



JONAH'S TOMB, GATH HEPHER, LOWER GALILEE from a Sketch by J. L. Porter.

THE
Story of **M**onah
The Prophet

BY
ALEXANDER RALEIGH, D.D.
//
CANONBURY



SKETCH-MAP OF MEDITERRANEAN SEA.

EDINBURGH
ADAM AND CHARLES BLACK

1866

TO THE DEACONS,
PAST AND PRESENT,
OF
HARE COURT CHAPEL, CANONBURY,
AS REPRESENTING THE CONGREGATION,
SHARERS WITH ME
IN WATCHFUL TOILS FOR ITS WELFARE,
I DEDICATE THIS BOOK,
THE SUBSTANCE OF WHICH WAS DELIVERED
IN SABBATH MORNING LECTURES TO THE PEOPLE ;
THE WHOLE OF WHICH
I NOW HUMBLY OFFER IN THE SERVICE,
AND COMMEND TO THE BLESSING,
OF
THE GREAT MASTER.



(FROM FRENCH MS. BIBLE. EDINBURGH UNIVERSITY, A.D. 1314.)

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THE AUTHOR, TIME, AND PURPOSE OF THE BOOK.



Y object in these lectures will be mainly threefold.

First.—I desire and will endeavour that they shall *be accurately historical*. There is but a section of the prophet's life recorded in the book that bears his name. But in that section there is a considerable history, and it is of great importance that the events narrated should be arranged in the proper order of sequence. Few of the Scriptural narratives are minutely complete. In that respect this is like the rest. Where a hiatus occurs, a wise conjecture is of some value. Where the historic link must be formed of an inference from indirect expressions in the book, one can but use his best judgment. If I can succeed in making this history of Jonah a little

more vivid, and *more manifestly true*, I shall be more than thankful.

Second.—I purpose, as far as in me lies, to make them *faithfully expository* of the meanings and teachings of the book. Not that I design anything like precise grammatical disquisition on particular terms and turns of expression, for which, indeed, as I do not profess to have much ability, so I have still less inclination. Such discussion is no doubt fundamentally necessary, and it would ill become those of us—comprising, I suppose I may say, the great body of the Christian teachers—who avail ourselves freely of the fruits of the higher scholarship, to seem to depreciate the labours of that scholarship, simply because they are necessarily somewhat hard and dry. But still it is true, that what is radically essential is often not practically edifying. I will try to expound the book fairly and honestly in the light of other Scriptures, and by the help of all the knowledge I possess, or can gather from the writings of others, making full use, of course, of expositions already existing. These last, however, as it happens, are not many; and I am already sure, that in the ex-

position I shall not be ruled by any of them. It is not, perhaps, too great an ambition to hope that, availing myself of the labours of others, but following my own plan, I may be able to convey some of the meanings of the book a little more vividly than you have seen them, to your apprehension.

Third.—*I hope to make them morally instructive.* For so short a book there are many striking and precious lessons. Some of them lie on the surface. Some are suggested only to a deeper thoughtfulness. These lessons will sometimes stand out clearly, in a kind of individual prominence; but mostly they will be more or less interwoven with the narrative and the exposition.

We shall find that the book is, in different ways, very full of the gospel—the unwearying, unwasting, love of God to man.

Undoubtedly *Jonah himself is the writer of the book* that bears his name, and in which he is the principal actor. This has been the uniform tradition among the Jews, who were the last people in the world to admit anything into the line of national tradition without sufficient

proofs of historic verity. If this opinion had not been universal among their official and learned men, and in itself unquestionable, the book never could have had the place assigned to it which it occupies in the sacred canon. It stands among the other prophetic books, which were written, each respectively, by the person whose name the book carries as a title.

The internal evidence is even stronger than the traditional. From beginning to end the book is full of the writer. There are touches, turns of expression, minute descriptions in it, which could be given *only* by one who was an eyewitness or chief actor in the events recorded.

It has been seriously proposed, as an objection to this view, that it makes the prophet write of himself in the third person. Certainly. What more likely? What more seemly? The prophets nearly all write so. Amos, Isaiah, Jeremiah through a great part of his book, Daniel, write of themselves as if they were other men. It is the style of modesty. It is the calm historic style. Uninspired historians have adopted it as natural and proper—Cæsar in his *Commentaries*,

Josephus in his History, Frederick the Great in the papers he intended for posterity. It is eminently adapted for the communication of divine truth. The chosen organ becomes for the time impersonal, unconscious of lesser interests and things, calmly ready to express, simply, the divine will. In such a mood—filled to fullness with the calm Spirit of God, in full sympathy with the Everlasting—it becomes a matter of small concern with the inspired writers whether they themselves have been to blame or to praise in the things narrated, as also what men may think of them. In thinking wholly of God and his truth, and yielding themselves unreservedly to him as vehicles for the communication of that truth, they thought little of contemporaries, and perhaps less of posterity.

Thus attributing, without hesitation, the authorship of the book to Jonah, we can have no difficulty as to *the time* when it was written. It must have been written towards the close of the prophet's life, and not very long after the things narrated in it were enacted.

If indeed there were any reason to doubt the identity of our prophet with him who is

named in the Second Book of Kings (xiv. 25), there might be uncertainty as to the time when this book was written. But it has never been denied or doubted that the Jonah who prophesied in the reign of Jeroboam the Second is the Jonah of this wonderful narrative. If there were two, then not only is each called Jonah, but each is a son of Amittai ; and each is of Gath-hepher—making a line of coincidence almost unparalleled.

Jeroboam the Second was a descendant of Jehu, and was called (evil omen !) after the first Jeroboam, who bears coupled with his name this everlasting stigma, “who made Israel to sin.”

Jeroboam the Second lived and reigned about 150 years after the first Jeroboam. That century and a half was nearly all a descent and departure from God. The process of degeneracy was indeed now and again checked, and for a little apparently turned, by strong arrestive forces, such as the ministry and miracles of the two great prophets Elijah and Elisha. But the downward forces renewed their operation as soon as God’s hindering hand was taken out of the way. Within that 150 years there is a

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long list of kings of Israel, most of them bad, some of them infamous—Nadab, the son of Jeroboam, and the last of his line; Ahab, the pliant tool of Jezebel; Ahaziah, who, in his last illness, sent to consult the oracle of Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron, concerning his recovery; Joram, veering like the weathercock, now to the prophets of God, now to the golden calves; Jehu, furious, cruel, selfish; Jehoahaz, Joash, Jeroboam.

This second Jeroboam was like the first, although certainly not so audaciously bad. He still kept up the worship of the calves in Samaria. God's judgments in consequence fell heavily on the land. "The affliction of Israel was *very bitter*." "There was not any shut up, nor any left, nor any helper for Israel." The meaning is, "not any shut up in fortresses and garrisons;" nor any "left" in villages, hamlets, or farms. Almost none. Very few inhabitants of any kind. The land well-nigh depopulated, and "empty." Their idolatry had almost ruined them. The Syrian armies and conquests were God's sword of vengeance, and it fell sharply over all the land.

In this time of bitter distress and apparent extremity God raised up this prophet Jonah. He came about seventy years after Elisha. There seems to have been no prophet in Israel between. None at least of any note ; none who has left writings or name. Our prophet is the oldest or first of all the prophets who has left writings—a book written by his own hand. But the book was not written until probably life and work were nearly ended. When first endowed with prophetic gift, he was raised up with a message of mercy and revival to the king and the people. His word came true (2 Kings xiv. 15). They were strengthened to make it true because it was, and they knew it to be, the Word of God. Probably it was never written, or written but for contemporary use ; and therefore, like so many other divine words spoken in this world, it has passed away from human memory, as an autumn leaf on the wind. It would be a great word in that time, when, in view of the people, it rose into splendid fulfilment. Success everywhere attended Israel's arms. Lost provinces were won back. "The coast of Israel" stood again at "the enter-

ing of Hamath" on the north, while "the sea of the plain"—i.e. the Dead Sea—was its southern bound. A flush of prosperity came back to the nation. The days of Solomon seemed to be returning, and for a brief season she seemed clothed again with the glory of empire. It was, however, but a transient gleam, and not the rising of the day. It *might* have been, if, in the light, they had sought the Lord God of their fathers. If they had renounced their idolatries, reformed their manners, and held by the old covenant, they would have stood proudly and unhurt among the nations. Doing none of these things, but rather making their prosperity the minister of their old sins, and the mother of new, they fell gradually back again into weakness and all adversity. Such were "the times" of the prophet.

*His name* speaks of the times in which he lived. Jonah signifies "dove." Amittai, the name of his father, signifies "the truth of God." The Hebrew names were nearly all significant. Sometimes commemoration was in a name. Sometimes it uttered a testimony. Sometimes a prophecy stirred in it. The very name of a

man sometimes shone like a burning lamp in the darkness of an evil time. When need was, a *new* name was taken or given, in addition to, or in place of, the original one, and borne as men bear a banner or speak a watchword. How significant is Elijah—"The Lord is my God!" Elisha—"My God is salvation!" Such names as these, in that bold, swerving time, when people and princes were rushing madly away from God, would be like a rallying-cry to the whole nation. "Baal! Baal!" everywhere. No. Not everywhere. Here is one strong man who carries fidelity and the true religion in his very name—Elijah, "The Lord is my God." So, the name of Jonah's father (some say the widow of Sarepta was his mother, but that is a mere Jewish legend)—Amittai, "The truth of God"—might be given by the Lord, worn by him, and accepted by the people, or by part of them, as a testimony and a promise—a testimony for the truth in evil times, when it seemed overborne and lost; a promise of its preservation, revival, supremacy.

Jonah, "the dove." But how is this? There is not much of the dove, not much of "mourn-

ing love," of which the dove has always been taken as the symbol, in anything recorded in this book. The name might express his father's feeling. As applied to himself, it seems a misnomer. The hawk, the raven, or the vulture, would seem to be more truly symbolical of the man who lives and acts in this book, than the "gentle, mourning dove."

But let us not forget that he tells his own tale, after the things recorded are all over; that he tells it very expressly to the glory of God's mercy, with which, designedly, he sets his own hardness and thoughtless cruelty in contrast. Let us remember that he seems to write, partly to tell his own defects and shortcomings, and not at all to defend his character or display any of his virtues. There is no careful explanation. No softening of wrong things. No rounding of hard angles. As has been justly said—"With a holy indifference, he has left his character to be hardly and unjustly judged by those who, themselves sharing his infirmities, share not his excellences."\* He has shown us in this book the unlovely side of his char-

\* Pusey.

acter; his deficiency in faith, in charity, in patient gentleness; the scantness at times even of his humanity. When a really good man writes his own history, he gets but meagre justice. He will be shy of manifesting some of the qualities which lie deepest in him. Now it has been thought, by the same interpreter whose words I have just quoted, that our *prophet's name* reveals some of those shrinking qualities of which he himself makes no mention; in short, the better character which he really possessed, although it is not displayed in the book—the character of one who moaned or mourned over his people. It must be confessed that the supposition does appear a little ingenious. But the more one studies the man and the book, it seems the less improbable.

