory. 2. Work in relation to others. II. God's work MUST BE DONE FIRST. To Sanballat's complimentary note Nehemiah replied by his conduct, "God's work first, compliments next." III. God's work PRESERVES FROM MISCHIEF AND MISERY. IV. God's work SHOULD BE LOVED FOR ITS OWN SAKE. V. God's work SHOULD BE BEGUN, CONTINUED, AND ENDED WITH PRAYER. (*Homilist.*) *Safety in Christian work*:—Christian work is—I. A SAFEGUARD AGAINST VICE. All honest work, indeed, is an antidote to vice, but Christian work is especially so. 1. It fills up those leisure hours that so often prove fatal to the unguarded soul. 2. By its very nature it supplies positive motives against temptation. (1) It strengthens all one's Christian principles. (2) It keeps one constantly under the play of Christian influences. (3) It prevents the spiritual life from dying of disuse. II. A SAFEGUARD AGAINST SPIRITUAL DEPRESSION. Our spiritual life depends in the first instance on the work of Christ for us; but its continuance is dependent on activity—on the work we do for Christ. 1. Physical

growth is dependent on activity. 2. So, too, with intellectual life. 3. So in a still higher degree it is in spiritual life. Selfishness is the greatest spiritual poverty. Life loses in the proportion in which it withholds itself, and gains by all it gives. According to the width of my sympathies and the self-forgetting ardour of my zeal is the true power and opulence of my being. If it be lawful or possible to enlist the higher selfishness in the service of unselfishness, as you value your religious life, as you would protect it on the one hand against innate tendencies to declension, and on the other against the sapping and undermining influences of the outer world, give your sympathies, your energies, your substance to the cause of God and man. It is not enough for your religious safety that you abstain from evil—you must engage in positive good. III. A SAFEGUARD AGAINST SCEPTICISM. Not that scepticism cannot be met in the field of argument. But argument is not, in every case, the best way to meet the native scepticism of the heart. Christian truth is of such a nature that to understand it fully you must live it. "If any man will do God's will he shall know of the doctrine." There was a minister who at an early period of his life was in doubt about the truth of Christianity. He had almost lost his faith, when hearing this text he resolved to make trial of it. He went and gathered a number of boys together from the streets and taught them as best he could; from that he went to something else as opportunity offered, with the result that he found the text to be true; that in doing God's will, especially in doing good to others, his doubts had all fled and never troubled him more. He found, as Carlyle says, "that doubt of whatever kind can be ended by action alone." As a rule it is not from the great class of Christian workers that scepticism draws its recruits, but from those who stand aloof from all Christian activities, and in many cases look down on them with contempt. IV. A SAFEGUARD AGAINST DESPONDENCY. It is an old saying and true that while the water flows and the mill-stones revolve unless the grain be thrown between them to be ground, the stones will grind each other. So the heart and mind which are inactive, which have no subjects of interest, to engross them, turn their force inward and prey upon themselves. The water that is stagnant soon loses its freshness of colour and of flavour, and engenders the worthless weed, the green scum, the foul mud and noxious exhalations; so the man or woman who leads a useless, purposeless, inactive life not only degenerates in inward character, but loses the freshness and brightness of life, becomes restless, discontented, and a prey to melancholy. To a woman of the desponding type who was wont to bewail her spiritual poverty in the language of the prophet, "My leanness! my leanness!" a shrewd and faithful friend, well-known for her good works, administered the needed and merited reproof, "Nay, but it would better become you to say, 'My laziness! my laziness!'" (*Robert Whyte, D.D.*) *Hindrances to revivals:*—I. A REVIVAL OF RELIGION IS A GREAT WORK. II. SEVERAL THINGS MAY PUT A STOP TO A REVIVAL. A revival will cease—1. Whenever the Church believes it is going to cease. 2. When Christians consent that it should cease. 3. Whenever Christians suppose the work will go on without their aid. 4. When Christians begin to proselytise. 5. When the Church in any way grieves the Holy Spirit. 6. When Christians lose the spirit of brotherly love. 7. When Christians are frequently reconverted. III. THINGS WHICH OUGHT TO BE DONE TO CONTINUE A REVIVAL. 1. Ministerial humiliation. 2. Churches which have opposed revivals must repent. 3. Those who promote the work of revivals must repent their mistakes. (*G. Finney.*)

Vers. 6, 7. *Gashmu* saith it.—*Detraction:*—I. WHAT IS DETRACTION? 1. In general it is an unjust violation of another's reputation or that good report which is due to him. (1) It is a sin against God. (2) It is a wrong to man. (3) The causes it proceedeth from are—(a) Malice and ill-will. (b) Uncharitable credulity, whereby men easily believe a false report, and so propagate and convey it to others. (c) Rashness and unruliness of tongue. (d) Carnal zeal, which is nothing else but passion for our different interests and opinions. 2. In particular. (1) Whispering, which is privy defamation of our brother, to bring him into disfavour and disrespect with those that formerly had a better opinion of him. (2) Backbiting, which is a more public speaking evil of our brother, to the impairing of his credit. II. THE HEINOUSNESS OF THE SIN. (*T. Manton.*) *Gashmu:*—I. MARK THE CHARACTER OF GASHMU. His history we know nothing of. Parentage, training, chieftainship, whether inherited or won, life's events, end—all are secret from us. But it is not secret that he was in friendship with Nehemiah's enemies, Sanballat and Tobiah. These three were one in their desire to keep Jerusalem weak. Whatever *Gashmu* thought of Sanballat, we can see that Sanballat thought much of

him. "Gashmu says it." That must, thinks Sanballat, carry conviction of peril even to Nehemiah and bring him to a stand. 1. Gashmu evidently was a man with a great reputation. His word had weight. It was the word of a superior person—of one who perhaps spoke but little, but who took care when he did speak to put a sting into what he said. He took care not hastily to commit himself. He not only thought before he spoke, but chose the words in which to pack most strikingly the thought. His was a quoted opinion. It went on long journeys. "A wise word that! A fine remark that! Whose?" "Gashmu says it!" Men looked up to Gashmu. From silent heights he spoke down to them. He despised most of them, as one of a loftier race, and yet strangely loved their reverential attention, prompt praise, and their homage to his wisdom in quoting far and wide his opinion. He was great in criticism. If there was a fault in anybody, he could spot it. No number of excellences, however bright, could blind him to that fault. He could not only see it, but could excel all others in speaking disagreeably about it. Who could expect such a superior person to have pity on human infirmities? It is not a difficult thing for a man to build up to-day such a reputation as Gashmu's. Let him be blind to all that is good in others. Let him darken and exaggerate the faults he sees, and when he cannot see them, imagine them. Let him pick the keenest and most poisonous words. Never commend anybody. Let him have a clever tongue, with a bad heart, and he would be a great man among pigmy souls. Let Christian men and women be on their guard. In the effort to live purely, and to serve God by serving their generation, they will meet with Gashmu. Let not such hinder you from Christian life and labour. Answer not this railing with railing; answer it only with a more devoted piety, and a larger Christian service. 2. Gashmu was a man without sympathy with goodness. Nehemiah was a patriot. From love to his country and his God he had given up an honourable and lucrative office at the Persian Court. If Nehemiah is dependent upon outside sympathy for the prosecution and completion of his work, he had better at once get his retinue together and go back to Babylon! No sympathy for him from clever and oft-quoted Gashmu! Welcome to all the inspiration of sympathy. The kindly eye, the warm-grasping hand, the love-kindling appreciation, how welcome! Difficult duty becomes easier, the hurried life is lightened of its load. But do not live on this; don't look for this. Live a life that lives above it. Live in God. Then let not their opinion dishearten you. Does Gashmu say it? Who is Gashmu? A man who, whatever his worldly shrewdness and reputation, is in the gall of bitterness and the bonds of iniquity. What judge can he be of the quality of Christian labour, of the beauty of a holy and Christian life? 3. Gashmu had keen hatred of religious enthusiasm. Nehemiah's religion was the root of his patriotism. He lost no time in carrying out the rebuilding of the ruined wall. He allowed not the quickened and responsive zeal of the people to flag. He was as ready to fight as to build. No specious pretence could call him from the work. On it went—on till done. This was gall and wormwood to Gashmu. If Nehemiah had only talked, however loudly, of his intentions, it had not mattered. Gashmu could not tolerate enthusiasm. He is still alive, though in English garb. The earnest Christian is certain to meet with him. He hates earnestness, and enthusiasm he cannot away with. 4. Gashmu was a man skilful to read motives. Or so he deemed himself. He could not only look at the rising walls of the city, but right through them. He could not only see Nehemiah on the wall inspiring the armed masons; but he could see into Nehemiah's heart. He knew the secret meaning of all this rapid labour. "What do you think, Gashmu, about it?" He knew, and soon the report is flying abroad among the surrounding heathens, that the Jews intend to rebel against the Persian power, and that Nehemiah means to be their king—King Nehemiah. So the lying rumour goes on its journey, and "Gashmu saith it" gives it wings. Not an atom of truth in it! But Gashmu smiled and nodded, and calmly whispered into willing ears the lie that no amount of confidence and conceit and cleverness could make true. But his lie is written here. "Gashmu says it!" And for that lie Gashmu is remembered to-day. Live to God—do any brave stroke of work for Him, and some present-day Gashmu will know all about your motive for doing it. He will know more about you than you know about yourself. Engage in work for Christ, and Gashmu will say, "I know pride is at the bottom of this; he wants to show how much better he is than anybody else. He wants to be talked about. Anything to make headway. Anything to build up a business. He knows that Sunday will help Monday." Slanderous Gashmu!

Is he not alive to-day? II. IMITATE NEHEMIAH'S TREATMENT OF GASHMU. He would not be hindered. He kept to prayer. He kept to work. He would not go down. Are you seeking to build up your character in truth, purity, holiness? This is God's work. Be not hindered in it. Be not diverted from it. Are you seeking to build up some other—some neglected, broken-down, and ruined character? Do the work—finish it. (G. T. Coster.) *Gashmu*:—I. WHO GASHMU WAS. Personally we do not know Gashmu from the ten thousand men of his era. He was Gashmu the Arabian, and that is all. But his real identity is not centred on the year of his birth, or who was his father, or how much he was worth. When our life begins, our name is almost everything; but when our life is ended it has been heavily freighted with good or evil, and is what the things are to which it gives personal identity. What we do know about Gashmu is that he came out square against a man who was determined to do good, and was earnestly doing it, and tried to put him down. II. WHAT HE TRIED TO DO. A good man was doing a good work and bad men tried to stop him. They tried to hurt his person. Gashmu was above that, yet he will sit there and nurse his dislike, and be glad to hear the petty stories that float like thistledown in the neighbourhood against the innocent man. One story in particular gets credence. This man means to be a king. Gashmu hears the floating absurdity. On any other subject he would pronounce anything so empty as this silly; but when this man is the subject of the rumour, he would rather believe it than not. He goes and sees for himself, and when he returns, ready ears listen, and the fatal word is uttered: "That man certainly means to be a king." Before night it is repeated by twenty tongues: "He intends to rebel; Gashmu says it." Gashmu has permitted his prejudices to grow into a lie. He is the representative man of unprincipled gossips and narrow bigots. 1. There are Gashmus in the Church, and "Gashmu said it" is at the bottom of nine-tenths of all the differences in Christendom. 2. There are Gashmus in social life. Your social Gashmu means well on his own estimate of things. Perhaps he is on the whole a good man, lives a life that wins the respect of a whole town; tells the truth so constantly that his word is as good as gold. But some one man does not train with him, he does not like that man at all; does not understand him; and so cultivates a little feeling of dislike, until it bulges into a receptiveness of idle rumours, that would be like mere straws if they were reported of a man he loves. Yet he will nurse them and cherish them, and at some moment his dislike will come to a head, and he will say, "I have no doubt it is true." Then "Gashmu said it" clips that man's margin at the bank, draws the sunshine out of half the faces he meets on the street, and puts him in a position that, it may be, brings the very tendencies for which Gashmu has spotted him. How many grown men and women regret bitterly to-day some such misjudgment on another—the hasty word of a single moment, that we could never recall and never atone for, by which the life of the man or woman about whom we said it has been darkened and injured past redemption! It was a small matter of itself, but Gashmu said it, and that was like sowing the thing in black prairie loam, insuring to us a harvest of bitter regrets, and to our victim a harvest of bitter memories. 3. There are Gashmus in the nation and the public life. III. WHAT CAME OF IT. It came to nothing. It was common rumour, and Gashmu on the one side, and God and the right on the other; and alas for Gashmu when he is found fighting against God! Conclusion: To every earnest man and woman I would say—1. Keep true to your task, whatever it may be, and never mind Gashmu. 2. When Gashmu comes and begins to say this and that to annoy you, do not come down to talk to him. 3. If you come across Gashmu in the Church, or in society, or in any way whatever, keep out of his way as much as you can—have nothing to say to him. 4. Let us take care that we are not Gashmus. 5. We must pity Gashmu. (R. Collyer.) *An ancient school for scandal*:—That some people will say things about their neighbours is a great evil. That some persons will repeat what others have said is a greater evil. That some persons will be disturbed by what other persons report that other persons have said about them or their friends, and will permit themselves to be turned aside from useful service, to be embittered in their personal feelings by such reports—this is the greatest evil of all. We hear a great deal about bigotry, intolerance, and persecution. These things have ever withstood the onward march of truth and righteousness. But no fiercest blast of persecution, no form of open antagonism, has ever injured the Church or hindered its work to such a degree as the secret and unrecorded workings of gossip and slander. The power of these evils lies in their very uncertainty and elusiveness. Whoever would

fight them finds himself beating the air. Who tries to hold them fast closes his fingers upon a shadow. Do you wish to know all about the spirit of gossip and the method of its working? Then read the sixth chapter of Nehemiah. It antedates Sheridan's "School for Scandal" by more than twenty centuries, and surpasses it in quality even more than in age. It is a drama from real life. Toward every case of slander or gossip four relations may be sustained. In the completing of the chain four persons may be involved. These relations and persons are represented by Sanballat, Gashmu, Shemaiah, and Nehemiah. First is Sanballat. He is not the originator of the slander, but he is the originator of the mischief, for he reports what he has heard, or professes to have heard, from another. Here is your typical scandal-monger. Who among us is so fortunate that he does not know Sanballat, yes, many Sanballats? The tribe of Sanballat is numerous. They are the persons who tell you so much, not on their own responsibility, but on the authority of others. They are dealers in cast-off testimony, traders in biographical second-hands. They keep no new goods, but they are master hands at polishing up that which is old and giving it a fresh lustre. They are the real mischief-makers, I say, for it is chiefly by this process of polishing and revamping that stories or statements become injurious and acquire unpleasant sharpness of venom. The most innocent and well-meant utterance falls into the hands of one of these repeaters and it is quickly transformed into a poisonous shaft. Some little modification of emphasis or inflection, an added or omitted word, and it becomes a source of heartburnings and bitterness and pain, a wedge that may sunder the strongest ties of affection and friendship. We are wont most severely to denounce the careless speaker, to lay all the blame of gossip and slander on the heads of those who say things about their fellows. And far be it from me to excuse or justify unkind speech even at first-hand, or to minify the sinfulness of "idle words." But I insist that he is a greater sinner who repeats what others say, especially if in the repetition he gives it the slightest change of form or emphasis. It is the Sanballat who comes to you with some story and tells you that "Gashmu saith it" who deserves the severest rebuke. He is the real pest of society, the enemy of all good. We may almost say, with Carlyle, that he "is among the most indubitable malefactors omitted, or inserted, in the criminal calendar." But what of Gashmu, the originator of the story? Who was Gashmu? A most important question, and one that has never been satisfactorily answered. The name occurs nowhere else except in this verse. The preceding narrative speaks of "Geshem the Arabian," and all the commentators assume that Gashmu is Geshem. Every reader assumes that the two are one. In fact, nobody doubts it. But it is worthy of notice that the names are not identical. Sanballat does not say, "Geshem saith it," but "Gashmu saith it." Why? He wants Nehemiah to understand the source of his information, but he does not propose to get caught by an exact statement. Nehemiah might take it into his head to trace the slander, and that would be extremely awkward for Sanballat. Is it not true to life? Is not Gashmu about as near as the modern retailer of gossip ever comes to Geshem? How often has one come to you with some injurious tale and left on your mind a very distinct impression as to its source without exactly telling you? How many a spicy bit of personal news is laid on the shoulders of the general public in the words, "They say." It matters little that you think you know Gashmu. Try to identify him and make him a responsible author of stories, and he will elude you every time. Go to Geshem with the stories that are attributed to Gashmu, and he will know nothing whatever about them. He will be utterly surprised that you could have imagined him to be their author. He will probably be very indignant that any one should have had the hardihood to invent such tales. Now this Gashmu, unreal though he may be, is an absolutely essential link in every chain of gossip. Gossip could not live without him. It were easier to spare the Prince of Denmark from the play of Hamlet than to omit Gashmu from the real School for Scandal. That is to say, there must be some point on the way which gossip has travelled where the trail becomes lost. Authority must vanish into impersonality. You attempt to follow up any bit of gossip or slander that you hear, and if you do not come to Gashmu sooner or later, your experience will be unique, not to say marvellous. The third person in this drama is Shemaiah. Shemaiah is the man who is afraid of gossip and runs away to hide himself, turning aside from good work and letting duty go by default. His invitation to meet in the house of God has a very pious sound, but, after all, it is only the expression of cowardice. Not for worship, but for safety, does he

wish to enter the sanctuary. Now this, I submit, is a greater evil than gossip—this minding of gossip. You say that people will talk about you. Well, what if they do? Did talk ever kill anybody yet? Did it ever seriously hurt anybody when he was hard at work minding his own business and the Lord's? Keep a clear conscience, then, and you need have no fear of gossip, however venomous. Now listen to Nehemiah, the last of this quartet: "And I said, Should such a man as I flee? and who is there, that, being such as I, would go into the temple to save his life?" That is the secret of it all. Get so thoroughly absorbed in work for God and man that the work shall seem great, and you will not mind gossip and slander any more than you mind the buzzing of flies outside the screen. Gossip may be afloat, but we are not obliged to hear it, still less to flee from it, or to pay it respectful attention. Our hearing is for the most part a matter of choice as well as our speaking. We are as truly responsible for the right use of our ears as for the right use of our tongues, though we seldom look at the matter in that light. "Take heed what ye hear." (G. H. Hubbard, D.D.) *Serene indifference to slander*:—A young clerk's eyes flashed as he read an article in the morning papers. It was an outrageous attack upon the gentleman at the head of his department for a course of action which was represented as both base and cowardly. All the correspondence relating to the affair had passed through the young man's hands, so he knew that the published statements were false and most damaging to the reputation of his beloved chief. Carrying the paper to the gentleman assailed, he asked if he might write a reply. The elder man read the paragraphs calmly, smiled, and shook his head. "What will you do?" the clerk asked. "Live it down," was the reply, "as I have done so many other calumnies. Talking back is the most futile and undignified exertion in the world. If you succeed in cutting up one falsehood, each part will begin to wriggle against you. Let it alone, and it will die of starvation." Frederick the Great looked with serene indifference on all that his enemies might say of him. One day, as he rode through Berlin, he saw a crowd of people staring up at something on the wall, and, on sending his groom to inquire what it was, found it to be a caricature of himself. The placard was put so high that it was difficult to read it, so Frederick ordered it to be placed lower in order that the people might not have to stretch out their necks. The words were hardly spoken when, with a joyous shout, the placard was pulled down and torn into a thousand pieces, while a hearty cheer followed the king as he rode away. (*Christian Age*.)

Ver. 9. Now therefore, O God, strengthen my hands.—*God's various ways of strengthening His people's hands*:—He sometimes does it by infusing into them an extraordinary measure of wisdom and knowledge. Joseph and Daniel appear to have been thus enriched, the faculty of interpreting dreams being conferred upon them, at a momentous juncture, to qualify them for a great and special work; our Lord promised His disciples that, in the critical moment, though not before, they should be supplied with the mouth of wisdom, that might answer all their adversaries. Sometimes the hands of such believers are strengthened by a strange alteration in the feelings of powerful foes towards them, or by an unexpected accession of friends from quarters where, perhaps, they have expected the least. "When a man's ways please the Lord, He maketh even His enemies to be at peace with him." Laban shall be arrested in a dream by night, with the stern command, "See that thou speak not to Jacob good or bad"; the gaoler's heart shall be softened, that he bring forth Paul and Silas "out of their dungeon," and "wash their stripes, and set meat before them"; and the Pharisees, those determined foes of the gospel, moved by their hatred of the Sadducees, take the part of the preacher of the resurrection. God may add to our strength by confounding and debilitating our enemies; as He acted by David, when on his behalf He "turned the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness"; when He struck the inhabitants of Sodom with blindness; when He poured terror on the Syrian army that invaded Judea; and when the host of the Midianites fled in dismay before the lamps and pitchers of Gideon, and not a sword was drawn. And now that miracles are not wrought, we must still recognise in thousands of instances the overruling providence of God, working under the cover of natural causes to strengthen His people's hands. (*J. N. Pearson, M.A.*)

Vers. 10-13. Should such a man as I flee?—*Panic*:—I. PANIC. Unreasoning, helpless fright. 1. National panic. 2. Business panic. 3. Personal panic.

4. Spiritual panic, II. THE EFFECT OF PANIC. All of these forms are commonly groundless; the wave is not so high as it seems to the retreating bather who hears its hiss behind him. It gathers all the selfishness of man to a focus. It substitutes a brief madness for calm thoughtfulness and decision. It makes a man behave unworthily—1. Of himself. 2. Toward his fellows. 3. Of his God. III. THE CORRECTIVES OF PANIC. Remembrance of—1. A man's own dignity. 2. Others. 3. God. (*Homiletic Commentary*.) *Christian firmness*:—I. THE SUTLETTY WITH WHICH OUR GREAT ADVERSARY WILL ASSAULT US. 1. To neglect our social duties to further our spiritual welfare. 2. To conform to the world with a view to conciliate their regard. 3. To use undue means with a view to obtain some desirable end. II. THE FIRMNESS WITH WHICH WE SHOULD RESIST HIM. We should set the Lord ever before us, bearing in mind—1. Our relation to Him. 2. Our obligations to Him. 3. Our expectations from Him. 4. The interest which God Himself has in the whole of our conduct. (*C. Simeon*.) *Courage*:—1. In the prosecution of this work, whilst building the spiritual wall of Zion, there are many artifices to be resisted. Our enemies will seek to draw us away from our work. We shall be invited to enter into friendly conformity with the world, and we shall be told that conciliation on our side will be met by concessions on theirs; but this is a mistake, for the world will take all and give none. 2. Our spiritual enemies will resort to intimidation. If they cannot draw they will drive. What fair offers were made of seeming friendship to the noble army of martyrs, and when these failed, intimidation followed. The offence of the Cross has not ceased. It is "through much tribulation" we must enter the kingdom, and the Christian will be threatened with the loss of caste or of business if he determine to maintain his consistency. Evil motives will be ascribed to him, wicked reports will be propagated concerning him. Ridicule and reproach are weapons of great severity. "Should such a man as I flee? and who is there, that, being as I am, would go into the temple to save his life? I will not go in." Let the earnest Christian resist the solicitations of evil in a similar manner. 1. Consider your relation to God. Say to yourself, "I am a child of God, a disciple of Christ, a temple of the Holy Ghost, and 'should such a man as I flee,' give way to temptation, dishonour my high calling, disobey my blessed Captain, and grieve the Spirit of grace?" 2. Consider your obligations to redeeming mercy. Say to your heart, "O Christian, I have been loved with an everlasting love, called by sovereign grace, washed in the blood of Jesus, and comforted by innumerable tokens of goodness and mercy, and 'should such a man as I flee?'" 3. "Consider your expectations. You are a candidate for eternity. Say to yourself, 'O Christian, life is short and uncertain; death may be near; my Lord Himself may come in His glory. In that day of His boundless mercy He will call me His brother, His own, and He will bestow upon me an inheritance of surpassing lustre; and 'should such a man as I flee?' shall I be guilty of base cowardice or perfidious ingratitude?" (*J. M. Randall*.) *Faith, courage, and prudence*:—We may consider this blending of faith, courage, and prudence in Nehemiah as worthy of admiration and imitation. 1. Sometimes we find a brave man who lacks both faith and prudence. In this case his courage is very apt to degenerate into a foolish bravado; and possibly he may do more harm than good by his unwise daring. 2. When prudence is the marked feature of a character it is apt to degenerate into selfish cunning and calculating cowardice. 3. Even when courage and prudence are found united, the character is still sadly defective if there be no spiritual faith—it is apt to fall into an unbecoming and dangerous self-sufficiency. 4. On the other hand, faith without prudence may degenerate into fanaticism, or into a "quietism" which cultivates the passive to the neglect of the active virtues. (*I. Campbell Finlayson*.) *Fortitude in duty*:—Holy courage is not that natural bravery which belongs to some men constitutionally—this is little more than strength of nerve and robustness of animal spirits, and in thousands of instances is found to exist apart from Christian principle; it is rather the bravery of the lion than the bravery of the mind and the man. Some of the most valourous have been the most depraved; and some who dragged their enemies at their chariot-wheels have themselves been dragged through the mire of pollution by their own appetites and passions. As water cannot rise higher than its level, neither can a moral quality rise higher than its principle. Holy courage springs from the fear of God, from "seeing Him who is invisible." Hence the soldier of Christ is fearless to do right, fearful to do wrong—afraid to sin, but not afraid to suffer. In considering the scope for this virtue, notice—I. HE THAT WILL BE A FOLLOWER OF GOD MUST TAKE UP ARMS AGAINST HIMSELF. It was finely

said by Richard Cecil that "a humble Christian, battling against the world, the flesh, and the devil, is a greater hero than Alexander the Great." II. IT REQUIRES A COURAGEOUS SPIRIT TO HAVE RESPECT TO ALL GOD'S COMMANDMENTS. III. IT REQUIRES GREAT COURAGE TO OVERCOME THE WORLD. (*Hugh Stowell, M.A.*) *The higher self-appeal*:—When I lived in the country years ago, I remember one of our friends was a great smoker, and used to smoke morning, noon, and night, and his friends used to say it was a very bad practice, and inconvenient and expensive, and all those arguments with which we are familiar. He always used to smile one of those tranquil smiles which come from parties of that kind. That man could not give up his pipe, and declared that he could not, and that he would smoke till he died. One day there was a mouth trouble. He went to a distinguished physician, and he told him that he was afraid the excessive smoking was inducing cancer. That put his pipe out. It did; he dropped it that very day. It was marvellous; he had done with that. It is one thing when it touches your shillings; one thing when it is a question of convenience and inconvenience; it is another thing when it touches you. And I say to you, when the day of darkness, the day of temptation, when all the sorcery and besetment of evil is around you, don't say, "Iniquity will mar my health or cloud my reputation or shorten my days"; say with Nehemiah, "Should such a man as I do this evil"—such a man as I, with reason and conscience, the heir of the ages, the master of the planet, redeemed with the blood of the Son of God, called to a great destiny—should such a man as I do this mean thing, this base thing? Appeal in the sight of God to your own greatness, and He shall strengthen you in the day when the worst comes to the worst. (*W. L. Watkinson.*) *Valour is sometimes the soul of discretion*:—We are constantly being reminded that discretion is the better part of valour; but there are occasions, and those not a few, when valour is the very soul of discretion, when at all hazards we must stand our ground and face the foe, that the work be not stopped. (*W. P. Lockhart.*)

Ver. 13. Therefore was he hired.—Bribery:—I. ITS EXISTENCE AND VARIETIES.

1. In statecraft. 2. In trade. 3. In morals and religion. II. ITS EFFECTS. 1. Personal degradation. 2. General disorganisation. 3. Hindrance of all good. III. ITS CURE. 1. Self-denial. 2. Resolute unmercifulness to the briber. 3. Trust in God and faith in right. (*Homiletic Commentary.*)

Ver. 15. So the wall was finished in the twenty and fifth day . . . in fifty and two days.—Fifty-two days' work:—Let us make a parable of the story and use the text as a motto of a deeper theme. Fifty-two Sundays and their work. I. HOW QUICKLY THEY PASS. II. WHAT OPPORTUNITIES THEY FURNISH. 1. Of rest. 2. Of spiritual friendship. 3. Of Divine instruction. 4. Of moral renewal. III. WHAT RESULTS THEY LEAVE. 1. In memory. 2. In life. 3. For judgment. Application: 1. Thank God for the day of days. 2. Use each day as it comes. 3. Determine upon a rounded result for each cycle of fifty-two. (*Ibid.*) *Finished work*:—1. The work of human redemption. Yes, the work was done. The atoning sacrifice was offered and accepted, as was demonstrated when Jesus rose again from the dead. 2. And is there ground for hope that the great and blessed work of renewal, begun in the believer's heart, will be perfected? 3. The progress of the Church at large is also assured. (*T. Rowson.*) *Success*:—There was great exultation when Lesseps completed the Suez Canal, by which the communication between Europe and the East has been materially expedited. There was great exultation when the favourite project of Count Cavour for a tunnel through Mont Cenis was brought to a successful termination, by which Paris and Turin have been approximated within a few hours of each other. There was great exultation and loyal thankfulness when, in 1873, the Prince of Wales put the top-stone to the Portland Breakwater. The foundation-stone of this work had been laid twenty-three years before, by his august father; and it was an interesting moment when the Prince completed the magnificent undertaking by adding to the words by which he formally announced the fact, "These are imperial works, and worthy kings"; and echoing shouts of joy went up, from two hundred thousand spectators. Similarly, it was a great day for Jerusalem when her walls and bulwarks were commended to the blessing of the Almighty. (*J. M. Randall.*)

Ver. 16. For they perceived that the work was wrought of our God.—The crown of Christian evidence:—Christianity does not stand in any merely literary defence,

although its literary defence is complete; it stands rather in its beneficent accomplishments, in its regenerated hearts, its elevated lives, its new spirit of consecration, its broad unselfishness, its generous sympathy—"Go and show John again those things which ye do hear and see." (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *The world's acknowledgment of God*:—I. *WORLD'S PAST ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF GOD*. 1. Biblical instances. 2. Later instances. II. *WORLD'S PRESENT ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF GOD*. 1. Unconscious acknowledgments. Think of the way in which Christianity penetrates the life of the modern world. 2. Unwilling acknowledgment. 3. Frank acknowledgment. III. *THE WORLD'S FUTURE ACKNOWLEDGMENT*. 1. Willing. 2. Enforced. Application: 1. Make acknowledgment of God. 2. Now. (*Homiletic Commentary*.) *Nothing succeeds like success*:—It is amazing sometimes to find how many there are who heartily endorse a good work when it has arrived at or is approaching success, however much they may have frowned at it, or even opposed it, when it was struggling with difficulties. (*W. P. Lockhart*.) *God acknowledged in results*:—In the present day there is an impatient craving for immediate results which comes perilously near to mistrust of God. But verily there are results, and when such results are seen, then even enemies are constrained to admit that God's hand is in the work. The faith of converts must always be evidenced by their works, otherwise the world will not, cannot, perceive that God is working with us. (*Ibid.*)

Ver. 19. *Also they reported his good deeds before me.*—*The bad men praised*:—I. *BAD MEN DO GET PRAISED*. 1. Sometimes this praise is real. 2. Sometimes this praise is mistaken. 3. Sometimes this praise is fictitious altogether. II. *BAD MEN ARE ANXIOUS FOR PRAISE*. 1. In this there is a sentence of condemnation. 2. In this there is an indirect homage to virtue. III. *BAD MEN ARE NOT HIDDEN BY THE PRAISE OF THE WORLD*. 1. Good men detect. 2. God detects. Application: 1. Do not be discouraged by this misdirected praise. 2. Do not be deceived into any lowering of the standard of righteousness. (*Homiletic Commentary*.)

CHAPTER VII.