*Jonah was of Gath-hepher*, in lower Galilee. He was therefore of the tribe of Zebulun. He was born probably in this small village among the hills, only a few miles from Nazareth. He must have been familiar from his youth with the very scenes amid which our Lord was nourished. And, on the other hand, our Lord must have come upon local traces

and traditions of the prophet Jonah perpetually. Supposing his tomb to be then existing—and there is no reason to doubt it—he must have seen it often in his walks and in his visits of friendship to Cana. It would not be derogatory in any way to the divine mission of Jesus to imagine that this was *one* reason, although of course a very subordinate one, for his selection of this prophet and his history to illustrate in some points his own great work of redemption.

In Jacob's dying prophecy concerning the fortunes of his sons (Gen. xlix. 13), he had said : "Zebulun shall dwell at the haven of the sea ; and he shall be for an haven of ships ; and his border shall be unto Zidon." It was a remarkable fulfilment of this prediction, when the lot of this tribe touched two seas—the Mediterranean on the west, and the sea of Galilee on the east. The sons of this tribe would all be familiar with the tribal prophecy, and would be more apt than others to take some pride in knowledge of "the sea," and "ships," and "havens." Not for the first time, probably, does Jonah stand on the deck of a sea-going ship when he is in flight. Many a

time he has looked from his hill-tops and seen both seas ; and many a time he has visited both.

The tradition is, that he died in the place of his birth, and to this day the Moslems show his tomb.

We must now say something *on the historic verity and credibility* of the book. It is a real history. No other supposition is admissible, although many other suppositions have been adopted. It has been regarded by a few as *a dream*. The prophet dreamt up in Gath-Hepher, as Joseph dreamt when he was a lad in the fields with his brethren ; as Pharaoh dreamt in Egypt. No sheaves came round about the lad's sheaf in the field. Sun, moon, and stars made no obeisance to him. There was no devouring of cattle by cattle on the bank of the Nile. Why then should we suppose that all the things narrated here actually happened, when we can so conveniently interpret them as parts of a very instructive dream ?

Others have taken it as a *historical allegory*, the meanings of which were well enough known in the times for which it was written, and

which may even be conjectured now. Jonah was symbolical of the kings of the time; the ship, of the Jewish state; the storm, of political convulsions; the fish, of the city of Lybon on the Orontes, where Manasseh was confined.

A still greater number, probably, have taken it as a kind of parable, or moral fiction, intended to teach important truth.

Perhaps the greatest number of those who think it desirable or necessary to discredit the historic claims of the book, would not choose or wish to commit themselves to any other definite theory. They would plead for the liberty of vagueness. "It may be this, or that. We cannot tell—it does not matter. The religious lessons will be much the same in any case." Dean Stanley, in his *Lectures on the Jewish Church*, second series, p. 351, says: "Whose story is related to us in the book of unknown authorship, of unknown date, of disputed meaning, but of surpassing interest—the Book of Jonah." The author not known, the date not known, the meaning disputed, and yet the *interest surpassing!* Wonderful! As though one saw the turrets and upper windows of a

beautiful castle, but, on searching, could find no base to it. Does our "interest" in a book of Scripture, or a religious question, rise the highest when the ascertained facts relating to it are the fewest; when the very "meaning" of it is in question?\*

We have no right to cleave to an old belief only to save ourselves the trouble of examination, or because it happens to be simpler and easier than any of the suppositions or non-suppositions which seek to supersede it; but truth is often easy and simple. And in the case before us there can be no doubt that the plain historic view, with all the wonders it involves, is simplicity itself in comparison with the difficulties which will be found to beset every other principle of interpretation.

Joseph's dream is a dream; so is Pharaoh's, and that of Nebuchadnezzar. Our Lord's

\* As this may probably be the only direct reference made to this distinguished writer in these lectures, and as this reference touches, to my regret, only on a point of antagonism, I wish to say, in a line, how much I enjoy the freshness and beauty of his writings, and how thankful I feel, with so many more, for his great contributions at once to biblical knowledge and the freedom of human thought.

parables *are* parables; not one single reader has ever imagined them to be anything else. The allegory of the apostle Paul bears its own name and character. But where is any hint or suggestion in this book that it is to be taken in any of these lights? or in any light whatever except that of plain and honest history? Surely no ordinary reader would think of making this book mean less or more than a simple relation of facts.

If we question this, we come upon a stupendous difficulty. How are we then to explain and interpret our Lord's language in *his* references to the prophet and the book of his history? He calls him "Jonah the prophet." He speaks of his confinement in the belly of the fish as "a sign" (τὸ σημεῖον), a real miracle, like unto his own death and burial. He says he preached in Nineveh; he says the people repented; and that their repentance would, on the judgment-day, condemn the impenitence of the people to whom he had himself preached; he says, "Behold, a greater than Jonah is here." Now, I confess that I see no way of evading the plain and ordinary meanings of such expressions; no way, therefore, of

preventing direct collision on these points, between the so-called higher criticism and the authority of Christ. Those critics who, in explaining this book and some other parts of the Old Testament, relegate to the regions of fable, dream, moral fiction, whatever to the natural reason seems improbable, whatever they think *ought* not to have happened in history, are really, whether they mean it or not, attempting to sap the very foundations of Christianity. "Can it be believed," say they, "that the truth and efficacy of divine religion among men are to be made dependent on the absolute historical correctness of certain alleged facts, which took place long ago—little enough some of them, if they actually happened—some of them so odd and unnatural that light wits and sceptical spirits have made a jest of them in every age? Is God's religion of love and spirit and power to be made dependent on such things as these?" This kind of language looks specious enough. Yet is it really away from the point of the present difficulty. There is no question as to the principles of religion. They are, of necessity, immutable and eternal—as high above all

the facts of human history as heaven is above the earth. What then? We are not saved by principles; we are saved by Christ. It is not that we are left to think out the abstract principles of religion, adopt them, live in them, and be saved thereby. We are saved by Christ. He redeems us—lifts us up, by divine power and love working through suffering, into the redeemed state, in which we are able effectually to take hold of the principles of religion. It is the uniform teaching of the Scriptures that without the great redemptive act of Christ we are not saved, and cannot be. And therefore it is not competent for us to entertain the question of our salvation apart from the question of our Saviour. If HE may be mistaken in a whole series of alleged historical facts, thinking and saying that such and such things happened, when in fact there was nothing more substantial than fable and dream, where is the ground of our trust? Still more, if he, *knowing* that there was nothing of historic reality in the story, deliberately represents it as *having* such reality, where again is the foundation of our trust? Whatever touches Christ—his wisdom, veracity,

prescience, divine all-sufficiency—in *any* point, touches Christianity. “If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?” If indeed it could be shown that our Saviour alludes to the history of Jonah, as any religious instructor might do to some floating legend or fable, in a manner allusive simply, or illustrative of some point in hand, well and good. There could be no good reason against his making use of myth and fable for religious instruction, as indeed he did in his parables. But the strength of the case for the historic verity of the book of Jonah, in so far as it is affected by our Lord’s testimony, is this, that he speaks of Jonah just as he does of Abraham, of Moses, of David, of Solomon; and of Nineveh, just as he speaks of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah.

We shall now say something of *the great purpose of the book*, if we can discover it. Here, however, I cannot but demur to the haste and confidence with which some interpreters fix on the leading purpose of a scriptural book, and then, of course, make everything else bend wholly to the illustration of that. If, indeed, the book proclaims its own chief

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object, and if its whole plan and structure are manifestly built up with a view to the accomplishment of that object, good and well. There can then be no mistake. But unless that be very evident, we cannot be too cautious in selecting for ourselves a chief object. Because, in the act of giving priority and pre-eminence to *one* thing, we compel all other things into a relative position of subservience and inferiority; just as the act that makes a king makes all other men of that nation subjects of the king. Suppose a people to make a mistake—to crown the wrong man. Then of course a usurper rules, while the rightful monarch is somewhere in hiding or disguise.

I have no hesitation in saying, that the leading purpose of this book of Jonah (supposing it to have one) has been misapprehended by some who have undertaken to set forth its meanings. For they have held that the great object of Jonah's mission to Nineveh, and of the writing of the book which gives the history of it, was the moral recovery and reformation of Israel as God's chosen people. He did not so much care for Nineveh in itself. The selec-

tion of that city was simply a matter of divine sovereignty. Some other city would have done as well for the purpose, if God had so chosen ; although, perhaps, on the whole, it was the best instrument that could be found. He wanted to speak to a people who would not hear him when he spake to them at home, and by the mouth of this very prophet, and he will therefore speak to them out of the heart of the great Gentile city. He desired to work graciously on them ; and as they would not permit him so to work in nearness and immediacy, he resolves to remove the position of operation hundreds of miles away, and work on them from thence. They were idolatrous, immoral, ungodly in the extreme, but he loved them as a man loves a favourite child ; and he would go away and make believe that he loved another people for whom he did not really care so much, just to provoke his own people to jealousy, and so draw them once more within the enfoldings of his tender mercies.

We disown such a principle of explanation, as unscriptural and unworthy of the character

of God, "who is no respecter of persons ; but *in every nation* he that feareth him and worketh righteousness is accepted with him."

Not that we need deny or doubt that God had Israel in view in sending Jonah to Nineveh. His mission, with its fruits, was well calculated, as it was divinely intended, to operate in a gracious manner, and for the production of a timely repentance, on the people of Israel. Indeed we cannot but observe, in reading Scripture, that God has *a principle of action* by the application of which he reaches one nation through another—a heathen people through Israel, or Israel through a heathen people, as the case may be. He says expressly to Moses : "They have moved me to jealousy with that which is no god ; they have provoked me to anger with their vanities ; and I will move them to jealousy with those which are not a people : I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation." And Paul, in his Epistle to the Romans, says, evidently recognising the same principle : " I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits ; that blindness in

part is happened unto Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in." Lest ye should be wise in your own conceits : lest you should think that God has taken *you* into a place of secure privilege, of sovereign favouritism, whence you can never be dislodged. "If God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee."

We see, therefore, that there is a fixed principle of divine operation in this matter, without respect of persons or nations. God has always had action and reaction of one nation upon another ; reciprocal influence of Jew upon Gentile, and of Gentile upon Jew ; of east upon west, and of west upon east again. His world-providence is *one* plan. At any one time each part is vitally connected with every other. The highest for a time holds its place for the sake of those below, even more than for its own sake ; and then gives place to another as soon as it ceases to be capable of the highest function.

But all this is very different from that principle of undisguised partiality, of sheer favouritism, which makes God love one people

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on and on, with a distinguishing and preferential love, whatever their moral character may be ; and which makes him use another people as a mere convenience, by which he may the better reach his favourites, and convince *them* of his unchanging regards. That is an odious principle. It may be dignified with the scriptural name of "Election." It may be covered with the great shield of "Sovereignty." But it is a detestable principle. It will not stand moral examination in a human family, or in any circle of earthly relationship. No doubt parents sometimes have their favourites. But if that favouritism leads to *partiality of action*, they never justify it ; they acknowledge that it is a weakness, against which they must watch and struggle. And will men impute what they themselves are ashamed of, to God ? Does a human weakness become a divine virtue ? Can God do as he likes, without the ruling of his own moral nature ? Undoubtedly *he feels* differently to different nations and individuals. Just as the most impartial father or mother in the world feels differently to each child—*cannot* feel to one exactly as to another ; and indeed ought never

to try. God feels to men and to nations exactly as their state and character require. He regards them *as they are*: and then, of course, *he acts* in accordance with the feeling; and *because* he is impartial, he has variety in his action, treating each according to character, circumstance, and need. But surely all that is a very different thing from the sovereign selection of some, to the neglect, the disparagement, or the rejection of others.

But what of the doctrine of election? Is it not in the Scriptures? Is it not in providence? Yes: It is in both—and we cannot but regard with the utmost reverence its silent and sometimes swift selections, its dispensations of sunshine and shadow, its welcomes and its banishments—all administered in a manner which *to us* is inscrutable. If the subject were not one of the utmost solemnity, it would be almost amusing to witness the abortive efforts of controversial Arminianism to outface the declarations of Scripture and the facts of history, while seeking to reduce the whole world to the uniformity and logical simplicity of the Arminian level. It never can be done. We may deny—

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in a sense we *must* deny—the principle of election, as it is apt to present itself in our own thought. But we find it, or what looks like it, in the Bible, and we meet it on the street. It appears in all the diversities of providence. It is coextensive with human life.

But although we thus bow before the doctrine of Scripture, and before those mysterious facts which give it daily confirmation, must we therefore put election on the throne of the universe, walk in the dread shadow, and be all our lifetime subject to the bondage? Must we, in our thought, compel all the attributes of God, and all the instincts of man to fall down and worship an unknown fact or principle, which no human intellect is competent to understand, which no human conscience would originate, and which holy Scripture does not explain? No. A thousand times no. God is the monarch of the universe, not sovereignty. God is the arbiter of life, the judge of nations and men—not election;—God in his holiness, in his wholeness, with his “truth enduring to all generations,” with his “tender mercies over all his works;”—God who “is no respecter of

persons, but in every nation, he that feareth him and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him."

If we *must* find in this book of Jonah one monarchical idea, one object taking priority of every other in divine regard and purpose, I should say, without the hesitation of a moment, this must be it—to show to all, and of course to Israel among the rest, that "God is no respecter of persons," that "his tender mercies are over all his works," that the greatest sinners, and the most wicked cities, will be treated with clemency as long as there is hope of their recovery, and that they will be welcomed into divine favour as soon as they repent and return.

This view, as I conceive, will give a *reality* to everything recorded in the book, which, on the other theory, cannot be obtained. We shall see that God is in earnest in his moral horror of the sin; in the denunciation of the judgment; in his proclamation of the mercy; in his acceptance of the penitents. The Prophet is a real messenger of judgment—of mercy. The people of Nineveh are real penitents, turning from the error of their ways—all is reality.

The merciful patience and clemency of God then, his impartial fatherly regard to all men, rather than a selective and favouring regard to some men, if we *must* fix on one end as the supreme one, is that supreme end. But, as we before hinted, there does not seem to be an absolute necessity for making one supreme end in this book. God seems to purpose many ends, each appearing in its own place and connection. Let us be contented with this. Let us abstain from forcible interpretations. Let us be thankful, as we go through it, to learn the lessons which it teaches as we come upon them, observing how they all form parts of "the manifold wisdom of God."

THE CALL.



THE first word of this book, although rendered "now," is the Hebrew conjunction "and." "And the word of the Lord came unto Jonah." It is remarkable that a considerable number of the books of the Old Testament begin with the copulative conjunction "and." Does it, in such a position, bear its usual signification? There is every reason to think so. Therefore the sacred writers who use it, meant to link on their several books to the other books of holy Scripture. Jonah wrote the history of his mission to Nineveh intending that it should be added, and knowing that it would, to the holy Scriptures then existing. The Bible forms one book. The writers knew that they were making only *parts* of it; and they believed that God, in his fulness of time, would build it into wholeness, and make it perfect.

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“The word of the Lord came” is the well-known formula of the prophetic writings expressing divine revelation to inspired men. How did it come? Was there an audible voice? Was the prophet in a natural or a *supernatural* state? Much has been written on the true prophetic mood, on that spiritual elevation and rapture in which the prophets were supposed to live, and in which alone, as some have presumed to think, man can become receptive and conscious of the higher communications of God. But the knowledge of such a “matter” is evidently “too high” for us—unless we ourselves should be inspired. We know more of their external life. Some of them wore hairy garments, and lived simple and abstemious lives. Some of them carried great force and impression in their bearing. We read of “the spirit and power of Elijah.” But they need not have been all alike. There may have been mild and quiet men among them; and among these gentler spirits (notwithstanding his ill-behaviour now) may have been this Jonah—the dove, moaning and mourning over his people. God may have taken with him a mode

of communicating his will in some respects different from that adopted in other cases. It seems, however, exceedingly probable that there was an audible voice—literally *the word* of the Lord. It is quite certain that Jonah himself, and probably others besides, were assured “by infallible proofs” that it was indeed the word of the Lord.

At what time of Jonah’s life did this commission come to him? In youth, say some—in fact before he had yet been in office. They consider this call to be his inauguration into the prophetic office—his work among his own people coming to him in later life. In home work, with its attendant honours, God gave him assurance of forgiveness and favour. But it is far more probable that he had been employed for a considerable time as a prophet in his own country before such a service as this was required of him. His mission to Nineveh was the *great* service of his life. It is natural to think that preparations would be made for it in many ways. We suppose, therefore, that when we meet Jonah here, we meet one who has already stood in the great “presence;” who

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has spoken to princes and kings ; who is known among his people as a prophet of the Lord ; whose reputation, through the fulfilment so far of his predictions in his own land, has perhaps already reached Nineveh, and will, with the invisible but mighty hand of influence, open the gate of the city for him, when he comes himself.

One glance at the city now, when first we come upon it in the narrative. We shall have to speak of it more at length in a while. It was built by Nimrod. Nimrod, "the revolter"—"the impious rebel." Such is the meaning of his name. It must have been given to him by his contemporaries as a characteristic and suitable appellative. Nimrod was the son of Cush, and of course a descendant of Ham. "He began to be a mighty one in the earth." "He was a mighty hunter before the Lord"—or "*against* the Lord." He began, probably, with the hunting of wild beasts, and, so far, was only fulfilling the divine behest to "subdue" the earth under the "dominion" and to the use of man. But he seems to have been lured on by his strength and skill to "hunting" of a very different kind—the hunting of men. By

stratagem and force he seems to have entrapped great numbers of his fellow-creatures, and to have formed them into a subject-kingdom. He was the founder of the first imperial kingdom. A very memorable event in this world! "The beginning of his kingdom was Babel"—the well-known city of Babylon on the Euphrates, which, from the time of Nimrod downwards, has been the symbol of the worldly power—the worldly power as hostile to God and his truth. "He built Babel, and Erech, and Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar." He then "went forth out of that land into Assyria" (see Gen. x. 11). Such is the proper rendering of that passage. Not "Ashur went forth;" but *he*, the same Nimrod, who had hunted and built so much already, went forth, goaded by insatiable ambition, into Assyria—the land beyond the Tigris—and there built Nineveh, and the city Rehoboth, and Calah, and Resen. "The same"—*i. e.* Nineveh, probably composed of these four places, making one grand composite city,—“the same is a great city.” A ruin now, but a great city once, standing on the east of the Tigris, in a position

now well known since the researches and description of Layard. A great man this Nimrod—builder of so many cities, father of all the Pharaohs, and Cæsars, and Napoleons, of after times.

He had long been at rest, but his cities and kingdoms had thriven well. Nineveh, with which we have to do, was now, in Jonah's time, not far from its meridian splendour of power. The history indeed is very uncertain. Those long lists of the names of Assyrian monarchs, with the supposed dates of their reigns, which we meet with in historical books, have no authority, and little to commend them as even probably true, beyond the certainty that there must have been *some line* of kings who reigned as Nimrod's successors down through those dim times. In the scriptural history we see the rise of the city under the hand of its founder—hordes of "hunted" and congregated men labouring at its walls and rearing its palaces; and now, in the same history, after many ages have passed, we look upon it not far from the height of its glory. But the glory is not un-mixed. As we look, the shadows of decay flit

and darken over it ominously. It is a "great city," but, alas, its "wickedness" corresponds with its greatness, and "goes up" before God.

Can we tell, or conjecture, what salient forms this wickedness assumed? Was there any one sin which overtopped all others, and cried as at the gates of heaven for that vengeance which seemed to be slumbering or dead on the earth? It is all but certain that there was. No doubt all the sins which a great city breeds would be there—scornful pride, bold ambition, greedy avarice, shameful profligacy. But there is good reason to believe that the crowning, characteristic wickedness of Nineveh was "violence." It had been, probably, always—it was now, utter lawless violence, which respected no rights of persons or peoples; which crushed down men like sheep for slaughter. This is the traditionary sin, which no doubt the men of power among them had learned to think of as glory, and not as disgrace. It is the old sin of the founder Nimrod—Nimrod, the mighty hunter of beasts and men. His successors are still hunters, nation-killers, right-destroyers, men-stealers, slave-holders! Another prophet,

Nahum, describes it thus :—"The dwelling of the lions, and the feeding-place of the young lions, where the lion, the old lion, walked, and the lion's whelp, and none made them afraid;" where "the lion did tear in pieces enough for his whelps, and strangled for his lionesses, and filled his holes with prey and his dens with ravin." What a description of the seat and capital of a mighty empire ! And what a disgrace to such an empire, that it can justly be likened to a lion's den—a place of strangling, blood, and death ! Nothing touches God more quickly, more sensibly, than such oppression of the poor and needy ! such glaring violation of human rights ! such despite done to his own image in man ! He judged it proper, therefore, to lift up a sharp, world-arresting testimony, against such a state of things. He has his laws always acting against wrong ; always favouring justice, and truth, and mercy. The history of the greatest empires that have ever been, constitutes a series of proofs that the strongest human things crumble down and pass away when they have not truth and justice in the heart of them ; and that nations, in their

whole history, *are* being brought up to the judgment-seat of God, and judged according to their works. Yet, as we have said, it is proper, accordant with the highest moral necessity, when wickedness becomes exceptionally bold, when impious and tyrannous men attempt to push God himself from his throne—catching, as it were, the reins of his government into their unsteady and blood-stained hands, grinding the faces of his poor, and destroying the souls of his people—that there should be some unusual interposition of God,—a prophet's cry! or the march of an army! or the sweep of a pestilence! throb of earthquake! or storm of fire! “A short work,” when need is, “will the Lord make upon the earth.” He has agents enough to do his will in such a time. Tongues enough to tell his message. He could send it by “the sightless couriers of the air;” or speak it in the dread event.

Jonah was a suitable agent; but he was not indispensable. God called him; but he could do without him. To be the bearer of such a message as that which is here recorded could not in itself be pleasant, but it was highly

honourable. To refuse to speak in such a case, at divine bidding, was almost to take part with the wrong-doers, and is recorded in this book, by his own hand, to his permanent discredit.

There is but this *one* reason for the mission stated here; but there were at least several other reasons in reserve—some gently hinted, some unrevealed until ages afterwards. God, as we know, not only kindled in the indignation of justice against what was wrong, but he longed for the repentance of the wrong-doers, and for the manifestation of his mercy among them, when thus penitent.

He thought, too, of the future; of the use he would make of that people when his own people should be led among them captive. As he sent Joseph into Egypt, he will send Jonah into Nineveh, to provide a remedy for a coming evil, a home for a captive people.