VERS. 1-7. *Now it came to pass, when the wall was built.*—*The guardian of the holy city*:—I. *HIS CARE FOR JERUSALEM'S PROTECTION*. It is a beneficent law of our nature that the more true affection is exercised it increases in strength, and knits the heart to its object in firmer bonds. This beautiful law, of the growth of affection by its exercise, is still more exemplified in the labour of love for Christ's name sake, and for the promotion of His truth in the earth. Thus it was that the suffering and sacrifice which Nehemiah had endured for Jerusalem bound him to it by stronger ties, and drew him to seek its good with deepening affection. He had wept over its desolation in the night; he had toiled, through many days, for its restoration; and, when its walls were now rebuilt, how could he but cherish a tender solicitude, lest any danger should befall the home of his heart? Was it not enough to fill him with sorrowful apprehension that false men were within the walls of Zion, and that, under the name of Israelites, they were ready to betray the dearest interests of their nation into the hands of the heathen? Then, as strong walls are no sufficient protection without faithful watchmen, he set apart true men, to keep guard in the common danger. 1. We remark the character of the men to whom he committed this high trust. "I gave my brother Hanani, and Hananiah the ruler of the palace, charge over Jerusalem." "My brother Hanani." The expression of fraternal relation is simple and dignified, but warm and affectionate. The brother's heart speaks the word, and utters in it a brother's love, glowing with a brother's pride, over one so dear, ready to help in a work so Divine. It is deeply interesting to observe how often, in the procedure of grace, God hallows the social affections, by grafting on their stock a Divine love; and how large a portion of the inspired history of the religious life is a record of kindred dear in the same households, united in the same faith, walking together to the better country. Abraham and Sarah, Jacob and Joseph, Moses and Aaron, James and John, Martha and her sister Mary, and Lazarus, with many more revered names in Scripture story, united in the bonds of nature and also of grace, prove how true God is to His promise—"I will take you one of a city, and two of a

family, and I will bring you to Zion." Hananiah, the other patriot, here entrusted with charge over the holy city, receives this high encomium, "He was a faithful man, and feared God above many." There was special need for this superior fidelity and piety in the watchmen of Zion then; and the same necessity demands such graces still in all who have charge in the Church of God. 2. We notice the nature of the charges given to these faithful men. Walls and gates are set around the city of God, not to foster indolence, but to aid active defence, and by this means to secure the guardian care of Omnipotence. This Divine help is ever sure to those who are willing by God's grace to help themselves, and who stand on their watch-tower, in the attitude of vigilance. This is an operation of faith, and an effect of that wisdom that is from above. Sound principles of truth are believed, not for the purpose of lying in the mind as a dead letter, or to be in themselves a certain defence against danger, but they are embraced to be used as a shield in times of assault, to be applied to the practical conduct; and if they are loosely held, the enemy will break through them to wound the heart, as surely as these foes of Jerusalem would have entered it by the gates or walls, had these been unguarded. The word is, "Take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand." Faith everywhere sets on this enterprise its indubitable seal. The city, we are told, "was large and great; but the people were few within, and the houses were not builded." It was reared in the sure confidence of a future increase, according to the promise, "Jerusalem shall be inhabited, as towns without walls, for the multitude of men and cattle therein." In like manner, everything devised and done for the kingdom of Christ may be planned on the largest scale, to accord with the amplitude of the purpose of grace. There is room in the heart of God for all sinners of mankind, would they but trust His love. II. HIS EFFORT FOR JERUSALEM'S PURITY. In a work of God, the completion of one service to His honour makes way for the commencement of another. A holy heart feels no desire to rest in complacency after the labour of one enterprise is finished, as if enough were done for a while to come. 1. We remark in this the means he adopts to secure the purity of Jerusalem. He owns, with grateful humility, the Divine source of all his plans of wisdom for the good of Jerusalem. "My God put into mine heart." All holy desires, all good counsels, all just works are from God; and it is right to ascribe to Him the glory of these precious gifts. The great thinkers of the world—the men whose vocation it is to exercise thought for the instruction of others—are under paramount obligation to give honour to the Father of lights for every grand or good idea He discovers to their mind. God is specially the author of all gracious purposes in the hearts of His children, and of every good counsel for the advancement of His kingdom. It is in this frame of exultant gratitude to the Lord for all good counsels that Nehemiah says, "My God put into mine heart to gather together the nobles, and the rulers, and the people, that they might be reckoned by genealogy." Recent events, no doubt, suggested reasons for making sure who belonged to the tribes of Israel; and God, by opening His servant's mind to the force of these reasons, rendered the path of duty plain. False men had lately appeared in the congregation of the Lord, claiming a place in it, who were not of it, but were proving traitors to its dearest interests. At this time, then, when much depended on the possession of a true heart in the children of Zion, the heads and people of Judah were convened, that all might be reckoned by genealogy. 2. We notice the fidelity Nehemiah evinces to secure the purity of Jerusalem. Many went up to the holy city who could not show their father's house, whether they belonged to Israel or no. Some of them would prove in their conduct they were the people of God; but they could not as yet produce evidence of their genealogy as the seed of Jacob. In like manner, want of assurance of personal salvation bars the way of no sinner in applying to Christ; and if any follow on to seek Him, He will in no wise cast them out, though they may not be able for the present to express their sure hope of eternal life. Some at this time in Jerusalem were friends of Zion, of this description, truly belonging to Israel in spirit, but unable, meanwhile, to prove their relation. But others were there of a different class, and, perhaps, also of a different character. Some of the priests "sought their register among those who were reckoned by genealogy, but it was not found" (ver. 64). In the fidelity, therefore, of these patriots to purify from alloy the congregation of the Lord, we have an example for the imitation of the universal Church of Christ. Purity of communion in a Church is essential to its healthful condition, and to its success in spreading religion in the world. A diseased member in the natural body may gradually destroy the vital functions of the entire frame;

and so, in the mystical body of Christ, one member unsound in heart will impair the spiritual action of the whole, just as one Achan in the camp occasioned the defeat of all the army of Israel. This register, used by the servant of God to ascertain who were the children of Zion, may suggest to us the joyous assurance that God knows all His true Israel, and will take means, in due time, to make them known. Oh! what a privilege to find your name in the Lamb's book of life in that day! On the other hand, what a dismay to discover then it is not there! (*W. Ritchie.*)

Vers. 2, 3. **For he was a faithful man, and feared God above many.**—*Faithfulness*:—I. CONSIDER THE MEANING OF FAITHFULNESS. It is the reverent and constant acceptance of those duties springing out of the relations in which I inevitably stand. Man is a being set in relations. When the ivy climbs up ruins and binds lovingly the fallen stones together, and wraps them in its green, it clambers and winds about and helps and beautifies because of the feelers it thrusts out, laying hold, by them, of the crumbling stones. It is the nature of the ivy to force these feelers out. So forth from every man there are shooting feelers of relations. They are part of his life-endowment. 1. Man is bound into relation with God. God is Creator—Father—Providence and Sustainer—King and Judge. 2. Men and women are bound to each other in the relation of father and mother, and child and relative, and fellow-citizen, and so on endlessly. Springing out of these relations there are forced upon us certain duties. Faithfulness is accepting and steadily discharging them. II. FAITHFULNESS IS A CHANCE OPENING RIGHT AT THE FEET OF EVERY MAN FOR A NOBLE LIFE. III. FAITHFULNESS IS AN OPEN DOOR FOR A RIGHT AMBITION—to develop a noble character. Thus we may lift humdrum from our daily life. There is nothing so invigorating as the consciousness of recognising and accepting duty. The peace of a quiet conscience is in it. 1. Thus I am sure of setting a right example. 2. Thus I shall certainly make my life tell in all directions. IV. A REWARD OF FAITHFULNESS. Nehemiah gave Hananiah charge over Jerusalem because “he was a faithful man.” V. THE REAL SOURCE AND INCITEMENT OF FAITHFULNESS. He “feared God.” Think of Milton as holding himself “as ever in his great Taskmaster’s eye.” Policy, expediency, self-interest may seem to hold a man to duty in fair weather. The only lasting motive for faithfulness for all times is God. (*Wayland Hoyt, D.D.*) *Piety and faithfulness*:—We are here taught:—I. THAT THE FEAR OF GOD—real, Scriptural piety—is THE SOLID FOUNDATION OF ALL FAITHFULNESS BETWEEN MAN AND MAN. II. THAT THE INDISPENSABLE EXPRESSION AND PROOF OF THE FEAR OF GOD IS TO BE FOUND IN A MAN’S FIDELITY AS TO THE AFFAIRS AND TRANSACTIONS WHICH TAKE PLACE BETWEEN HIM AND HIS FELLOWS. III. THAT PERSONS OF EMINENT PIETY AND GREAT FIDELITY WILL BE HONOURED BOTH BY GOD AND MAN. (*J. Taylor.*) *Eminent piety*:—I. THAT FAITHFULNESS IN RELIGION IS ESSENTIALLY CONNECTED WITH EMINENCE OF ATTAINMENT IN THE CHRISTIAN CHARACTER. II. CHARACTERISTICS OF EMINENT PIETY. 1. It consists in the habitual maintenance of a close walk with God. 2. It comprises a high and enlightened estimate of the character and work of Christ. 3. It is connected with an exquisite spiritual and moral sensibility. 4. It is always most powerfully swayed by spiritual motives and considerations. 5. These characteristics show the baselessness of the claims and pretensions to the possession of exalted religious attainments that are sometimes advanced. III. MOTIVES WHICH MAY LEAD CHRISTIANS TO ASPIRE AFTER EMINENCE OF PERSONAL PIETY. 1. The honour of religion. 2. It is a great preservative against apostasy. 3. Regard to personal enjoyment. 4. Its relation to usefulness. 5. Its bearing upon our future blessedness. 6. The enduring nature of the distinction it confers. 7. The adequate provision that has been made to aid in its attainment. (*W. Hurd.*) *Eminent piety*:—I. THE NATURE OF EMINENT PIETY. 1. It involves a habit of serious reflection. 2. It is consistent and comprehensive. The man who exemplifies it believes the doctrines of revelation, is awed by its threatenings, animated by its promises, and controlled by its laws. He is at once sober, righteous, and godly. 3. It endures severe tests. It resembles a robust constitution, which can pass through all varieties of climate, while a sickly constitution demands careful restriction to one. 4. It is active and laborious. 5. It is piety that grows. II. CONSIDERATIONS THAT ENFORCE EMINENT PIETY. 1. The effects it produces on those who exemplify it. (1) They manifest that they are born of God. (2) They are fitted for every spiritual conflict. (3) They are provided with all needful consolations. (4) They are qualified for an advantageous approach to Divine

ordinances. (5) Their anticipations are bright and triumphant. 2. The effects it produces on those who witness it. Conclusion: 1. Eminent piety is very rare. 2. The means of acquiring and promoting eminent piety are invaluable. Inter-course with good men—attendance in a Christian sanctuary—reading, meditation, and prayer. 3. Real piety is indispensable. (*Joseph Hughes.*) *A faithful man*:—

I. THE DISTINGUISHING FEATURE OF HANANIAH'S CHARACTER. "He was a faithful man." If we suppose with some that Hananiah is the same as Shadrach mentioned in the Book of Daniel, we see how brightly this trait of his character shone forth in him in Babylon. "A faithful man" is perhaps the most distinguished commendation that can be passed upon any mortal. It refers to that attitude under which God Himself has been pleased to allow His people to regard Him. "God is faithful"; "the Lord is faithful"; and it is in the faithfulness of God that His people hope and confide. "A faithful man"—1. Is one that can be depended on, who performs all his promises, executes all trusts confided to him, one who is punctual and unwavering in all his engagements, and whose uprightness and integrity are transparent to all. 2. He is one who has been made the recipient of a gracious and Divine principle that is—(1) Saving in its nature; (2) justifying in its character; (3) purifying in its results. 3. He is a godlike man (2 Pet. i. 4).

II. THE CONDUCT WHICH HANANIAH SHOWED—he "feared God." The fear of God is—1. A reverential awe of the majesty of God. 2. An implanted principle (Jer. xxxii. 40). 3. A governing principle—Obadiah (1 Kings xviii. 12, 13); Nehemiah (chap. v. 15).

III. THE DISTINGUISHED POSITION ASSIGNED TO HANANIAH. (*Francis Wills.*) *An example of excellent piety*:—

I. HE WAS A FAITHFUL MAN. To serve God acceptably we must be faithful. 1. By believing what God has revealed, on His testimony (2 Chron. xx. 20). To the exercise of this faith we are urged by the best example, as that of Abraham (Gal. iii. 9; Rom. iv. 20), and that of Barnabas (Acts xi. 24). Under the influence of this faith, we shall be led to seek God in the way He prescribes. 2. By conscientiously performing those duties which arise from our relations to God; as His servants, stewards, and soldiers. As His covenant-servants, we must devote ourselves to His service (Jer. i. 5; 1 Cor. iv. 19, 20). As His stewards, we must employ His gifts for His glory (1 Pet. iv. 10, 11). This faithfulness is required in stewards (1 Cor. iv. 2). As His soldiers, we must be valiant for His revealed truth (Jer. ix. 3). We must be faithful—3. By steadfast adherence to the required worship and service of God. Like the Church at Pergamos, we must not deny Christ through fear of suffering for righteousness' sake (Rev. ii. 13, xvii. 14). 4. By seriously realising the invisible things of God (Heb. xi. 1). We should realise God's presence with us, as our Master, Helper, and Observer (Psa. xvi. 8, xli. 1; Heb. xi. 27). We should realise the general judgment, when we must all appear before Christ (2 Cor. x. 7, 9, 10).

II. AND HE FEARED GOD ABOVE MANY. 1. By the fear of God, in this place, is meant the whole of personal religion, including the principles and practice, the dispositions and the conduct of its subject or possessor (Psa. xxxiv. 11, cxi. 10; Prov. xix. 23; Eccles. viii. 12). 2. He feared God above many. This implies that there are different degrees of piety among those who truly fear God. This is intimated by our Lord, in His parable of the Sower (Matt. xiii. 8). It is admitted by St. Paul, in his doctrine of future rewards (2 Cor. ix. 6). This difference in pious attainments is also evident from the present state of the religious world. Of some eminent Christians, who are now the salt of the earth and the lights of the world, it may be said with great truth that they fear God above many. They acknowledge God more than many in their secular concerns (Prov. iii. 6; Phil. iv. 6); they are more careful than many to allow themselves in those recreations only which are consistent with, and favourable to, their advancement in holiness (1 Cor. x. 31); they converse more spiritually and profitably than many (Eph. iv. 29); and they are more zealous than many, in employing all their talents for God's glory and the benefit of mankind (Acts xiii. 36). With respect to reputation; some have a good report from them that are without the Church, while the good that is in others is evil spoken of, through their indiscretions. With respect to usefulness; some are general blessings to their respective connections, while others are not visibly instrumental in bringing scarcely any souls with them to Christ and heaven. 3. The honourable mention of Hananiah's distinguished piety should excite us to imitate him, by endeavouring to excel in piety also. To excel in piety is—(1) Our privilege. This is incontestable from the prayers which the Holy Spirit has dictated for our adoption (Eph. iii. 14-21; 1 Thess. v. 23, 24; Heb. xiii. 20, 21). (2) Our

Interest. For this will be conducive to—(a) Our greater happiness (Isa. xlviii. 18); (b) our greater safety (2 Pet. i. 10); (c) our greater glory in heaven (2 Pet. i. 11; 1 Cor. xv. 51). (3) Our duty. (a) God calls us to this (1 Pet. i. 15, 16); (b) God will hereby be glorified (John xv. 8); (c) herewith He will be pleased (Psa. xxxv. 27). (*Sketches of Four Hundred Sermons.*)

Placed in trust:—It was a State appointment made on moral and religious grounds. Hannaniah was put in “charge over Jerusalem: for he was a faithful man, and feared God above many.” Without discussing in detail the merits of the principle, let us inquire, What would be its effects as a passport to office? 1. In the first place, it would shut out atheists from the Legislature of the country. 2. It would exclude from power all immoral or ungodly persons. 3. Such recognition would show that the profession of religion is not incompatible with, nor a disqualification for, the duties of public life. 4. The appointment was on Scriptural lines. It was strikingly in accord with the advice of Jethro to Moses: “Moreover, thou shalt provide out of all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth hating covetousness, and place such over them to be rulers of thousands, and rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens.” (*T. Robson.*)

Eminent of character:—It is not the first thousand feet, but the last, that give a mountain its name and fame. There is not a vast difference, for example, between Monte Rosa and Mont Blanc, but the latter is celebrated owing to those few extra feet. It is not so much ability, or learning, or diligence which differentiates Christian men as nearness to heaven and God. Those few extra hours spent in prayer, the additional steps of approach to Christ—these raise above the level of average piety and impart sanctity to the character. (*Sunday Companion.*)

Religious sentiment the most refining:—It is the property of the religious sentiment to be the most refining of all influences. No external advantages, no good birth or breeding, no culture of the taste, no habit of command, no association with the elegant—even no depth of affection that does not rise to a religious sentiment—can bestow that delicacy and grandeur of bearing which belong only to a mind accustomed to celestial conversation. (*R. W. Emerson.*)

Men loyal to God:—Martin Luther used to say, “God needs strong men as much as strong men need God,” and it was true. Let men seek to escape from the responsibilities of labour and law, and the freedom won by patriots and martyrs would soon fall, superstition would soon reassert its sway, and passions would leap forth again which would throw civilisation back into barbarism. If the Apostles had trusted the men of their age there would have been no true Christianity. If John Knox and others had trusted to such there would have been no Reformation. Let them bestir themselves in every noble way. They could each, at least, give to God one life that was true and faithful, one loyal to the core to truth and duty. It was not enough to contribute their criticism, they must contribute themselves—be willing to perish that others might live. That was what was meant by Christianity. (*John Hunter.*)

Coherence in character:—What is the cause which makes one life so full to us while another has no meaning? What is it that constitutes the articulateness or the inarticulateness, the significance or the insignificance, of human lives? One very simple thing—coherence, that is all. The reason why these letters spell something is because they cohere together according to a certain law, and express something. The reason why these notes are sweet and inspiring to your ear is because they blend together according to the codes of harmony. And so are human lives bound together by something which brings coherence and significance, harmony and force. Look at the lives which strike us; look at the imperious and imperial personalities amongst us. What made Bismarck such as he was? Coherence—one purpose! The difference between a life which is insignificant lies precisely in the word “coherence.” Why was Newton great? Why, because Newton, like all great men, said, “This one thing I do,” and he forgot his food in the earnest contemplation and pursuit of science. It is coherence which makes greatness in life. (*Bp. Boyd Carpenter.*)

Every one in his watch.—*Every one in his watch:*—This book may almost be called the Book of the Busy Man, telling as it does of the multifarious duties and responsibilities of one who acted as governor of the Jewish people in a very difficult and anxious time, and who had the rare and excellent faculty of leading every one else to work also. The picture which this book presents is almost that of a beehive, the murmur of whose work rises from every page. It is in entire sympathy with the general strain and tenor of the book that our text speaks when it shows us “every one in his watch.” Consider—I. THE INDIVIDUAL DEALING OF GOD WITH US—“every one in his watch.”

We often resist the thought of having to do individually with God ; it becomes too solemn, too oppressive, too terrible for a soul that is not reconciled to Him. This is partly at the root of the preference which many have for the Church life rather than the individual life, for the idea of the multitude in which we may hide rather than that of solitude in which we must be seen. There is much in which we can have no companionship. We are born alone ; every great disease or pain finds us in the deep places of a loneliness which none can share with us ; and it is in utter solitude that each of us dies. In all such cases it is individual dealing between the Lord and us. We never come right, we never come to the Pardoner of sin, or the trust of daily life, or, real work for Christ, till we have had the individual dealing with God which brings us into the position of those whom God has accepted for Christ's sake, and for whom henceforth He will provide. II. The text is also UNIVERSAL IN ITS REACH. EVERY MAN means ALL MEN, which gives us the thought that there is a post for every man which God has appointed for him. III. THE WORK OF THE CHRISTIAN may be regarded as military service. In this aspect of life three things are required. 1. Strict discipline. 2. Instant obedience. 3. Perfect obedience. IV. THE PART OF MILITARY SERVICE WHICH FALLS TO US ALL IS SENTINEL DUTY. V. THE OBJECT OF THE WATCH WHICH IS LAID UPON EVERY CHRISTIAN. 1. It is a watch against attack. 2. It is a watch for reinforcement and succour. (*T. Elder Cumming.*)

Ver. 67. **And they had two hundred forty and five singing men and singing women.**—*Church music*:—The captives in the text had music left in them, and if they could find, amid all their trials, two hundred and forty and five singing men and singing women, then in this day of gospel sunlight and freedom from all persecution there ought to be a great multitude of men and women willing to sing the praises of God. All our churches need arousal on this subject. Those who can sing must throw their souls into the exercise, and those who cannot sing must learn how, and it shall be heart to heart, voice to voice, and the music shall swell jubilant with thanksgiving and tremulous with pardon. Have you ever noticed the construction of the human throat as indicative of what God means us to do with it? In only an ordinary throat and lungs there are fourteen direct muscles that produce 16,383 sounds, and thirty indirect muscles that produce 173,741,823 sounds, and the human voice can produce seventeen trillion, five hundred and ninety-two billion, one hundred and eighty-six million, forty-four thousand, four hundred and fifteen different sounds. What does that mean? It means that you should sing! Do you suppose that God, who gives us such a musical instrument as that, intends us to keep it shut? Suppose some great tyrant should get possession of the musical instruments of the world, and should lock up the organ of Westminster Abbey, and the organ of Lucerne, and the organ at Haarlem, and the organ at Freiburg, and all the other great musical instruments of the world—you would call such a man as that a monster ; and yet you are more wicked if, with the human voice—a musical instrument of more wonderful adaptation than all the musical instruments that man ever created—you shut it against the praise of God. I. MUSIC SEEMS TO HAVE BEEN BORN IN THE SOUL OF THE WORLD. The omnipotent voice with which God commanded the world into being seems to linger yet with its majesty and sweetness, and you hear it in the grain-field, in the swoop of the wind amid the mountain fastnesses, in canary's warble and in thunder-shock, in brook's tinkle and in ocean's pæan. There are soft cadences in nature, and loud notes, some of which we cannot hear at all, and others are so terrific that we cannot appreciate them. The animalculæ have their music, and the spicula of hay and the globule of water are as certainly resonant with the voice of God as the highest heavens in which the armies of the redeemed celebrate their victories. When the breath of the flower strikes the air and the wing of the firefly cleaves it, there is sound and there is melody ; and as to those utterances of nature which seem harsh and overwhelming, it is as when you stand in the midst of a great orchestra, and the sound almost rends your ear because you are too near to catch the blending of the music. II. MUSIC SEEMS DEPENDENT ON THE LAWS OF ACOUSTICS AND MATHEMATICS, AND YET WHERE THESE LAWS ARE NOT UNDERSTOOD AT ALL THE ART IS PRACTISED. There are to-day five hundred musical journals in China. Two thousand years before Christ the Egyptians practised this art. Pythagoras learned it. Lasus, of Hermione, wrote essays on it. Plato and Aristotle introduced it into their schools ; but I have not much interest in that. My chief interest is in the music of the Bible. The Bible, like a great harp with innumerable strings, swept by the fingers

of inspiration, trembles with it. So far back as the fourth chapter of Genesis you find the first organist and harper—Jubal. So far back as the thirty-first chapter of Genesis you find the first choir. All up and down the Bible you find sacred music—at weddings, at inaugurations, at the treading of the wine-press. The Hebrews understood how to make musical signs above the musical text. When the Jews came from their distant homes to the great festivals at Jerusalem they brought harp and timbrel and trumpet, and poured along the great Judæan highways a river of harmony, until in and around the temple the wealth of a nation's song and gladness had accumulated. All through the ages there has been great attention paid to sacred music. Ambrosius, Augustine, Gregory the Great, Charlemagne, gave it their mighty influence, and in our day the best musical genius is throwing itself on the altars of God. Handel, and Mozart, and Bach, and Durante, and Wolf, and scores of other men and women have given the best part of their genius to Church music. A truth in words is not half so mighty as a truth in song. Luther's sermons have been forgotten, but the "Judgment Hymn" he composed is resounding yet all through Christendom. III. While there may be great varieties of opinion in regard to music, it seems to me that the GENERAL SPIRIT OF THE WORD OF GOD INDICATES WHAT OUGHT TO BE THE GREAT CHARACTERISTICS. 1. A prominent characteristic ought to be adaptiveness. Music that may be appropriate for a concert-hall or the opera-house or the drawing-room may be shocking in church. Glees, madrigals, ballads may be as innocent as psalms in their places. There is no reason why music should always be religious music. So I am in favour of concert-halls as well as churches. But church music has only one design, and that is devotion, and that which comes with the toss, the song, and the display of an opera-house is a hindrance to the worship. From such performances we go away saying, "What splendid execution! Did you ever hear such a soprano? Which of those solos did you like the better?" When, if we had been rightly wrought upon, we would have gone away saying, "Oh! how my soul was lifted up in the presence of God while they were singing the first hymn; I never had such rapturous views of Jesus Christ as my Saviour as when they were singing that last doxology." There is an everlasting distinction between music as an art and music as a help to devotion. Though a Schumann composed it, though a Mozart played it, though a Sontag sang it, away with it if it does not make the heart better and honour Christ. 2. Correctness ought to be a characteristic of church music. God loves harmony, and we ought to love it. There is no devotion in a howl or yelp. 3. Another characteristic must be spirit and life. Music ought to rush from the audience like the water from a rock—clear, bright, sparkling. If all the other part of the church service is dull, do not have the music dull. With so many thrilling things to sing about, away with all drawing and stupidity. Let our song be like an acclamation of victory. You have a right to sing. Do not surrender your prerogative. If, in the performance of your duty, or the attempt at it, you should lose your place in the musical scale and be on C below when you ought to be on C above, or you should come in half a bar behind, we will excuse you. Still, it is better to do as Paul says, and sing "with the spirit, and the understanding also." 4. Again, I remark, church music must be congregational. This opportunity must be brought down within the range of the whole audience. A song that the worshippers cannot sing is of no more use to them than a sermon in Choctaw. Let us wake up to this duty. Let us sing alone, sing in our families, sing in our schools, sing in our churches. I never shall forget hearing a Frenchman singing the "Marseillaise Hymn" on the Champs Elysées, Paris, just before the battle of Sedan. I never saw such enthusiasm before or since. As he sang that national air, oh! how the Frenchmen shouted. Have you ever in an English assemblage heard a band play "God Save the Queen"? If you have, you know something about the enthusiasm of a national air. Now, I tell you that these songs we sing Sabbath by Sabbath are the national airs of Jesus Christ and of the kingdom of heaven, and if you do not learn to sing them here, how do you ever expect to sing the song of Moses and the Lamb? (*T. De Witt Talmage.*)

Ver. 72. **And that which the rest of the people gave.**—*The rest of the people gave*:—It is a great misfortune when any Christian effort is supported by the contributions of the few and not of the many. All should be encouraged to contribute so far as they are able. Workers, too, should, as their means admit of, subscribe towards the expenses of work. "What people pay for they will pray for, and what they pray for they will pay for." (*W. P. Lockhart.*)

CHAPTER VIII.

VERS. 1-12. **And all the people gathered themselves together as one man into the street.**—*The instructor in the law* :—God has evermore blessed His own Word as the chosen instrument of all revival and progress in His Church. It was in this faith of the power of Bible truth in the hand of the Holy Spirit that Nehemiah here sought to instruct the remnant of Judah in the Divine law. His past labours for the good of Jerusalem had chiefly tended to inspire his brethren with patriotic love, and to surround the holy city with a material defence. But his affection for Zion had, from the beginning, higher aims than these; and henceforth his endeavours move in a loftier sphere. He rises now above the work of setting dead stones into a strong wall around the city of God, and labours to place holy affections in the hearts of its people, that they may be adorned with the beauties of the Lord's own Israel. To secure these great ends, the first and highest means he employs is the diffusion of the knowledge of the Holy Scriptures. He perceived, no doubt, that many of the children of Judah needed much this instruction in the law of the Lord. They had been long scattered abroad in strange lands, far away from temple privileges, and were on this account sadly defective in their knowledge of the Divine Word. 1. **THE ASSEMBLY OF ISRAEL CONVENED.** The persons who presided in this assembly deserve our notice. When God raises up a great man to perform an important work He usually associates another with him of a kindred spirit, who, though endowed with different gifts, is a helper in the good cause. The defects of the one are thus counterbalanced by the graces of the other, and religion is promoted by their mutual co-operation. In the redemption of Israel from the house of bondage Moses and Aaron were united in the common enterprise. And so, in this revival of Judah, Nehemiah and Ezra are joined together; and, through means of the energy of the man of action, coupled with the influence of the man of sacred study, God blesses Zion with His quickening and restoring grace. It is an honour to the youthful Nehemiah that, though invested with ruling power in the holy city, he gives place to the ministers of the sanctuary in their proper work of teaching. These two servants of God, presiding in this great congregation of Israel, differed much from each other in age, in office, in rank, in character; but they were one in heart, and they join here in complete harmony of action for the revival of their beloved Zion. God in nature makes full provision for diversity of elements and forces co-operating together for a common result. And God in the Church also provides for different men looking on revealed truth with free thought and honest heart, where the shades of belief may vary like the colours of the rainbow, but all blend under the power of love, into a pure white ray as from the parent orb. The time at which this assembly was held also merits our consideration. "They gathered themselves together on the first day of the seventh month" (vers. 1, 2). This was emphatically the sacred month of the Jewish year, during which the most touching and impressive ceremonies of their law were observed. 1. It was a full assembly. "All the people gathered themselves together as one man." They were all there, and they were there all of one heart. In times of spiritual indifference and decay the ways of Zion mourn because few come to her solemn feasts. The Great Physician is present to heal them, but they, the dying patients, are not there to be made whole. 2. It was an earnest assembly. "They spake unto Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses, which the Lord had commanded to Israel." 3. It was an attentive assembly. "Ezra the priest brought the law before the congregation, and read therein from the morning until mid-day, before the men and the women; and the ears of all the people were attentive unto the book of the law." This deep attention to His truth is demanded as an act of reverence to God who speaks it. It is reckoned an affront for any one to turn his back on an earthly sovereign or converse with others while the king is addressing words of importance to all in his presence. Besides, men require to give earnest heed to the Word of life in order to derive saving benefit from it! Alas! many give attendance on the Word who do not give attention to it. Gospel truth is a means of persuasion to repentance, but if attention to the Word of conviction is suffered to waver the blessing will in all likelihood be lost. It is difficult with an arrow, however well aimed, to strike a bird on the wing that rapidly changes its flight in the air; and so it is not easy to fix the arrow of conviction in the heart that flits meanwhile from thought to thought, inattentive to the Word. 4. It was a devout assembly. "Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God.

And all the people answered, Amen, Amen, with lifting up their hands; and they bowed their heads, and worshipped the Lord with their faces to the ground." This devout frame of mind is essential to full spiritual profit in Divine worship for hearing the truth. II. THE DIVINE KNOWLEDGE CONVEYED. Ezra was chief among the teachers of Israel in this great assembly, and his eminent gifts fitted him for this position. He is elsewhere distinguished as "a ready scribe in the law of Moses"; he possessed a true love for it, an intimate acquaintance with it, and a profound knowledge of it. "For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments." 1. The instruction here embraced an exposition of the law. "So they read in the book of the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading." 2. The instruction comprised exhortation to present duty. "By the law is the knowledge of sin." "For all the people wept when they heard the words of the law." These, with them, were tears both of alarm and compunction—of apprehension for the consequences of their sin and godly sorrow on account of it. It was an expression of deep anxiety, in view of their spiritual danger, as revealed in God's Word. Some men insinuate that all such agitation about the state of the soul is questionable, and not consistent with rational piety. Shall it be deemed reasonable that tears may freely flow on account of temporal bereavements and losses and no sorrow be expressed in fear of everlasting ruin? Observe, then, how nobly Nehemiah here appears to give direction and counsel to his people, mourning all of them for their iniquity: "This day is holy unto the Lord your God; mourn not, nor weep." It is not implied that their sorrow was altogether wrong or without foundation, but it was out of time and defective in its views of the Divine mercy. It might not take too lowly a view of their own sinfulness, but it was wanting in a believing apprehension of the loving-kindness of the Lord, their covenant God. This is useful caution for awakened ones, to make sure that they exercise the full look of faith upward to grace as well as downward to guilt. This counsel to Judah not to weep prepares the way, and then follows this threefold call for relieving their sorrows: "Go your way, eat the fat and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared; for this day is holy unto our Lord; neither be ye sorry: for the joy of the Lord is your strength." This is first a call to assuage their griefs in social enjoyment of the gifts of Providence. It is not best always to seek to cure sorrow by reasoning against it; it is often more effectual to meet it with a counteracting joy; and this is the course here followed by this "son of consolation." This is a call, moreover, to relieve sorrow by the exercise of benevolence to poor brethren. "Send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared." To inherit the full blessing of life it is not enough to partake of the comforts of Providence; there requires to be joined with this a compassionate charity to the needy and the destitute. This compassion of the needy sanctifies all the enjoyments of life. It possesses a wonderful power of removing the load of sorrow from the giver's heart and of chasing the cloud of sadness from his brow. (*W. Ritchie.*) *The open-air meeting*:—We see here— I. THAT THE WORD OF GOD IS THE GREAT MEANS FOR THE INSTRUCTION OF HIS PEOPLE. II. THAT THE WORD OF GOD IS NOT ONLY TO BE READ, BUT UNDERSTOOD. III. THAT IT MUST BE READ WITH PRAYER. IV. THAT THIS WORD WILL OFTEN REBUEE US AND LEAD US TO MOURN AFTER A GODLY SORT. V. THAT IT WILL ALSO ENCOURAGE US, AND IN THE END BRING US MUCH JOY AND GREAT GLADNESS. VI. THAT THE SOURCE OF JOY AND THE SECRET OF STRENGTH IS DIVINE. (*W. P. Lockhart.*) **And Ezra the priest brought the law before the congregation.**—*Hearty appreciation of God's Word*.—1. The people of Jerusalem, like the disciples at Pentecost, were "of one accord, in one place." Their hearts were inclined to God's testimonies. 2. The standing position is one of respect. Men stand before their superiors. Moses before Pharaoh, Daniel before Nebuchadnezzar. 3. The messages of a king are entitled to respect. I once witnessed the reception of a royal message by the Parliament of Prussia. As the messenger entered the hall and the royal seal was broken "all the people stood up." Officers, members, and visitors by one impulse rose to hear the writing of their king. A like impulse moved the people before whom Ezra brought the law. 4. A proper appreciation of God's Word is necessary to spiritual success. 5. Respect for God's Word involves respect for His day. It is interesting, in this age of Sabbath desecration, to notice that in the revival of Jewish institutions the observance of the fourth commandment was enforced both among Jews and unbelievers. 6. Respect for God's Word also involves respect for His worship (vers. 14-16). Worship will be a delight. 7. Re-

ligion is not only joyous, but unselfish. 8. Respect for God's Word involves respect for all His commandments. 9. A proper appreciation of the Bible is possible only as its Divine authorship and object are recognised. 10. The object of the Bible is to reveal God and the duty He requires of men. 11. How are we to show our appreciation of the Bible? Our duty is to receive and use it. The whole mind and soul must lay hold of and appropriate its truths. It must be esteemed above all books, and its decisions recognised as final. A wealthy gentleman, having built him a library, placed in it, on a pedestal high above all the shelves, a copy of the Bible. We should do for the sacred volume what he signified by this act. We should give it also a place in our affections—such a place as it had in the heart of the Scotch girl, who, when driven from her burning home, cared first for her copy of the Scriptures. 12. We do appreciate the Bible. We read it at family prayers, and in our closets, and learn verses, and hear it on Sabbath from the pulpit. I have heard that when, in a long war, the city of Haarlem had been desolated by fire and sword, the news of peace was a long letter, which a feeble old man read from a window. His voice could scarcely be heard, yet the people gave profound attention. When the Bible is read men should listen as those burghers listened. 13. The best acceptance of such news is an acceptance of the relief it brings. So the best appreciation of the Bible is an acceptance of its salvation in Christ. 14. Respect for God's Word places it above all creeds and criticism. 15. Respect for God's Word also demands that it be handled reverently. This condemns all trifling with God's truth. All puns, parodies, and riddles based upon mis-quotation of the Scriptures are hereby condemned. (F. C. Monfort, D.D.) *Reading the law:—*

I. A NEGLECTED DIVINE ORDINANCE MAY BE RESTORED AS A CHANNEL OF DIVINE GRACE. Is there not a suggestion in this incident of how we may often return to methods of service, to means of grace that have been passed by, as useful for the present time? Certain truths have been allowed to remain in the background for a time which may be wisely pressed at another. Currents never carry all that floats on their surface to the sea. Much is left on the banks of the channel. So currents of thought in any age or time do not carry forward all that is valuable. There are cargoes of flotsam and jetsam that will reward the wreckers along the shore. II. RELIGIOUS QUICKENING MAY RESULT FROM MORAL REFORMS AND WISE MEASURES OF CIVIC RULERS. III. ALL DIVINE ORDINANCES, AS WELL AS PROVIDENTIAL EXPERIENCES, ARE CHANNELS FOR THE JOY OF THE LORD. (*Monday Club Sermons.*)