He thought, too, of the far future of the world, and of the spiritual use to be made of the penitence of that wicked people in the proclamations of his mercy by the gospel. He has made the Ninivites “a pattern” to all cities and ages—a proof that shall be known as long as history

remains, that if a whole city-full of sinners turn unto the Lord, they shall live.

Whether Jonah knew much of these and such like reasons or not, it is certain that he knew quite enough to make the road to Nineveh, far and difficult as it might be, the Lord's highway of duty and life to him; and any way else he could find, the devil's road of crookedness, danger, and death.

"Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it"—What? Was he told *what* to cry on this first occasion? Clearly he was. "Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be destroyed." The Lord took him so far into confidence, showed him the main aspects of the case, and probably indicated to him in some way, the merciful possibilities connecting themselves with the discharge of his mission. Nothing is *said* of this in the first verse, which speaks only the language of justice and severity, with no hint of the possibility of mercy. But it must have been just at this juncture—after hearing the call—that the prophet ventured to remonstrate, as we are told in a subsequent part of the book (iv. 2) he did—"I pray thee,

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O Lord, was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country?" Now, on what was this remonstrance founded. It may have been founded partly on something actually said by God, although not *here* recorded—on the phrase "yet forty days," showing the delay of the sentence, and thus suggesting, although only obscurely, a *possible* deliverance through repentance: or it may have been founded only on the prophet's knowledge and experience of God's character and ways: or it may have arisen from both these sources. What appears is, that at this point it *did* arise. Here, when called and commissioned, the prophet hesitates, remonstrates, objects. He "takes against" the mission from the first. We shall examine the reasons of this more minutely in the next lecture, when we come to consider his flight. Meantime we note the fact of his reluctance; and the deliberate character of it, as seen in the *declaration* of his objections to the Lord. It was no sudden, truant impulse, no access of coward fear that led him astray. His objections were such as he felt he could state calmly to the Lord. They were such as the Lord

deigned to consider. Knowing their existence in his servant's mind, he seems to have considered them even before they were stated. There is a recognition of them in the very first divine word that breaks on the prophet's ear. After the mystical preparation for conference with his servant, whatever that preparation was—a deeper silence in the air, perhaps, betokening the approach of “the god of peace;” or a sudden elevation of sense and soul into the pure spirit life—the *very first word* he hears is “ARISE.” It is a word used before another verb as a term of excitement. “Arise—I know you have difficulties, in yourself, in your people, in the mission, in Nineveh; arise, therefore, gird your loins, and stir your strength, and go!”

In the very next verse we read that “Jonah rose up.” But, as we have seen, a good deal came between the command to arise and the actual arising. The Bible gives us things in brief—the pith and substance of them. It leaves many utterances of God and man unrecorded, the lapse of time unnoted, and events and circumstances which would figure largely in human histories, without a chronicle.

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We need not therefore suppose—we cannot suppose—that all this took place in an hour ; or perhaps even in a few days. “The word” came at once, clearly, strongly. Then came his expostulation, uttered probably at more length than is recorded here, perhaps repeated again and again in the divine presence (as Paul “besought the Lord thrice” for exemption from some trouble), in the hope of winning release by earnestness. Then—silence perhaps on the Lord’s part, or simply a repetition of the call—“Arise, go to Nineveh.” Then, it may be days elapsed, days of dark, troubled, anxious thought. Days of spiritual decline they must have been—for in such a case to consider, and hesitate, and linger, is to decline. Did he consult with any one ? Did he go to the old man his father, if he was yet alive ? Did he think of his name as he went : “Amittai—the truth of God ?” Did he, like Balaam, go to any mountain top in the neighbourhood ? Did he pray ? We know not. The probability is that he spake but little to any one, and least of all to God. Considering his temperament and his circumstances, it is more than likely that he grew moody and distressed,

even ill-tempered to those about him. In that time of dark uncertainty there would not be an Israelite from Dan to Beersheba more miserable, more to be pitied than he! When he entered upon the activities of rebellion and began his flight, his conscious misery would probably be less. Here, in this darkness, we must leave him for the present—the history taking us no farther. But his condition is so critical, and so fruitful of consequence both evil and good, that we may well, for a little longer, in a practical mood, consider the situation.

The main features of the case are clear, scarce could be clearer, and to these it will be best to limit our attention, and from these draw the principles and lessons to be enforced. On the one hand there is a divine commission and command distinctly and authoritatively given, with *some* of the reasons for it annexed, although with others certainly not fully revealed. On the other hand there is a state of reluctance and suspense ever verging towards actual disobedience—expressing itself, now in remonstrance, now in request for exemption, now in moody and distrustful silence. The situation is none

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so rare. The principles involved, and the lessons arising, are for all time.

First, then, we take occasion to enforce the supreme and unchallengeable obligation of the divine will when clearly expressed. There can be no higher obligation to man or angel than that. There can be no higher virtue in the creature than a simple and sincere obedience to that will when clearly understood. That will, of course, is always in harmony with the eternal principles of truth and goodness, with what men call "the nature of things." But it does not derive *its authority* from the nature of things, any more than the nature of things derives its authority from a pure act of divine will. The truth is, that the two things are inseparable, and it is idle to try to separate them. Divine will is in the nature of things, and the nature of things is expressed in each act of the divine will. Therefore, when God "speaks" to a servant, there can be no pretence for delay or non-compliance, much less for disobedience.

Obedience, promptly, fully given, is the most beautiful thing that walks the earth.

There came a divine call to Abram to "go out from his own country, and from his kindred, and from his father's house," to an unknown land. His obedience is recorded in language as sublime as it is simple : "So Abram departed as the Lord had said unto him." Grand, angel-like almost, is the ancient spiritual chief, marching steadily across the lonely wastes to the unknown land, led all the way by that one "word of the Lord !" There came this divine call to Jonah, to go to a distant city, but only for a season, then to return to his own land in safety ; and "Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish." What a difference ! And what a difference, as we know, in results also ! Prompt and simple obedience, when we are sure that God speaks, is the way to clearness, virtue, honour, strength, safety, peace. While consideration and suspense, ending as they are but too apt to do, in resistance and disobedience, make the nearest way to overwhelming storms, to engulfing seas, to whales' bellies, to danger of eternal loss.

The corresponding lesson is the exceeding danger of a mood of hesitation or remonstrance.

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All the sorrows of the sea sprang, like harvest, from this wrong mood at the time of his call, on the land. And yet the mood, arising as it did out of settled sentiments and feelings, would seem natural, and not very alarming to the prophet at the time. We should watch with great self-jealousy the moral hesitations of the will, and the silent petitionings for delay or exemption, and the attempts to have the case reasoned out more fully *after* the command has been heard, and the conviction of duty clearly produced. All such heart movements are fraught with peril. Divine light is given for "walking," and "working." Divine voice speaks, whether in the written law, or the living conscience apprehending it, *only* to be obeyed. Of course we are to make full use of our reason, our prudence, our information, in settling the line of practical duty in all those cases where it is not manifest to us when we look. But in most, if not all of the critical moments of life, duty is revealed very quickly, and made very plain and clear. "And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when

ye turn to the left." These clear monitions of the conscience, these fresh new-born convictions, swift, and bright, and strong in their action, are the supreme things for the state and time. They take rank above all efforts of reason, all flights of imagination. They are the divinest lights of the time, and ought to be the guiding lights for the coming time. In matters of expediency and prudence wait for the after-thoughts. In matters of conscience and present duty, take the first thoughts that arise, for they are the divinest. Happy is he whose action is as quick as the impulse that calls for it! whose daily obedience has in it the fresh colours of new-born convictions! whose feet sound the echo of God's "Arise!"

A practical difficulty with many will be, to find a sufficient analogy between a call like this, a high call of God to an inspired prophet, requiring a service that would be memorable in the history of the world, and the simple calls of duty to Christian service and daily work. "There seems to be little resemblance. Little fitness therefore in a summons expressly, supernaturally given, when applied to the ever-

recurring duties and humble scenes of common life." On the contrary, there is all the fitness that need be desired. The obligations of duty would be no more sacred and binding to us in reality, if they were enforced by an audible voice, and by the pointing of a visible finger. The Christian convictions—the convictions of Christian men in common life—although produced insensibly and slowly, wrought out of knowledge, prayer, and effort, yet, *in authority*, take rank with the highest. In a sense they are higher than any. For they are the *last results* of a very long process. They are the fruit of the action of the Spirit of God, making use of all that has been done in the world for man's redemption. Voices came, of old, from the invisible, patriarchs were called, prophets were illumined, priests were robed, and God's own Son was clothed in flesh and accredited "by mighty signs and wonders," that the world might come into order and calmness, and that the humblest might feel that in doing their humblest works, they are living under the highest sanctions and solemnities of heaven. Only listen then, and you will hear the stir and

whisper of God's "Arise" in every part of your life. In the morning, calling you up from sleep! In weariness, reminding you of the nobleness of work! In difficulty, filling you with inspiration! In temptation, alarming you with danger! In despondency, suggesting the consolations of change! In sorrow, pointing to realms of gladness! In death, with hand of help and gracious convoy, to the home of eternal life!

An old author,* writing on this book, puts this matter well. "Jonah and his 'Arise and go to Nineveh,' giveth a warning to us all, for we have all a Nineveh to go unto. Magistrates, arise and go to the gate, to execute God's judgments. Ministers, arise and go to the gospel, to do the works of evangelists. People, arise and go to your trades, to eat the labours of your hands; eye, to thy seeing; foot, to thy walking; Peter, to thy nets; Paul, to thy tents; merchant, to thy shipping; smith, to thy anvil; potter, to thy wheel; women, to your wherms and spindles; let not your candle go out, that your works may praise you in the

* King *On Jonah*, page 12.

gates. Your vocations of life are God's sanctions, he ordained them to mankind, he blesseth them presently at his audit ; he will crown them, if, when he calleth for an account of your fore-passed stewardships, you be able to say, in the uprightness of your soul, 'I have run my race ; and, as the Master of the house assigned me, so, by his grace and assistance, I have fulfilled my office.'"

THE FLIGHT.



IN the last lecture we considered some of the things which should have operated as strong reasons, or inducements, to an immediate and hearty compliance with the divine call. But as Jonah did *not* obey, there must have been other things which, for the time at least, *seemed* to be reasons against compliance. We cannot understand the conduct of Jonah fully, we cannot judge it fairly, without also giving some consideration to these. How did he, a prophet of the Lord, persuade or allow himself to enter on a course of disobedience to the divine will so open and declared? Some of the reasons that moved him we know, for they are recorded. Concerning others we may make conjectures more or less probable.

It was a long way—many hundreds of

miles. "From Dan to Beersheba" was a mere trifle compared with "from Gath-Hepher to Nineveh." A long way, and a great part of it through a desert. No doubt there was the common track, and the established means of conveyance. The camel—that old "ship of the desert"—was sailing then, even as it is sailing now, slowly, steadily, across the wide and weary wastes. The caravan, or company of merchants and pilgrims, from Assyria to Egypt, and from Egypt to Assyria, was passing to and fro. But Jonah probably had never been out of his own country, and the journey might naturally seem to him, in prospect, long, wearisome, uncertain. But suppose the journey made safely.