*Reading the law:—*Concerning "the book, in the law of God," and the giving of the sense to the people, we remark in explanation—I. THE ACTUAL SPEECH IN WHICH THE GOSPEL WAS FIRST UTTERED BY JESUS AND PROCLAIMED BY THE APOSTLES AMONG THE ISRAELITES IS HERE, PROBABLY FOR THE FIRST TIME, PUBLICLY PUT TO SACRED USE. The old Hebrew language in which the law was written had become, when the exile was over, the tongue of the learned. It was unknown to the common people, as that of Spencer and Chaucer is unknown to us. Interpreters were necessary. Ezra knew the need, and provided for it. The Levites gave the sense and caused the people to understand the reading. II. IN THIS EVENT WE BEHOLD THE RISE OF THE SYNAGOGUE AND OF SYSTEMATIC BIBLE STUDY. From the time of Ezra the temple gradually retired into the background, and the synagogue came into prominence. The pulpit and sermons were institutions. The soul was nurtured by Bible study. Less and less did the priests wield power in the regions beyond Jerusalem, and more and more did the congregations or synagogues become like our best modern prayer-meetings, where speech and devotional service are free. When Christianity spread over the world the synagogue was its cradle. Everywhere the apostles found first welcome here and the place and privilege of preaching Christ. In the substitution of prayer for sacrifice, in the triumph of moral over mechanical functions of worship, we see a tremendous advance, and read for our times an inspiring lesson. (W. Elliot Griffiths.) *The reading of the law:—*In this scene are suggested—I. SOME SOURCES OF POWER IN PREACHING. 1. The simple proclamation of the law of God. 2. The statement of God's work in human history. 2. The earnest utterance of intelligent faith. II. THE CONDITIONS FOR PROFITABLY HEARING THE WORD OF GOD. 1. An aroused interest. 2. A prayerful spirit. 3. Listening with the resolve to obey. III. PRACTICAL LESSONS. 1. Love for the law makes noble men. 2. Honouring the law insures the prosperity of the Church. (*Monday Club Sermons.*) *Ezra expounding the law:—*I. A LARGE GATHERING. There are two important advantages connected with a numerous congregation over one that is thinly attended. 1. It gives an opportunity for more extensive usefulness. We grant that there is not a little to encourage even

those whose hearers are few, "For where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them." "A sportsman," says Jay, "has fired into a flight of birds and not killed one, and he has killed one when he had only one to aim at." That may be true; but on the other hand, if two anglers went forth with rod and line to spend a day in fishing, it would be naturally expected that the largest number would be caught by him who had secured a pond where fish were abundant, rather than by the other, who had toiled from morning till night in a place where they were scarce. 2. Large congregations possess a peculiar power of stimulating those who have to address them. Probably the man has never yet lived who could long be an orator before a small assembly. Even Cicero could not deliver his famous oration in behalf of the poet Archias, though addressed to a single man, without having all that was learned and great in Rome to listen to him. Those who love the means of grace should do all they can to induce their friends and neighbours to attend. II. AN OPEN-AIR GATHERING. III. A PROTRACTED GATHERING. IV. AN ATTENTIVE GATHERING. V. A DEVOUT, EARNEST, AND REVERENTIAL GATHERING. To stand in awe of God's holy Word, whenever it is read and expounded in our hearing, indicates a right state of mind; and those who are thus influenced are regarded by God with approval and delight (Isa. lxvi. 2). VI. AN INTELLIGENT AND WELL-INSTRUCTED GATHERING. (*Expository Outlines.*) *The Scriptures related to revivals of religion*:—Every great revival of religion has had its beginning in this hunger for the Word, and has been permanent and widespread exactly in proportion as it has been rooted in the Scriptures. There is Wickliffe, frightened like the rest of the nation by the plague that had swept from Asia to Europe, and now had burst upon England, sounding in the ears of men like the trump of the judgment day. Lying in his cell poring over the pages of an old Latin Bible, he finds the truth that fills his soul with the sweetness of God's peace and the music of heaven. At once he began to translate passages of the blessed book into English, and sent them forth by his "poor priests," as they were called, to be read as best they might amongst the peasants of England; and so came the dawning of the day of God upon our land. Thus, too, was it that the later reformation had its birth. Erasmus had sent to Cambridge his new translation of the Greek Testament; and a copy of it comes into the hands of "Little Bilney," who tells us how that on the first reading of it he chanced on these words, "It is a faithful saying, and worthy of all men to be embraced, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief." "These words," says he, "by God's inward working did so lift up my poor bruised spirit, that the very bones within me leapt for joy and gladness." Then forthwith, he, unable to keep the sweet secret to himself, goes to confess his soul to Father Latimer, and pours out the story of his great discovery, how that being justified by faith he has peace with God through the Lord Jesus Christ; and thus Latimer was led into the light, and became the great preacher of the English Reformation. And Luther, more slowly, but no less surely, is led by the study of the Word of God to the great truth which comes back again to him, as from the lips of God, whilst crawling up the steps of the sacred stairs in Rome, "The just shall live by faith." It was two hundred years later that a little meeting was being held in Aldersgate Street, London, where one was reading Luther's Preface to the Romans; and amongst the company was one who, as he listens, tells us that he felt his heart strangely warned: "I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation," says he, "and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine." So was it that John Wesley went forth to claim the whole world for his parish, and uplift the nation by the Word of truth, the gospel of our salvation. (*Sunday School.*) *Improper hearing of the Scriptures*:—Suppose a company of people coming, not to an elbow, but to a working goldsmith's shop; one buys a chain, another a diamond ring; this buys a jewel, that a rich piece of plate; and that there should be one amongst them so self-conceited, should take up a coal from off the floor, and handle it so long, till he had all besmeared his fingers, refusing what the shop afforded, so as he might but have that coal along with him. Were not this great absurdity? Yet such and more is the condition of those captious hearers of God's Word, that while others carry away good and wholesome doctrine, precious promises, such as is food for their souls, they come only to carp and catch at their minister, that so they may more easily traduce him, and brand him with the black coal of infamy and disgrace. (*J. Spencer.*) *All the Bible wanted*:—A little blind girl in Cairo, who had read a copy of the Psalms in Arabic, by the aid of Dr. Moon's "Alphabet for the Blind," sent a message by a gentleman who was coming to

England, "Please tell Dr. Moon, when you see him, I am so hungry, I want all the Bible." (*Great Thoughts.*) *Familiarity with the Bible; its danger*:—There were no listless or indifferent ones among them. They had been so long without the Word of God that their appetites were whetted. We are so familiar with it that possibly we are not as sensitive to its Divineness as we should be. Our familiarity induces a measure of indifference. The settlers of Arizona walked over their fields for years without knowing that untold treasures of precious ore lay just below the surface. Thus we treat our Bibles as we treat other books; but other books are mere pasture-land, while this is a goldfield. (*D. J. Burrell, D.D.*) **And the ears of all the people were attentive unto the book of the law.**—*Constant attention*:—One of Mr. Browning's particular pleasures was to lie beside a hedge, or deep in meadow grasses, or under a tree, and there to give himself up so absolutely to the life of the moment that even the shy birds would alight close by, and sometimes venturesomely poise themselves upon his body. I have heard him say that his faculty of observation would not have appeared despicable to an Iroquois Indian. He saw everything—the bird on the wing, the snail dragging its shell up the woodbine, the bee adding to his golden treasure, the green fly darting hither and thither like an animated seedling, the spider weaving her gossamer from twig to twig, the woodpecker scrutinising the lichen on the gnarled oak, the passage of the wind across the grass, the motions and shadows of the clouds. And his own words are "Keep but ever looking, whether with the body's eye or the mind's, and you will soon find something to look on!" (*William Sharp.*) *Attention and retention of Divine truth*:—It is related that Gotthold had for some purpose taken from a cupboard a phial of rose-water, and, after using it, inconsiderately left it unstopped. Observing it some time after, he found that all the strength and sweetness of the perfume had evaporated. Here, thought he, is a striking emblem of a heart fond of the world and open to the impression of outward objects. What good does it do to take such a heart to the house of God, and there fill it with the precious essence of the roses of paradise, which are the truths of Scripture? What good to kindle in a glow of devotion, if we afterward neglect to close the outlet—that is, keeping the Word in an honest and good heart? (*Luke viii. 15.*) How vain to hear much, but to retain little, and practise less! How vain to experience within us sacred and holy emotions, unless we are afterward careful to close the heart by careful and diligent reflection and prayer, and so keep it unspotted from the world! Neglect this duty, and the whole strength and spirit of devotion evaporates and leaves only a lifeless froth behind. (*Christian Age.*) **And Ezra the scribe stood upon a pulpit of wood.**—*The oldest pulpit*:—We offer three remarks upon this old pulpit. I. IT WAS OCCUPIED BY DULY QUALIFIED MEN. Ezra the priest and scribe, with thirteen other Levites, occupied this pulpit. They were the recognised teachers of Israel. Who is the duly qualified preacher of the truth? The man who is superior to the people in mental capability, spiritual intelligence, and practical godliness, having the power to convey his thoughts acceptably, and with propriety and force. II. THIS OLD PULPIT WAS ATTENDED BY AN EXEMPLARY CONGREGATION. 1. It was a congregation disposed to hear. 2. It was a congregation competent to understand. 3. It was a congregation deeply interested in the discourse. 4. It was a congregation inspired with religious reverence. III. THIS OLD PULPIT ACCOMPLISHED THE GRAND END OF PREACHING. 1. It imparted spiritual instruction. 2. It made a deep religious impression. 3. It stimulated a practical godliness. (*Homilist.*)

Ver. 6. And all the people answered, Amen, Amen.—"Amen" in public worship:—The subject is: That it is a lawful and laudable practice for people, in the conclusion of public prayer or praising God, to pronounce an amen. I. I WILL EXPLAIN WHAT IS MEANT BY "AMEN." 1. There is an amen substantive. And that is God Himself (*Rev. iii. 14.*) 2. There is an amen affirmative—a phrase used in the beginning of any momentous truth, as an asseveration (*Matt. xvi. 28; Luke ix. 27.*) 3. There is an optative amen—"Let it be so" (*Jer. xxviii. 6; 1 Kings i. 36; Num. v. 22; Deut. xxvii. 15-26.*) II. SHOW WHAT WARRANT THERE IS FOR THE PRACTICE. 1. Assent to repetitions is essential unto prayer, and it is not signified publicly but by our amen. 2. We have the practice of the Old and New Testament believers for our example. Moses in Numbers and Deuteronomy; David (*Psa. li. 13, cvi. 48*); Jeremiah (*Jer. xi. 5*); Paul (*1 Cor. xiv. 16*); Eph. iii. 21; Christ Himself (*Matt. vi. 9-13; Rev. v. 14, vii. 11, 12, xix. 1-6, xxii. 20.*) 3. Amen after prayer and praise is the man's consent, judgment, and approbation of what is offered unto God. 4. This vocal amen is, as it were, the epitome and sum of all our petitions

and praises to God. It is the centre which all those lines are drawn towards. It is all the duty virtually reduced to one word and point. It is the repeating and echoing, or redoubling of all over again. As the mercury behind the glass, it reverberates the lively image of all preceding devotion. It is the drawing the arrow to the pile by a strong ejaculation in Bellarmine's phrase, "Whereby the whole heart is darted up to God." It is a "stirring up of ourselves to take hold of God" (Isa. lxi. 7). It is taking aim, and "directing our prayer to Him and looking up" (Psa. v. 3), as if they would hand up God's praises to Him, and stand ready to receive His mercies with open hands and mouths. It winds up all together in one bundle. 5. Amen, rightly pronounced, is an intensive act of faith, or it involves a strong faith. (1) That God is firm and immutably true in Himself and His Word. (2) That we will not only believe His truth, but trust to His veracity and build upon it (Jer. xi. 5). The Jews say "amen" hath three kernels; the one is of an oath, the second of faith, the third of confidence. 6. The unanimous pronouncement of amen is an assurance that God will accept our praises and answer our prayers (Matt. xviii. 19; Mark xi. 23). 7. This unanimous amen of faith strikes terror in the enemies of the Church, whether devils or men. When the Romans had conquered Philip and the Grecians, and Flaminus caused peace to be proclaimed to the Grecians, "there was such a shout," says Plutarch, "that the very crows and other birds fell down to the ground." Our amens must not drop like a cold bullet of lead out of the mouth of a musket, bowing to the ground; but they must be fired by preparations of the heart and warm affections, they must be discharged and shot off with the utmost vehemency of the soul and fervency of the spirit. When God's people can unite in one voice, God gives His voice with them and for them. (*Thomas Woodcock A.M.*) Amen:—St. Jerome tells us it was the custom in his days to close up every prayer with such a unanimous consent that their amen rang and echoed in the church, and sounded like the fall of waters or the noise of thunder. The Chinese have no word which will compare with our English word amen. They say instead: "Sin yenen ching sing"—"The heart wishes exactly so."

Ver. 8. So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense.—*The Bible ought to be intelligently understood*:—It is to be feared that nowadays there are some Christians who, although they almost worship the Bible, care little for an intelligent understanding of its contents. The sacred Scriptures are useful to us in proportion as they help us to worship God more reverently, intelligently, and spiritually; and therefore we truly honour them by diligently seeking to understand their real sense, and to profit by their meaning. (*T. Campbell Finlayson.*) *The mission of the pulpit*:—The pulpit of Ezra was the place for the unfolding of the law of God. It was the place of a new religious departure. Formerly the temple had filled the whole religious horizon of the Jew. It was the Alpha and Omega of his faith. The temple was a place for sacrifice, not instruction. It was the home and sphere not of the scribe or prophet, but of the priest. Its chief object was not a pulpit or a desk, but an altar. In it the law was not unfolded, but the victim slain. But before us we have the introduction of a new element into the religious realm. The altar falls into the background, the pulpit comes to the front. The priest is shadowed by the scribe. It is the beginning of an order of things which has quietly gone forward ever since. The modern pulpit is connected by subtle, mental, and spiritual associations with that of Ezra. Our worship of instruction is the gradual outgrowth of that begun by this scribe of old. This desk is consecrated to a like purpose. It is the place where the law of God may be read and expounded; not of course within the narrow limits imposed upon Ezra. Before him lay only the scroll of the law. It was but the beginning of the sacred oracles. The hazy lamp of the olden time which Ezra held has grown clear and clearer until its light is as the sun in the perfect day. But it is still a law, not in the sense that it is one long list of commandments, but in the far higher sense—that it is the unfolding of the eternal mind to men. God's thoughts ought to be man's law. There is a law higher than that of commandment. Commandment can only work in the lowest realm. I can bid my child to do or leave undone certain things, but higher than these are my thoughts of what he might be and my longings for what he should be. I can't put these into commandments, or into law. They are too high for that. And yet they ought to be my child's highest law, moving him far more strongly than my mere commands. Here we have "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus." The very centre of God's purpose for us—His highest commandment. Such is our law. How has it to be treated? 1. It is the duty of the pulpit

to give the sense of Scripture. It is no part of that duty to make nonsense of it, to wrest it, to handle it deceitfully. This has too often been done. Even by learned men—e.g., Augustine insisted that the Psalms ascribed in their titles to Korah are descriptions of the Passion, and that the sons of Korah are Christians because Korah in Hebrew and Calvary in Latin may be translated “baldhead,” and because Elisha was derided under that name. Gregory the Great saw the twelve apostles, and therefore the clergy in the seven sons of Job, and the lay worshippers of the Trinity in his three daughters. Scripture is not to be played with in that style. “We must give the sense.” 2. Not only was the sense given, but it was given in the language of the people, their common, every-day speech. It is our duty to set forth God’s law in language that will be intelligible to the people. It is possible to put it into English and yet be unintelligible. If the law be made known in the technical language of theology, or even of literature, it may utterly fail of its purpose. The law of God may be spoken in speech understood of the people, and yet not adapted to their needs. It must be spoken not only in the language of our time, but suited to its present wants. In his *Aids to Reflection*, S. T. Coleridge says “that there is one sure way of giving freshness and importance to the most commonplace maxims, that of reflecting on them in direct reference to our own state and conduct, to our own past and future being.” When you think of those whose high functions are discharged in the pulpit there is no prayer more necessary to be offered than this, that they may be “men having understanding of the times to know what Israel ought to do.” 3. It may be still further worthy of remark that Ezra and his disciples spoke to the people the law of God. Printed will never take the place of spoken words. Christ said to the disciples, “Go and preach the gospel to every creature.” The word “preach” means to make known as a herald. The herald’s voice is more powerful than a printed proclamation. The voice carries feeling better than the printed page. Life expresses itself more fully through the voice than by paper or book. The world has caught its highest inspiration through spoken words. Great changes, political, social, moral, religious, have been brought about by the speech of mighty men. The Corn Laws would never have been repealed by books on the subject. Slavery would never have been abolished by anti-slavery literature. (*W. Garrett Horder.*)

Vers. 9, 10. This day is holy unto the Lord your God; mourn not, nor weep.—*True penitence and spasmodic emotion:*—Observe the profound wisdom of Nehemiah’s injunction. The distress of the people was not unnatural; neither was it excessive. It might, however, through indulgence of it, have become excessive and unreal. The surest test by which to distinguish between true penitence and spasmodic emotion is to set a man about the common duties of life. If, amid the distractions of these things, he loses his contrition, it is evident that he never was earnestly contrite; that his was mere excited sensibility and not inward feeling. And even a true emotion requires to be directed into wholesome channels. There was hard work for these Jews to do; the whole task of religious reformation lay before them. Their penitence needed to be husbanded for future motive, not wasted in floods of tears and the ecstasy of a common weeping. It may seem strange to us that a cold external commandment should have been the consideration by which they were bidden to self-restraint. But when people have lost their self-control it is only by an external influence that they can be recovered. If you have to do with hysterical persons, it is not along the line of their feeling you restore them, but by definitely settling yourself against it; not by sympathising with their emotion and words of tenderness, but by the quick, sharp rebuke, “Enough of this; you must not give way.” You recover the widowed mother to composure by bidding her, not indeed forget her dead husband, but remember her living children. We always draw back stricken mourners to hope and usefulness by reminding them of imperative and healing duty. (*A. Mackennal.*) **Go your way, eat the fat . . . send portions . . . for whom nothing is prepared.—***Christian sympathy:*—I. THE CHARACTERS SPECIFIED IN THE TEXT. They are said to be those “for whom nothing is prepared.” The Scriptures, when speaking of man’s condition by nature and practice, in the sight of God, very pointedly state the matter. The language of the text speaks of our poverty, destitution, starvation, and ruin. II. THE “PORTIONS”—these blessings. Behold the grace and mercy of God! If God meted out to us mere justice, where should we be? and if God left us in our condemnation and ruin, where should we go? If God neglected us, in what condition should we be? Was God under any obligation to us? And yet we are in mercy spared, and instead of vengeance, behold

our text speaks of "blessings." And these are not only worthy of God to give, but blessings suitable to us. III. THE COMMAND: "Send." (*H. Allen, M.A.*) For the joy of the Lord is your strength.—*The joy of a Christian*:—Let us bear in mind three things—I. A BRIGHT AND HAPPY WALK IS ONE OF THE GREATEST ORNAMENTS OF OUR CHRISTIAN PROFESSION. II. INDULGENCE OF SIN, CARELESSNESS OF WALK, INCONSISTENCY OF CONVERSATION, WILL SURELY BRING A CLOUD OVER THE CHRISTIAN'S JOY. III. IN CHRIST ALONE MUST WE PLACE ALL OUR HOPE AND CONFIDENCE. (*J. N. Randall.*) *Pure joy an inspiration*:—It refreshes and exhilarates the whole nature. It helps to fortify the soul against the assaults of the devil. See how the joy of a human affection will often lift a young man right out of the range of low, sensual temptations, and fire his soul with noble and worthy ambitions. Can we wonder then, that it should be true of the joy which springs from the revelation of God's protection and favour? (*T. Campbell Finlayson.*) *Spiritual joy*:—I. BELIEVERS IN THE LORD JESUS CHRIST ARE CALLED UPON TO REJOICE. Would that this were more remembered by us, and experienced by us, and gloried in! 1. None but the believer ought to rejoice. [I do not deny that there is such a thing as natural joy in natural objects. There is such a thing as natural joy oftentimes stirred up on spiritual subjects. It is like the arrow that passes through the air; it is like the early frost—the sun arises and it is gone. Oh! no one can rejoice but the believer in the Lord Jesus Christ; the worldly man does not know what true joy is. You cannot explain it to him; he cannot receive it; he calls it enthusiasm, fancy, and imagination. A Christless man, a graceless man, a prayerless man, a thoughtless man, a godless man, a hopeless man, how can I expect him to rejoice. In this one thing thou canst rejoice: thou canst rejoice that the door of mercy is not closed. For their own sakes, the Lord will have His people to rejoice. He loves them; and therefore He commands them to be happy. For the sake of others, He would have them to rejoice. He would have them bring the grapes, to show the fruit of the land. And not only so, but for His own great name's sake, for His glory's sake, He would have His people rejoice. As He is Himself infinitely happy in Himself, He would have His people reflect Himself. II. AS THIS JOY IS NOT A NATURAL JOY IN NATURAL OBJECTS, SO IT IS NOT A NATURAL JOY IN SPIRITUAL OBJECTS, BUT IT IS "THE JOY OF THE LORD." 1. It is pre-eminently and peculiarly the joy of which the Holy Ghost is the author. Nature gives it not; nature maintains it not. It is the fruit of the Holy Ghost: "the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace." 2. But observe, it is not only the joy of the Lord, but it is joy in the Lord. That which made the eunuch's heart rejoice was Jesus. And if you and I see Him with the eye of faith at this moment, we shall rejoice and be glad too. Oh! there is everything in Jesus to make the soul to rejoice. What is there not in His work, to make the soul to rejoice? The completeness of His atonement. Is there not enough cause in the matchless, majestic, glorious righteousness to make the soul rejoice? III. THAT THIS "JOY OF THE LORD" IS NOT FOR OUR OWN ENJOYMENT MERELY, NOR FOR OUR SELF-GRATIFICATION, BUT TO STRENGTHEN US. There are two passages of Scripture, to which I would direct your attention here. In the first place, remark in the first of the Epistle to the Philippians, the twenty-fifth verse—"And having this confidence, I know that I shall abide and continue with you all for your furtherance and joy of faith." See how "furtherance" stands connected with "joy of faith"; joy springing from faith, and that joy furthering, advancing, leading onwards and forwards, in the Divine life. Observe too in the third of the Epistle to the Hebrews, the sixth verse, there is that same rejoicing, "the rejoicing of hope," and see how it stands connected with the confidence of hope: "if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end." We have some precious instances in the Word of God, to show the strengthening power of joy. Observe one in the thirtieth of the first of Samuel. David was, as you and I often are, "greatly distressed," "for the people spake of stoning him, because the soul of all the people was grieved, every man for his sons, and for his daughters; but"—ah! that "but," it is a volume, it is a folio—"but David encouraged himself in the Lord his God." Observe how that strengthened him. Do you ask, What is that which strengthens for service? It is "the joy of the Lord." Take the instance of the prophet Isaiah. Now observe—"Also I heard the voice of the Lord saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me." "Then" said I. "The joy of the Lord was his strength": "whithersoever Thou wouldst send me I go." And now there are some few remarks I would make by way of conclusion. 1. In the first place, I would say, that the believer is placed by his covenant God and Father in that position that he requires day by day

fresh accession of strength. 2. Then the question now arises, How comes it to pass that there is so much feebleness amongst many of the real children of God if the "joy of the Lord" is our strength? May we not at once answer, Because they do so little enjoy "the joy of the Lord"? 3. Remember that this is a joy which the Holy Ghost alone can give; ask it, then, of Him; wait on Him for it; use every means for it. (*J. H. Evans.*) *Joy of the Lord*:—There is a joy that enervates one's powers. The joy of the miser, the joy of the worldling, the joy of all carnal gratification. The strength of a good man is "the joy of the Lord." Observe—I. THE NATURE OF RELIGIOUS JOY. 1. It is pure. 2. It is elevating. 3. It is solid. 4. It is durable. 5. It is heavenly. 6. It is Divine. II. THE CONDITIONS OF RELIGIOUS JOY. (*Homiletic Review.*) *Religious joy*:—I. THE JOY HERE SPOKEN OF IS SAID TO BE "OF THE LORD," AND IT IS SO IN A TWOFOLD SENSE. 1. God imparts it—it is one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit (Gal. v. 22; Rom. xiv. 17). 2. God Himself shares in it (Isa. lxxv. 19; Jer. xlii. 11, xxxiii. 9; Zeph. iii. 17). II. THE JOY OF THE LORD IS SAID TO BE A STRENGTH; AND IT IS SO. 1. Because it is of God. 2. Because, as such, it enables us to bear up against the ills and disappointments of life (Psa. iv. 7). Witness what it did for David, Daniel, Paul, and Silas. 3. Because, when earthly joys fail, the "joy of the Lord" remains ("your joy no man taketh from you"); and on the very ruins of the former the latter oftentimes finds the soil most fitted to its growth. III. TO WHOM THE "JOY OF THE LORD" IS GIVEN. It is imparted to those only—1. Who are in union and communion with Jesus Christ; this is its true source. 2. Who ask for it by earnest prayer. "Ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full" (John xvi. 24). 3. Who love God, and keep His commandments (Psa. xix. 8). IV. FOR WHAT PURPOSE IT IS GIVEN. It is imparted—1. To be as "oil to the wheels of our devotion." Joys are our wings, sorrows are our spurs. 2. To be an inward testimony to ourselves that we have the smile of God's approval coming down upon our efforts to do what is "pleasing and acceptable in His sight"; and—3. To be an outward testimony that our religion is not the "joyless" service that the world judges it to be; but that all its crosses and calls for penitence and self-denial lead, even in this life, to an inward joy which is unspeakable and full of glory. (*C. G. E. Appleyard, B.A.*) *Joy our strength*:—THE JOY OF THE LORD IS THAT SENSATION OF GLADNESS AND HAPPINESS WHICH THE HOLY SPIRIT CONVEYS TO THE SOUL, AND MAINTAINS IN THE SOUL, THROUGH THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD IN HIS TRUE CHARACTER TOWARDS US. 1. It has nothing to do with worldly joy. It is substantial, eternal, shines brighter and brighter unto the perfect day of its consummation in the saints around God's heavenly throne (Gal. iii. 22; Rom. xiv. 17). 2. It belongs to the people of God to rejoice in a sense of their reconciliation; to know their salvation is sure through Christ's life; to rejoice in the glorious Creator Himself (Rom. v. 11). II. MANY A TIME HAVE THESE SHORT WORDS DELIGHTED THE BELIEVER'S EAR, AND CHEERED HIS HEART. 1. Mark their excellency. Sound like a sentence uttered in the full knowledge of the gospel rather than under the law. Weak and helpless in yourselves, the Spirit can strengthen you, and supply you with new motives and ability to please the Lord. God has given His only Son to be our joy and our strength. We have a strong city (Isa. xxvi. 1; Heb. vi. 18; Eph. vi. 10). 2. But how does joy act in rendering us strong—strong to deny ourselves, to suffer, to labour in the cause of Christ? We know our privileges in Christ. This makes us joyful and happy. 3. The Christian rejoices in the past work of Christ, who died; in the present work, intercession; in the future work, returning again in majesty, to endow His servants with eternal bliss (Rom. viii. 32). 4. Again, joy in the Lord will enable the Christian to accomplish works for the glory of God and the good of others. We know that "heart" or "spirit" will enable the competitor for a prize to go through extraordinary exertion. It is the same with the soldier, the labourer, all who have to exert themselves with their bodies or minds. So with the Christian. (*F. Trench.*) *Christian joy*:—That few men are profoundly happy is but too true. Nor is it difficult to account for the universal failure on man's part to compass the desires of his soul. 1. The sources on which he draws may be drained dry. 2. The satisfaction which these resources yield is a measurable quantity. 3. Men are not happy, because they seek happiness as an end, and not as a means. Now, if Christianity be Divine, it will accomplish for me what I cannot do for myself. It claims to give men true lasting happiness, because it opens a perennial fountain. In other words, the source of Christian joy is God. This joy is the secret of Christian strength. I. THE SOURCE OF CHRISTIAN JOY IS GOD. Not without significance that one of Divine attributes is "blessedness." God is absolutely happy in Himself, and happy in relation to His creatures. 1. We can

tell something of a man's character and disposition by his works. Now God's works are full of gladness. There is joy in the streams, the woods, the meadows, the cornfields. 2. As in nature, so in grace. The Bible, from cover to cover, warrants the conclusion. The Old Dispensation a much brighter and more beautiful scheme than many superficial students will allow. Law, Prophets, Psalms are full of declarations that God's people are a happy people. Moses: "Happy art thou, O Israel, O people saved of the Lord!" David: "Blessed are the people that know the joyful sound!" Isaiah: "With joy shall ye draw water from the wells of salvation." And when we turn to the New Testament the witness becomes overwhelming. The "Man of Sorrows" went to the house of feasting to hallow it with the sunshine of His presence, and to the house of mourning to make it radiant with His everlasting joy. One of His last bequests was this: "These things have I spoken unto you, that My joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full." II. THE JOY OF GOD IS STRENGTH. 1. The joy of the Lord is our strength for service. No man can work well unless his heart is in it. The three essential elements of successful service are fitness, enjoyment, enthusiasm. God has a work for all that is in harmony with the best powers of each. 2. The joy of the Lord is our strength against temptation. We are tempted to doubt, but the joy of the Lord will afford a sufficient answer to all anxious questions. We are tempted to fear, but fear is the child of doubt or suspicion. We are tempted by the pleasures of sin, but God's ways are the ways of pleasantness. 3. The joy of the Lord is our strength for endurance. Christ: "In the world ye shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer," &c. (John xvi. 33). Paul: "I am filled with comfort," &c. (2 Cor. vii. 4).

III. THE JOY OF THE LORD, THEREFORE, BECOMES A CHRISTIAN LAW OF LIFE. Ingratitude not to accept rich provision God has made for profoundest needs of human spirit. And, further, this provision stands in relation to our duty as means to an end. To neglect our joys is to leave our work undone. But it may be said that our emotions are the creatures of circumstances. But then we are not the creatures of circumstances. The man who turns his thoughts in upon himself creates for himself an atmosphere in which there can be no joy. Look away from self to God. "Walk in the light, as He is in the light." Or if you must look at self, let it be as "accepted in the Beloved"; if at the past, as forgiven; if at the present, as full of Divine favour; if at the future, as bright with all the promises of God. (J. W. Burn.)

Strength and joy:—The physical strength of a man as a labourer is not unfrequently regarded as the measure of his worth; but mental strength is as much superior to the physical as the soul is to the body. Physical weakness often co-exists with mental might; but both bodily and mental strength may be found in combination with the utterest spiritual weakness. I. HUMAN JOY IS IDENTICAL WITH DIVINE JOY. 1. The joy of atonement with God. God and man atoned by Christ's death, *de facto* as well as *de jure*, produces joy in God and man. "We joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom also we have received the atonement." 2. The joy of reciprocated love. Antecedent to reconciliation with God, His love to us is love of pity and compassion; but atoned in Christ, God's love to us is that of moral esteem, and our love to Him is the re-percussion of His love to us. "We love Him because He first loved us." "If any man love Me," &c. (John xiv. 23). 3. Joy of assimilated character. As an element of the kingdom of God joy is a Divine attribute, inherited by those who are "one with Christ." "That they might have My joy fulfilled" (John xvii. 13). "That they all may be one," &c. (John xvii. 21). Divine strength and joy are our everlasting inheritance. II. HUMAN STRENGTH IS GENERATED BY DIVINE JOY. 1. As experienced in freedom from man-fear. "Only fear the Lord" is one of the first lessons of Christian manliness. God-fear annihilates man-fear, which ever "bringeth a snare." 2. As experienced in freedom from death-fear. Really in birth we take up death; but in Christian de cease death dies. "That through death He might destroy," &c. (Heb. ii. 14, 15.) 3. As developed in all holy action and endurance. The strength of health must be operative. To use is to gain strength. "They go from strength to strength" (Psa. lxxiv. 7). (Hornilist.)

Strengthening influence of Christian joy:—A morose man is generally morally weak. "A merry heart doeth good like a medicine," and medicates itself. Men weary with sombre thoughts, and are disposed to get rid of them; hence the danger of lapsing from harsh theology into infidelity. Christ came with "glad tidings." Strengthening influence of Christian joy shown in the elements of it. 1. The joy of faith is strengthening. Faith is enlargement of mind, seeing man in relation to the Creator, a system of providence, redemptive love, immortality, &c. It is intellectual patience—the "truss-beam"

of the soul. 2. The joy of a free conscience is strengthening. No man has courage for high duty who does not know of a forgiven past. The Cross has done more for building up character than did the law. 3. The joy of Divine companionship and help is strengthening. Dependence upon God does not destroy the courage of self-reliance; just the reverse. Bismarck said that without his faith in God's purpose with him, he would not have courage to keep the German portfolio a single day. Read Froude's "Calvinism" for the influence of Divine faith upon the enterprise of nations. Gibbon explains the fulfilment of prophecies by assuming that the belief in God's presence and plan for them gave men the ability to accomplish the predictions. 4. The joy of love to Christ is strengthening. We always serve willingly, patiently, unswervingly, according as we put our hearts into the duty. (*Homiletic Review*.)

The duty and utility of Christian joy:—In all human systems of theology the terrible has preponderated over the lovable, the severe over the kind, in the conceptions of the Divine nature. The outlines of the Eternal face, as imaged by the creature, have been stern; as disclosed by the Creator, they are unspeakably gracious. Hence in the Bible descriptions of heaven, the increase of happiness and of nearness to the Almighty go hand in hand. Hence again, joy, not grief, is the frame of mind in which we are encouraged to come before the Lord. The connection between gladness and God is strikingly brought out by Nehemiah. A reunion with God must not be sullied with weeping, for God is a God of gladness; and the gathering in His presence on earth is to be a forepart of the heavenly meeting. Therefore does he, who in Babylon at the king's table could not repress his own tears—what a strange shadow of a great truth was that heathen tradition that no sign of grief must be shown in a monarch's presence-chamber?—therefore does he allow no wailing in Jerusalem. I. THE JOY OF THE LORD—WHAT IS IT? II. HOW DOES IT CONSTITUTE THE MORAL STRENGTH OF A MAN? It has been well remarked that even cheerfulness of animal spirits is of great aid to virtuousness. There are certain temptations to which a joyous temperament is at once a bar. For example, hardness in judging others, malice, pride, can scarcely coexist with brightness and cheerfulness of heart. Many temptations at once flee away when cheerfulness is enjoyed within. The power of exertion revives after sorrow from the habit of looking at the brighter side. There is one special way in which gladness in God is essentially strength. What, it may be asked, is to be the uneducated man's guard against unbelief? What shall garrison his soul against the infidel tract? I reply, the "joy of the Lord," that secret complacency which he consciously gathers from the practice of the commandments of Christianity, and from the resting in the doctrines of Christianity. Teach a man to find a happiness in his Sundays, a gladness in the going up to the house of God, knitting the pleasures of his life with the mysteries of his faith, and the wave of unbelief will only break itself upon him. It is when you separate pleasure and duty; giving to the things of time all the bright colours, and to the things of eternity all the dark; calling men away from what they like, to pay the debt of a dull, forced uninteresting homage to God, instead of making the rendering such homage in itself a delight—it is then that you create a temptation to withhold the homage, and a temptation to the unbelief which comes in secondly to justify such withholding. When the lamp is gone out in the temple of the Lord, what marvel if the world stands aloof? (*Bp. Woodford*.)