The thing to be done was very difficult. It was to go into and through the greatest city in the world, a single, solitary man; a foreigner to them; not silently, but reproving sin and denouncing vengeance. A service like this would manifestly require courage and self-reliance in high degrees. I do not know that we ought to impute to the prophet any fear. As a class, the prophets were peculiarly exempt

from that passion. Yet Jonah could not fail to have a deep sense of the singular difficulties of this mission. To be sensible of these difficulties would not of itself be sin. The sin and misfortune lay in thinking of them *alone*, without duly remembering and relying on that divine strength which he must have known to be "sufficient" to carry him triumphantly through them all.

It would be natural that he should despair of any great success. He had little or no experience of success in its highest forms. And therefore, among the anxious meditations of those days of doubting and trouble which preceded the flight, may well have been such as this:—"I have been teaching, witnessing, reproofing in my own country for many years, but, alas, with how little effect! I have not turned back the great stream of corruption. I have been the means of bringing some outward blessing and deliverance to my people; but God's goodness has not led them to repentance. How can I expect to be more successful among strangers? How can I look for a gracious gentleness in the capital of the most imperious

empire in the world? How can I expect meekness in the lion's den? justice in the seat of oppression? any goodness, purity, or sense of duty in the great realm of lawless, godless pleasure?"

Still further, he may have thought (it is evident he did) that, in the event of attaining a spiritual success, *failure must come in another way*. "If I awaken in them any sense of sin, any fear of danger, and if they cry to God in their misery, he will spare them, as he has so long spared, and so often forgiven, his own rebellious people. Then my reputation must suffer; perhaps even His will be compromised!" Over-consciousness of personal character, and over-carefulness for the divine honour, were not of old, are not now, so very uncommon.

Again, it is quite clear that *the prophet had some dark forecast of evil to his own country* from the probable turn which matters would take, if his mission at Nineveh should be successful. We ascertain this only in a vague and general way; and it is difficult to know exactly what the prophet feared, or wherefore

he should fear it. But that he did think that the preservation and continued prosperity, under some divine blessing then, of the great Gentile city and kingdom, would, in some way, be connected with disaster and possible downfall to Israel, is quite clear. Some shadow of the actual providence that led them away captive seems to have passed over the prophet's soul.

Nor should we, of all people, affect unmeasured surprise at such a feeling as this. Has it not been a principle with many of our leading statesmen, and a habit, albeit perhaps an unconscious one, of a great many of our people, to regard the prosperity and growth of other countries as having some sinister relation to the glory and supremacy of England—as being providential threats and omens against that glory? “Was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country?” Patriotism is a noble passion, but it is singularly capable of being associated with bigotry, intolerance, even injustice. It never seems to enter the thoughts of some men that they ought to rejoice in the prosperity of neighbouring nations; that they ought to protect

the rights of those nations, and promote their interests, as far as may be possible to them ; and it never seems to strike them that in striving to prevent some imaginary conjunction of circumstances, some hypothetical development of strength, in the coming years, they are taking *rather* too much hand and care in the government of the world ; that they are staying the ark of God's presence with the feeble hand of human wisdom, because the oxen seem to stumble, because, to them, events seem to be out of joint. "Let Nineveh reap as she has sown ! If she perishes in her sin, God will be glorified, other nations will learn an awful lesson, and *Israel will be saved.*" So Jonah. "Let North and South dash together in bloody fields, in long passionate strife !—and let the great Republic go to pieces if it must. So much of the dark thunderous element that was brooding in the sky of that western world has gone ! They will have the less power to do harm to others. *We* are the safer in the coming years !" So some among ourselves, who are not conscious to themselves of really meaning any harm to America ; who are only conscious of being

eminently patriotic as Englishmen.* There may be a certain kind of political wisdom in that way of looking at things. At any rate the instance may help us somewhat to understand, if we cannot approve, Jonah's reluctance to be in any way the possible instrument of calamity and reverse to his country ; and it may remind us, naturally, that we are perhaps all too apt, in great things and little, to encroach upon the sphere of strictly *divine* government, to concern ourselves "in matters too high for us ;" to try world-guiding, nation-guiding, life-guiding *from above*, as though we stood on the supreme place, instead of walking *under* the law, the love, the faultless wisdom, and perfect providence of God.

For these, then, and probably for other reasons unknown to us, the prophet seems to have felt strongly disinclined to an enterprise encompassed with so many difficulties, and likely to issue in disadvantage and disaster to his people. A prophet's message was nearly always "the burden of the Lord." *This* message

* This lecture was delivered when the American war was about its height.

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was manifestly a burden of peculiar gravity. Taking it the wrong way, and without inspiration of strength from above, he reeled under the load, threw it down, and in a kind of despair rushed into the darkness of disobedience.

But surely, when we look at the circumstances of the case as far as we know them, and when we exercise a wise and charitable imagination in regard to what we do not actually know, we shall feel little disposed to pass on Jonah that kind of severe and overwhelming judgment which has been but too common, and to represent his disobedience as something quite singular and monstrous. There is too much reason to fear that *the kind* of disobedience is not at all uncommon. Far oftener than many suppose, great and gifted spirits have shrunk back from great responsibilities. Did not Moses say : "Send, O Lord, by whom thou wilt send?" Not by me. The burden, the toil, the honour are far too great for me. When the Lord told Gideon to go and save Israel from the hand of the Midianites, he said unto him : "O my Lord, wherewith shall I save Israel? Behold my family is poor in

Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house." The truth is, that we ordinary men are not able to judge justly, either of the success or the failure of a great man in a great crisis. We can, indeed, in a measure, judge, as we certainly can admire, the success; but we are very apt to misjudge both the character and the extent of the failure in such a case. This man Jonah—his custody in a living grave was not the worst that befell him. Has he not, during all these ages, been the subject of pleasantry and banter by sceptical spirits and light-headed witlings? Worse: has he not been the subject of serious animadversion, and blame without discrimination, by a very large portion of the Christian ministry, as often as a strong illustration of the guilt and folly of reckless disobedience was needed?

Of course we are not hinting that it is possible, however thoughtfully and sympathetically we may enter into the difficulties of the case, to justify, or to do less than deplore and condemn, the course the prophet took. For it was not a sensitive and momentary shrinking merely in which he was overtaken; it was

quite a deliberate and systematic disobedience. But yet *such* a disobedience as many a soul of high and kingly temper has fallen into ;—such a disobedience as would not seem to himself at the time anything like so serious and so full of peril as it really was, and as he soon saw it to be. All this will become more clear as we attend to the exposition of the verses.

We read that “ he rose up to flee from the presence of the Lord.” The meaning of that expression we take to be, that he retired, or wished to retire, from the prophetic office, at least for a time, and from that peculiar and sacred nearness to God which a true prophet, in service, always had. He did not think of fleeing actually out of divine presence in the widest sense. Familiar as he was with the Psalms of David, those words must have been often in his heart, and probably on his lips : “ Whither shall I go from thy spirit ? or whither shall I flee from thy presence ? If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea ; even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me.” Asks one of the new school inter-

preters, of course with disparaging design upon the book, regarding it as little more than a myth: "How could *a prophet* imagine that he could flee from the presence of God?" The answer is, that he never imagined any such thing. If we might take our turn at questioning, we should feel very much disposed to ask "how a scholar and a critic could imagine that he could imagine it." The unconscious pressure of a preconceived theory would furnish a good part of the reply. "He went out of the king's presence," might be said appropriately of one retiring from the court, or from some high state office. Does it follow that he goes from under the law of that king? Never; as long as he is in his realm. Jonah knew, as he afterwards told the sailors, that "Jehovah had made the sea and the dry land."

Some think that he supposed that if he went out of the land of Israel the spirit of prophecy would not rest on him. He may have had such a hope. But the essential idea is just *retiring from the presence*—the near, immediate presence—of God. He knew that if he continued in that presence it would *move*

soon, as did the pillar of old, and that he must go eastwards. To escape, if possible, from that necessity, he went out of the presence, westwards, as fast and as far as he could. It is certainly worthy of notice that the way he fled was almost the direct opposite of the way he would have gone if he had done God's bidding.

When the resolution was actually taken, he put it in force with the utmost alacrity. "He *rose up*"—girded, resolved, despising hindrance; turning away from the endearments of home. "He *rose up to flee*"—fast as horse or mule can carry him, or as his own feet can mark the ground! "He *rose up to flee unto Tarshish*," far away in the western world, by the yonder shores of "the Great Sea." Is there not something grand in this man's "rising?" A prophet cannot sin like a common man. There yet lingers about him, although darkly, the glory of the past. The virtue won in faithful service, the nobleness caught in divine presence, cannot be extinguished in an hour. Ah! if he had but "risen" with face and purpose to the north-eastward road, how beautiful his fleeing would have been! How admirable

his expedition ! He would have found a hiding-place from every tempest, and a covert from every storm ; rivers of waters in a dry place, and the shadow of a great rock in a weary land ! Angels would have met him by the way, and his march across the lonely wilderness would have been like the march of a king !

But no. “He went down to Joppa.” It was a literal descent from the mountain district of Zabulun, the prophet’s native country. Alas ! it was also a spiritual descent from the calm heights of divine presence—where every mountain stood like a sentinel for his protection, and every star beamed kindly on him—to the open, unsheltered plains where unseen arrows fly, where murky vapours roll, where dark foes watch occasion ; beyond which rolls—with hidden vengeance in every wave—the great and wide sea !

Always, to leave the presence of God is to “go down ;” and the history of many a day might, in the evening, be written but too faithfully in the sad brief record, “I have been going down.” Down from communion, from a conscious faith, from quietness and assurance,

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from steady, firm obedience. Down into strife without victory, into toil without fruit. Down into mere bargain-making; mere money-making; mere pleasure-seeking; mere time-wasting. The success and glory of true life can be found only by keeping the *upward* road—in hearing and following the voice which says perpetually “Come up hither!”

Jonah settled where to go before he left home. God had made all arrangements to disembark him at another place; but he meant to go to Tarshish—Tartessus in Spain, an ancient merchant city named after one of the sons of Javan (Gen. x. 4). It was long proverbial for its wealth: “The kings of Tarshish and of the isles shall bring presents: the kings of Sheba and Seba shall offer gifts” (Ps. lxxii. 10). It supplied Judæa with silver: “Silver, spread into plates, is brought from Tarshish, and gold from Uphaz, the work of the workman, and of the hands of the founder” (Jer. x. 9). It gave to Tyre all the riches of the west: “With silver, iron, tin, and lead,” Tarshish traded in the Tyrian fairs (Ezek. xxvii. 12). To Tarshish would Jonah flee.

He soon came to Joppa, the Jaffa of this day. Two or three days would bring him down. We have no account whatever of that journey. We are not told whether he had any companions ; whether he met any persons of importance by the way who knew him ; whether any one “ trembled at his coming, and said, Comest thou peaceably ? ” Whether he staid by night in city, village, hamlet, or cottage, or preferred sleeping in a cave or under a tree. Whether he halted on the road ever, held for some moments of agony between two opinions still, thinking sadly of what he had lost, and how far he might now have been on the way to Nineveh. Judging from the narrative, there was little relenting and no delay ; for he is presently in Joppa.