Sources of happiness:—Happiness in the highest sense of the word is not a quality brought into the soul from without, but music that flows from qualities already existing within the soul. Circumstances, environments, possessions, and pursuits may affect the harmony, but it is the attuning of the soul's capacities to the key-note of the music of heaven that is the secret source of happiness. There can be no happiness without religion. The most truly religious man ought to be the happiest man. The object of the religion of Christ is sanctified service; the end of that religion is nobility of character, honesty of conduct, purity of heart, veracity, self-sacrifice, high aims, Godlike pursuits. All the happiness of a Christian man will come from the exercise of his faculties, in the attuning of all his capacities and energies to the Divine will and to the eternal laws of truth, rectitude, justice, and righteousness. Thus the music of life is evolved by our own fingers from capacities that we ourselves possess. To ensure the highest happiness—

I. HAVE HIGH AIMS AND PURSUE THEM WITH AVIDITY. Our faculties are only productive of happiness when they are in motion, just as the string of the harp only makes music when it vibrates. Many lives, therefore, are wretched because they are passed in indolence; many more are tuneless and musicless because they are

frittered away in unworthy pursuits. II. **CHERISH THE SPIRIT OF CONTENTMENT.** III. **ALWAYS MAINTAIN AN ADDING FAITH IN GOD AND IN THE PROVIDENCE WHICH GOVERNS THE WORLD.** (*W. J. Hocking.*) *Joy* :—The goodness of God in His providential dealings with us, and in the general economy of the world, is shown not so much by the supply of what is necessary as by the provision of what is in excess of the bare necessities of life. To call creatures into existence, and then to make no sort of provision for their existence, would argue not so much want of benevolence as despotic inconsistency and capricious ineptitude. In our Zoological Gardens, with their regulation allowances to the animals, there is just enough to meet the claims of necessity; but God makes that wonderful environment in which, when left to themselves, these animals find not only a bare sufficiency that makes life possible, but a profusion of favourable conditions and features that makes life worth living. The lark soaring heavenward; the herd of hippopotami disporting themselves in an African river; the school of whales shooting up their foam-fountains, or placidly basking on the sun-warmed surface of the bay—these and a thousand other objects all seem to bear the same witness that God has made provision, not only for the maintenance, but for the enjoyment, of His creatures. If He shows His goodness towards the lower animals by surrounding them with all that seems necessary for their enjoyment of life, it is only reasonable to suppose that He will make a similar provision for man. Such provision is made in the gospel revelation. Man asks for happiness, and God proposes to give him joy; he asks for security, and God proposes to give him peace; he asks for permanence, and God proposes to give him eternal life; he asks for satisfaction, and God offers him nothing less than Himself. If men could be persuaded that there is more real happiness to be found in serving God than in serving self, in doing right than in doing wrong, Satan would be robbed of his favourite weapon, and we should soon see the whole world transformed. But how is this to be brought about? Happy lives that are happy because they are holy are more likely to speak forcibly to the hearts of the children of this world than any amount of theological theorising. This was one of the mightiest arguments employed by primitive Christianity. Real joy in religion—a joy that followed men into their daily life, and lit up all their experiences; a joy that was unspeakable and full of glory—all this was entirely new in the history of the world, and it must have seemed just what the world wanted. What a weary world wants as much as anything to-day is the testimony of bright faces and bounding hearts as well as joyful tongues, to the fact that the kingdom of God is not only righteousness, but peace and joy in the Holy Ghost. The Church of Christ is weak to-day because there is so little joy in it. Joy, then, is designed to play an important part in Christian experience. We shall do well to consider—I. **THE SOURCE FROM WHICH IT PROCEEDS.** 1. Joy is mentioned next to love amongst the fruits of the Spirit, and this order is usually illustrated in spiritual experience. Joy is one of the earliest signs of the new life; if there is joy in heaven over the sinner saved, no wonder that there is joy on earth in the sinner's consciousness of salvation. 2. It is also the product of the new and wondrous influence which stirs the soul to its depth when we are restored to our proper relations to the Divine, the mighty impulse of renewed vitality. There is always something essentially joyous in the bursting forth of new life. As in nature, so it is in grace. The new life that is born is indeed an Isaac—a child of laughter. When the Divine Spirit enters and takes possession of our quickened nature He necessarily brings His own joy along with Him. II. **THE CHARACTERISTICS THAT BELONG TO IT.** 1. As joy flows from a renewal of our proper relations with God, so it is dependent upon the maintenance of those relations. St. Peter tells us that it is in Him “whom having not seen we love” that we “rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory,” and Paul, “Rejoice in the Lord.” Twice he speaks of joy in the Holy Ghost. 2. There is always something in God that we may rejoice in (Hab. iii. 17, 18). It is this characteristic of true spiritual joy that raises those that possess it superior to the circumstances with which they may be surrounded, and which makes it possible for them to realise in their experience what may seem a paradox—“sorrowful, yet always rejoicing.” 3. This joy is enhanced by all that is in accordance with the mind and will of God. What causes joy to Him, causes joy naturally enough to those whose joy is in Him. Thus we have—(1) The joy of calm acquiescence in the Divine will. (2) The joy of co-operation in the Divine work. 4. The intensity of this joy will be in proportion to its purity. Conclusion: It may be asked, How are we to get this joy? I answer—1. Cease to seek joy for its own sake. Self-abnegation is the condition of the higher joy, and when we are pursuing joy for its own sake, we are not

complying with this condition. 2. Remember that joy is a fruit of the Spirit, and you can't make fruit grow. It is the life that produces the fruit; but you must see to it that the life has fair play. Beware of loss of communion. Guard against disobedience. Exercise yourself in contemplation, in praise, and in adoring worship. The tree needs to be bathed in sunshine if its fruit is to be ripe and perfect; and nothing must come between us and the light of His face if our joy is to be perfected. In heaven it will be all joy, because in that fair land God has His way. (*W. H. M. H. Aitken, M.A.*) *On religious joy, as giving strength and support to virtue*:—I. THAT IN THE PRACTICE OF RELIGIOUS DUTIES THERE IS FOUND AN INWARD JOY, here styled “the joy of the Lord.” 1. Joy is a word of various signification. By men of the world it is often used to express those flashes of mirth which arise from irregular indulgences of social pleasure. It will be easily understood that the joy here mentioned partakes of nothing akin to this; but signifies a tranquil and placid joy, an inward complacency and satisfaction, accompanying the practice of virtue, and the discharge of every part of our duty. 2. In order to ascertain this, let us consider the disposition of a good man with respect to God. When we consider in what manner religion requires that a good man should stand affected towards God, it will presently appear that rational enlightened piety opens such views of Him as must communicate joy. It presents Him, not as an awful unknown Sovereign, but as the Father of the universe, the lover and protector of righteousness, under whose government all the interests of the virtuous are safe. With delight the good man traces the Creator throughout all His works, and beholds them everywhere reflecting some image of His supreme perfection. Amidst that Divine presence he dwells with reverence, but without terror. Conscious of the uprightness of his own intentions, and of the fidelity of his heart to God, he considers himself, by night and by day, as under the protection of an invisible guardian. He listens to the gracious promises of His Word. With comfort he receives the declarations of His mercy to mankind, through a great Redeemer. All the various devotional exercises of faith and trust in God, all the cordial effusions of love and gratitude to this Supreme Benefactor in the acts of prayer and praise, afford scope to those emotions of the heart which are of the most pleasing kind. But it may here be objected, Are there no mortifications and griefs that particularly belong to piety? What shall we say to the tear of repentance, and to that humiliation of confession and remorse which may, at times, be incumbent on the most pious, in this state of human infirmity? To this I reply, first, that although there may be seasons of grief and dejection in a course of piety, yet this is not inconsistent with the joy of the Lord being, on the whole, the predominant character of a good man's state; as it is impossible that, during this life, perpetual brightness can remain in any quarter, without some dark cloud. But I must observe, next, that even the penitential sorrows and relentings of a pious heart are not without their own satisfactions. A certain degree of pleasure is mingled with the tears which the returning offender sheds. 3. When we consider, next, the disposition of a good man towards his fellow-creatures, we find here the joy of the Lord exerting its influence fully. That mild and benevolent temper to which he is formed by virtue and piety; a temper that is free from envious and malignant passions, and that can look with the eye of candour and humanity on surrounding characters, is a constant spring of cheerfulness and serenity. With respect to that part of religion which consists in the government of a man's own mind, of his passions and desires, it may be thought that much joy is not to be expected, for there religion appears to lay on a severe and restraining hand. Yet here also it will be found that the joy of the Lord takes place. To a person just reclaimed from the excesses of sensual indulgence, the restraints imposed by virtue will, at first, appear uncouth and mortifying. But let him begin to be accustomed to a regular life, and his taste will soon be rectified, and his feelings will change. In purity, temperance, and self-government there is found a satisfaction in the mind similar to what results from the enjoyment of perfect health in the body. A man is then conscious that all is sound within. There is nothing that gnaws his spirit; that makes him ashamed of himself, or discomposes his calm and orderly enjoyment of life. His conscience testifies that he is acting honourably. He enjoys the satisfaction of being master of himself. He feels that no man can accuse him of degrading his character. From this slight sketch it plainly appears that there is an inward satisfaction, justly termed “the joy of the Lord,” which runs through all the parts of religion. This is a very different view of religion from what is entertained by those who consider it as a state of perpetual penance. But what it concerns us at present

to remark is, that some experience of this joy of the Lord which I have described enters as an essential part into the character of every good man. In proportion to the degree of his goodness, to his improvement and progress in virtue, will be the degree of his participation in the pleasure and joy of religion. II. To show in what respects the joy of the Lord is justly said to be the strength of the righteous. 1. In the first place, it is the animating principle of virtue; it supports its influence, and assists it in becoming both persevering and progressive. Experience may teach us that few undertakings are lasting or successful which are accompanied with no pleasure. If a man's religion be considered merely as a task prescribed to him, which he feels burdensome, it is not likely that he will long constrain himself to act against the bent of inclination. It is not until he feels somewhat within him which attracts him to his duty that he can be expected to be constant and zealous in the performance of it. Was it ever found that a person advanced far in any art or study, whether of the liberal or mechanical kind, in which he had no pleasure? A sense of duty may sometimes exercise its authority, though there be no sensations of pleasure to assist it. Belief of those religious principles in which we were educated, and dread of future punishment, will, in cases where no strong temptation assails us, restrain from the commission of atrocious crimes, and produce some decent regularity of external conduct. But on occasions when inclination or interest prompt to some transgression of virtue, which safety or secrecy encourages, and which the example of the world seems to countenance, is it to be thought that conscience will then stand its ground with one who never was attached to virtue on its own account, and never experienced any joy in following its dictates? But these are the occasions when the joy of the Lord proves the strength of the righteous man. Accustomed to take pleasure in doing his duty; accustomed to look up to God with delight and complacency, and to feel himself happy in all the offices of kindness and humanity to men around him; accustomed to rejoice in a clear conscience, in a pure heart, and the hope of heavenly bliss, he cannot think of parting with such satisfactions for the sake of any worldly bribe. There is something within his heart that pleads for religion and virtue. 2. In the next place, the joy of the Lord is the strength of the righteous, as it is their great support under the discouragements and trials of life. From the view which we have now taken of the subject, it must clearly appear, that to every one who wishes to possess the spirit, and to support the character of genuine goodness and virtue, it is an object most desirable and important, to acquire a prevailing relish for the pleasures of religion. To attain this spirit, of considering the discharge of our duty as our pleasure and happiness, is certainly not incompatible with our present state of infirmity. It is no more than what good men have often attained, and have testified to it, that their delight was in the law of God; that His statutes were sweet to their taste; that they had taken them as an heritage for ever, for they were the rejoicing of their heart: "I delight to do Thy will, O my God; Thy law is within my heart." It is therefore of high importance, that all proper means be employed to form our internal taste to a proper relish for this joy of the Lord. (*H. Blair, D.D.*) *The gospel of joy*:—The first work of the Holy Spirit is to convince of sin, but that is by no means His only work. It is only in preparation for another and more blessed work. I. WHAT IS MEANT BY THE JOY OF THE LORD. 1. Much is said of the joy of the Lord in sacred Scriptures; sometimes the Lord Himself is said to rejoice over His people; of Christ it is said, "For the joy that was set before Him," so also in prospect of His death, He rejoiceth over the truly repentant sinner. When the Lord assures His people of their salvation from every danger and every enemy, He says, "The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty, He will save, He will rejoice over thee with joy." In like manner they also are exhorted to joy in Him: "Let the children of Zion be joyful in their King." Indeed, the gospel itself is a gospel of joy. As such it was announced by the angel to the shepherds: "Behold I bring you tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people." And we find that the preaching of that gospel was a matter of joy to the poor sinners to whom it was sent. Philip, we are told in the Acts, "went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them," and the consequence was that there was great joy in that city. Now we shall find that their joy arose from a threefold source—1. What the Lord had done for them. The Lord had brought them back from a miserable and degrading captivity. He had brought them from under the yoke of Babylon; they had been protected and delivered in a more marvellous manner; they were restored to Zion, the city of their solemnities; the king's heart had been

softened towards them, and under his authority and protection they were obtaining a secure settlement in their own land. Surely this was a cause for joy. When they looked at the difficulties that stood in their way, and the steps by which the Lord had led them, they could not but rejoice. 2. What the Lord would do for them. Why, even before they took possession of the land of Canaan, while they were under the guidance of Moses, and under the Lord's special care in the wilderness, in the foresight of their future dangers and sins, the Lord had declared, even in their greatest straits and most pressing difficulties, though those very straits and difficulties were occasioned by their sins, that He would never forget His covenant, and would still receive them with mercy (Lev. xxvi. 40-45). 3. That the people understood all this. When Ezra read in the book of the law of God, he did it "distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading" (ver. 8). II. ITS HAPPY EFFECTS. When Nehemiah called upon the people thus to joy in the Lord, he told them at the same time what effect it would produce in them. It would be their strength. 1. It will support the Christian under all difficulties. This world is not one of ease and prosperity to the children of God. 2. It will sustain him in all his temptations. 3. Encourage him for the performance of all duties. It will make duties which without it would be burdensome and irksome, pleasant. 4. It will encourage him in prayer. He who has the joy of the Lord for his strength, does not live upon his joy, nor upon his strength. His life is in the Lord, and in proportion as he lives upon Him, he has joy and strength both in and from the Lord. 5. Incite him to hold on to the end. He who has the joy of the Lord for his strength will not rest in present attainments. The joys that are in store for the people of God are far greater than those already tasted. (1) How greatly are many people mistaken as to the nature of true religion. (2) Learn what you should be anxious to obtain. No man can joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ till he has received the atonement. (3) What a vast difference between the empty joys of the world and the solid joys of the gospel! (*G. Maxwell, B.A.*) *The joy of the Lord is your strength*:—I. Our joy in the Lord is the effect of His joy in us. As, for example, the brightness of the stars of night is derived from the unseen sun, so the light of our joy beams from the face of the Sun of Righteousness, which is the God-Man, Christ. Now, God's joy in His people is most wonderful, as we find in the hundred and forty-seventh Psalm, the eleventh verse. In the moral world all happiness and joy are but reflections of heaven's light. Peace and order are but the echoes of His Holy Spirit, amidst the tumultuous tossings and confusions of this world. Again: other and unfallen worlds might cause joy to God; for remember, God must rejoice in His own image, which is reflected more perfectly in unfallen creation; for example, angels are a perfect mirror, in which His image is reflected. They have larger capacities for comprehending God's perfections. But mark the littleness of man's mind. If we compare our own modes of feeling towards one another, we shall find that the philosopher delights not in the company of the unlearned, but rather despises it, and seeks the companionship of those who move in a more congenial element. Hence it is wonderful that God should delight in us, fallen sinful creatures. But the measure of God's joy in us is the more wonderful when we come to consider the language of David in the hundred and thirty-fifth Psalm and the fourth verse, wherein it is written of His rebellious children, "For the Lord hath chosen Jacob unto Himself, and Israel for His peculiar treasure." God's people are also called His portion, as we read in Deuteronomy, the thirty-second chapter and ninth verse—"For the Lord's portion is His people. God's joy in His people, as we read in Ephesians, the first chapter and the tenth and eleventh verses, is the cause of the rich inheritance which He has provided for them—"that in the dispensation of the fulness of times, He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth, even in Him: in whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of Him who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will." But we must remember also the other and numberless sources of glory to God, namely, the glory of the kingdom of nature stretching along infinity which is only filled with the beauty and majesty of the Deity itself. But it is not wonderful that God should joy in us, when we reflect upon it, for He is more glorified in us than in any other portion of His creation, considering that the work of redemption stamps a value upon us; for human nature, and none other, was taken up into the Godhead, so that our fallen condition opened up a way for glorifying God. Whether we consider His mercy or His justice, His long suffering or His love, all of which were exercised and glorified

by the redemption scheme, God rejoices over the theatre where His own glory is exhibited amongst His redeemed children rather than over angels, just as a parent rejoices more over the sick child restored to health than he does over the naturally robust and strong one. God blesses other worlds through the medium of ours. II. Let us now consider OUR JOY IN THE LORD. We have greater cause to rejoice in the Lord than the Jews, for our deliverance is from a worse captivity, namely, from the bondage of sin. Nehemiah could not set before his people anything but a distant hope of things to come. For how indistinct must have been their views of the promised Saviour compared with ours! III. THE JOY OF THE LORD IS OUR STRENGTH. A broken spirit disqualifies us for action. "A merry heart doeth good like a medicine; but a broken spirit drieth up the bones"; while, on the contrary, a joyous spirit disposes man for action, as may be seen in Psalm fifty-one, and the twelfth and thirteenth verses—"Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation, and uphold me with Thy free Spirit: then will I teach transgressors Thy ways, and sinners shall be converted unto Thee." The condition of the animal spirits is admitted to have a powerful influence upon all our faculties. Sorrow and dejection unnerve the body as well as the mind, and take away the power of exertion. The discharge of our several duties depends upon the spirit in which they are conducted; for an earthly servant, brooding over his misfortunes, would be unfit for his position in life. The soldier entering the battlefield must have a spirit and courage to encounter the enemy. So likewise must a Christian feel competent for the encounter with his spiritual duties and enemies. No man can diligently and cheerfully apply himself to any duty unless he has the hope of success in the performance of it. In conclusion, let us consider, how this strength is to be attained. It is not to be procured by any intellectual process of reasoning, nor is it the creature of imagination. We must move into an atmosphere of holiness in order to secure it; for the Christian's joy is the fruit of another clime. We must embark for a foreign land. It is the fruit of the tree of life, and must be plucked by the hand of faith. We must yield ourselves up to the guidance of the Holy Ghost; our souls must be tuned and re-tuned to heaven's harmonies by Him. Joy is the voice of order, and peace, in the soul; and God the Holy Spirit, who moved over creation's dark waters, must breathe over the angry passions of our fallen nature to produce this result. (*G. F. Galaher, M.A.*) *God's joy our strength*:—The truth to which I would call your attention is this: that notwithstanding the misery, the shame, the conflict of human life—a misery and shame and conflict which are keenly felt by Him whose nature is sympathy, and whose name is Father—there is in God a deep, abiding, essential joyousness; and that this joyousness is the strength of His people. I. THE ESSENTIAL JOYOUSNESS OF GOD. This is seen—1. In nature. All simple things in nature are joyous—flowers and fruits, woods and streams, the meadows and the breezes, the song of birds, the movements of animals, the irrepressible mirth of children. All the strong things of nature are magnificently joyous. The sun, the sea, the tempest, &c. What are we to think of Him, what must He be like, who has so constituted man that the very aspect of the world in which he lives furnishes him with quenchless impulses of gladness. The maker is known by his work; his thoughts will be in it; as he is so it will be. 2. In the Christian revelation. The Jewish system enters into the history of the Christian revelation. This system was in the main a festal, joyous service. Its restrictions were for the well-being of the people, and added comfort to their life; its festivals were more numerous than its fasts. If anywhere we should find an incident typical of Jewish history, we should find it in our text, where we see a grave preacher calling on remorseful and broken-hearted penitents to be more glad for God's sake than they were mournful for their own, because the Lord was still joyous, and the joy of the Lord was their strength. Christ is the Christian revelation; the Son and manifestation of God. Although we call Christ a "man of sorrows" yet it should be impossible to speak of Him as an unhappy, a wretched, a miserable man. "He bore our griefs and carried our sorrows"; but He was not daunted by them, not worn down by them. Sadness oppressed Him, but never gloom; care, but not despondency. He was a welcome guest at feasts. Mothers brought their children to Him; little ones sang around Him, and He was glad to hear their singing. There broke from Him signs of a quenched joy: "At that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit." He has no better thing to leave His disciples than His own joy. He was sustained under the tribulation of His mission by the deeper joy of His achievement. The deep, unquenchable joy of Christ is itself a revelation of the essential joyousness of God. 3. In the spiritual life. Speaking doctrinally,

joy is the "fruit of the Spirit," and a direct result of the gospel: "Behold I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people." God intended to give to the penitent the joy of pardon; to the defiled the joy of holiness; to the feeble the joy of strength. God intended by His promises to lift our hearts to exultation; and therefore He sent His Son for our acceptance. Christian history and experience confirm the testimony. Witness the writings of Paul to the buoyancy of his spirit. Strong Christians are always glad some men; they find inspiration in their mission, bliss in their work. "The voice of rejoicing and thanksgiving" is in their "tabernacles"; they "rejoice in the Lord alway"; they "rejoice with them that do rejoice," and thus give full play and scope to the spirit of their Father who dwelleth in them. The inspirations of the indwelling Spirit declare the essential joyousness of God.

II. THE BLESSEDNESS OF APPREHENDING THE ESSENTIAL JOYOUSNESS OF GOD. It is too much forgotten that joy equally with sorrow enters into a true human development. "'Tis held that sorrow makes us wise"; but it needs a strong soul to endure the discipline. "A merry heart doeth good like a medicine." Joy is the tonic of the mind. There are some households into which it does us good to enter; the inmates are so happy, so frank, so loving, that only to be with them refreshes the weary spirit. We thus see how the joy of others may be our strength. It is a refuge for the distressed, a hiding-place from the storm, as "the shadow of a great rock in a weary land." And "the name of the Lord" is above all others the "strong tower" into which "the righteous runneth and is safe." To turn from the contemplation of a smiling world, and smiling men and women, to the thought of a joyous God: what inspiration is here! (*A. Mac-kennal*.)

On religious joy:—A few years ago a fierce and violent dispute was carried on between the chief physicians of Europe concerning antimony. And while some maintained that this mineral was a most valuable medicine, and extolled it to the skies, others asserted that it was injurious, and ought to be classed among the deadly poisons. The debate at length subsided; and it is now admitted that the article in question may be useful when administered with sound judgment. The opinions of men have always been greatly divided on the subject of religious joy—some extol it in the highest strains; others reprobate and condemn and labour to extinguish it.

I. THE NATURE AND SOURCE OF RELIGIOUS JOY. An able writer on the passions says, "Joy is the vivid pleasure inspired on our receiving something peculiarly grateful; something evidently productive of advantage, or something which promises to contribute to our present or future happiness." The worldly man exults in the acquisition of wealth, power, titles, and honours. When religion enters the mind it both informs the understanding and moves the passions. Among the passions joy holds a conspicuous rank.

1. Religious or holy joy arises from a sense of the free favour of a merciful, covenant God.

2. Religious joy arises from a sense of the special presence of a merciful, covenant God.

(1) While he contemplates the grand and beautiful scenes of visible nature.

(2) In the ordinances of His worship.

II. HOLY JOY TENDS TO INVIGORATE AND SUSTAIN THOSE WHO ARE THE PARTAKERS OF IT. There are certain states of mind which we are accustomed to express in figurative terms and in the form of maxims. Thus we say knowledge is power, and ignorance is imbecility; hope braces, and fear relaxes the soul. If there be any aptness in such contrasts, we may assert, that as melancholy is weakness, joy is strength. Joy has a manifest tendency to invigorate and sustain—

1. The Christian's resolutions, in prosecuting all the arduous labours of virtue and piety.

2. The Christian's faith under the afflictions and trials he is called to endure (Hab. iii. 17-18).

Conclusion: We have an express warrant to rejoice: "Rejoice in the Lord alway."

1. Our personal interest is wrapt up in this duty.

2. The welfare of our brethren is in a certain degree involved in this duty.

3. The honour of our Master is implicated in the right discharge of this duty. (*Congregational Remembrancer*.)

The strength of Divine joy:—Christianity asserts with great emphasis and illustrates with all its light the old doctrine of Nehemiah and the priests, that Divine gladness is power.

I. ITS NATURE. There is a broad distinction between mere gladness and spiritual joy. Spiritual joy rises from within the soul, and does not depend on the outward circumstances of its life. It wells like a fountain from the inner soul. It is confined to no place. It is bounded by no time. It may grow where earthly gladness would perish. It is a joy springing from the inner communion of the spirit with its God.

1. It is the joy of self-surrender to God. True joy can only begin when the self-life has been surrendered. Until this surrender has been made the consciousness of a guilty past hangs like a burden on the heart. Men know that their

gleams of joy are only like flowers growing on the edge of a dark volcano, which when they are alone and outward excitements have passed away will waken in lurid glare and thunder, and distract their repose. They want a joy that shall pierce deeply into the region of self and rise from the consciousness of self-surrender and forgiveness. At the Cross of Christ the burden of the past falls, for at the Cross he yields himself. 2. The joy of fellowship with the Father. All profound gladness springs from sympathy with a spirit or a truth higher than ourselves. Why do our hearts bound on spring mornings with the joy of nature? Why does the beauty of a summer evening calm us? Why do we feel a "glory and a joy" as we tread the mountain sides? Why do we feel a deepening peace as we walk amid the splendours of the golden autumn? Is it not because we realise the presence of a spirit of beauty surrounding us, and inspiring us with an emotion which no words can describe? Or why is it when a truth breaks in upon us through clouds of doubt, and a clear vision of its beauty is gained after long and fruitless searching, that we feel a thrill of joy deep and unspeakable? Have we not after communion with some greater soul felt our own darkness dissipated and our own isolation broken down? In that hour has not the touch of a greater Spirit made us feel nobler, stronger, wiser? And if this be true of earthly communion, must it not be supremely so when we realise the fellowship of God as our Father? It is this which makes "our joy full." II. THE POWER OF THIS JOY OF THE LORD. We may trace it in three ways. 1. It is power to resist temptation. It forms in itself the fulness of emotion, and surrounds us with a heavenly atmosphere in which the assaults of evil fall powerless away. 2. It is strength for Christian action. 3. It is strength for patient endurance. We are too weak to endure the discipline of life unless we have joy—the present earnest of the future reward. (*E. L. Hull, B.A.*) *The joy of the Lord*:—George Whitfield, it is said, once addressed a great gathering of colliers. As he discoursed to the rude, rough men who stood there in their working garb, and with unwashed faces, the Spirit of God touched their hearts. Tears filled their eyes and ran down their faces, making channels for themselves through the coal-dust there. And so here. As the priest made plain the Word of God, the people wept and could not help it. As Nehemiah saw them weep, he exclaimed, "Weep not," &c. "The joy of the Lord is your strength." I. THERE IS JOY AND HAPPINESS IN LIVING WITH AND FOR GOD. I can well remember the first time I saw an engraving of the picture, "The Pursuit of Pleasure." In the picture was the beautiful figure of a woman, with butterfly wings gliding through space. Following hard after her were all ranks and conditions of men, so arranged by the artist as to suggest many forms of enjoyment and excitement, but all eager to get the goddess. In the haste and whirl, and rush, some had fallen and were trampled, but all who could were pressing on, eagerly on, to the abyss. Men pursue that goddess still, forgetting that peace, joy, real happiness, must arise from within, from the state of the mind and heart, from union with God and all that is purest and best men rush blindly off into a thousand outward diversions, all which fail to give rest to the troubled conscience, ease to the sore heart, or anything of the nature of permanent joy and happiness. This is only realised by those who will live with and for God. II. THERE IS JOY IN WORKING FOR GOD. 1. All work for the good of man is work for God. 2. Those have greatest joy who work in a godly spirit, and put heart into their work. 3. God has a work for us all, and can give us joy in it. I know what it is to have the good word of one's fellow-men, to have the confidence of one's companions and helpers in toil, to have some of the honours which men have to bestow, to enjoy the comforts of home and to share the advantages and blessings of travel, but not all these equal the blessing which God gives me when I am used as the instrument to make one sad heart happy. III. THE JOY OF THE LORD IS YOUR STRENGTH. 1. In temptation. 2. In suffering and loss. 3. In all your life. (*Charles Leach, D.D.*) *The joy of the Lord*:—All deep religion ought to be joyful, and all strong religion assuredly will be. I. JOY IN THE LORD IS THE NATURAL RESULT OF CHRISTIAN FAITH. 1. Because of what it gives us. (1) A sense of acceptance with God. (2) God for the rest of our spirits. (3) Communion with Him. 2. Because of what it takes away from us. (1) The fear that lies before us. (2) The strifes that lie within us, the desperate conflict between conscience and inclination, our will and our passions. (3) The sense of sin. Faith in Christ naturally works gladness. It also produces sorrow—solemn, manly, noble, and strong. This is not contradictory. All great thoughts have a solemn quiet in them, which not unfrequently merges into a still sorrow: "As sorrowing, yet always rejoicing." These two states of mind, both of

them the natural operation of any deep faith, may co-exist and blend into one another, so as that the gladness is sobered, and chastened, and made manly and noble; and that the sorrow is like some thunder-cloud, all streaked with bars of sunshine, that go into its deepest depths. The joy lives in the midst of the sorrow; the sorrow springs from the same root as the gladness. They blend into one another; just as, in the Arctic regions, deep down beneath the cold snow, you shall find the budding of the early spring flowers and the fresh green grass; just as some kinds of fire burn below the water; just as in the midst of the undrinkable sea there may be welling up some little fountain of fresh water that comes from a deeper depth than the great ocean around it. The Christian life is all like one of those spring showers in early April, when the rain-drops weave for us a mist that hides the sunshine, and yet the hidden sun is in every sparkling drop, and they are all saturated and steeped in its light. The joy of the Lord is the natural result of Christian faith. II. JOY IS A CHRISTIAN DUTY. It is a commandment here and also in the New Testament. It follows from this that the degree to which a Christian life shall be a cheerful life is dependent in a large measure upon our own volitions. By the selection or the rejection of the appropriate subjects which shall make the main portion of our religious contemplations we can determine the complexion of our religious life. Just as you inject colouring matter into the fibres of some anatomical preparation, so a Christian may, as it were, inject into all the veins of his religious character and life, either the bright tints of gladness, or the dark ones of self-despondency. If your thoughts are chiefly occupied with God, and what He has done and is for you, then you will have peaceful joy. If, on the other hand, they are bent ever on yourself and your own unbelief, then you will always be sad. It is only where there is much faith and consequent love that there is much joy. If there is but little heat around the bulb of the thermometer, no wonder that the mercury marks a low degree. If there is but small faith there will not be much gladness. III. REJOICING IN THE LORD IS A SOURCE OF STRENGTH. All gladness has something to do with our efficiency; for it is the prerogative of man that his force comes from his mind, and not from his body. If we have hearts full of light and souls at rest in Christ, work will be easy, endurance will be easy, sorrows will be bearable, trials will not be so very hard; and above all temptations we shall be lifted and set upon a rock. If the soul is full, and full of joy, what side will be exposed to any temptation? If it appeal to fear, the gladness that is there is the answer. If it appeal to passion, desire, wish for pleasure of any sort, there is no need for any more—the heart is full. Christian gladness, like the magic shield of the old legends, invisible in its crystalline purity, will repel all the “fiery darts of the wicked.” (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*) *The joy of God the strength of men*:—I. EZRA FELT THE UNIQUE POWER OF THE NATION'S LITERATURE. For him it contained all that is best for men to do, and happiest to desire. Therefore, he and his fellow-reformers were “the men of the book” of the law of the Lord, using it as “the man of their counsel” a fount of refreshing, a goad to penitence, and a stimulus to faith, generosity, and joy. II. GOD IS INFINITE, AND NO MAN, NAY, NOT ALL MEN, CAN EXPRESS HIM; BUT EVERY TRUE SOUL MAY SAY SOMETHING ABOUT HIM, and every nature He trains by His spirit may either add something of freshness of setting and force of applicability to an old truth, or open for some soul new glimpses of His wondrous fulness. High thoughts do not disdain lowly minds. The ascent to the loftiest ranges of light and power is given, not to a prophet like the seraphic Isaiah, nor to a singing poet like David, nor to a great leader like Moses, but to Nehemiah, a courtier and a statesman, a politician and a reformer. Nehemiah is for the moment lifted to the highest grade of teachers, and placed by the side of Christ when He says, “These words have I spoken to you that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full.” He has fellowship with Paul, when he rejoices that he is counted worthy to preach “the glorious gospel of the happy God.” He anticipates Christianity in its most vital and essential element; links together in natural sequence the two economies; shows that God is a Being not coldly impressive, stolidly majestic, without sympathy, but tender-hearted, forgiving, delighting in mercy, and plenteous in redemption; a God whose joy is strength for troubled men. III. TO ME IT APPEARS LIKE A STROKE OF TRUE GENIUS AS MEN CALL IT—a breath of inspiration from God, as I would name it—THAT NEHEMIAH DELIVERS THIS HIGHER AND RICHER MESSAGE CONCERNING GOD AT THE MOMENT WHEN THE PEOPLE ARE PROFOUNDLY STIRRED BY THE RECENTLY REDISCOVERED MESSAGE OF THE ANCIENT LAW, AND OVERWHELMED WITH DEJECTION AND SORROW for their newly-revealed sins. The law is not a goal, but a light and a goad; a light

on the way to God, and a goad to petition for His pardon. This disclosure of sin and penalty is intended, like the flames out of the mountain, to hurry the approach of the pilgrim to the wicket-gate of repentance. IV. "God's JOY A STRONGHOLD" (marginal rendering). Who can tell the immense strength infused into a soul to whom God is an ever-present, ever-bright consciousness of infinite joy? Such a consciousness of the presence of the joyful God flings around us an all-protecting shield from the shafts of doubt and care; builds about us a defensive tower from obtrusive fears; delivers us from the world, with its ceaseless din, low ideals, &c.; from the flesh, with its blinding passion, base motive, and thwarting caprice; and from the devil, with his insinuations of the necessity of evil, the selfishness of the good, and the folly of righteousness. 1. This consciousness of God's presence makes to us this world of nature a new creation, instinct with a new significance, and potent with an evangelical energy. We know we are under law. We accept the teachings of science as the teachings of our Father God, and rejoice in its demonstrations of the Abiding Order and Fixed Law of this world because we know the Lawgiver Himself is not a stern Draco, imaged only in the desolating earthquake, fire-belching volcano, and fierce tornado; but a Father, yea, our Father and Redeemer, and that we belong to Him and not to the house in which He has put us. 2. This consciousness makes us feel that the bitter and painful experiences of life are part of the Divine order and plan of a loving and rejoicing Father. A poor fellow said to me after thrusts and stabs of bewildering pain that almost made him reel, "Still, we know it's all right, don't we? We know whom we have believed, and are persuaded we are not going to lose anything we have given over to Him." Such testimonies show how the consciousness of God changes the very face of sorrow; that grief is a joy misunderstood; that the burdens of life are its benedictions; that the old gospel is still new, and that though in the world men may have tribulation, in Christ they have peace. Such testimonies interpret to me the rapturous experiences of persecuted and afflicted men that in my earlier years I was tempted to think over-weighted and unreal: Samuel Rutherford, Payson, Doddridge, Erskine, Robertson, F. R. Havergal, Mrs. Prentiss, and many others. 3. This pervading consciousness of the happiness of God invests death itself with a new mission, forces it to take its place amongst the servants of the Father and the friends of His children. "Absent from the body, we are at home with the Lord." V. THE JOY OF GOD IS THE SOURCE OF OUR ACTIVE, SELF-FORGOTTING GENEROSITY. "Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions for whom nothing is prepared." Whatever God is, He is for us. Whatever God is for us and to us, it is that we may be the same for and to others. Joy in the Lord is strength, positive actual power for ministry. It creates around us the most favourable atmosphere for evoking our resources; raises our entire nature to the highest pitch of energy, and gives unwonted elasticity and capacity of tension to all our faculties. As bodies expand under heat, so the soul enlarges under the genial influence of joy. Indeed, men never reach their best before they have mastered the whole gamut of joy, from the lowest note of cheerfulness to the highest of rapture. As some men do business without obtaining a fiftieth part of the profit gained by others, so some Christians never "nett" the "great gains" that flow from a cheerful piety. Vast is the difference between working for God from a sense of responsibility and from a delight which springs out of fellowship with Christ. Responsibility is a goad. Joy is a magnet. One pricks and urges forward by a sense of painfulness that reduces all work to the severe limits of obedience to imperative and resistless orders. The other is life; and such is its magic it converts even hard toil into play, and makes it as welcome as song to the merry birds, or sport to romping children. The joy of God is strength for the suppression of all life's evils, the solace of all sad hearts, and the service of all for whom nothing is prepared. Conclusion: 1. The God of the Hebrews is no mere object of worship seated coldly apart and awaiting the homage of men; He is a radiant presence, inspiring the mandate, "Rejoice in the Lord, O ye righteous." 2. Remember, too, that the joy of our friends is our strength. The bare sight of some men is an instant dismissal of despair. The arrival of another is as the report of a disaster. A light heart dissipates gloom as the sun lifts fog. The joy of friends is a flowing fountain of perennial strength. 3. What an exhaustless fund of gladness is a free, healthy, simple, and natural child; how unspeakably indebted many of us are to the irrepressible joy and strange, heaven-sent wisdom of children for the loss of our moroseness, acerbity, and misery. The joy of children is our strength. 4. It is a common experience, this contagion of joy—

this conversion of joy into power. Rejoice, then, in the God of joy, and minister to those for whom nothing is prepared. Pour out your gladness for other hearts. Restrain it, and you destroy it. Cage your lark, and it will not sing. Open the door, give it access to the wide heavens, and away it goes merrily chanting its music up to heaven's gate. (*J. Clifford, D.D.*)