Nor does he linger in the streets. He is bustling about the quays, questioning the sailors, looking into the ships. There are little fishing-smacks : he does not want one of these. There are vessels from Tyre and Sidon, which creep along the coast in summer weather : *they* will not answer his purpose. But here is A SHIP going to Tarshish,—the very place, of all places

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in the world, where he would be. And she must be going soon, for there is bustle and hurry on board—evident preparations for an immediate voyage. “Ah! this will do.” And so, as he tells us with a minuteness and particularity evidently intentional, “he found a ship going to Tarshish, and paid the fare thereof, and went down into it, to go with them unto Tarshish, from the presence of the Lord.”

What is the prophet's object in such careful minuteness? It may have been to keep himself in remembrance, and tell all the world *how many steps* there were, so to speak, in his down-going. He had come down from Gath-Hepher as men come down a smooth hillside or a gentle incline. But now, when he has reached Joppa, the descent is more steep and swift, as when men go down a flight of stairs.

It is as if he had said: “I came to Joppa. I might have paused *then*, smitten by the first sounds of the booming sea, admonished or terrified by the sight of its treacherous waves. But I did not; I went among the ships.

“After looking among them, I found *one*,

going to Tarshish. I might have paused *then*, and said to myself: Shall I venture, unbidden, unblessed as I am, into a company of rough sailors, not one of whom, probably, knows the name of my God; and, for long weeks, go sailing the seas in their company? But I did not.

“I ‘paid the fare thereof.’ I might have paused *then*, just before completing the bargain, and said to myself: Shall I give all this money—the fruit of my father’s carefulness, or of my own toil—to be allowed to disobey, and to be carried where I have no legitimate business, where none will know me, where I may possibly come to be in want? But I did not.

“I ‘went down into it.’ I might have paused *then*, as men shrink back from the entrance of a dark cavern, or from the brow of a beetling precipice, and said: Shall I trust myself in a frail structure like this, and go to sleep on the wide waters, with only a few inches of plank between me and death? But I did not. I was infatuated. I was asleep.”

Whether the record carries in it these intentions directly from the prophet himself or

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not, there can be no doubt that in these illustrations we touch upon a real principle of active and general operation in the providence of God. There are "compunctious visitings" of nature. There are times when men may well relent. There are spaces where they may turn. There are silent, sometimes secret doors of opportunity, which move easily on their hinges. There are quick and free occasions for retrieval. There are whisperings and strivings of the spirit in the heart. "Now! Now! Now, if ever! Now, or never!" Balaam is going the wrong way. But even Balaam shall have warning; and as he is resolute in his sin, the warning shall be strong—a battle-angel meets him with a drawn sword! And if the man were not at the time blinder and duller than the ass he rides, he would see him and turn back. Ah! it is an ill sign of a man when, Jonah-like, he goes blindly on his way, down, and still down, until he reaches the hold of some ship that will carry him out to the storms! When, Balaam-like, he beats the ass of circumstance that carries him, and rushes, unwittingly, into the presence of the angel of judgment.

Are any of you beginning to "go out from the presence of the Lord?" Standing as yet on the first gentle slope of declension, as Jonah may have stood for a few moments ere he began his flight, looking sorrowfully at home and hills around Gath-Hepher? I call you to stay before you go farther, and turn Godwards, homewards again while turning is yet easy—easier than it will ever be again.

Are any quite on the downward road; treading the steps of a self-planned journey, and fleeing fast from life's higher duties and God's nearer presence? I meet you to-day on your ill-starred journey, and say: "Whither away, so fast, so far from home? Come, let us go back again."

Are any come down, as it were, to the shore of an unknown sea, on the yonder side of which lies the haven of a sinful purpose? and are you listening as yet to the melancholy dash of its waves, and looking wistfully, and with some fear, to the dim and far horizon? Stay on the shore. Keep footing on the land while you may. Once afloat, you must go in a vessel, the helm of which you cannot touch.

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Have you found a ship that is exactly suited to your needs, or rather to your desires, which is going to the very place where you would be,—some scheme for profit or pleasure so fitly fashioned and prepared that it stands like a full-rigged and well-manned ship just ready to sail? Stay. Speak not to the captain. Go not among the crew. Make no league with the passengers. You may *yet* escape.

Have you “paid the fare?” Have you taken some fateful step—made promise to man or woman—given hostages to sin? Sacrifice the money, and be quits. Break the promise you had no right to make. To keep it will be to commit a double sin. To break it will be to make retrieval of the first.

Have you “gone down into” the ship, quite out of sight, looking for some place where to lay your head in that dark hold? Come up again, come up; ere the cable is loosed, ere the sail is unfurled. “In returning and in rest shall ye be saved, saith the Lord your God.”

But the prophet may have had another reason for this particularity of specification. He may have meant to teach us *that the out-*

ward aspects of providence to us at any one time, constitute a very insufficient and unsafe guide in matters of moral duty. Everything he mentions here seems to have been outwardly favourable. No check on the way. No difficulty in finding what he sought. No dispute about the terms. No delay in sailing. No striking of the vessel on the bar. They have gone over at high tide (what little tide there is in that sea). The sailors are the best. The breeze is favourable, and touches with a reviving coolness the brows of heated men. The setting sun—shall we say?—is shooting shafts of glorious light, and “the rippling waters echo merrily to the mariner’s song.” As Homer sings of Ulysses and his crew, when, after restoring Chryseis to her father and her native land, they turn their bark home again :—

“ A favouring breeze the far-destroyer sent :
They stepp’d the mast, and spread the snowy sail :
Full in the midst the bellying sail received
The gallant breeze ; and round the vessel’s prow
The dark waves loudly roared, as on she rushed,
Skimming the seas, and cut her watery way.” *

* Lord Derby’s Translation.

Does not all this look as if God were letting the prophet go? As if he were winking at the time of his ignorance? As if he had changed his will concerning Nineveh? Or would find some other to put that will in force? We shall see. The voyage is but beginning: "Better is the end of a thing than the beginning" for a full and fair judgment of its character.

So men, judging hastily, judging along the line of their wishes, behold sometimes, as they think, a complete chain of favourable providences. "Do you not see," they will say, "how providence seems to favour our design? If God disapproved, would he not put some stop? Would he not send some remonstrating friend? an unfavourable letter? a sickness? an accident? a failure? Something, as an indication of his will? No. He might; or he might not. He did not to Jonah. He allowed him to flee, to sail, and then caught the full-blown plan with a whirlwind which rent it to pieces, submerging it, and him, in an ignominious grave.

Let none of us think it much to be in full sail; fanned by breath of popular applause,

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carrying heavy cargo of success, prow turned towards some port of release, or towards some realm of pleasure. Let us ask ourselves: "Whence we have come—and why? Whither we are going—and wherefore? What exactly we mean to do—and who hath sent us on the errand?" Let us put to ourselves those simple, yet through-and-through questions, which will pierce to every point of life, and run along all the lines of possibility. Especially let us ascertain, as we may, whether the great ruler of that providence which we fondly say is "favourable," is HIMSELF with us, in his approving presence, according to the terms of his revealed will. The answers we are able to give to such questions as these will settle the character of our life-voyage, or of our separate enterprises, not hasty, and self-flattering interpretations of outward providence. Up, my brethren, from providence to the Bible. The word of God is "the lamp to our feet, and the light unto our path." Interpretations of providence, which are not according to the principles of that word, can have "no light in them." Nay, but we ought to rise higher yet.

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Up, my brethren, from the very Bible to God. We are not safe even among divinely-written laws, if we do not feel the great presence of the giver of them. Providence, Bible, Christ, the Spirit, Church, Ministry, and all else revealed appointed, or given, are intended, in last result, to fill our life with divine presence. With that presence about us all is well. The sunshine will be nourishing. The darkness will be sheltering. Winds that blow our way will lift us with a sense of joyousness above the rolling waves; and storms that dash against us will not start a timber in the vessel in which we sail. "If God be for us, who can be against us?" If God be against us, what matters it who or what may happen to be for us?

## SAILED.



SAILED—for Tarshish ! To call here and there by the way. Sailed—all well ! The captain at his post. The rough brown sailors ready. The good ship obeying the helm and answering well to the lift of the gale. Very few passengers—perhaps only one ; a still man, who seems in some trouble, which perhaps the strong sea-wind will blow away. Sailed—over the bar made along that coast by the coral reefs ; quite out to sea, and beyond the sight of the breakers ! Sailed—and all will go well ! There may be now and again a stiff gale, which will serve but to quicken the sailors' blood ; and, if a storm comes, the ship is strong, the sailors are pious, and the gods above will help !

“ All will go well ! ” Nay, that depends on “ Him who made the sea and the dry

land!" That depends on who is in the ship! If a ship carries Cæsar—one of God's Cæsars—she cannot sink. Euroclydon, black north wind, simoom—she will weather them all! If a ship carries Jonah—one of God's Jonahs—a recreant and a fugitive, it is like enough that she will not go far till she shivers in every timber, groaning as if she were a living thing in death in the midst of the seas!

How far the voyage was pursued thus pleasantly we do not know. But the narrative seems to import that *very soon* after they sailed out into the sea, God roused up his pursuivant, and sent him after, to bring the prophet back. As God has an innumerable company of angels—living, spiritual persons—ready to fly on his service any whither, so hath he also, in the lower sense, angels, "messengers," to do his will in all material things. Earth and sea and air are full of them. Light and darkness; heat and cold; rain, sunshine, electricity; "fire and hail; snow and vapours; *stormy wind*, fulfilling his word." The whole world is full of these invisible couriers, robed and ready for divine service. Men call them

laws and forces. So they are. But they are also "ministers of his, that do his pleasure." In this case, he could, with the surge of a wave (and without breaking in upon the chain of second causes), spring a leak in the vessel, and make her glad to roll, waterlogged, to the shore. Or he could, by the carelessness of one of these sailors (and that without touching the man's free-will), kindle a fire on board, which would wrap the ship in flames, and make them glad to steer her right through surf and breaker, if by any means they might reach the shore.

But he does not want the vessel back. He wants the prophet back. When *he* is given up, the vessel may go her way. And so "the Lord sent out a great wind into the sea, and there was a mighty tempest in the sea, so that the ship was like to be broken." Literally, "He cast along," "caused to come down at full length." The same word is used in the next verse when it is said that the mariners "*cast forth* the wares that were in the ship;" and in the 15th verse, where it is said that "they *cast Jonah forth* into the sea." Coverdale renders the phrase, "But the Lord hurled a great

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wynde into the sea." Immediate, personal divine action is the thing declared. Jonah has been busy for days, and has done his part. Very likely he feels, and has felt, in a dull manner all through, that it is an ill work, but at least it is so far done now that he can, as it were, leave the stage of action and sink into his heavy sleep. And *then* the Lord begins to work. "*And*"—not "*but*"—"the Lord sent out a great wind." The prophet has played out his part for the time—"and," then, the Lord begins *his* sublime action. The one thing is connected with the other in the narrative. While Jonah works God waits. When Jonah falls asleep God begins to work. The scene is thus arrestive and striking. The man hasting away for days from "the presence," out among second causes and exterior things—into a blank world of indifference. Then God, with a touch of his hand, raising up those second causes, which hitherto had seemed to favour the flight, into an irresistible combination for the arrest and recovery of the fugitive. "He taketh the wise in their own craftiness; and the counsel of the froward is carried headlong." Men dig pits, and fall into

them. They weave webs, and by a touch of his hand they are snared and taken. If we look in our own lives we shall see, or we shall feel the touch of, the same principle of divine action. Those very circumstances by the misinterpretation or the misuse of which we go wrong, are made the instrument of our chastisement and (if we will be admonished), the means of our recovery. Those providential things in and by which we sin, in all probability carry our suffering hidden in them. For a little while they may seem to favour desertion of duty, and escape from the nearer presence of God. But before long they will explain their meanings, and avenge the thoughtless slights that were put upon them. Before long, they will make a way back again (very likely through darkness and tempest) into truth, simplicity, divine presence.

When we say that God comes thus expressly on the scene, with his personal presence and agency—just as fully and properly as Jonah is there—we do not of course mean to exclude the action of second causes and natural laws. The great wind he cast into the sea was

no doubt generated, in a natural manner, by atmospherical and terrestrial influences. It was the rush of the air to make equilibrium and rest. It was not cast down from the stars. It was a home-wind, so to speak, in those parts. The sailors knew it well, and called it "the black north wind." Euroclydon lived "off Crete," and was very ready to give rough salutation to any vessel passing that way. This "black north wind" dwelt along the coast of Palestine, and, but too often, broke ships in pieces, and cast the pliant waves in thunder on the coast.

But if we say "second causes," meaning what we say, we must allow that at some time, and somewhere, there must be a *first* cause. And if we mean what we say when we speak of a *first* cause, we must allow that *that* touches, holds, and *rules* the whole chain and series of second causes. The chain may be a short or a long one (each link as we ascend both a cause and a consequence), but we are soon at the top, and then, there is—not a link, but a *hand*, not a law, but a *will*. The spirit and tendency of one part of modern philosophy is just this—

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to say, and to try to prove, that there is no hand atop, no will above, no person there, and therefore that there can be no personal interference or superintendence—an interminable chain, with nothing but links for ever! an eternal cycle—of things evermore revolving, which does not admit or allow the personal action of a Deity at all. If a God is acknowledged, it does not seem to me to matter much whether you make a long or a short chain of phenomena—in the last resort, all comes into his hands. Nor does it seem to matter much at what points in this great world-instrument he may be regarded by us as laying his finger; *near* to the man to whom he is speaking; *on* the very wind which is roaring about him; or *higher up* among those potent elements which put the winds in force. It may quite well be that this “great wind” would have been “cast into the sea” that day or night, all the same if the ship had not been there, and if Jonah had been on the way to Nineveh. I do not presume to say that this is so. Indeed, one cannot but marvel at the enormous assumption of those who confidently make such an assertion. But, on the other

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hand, we need not be "careful to answer in this matter." In either case it is God who sends the wind, and makes the mighty tempest in the sea, and gets recognition of his presence from the sailors, and from the very ship. "The ship was like to be broken;" literally "thought to be broken;" felt as if it could not survive—as if it must go to pieces. The image is very striking. The dead ship becomes like a living thing—rolls about among the billows in anguish!—creaks and groans in terror!—and thus reproaches the insensate prophet and the impertinent philosopher.

If the storm was such that the very ship could be represented as in fear, it is not surprising that "the mariners were afraid." "They were afraid, and cried every man unto his god, and cast forth the wares that were in the ship into the sea, to lighten it of them." They were probably Phœnicians or Spaniards. Each would have his tutelary deity; and so "they cried every man unto his god." Not all to one heathen deity. But each man to his own god. When God is forsaken, men forsake each other. They lose the power of mutual sym-

pathy and help in the highest things. Only the true worshippers have that great power—the power of social sympathy—working in full strength among them. Idolatry, like every other kind of sin, separates men from each other; isolates, and in times of danger leaves *each alone* before his helpless deity. It is curious to think what these mariners would have said and done if a calm had come—how they would have apportioned their thanks—to *what* god *supreme* honour would have been paid. Probably they would have been but too well satisfied with the result to care much either for the form or the amount of the thanksgiving due.

And yet I think we have no ground for uttering one word of reproach or blame against these men. They would contrast but too favourably with many a ship's crew that sails out of London or Liverpool. These poor heathen men prayed to their gods. Many a British sailor only swears and curses by his. They did what they could. They were true to the best instincts of the human mind. They did not know God, and therefore they could not

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call upon HIM. They knew, however, that there was a providence, that there were powers—ruling powers—above mere laws and forces. They believed in gods, and to the gods they cried. Honour their honesty while you deplore their ignorance. Reverence their worship while you turn away from the objects of it. Bow the knee beside them, and feel that you are on holy ground, while you are in company and fellowship with human spirits in prayer. I say they did all that could be expected of them. They prayed and wrought. They cried to their gods, and cast the wares out of the ship ; a clear and good example to all men who are in straits.

Here arises a very interesting question. Did God hear these prayers ? Did he accept them ? Did he answer them ? Did they “avail,” and become “effectual” in any degree, as the fervent prayers of righteous men do ? Did the cries of these sailors become powers for the occasion, altering the chain of circumstances, and helping, among other things, to bring on the issues which actually came ? God only can answer such questions fully. No one may dogmatise, or speak as possessing absolute

knowledge. But I am very much inclined to answer these questions in the affirmative. Something, of course, would depend on the character of the men. "He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination." If men regard iniquity in their hearts, "the Lord will not hear them." But looking at the question generally, the probability seems to be, that the earnest and agonising cries of such men as these, to the only gods they knew, for deliverance from a danger expressly brought upon them, not by their own misconduct, but by the misbehaviour of one of the Lord's own servants, would be heard of him, accepted as true prayer, and as though it had been made unto himself. In one of the Psalms, you remember, God is called "the hearer of prayer." Then it is immediately added that "unto him shall *all flesh come*," as if to guard against the narrowing supposition that he will hear only the prayers of *some* men—of men who have knowledge, religious privileges, established character, social standing. As I read the Scriptures, there is but one fatal hindrance to the acceptance of the prayer of any

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man—Jew or Gentile, pagan or Christian—and that is a hindrance which he himself must make, and keep—viz. his own voluntary wickedness. If he quenches the lights he has, and violates the convictions of his moral nature, then his prayer is but a selfish cry, not a great moral force co-operating with the volition and affection of God. But, on the other hand, if a man—say a poor heathen sailor—looks up towards the only lights that ever shone or twinkled in his moral firmament, and sets his moral nature, of course very imperfectly, to the keeping of the laws and the reverencing of the gods above him, and then in danger cries to those gods for deliverance, I *think* the one only living and true God will hear the cry, and send answer as he would to a Christian's prayer. Otherwise the man is irrevocably doomed, do what he will, to darkness and death. There are insuperable objections to making *knowledge* the criterion of the acceptance of prayer. All human knowledge is "part" knowledge, and must come almost infinitely short of the full glory of the Lord. It is not so much what we know as *the use we make* of what we know,

that becomes critical of our acceptance with God. "God is no respecter of persons, but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him." Well, now, if the prayers of these men are heard, we have here a strange, striking picture of men and things. A prophet of God refusing to go and speak to the heathen ! Heathen sailors saving that prophet, or helping to save him, from the consequences of his disobedience, by their prayers !

But where is he ? What is he doing for his own safety ? Does he know that all this tumult and riot of the elements is for him ? That the hurricane is beating the ship until it shivers, "curling the monstrous waves, and hanging them with deafening clamour in the slippery shrouds ?" He, in whose soul there should be the answering storm of pain, remorse, and fear, is the only insensible man on board—"But Jonah was gone down into the sides of the ship, and he lay, and was fast asleep." He had probably gone down soon after leaving the shore. He hardly *could* have gone to sleep after the storm began. Supposing him to have gone down before, there is nothing unnatural

or unlikely in his deep sleep. In fact, it is profoundly natural. It is one of those touches in the narrative which only the pencil of truth could impart. He had come a long journey, in haste. He fled; not sleeping much by the way. He was weary. He was remorseful, full of dull dark sorrow. He had nothing now to do. He would not dare to think. His feeling, or involuntary thought, would be pain. The one thing of all others he would be most likely to do in the circumstances is just the thing it is said he did—"He lay, and was fast asleep." So the disciples fell asleep in their sorrow, while watching. So Sisera slept in the tent of Jael, and never woke. Sleep; what a rich boon it is to frail and weary men! It is one of God's purest acts of beneficence, this continual gift of sleep. He gives what he never needs, what he never takes. He sheds a sweet oblivion round and round the world, himself keeping watch, while man, and beast, and bird, and even, in a measure, bud, and leaf, and blossom, take their rest! "Tired nature's sweet restorer, balmy sleep"—it comes to the wet sea-boy in the rudest hour, to the poor slave in the intervals of his hopeless toil,

to the traveller in the forest or on the mountain-side, and—marvel of mercy—to the sinner under the heavy load of his sin! Many a one since Jonah's time has gone down to the sides of a ship, burdened like him with some recent sin, and fallen fast asleep! Thousands, every night, in quiet houses, the beams of which do not creak like the timbers of Jonah's ship, fall asleep in sin, in flight, in fear, in sorrow—the sorrow of the world that worketh death—and some sleep the sleep that knows no waking!

But Jonah is waking now. There is a hand upon his leathern girdle or upon his prophet's dress. There is a voice in his ear such as he has not been used to—a voice of instancy, sharpness, and pain. "The shipmaster came to him, and said unto him, What meanest thou, O sleeper? Arise, call upon thy God, if so be that God will think upon us, that we perish not." The skipper went down *himself* to the prophet. He evidently knew that he was a person of consequence, and he would pay him this respect. He did not cry out to one of his rough sailors, "Go and shake up that landsman, and see what he has to say." "The captain went close

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up to him," some translate, "and said"—not "What meanest thou?" in the way of angry reproach, but "What aileth thee?"—literally "What is to thee? What is the matter? How is this?" He evidently had a strong suspicion that the calamity had come on board with the prophet in some way, and that the storm, the like of which he had never seen, was a god's messenger. This strange, almost preternatural sleep, was a confirmation of his fear, although it was not at all what he would have expected. At any rate, it is clear to him that he must awake the sleeper, and, if possible, send him to prayer. And he does. What is singular, he asked him to pray, not simply to his God, as another of the many, some of whom had been already appealed to, as one who might probably be more powerful than they. But he asks him to pray to God—to the God—the true God. Some have supposed it possible from this that the captain was himself a worshipper of Jehovah. He would certainly be more likely to have heard of Him and of his wondrous works than the sailors; and beyond all doubt his charge to the prophet is the very best that could have been given in

the circumstances. The form and manner of the charge, too, seem unexceptionable. "If so be that God will think upon us." Perhaps he will. We have no claim that we can stand by. But is he not merciful? Are not we miserable? Can he not—will he not—think upon us, that we perish not? At least, we have a claim on you, as a fellow-man, that you should earnestly invoke his pity and add your cry to ours, that help may come. Whatever be the meaning of the storm—pray. Whatever the unknown sin—pray. Whatever your past life has been, whatever your future may be—pray. This is no time to reason. Still less a time to sleep—"Arise and call upon thy God!"