The joy of the Lord the strength of His people:—The people here bidden to rejoice were even then melted with penitential grief, "for all the people wept when they heard the words of the law." As certain fabrics need to be damped before they will take the glowing colours with which they are to be adorned, so our spirits need the bedewing of repentance before they can receive the radiant colouring of delight. The glad news of the gospel can only be printed on wet paper. I. THERE IS A JOY OF DIVINE ORIGIN. 1. It springs from God and has God for its object. 2. It springs from a deep sense of reconciliation to God, of acceptance with God, and yet beyond that, of adoption and close relationship to God. 3. It springs from an assurance that all the future, whatever it may be, is guaranteed by Divine goodness. 4. There is an abyss of delight for every Christian when he comes into actual fellowship with God. 5. Another form of "the joy of the Lord" is the honour of being allowed to serve Him. II. THIS JOY IS A SOURCE OF GREAT STRENGTH. 1. It is so because it arises from considerations which always strengthen the soul. Very much of the depth of our piety will depend upon our thoughtfulness. He is the joyful Christian who uses the doctrines of the gospel for spiritual meat, as they were meant to be used. 2. "The joy of the Lord" within us is always the sign and symbol of strong spiritual life. The warmth of the South of France does not spring from soft, balmy winds, but from the sun; at sunset the temperature falls. A man who walks in the sunlight of God's countenance for that very reason is warm and strong. 3. It fortifies him against temptation. 4. It makes him strong for service. 5. A joyous man such as I have in my mind's eye is to all intents and purposes a strong man. He is strong in a calm, restful manner. Whatever happens he is not ruffled or disturbed. III. THIS STRENGTH LEADS TO PRACTICAL RESULTS. 1. Great praise. 2. Great sacrifice. 3. Other expressions of joy. When a man has the oil of joy, then in his business and in his family the wheels of his nature glide along sweetly and harmoniously. 4. Family happiness. "The wives also and the children rejoiced." I dislike much that Christianity which makes a man feel, "If I go to heaven it is all I care for." Why, you are like a German stove which I found in the room of an hotel—a kind of stove which required all the wood they could bring up merely to warm itself, and then all the heat went up the chimney. IV. THIS JOY, THIS STRENGTH, ARE BOTH WITHIN OUR REACH. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

Joy in the Lord a source of strength:—There is strength in joy, and a sense of adequate security is an element of joy. If a man deem himself certain of triumph at last, he will be joyful, whether that triumph be achieved by himself or another. The joyful man is a strong man because he is a confident man, and the dejected man is a weak man because he distrusts his cause, himself, or some one else upon whom he depends. Two armies, with numbers equal, are mustering for battle. They are well matched in war materials, both brave, both earnest, eager for battle. But one side are exhilarated by repeated successes; they have won a terrible name; the general who leads never knew defeat. On the other side is the humiliation of repeated failures; again and again with lowered standards they have retreated. They have lost all confidence in themselves and their commanders. Now, who deems the conflict doubtful? Triumph is written in the joyful confidence of one, and defeat in the deep dejection of the other. The assurance of the army expectant of success is worth ten regiments and a hundred guns; and it may be truly said of them, "In the joy of victory is their strength." Let us—I. ASCERTAIN WHAT IS THE JOY OF THE LORD. The joy of the Lord is that sweet and holy gladness which springs from and originates in a calm, humble faith that we are the recipients of the Divine favour, under the Divine protection. In the followers of the Lord it is a holy cheerfulness founded on the belief that they are the children of God by Jesus Christ. That their Substitute has paid the debt and accomplished the work of redemption; that they are saved now. Just in proportion as you make salvation a contingency you undermine the basis of Christian joy. Dr. Doddridge once succeeded in procuring the pardon for one condemned to die. As the cell-door was thrown open the poor man cast himself down, and clasping the feet of his deliverer, exclaimed, "Every drop of my blood thanks you, for you have saved them all." This was the joy of salvation realised as a fact. II. LET US SEE HOW THIS JOY OF

THE LORD IS OUR STRENGTH. 1. It strengthens us negatively in the removal of anxieties. 2. It imparts assurance of final victory. 3. It permits a concentration of the whole life force upon a single point. The Christian who believes himself saved trains all his guns in one direction, the end of which is his Master's glory. 4. It reinforces all other motives by the power of gratitude, and puts us under the sweetest and holiest of obligations. (*W. T. Sabine.*) *Joy in Christ Jesus our Lord*.—I. THE NATURE OF JOY IN CHRIST. 1. It is the joy which springs from the knowledge of the reconciliation of God to His sinful creatures; by which our lives are saved from destruction, and we are brought into a condition to enjoy His presence and favour. 2. It is such a joy as arises from the possession of a perfect revelation of the character and will of the Most High, and consequently of our interest, duty, and destination. Before the coming of Christ idolatry reigned, and with it necessarily prevailed a general depravation of morals, and a total want of those spiritual excellences and comforts which exalt and bless the human character. Some few sages, indeed, shed by their researches a dubious light on the path of life. But they were like the scattered and glimmering stars of a cloudy midnight. They could neither impart the warmth nor give the light which the wretched traveller needed. Their occasional twinklings only rendered the darkness more apparent and oppressive. This darkness was dispersed by the rising of the Sun of Righteousness. The gospel makes us acquainted with all that is necessary for us to know of God and with all that He requires of us. 3. It is the joy which springs from the well-grounded hope of inheriting heaven and immortality. 4. It is the joy which arises from our knowledge of the exalted character of our Redeemer, which furnishes a peaceful assurance of the sufficiency of the atonement and of the greatness of the Almighty's love. II. THIS JOY IS OUR STRENGTH. 1. It is the foundation of our encouragement in approaching our Maker. 2. This joy which we have in the character, instructions, and achievements of Christ animates us in the performing of the duties of life. 3. It is our strength in bearing up under life's troubles and adversities. 4. It gives us comfort in the approach and will give us victory in the conflict with death. 5. It is the principal source of composure and hope when we contemplate the final judgment. (*Bp. Dehon.*) *The nature and effects of a true believer's joy*.—I. THE NATURE OF A TRUE BELIEVER'S JOY. It is "the joy of the Lord." Why? 1. Because God is its author. This joy is no mere animal sensation. It is not the same thing as what we call "good spirits." It is not that flow of lively feelings and sensations which spring up themselves in a man's heart when things are grateful and agreeable. Such feelings are of nature only, and never hold. Religion has no root in them (*Matt. xiii. 20, 21*). The joy of true believers is a spiritual gift (*Gal. v. 22*). 2. Because God is its subject. True believers "joy in the God of their salvation." (1) They joy in the freeness of His great salvation. (2) They joy in the imputation of His justifying righteousness. 3. They joy in God as the Giver of their present privileges and the Preparer of their future glories (*2 Cor. v. 21, xii. 9, 10; Isa. lxi. 10; Rom. v. 5; Phil. iv. 7; Prov. iii. 17; Jas. i. 2*). II. THE EFFECT OF THIS JOY UPON THE BELIEVER'S HEART AND LIFE. 1. It strengthens him for duty. How beautifully is this exemplified in the case of the Churches of Macedonia (*2 Cor. viii. 2-5*). What made them so warm, so zealous in their duties? "The abundance of their joy." The joy of the Lord was their strength. 2. It strengthens him for suffering. See this exemplified: David (*1 Sam. xxx. 6*); the apostles when they were beaten before the Jewish council (*Acts v. 41*); Paul when he calls his heavy trials "light afflictions" (*2 Cor. iv. 17*); Paul and Silas in the prison at Philippi (*Acts xvi. 25*); the victories in the dying hours of true believers (*Psa. cxlix. 5, 6; 2 Cor. iv. 16*). (*A. Roberts, M.A.*) *God's tonic of gladness*.—The man I am thinking of had been born in a Christian home, but had gone away and tramped the world. The story of the prodigal or some other lyric of salvation is read. And, as the old forgotten sanctities sweep over his memory and are sung into his neglected heart, the crust of careless habit is broken, the founts long closed are reopened, and he is bent and swayed with surging recollections of the good and beautiful in the Christian life which has passed out of his existence. Such emotions sweep over the hearts of the Jews as they hear the long-neglected Law while Ezra reads it from his extemporised pulpit of wood. They had returned from the captivity of Babylon. Now is the opportunity for Ezra to introduce the neglected Law. The Levites go about among little groups answering questions and expounding what is read. The effect is that the multitude are swept, as only an Oriental people can be swept, with a wave of feeling and

lamentation. Why these outbursts of distress? Because the ancient covenant of God with their race had almost dropped out of memory. When they hear again what God did for their fathers—the story of Egypt and Sinai, of the tabernacle, the temple, the shechinah and the pledges of sheltering mercy—it comes upon them as the revelation of a new discovery. The sins and faithlessness of the past bow them low. “Grieve no longer,” cry Nehemiah and Ezra to the distraught people; “do not waste your hearts with sorrow.” Put away tears of distressful memory, “for the joy of the Lord is your strength.” 1. Listen to God’s comfortable words of reassurance to hearts filled with shame and sorrow. “Grieve not, grieve not”; and it is said over and over again. Such comfortable words can only be spoken to men and women already softened. To most people the trumpet call is rather, “Grieve and lament for your sins; abase yourselves for your follies and self-willed lives.” But here the people’s hearts have been made soft. Encrusting callousness has been broken through; a wave of tender feeling is passing over them. And God is quick to speak peace to them and offer them “the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.” When men’s hearts are moved and softened, when at last they let all the barricades of feeling give way and the long pent-up sin and the hunger for good and love Divine pour out in the hidden chambers of the soul, then God hastens to them with His generous assurances. “Do not lay waste your hearts with grief. Take comfort to yourselves. Rejoice that now at last the dead and careless years are gone, and that the words of life and love ring in your ears once more.” In every company of people there are some whose shame and grief over past folly and misbehaviour is a sore that runs perpetually, they cannot get over it nor escape its anguish, the dark burden on memory paralyses them. Yet, if only they could get the records on the table of the heart wiped clean they would be strong men of God. Let me echo the generous comforts of Divine compassion. Oh, let the Divine heart bear away these curses that lie heavy on you. Yield to the goodness that has come into your life. Let sheer goodness and love swamp all self-accusations. Then will you enjoy the sacrament of forgiving grace. Your life will be given back to you as a new and clean thing. Many, I feel sure, are going cold and comfortless, wearing out their spirit in secret regrets that are never salved and soothed away with love. The one thing they need most is a bit of gladness in their life, sun’s warmth in enveloping love. 2. The proper Christian note is gladness of heart. What a piece of irony is the laughter and merry-making of the careless, unforgiven man! Underneath the mirth and free play, what a region of unpurged evil deep down within them in their tastes, memories, and habits! How dare men sing and take the delight of life while they are moribund with sin’s leprosy and going forward to face the last reckoning unprepared? But Christians—they have the heritage of Christ, the peace that makes the singing heart. True, you cannot ignore the inevitable hardships and pains of living, which are no respecters of persons; and the Christian is as open as any one to the cut of unkindness, the depression of dark times, and the heartache over others’ wrongdoing. Yet so far as the inevitable will allow, you are entitled and required to accept the good and joy of your days, to delight in all beauty, all the cheer of human love, all stimulating influences and glad hopes. The common delights of human life are all the more yours because you have the diviner reasons for happiness. I am certain that numbers of Christians have never accepted the full gladness of their high calling in Christ. What is the reason? Is it that they think it unbecoming to let their hearts swell with natural joy? Has religious seriousness overpowered their natural good spirits, a tradition of sombre piety suppressing their buoyancy? It is a false conception of the Christian mind. Take joy in, and let radiance suffuse your life. Yes, I know there is a heartless element in the unmitigated delight of some people. There is a heartless mirth which is careless of mankind. And it is possible for us to take the pleasure of our days without regard to the sore problems of the world and the sins of men. Christian music must have its minor as well as its major notes. Yet we are not meant to surrender our hearts much or long to the oppressing burden of human sin and distress. We are to feel it so far that we shall “send portions to them for whom nothing is prepared,” to better the hard lot of such as we can reach and assist Christ to gladden the whole race. That is an essential condition of a joy that is Christian. But, having done this, we are to take the sun. If we took all the world’s misery into our hearts it would crush us, spoiling our personal influence, without doing any good. We must leave the most of it to Almighty God to bear, who alone has the almighty heart. The sun of righteousness is not sinking in the sky, but ascending over the world.

In spite of evil we rejoice by faith, by anticipation of what God in Christ is in process of achieving, because of the entrance of Divine power into the world in Christ. Even our sins which sadden us will be overcome if we remain faithful.

3. There is God's tonic for our hearts in this devout gladness. Happiness is a bracing tonic in its own time and place. I do not forget—it is often enough said—that suffering and sorrow are bracing forces, and they, too, are required to make men sterling and strong in virtue and godliness. Shadow and discipline have their indispensable work to do in forging Christian character. The paler hues of character, the sombre greys of meekness and gentleness, are not the sole Christian colours. Those who suffer prolonged discipline are apt to lose the warmer tints which brighten the Christian faith, and to miss the elasticity of spirit which helps us to rise from our errors and press toward the mark. If we could get some rays of luminous sunshine transmitted into our hearts we should take a new lease of life; new springs would be opened in us for the refreshment of others. (*R. E. Welsh, M.A.*)

The joy of the Lord the Christian's strength:—Here observe that the parties to whom these words were originally addressed were in the act of expressing deep sorrow for sin. Nehemiah had no intention to make light of sorrow for sin, nor to represent it as aught else than a necessary ingredient in the composition of genuine repentance. The sin that is not lamented will hardly be forsaken; and though there may be grief which does not issue in amendment, we may doubt whether you will find the amendment which has not been preceded by grief. There is a point beyond which sorrow being carried, will neither constitute nor prove repentance. The grief cannot be such as God demands which hides from man the attributes of God and the arrangements Divinely made for the pardon of sin. A man who sorrows for a sin with a sorrow that seems to say that sin is unpardonable draws for himself and presents to others a picture of God which is altogether unscriptural. In the light of the gospel there is a point at which sorrow for sin becomes itself sinful, and that is the point at which we sorrow “even as those who have no hope”; when we lament as if there were no remedy. Looking at the text with special reference to ourselves, we observe that “the joy of the Lord is our strength”—

I. IN RENDERING EFFECTIVE OUR SORROW FOR SIN. Sorrow alone and by itself can produce no genuine repentance; but “the joy of the Lord”—the assurance of a free and unqualified forgiveness—must be mixed with the sorrow to produce such a result. We understand by repentance, not only the lamenting sin, which is a part, but the forsaking sin, which is a greater part. It is the pleasure of God, the joy of God, that men should forsake their sins and receive salvation at His hands without money and without price. “Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked shall die, saith the Lord God, and not that he should return from his wicked way and live?” God joys in nothing so much as in welcoming transgressors who trust themselves to the suretyship of His Son. It is right to tremble at the wrath of God. It is right to mourn over your sins. But you must do more than tremble and mourn—you must “eat the fat and drink the sweet.” “The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin”—here is the fat. “Come unto Me, all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest”—there is the sweet.

II. IN ENCOURAGING US AND HELPING US TO WRESTLE WITH TEMPTATION. The assurance of Divine help is “the joy of the Lord,” and in this joy does the true Christian's strength consist. The encouragements of the gospel are encouragements to strive, encouragements to labour—to resist evil, to mortify passions, and to cultivate holiness. They are encouragements to hold on through a course of temptation in the assurance that the Redeemer will furnish help proportionate to the attack. The slave may be kept in awe by the scourge, but the affectionate son is best ruled by a smile; and as soon as the believer has been admitted into the very family and household of God, he will derive from “the joy of the Lord” his best strength for the mastery of evil. (*H. Melville, B.D.*)

The Christian in his spiritual joys:—Let us contemplate the Christian—I. IN THE DIVINITY OF HIS JOY. II. IN THE UTILITY OF HIS JOY. 1. In the profession of his religion. Joy is the very strength of this. 2. In his concern to recommend religion to others. 3. In the discharge of his duties. 4. In his perils. 5. In his sufferings. 6. In death. (*W. Jay.*)

Joy a strength:—Go out of your cares, and your fevers and perils, by going nearer to your Saviour. Catch that glance of His gaze, the very rest of God. The sky is blue above the bleak and barren ground; the heavens smile above the storms. All things seem to die; but God is over all, blessed for ever. His joy will comfort your sorrows. It will conquer your fears. It will neutralise your bereavements. It will negative your death. You are on a vessel, and it seems to you that the storm

is awful; the waves run mountains high; the ship pitches, and shudders, and creaks. "Captain," you say, with pale face and staring eyes, "this is a terrible peril. We shall go down; she never will weather this gale!" "Gale!" says the captain, "I call this a good breeze. If we had a little more of it we should soon make land." Then you turn and look with wonder in the captain's eyes; they are full of smiling satisfaction, and his heroic face is mild and calm. The captain says, "All is well." He is not disturbed. And the captain's calm is your strength. He ought to know. So Jesus knows. (*Hugh S. Carpenter, D.D.*)

The joy of the Lord in the hour of death:—When I was about fifteen years of age I sat up one night with one of my class-mates, an aged man, who had suffered from spasmodic asthma for a number of years with great resignation and patience; and about the noon of night he called me to his bedside, and with difficulty articulated a few words, which were these: "Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby." He then closed his eyes, gathered up his feet, and slept with his fathers. I have blessed God a hundred times, a thousand times, that when I was so young in the way I saw a Christian die. "In the joy of the Lord" was his "strength"—the strength of his heart, and his portion for ever. (*J. Entwistle.*)

Conspicuous Christian joy:—Let your face shine with love to God and to men. The expression of one's countenance speaks more eloquently sometimes than words. When Murray McCheyne died there was found on his desk an unopened letter, which proved to be from a man in Broughty Ferry, who wrote that he was converted, not by anything Mr. McCheyne had said, but "By your look, sir, as you entered the pulpit." Christ's joy should be in all who love and serve Him. "Let the children of Zion be joyful in their King." "Rejoice in the Lord alway, and again I say, Rejoice" (Psa. cxlix. 2; Phil. iv. 4). (*Dr. Fergus Ferguson.*)

The joy of the Lord our strength:—George Stephenson and a friend were once looking at a train which was rushing along. The trains in those days were not so common as they are now, and George asked his friend what he thought propelled the train along. His friend answered, "Probably the arm of some stalwart north country driver." "No," said George, "it is the heat and light of the sun which shone millions of years ago, which has been bottled up in the coal all this time, and is now driving that train." In the same way the joy of the Lord, the sun of our spiritual lives, is the power that works in us and gives us our strength.

The joy of the Lord continues in sorrow:—The joy the Holy Spirit gives lives on in the heart when all earthly sources of gladness have failed. It hides like a rainbow in the bosom of the darkest cloud, and shines out in the gloom. There is a legend of a wondrous golden organ that was in some ancient monastery, which once, when in danger of being stolen, was cast by the monks into a deep river, to be hidden from the robbers; and, in the waters, buried out of sight in the floods, it still played on, pouring out its sweet music. This legend illustrates the heart which has in it the secret of Christian joy. Floods of sorrow may roll over it, but in the depths its song is not silenced. (*J. R. Miller, D.D.*)

Religious happiness:—Mr. Haslam told how "Happy Peter" was in the habit of saying he had been happy for thirty-seven years. One who visited him, and noticed the appearance of his sickly wife and humble home, said, "Have you no clouds?" "Yes," replied Peter, "but if there were no clouds there would be no sweet rain." Dwelling on common mistakes about the gloom of a religious life, Mr. Haslam added: "I have a friend in Norfolk who was converted seventeen years ago. He is a magistrate and chairman of the Local Board. People said when he was converted, 'It's all over with him'; and a cousin of his said to me, about the same time, 'My cousin has become serious.' 'No,' I said, 'he hasn't.' 'Well, well, he has become religious.' 'No, he hasn't. A Hindoo, a Mohammedan, a Jew is religious, and your cousin might be that and be going to hell.' 'Then he must be going to die.' 'No, he isn't, for I've got hold of the same thing, and am stronger far than I was thirty years ago.' There are many people like that; and to one and all of them I give the same answer."

The joy of religion:—Christ never means us to stay in shadowland; He desires us to substitute His joy for the less permanent joys of earth; and it should be our wish to please Him by apprehending the deep and solemn joyousness which is the very soul of His religion. It is joy to know Christ, to love Him, to serve Him, to follow Him. It is joy to meditate on the Divine grace in redemption; it is joy to know that we are being sanctified; it is joy to share with others our spiritual heritage. It is joy to look forward to that fair season when conflict and struggle shall be over, and the best we have loved on earth will reunite with us in a joy that

shall never be broken or shadowed any more. Compared with this vision, what has the world to offer? No kind of gratification that the world gives ever lasts very long. There is a law of diminishing returns in our earthly joys. Our tastes alter, our wishes change, all pleasures and successes pall in time. There is, as Professor Romanes has said, only one joy which, instead of diminishing, continually increases in intensity and power while life remains: it is the joy of religion. A grand, exalted sentiment it is, but never an unreal or fictitious one. (*R. J. Campbell.*) *Christian joy an inspiration to others*:—There was a young lad who had a great ambition to learn to play on the bugle, and to that end he practised continually. As the practice went on night after night without intermission, his mother, after hearing it as long as she could, got thoroughly disgusted and finally suggested that he should get out of the house and practise in the open-air. The boy took his bugle and went to the top of a hill and there practised the one tune that he could play. When he had thoroughly mastered it, he went one evening to his favourite spot on the top of the hill and there started a grand solo concert. He could not see any one, but unobserved by him, down towards the valley, seated upon a dyke was an old man, with his face buried in his hands. He was very much down-hearted; everything seemed to be going wrong with him. He had lost all his life's savings; he had not heard for a long time from his only son; and his daughter had just gone and left him. Just when down in the deepest depths of despair the sound of the bugle caught his ear as it poured forth the strains of "The march of the Cameron men," the one tune the boy could play. Somehow it seemed to put new life into the old man. His spirits rose, and rising from his seat he started homewards with new vigour. Everything seemed to be brighter. Oh! we should be cheerful Christians. How much good Christian happiness does not only to ourselves, but to others! How it cheers them on in life's dark and steep places! (*J. Robertson.*) *Increasing joy*:—I remember, when an undergraduate at Oxford, being invited to breakfast by one of the city clergy. The good man showed us three photographs of himself, taken at different times, remarking, "Don't I look happier as I grow older?" It shall be even so with every one who drinks at the fountain of all joy, and thirsts no more. (*F. Harper, M.A.*) *Joy in Jewish worship*:—It is remarkable how largely feelings of joy characterised Jewish worship. The abjectness and terror that were often such marked features of idolatrous worship were altogether absent. Heathen worship was never joyous except when it took the form of a licentious orgie. It is true the Jewish festival was also a sacrificial feast, but the feast was only a form of public entertainment for a multitude who had been brought from their homes and needed some kind of hospitality. These feasts were not occasions for riotous excess. The sternest of the prophets utter no reproach of this kind. Even the social character of the festivals is scarcely more than indicated in the psalms that were composed for them. They are gladsome very, but with a religious joy, a joy of faith.

Vers. 15-18. So the people went forth, and brought them, and made themselves booths.—*The celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles*:—I. WE ARE REMINDED HERE THAT THERE IS SUCH A THING AS BURIED TRUTH. True reformatations and revivals of religion have always consisted in people's minds being directed to some portion of truth which, though contained in the Word of God, has for a time been lost sight of. II. WE OBSERVE THAT IN THIS INSTANCE THE JEWS DARED TO FOLLOW GOD, APART FROM AND IN SPITE OF THE TRADITIONS OF A THOUSAND YEARS. It is not a valid argument against a view of truth that it has found no acceptance for long, or even that the testimony of successive generations is against it. III. WEAK AND DESPISED INSTRUMENTALITY IS OFTEN USED OF GOD TO RECOVER LOST TRUTH. "It was reserved for the feeble remnant that returned from the Babylonish captivity to do what had not been done even in the bright days of Solomon." The Waldenses bearing dogged testimony against Rome for centuries. The Gospellers of Wycliffe's and other days in our own land. George Fox and his noble band of "Friends." IV. IT WAS AFTER BITTER CHASTISEMENT OF CAPTIVITY THAT THE NATION WAS THUS MADE "WILLING AND OBEDIENT." (*W. P. Lockhart.*) *Religion in booths*:—It is a grand festival. It is the Feast of Tabernacles. The people celebrate the deliverance of their fathers from desert travel, where they lived in tents. And it is also typical of our march to heaven—pilgrims in a temporary booth on the way to Canaan. So that I say to you in a figurative sense what was said to the Jews in a literal sense, "Go forth into the mount, and fetch olive branches, and pine branches, and myrtle branches, and palm branches, and branches of thick trees, to make

booths." I. THE "OLIVE" BRANCH IS ALWAYS USED AS A SIGN OF PEACE. The olive-tree grows in warm climates to the height of about twenty-five feet, has an upright stem, and many out-shooting branches which can easily be stripped off. If a twig of this tree, in time of war, is handed from one general to another, it means the unsaddling of cavalry horses and the hanging up of the war knapsacks. After hostilities have ceased, these branches are placed over doorways, and they are built into triumphal arches, and they are waved in processions. They spell out in verdurous letters that heaven-born word of "Peace!" Now in this gospel arbour which God sends us to build we must have two of these olive branches. 1. Peace with God. 2. Peace with each other. II. My text, in the next place, suggests that in this arbour for our soul, on the way toward glory, we ought to HAVE A GOOD MANY "PINE BRANCHES." Now, pine is healthful, aromatic, and an evergreen. It has often been the case that invalids have been sent into the regions where the pine grows, and they have come back thoroughly well. It is a frequent prescription, on the part of physicians, to say, "Go for a few weeks amid the pines, and you will be better." Now we want in this gospel arbour pine branches. We want something that means health, aroma, and evergreen. This is a very healthy religion. I have known an old Christian, with no capital of physical health, and carrying about him all the respectable diseases that one can carry, and yet kept alive by nothing at all but his religion. But this gospel is evergreen. What does the pine forest care for the snow on its brow? It merely considers it a crown of glory. You cannot freeze out the pine forest, and this grace of God is just as good in the winter of trouble as it is in the summer of prosperity. It is the religion you want—not dependent upon weather or upon change. III. My text suggests still further that this arbour of Christian grace ought to have in it A GOOD MANY "PALM BRANCHES." You know that it is a favourite tree at the East. The ancients used to make it into three hundred and sixty uses. The fruit is conserved. The sap becomes a beverage. The stones are ground up as food for camels. The base of the leaves is twisted into rope. Baskets and mats are made out of it, and from the root to the tip-top of the palm it is all usefulness. It grows eighty-five feet in height, is columnar, its fringed leaves sometimes four or five yards long, and the ancients used to carry it in processions as a symbol of victory. Oh, for more palm branches in our gospel arbour! Usefulness and victory! Head, heart, tongue, pen, money, social position—all employed for God. Counsel is often given on worldly matters—about investments—that you must not put all the eggs in one basket; but in this matter of religion I wish that we might give all to God, and get in ourselves. "Oh," says some man, "my business is to sell silks and calicoes." Then sell silks and calicoes for the glory of God. Says another man, "My business is to edit a newspaper." Then edit a newspaper for the glory of God. Anything that a man cannot do for the glory of God he has no right to do. The vast majority of professed Christians in this day do not amount to anything. You have to shovel them off the track before the chariot of God's grace can advance. What we want in the Church now is not weeping willows, sighing and weeping by the water-courses, admiring their long fringes in the glass of the stream; not hickories full of knots; not wild cherry, dropping bitter fruits; but palm-trees, adapted to three hundred and sixty purposes—root, trunk, branch, leaf, producing something for God and man and angels. IV. My text demands that in the making of this gospel arbour we shall get "BRANCHES OF THICK TREES." You know that a booth or arbour is of little worth unless there be stout poles at the corners, or the wind will upset the booth; and you will be worse off than without shelter unless you have strong branches of thick trees. A gospel that is all mellowness and sweetness will have no strength to withstand the blast of temptation and trial and trouble. We want a brawny Christianity. We want a gospel with warnings as well as with invitations. While olive branches are good in their places, and the palm branches, and the myrtle branches, we want the stout branches of thick trees. The tempest of temptation will come down after a while; the hurricane of death will blow; and alas! for that man who has not his soul sheltered under the stout branches of the thick trees. (*T. De Witt Talmage.*) **Also day by day, . . . he read in the book of the law of God.**—*Daily Bible-reading*:—I. Why? 1. Because of its infinite preciousness and value. 2. Because of its tendency to build up the inner and spiritual life. 3. Because all great revivals of the power of religion have been associated with high reverence for the written Word. 4. Because by this Word you must be judged. II. How? 1. With reverence. 2. With special affection and prayerfulness. 3. Take time. 4. Keep the end in view. (*S. Thodey.*)

CHAPTER IX.

VERS. 4-38. And cried with a loud voice unto the Lord their God.—The suppliant:—The true test of the good received in religious ordinances is their sanctifying effect on the life. Many a tree is gay with blossoms in spring that yields no fruit in autumn; and so many gospel hearers, who appear full of promise in the time of ordinances, show no decided piety in their subsequent conduct.

I. THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE PRAYER. It is often easier to act for God than to pray to Him—to work in His vineyard than to wait at His throne. Activity may afford occasion for excitement, and scope for display, and opportunity to attract the admiration of others; while prayer calls to the exercise of faith, to cultivate humility, to live under the eye of God. Spiritual work, indeed, might be expected to draw the servant near to the Master for communion and help. It soon discovers human weakness and want, and dependence on almighty power for strength, for supply, for all blessing. But, instead of proving an incentive to prayer, it is often made a substitute for it; and the labourer feels as if too busy in service to find time for unceasing supplication. And thus the people of Judah here set a high value on prayer. They have laboured to restore the walls and temple of Jerusalem, and success has crowned their efforts. But activity in these sacred undertakings, so far from cooling their devotion, inspires them to growing fervour in prayers and supplications to God. In reference to the circumstances of this prayer, it may be remarked—1. It was offered immediately after the observance of the Feast of Tabernacles. On the fifteenth day of the seventh month this festival commenced, on the twenty-second it was closed; and “on the twenty-fourth day of this month the children of Israel were assembled” for this prayer. The time of meeting is proof of the ardour of their devotion. Formal worshippers are soon wearied in spiritual exercises, and ask, “When will the new moon be gone, that we may sell corn; and the Sabbath, that we may set forth wheat?” It is a frame of devotion much to be desired. Protracted meetings like this, for religious exercises, may be expedient only on extraordinary occasions, but habitual love of communion with God is both the strength and joy of a holy heart. It is not one intense momentary influence, flowing from the summer sun, that covers fields with corn and trees with fruit, but the daily glow of his genial beams; so it is not a single hour in the presence of Christ, receiving one full manifestation of Him in the soul, that saves it from the fears of guilt, and beautifies it with His image, but it is an abiding in Him, a “looking unto Jesus,” a “coming unto God by Him.” “Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in Me.” Further, this prayer was offered in a season of solemn fasting (ver. 1). In the pilgrimage to the better land, the valley of humiliation lies near the delectable mountains; and the goodly prospects of Emmanuel’s land obtained from the one prepare for walking in safety through the rugged paths of the other, while the same life of faith is maintained in both. Moreover, the prayer was offered amid earnest desires after new obedience. “The seed of Israel separated themselves from all strangers” (ver. 2). This sincere desire to put away sin, and to obey the Divine Word, is essential to effectual prayer. “If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.”

II. THE SUBSTANCE OF THE PRAYER. 1. An adoration of the Divine majesty (ver. 6). 2. A review of past mercies. The mercies celebrated are—God’s choice of Israel; His deliverance of them from bondage; His guidance of them through the wilderness; and His bestowal on them of spiritual privileges. 3. We notice in the prayer confession of numerous sins (vers. 16-35). The light of Divine mercy here shows the dark cloud of their iniquities. They confess their obstinate disobedience to God (vers. 16-19). They hardened their necks, and hearkened not to the Lord’s commandments. They confess their slighting of almighty goodness (vers. 20-26). They confess their refusal of Divine warning (vers. 27-30). They confess they did not glorify God in His gifts (vers. 34, 35). 4. We observe in the prayer a plea for sovereign mercy (vers. 32, 36, 37).

III. THE LESSONS OF THE PRAYER. 1. The duty of prayer in public distress. The people of Judah were here in public distress, and they offer united prayer to God for His help in their time of need. 2. The blessing of prayer to a community. This prayer for Jerusalem was succeeded by times of prosperity in the holy city, and all it represented. 3. The power of prayer for the revival of the Church. (*W. Ritchie.*) **Thou, even Thou, art Lord alone; Thou hast made heaven.**—*The Te Deum:*—In this we have perhaps the fullest setting

forth of the glorious and manifold character of Jehovah which is to be found in any single passage of Scripture, and in it also is brought out in striking contrast the sinful conduct of His chosen people. The Almighty is here recognised as—1. The God of creation. 2. The God of the covenant. 3. The God of redemption (vers. 9-11). 4. The Leader of His people. 5. The Lawgiver. 6. The Sustainer of His people. 7. The God of compassion and the hearer of prayer. (*W. P. Lockhart.*) *The purpose of the rehearsal of national shortcomings:—*I. To ENCOURAGE THEM TO EXPECT FURTHER HELP FROM GOD. II. To CONSTRAIN THEM TO ENTER INTO CLOSER COVENANT WITH HIM. (*Ibid.*) **Thou art the Lord the God, who didst choose Abram.—God's choice:—**My strength during all my life has been precisely this, that I have made no choice. During the last thirty-six years God has twelve times changed my home and fifteen times changed my work. I have scarcely ever done what I myself would have chosen. (*Dean Farrar.*) **And hast performed Thy words.—The certainty of God's promises:—**All means are in His hands. A father may promise his son that he will make something of him when he grows up, but his business declines, he is made bankrupt. But the great Father will never become bankrupt, never fail; His power is infinite. Many a sea captain has had, during a storm, to tell the passengers, "I have done all I can; there is now nothing but the boat." God has never to tell His people that. (*Thomas Jones.*) **The Divine promise sure:—**Corporations may be disfranchised and charters revoked. Even mountains may be removed, and stars drop from their spheres; but a tenure founded on the Divine promise is inalienably secure, and lasting as eternity itself. (*Hervey.*)

Ver. 9. And didst see the affliction of our fathers in Egypt.—The path of duty the path of trial:—I. THAT THE PATH OF HUMAN DUTY HERE RUNS THROUGH GREAT TRIALS. 1. Sometimes it involves the sacrifice of endeared friendship. Lot had to separate from Abraham, Barnabas from Paul, Paul from Mark. 2. Sometimes it involves the sacrifice of worldly prospects. 3. Sometimes it involves the endangering of life itself. 4. Sometimes it involves an outrage on our tender sentiments. Abraham offering up Isaac. II. THAT GREAT TRIALS THROUGH WHICH THE PATH OF DUTY HERE RUNS SERVE TO TEST THE PRINCIPLES OF THE PILGRIMS. 1. It reveals the bad principles of the heart. The Jews at the Red Sea revealed their ingratitude, meanness, apostasy, cowardice. 2. It reveals the good principles of the heart. III. THAT UNBOUNDED FAITH IN GOD IS ESSENTIAL TO CARRY US SAFELY THROUGH THE PATH OF DUTY WITH ALL ITS GREAT TRIALS. (*Homilist.*) **God our helper:—**The following is an extract from Stanley to Sir William Mackinnon: "You, who throughout your long and varied life have steadfastly believed in the Christian's God, and before men have professed your devout thankfulness for many mercies vouchsafed to you, will better understand than many others the feelings which animate me when I find myself back again in civilisation, uninjured in life or health, after passing through so many stormy and distressful periods. Constrained at the darkest hour to humbly confess that without God's help I was helpless, I vowed a vow in the forest solitudes that I would confess His aid before men. A silence as of death was round about me; it was midnight; I was weakened by illness, prostrated with fatigue, and worn with anxiety for my white and black companions whose fate was a mystery. In this physical and mental distress I besought God to give me back my people. Nine hours later we were exulting with a rapturous joy. In full view of all was the crimson flag with the crescent, and beneath its waving folds was the long-lost rear column." Mungo Park was comforted by the Lord by a tiny morsel of moss, and Livingstone was preserved by Him when most people gave him up for lost: and now, from the awful gloom of endless forests, Stanley cries unto the living God, and lives to bear witness to the faithfulness of the prayer-hearing Jehovah.

Ver. 12. Moreover Thou leddest them in the day by a cloudy pillar.—The pillars of cloud and fire:—The people who for forty years followed that fire-cloud have left footprints in the sands of time which serve us as an alphabet of life. The march of the Israelites is an allegory of the life of man. Like a providence palpable to the very eyes of man, the fire-cloud indexed that will of God which it is the longing of true hearts in every age to fulfil. This fire-cloud suggests—I. THAT MAN'S LIFE ON EARTH IS A DIVINELY-CONDUCTED DISCIPLINE. The Israelites emerged from Egypt a huge bee-swarm of humanity making for another hive. From the dark superstitions of life and the coarse immoralities of antiquity they went into the wilderness

to learn the rudiments of life. Outside the sphere of man's natural resources Israel had to learn faith in the supernatural environment of man. Their wilderness journey was the drill of a nation destined to be the vehicle of Divine revelation to a world. Our life on earth is mainly a prolonged and various discipline, and its significance lies in the finally resulting manhood. The main matter is not how long it takes us to cross this strip of earth, or how much we have while we travel, but what the journey makes of us as regards the naked, moral character of us all. Very suggestive, if you will ponder, is Israel's inability to comprehend the meaning of a great deal of their march. Why they should lie still, and why move, were not always plain. We cannot readily comprehend the zigzag ways of life. Looking at our things, and not at our soul, we sometimes seem to be moving in a very resultless way—marking time rather than marching. Said a good and active man whose work is his life, "By this sickness I have lost a month." How so? Through every day of his life henceforth he will carry a reverent thoughtfulness of God, and in all his character there will be the tinge of a mellow tenderness, the results of that "lost month's" meditative realisations. Was the month lost, then? God leads and leaves us not where we would like to be, but where we have need to be. There is wisdom in every stage of life's march and countermarch. Life's roughest mile is "ordered of the Lord," and its darkest place is illuminated by the pillar of fire. It is wisdom to store the lessons of experience. Child-like, we forget the back lessons. The teachings of sorrow's school are forgotten in the playground of our joyfulness. II. THAT THROUGHOUT OUR LIFE-JOURNEY WE FOLLOW A GOD WE NEVER SEE. That fire-bordered cloud was not God. The cathedral window ablaze with its mingled glories hides the sun, while it is at the same time a many-coloured witness of his living radiance. Life leaves room for doubt, and gives worldliness its chance. Herein lies much of our probation. Those tokens of God which are evidence of things not seen are frequently familiarised into comparative powerlessness over the soul. 1. Some of the Israelites sinned under the very shadow of the pillar of fire. The sentiments of reverence and wonder are in danger of exile from the mind. 2. Nature, with its transformations of the seasons. 3. The Sabbath. 4. The house of God. 5. Prayer; our prayers may become like the winding of our watches—acts we do, scarcely sure whether they are done or not. We often see most of God in the night of experience. III. THAT PROTECTION WHICH GOD'S PRESENCE INSURES TO THOSE THAT FOLLOW HIM. Over the sleeping camp the cloud lay like a golden warrior-shield. Yet how slowly was Israel trained to courage! Every new danger created a coward hubbub in the camp. Their foes could do them no harm; but their imaginations were terrible to them as an army with banners. Their minds were made nervous by their own delusions. The Parisians have exhibited what they call a "Panorama of the War." Climbing what appears to be a kind of tower, you seem to see the country around Paris alive with the grim activities of war. Nearest the spectator are placed real cannon and the like, and these shade off into painted forms beyond so perfectly as to produce an illusion like that of the painter who attracted the quick-eyed birds to his painted grapes. The illusion is wonderful, and you can all but smell the gunpowder. But there is no movement—the soldiers are still as stones, the bursting shell remains in the act of explosion, and the flame-flash continues from the cannon-mouth. That breaks the spell. It is but picture, after all. Thus we go at times up the tower of apprehension, and see besieging armies of trouble. Near to us are some real objects of fear, and from them we go on to paint a long perspective of morbid fancies, until life seems ringed round with innumerable foes. After awhile we find it is mostly picture—"the very painting of our fear." Let the chief anxiety of all be to follow the great Leader of life's pilgrimage. (*Samuel Gregory.*)

Ver. 13. *Thou camest down also upon mount Sinai, and spakest with them from heaven.—Go by the directions :—*I saw a picture once which has stuck to my memory for years and years. It was a picture of a dark, wild, stormy night, and a traveller was standing up in the stirrups of his horse at a parting of the way, trying to read the directions on the finger-post. How eagerly he is looking! I can see him yet—holding the lighted match carefully in his hands lest the wind should blow it out before he had read the directions! It was a good thing for him that there were directions, and it is a good thing we have them too. Where are our directions? They are—the Bible. That is God's Word to us, telling us which road to take when we come to the parting of the way. Go by the directions. Do what God says, and you will never go wrong. (*J. Reid Howatt.*)

Ver. 16. **But they and our fathers dealt proudly, and hardened their necks.**—*Hardened by sin*:—Dr. Manton says: "As a delicate constitution is more capable of pain than a robust and stubborn one, and the tender flesh of a child will sooner feel the lash than the thick skin of a slave, so the children of God, having a more serious apprehension of things, and a more tender spirit, soonest feel the burden of their Father's displeasure, and do more lay it to heart than careless and stupid spirits, who laugh at their cross, or drink away their sorrows." Tenderness of heart is thus an attribute of the child of God, and a very precious attribute, too. Hard-hearted men are not men after God's own heart. In proportion as feeling declines, life has declined. Spiritual men are sensitive men. Ossification of the heart is a fatal disease. Declensions in grace are a searing of the soul. When water is warmed by the summer sun, the smallest stone sinks into it; when it is frozen in the northern blast, a huge block will be borne up upon the surface of it, and will never penetrate to its depths. So, when the soul grows cold with distance from God, it will sustain an enormous weight of sin; but when grace returns, and the soul is in a right spiritual condition, an ounce of sin will be more than the soul can bear. Oh, for more of this holy sensitiveness! (C. H. Spurgeon.)

Ver. 17. **But Thou art a God ready to pardon, gracious and merciful.**—*Divine forgiveness*:—I. WHAT IS NECESSARY TO RENDER THE SUBJECT INTERESTING. 1. A conviction of guilt. 2. An apprehension of our danger as transgressors. 3. A discovery of the privileges of a pardoned state. II. THE PROOFS WHICH ESTABLISH THE TRUTH OF THE DOCTRINE. 1. The provision He has made for the exercise of pardon. 2. The promptitude with which He pardons on our return. 3. His earnestness to excite us to seek after the blessing. 4. The character of those who have received pardon. 5. The number of those who obtain forgiveness. III. THE WAY IN WHICH THIS SUBJECT MAY BE ABUSED. 1. When it leads us to deny any disposition in God to punish. 2. When it encourages us to hope for pardon in ways not warranted by the Word of God. (1) Without a reference to the work of Christ. (2) Without repentance. (3) By delaying an application for it to the close of life. (4) By expecting to find this pardon in another world if we fail to obtain it in this. IV. IMPROVEMENT. 1. It should yield encouragement to the broken-hearted. 2. It should afford consolation to those who have believed through grace. 3. The subject demands our admiration and praise. 4. It also calls upon us not only to admire, but to imitate (Eph. iv. 31, 32, v. 1). (W. Jay.) *Pardon of sin*:—I. THE CERTAINTY OF THIS READINESS TO PARDON. This may be discerned—1. In the plans which He devised for its bestowment consistent with His honour as a sovereign, and compatible with His character as a just and moral Ruler. 2. In the repeated assurances and urgent entreaties with regard to the facts which are furnished in His Word. 3. In the efforts He makes to effect it, and so frequently recorded in the pages of history. II. THE CONDITIONS OF THIS READINESS TO PARDON. 1. A vivid apprehension of personal guilt. 2. A full consciousness of personal danger. 3. Repentance and faith. (W. S. Edwards.) *The pardon of sin*:—No attribute of the Deity is so calculated to afford encouragement and relief to the distressed and penitent sinner as that of His mercy. His justice and holiness make him tremble. The Divine mercy is the only fountain from which all our hope is derived. If God were unmerciful—if He were unable and unwilling to forgive, how awful and desperate would be our condition! I. SOME OF THE DISTINGUISHING CHARACTERISTICS OF DIVINE PARDON. Respecting this blessing, we observe that it is—1. Gratuitous in its bestowment. Had it not been perfectly free, it would be for ever beyond our reach. As fallen man is altogether destitute of all inherent and acquired righteousness, he can never obtain it on the ground of his own merit. Conscious of his utter unworthiness, and that he was destitute of all merit, the psalmist cried, "For Thy name's sake, pardon mine iniquity, for it is great." In the forgiveness of sin, God acts like the creditor towards his two debtors; one owes him five hundred pence, and the other fifty; and when they had nothing to pay, he frankly (freely) forgave them both. It is true that there are certain duties which must be discharged by the sinner; he must repent and believe; but these acts can never merit forgiveness. The pardon of the penitent flows from the free and sovereign grace of God, and is conveyed through the channel of the Redeemer's atoning blood. 2. Unlimited in its extent. The pardoning mercy of God is not confined to any degrees of guilt or amount of transgression. "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits; who forgiveth all thine iniquities, who healeth all thy diseases." The pardoning mercy of God extends to the most flagrant

transgressions, and transcends all human conception. There is no sin so heinous which God cannot forgive, and no guilt of so deep a hue which He cannot remove.

3. Permanent in its enjoyment. II. PROVE THE TRUTH OF THE DECLARATION. God's readiness to pardon is manifest—1. From the provisions made for this purpose. Before sinners could be pardoned and saved, there were certain barriers that must be removed. As God was the supreme Lawgiver and Judge of the world—the Protector of righteousness and goodness—it became Him not to pardon the guilty without the punishing of sin, and that in such a manner as would satisfy His injured justice, and vindicate the honour of His despised law, and at the same time declare His greatest hatred to sin. Had there been no Mediator, the justice and holiness of God would have stood as everlasting obstructions to the exercise of pardoning mercy. 2. The express declarations of Scripture. Listen to the exulting and triumphant language of the prophet Micah: "Who is a God like unto our God, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He retaineth not His anger for ever, because He delighteth in mercy." See how earnestly does God exhort the careless and impenitent, saying, "Turn ye, turn ye from your evil way, for why will ye die, O house of Israel?" "How shall I give thee up, O Ephraim? How shall I deliver thee, O Israel? How shall I make thee as Admah? How shall I set thee as Zeboim?" Observe the grand commission of the apostles, "that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name, among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem." 3. Recorded facts. This glorious truth is not only declared by the voice of inspiration, but also by the loud and impressive testimony of experience. What multitudes have already obtained forgiveness! The Scriptures abound with the most astonishing and striking instances of this delightful truth. But if we look into the New Testament, we shall see this truth shining forth with greater lustre still. The first instance that strikes us here is Peter. How great and dreadful were his sins! He denied his Divine Lord and Master, and that with oaths and curses; and yet repenting, he was forgiven. In the same list we behold Mary Magdalene, "out of whom seven unclean spirits were cast." (*Essex Congregational Remembrancer.*) *Pardoning mercy*:—These words—I. PREFER AN IMPORTANT CHARGE. "And refused to obey," &c. Though this charge was primarily brought against the Jews, it is substantially applicable to all impenitent sinners. Here is—1. A charge of obstinate disobedience. We are guilty of the same charge. We are under infinite obligations to the Divine Being. He is the Creator, Sovereign, Benefactor, Redeemer, Saviour, and Judge of mankind. 2. A charge of criminal forgetfulness. "Neither were mindful of Thy wonders" (Psa. lxxviii. 10-17, cvi. 21-26). God has crowned each of us with loving-kindness and tender mercies, and wrought wonders in our creation, preservation, redemption, and salvation. We have too often unfaithfully forgotten His innumerable benefits, and ungratefully murmured against His kind dispensations (Isa. i. 2, 3). 3. A charge of hardened impenitence. "But hardened their necks," &c. This is an awful state (Prov. xxix. 1; Rom. ii. 5, 6; Heb. iii. 15).

II. CONTAIN A GRACIOUS DECLARATION. "Thou art a God ready to pardon." This is manifest from—1. The perfections of the Divine character. 2. The glorious scheme of human redemption (Isa. liii. 5, 6; Rom. iii. 25, 26; 2 Cor. v. 18, 21). 3. The testimonies and promises of Scripture. III. SUGGEST APPROPRIATE INSTRUCTION. (*Sketches of Four Hundred Sermons.*) *A God ready to pardon*:—I. THE HISTORY OF ISRAEL SINGULARLY ILLUSTRATES THE READINESS OF GOD TO PARDON. II. IT IS EQUALLY TRUE THAT THE LORD AT ALL TIMES IS A GOD READY TO PARDON. 1. It is true of Him by nature. Mercy is an essential attribute of God. 2. He Himself removed the impediment which lay in the way of forgiveness. 3. He sends His message of love to sinners while they are yet in their sins. 4. He makes no hard conditions with sinners. 5. What He demands of man by the gospel He also works in Him by His Spirit. 6. He accepts even the very lowest grade of the necessary graces. Repentance, &c. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *A pardoning God*:—I. THE NATURE OF THIS PARDON. It is—1. Free. Pardon must be so. It is no objection to say that Christ has purchased it. True, He has purchased, but it is free in its bestowment on us, because we could not merit it, nor claim it as a right. 2. Complete. Do not mean that it refers to the future. Some say when once pardoned all done. Not so Scriptures. Complete because it refers to all; complete because it is full. 3. Present. Some say not until death. Not so Scriptures. 4. Righteous. "Be it known unto you, therefore, men and brethren," &c. Righteous because bestowed on righteous principles; because of Christ's atonement. 5. Discriminating. If Christ died for all, how is it that all are not pardoned? Remedy

only available for those who apply for it. Hence—II. THE CONDITIONS. Scriptures teach us duty of forgiveness if offender repents and asks. So with God our confession must be—1. Frank. "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper, but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy." 2. Penitent. "The sacrifice," &c. Many frankly confess, but not penitently. True penitence seen in the publican. 3. Believing. III. EVIDENCE THAT GOD IS READY TO PARDON. 1. From scheme of redemption. Love in scheme, end of scheme; and if pardon not dispensed, end defeated. 2. From His relation to the Saviour. As Father He could not furnish a greater guarantee. 3. From means He employs to bring to Him. Sends Spirit—Providence—Word. Characterised by love. 4. From receptions others have met with. Manasseh—dying thief—Saul. Shown in Prodigal. Lessons: 1. Subject does not imply God will not punish. 2. Subject shows only way of deliverance, and that way to be taken now. (*E. R. Derry.*) *The joy of pardon*:—A man named John Welsh lay in prison in Chicago under sentence of death. His friends tried to get his sentence commuted to imprisonment for life. The day before that fixed for the execution arrived without any favourable reply being received. The prisoner sat in his cell listening and longing earnestly for a respite. Presently he heard the rumbling of the wheels of a car. It brought the materials for his scaffold, and soon he heard the strokes of the hammers, and pictured himself hanging on the scaffold which he could hear them raising. The sound almost drove him frantic, and he sent for the governor, and begged that he might be taken away anywhere from that dreadful noise. He was taken to a distant cell, and there he sat on the edge of his bed, haunted with gloomy thoughts, all hope gone. He was startled from his reverie by a hurried step along the corridor. The key was thrust into the lock, and one of the officers of the prison stood before him. He held a paper in his hand signed by the Governor of the State of Illinois. It was a commutation of his sentence. . . . How the truth burst on his mind! When the paper was handed to him he could not read it for tears; but it was a paper bringing him his life, and he hugged it, and clasped it, and kissed it. (*H. W. Taylor.*)

Vers. 26-29. Nevertheless they were disobedient, and rebelled against Thee.—*Provocations and punishment*:—I. HOW JUSTLY WE MAY BE CHARGED, AS THE JEWS ARE IN THE TEXT, WITH HAVING WROUGHT GREAT PROVOCATIONS. This will be manifest if we consider—1. To what a prodigious height all kinds of iniquity are raised amongst us. Atheism, infidelity, blasphemy, intemperance, impurity, commercial immorality. 2. What engagements we are under to abstain from all transgressions of the laws of God. 3. That our sins have been committed against the most prevailing attempts of the Spirit of God to restrain and reclaim us from them. 4. That our sins have been committed against many and great mercies. 5. That our sins have been committed against the discipline of God's rod and those many judgments He hath sent to teach us righteousness. II. THAT WE HAVE GREAT REASON TO FEAR THAT OUR GREAT PROVOCATIONS MAY BE PUNISHED BY GOD AS THOSE OF THE JEWS WERE. Conclusion: What is the most effectual means to prevent the punishment our great provocations threaten us with? (*Lilly Butler.*) *And testifiedst against them, that Thou mightest bring them again unto Thy law.*—*God's laws*:—Some years ago I was enjoying a ramble on the Portsmouth Hills, a favourite resort of the Portsmouth people, and commanding a delightful view of the sea. They are all open to the public, except a few places which are carefully fenced off. Are these the most luxurious spots, where the grass is softest and the moss most green? No, indeed, these are the broken and precipitous parts, where serious accidents might occur. God's laws are just like these fences. God's love has placed fences there to keep us from hurting ourselves. (*F. S. Webster.*) *Danger signals*:—In travelling along our great railroads we pass many signal stations. In connection with each of these there is a man appointed, one of whose duties it is to see that the way is clear. If a bridge should be broken, or any obstruction is on the road, he is expected to ring a bell, wave a flag, or make a signal of some kind, so that the driver of any train coming along the road may know in time to stop his train before any harm is done. And the flag the man waves, or the signal he puts out, is the warning given to approaching trains to save them from injury. In the journey that we are pursuing through this life we are sure to meet with many dangers. The Bible is the guide-book which God has given us to use on the journey. And the warnings found in this book are the signals to tell us of the dangers that lie along our path in order that

we may avoid them. We cannot be safe in our journey through the world unless we are careful to mind these warnings.

Ver. 38. Howbeit, Thou art just in all that is brought upon us.—*The miseries of life; their origin and remedy*:—The miseries of life have been a fruitful theme to writers in all ages. Some have endeavoured to engage us in their contemplation for a wise and good end. Others have taken occasion from them to dispute the wisdom, justice, and goodness of God. Such notions, thus derogatory from the providence of God, tend, even in the best of men, if not timely eradicated, to weaken those impressions of reverence and gratitude which are necessary to add warmth to devotion and vigour to virtue. The teaching of Scripture is, that God is not to be charged with disregard of His creation. He created man for happiness, and this happiness was forfeited by a breach of the conditions to which it was annexed. Physical and moral evil entered the world together. To avoid misery we must avoid sin. Consider—I. **HOW FEW OF THE EVILS OF LIFE CAN JUSTLY BE ASCRIBED TO GOD.** We must carefully distinguish that which is actually appointed by Him from that which is only permitted, or that which is the consequence of something done to ourselves, and could not be prevented but by the interruption of those general laws which we term the course of nature or the established order of the universe. If we examine all the afflictions of mind, body, and estate by this rule, we shall find God not otherwise accessory to them than as He works no miracles to prevent them, as He suffers men to be masters of themselves, and restrains them only by coercions applied to their reason. 1. In making an estimate of the miseries that arise from the disorders of the body, we must consider how many diseases proceed from our own laziness, intemperance, or negligence; how many the vices or follies of our ancestors have transmitted to us. 2. Nor are the disquietudes of the mind less frequently excited by ourselves. (1) Pride is the general source of our infelicity. (2) Immoderate desires. (3) Undue solicitude about future events which gives rise to harassing fears and anxieties. 3. Poverty is not always the effect of wickedness—it may often be the effect of virtue; but it is not certain that poverty is an evil. II. **HOW FAR A GENERAL PIETY MIGHT EXEMPT ANY COMMUNITY FROM THOSE EVILS.** A community, in which virtue should generally prevail, of which every member should fear God with his whole heart and love his neighbour as himself, where every man should labour to make himself “perfect even as his Father which is in heaven is perfect,” would find these evils practically non-existent. III. **HOW MUCH IN THE PRESENT CORRUPT STATE OF THE WORLD PARTICULAR MEN MAY, BY THE PRACTICE OF THE DUTIES OF RELIGION, PROMOTE THEIR OWN HAPPINESS.** (*John Taylor, LL.D.*) **God has done right**:—I. **RIGHT AS TO WISDOM.** It is of great importance for us to know, and to feel, especially when tossed on the billows and enveloped in the darkness of some heavy affliction, that God is infinitely wise, and that His wisdom can and will conduct all the circumstances of His people to a happy issue. This is absolutely necessary to the enjoyment of anything like calm security amidst such scenes. It is so in the common affairs of life. The soldier trusts in the wisdom of his general, and is calm in battle. The sailor trusts in the wisdom of his captain, and is calm in the tempest. The traveller has confidence in the wisdom of his guide, and pursues his course in peaceful security. And so, if believers would enjoy a calm and cheerful assurance in fighting the battles, braving the storms, and pursuing the pilgrimage of their present probation, they must have a settled and solid repose in the infallible wisdom of God. And they must seek this, not so much from the deductions of human reason, or the better lights of their own experience in relation to providence, as from the operations of faith in the Scripture revelations of God and His government. II. **RIGHT AS TO JUSTICE.** Amidst the afflictions of life, not only must we recognise and trust the infinite wisdom of God, but we must endeavour, by the lights of revelation and experience, to reconcile the justice of God with the afflictions of the righteous, and thus justify the ways of God to men. Men who only look on the surface of things and events, and judge from that, often charge God with being rigorous, unjust, and unrighteous in the operations and issues of His providence. All temporal sufferings are the righteous consequence of original or actual sin, and are frequently merited by the best of men. None can affirm that they are free from human frailties and sinful defects, and therefore they have no right to complain of the punishment of their sins. Our afflictions, generally, fall far below the guilt which we have contracted. The time is hastening on when the wisdom and justice of providence will be convincingly evident to all. III. **RIGHT**

AS TO GOODNESS. "Thou art good, and doest good." Such was the testimony of the psalmist; such is the uniform testimony of revelation; and such, notwithstanding its mysteries, is the acknowledgment of universal providence. And it is very necessary for us to be convinced of this, and live under the perpetual and growing influence of it, amidst the tribulations of life. Else how can we be calm, secure, and happy? 1. Strive to understand God in your afflictions. From the absence of this intelligent view of God's providence in affliction the greatest mischief often springs. Ignorance here, as everywhere else, is ever attended by distrust, fear, dissatisfaction, and wasting anxiety; while, on the other hand, intelligence produces confidence, serenity, contentedness, and a delightful peace and repose. 2. Learn to avoid a spirit of envy and murmuring. If God acts wisely, justly, and mercifully, in often permitting the wicked to live and prosper and the righteous to fall into great afflictions, then resign yourselves to His will, be satisfied with the dispensations of His hand, envy not the condition of others, neither murmur at your own. Consider well the folly, vanity, and misery of sinful prosperity, which rather needs your pity than your envy. 3. Learn to be firm and faithful in the service and cause of God. Afflictions have driven many from Christ and His kingdom. (*W. Gregory.*) *God's proceedings in His justice sometimes inexplicable*:—Take a straight stick and put it into the water, then it will seem crooked; why? because we look upon it through two mediums, air and water. There lies the *deceptio visus*; thence it is that we cannot discern aright. Thus the proceedings of God in His justice, which in themselves are straight, without the least obliquity, seem unto us crooked. That wicked men should prosper, and good men be afflicted; that the Israelites should make the bricks, and the Egyptians dwell in the houses; that servants should ride on horseback, and princes go on foot—these are things that make the best Christians stagger in their judgments. And why? but because they look upon God's proceedings through a double medium of flesh and spirit, that so all things seem to go cross, though indeed they go right enough. And hence it is that God's proceedings in His justice are not so well discerned, the eyes of man alone being not competent judges thereof. (*J. Spencer.*)

Ver. 38. And because of all this, we make a sure covenant, and write it.—*Covenanting with God*:—It may be asked, Are Christians of the present day expected to enter into such covenants? To this we reply both yes and no. Yes, if regard be had to true heart-consecration to the Lord. No, if it be a mere matter of form, a source of bondage or a minister to spiritual pride. If we mistake not, some of the Churches of New England have a form of covenant which each new adherent is required to sign, and we know that the esteemed President Edwards advocated the making of written covenants between individual Christians and the Almighty. In reference to this each must exercise his own judgment as before God. (*W. P. Lockhart.*)

CHAPTER X.

VERS. 1-39. Now those that sealed were, *Nehemiah*.—*Covenanting with God*:—I. THE PARTIES ENTERING THE COVENANT. 1. *Nehemiah* the governor. This is true greatness in the sight of God, to be foremost in consecration to the service of religion, and to stand among His people in trying times. 2. The priests. It is remarkable that the name of *Eliashib*, the high-priest does not appear in this list. It is honourable to the rest of the priests that notwithstanding this defection of their chief, so many of them set their hands to this holy bond. 3. The Levites. We observe among them almost all the names of those who took part in the previous solemnities of this memorable day. It is well, when those who are eminent in devotion are also eminent for devotedness. It sometimes happens that those who are gifted in prayer are not distinguished for holy practice. 4. The chiefs of the nation. This fidelity to the cause of truth adds a lustre to all earthly glory, and sets an ornament of grace on the noblest brow. 5. The rest of the people. It is a blessed thing when whole families thus unite together in the faith of Christ and the life of religion. II. THE ENGAGEMENTS OF THE COVENANT. 1. Sins to be

renounced. It is vain to make loud profession of spiritual experience, and of devotion to the Saviour, unless besetting sins are abandoned and a new course of obedience begun. 2. Duties to be performed. (1) To give to God. (2) To work for God (ver. 34). All vow to work for God, each in his own place, according to the Divine will, at the appointed times, and unwearied in well-doing. Henry Martyn wrote: "With resignation and peace, I can look forward to a life of labour and seclusion from earthly comforts, while Jesus stands near changing me into His holy image. How happy and honoured am I in being suffered to be a missionary." And Levi Parsons testified: "I can subscribe with my hand to be for ever the Lord's, to be sent anywhere, to do anything, to endure any hardship, to live and die a missionary." (3) To wait on God. III. THE INFERENCES DEDUCIBLE FROM THE COVENANT. 1. We here see the propriety of religious covenanting. 2. The obligation in covenanting established. When you devote yourself to the Lord in covenant, to obey the precepts of His Word, your essential obligation is not strengthened or altered; it is merely recognised by you, and promised to be fulfilled. 3. The benefits from covenanting illustrated. (*W. Ritchie.*) *Covenant comfort*:—Christmas Evans, after being sorely tried, was led to enter afresh into personal covenant with God; and such was the joy in God which followed, that he said of it, "After forming this covenant I felt great calmness and peace. I had the feelings of a poor man who has just come under the protection of the Royal Family, and has obtained a pension for life, the dreadful fear of poverty and want having left his house for ever. I felt the safety and shelter which the little chickens feel under the wings of the hen." (*The Thinker.*) *A national covenant*:—On February 25, 1638, a memorable scene was witnessed in the churchyard of Greyfriars, Edinburgh. The National Covenant to maintain Presbyterianism, and to resist contrary errors, having been numerously signed within the church, the parchment was subsequently placed upon the flat tombstone, still extant, of Boswell of Auchinleck, where many others, to show their determination to die rather than yield, signed it with blood from their arms. History testifies that numbers of them endured much suffering rather than violate their pledge. If frail men will so keep their promise, much more must the Omnipotent God honour His covenant. (*Ibid.*)

Vers. 28–30. **And all they that had separated themselves from the people of the lands unto the law of God.**—*A genuine revival*:—1. The crucial test of any revival is the extent to which it actually purifies and reforms the lives of those who come under its influence. 2. This is the kind of revival which ever and again we all need. For we are constantly liable to fall below the level of our Christian privileges. We are also apt to grow blind to our own defects, and to under-estimate the extent of our own shortcomings. We have need to bring our lives into the light of God's holy law, and into the light of the life of Christ, that our consciences may be awakened to a truer and deeper penitence. 3. A repentance which is the fruit of a true revival of the religious life naturally goes into the details of conduct. (*T. Campbell Finlayson.*) **And that we would not give our daughters unto the people of the land.**—*Marriage and purity*:—Wherever I find a purely savage life, which means life eaten up by impure sin, there I also find no capacity in the life to advance and grow. You have an instance in the case of Africa, the life of which has not moved for a couple of thousand years, simply because it is soaked with impurity. Turning to the earliest efforts of civilisation, as recorded in the Bible, I find men making effort after effort, getting a little way, and then each effort vanishing in a sink of impure sin. Life ought to grow if natural, but if impurity is natural, it is natural to stagnate, never to grow, to fall to pieces, and for civilisations to be swept out by weakness and impotence. The history of our European civilisation is the history of the gradual rise in the idea of marriage and purity. (*Canon Scott-Holland.*)

Ver. 31. **And if the people of the land bring ware or any victuals on the sabbath day to all.**—*The profit of Sabbath-keeping*:—John Brand was an old Cornish fisherman. The fishing had not been good for some days, the water had been wild and stormy; but at length, on the Sunday, the weather became fine, and the other fishermen said, "We would keep Sunday—but—we have had so few fish lately; and we are sorry to go out to-day—but—the weather is so good. It is a pity; we would not go if we were not so poor." "What!" said honest John, "are you going to break God's laws with your ifs and buts? Better be poor than

be wicked. My religion is not the kind that shifts with the wind. 'Thou shalt remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy'—that is enough for me." So he persuaded them, and they took his advice, and spent the day in worshipping God. And it was well they did so; for that night, just when the boats would have been coming back, a terrible storm suddenly burst over the deep, and lasted two days. Any boat out in that weather would certainly have been wrecked. But two days after the beautiful weather returned, and more fish were taken than than had been caught for weeks before. No; no one ever yet lost by obeying God. Be you like John Brand; be thorough, honest, and God-fearing in and out; do not have a religion like a weathercock that shifts with the wind, or one that can be broken with an "if" or a "but." (*J. Reid Howatt.*) *The Sabbath beneficial*:—In a prize essay on the Sabbath written by a journeyman printer in Scotland, there appears the following striking passage: "Yoke-fellows, think how the abstraction of the Sabbath would hopelessly enslave the working-classes with whom we are identified. Think of the labour thus going on in one monotonous, and continuous, and eternal cycle—limbs for ever on the rack, the fingers for ever plying, the eyeballs for ever straining, the brow for ever sweating, the feet for ever plodding, the brain for ever throbbing, the shoulders for ever drooping, the loins for ever aching, and the restless mind for ever scheming! Think of the beauty it would efface, of the merry-heartedness it would extinguish, of the giant strength it would tame, of the resources of nature it would exhaust, of the aspirations it would crush, of the sickness it would breed, of the projects it would wreck, of the groans it would extort, of the lives it would immolate, of the cheerless graves it would prematurely dig! See them toiling and mowing, sweating and fretting, grinding and hewing, weaving and spinning, sowing and gathering, mowing and reaping, raising and building, digging and planting, unloading and storing, striving and struggling—in the garden and in the field, in the granary and in the barn, in the factory and in the mill, in the warehouse and in the shop, on the mountain and in the ditch, on the roadside and in the wood, in the city and in the country, on the sea and on the shore, on the earth in days of brightness and of gloom. What a sad picture would the world present if we had no Sabbath!"

Vers. 32-39. Also we made ordinances for us, to charge ourselves yearly with the third part of a shekel.—*Voluntary taxation*:—Not to enter upon the thorny path of endowed or voluntary religion, nor to inquire whether tithes are coeval with the first man, and binding upon the present age, let us maintain—I. THAT THE CHURCH SUPPOSES AN EDIFICE. God may be worshipped in any house. Experience has taught the convenience and value of a house of God. The edifice must be built and maintained. II. THAT A CHURCH REQUIRES A MINISTER. "No man can rightly labour in the Word and doctrine without diligent and habitual Biblical study; no man can conduct such study without the renunciation of secular pursuits; no man can abandon such pursuits without an adequate and guaranteed salary from the Church in which he teaches, for which he labours." The ministry must be sustained. III. THAT A CHURCH IS A BROTHERHOOD. "The rich and poor meet together." "The poor ye have always with you." In a Church sense, "if any provide not for his own house, he hath denied the faith." IV. THAT A CHURCH IS A MISSIONARY ORGANISATION. It has duties both at home and abroad. The Word of God must be translated, the masses evangelised, society leavened. A true Church must of necessity be a generous Church. It gets to give. (*Homiletical Commentary.*)

Ver. 35. And to bring the first-fruits of our ground.—*A fruit-service*:—We notice in this text—I. WILLINGHOOD. "And to bring." It was no tax. Love is its own tax-levier, and it ever gathers the richest, the ripest, and the best fruit. When a Church or a community is filled with love you need have no fear for revenue. II. PRECEDENCE. "First-fruits." In all things Christ must have the "pre-eminence." He must be Alpha. III. UNIVERSAL LORDSHIP. First-fruits of "all trees." He is Lord of all. So it is with the fruit of our souls. Jesus claims tribute from all provinces of our nature. He is not satisfied with actions. He claims the captivity of our thoughts. He wants not only the first-fruits of our emotions, of penitence, but also of our gratitude, our adoration, our trust, and our love. Let us see that His flag is waving over every province of our nature, and that we give to Him the first-fruits of conscience and meditation, of imagination and memory, of ardent love and submissive will. IV. ANNUAL OFFERING. "Year

by year." We should lose the consciousness of advancing time if it were not for our birthdays. We should miss much of occasions for gratitude if it were not for seed-time and harvest, summer and winter. The living earth reminds us of the living God, who supplies all we need. (*W. M. Statham.*)

Ver. 37. **And the tithes.**—*Tithes*:—Without inquiring into the reason for which the number ten has been so frequently preferred as a number of selection in the cases of tribute offerings, both sacred and secular, voluntary and compulsory, we may remark that numerous instances of its use are found both in profane and also in Biblical history, prior to, or independently of, the appointment of the Levitical tithes under the law. In Biblical history the two prominent instances are—1. Abram presenting the tenth of his property, according to the Syrian and Arabic versions of Heb. vii., but as the passages themselves appear to show, of the spoils of his victory, to Melchisedek (Gen. xiv. 20; Heb. vii. 2-6). 2. Jacob, after his vision at Luz, devoting a tenth of all his property to God in case he should return home in safety (Gen. xxviii. 22). These instances bear witness to the antiquity of tithes, in some shape or other, previous to the Mosaic tithe system. But numerous instances are to be found of the practice of heathen nations, Greeks, Romans, Carthaginians, Arabians, of applying tenths derived from property in general, from spoil, from confiscated goods, or from commercial profits, to sacred, and quasi-sacred, and also to fiscal purposes, viz., as consecrated to a deity, presented as a reward to a successful general, set apart as a tribute to a sovereign, or as a permanent source of revenue. (*Smith's Bible Dictionary.*) *Giving as a means of character culture*:—God carries on His cause in the world by the aid of His people. He is constantly calling on us to give, now to this cause and now to that. Why so? Surely He to whom the silver and gold belong has no need of us to help forward His work. He could, if He would, do it much more efficiently without us. But He is striving to educate us into resemblance to Christ and meetness for heaven. If a father could place his child where he would be habitually giving, giving, in the expression of a benevolent sympathy and helpfulness, he would be putting him under the most efficient of all means for the development in him of a truly Christian, or Christlike, spirit. He would be conferring on him one of the richest possible blessings. This is the blessing which our heavenly Father is trying to bestow upon us, in surrounding us as He does with those who need our sympathy and help. If we gratefully recognise our Father's wise and loving design, and, so far as we can, give our help with a truly Christian spirit, our contributions will do more good to us who give than to those who receive them. Every such expression of Christian love will leave an impress on our character which we shall carry with us for ever. It will develop into augmented power and more absolute supremacy within us that Christlike spirit without which we can never walk the golden streets. We need, then, to cultivate the habit of giving as much as the habit of praying.

Ver. 39. **And we will not forsake the house of our God.**—*Zeal for the sanctuary*:—Why should we say of "the habitation of God's house," "We will not forsake it"? 1. God has clearly ordained public worship. He made man to be social—social in virtue of his sorrows, joys, wants, affections, and relationships. He also made man to be social in things spiritual. The isolation of selfishness is sin. Union is cherished by communion, and communion strengthened by public worship. Jesus honoured the temple. The faithful in every age have desired to dwell in the house of the Lord. 2. The special manifestations of the Divine presence, vouchsafed in the congregations of the saints, ought to endear to us such privileged scenes. 3. As the sanctuary has been the place of the Lord's rest, so has it been the scene where He has imparted the richest gifts to His worshippers. 4. The servant of God will love the courts of the Lord, and not forsake them, because in them he tastes most of heaven below. You cannot form a better conception of heaven than by fixing on the happiest Sabbath, and the happiest hour of worship on the happiest Sabbath, you ever enjoyed in the assembly of the saints. (*Canon Stowell.*) *Zeal for God's house expressed in a holy resolution not to forsake it*:—I. A RESOLUTION WELL BECOMING CHRISTIANS THEMSELVES. This resolution comprehends the following particulars: 1. That we will never cast off the profession of our faith, nor make a defection from the truth and ways of the gospel, for any cause, nor upon any account whatsoever. 2. That we will not neglect the ordinances of Divine worship, nor be wanting in our attendance on them whenever

we are called, and have an opportunity of appearing before God in His house. (1) Jesus Christ, as Lord of His own house, has appointed divers ordinances to be observed. (2) There must be an assembly of people meeting together for the public administration of these holy ordinances. (3) There must be some proper and convenient places appointed and agreed upon for such religious assemblies where they can be had. (4) There are particular times and seasons for the holding these religious assemblies. (5) There are certain persons whose work and duty it is to go before others in these holy administrations. 3. That we will promote as far as in us lies the interests of religion, and spread the kingdom of Christ in the world. II. IT IS NOT ONLY LAWFUL, BUT MAY BE USEFUL AND EXPEDIENT, FOR CHRISTIANS IN SOCIETIES TO ENGAGE THEMSELVES TO GOD, AND THE DUTIES THEY OWE TO HIM AND ONE ANOTHER. III. OFFER REASONS BOTH FOR MAKING THIS RESOLUTION AND OBLIGING OURSELVES TO MAKE IT GOOD. 1. Because it is God's house. (1) To forsake God's house would be to forsake our own mercies. (2) To leave this house is to forsake the place which God Himself hath chosen and where He delights to dwell. (3) To forsake this house is to forsake God Himself. We cannot quit the inheritance of the Lord but in effect we go and serve other gods. 2. Because our particular good is lodged in the public interest. 3. This is the noblest way of imitating the great God Himself, and conforming to the example of our blessed Saviour. 4. This makes men real blessings to the world. Such men really are the strength and security of a nation. For their sakes God sometimes preserves others from those judgments which their crying sins would otherwise pull down upon their guilty heads. Sodom had been preserved for the sake of ten righteous men, could so many have been found in the place. 5. This will be our rejoicing and comfort another day. Application: Having made this resolution, we must oblige ourselves to make it good. Because of the inconstancy and deceitfulness of our hearts. Such engagements will help to fix us more firmly in the interests of religion, and make us more successful in resisting all temptations to apostasy. Hereby we are rendered more capable of serving the interests of religion. A force when united becomes the stronger. The joint concurrence of many gives a great advantage to a design, and a better prospect of success. (*Matthew Clarke.*) *Attachment to God's house*:—Consider—I. THE RESOLUTION ITSELF: "We will not forsake," &c. This resolution includes—1. Constant and regular attendance. 2. A lively interest in its welfare and prosperity. II. THE GROUNDS OF THIS RESOLUTION. 1. Our gracious union with God. All connected with God should be dear and sacred to us—His Word, ordinances, people; therefore His house. 2. Our clear and imperative duty. Public worship is of His own appointment. 3. Our public profession. 4. The special advantages we shall derive from it. Exaltation of desires; soul elevation; enlargement of mind; soul enrichment with all spiritual blessings in Christ. "A day in Thy courts is better than a thousand," &c. "They that wait upon the Lord," &c. 5. The connection of the house of God with the celestial world. It is "the gate of heaven." Application: 1. Where professors are indifferent to the welfare of God's house, it is an unfailing indication that the heart is not right with God. 2. Let the subject inspire the sincere friends of Christ to more ardent zeal for the diffusion of the Divine glory. 3. How suited is God's house to every description. The reckless here are warned, the supine aroused, the inquirer directed, the mourner comforted, the faithful established, &c. (*J. Burns, D.D.*)

CHAPTER XI.

VERS. 1-19. *And the rulers of the people dwelt at Jerusalem.*—*The holy city replenished*:—Jerusalem is called here the holy city, because there the temple was, and that was the place God had chosen to put His name there. Upon this account one would think the holy seed should all have chosen to dwell there. They declined, however. Either—1. Because a greater strictness of conversation was expected from the inhabitants of Jerusalem than from others, which they were not willing to come up to; or—2. Because Jerusalem, of all places, was most hated by the heathen, their neighbours, and against it their malicious designs were levelled, which made that the post of danger, as the post of honour uses to be, and therefore they were not willing to expose themselves there; or—3. Because it was more for

their worldly advantage to dwell in the country. We are here told—I. BY WHAT MEANS IT WAS REPLENISHED. 1. The rulers dwelt there. The "mighty are magnetic." When great men would choose the holy city for their habitation, it brings holiness into reputation, and their zeal will provoke very many. 2. There were some that "willingly offered themselves to dwell at Jerusalem," bravely postponing their own secular interest to the public welfare. The people blessed them. They praised them, they prayed for them, they praised God for them. Many that do not appear forward themselves for the public good will yet give a good word to those that do. 3. They, finding that yet there was room, concluded, upon a review of their whole body, to bring one in ten to dwell in Jerusalem, and who they should be was determined by lot; the disposal they all knew was of the Lord. The proportion of one in ten seems to refer to the ancient rule of giving the tenth to God. And what is given to the holy city He reckons given to Himself. II. BY WHAT PERSONS IT WAS REPLENISHED. 1. Many of the children of Judah and Benjamin dwelt there. Originally part of the city lay in the lot of those tribes and part in that of the other; but the greater part was in the lot of Benjamin; hence more families of that tribe abode in the city. 2. The priests and Levites did many of them settle at Jerusalem. Where else should men that were holy to God dwell, but in the holy city? (*Matthew Henry*.) *Repeopling the capital*:—This was altogether worthy of Nehemiah's practical sagacity. The restored walls of Jerusalem could not do much to promote its security and welfare so long as it was inhabited by a mere handful of people. It would be well if some of our modern statesmen were to grasp the principle of this policy, and open their eyes to the fact that the chief wealth and strength of any nation must ever lie, not in massive fortifications or colossal armies, but in the numbers, the character, the patriotism, and the prosperity of its people. (*T. Campbell Finlayson*.) *The holy city*:—The two leading thoughts connected with the holy city in this phase of her history are singularly applicable to the Christian community. I. ENCLOSED WITHIN WALLS, THE CITY GAINED A PECULIAR CHARACTER AND PERFORMED A DISTINCTIVE MISSION OF HER OWN. Our Lord was not satisfied to rescue stray sheep on the mountains only to brand them with His mark and then turn them out again to graze in solitude. He drew them as a flock after Himself, and His disciples gathered them into the fold of Christian fellowship. This is of as vital importance to the cause of Christianity as the civic organisation of Jerusalem was to that of Judaism. The Christian City of God stands out before the world on her lofty foundation, the Rock of Ages—a beacon of separation from sin, a testimony to the grace of God, a centre for the confession of faith, a home for social worship, a rallying-point for the forces of holy warfare, a sanctuary for the helpless and oppressed. II. THE PUBLIC DUTY OF CITIZENSHIP. The reluctance of Christians to accept the responsibilities of Church membership may be compared to the backwardness of the Jews to dwell in Jerusalem. (*W. F. Adeney, M.A.*)

Ver. 16. *Had the oversight of the outward business of the house of God.*—*The secular in sacred service*:—I. IT IS POSSIBLE TO SECULARISE THE SACRED. When sacred service is entered upon from secular motives; when it is performed in a perfunctory manner; when any object less than God is regarded in its performance. An unhallowed hand may not bear up an ark. A cowl does not make a monk. High office cannot elevate a base man. II. IT IS NECESSARY TO MAKE THE SECULAR SACRED. "He can who thinks he can." Application: 1. The secret of contentment. "Self-humiliation is full of truth and reality." 2. The law of growth. Be thy ambition to become pure in thought and feeling, strong in resolve and deed. Serve. Care not how, mind not where. (*Homiletic Commentary*.) *Outward business*:—We have prayed about that house, we have thanked God that the crumbling walls of our little houses lean against the foundations and the walls of God's dwelling-place. Do we catch the music, do we see the vision of the house of God? Do the words balance well? "House" is a familiar word, "God" is the most awful of all words; yet here we find them together in sublime unity and relation. What is the house of God? "A church." "A chapel, a sanctuary, a tabernacle, a temple." Not necessarily. You may have a cathedral without a house of God, and you may find in some little thatched cottage or chapel on the hillside all the cathedrals out of heaven. Hence it is that we must not look at magnitudes, sizes, revenues, apparatus, but at the ideal. "I never go to the house of God." How do you know that? Have you ever been really out of it? Let us go to Jacob for an answer. What said he when he awoke after the delight and yet the torment of the dream? He said, "This is none other than the house of

God." There are those who only know houses by architecture, by walls, stones, bricks. Well, now, what was Jacob's environment at that time? Churches, chapels, institutions? Not one. Yet he was in a walled place, walled in with light, and ministered to by ascending and descending angels. We must get the house of God and many other things back from little definitions and narrow and petty localisations, and regard the universe as God's house. Of course Jacob, having seen all these things, could have said, "Nightmare!" That is all the answer some men can return to the universe. Let us so live as to make the house, even though a little one, grand, tender in all its ministries, a nest in the heart of God. Let us be careful how we divide things into outward and inward. The time will come when we shall get rid of even Scriptural uses of outward, alien, strange, foreign. All these words are doomed to go. "I saw no temple therein," said John. Why did he not see a temple in heaven? Because heaven was all temple. He who lives in light does not even see the sun; he who lives in God has no moon, for he has no night. But men are crafty and expert almost at making little definitions, parties, separations, and the like. Some men divide music into sacred and profane. I never heard any profane music; I do not believe there is any. I have heard sacred music, and I have heard music profaned, perverted, taken away to bad uses, made a seduction on the road to hell. But we must get back to real definitions and proper qualities, and see things as God meant them to be seen. I have also heard of profane history and sacred history. There is no profane history. History truly written, and true to human experience, is an aspect of Providence, an elucidation of that marvellous mystery which penetrates all life, and that whispers to us in many a moment of unexpectedness, "The very hairs of your head are all numbered." Who is it that rises up amongst us and splits up history into sacred and profane? What right has such a man to define and separate and classify? I would follow the historian who sees God in everything, in the defeat as well as in the success of the battle. And there are persons who have carried their defining powers, if powers they be, into what are called ecclesiastical matters, so that now we have "the temporalities" and "the spiritualities." What man devised so insane a distinction? There is a sense, but a very poor, narrow sense not worth considering, in which the work of the Church may be divided into the temporal and the spiritual, but, properly regarded, in the spirit of Christ and in the spirit of the Cross, the gift of the poor man's penny may be as true an act of worship as the singing of the anthem. There is nothing secular, or if there is anything that we call secular it is only for momentary convenience. He that made all things is God; He built the wall of the Church, and He will take care of the roof; it is His place. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

CHAPTER XII.

VERS. 1-23. Were written in the book of the chronicles.—*A book*:—I. A BOOK UNITES THE AGES. Brings the past into the present; borrows the future to give the present significance. The "sceptred spirits of history" rule us still. With books the poorest enters the highest society: the loneliest need not be solitary. II. A BOOK REVEALS LIFE'S IMPORTANCE. It gives permanence to thought. Life is a writing. III. A BOOK SILENTLY ANTICIPATES THE JUDGMENT. A record may be appealed to: "Is this thy handwriting?" God's "Book of Remembrance." (*Ibid.*) *Books*:—"The commerce of books," says our gossiping Montaigne, "has the constancy and facility of its service for its own share: it goes side by side with me in my whole course, and everywhere is assisting to me: it comforts me in my age and solitude; it eases me of a troublesome weight of idleness, and delivers me at all times from a company that I dislike: and it blunts the point of griefs, if they are not extreme, and have not got an entire possession of my soul . . . books do not mutiny to see that I have only recourse to them for want of other more real, natural, and lively conveniences; they always receive me with the same kindness."

Ver. 24. According to the commandment of David the man of God.—*Posthumous influence*:—A man's influence after he is dead. He is still present with his people. I. BY HIS WILL. "The commandment of David." The grip of the dead is on our

fields and churches, our schools and hospitals. II. BY HIS WRITINGS. Immortality of genius. David's psalms. Solomon's proverbs. The writings of Shakespeare, Milton, Bunyan, and many others. III. BY HIS EXAMPLE. "David the man of God." For good or evil a man lives. For good or evil his deeds will live after him. "The memory of the just is blessed." (*Homiletic Commentary.*)

Vers. 27-43. **And at the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem.**—*The dedication of the wall.*—In this dedication—I. IT WAS DESIGNED TO OFFER THANKS TO GOD FOR THE COMPLETION OF A GOOD WORK. II. IT WAS INTENDED TO SET APART THE HOLY CITY FOR ITS SACRED ENDS. III. IT WAS DESIRED TO INVOKE THE DIVINE BLESSING AND GUARDIANSHIP ON THE CITY OF GOD. IV. IT IS BEAUTIFUL TO OBSERVE HOW FULLY THE DOMESTIC AFFECTIONS ARE CHERISHED AND DISPLAYED. "The wives also and the children rejoiced." (*W. Ritchie.*)

Ver. 30. **And the priests and the Levites purified themselves, and purified the people.**—*Beginning at the right place.*—I. A PURE CHURCH MAY MAKE A SOUND COMMONWEALTH. "They purified themselves." Like priest, like people. Cleric and laic act and react on each other." Be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the Lord." Eli's sons. Uzzah may not sustain the ark. II. TO A PURE PEOPLE ALL THINGS ARE PURE. "They purified the people and the gates and the wall." Citizens and city; sanctuary and house; God's work and their own.

"All things are sacred;
The eye of God is on them all,
And hallows all."

Jesus revealed God in the minutest. Peter's vision. The present preparatory. "I think our fathers had a better, grander, a diviner idea even of common life than we have when they spoke of the trades and professions of men as being their calling. There is a great thought in this word. It makes all the men, streets, shops, and warehouses to me as I walk along Divine objects. I feel that I am in a Divine place when I think of the men about me as following their calling. I feel that there is a God above men; that there is a God in human society; a God in the shops and counting-houses of London, touching and teaching every human being; and that every man is occupying the place, and putting his hand to the work to which God has called him. Sometimes you may see a man at a certain calling which is but preparatory. He is meant for something else. Providence opens the way, and he goes up higher and does another thing. God has given us a spiritual vocation—a Divine calling in Christ Jesus—and we are to walk worthy of that vocation here, doing all worldly things in a spiritual manner, preparatory to a higher calling which shall come one day, when we shall enter upon other forms of duty and service, to which the present inferior forms of duty and service faithfully fulfilled shall gradually prepare and fit us. (*T. Binney.*)

Ver. 43. **Also that day they offered great sacrifices, and rejoiced.**—*A great rejoicing.*—A great rejoicing as it should be. I. ASSOCIATED WITH THE RITES OF RELIGION. II. THE OUTCOME OF A GREAT DELIVERANCE. From captivity to freedom: heathen surroundings to heaven-chosen city and Divinely-built temple. The memory of God's great goodness should awaken joy—a joy that all may share. "The wives also and the children rejoiced." III. THE PREPARATION FOR STRONG ADHESION TO A GREAT CAUSE. Sacred festivals not an end, but a means to an end. (*Homiletic Commentary.*) *True joy.*—I. ITS RIGHT. The God who has given us life wishes also that it shall move joyfully; the God who always anew overwhelms us with favours wishes that they should fulfil their mission; that is, make us happy, in the end holy. II. ITS OCCASION. God's grace, which has strengthened, protected, assured, and elevated our lower or higher life. III. ITS KIND. It raises itself to God, is a joy in Him; that is, becomes a service to God and our neighbours. (*Dr. Schultz.*) *The joy of Christian work.*—Notice—I. THAT GREAT SACRIFICES ALWAYS PRECEDE GREAT JOY. God's best gifts never increase by saving, but by scattering. The sea is in a constant state of evaporation. The mist rises, there are clouds above the hills; there are streams running into the valleys, there is life and greenness everywhere. There are some men who do not believe in evaporation. They believe in getting all they can and keeping all they get. But they are never joyful. There is no joy in selfishness. It is against the great law of God, the law

of sacrifice by His own Son. What is the meaning of these sacrifices mentioned in the text? 1. The sin-offering. This shadowed the great sacrifice. Morality alone will not save any man, and if you will only admit sin, you admit half the Bible, and the rest has to do with God's way of getting rid of it. 2. The burnt-offering. This means that we give ourselves up to God entirely; and the happiest men I have met in my life have been men who have handed the keys of every room in their soul up to Christ, without keeping one closed to hide a loved sin. 3. The peace-offering. This was a peculiar offering in Israel. It was a free-will offering. When a man brought the peace-offering, God gave him a feast there and then in his house. A part of the offering was given back to the offerer. This peace-offering is very much like your contributions to-day. You can keep your offerings, but if you do God will keep the feast from you. We in Wales have two sermons in one service very often, and the collection comes before the second sermon. I have watched a man drop the smallest coin into the plate from a richly gloved hand. I have seen a poor old woman unwrapping a two-shilling piece from a paper, from another paper, from a third paper, in which she had wrapped it in order to keep it for the collection. And I have watched them through the second sermon. The tears of joy are coursing down the wrinkled face of the poor Christian woman, but the man who dropped his miserly coin is as dry as Gilboa. It is a remarkable fact that the Almighty never accepted a wild animal as an offering in the old time. A man was always obliged to offer something he had taken trouble with: the fruit of his own garden, the fruit of his own farm, or from his own flock. I have heard a man say sometimes, "If I succeed in this speculation now, I will give to the cause of Christ." Ah! that is a wild hare. II. GREAT WORK FOR GOD BRINGS GREAT JOY FROM GOD. Charles Kingsley has said that every man ought to thank God every morning because he has something to do that must be done that day. Work is the greatest blessing. I was once struck down with complete nervous prostration, and a medical man told me that I must do nothing for a twelvemonth, and that was the hardest work I ever did in my life—to do nothing. I see gentlemen come up along the Menai Straits in their yachts fighting the tempest. On they come like sailors on the ocean-wave, because it is easier to do that than to do nothing. You may see the room in which Louis XVI. worked as a common blacksmith, because it was easier to do that than to do nothing. Prisoners have come to the gaoler many a time, when confined in a room to do nothing, asking him for permission to pick oakum, or anything rather than do nothing. It is possible to do the most common work to God, to Christ, and when every one will do his work to Christ, that is the time when this world will be full of happiness and song. There is joy in serving Christ. Just think, for instance, of the erection of a place of worship: what an investment it is to contribute towards that. III. THIS RELIGION OF GREAT SACRIFICE AND GREAT JOY WILL TELL ON OUR FAMILIES. "The wives also and the children rejoiced." Joyful religion repeats itself to others. Parents should let their children see that they value religion. 1. By making sacrifices for it. 2. By letting them see that they are most anxious for them to become decided Christians. IV. THAT THE RELIGION OF GREAT SACRIFICES AND GREAT JOY WILL BE HEARD OF AFAR OFF. "Then joy was heard afar off." It is the names of self-sacrificers that live—Abraham—Abraham Lincoln—Florence Nightingale—Jesus, the Redeemer of the world. (E. Herber Evans, D.D.) *Sacrifice, a condition of joy*:—The principle of sacrifice stands at the very threshold of the ever-fascinating study of life, and is found at every turn of the bewildering maze which marks life's upward pathway of struggle and survival. In merely physical processes, as well as in many vital functions of vegetable and animal life, there are clear foreshadowings of the part which sacrifice plays in the great tragedy of existence. The primitive rock, when subjected to the disintegrating action of the atmospheric agents, yields up its characteristic compactness, and crumbles into soil, which, in turn, surrenders its richness to promote the welfare of multitudinous forms of vegetable growth. In the lower species of animal life the death of the parent is the essential condition of the life of the offspring, and in the higher grades of creatures there is invariably a parental sacrifice in favour of the well-being of the progeny. Notwithstanding that these functions are nothing more than compulsory obedience to the stern mandates of nature, Mr. Herbert Spencer calls them acts of unconscious sacrifice, and so distinguishes them from those voluntary surrenders of self which spring from love to others, and which, strictly speaking, can only be termed sacrifice. The helpless infant survives merely on account of the care which the maternal love lavishes upon it. Let the attention of others be withdrawn, and the child must perish. It lives

by the sacrifices which others make for it. The bond of family life is kept intact by a succession of beautiful deeds, springing from the ever-growing tendency to sacrifice the immediate interests of self to promote the good of others. The capacity to enjoy purely egoistic pleasures is heightened by ministering to the wants of others. Indulged selfishness, by producing satiety, defeats itself. But a nobler truth than that is this—that the deepest satisfactions and most lasting joys of life are blossoms on the tree whose roots derive nutriment from the soil of sacrifice. (*S. S. Chronicle.*)

Vers. 45-47. *And both the singers.—Thanks-giving and thanks-living:—*We have here the effects of the joy that was at the dedication of the wall. I. THE MINISTERS WERE MORE CAREFUL THAN THEY HAD BEEN OF THEIR WORK. II. THE PEOPLE WERE MORE CAREFUL THAN THEY HAD BEEN OF THE MAINTENANCE OF THEIR MINISTERS. The surest way for ministers to recommend themselves to their people, and gain an interest in their affections, is to wait on their ministry, to be humble and industrious, and to mind their business; when these did so, the people thought nothing too much for them to encourage them. 1. Care is here taken for the collecting of their dues. 2. Care is taken that, being gathered in, it might be duly paid out. (*Matthew Henry.*) *For in the days of David and Asaph of old.—The good old times:—*I. NOTHING IS NECESSARILY GOOD BECAUSE IT IS OLD. "Hast thou marked the old way which wicked men have trodden?" Habit, education, tradition, prejudice, play an important part in history. II. THAT WHICH IS OLD IS PRESUMPTIVELY VALUABLE. Good lasts. Truth is as old as the hills. Application: Prove all things. Despise nothing. The present is a huge borrower from the dead past. (*Homiletic Commentary.*)

CHAPTER XIII.

VER. 2. *Howbeit our God turned the curse into a blessing.—The curse turned into a blessing:—*This was just like God, whose name and nature are love. 1. The devil turns the blessing into a curse. When God created man He endowed him with the power of choice, made his will free, so that he might choose good and evil. The creature was thus endowed with an inestimable blessing. The devil, by the subtlety and force of temptation, turned man's dignity against himself and effected his ruin, and through successive generations he has sought to turn the blessing into a curse. 2. Man often turns the blessing into a curse. Physical strength, intellectual endowments, social position, wealth, opportunities for usefulness—things good in themselves—are often transformed by man's depraved nature into instruments and occasions of evil. Of all the plots and assaults of the devil, all the mischievous purposes of wicked men, all the disasters of life, all the forms of evil we may have to encounter we may say, "Howbeit our God turned the curse into a blessing." I. GOD HAS TURNED THE CURSE OF SIN INTO A BLESSING. The existence of sin is an awful and mysterious fact, permitted by God for wise and gracious issues. We can conceive of no greater curse. It separated man from God. It destroyed his original righteousness. It cut him off from happiness. It brought upon him condemnation and death. God comes to man in this state with the blessings of His grace. 1. The fall of man furnished an occasion for the exercise of the restoring grace of God. Sin prepared the way for salvation. "Paradise Regained" is more than "Paradise Lost." 2. The curse of sin has supplied an opportunity for such an exhibition of the character and glory of God as we nowhere else behold. God's brightest glory shines in the method of man's salvation. God in Christ is more glorious far than God in creation. In the Saviour of the world we have the most perfect manifestation of God. 3. Throughout the earth, following in the track of the destroyer, God bestows the blessings of His great salvation. God is still "in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself." II. GOD TURNS SORROW INTO A BLESSING. 1. Sorrow is a teacher. Sorrow seems sent for our instruction as we darken the cages of birds when we would teach them to sing. As the night brings out the stars, so trouble reveals to us many truths that would otherwise remain unseen. It clears our visions, so that we get new views of God and ourselves, of truths and duty, of

this world and the next. 2. It awakens thoughtfulness. 3. Under this gracious ministry and discipline the noblest characters have been perfected. Poets, it is said, "learn in suffering what they teach in song." Sorrow is one of the best nurses of godliness. Some plants thrive better in a poor than in a rich soil; so some virtues come to speedier and fuller perfection in grief than in gladness. When spices are crushed, then they emit their odours. After the diamond is ground and polished on the wheel, its facets flash with lustre. It is said that when growers of roses want to develop the bloom of a favourite tree in special richness and beauty they sometimes deprive it for a season of light and moisture. In this condition its leaves fall off. But while this process is going on, and the tree is almost leafless, a new life is springing, from which come in due season a tenderer foliage and a choicer and more abundant bloom. This suggests some of the sweet uses of sorrow. 4. In the gracious arrangements of God sorrow is often succeeded by joy. 5. God is preparing the way for the extinction of sorrow on the earth. III. GOD TURNS THE CURSE OF DEATH INTO A BLESSING. To the Christian man death ceases to be the king of terrors, and becomes a friend to call him home. He delivers him from the infirmities of the flesh, the corruptions of sin, the temptations of Satan, and the sufferings and troubles of life. Death is the gate of life. In conclusion—1. The subject teaches us the benevolence of God. 2. Learn the loving confidence you may cherish in God. Let us learn to imitate God. Let us endeavour through life to turn the curse into a blessing. (*William Walters.*) *Sorrows turned to blessings*:—We might tell of the blessed effects of the captivity of Joseph—the means of preserving his father's household and the lives of the thousands of Egypt. We might speak of the happy results of Israel's national calamities; how they were led to seek the Lord in their sorrow, and the Lord hearkened and heard them. We might tell of Paul's imprisonment issuing in the conversion of his jailor and his household; or we might speak of John's banishment to the lonely Isle of Patmos, where his spirit was refreshed with those wondrous discoveries of God's doings and purposes that form the last book in the Canon of Sacred Writ. In these instances sorrow is not to be denominated a curse, but a blessing—not a punishment, but a medicine. True it is that sorrow has been styled the winter of the soul, because it freezes up the streams of comfort, and ices the soul over with the frosts of sadness; but, like as that season, rough and stormy and bleak as it is, is conducive to the ultimate fertility of the earth, so the moral winter at once prepares for the fuller enjoyment of the coming spring of peace, and is productive of a richer harvest of righteousness to the praise and glory of our God. Affliction has been styled the storm of life; but, like as those tempests that agitate the bosom of the ocean serve alike to overpower the shattered bark, and to urge forward others more speedily to their desired haven, so these moral tempests, while they may overwhelm the wicked and impenitent, are ever conducive in speeding forward the journey of the children of the kingdom to heaven and to God. (*J. Macnaughton, A.M.*) *Curses and blessings*:—Nehemiah sees God at work in this transformation, and openly, gladly, gratefully acknowledges that the transformation of the curse was not the work of human good-will or of human genius, but a direct operation of the Divine almightiness itself. We lose so much by not seeing God immediately. Why do we allow God to go so far away from our consciousness and appreciation and love? Why do we not cry for Him, and bid Him come to us, and give Him no rest until He draws near? This is the true religion; this is the noble piety. I. TO BE CURSED OF MAN IS REALLY NO PROOF OF GOD'S DISAPPROBATION. II. HE OUGHT TO BE A VERY GREAT MAN, AND A VERY PURE, LOFTY, AND GODLY SOUL, WHO UNDERTAKES TO CURSE ANYBODY ELSE. III. TO BE BLESSED OF MAN IS NO PROOF OF GOD'S FAVOUR. IV. THE VANITY OF TRUSTING IN ANYTHING WHICH CAN BE TURNED INTO A CURSE. Application of these truths to your personal experience: 1. The frowns of society. 2. Wronged in business. 3. The seeming opposition of nature. God is willing and able to turn all curses into blessings. But the blessing will not be given without action on our part. Art thou suffering? Go to thy knees; tell God thy sin; then the film shall be taken from thine eyes—thou shalt see the great, mighty, redeeming Cross of Christ, and He shall say, "Thy sins, which are many, are all forgiven thee." The curse will be turned into a blessing, and thou shalt be the better for the abasement. (*Joseph Parker, D.D.*) *Sorrows keeping from worldliness*:—An evangelist tells of a young lad who left his father's home to be a sailor. He was absent for three years, and on the return voyage, just as he was thinking of how soon he should see all the dear ones at home, his ship was

wrecked off the coast of Norway. Many were lost, but he and some others managed to get into a boat. They tried to row for the shore, but the men being wet, and the cold so intense, many of them were frozen to death. The first mate had command of the boat, and the lad being a favourite of his, he was afraid that he should fall a victim to the cold, and whenever he saw him dozing, or showing any signs of sleepiness, he thrashed him with a rope's-end. In vain the lad expostulated, the thrashing continued until all drowsiness was gone. At length they reached land, and were hospitably entertained by the natives, and in time were forwarded home. That young man often says he owes his life to the mate who administered to him that timely discipline. The sufferings and sorrows which God puts upon His people are like that thrashing. Only to keep them from falling into the sleep of worldliness that leads to death, to keep them alive in grace, and looking unto Him, does He afflict them. *God's providences not to be feared:*—We ought never to be afraid of God's providences when they seem to break up our lives and crush our hopes, and even to turn us away from our chosen paths of usefulness and service. God knows what He wants to do with us, how He can best use us, and where and in what lines of ministry He would have us serve. When He shuts one door it is because He has another standing open for our feet. When He breaks our lives to pieces it is because they will do more for His glory and the world's good broken and shattered than whole.

Vers. 7-31. And I came to Jerusalem, and understood of the evil that Eliashib did.—*The religious reformer:*—Remark—I. THE STATE OF JERUSALEM DURING NEHEMIAH'S ABSENCE. II. THE REFORMS HE ACHIEVED. 1. His purification of the temple. 2. His renewal of the observance of Divine ordinances. 3. His promoting the sanctification of the Sabbath. 4. His setting apart Judah from mingling with the heathen. (*W. Ritchie.*) *Personal purification of the believer:*—We must never forget that the Christian is now what the temple was of old, the dwelling-place of the Most High (1 Cor. vi. 19). Luther observes: "A Christian may be compared with the tripartite temple of Solomon. His spirit is the holy of holies, God's dwelling amid the darkness of faith (he believes what he neither sees, nor feels, nor grasps); his soul is the holy place, where are the seven lights of the golden candlesticks; his body is the fore-court exposed to general view, where every one can observe how he lives and what he does; in the fore-court stands the altar of burnt-offerings, whereon we are to lay our bodies as living sacrifices unto God. How sad when the temple in any part of it is desecrated! When the heart in which Christ should dwell is occupied by the world, many things must be cast forth, in order that it may become the abode of the King. (*W. P. Lockhart.*) *The devoted patriot:*—The story commences with the return of Nehemiah to Babylon. Either through the reports that his enemies had sent to the court, or the leave of absence having expired (chap. ii. 6), Nehemiah returns to the king to report himself, and to seek permission for a further sojourn in Jerusalem. The fact that Ezra is absent at the same time strengthens the opinion that the misrepresentations of those about them moved the jealousy of the king and led to their recall. It is scarcely possible to think of the swift and complete destruction of the religious life of the city apart from a deeply-laid plot on the part of the foes who saw in the recall of Nehemiah their own opportunity, and whose plans were carefully laid and boldly carried out as soon as he had left. The building of the walls and gateways of the city had been followed by a yet bolder effort for the security of Jerusalem. Taking advantage of the fervour of the new religious life which had sprung up amongst them, Nehemiah had gathered the people together and got them to enter into a very solemn covenant, which they had signed and sealed. The list of those who signed this covenant is given—in itself a suggestion that it was not signed by all. The first name is that of Nehemiah: and next to his we should naturally look for that of Eliashib, the high priest, and of Jehoiada his son. But these two are conspicuously absent. So then it is plain that before the departure of Nehemiah there were two parties whose antagonism could only be fierce and bitter; a party which had surrendered itself to the strictest observance and enforcement of the law, and another party which had entangled itself by heathen relationships; and of this latter party the first and foremost was Eliashib, the high priest. As soon as Nehemiah has gone this Eliashib at once becomes the head and ruler of the city. Now comes the collision of the two parties; on the one side a people like the Puritans of old—stern, resolute, exclusive, hateful of everything that swerved a

hair's breadth from the letter of the law. On the other side was the party of the court—hand in glove with the wealthy “people of the land”; eager for their own advancement and position. Eliashib, the leader of the courtiers, had nothing to expect from the covenanters but a stern and bitter opposition. To strengthen his position, and perhaps for his own personal security, he gathers about him these from the outside, intending doubtless to draw the line sharply as soon as they had served his purpose, but finding, as such men always do, that he has to yield step by step, until everything that the law held sacred was broken down before the influx of “the people of the land.” A swift and terrible reaction followed the high-pitched fervour of the great revival. First to be swept away were the reforms that Nehemiah had introduced in the matter of mixed marriages. That which the high priest himself had sanctioned by the example of his own family was speedily imitated, until it seems to have become a rage amongst the people, many of the Jews putting away their own wives for these women of Ammon and Moab and Ashdod. The Book of Malachi throws a lurid light upon the condition of things in this as in other respects (Mal. ii. 11, 14, 16). Eliashib seeks further to strengthen his position and to weaken his opponent's by a concession to the greed of the people, as he had previously indulged their lust. The tithes and offerings which were claimed by the priests and Levites were withheld from them, or the people brought only that which was diseased or torn by the wild beasts; the people robbed God, as Malachi says. Thus the temple came to be neglected, as the priests had to go “every one to his own field.” With this must have fallen every barrier for the protection of Jerusalem. When things had reached such a pass it was evident that the heathen had everything their own way. The occupations of the people went on as if there were no Sabbath day. The wine presses were trodden; the corn was carried; the asses were laden; through the city gates came the men of Tyre with their fruit and fish for sale; foreigners filled the streets with their cries, and the place rang with the noisy chaffering of those who stood to sell and those who came to buy. With them these strangers brought their evil ways, and their foul idolatries—the sorceries of which Malachi speaks (Mal. iii. 5). Such is the state of things which Nehemiah finds on his return to Jerusalem. Perhaps his coming was unlooked for, the enemy hoping to keep him still at the court of the king. We have thought perhaps of Nehemiah as the graceful courtier, the stately cupbearer, whose appearance would have much to do with his high position. But here is a very different man. He seems to stand before us with knitted brows and flashing eyes—a man who does not hesitate to lay hands upon the offenders, and whose words terrify the city. Nehemiah's indignation is kindled first by the tidings of the desecration of the House of God; and hastening thither he faces Eliashib on his own ground, and with his own hands he flings out the “household stuff” of the intruding Tobiah, and has the chambers cleansed from the defilement, and the holy vessels set again in them. That Eliashib and his party should have submitted to such a high-handed proceeding may seem surprising; but the conscience of the people was with Nehemiah, and they felt that it was useless to resist one of such resoluteness, backed by such authority as he possessed. Then the priests and Levites were again set in their places, and the provisions were duly delivered, treasurers being appointed to receive and distribute the offerings of corn and oil and wine. Meanwhile the rulers had gathered themselves together, as they did when Christ came to the temple. The interference with the hope of their gains stirred their resentment; for to those nobles a working day was not to be lightly parted with, since others did the work of which they reaped the advantage. Nehemiah orders the gates to be shut at sunset on the Sabbath eve, and that none shall enter bearing burdens until the day is done. Yet more difficult and involved was the matter of the mixed marriages. But in this as in everything else Nehemiah would tolerate no half measures. When the people gathered to protest, he tells us that “I contended with them, and cursed them, and plucked off their hair, and made them swear by God, saying, Ye shall not give your daughters unto their sons, nor take their daughters unto your sons, or for yourselves.” Jehoiada, the son of the high priest, and the son-in-law of Sanballat, thought doubtless to screen himself behind these high relationships. But instead of defence it added to the wrong, and the indignant governor chased him out of the city, and forbade him to return. Taking refuge in Samaria with others who resented the action of Nehemiah, he set up there a rival temple and service, and thus cleared the way for the reforms which were established in Jerusalem. Looking back over the chapter, we see a lesson for all time and for us: that we can never loosen the law of God in

one particular without loosening it in all. The law of God is one, and to break it in any point is to endanger it in all. The thickening of the ills about Eliashib one by one until everything is lost, is the story of the destruction of the individual and the nation. (*M. G. Pearse.*)

Ver. 11. Then contended I with the rulers.—Work and worship:—Then the topic is not new. It is a question which propounds itself in every age. The particular aspect of the question we have to deal with at present is this, Why does the working man forsake the house of God? Many of the reasons given arise out of the industrial conditions of the working classes. 1. One of the reasons given by working men is that the conditions of their industrial existence afford them no leisure time. Is this a reason or an excuse? It is true that there is a considerable number of working men who are doomed to drag on a weary, dreary, grinding, rayless life. They have no leisure. The only rest they have is the unconscious rest of sleep. The system that perpetuates this state of things is unrighteous, inhuman, and hostile to the teachings of the Bible. But this is not true of the majority of working men; their absence arises not from want of leisure, but from want of inclination. 2. Another reason assigned is that the Christian ministry is in league with the employers. I am not here to hold a brief for the ministry, but I am here to defend the interests of truth, and I wish to ask where this weak and effeminate ministry is to be found? I venture to believe that there never was a time when the pulpits were ringing with a clearer and more unambiguous note, when there was more straight and wholesome teaching on the obligations of power and the responsibilities of wealth. I believe that to-day there is far more preaching to the rich than there is to the poor, and this charge of sinful silence and sinful flattery cannot be sustained. 3. Another reason advanced is that ministers do not take their rightful position as leaders of secular progress, and that they are not to be found in the van of social and political reform. This is a more reasonable objection. I wish to confess candidly and frankly that in my opinion the pulpit has been too speculative, too abstract, too unpractical, too other-worldly. But this reproach is now being rapidly rolled away, and the ministry are giving both hands to the neglected work of social reform. 4. Working men further complain that when they do come to church they meet with a cold and unfriendly reception. In the church there is "respect unto persons." It is charged against us that our profession of brotherhood is a mere pretence. It is said that men will sit by their fellows in the house of God for years, will pray and sing of their brotherliness and love, and then outside the church will ignore and pass them by without so much as recognition. Against such conduct no word can be too outspoken or too severe. 5. Another reason is that the church is not democratic, and that the workman has no voice or influence in its affairs. This reason has been confirmed and emphasised by the editors of our daily press. But it is a statement altogether too sweeping. If the working man wants democratic churches he need not seek far to find them. 6. One speaker at a meeting convened to consider this question, declaimed against the pulpit because it treats of such topics as the restoration of man and the forgiveness of sins. He declared that there is no practical value in such teaching, and that the working man does not hold to it or believe in it. Here there is no room for compromise. Oh! fellow-men, the Nazarene wears many crowns, and among His crowns is that of Social Reformer. But there is another crown brighter by far than that of Reformer, the crown of Redeemer. The gospel we have to preach is not a mere uprooter of social wrongs, an equaliser of men's estates; it is a regenerator of the human heart. The supreme aim of the gospel is not to beautify man's circumstances, but to beautify man's life. The Master Himself told us how useless it is to reform a man's house unless you redeem the man. The gospel is preached, then, that man may be rectified, and that rectified man may transform the world. The work of the Redeemer includes the work of the Reformer, but redemption is the first and dominant note in the Church's song. On the other hand, if we are truly Christ's we are genuine reformers. The Church of Christ should be the centre of all the reforming agencies of our time. All true reformers get their weapons from Christ. (*J. A. Jowett, M.A.*)

Vers. 14-22. Remember me, O my God, concerning this.—The mercy of God the origin of the reward of good works:—**LEARN**—I. THAT TO MAKE PROVISION FOR THE MAINTENANCE OF GOD'S WORSHIP AND THE MINISTERS THEREOF IS A WORTHY WORK, AND

OF HIGH ESTEEM AND FAVOUR WITH GOD (1 Chron. xxix. 17, 18; Deut. xii. 19; 2 Kings iv.; Luke vii. 3-5; Matt. x. 41; Phil. iv. 18; 2 Tim. i. 16-18). II. THAT GOD REWARDETH THESE AND ALL OUR OTHER GOOD DEEDS AND WORKS NOT FOR ANY MERIT OR WORTHINESS THAT IS IN THEM, BUT OF HIS FREE MERCY AND GOODNESS. 1. The Scriptures encourage us to work in hope of reward (Psa. xix. 11; Prov. xi. 18; Matt. v. 11, 12, x. 41, 42; Luke vi. 35; 2 John 8). 2. Whence this reward cometh. "According to Thy great mercy" (Hos. x. 12; Rom. vi. 23; Psa. lxxii. 12). III. THAT IT IS LAWFUL TO DO GOOD WORKS WITH RESPECT TO THE RECOMPENSE OF REWARD. It is plain Nehemiah here did so. So did Moses (Heb. xi. 25, 26). (*Joseph Mede, B.D.*) *The law of reward*:—Nehemiah's prayer occurs thrice in this chapter, at the close of each section recounting his reforming acts. In the first instance (ver. 14) it is most full, and puts very plainly the merit of good deeds as a plea with God. The same thing is implied in its form in ver. 22. But while, no doubt, the tone of the prayer is startling to us, and is not such as should be offered now by Christians, it but echoes the principle of retribution which underlies the law. "This do, and thou shalt live," was the very foundation of Nehemiah's form of God's revelation. We do not plead our own merits, because we are not under the law, but under grace, and the principle underlying the gospel is life by impartation of unmerited mercy and Divine life. But the law of retribution still remains valid for Christians in so far as that God will never forget any of their works, and will give them full recompense for their work of faith and labour of love. Eternal life here and hereafter is wholly the gift of God; but that fact does not exclude the notion of "the recompense of reward" from the Christian conception of the future. It becomes not us to present our good deeds before the Judge, since they are stained and imperfect, and the goodness in them is His gift. But it becomes Him to crown them with His gracious approbation and to proportion the cities ruled in that future world to the talents faithfully used here. We need not be afraid of obscuring the truth that we are saved "not of works, lest any man should boast," though we insist that a Christian man is rewarded according to his works. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*) *Nehemiah's sincerity*:—Paul assures the believing Hebrews that God will not forget "their work of faith and labour of love," and this prayer of Nehemiah's is nothing more than a petition that God will be pleased to fulfil His own promise regarding him. It was not the dictate of a self-righteous spirit. There is no self-righteousness in the humble prayer that God would look upon him in love; that He would deign to accept of his feeble services as proof and evidences of a religious spirit; that He would be pleased to verify His promise, that "it shall be well with them that fear the Lord," and that "godliness is profitable unto all things, having the promise of the life that now is, as well as of that which is to come." Consider—I. A sketch of Nehemiah's HISTORY. II. Nehemiah's CHARACTER. 1. His steady religious principle. Dwelling amid scenes very uncongenial to the progress of piety in the heart, he displayed a firmness of principle and an ardour of religious feeling truly admirable. Amidst the enticements of a splendid and licentious court he sought the glory of God and not the gratification of vanity, ambition, or worldly desire. Surrounded by the ensigns of a gross and impious superstition, he reared a standard for the true God, and stood forth as a witness for Him, in the midst of His enemies. Confidence in God kept him steady in the scene of danger; and the lofty aims of a devoted spirit raised him above the grovelling pursuits of sense. 2. His self-denial. This is one of the best evidences of sound religious principle. When the will is subjugated to the will of God; when the mind feels itself completely satisfied with the wisdom and goodness of the Divine economy; when self is thrown into the background, and a noble disinterestedness gives its tone to the character, then we have some good proof that our religion is sincere. Nehemiah improved his advantages at the Persian court not for his individual good, but for the good of his countrymen. He lost sight of selfish considerations, and feeling for the humblest of the people, he gave them the full value of his labours, without the slightest remuneration. That which he asked not from man he knew God would bestow; hence the prayer of the text. 3. His zeal for the worship and ordinances of God. This is specially displayed in his anxiety to vindicate God's ordinances from abuse, and to enforce their punctual observance. The public reading and expounding the law, for the edification of the people, testified his regard for God's Holy Word. The exactness with which the appointed rites in the feasts of trumpets and tabernacles were gone about, under his superintendence, testified his reverence for the law, in all the minuteness of its requisitions. His zeal for the sanctification of the Sabbath proved the high sense he entertained of

its value. 4. His enlightened and consistent perseverance in the discharge of personal and official duty. (*Robert Burns, D.D.*)

Vers. 15-22. In those days I saw in Judah some treading wine presses on the Sabbath.—*Keeping the Sabbath*:—In reforming the evil of Sabbath desecration Nehemiah—I. CONTENDED WITH THE NOBLES, OR JEWISH ARISTOCRACY. It was their trade that kept the marts open. Were they to hold aloof, the Sabbath-breakers would fail for want of patronage. II. HE ENFORCED THE LAW. III. HE DEALT PARTICULARLY WITH THOSE WHO SOUGHT TO EVADE THE LAW. IV. HE TOOK MEASURES TO PERPETUATE THE REFORM. Conclusion: Reflect on the considerations which underlie the duty of Sabbath rest. 1. The institution of the Sabbath is coeval with the race. Adam in paradise kept the holy day. This is evidenced by the primitive division of time into weeks. The word "remember" in the fourth commandment shows that this injunction was but the revival and re-emphasising of one which had all along been binding upon them. 2. It is based upon a ground which in the nature of the case makes it perpetual. The Lord "rested on the seventh day; wherefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day, and hallowed it." 3. The Sabbath law was interwoven with the nerves and sinews of the human constitution before it was inscribed on the tables of stone. 4. The injunction, "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy," when placed in the Decalogue, received the formal sanction of Jehovah as an essential part of the moral law. 5. Christ came to fulfil the ceremonial law; at His coming it vanished as shadows do before the sun. But as to the moral law, He came to fasten it more and more permanently on the hearts and consciences of men. 6. The change from the seventh to the first day was in no wise a violation of the original injunction, but rather in pursuance of it. It commemorates the resurrection of Christ, and thus a new and living branch of joy was engrafted upon it. (*D. J. Burrell, D.D.*) *Keeping the Sabbath*:—The several points suggested by this narrative are specially suited to times like our own. I. IT REMINDS US OF THE BLINDING AND HARDENING POWER OF WORLDLINESS. It blunts conscience, deadens spirituality, and estranges from God. II. IT REMINDS US OF THE RISKS OF ASSOCIATION WITH CARELESS AND IRRELIGIOUS NEIGHBOURS. III. IT REMINDS US OF THE RESPONSIBILITY OF MEN IN HIGH POSITION FOR PREVAILING EVILS. IV. IT REMINDS US THAT NEGLECT TO KEEP THE SABBATH IS AN EVIL WITH WHICH GOD CAN NEVER BE OTHERWISE THAN SORELY DISPLEASED. V. IT REMINDS US OF THE RESOLUTE FIDELITY REQUIRED TO SAVE THIS DAY FROM GENERAL PROFANATION. (*Monday Club Sermons.*) *Keeping the Sabbath*:—I. SABBATH OBSERVANCE HAS TO CONTENT WITH THE GREED OF MEN WITH WEALTH. II. SABBATH OBSERVANCE SECURES THE COMMUNITY AND NATION FROM PERIL. Divine requirements have always a wise and loving purpose in them. A God-fearing nation is strong because it has learned, in its several elements, to exalt those things which have abiding power in them. Charity and integrity, reverence, purity, intelligence, and self-control are mighty forces. Against these immorality, intemperance, extortion, ignorance, surge like a desolating flood. The Sabbath is a protecting dyke raised across their path, so clear and effective that they each hate and would abolish it. A million soldiers under arms cannot defend us as sixty million citizens without other weapon than recognition of God's claims and their fellows' rights will do. The former may be defeated as Rome's numerous legions were. The latter are invincible. III. SABBATH OBSERVANCE MAY BE DECREED BY PUBLIC STATUTE AND ENFORCED BY THE CIVIL MAGISTRATE. The State may, and must, maintain itself. It may, and should, forbid those practices which threaten its life. It must respect the religious nature and requirements of its citizens. Its province is, not to say how any shall observe the hours of rest, but simply to guarantee that they shall have them. (*De Witt S. Clarke.*) *The benefit of the Sabbath*:—Consider it—I. AS AN ACCEPTABLE REST FROM THE TOILS AND LABOURS OF LIFE. II. AS A HIGHLY USEFUL AND CIVIL INSTITUTION. III. AS A NECESSARY RELIGIOUS ORDINANCE. IV. AS A SIGN BETWEEN GOD AND MAN. (*J. Venn, M.A.*) *Sabbath desecration*:—The last page of many a reformer's history has been, like Nehemiah's, a sad account of efforts to stem the ebbing tide of enthusiasm and the flowing tide of worldliness. The heavy stone is rolled a little way up hill, and, as soon as one strong hand is withdrawn, down it tumbles again to its old place. The evanescence of great men's work makes much of the tragedy of history. Our lesson is particularly concerned with Nehemiah's efforts to enforce Sabbath observance. I. THE ABUSE CONSISTED IN SABBATH WORK AND TRADING. It is easy to ridicule the Jewish Sabbath and "the Puritan Sunday." No doubt there have been and are well-meant but mistaken efforts to insist on too rigid observance. No doubt it has been often forgotten by

good people that the Christian Lord's Day is not the Jewish Sabbath. Of course, the religious observance of the day is not a fit subject for legislation. But the need for a seventh day of rest is impressed on our physical and intellectual nature; and devout hearts will joyfully find their best rest in Christian worship and service. The vigour of religious life demands special seasons set apart for worship. Unless there be such reservoirs along the road, there will be but a thin trickle of a brook by the way. It is all very well to talk about religion diffused through the life, but it will not be so diffused unless it is concentrated at certain times. They are no benefactors to the community who seek to break down and relax the stringency of the prohibition of labour. If once the idea that Sunday is a day of amusement takes root, the amusement of some will require the hard work of others, and the custom of work will tend to extend, till rest becomes the exception and work the rule. There never was a time when men lived so furiously fast as now. The pace of modern life demands Sunday rest more than ever. If a railway-car is run continually, it will wear out sooner than if it were laid aside for a day or two occasionally; and if it is run at express speed, it will need the rest more. We are all going at top speed; and there would be more breakdowns if it were not for that blessed institution which some people think they are promoting the public good by destroying—a seventh day of rest.

II. THE VIGOROUS REMEDIES APPLIED BY NEHEMIAH WERE ADMINISTERED FIRST TO THE RULERS. He sent for the nobles, and laid the blame at their doors. "Ye profane the day," said he. Men in authority are responsible for crimes which they could check but prefer to wink at. Nehemiah was governor for the Persian king, and so had a right to rate these nobles. In this day the people have the same right, and there are many social sins for which they should arraign civic and other authorities. Christian principles unflinchingly insisted on by Christian people, and brought to bear, by ballot-boxes and other persuasive ways, on what stands for conscience in some high places, would make a wonderful difference on many of the abominations of our cities. Go to the "nobles" first, and lay the burden on the backs that ought to carry it.

III. THEN NEHEMIAH TOOK PRACTICAL MEASURES BY SHUTTING THE CITY GATES ON THE EVE OF THE SABBATH, AND PUTTING SOME OF HIS OWN SERVANTS AS A WATCH. The methods adopted may yield suggestions for all who would aim at reforming abuses or public immoralities.

1. One most necessary step is to cut off, as far as possible, opportunities for the sin. There will be no trade if you shut the gates the night before. There will be little drunkenness if there are no liquor-shops. It is quite true that people cannot be made virtuous by legislation, but it is also true that they may be saved temptations to become vicious by it.

2. Once more, the guard of Levites may suggest that the execution of measures for the reformation of manners or morals is best entrusted to those who are in sympathy with them. Levites made faithful watchmen. Many a promising measure for reformation has come to nothing because committed to the hands of functionaries who did not care for its success. The instruments are almost as important as the means which they carry out. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*)

An argument for Sabbath-keeping:—"I tell our directors that if they compel conductors to break the fourth commandment they have no right to expect them to keep the eighth." That was the Hon. William E. Dodge's business way of putting to railroad companies the argument for Sabbath-keeping.

Loyalty to the Sabbath:—A ferry company, with a fine prospect of a lucrative business, desired the late Governor Gamble to make an investment in their stock, which he declined, because they ran their boats on the Sabbath. "We are obliged by law to do so," was the excuse offered. "Yes," he replied; "I know that the law requires your company to run its boats on the Sabbath, but the law does not require me to invest my money in your stock."

Profanation of the Sabbath:—Consider—I. WE ALSO HAVE A SABBATH WHICH OUGHT TO BE OBSERVED. II. SOME OF THE PREVALENT ABUSES OF THE SABBATH. III. PRACTICAL REMEDIES. Nehemiah is here our pattern. 1. He took no part in the sin himself. 2. He made a public protest. 3. He promoted active measures for the suppression of Sabbath profanation. (*J. Hambleton.*)

Sabbath observance:—This passage contains a detailed statement of the transgressions of the Israelites in this particular, as well as of the testimony of God through Nehemiah against them; and as it distinctly indicates certain transactions on the Sabbath as grossly sinful, the guilt of which is by some considered as at least questionable, it will be profitable to closely examine the sacred writer's words, in order to evince the iniquity of such practices. I. IN WHAT CONSISTED THE ABUSES THEMSELVES. 1. Agricultural work on the Sabbath. "In those days saw I in Judah some treading wine-presses, and bringing in

sheaves," &c. The feeding of cattle and similar labours on the Sabbath are clearly permitted, because the life or health of the beast depends on its nourishment; but all other sorts of work are plainly evil, and as much just subject of rebuke from the Christian minister as the labours of the Jews were from the Jewish.

2. Sabbath traffic (ver. 16). The pleas of opposition, convenience, and such-like, cannot be allowed even in palliation; for the law of God must not be bent or modified to suit the will and caprices of man. Here no subterfuge, or sophistry, or excuse, is permitted. II. THE PROPHET'S PROCEEDINGS CONSEQUENT UPON THESE PRACTICES. 1. He testified against them. It is the duty of ministers on any symptoms of irreligion in their respective districts to rebuke and raise their voices against it. For that purpose they are appointed as sentinels and guardians. Now this word "testify" is a comprehensive term, and will signify, first, that he indicated the evil—that he expressed his dislike of the practice—that he showed them its sinfulness, and the punishment surely consequent upon it. He then charged them with it. "Ye do it." "What evil thing is this that ye do?" The better sort were not sellers, but buyers; they connived at the practice, and encouraged it. The prophet accordingly accuses them with being accessories, and casts on them the major part of the guilt. "Ye do it," he says, because but for their purchases the markets would have been shut. He censures them, moreover, on the ground of bad example. The people naturally took their tone from them, and when they saw the Sabbath traffic of the nobles, they, also, profaned the Sabbath day. He rebukes them, too, for contempt of God and want of patriotism. "What evil thing is this that ye do," &c. Now this instance of the destiny of Israel proves the fact, that God does not reserve His wrath against the Sabbath-breaking nation for the next world, but here inflicts at least a part of the retribution. 2. He exerted his authority to prevent the entrance of the traders into the city. "I commanded that the gates should be shut, and charged that they should not be opened till after the Sabbath," &c. The authority he exercised was exclusively secular. Therefore, though the state should be cautious of interfering in matters purely ecclesiastical, yet with this case before us it is evident that the magistrate may interpose to carry out the Divine ordinances. The authority, then, vested in magistrates or others by the state for this purpose is a legal authority, according to Divine law; and the conduct of Nehemiah in this case sets a proud example to officials of every time and place, with equal zeal and prudence to execute their functions. (*John Budgen, M.A.*)

Ver. 22. Spare me according to the greatness of Thy mercy.—*Nehemiah's appeal to God's mercy*:—The bird which soars the highest builds the lowest nest. The more a man is lifted up in communion with Heaven the deeper is his abasement in his own eyes. The holiest are the humblest. Those who bear most fruit have least "confidence in the flesh." How interesting to observe that, though the conceptions of believers under the old dispensation respecting the exact mode of salvation were dim, yet they themselves clung as earnestly to the mercy of the Lord as more privileged believers do now! (*Hugh Stowell, M.A.*) *Increasing holiness means increasing sensitiveness to the need of mercy*:—The more holy a man's spirit becomes, the more sensitive will it become; and the more sensitive his spirit, the deeper and livelier will be his sense of sinfulness. Shut up an individual in a dark room, hung round with cobwebs and defiled with dust, and he will be insensible to its condition; then admit a little light, and he will begin to suspect its state, and the more clearly the light shines, the more clearly will he discern the impurities which were hidden before. (*Ibid.*) *Nehemiah*:—Here is—I. AN APPEAL TO GOD'S APPROBATION. Nehemiah often makes appeals of this kind. This was an appeal to God—1. From man's judgment. He had engaged in an undertaking which was likely enough to appear contemptible in the eyes of his Persian acquaintance. But what then? It was for God's honour, and therefore he despises this shame, casting himself upon the approbation of God. This principle it was that influenced Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, Paul. It is the principle of faith rendering an unseen God visible. Such men look for a future "recompense of reward" promised by Him who cannot lie. 2. From man's enmity. While one party satisfied themselves with despising, there was another party in Jerusalem itself who hated and opposed his proceedings. It is in reference to their enmity that the appeal of the text is made. Modern enmity. 3. From man's ingratitude. It was here that he found his greatest trial. How painful, when the very persons whom in God's name he sought to benefit were cold, reluctant, unfeeling! Nehe-

minah's was no solitary case. You find in connection with this appeal—II. A CONTRITE PRAYER FOR GOD'S FORGIVENESS. 1. After all he has done for God's service, Nehemiah cannot forget that there is a load of original and actual sin recorded against him for which no subsequent obedience can make satisfaction. 2. He finds even his religious actions so stained with sin that though he may appeal from man, he cannot make them a plea for merit before God. 3. He casts himself, with a steadfast faith, on the free grace and covenanted mercies of the Lord. Application: If the despised believer may thus appeal from man to God, what hope can there be for those who compel him so to do? (*Joseph Jowett, M.A.*)

Ver. 26. Did not Solomon king of Israel sin by these things?—*Solomon* :—

1. It may appear remarkable that one who fell so grievously should contribute at all to the Book of God, nor is there any other instance of the kind; but his sad history adds a peculiar weight of warning to his words; nor are there any books more strongly marked by the finger of God. 2. Solomon was chosen of God, and afterwards rejected as Saul had been; he was full of wisdom and understanding, and what is far more, of holiness and goodness. There is perhaps no one of whom the early promise of good seemed so decisive. 3. It has been said, as by St. Augustine, that Solomon was more injured by prosperity than profited by wisdom. Yet we may observe that his falling away is not attributed in Scripture to his wealth, his power and honour. 4. We cannot conclude that Solomon himself did not at last repent, but this has always been considered by the Church as very doubtful, to say the least. All we know is that Scripture has fully made known to us his falling away from God, but has said nothing of his repentance. The very silence is awful and impressive. 5. What more melancholy than the fall of one so great—so wise! What words could have been spoken to him more powerful than his own! What eloquence could describe his fall with more feeling and beauty than his own words! What could more powerfully paint the loveliness of that holiness from which he fell? what the overpowering sweetness of that Divine love which he has consented to give up to feed on ashes! Who can describe the temptations to those very sins by which he was ensnared in a more searching manner than he has done? It is very awful to think how God may use men as instruments of good that His Spirit may teach them, and through them teach others, and guide them to the fountain of living waters, yet they themselves at last fail of the prize of their high calling. What a warning for fear! (*Isaac Williams.*) *Solomon's restoration* :—I. THE WANDERINGS OF AN ERRING SPIRIT. "Did not Solomon king of Israel sin by these things?" 1. That which lay at the bottom of all Solomon's transgressions was his intimate partnership with foreigners. "Did not Solomon sin by these things?"—that is, if we look to the context, marriage with foreign wives. The history of the text is this—Nehemiah discovered that the nobles of Judah, during the captivity, when law and religious customs had been relaxed, had married wives of Ashdod, of Ammon, and of Moab; and then, in his passionate expostulation with them, he reminds them that it was this very transgression which led to the fall of the monarch who had been most distinguished for God's favour. Exclusiveness was the principle on which Judaism was built. Everything was to be distinct—as distinct as God's service and the world's. And it was this principle which Solomon transgressed. The Jewish law shadowed out an everlasting truth. God's people are an exclusive nation; God's Church is for ever separated from the world. This is her charter, "Come out from among them, and be ye separate," &c. We are to be separate from the world. Mistake not the meaning of that word. The world changes its complexion in every age. Solomon's world was the nations of idolatry lying round Israel. Our world is not that. The world is that collection of men in every age who live only according to the maxims of their time. The world may be a profligate world, or it may be a moral world. All that is a matter of accident. Our world is a moral world. The sons of our world are not idolaters, they are not profligate; they are, it may be, among the most fascinating of mankind. No marvel if a young and ardent heart feels the spell of the fascination. No wonder if it feels a relief in turning away from the dullness and the monotony of home life to the sparkling brilliancy of the world's society. The brilliant, dazzling, accomplished world—what Christian with a mind polished like Solomon's does not own its charms? And yet now, pause. Is it in wise Egypt that our highest blessedness lies? Is it in busy, restless Sidon? Is it in luxurious Moab? No. The Christian must leave the world alone. His blessedness lies in quiet work with the

Israel of God. 2. The second step of Solomon's wandering was the unrestrained pursuit of pleasure. And a man like Solomon cannot do anything by halves. No man ever more heartily and systematically gave himself up to the pursuit. There are some men who are prudent in their epicureanism. They put quietly aside when they begin to get palled with it, and then return to it moderately again. Men like Solomon cannot do that. No earnest man can. No! if blessedness lies in pleasure, he will drink the cup to the dregs. But let us mark the wanderings of an immortal soul infinite in its vastness. There is a moral to be learnt from the wildest worldliness. When we look on the madness of life, and are marvelling at the terrible career of dissipation, let there be no contempt felt. It is an immortal spirit marring itself. It is an infinite soul, which nothing short of the Infinite can satisfy, plunging down to ruin and disappointment. That unquenched impetuosity within you might have led you up to God. You have chosen instead that your heart shall try to satisfy itself upon husks. There was another form of Solomon's worldliness. 3. It was not worldliness in pleasure, but worldliness in occupation. He had entered deeply into commercial speculations. He had alternate fears and hopes about the return of his merchant ships on their perilous three-years' voyage to India and to Spain. He had his mind occupied with plans for building. The architecture of the temple, his own palace, the forts and towns of his now magnificent empire, all this filled for a time his soul. He had begun a system of national debt and ruinous taxation. Much of this was not wrong; but all of it was dangerous. It is a strange thing how business dulls the sharpness of the spiritual affections. It is strange how the harass of perpetual occupation shuts God out. There are writers who have said that in this matter Solomon was in advance of his age—enlightened beyond the narrowness of Judaism, and that this permission of idolatry was the earliest exhibition of that spirit which in modern times we call religious toleration. But Solomon went far beyond toleration. The truth seems to be, Solomon was getting indifferent about religion. He had got into light and worldly society, and the libertinism of his associations was beginning to make its impression upon him. He was beginning to ask, "Is not one religion as good as another, so long as each man believes his own in earnest?" There are few signs in a soul's state more alarming than that of religious indifference; that is, the spirit of thinking all religions equally true, the real meaning of which is, that all religions are equally false. II. GOD'S LOVING GUIDANCE OF SOLOMON IN THE MIDST OF ALL HIS APOSTASY. In the darkest, wildest wanderings a man to whom God has shown His love in Christ is conscious still of the better way. In the very gloom of his remorse, there is an instinctive turning back to God. It is enumerated among the gifts that God bestowed upon Solomon that He granted to him "largeness of heart." Now that largeness of heart which we call thoughtfulness and sensibility, generosity, high feeling, marks out for the man who has it a peculiar life. You look to the life of Solomon, and there are no outward reverses there to speak of. His reign was a type of a reign of the power of peace. No war, no national disaster, interrupted the even flow of the current of his days. No loss of a child, like David's, pouring cold desolation into his soul—no pestilences nor famines. Prosperity and riches, and the internal development of the nation's life—that was the reign of Solomon. And yet, with all this, was Solomon happy? Is there no way that God has of making the heart grey and old before its time without sending bereavement, or loss, or sickness? Has the Eternal Justice no mode of withering and drying up the inner springs of happiness while all is green, and wild, and fresh outwardly? We look to the history of Solomon for the answer. The first way in which his aberration from God treasured up for him chastisement was by that weariness of existence which breathes through the whole Book of Ecclesiastes. Another part of Solomon's chastisement was doubt. Once more turn to the Book of Ecclesiastes. "All things come alike to all: there is one event to the righteous, and to the wicked; to the good and to the clean, and to the unclean; to him that sacrificeth, and to him that sacrificeth not." In this you will observe the querulous complaint of a man who has ceased to feel that God is the ruler of this world. A blind chance, or a dark destiny, seems to rule all earthly things. And that is the penalty of leaving God's narrow path for sin's wider and more flowery one. But the love of God brought Solomon through all this to spiritual manhood. "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep His commandments: for this is the whole duty of man." In this we have the evidence of his victory. Doubt, and imprisonment, and worldliness have passed away, and clear activity, belief, freedom, have taken their place. It was

a terrible discipline, but God has made that discipline successful. I speak to those who know something about what the world is worth, who have tasted its fruits, and found them like the Dead Sea apples—hollowness and ashes. By those foretastes of coming misery which God has already given you, those lonely feelings of utter wretchedness and disappointment when you have returned home palled and satiated from the gaudy entertainment, and the truth has pressed itself icy cold upon your heart, "Vanity of vanities"—is this worth living for? By all that, be warned. Be true to your convictions. Be honest with yourselves. Learn from the very greatness of your souls, which have a capacity for infinite agony, that you are in this world for a grander destiny than that of frittering away life in usefulness. Lastly, let us learn from this subject the covenant love of God. There is such a thing as love which rebellion cannot weary, which ingratitude cannot cool. (*W. F. Robertson, M.A.*)

Ver. 31. Remember me, O my God, for good.—*Simplicity and power*:—Consciousness of religion cannot be of necessity wrong, and it is only a false estimate of human nature with regard to God which enables men to take another view with regard to such acts. With boldness and without hesitation Paul says he has run a good course and fought a good fight; and he based upon this declaration that there was laid up for him a crown of righteousness. In the same way we find constant recognition by David of his own good conduct throughout the Psalms; and Samuel protests his innocence in the sight of the congregation. Hezekiah upon his sick-bed narrates the better acts of his life as a reason for God to prolong his term of years; while more than one of the apostles reminds our Lord of their self-denying adherence to His cause. While Nehemiah's consciousness of certain acts that he knew he had done to please God shines with a soft and mellowed lustre on his figure whenever he comes into notice, the evident simplicity of his purpose and sincerity of his mind, and the utter absence of anything like censoriousness or boastfulness, prevent him from being in the least degree shadowed by vanity or presumption. A view like Nehemiah's of those acts which are performed with a pure intention of pleasing God is justified, because—1. The doing so involves truthfulness in our estimate of moral action. 2. Of the very direct encouragement that we receive from the consciousness that we have done what is pleasing to God. In our intercourse with our fellow-creatures nothing so encourages in the effort to please as the fact of having pleased; nothing so discourages as the consciousness of not having given satisfaction, or what is worse, the impression that we have dissatisfied. (*E. Monro.*) *Prayer for God's blessing*:—The Rev. Dr. Brock, of Bloomsbury, when about twenty-one years old (1828), and just out of his apprenticeship, left Devonshire for London. "He had not gone far from his home before he stopped, and sat down under a hedge, in a lane, and opening his Bible at the 13th chapter of Nehemiah, his eye fell upon the 31st verse: 'Remember me, O my God, for good.' Kneeling down upon his knees under that hedge, with his hand upon the passage, he put up a fervent prayer that God would befriend him by remembering him for good in his metropolitan life. How strikingly was that prayer answered! Dr. Brock himself used to say, 'Who can tell how much of the success of my after-life may be traced back to that prayer?'"