At this point of the narrative we must pause to-day; and we shall take our closing lesson from this heathen captain. Let us hear him speak, not alone to the somnolent, yet awaking prophet, but to ourselves in regard to the sins, and straits, and duties of our own life. Let us be sure of this—that he is "the minister of God to us for good." He, and not Jonah, is the prophet for the hour. The man who speaks the truth that is truest for the time, the place,

the persons, is the highest *then* in office under God. When Samuel looked fondly on Eliab, and said: "Surely the Lord's anointed is before him!" the Lord said: "Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature, because I have refused him." So, if you look at the leathern girdle, at the hairy garment, at the Hebrew face, at the man once anointed with the holy anointing oil, and say in your heart: "There can be no proper, authentic, divine instruction until *he* awakes and speaks;" the answer of God in his providence is: "Listen to the speaker whom I have brought on the scene. I have called him by the storm. I have anointed him with the holy terrors of the hour. I have filled him with the spirit of truth. Give audience! Give acceptance to his words!" This is not the only instance recorded in the Scriptures of Gentile heathen men reproving the errors and sins of God's servants, and uttering the appropriate truth for the time. Pharaoh smote and silenced the father of the faithful for his faithlessness and duplicity. Abimelech gave a similar correction to Isaac. Abigail (she, however, was a Hebrew woman)

instructed David, and staid him from cruel sin. And the little children, singing Hosanna in the temple, reprov'd the Scribes and Pharisees for their proud silence and scorn. Will any one say that he will still hold with the anointed ones—the official persons—not only in the main, because they are still good, but *in* the error and in the sin, because they *are official* persons? That would be despite done to the spirit of God. Hold with the truth wherever it is found. Receive it from *any* lips that utter it, and (unless you have reason to the contrary) be apt to judge him true who speaks the truth. Let this shipmaster teach us, first, generally by his example; and then, secondly, let him arouse us by his words.

His example generally is good, and well worthy of imitation. He is "*master*" of the ship, and he feels that, in an hour of peril especially, it lies within his province to incite and constrain all who sail in the ship, and who, therefore, as passengers or sailors, are under his care, to the discharge of their very highest duties.

Now, there are many persons who would say

that he clearly went beyond his province, that he had no right to call upon a passenger to pray. They would say that his part was to mind the ship, to keep the men at their work, to spread or furl the sail, to cast out the wares, and so forth. But that he was neglecting his duty, increasing the danger, and intruding into a province quite beyond his own, in asking either sailor or passenger to pray. Secularists would say that. And some religionists who, carrying the voluntary principle to all lengths, would say not much less; although, I dare say, if they were in circumstances anything like those of this ship captain, they would act as he did. And wisely too.

Well, then, the lesson is this. Masters (and mistresses too, of course), remember that you have religious duties to the full length and breadth of your mastery. Be it over ship, or waggon, or warehouse, or house—be it over sailors, servants, children, or friends—you have the right, and having the right, there rests on you the solemn *duty*, arising out of the same relation that confers the right, to promote the highest wellbeing of all who come under your sway.

If there is within your house, within your sphere, one sleeping soul which you *could* awake, and yet allow to sleep on, you will be held responsible—I do not say for the entire loss of that soul, but at least, for *not* awaking.

There is need for this lesson. A contrary doctrine has been making way, and especially in educated society, for some time—the doctrine of reticence in spiritual things. It is supposed that in proportion as men are educated, they become silent and secret from all their fellows in their whole religious experience. It is hinted that it would scarcely be less than a breach of politeness and religious propriety to mention the soul, the Saviour, the God of salvation. It seems to me that if that theory be true, when human perfection is reached, here or in heaven, God might as well not be, for he will never be named again. So you see the ideal heaven of those men would come to be exactly what our fallen and miserable state now is—a state of estrangement from God, and of cold and selfish isolation even from one another.

Of course we are not pleading for any violation of the true propriety, for any outrage on

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social customs or educated taste. Often, to be reticent, timorous, and tentative, will be far more christianly beautiful, and also more *effectual*, than to be outspoken and demonstrative. "There is a time to keep silence and a time to speak." There is a *way* of keeping silence and a way of speaking. "Walk" and speak "circumspectly ; not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time." But if you commit yourself to the doctrine of unvarying silence, or allow yourself to fall into the *habit* of it, without sanctioning its principle, you will inevitably come short of that which is highest both in duty and privilege within the sphere of your life, and then—gather up your garments how you will, the blood of souls will be upon them.

Now, let us listen, all of us who need, to the shipmaster's awakening call to the sleeper. These words of his *have* aroused many a sleeper besides Jonah. It is simply true to say that, instrumentally, they have converted many a soul. They have been heard through the ages since, as watchman's cry, as trumpet sound, to awaken and save souls from death. Hear them, sleeping soul, to-day. This captain calls to you : "What

meanest thou, O sleeper?—sleeping *here* in this great battlefield, where souls are lost and won? In this vineyard of noblest work, where God-given talents are doubled, or forfeited for ever! In this treacherous sea of life, girt round with storms which might so easily break the strongest ships that float! What meanest thou?—sleeping *now*, with noonday lights above thee, and about thee men who strive, and men who pray! In sight of the busy angels, and on the lap of the ever-hasting time! While helps are waiting, and hostilities are mustering! While the gates of heaven and of hell stand open—the murky shadows of the one gathering in deeper folds, the joy-bells of the other waiting to peal! Will you not awake, in such a scene, in such a time as this? Arise, call upon thy God, and the Lord *will* think upon thee, and thou shalt not perish.”

THE STORM.



PERHAPS never before had the prophet beheld a scene like that which would gradually disclose itself to his awakening senses. The anxious captain! The terror-stricken sailors! The reeling ship! Possibly his first emotion on awakening would be one of sharp disappointment, as he thought within himself: "I did not expect this; I thought of sunny seas, and gentle breezes wafting sweet odours out upon us from the islands as we sailed past them, away to the western shores." But there is no time to think. The voice of the captain, heard above the roar of the storm, is calling him instantly to prayer. He must either pray, or give some reason for refusal. There is nothing else that he can do. He is no sailor. All on board have done this except himself. Then, *did* he pray? It is

more than probable he did. To have declined would have been tantamount to a confession of his guilt, and he was not as yet quite prepared for that. Surely also it would have betokened a shocking want of natural sympathy with innocent fellow-creatures in distress—such a want of sympathy as, on a full and fair view of the prophet's character, we have no right to impute to him. Moreover, although a recreant prophet, he was still a man, and he was asked to do, in circumstances of the last extremity, what almost any man would do instinctively. But *if* he prayed, why is it not mentioned? May be because Jonah, himself telling the story, seems for some reason intentionally to have omitted everything that would soften or qualify his own guilt. Or may be, the attempt at prayer on his part resolved itself rapidly into an exercise of self-accusation, and he could not conscientiously put it down as prayer at all. His prayer, if made, would not be very long. And alas! it has brought no relief. Still the pitiless storm and the insatiable sea!

And now, apparently with great unanimity, they fall upon another scheme to discover the

cause and reason of this calamity, or at any rate the *person* on whose account it has come. For "they said every one to his fellow, Come and let us cast lots, that we may know for whose cause this evil is come upon us." The idea of this must have originated with some *one*. But it was evidently the expression of the common feeling. It was the impulse of the hour. For "*every one said to his fellow, Come and let us cast lots.*" It would therefore seem that they were in the habit of making this appeal to the lot in any great emergency. From the quickness and readiness with which *all* accept the proposal, you would think that they must have done it before, in cases much less urgent. The appeal to the lot was common in ancient times. When Menelæus and Paris were to engage in deadly combat—

"Then Hector, son of Priam, measur'd out,
With sage Ulysses joined, th' allotted space ;
Next, in the brass-bound helmet cast the lots,
Which of the two the first should throw the spear."

And what is singular and well worthy of our notice, as showing a resemblance to the present case in a very important feature, that

appeal to the unseen powers was connected with special prayer to the gods by the whole people :—

“The crowd, with hands uplifted to the gods,
Trojans and Greeks alike, address'd their prayer :
‘ O father Jove ! who rul'st from Ida's height,
Most great ! most glorious ! grant that whosoe'er
On both our armies hath this turmoil brought
May undergo the doom of death, and we,
The rest, firm peace and lasting friendship swear.’ ”

So here. They all pray, and then cast lots. They did not mean it as a desperate chance-stroke. In their intention it was a religious act. As such it was accepted, for the lot fell upon Jonah. If, using more caution, we say it was *overruled*, without being sanctioned, by divine providence, it does not alter very much the real state of the case as between God and his creatures. Still the fact remains that He uses the honest although blind endeavours of his creatures to discover truth and duty, to reveal to them in a measure what they are seeking, and at the same time to go on with the development of his own perfect providence. The Philistines in their distress, having consulted their priests and diviners, put the ark

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of God on a new cart, drawn by "two milch kine" on which had come no yoke ; and they said, "If the cattle take the way to Bethshemesh, then the Lord hath done us this great evil. But if not, then we shall know that it is not his hand that smote us : it was a chance that happened to us." They put up that arbitrary, and as you would say, almost impious test, without divine leave, and yet God took the test and gave the answer. The senseless cattle went along the way, lowing as they went, turning neither to the right hand nor to the left, the lords of the Philistines walking after them, God overruling all. This terrified ship's company, without divine leave, fall upon lot-casting to discover a supposed culprit in the ship, for whom the angry elements are howling like beasts of prey, and God with his unseen hand shakes the fateful box or vessel, and makes the lot fall upon Jonah. Is not this an instance of what we may call the liberality of God ? He comes to men as they are. He takes *what there is* in the form of worship and service of him, if it is the best that men can achieve in the circumstances.

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He will be pleased with the incense of true prayer, although it exhales from a pagan censer. He will approve the efforts men make to find out truth, justice, crime, although these efforts do not seem to be regulated by pure reason, and although they are not conducted with perfect calmness. Men who have but broken lights to follow, in following them truly, are in "the path of the just, that shineth more and more." The long "times" of human "ignorance" that preceded the coming of Christ "God winked at"—overlooked and passed by. He did not try men by higher standards of knowledge than any which they possessed, or could possibly possess. He tried, and judged, and governed them by the laws and lights they actually had. He did that uniformly. It was a *discovery* to Peter; but it was not therefore a new thing with God. What the wondering apostle "perceived" for the first time, had been true from the beginning of the world—viz. that "God was no respecter of persons."

It is fair to say that in both the cases we have just cited—that of the Philistines and that of the sailors—the divine interposition

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and response were made to heathen men, not simply in their isolated heathen state, but when they were in relations with people of God—the Philistines with Israel, and the sailors with the prophet. That therefore we cannot say what God might have done if no such relations had existed ; nor what he may do now among purely heathen nations. Does he ever acknowledge the lot now, when used for a purpose as important as that of the present instance ? Does he in any wise, or in any degree, sanction lot-casting, charms, incantations—rude tests of guilt, such as the poison-cup of Madagascar ? *Generally*, we have no difficulty in answering, “No.” The great majority of such things are manifestly “lying vanities”—mere imaginations of the human heart, or gross delusions of the devil. God, in revelation from the very beginning, set himself and strove to turn his people against all such things—against sorcery, enchantment, wizardry of every kind ; speaking, legislating, acting against them in the strongest manner. From the first, God was introducing, as he could, reason, law, reflection, justice, for the government of human actions ;

discouraging of course at the same time regards and appeals to demons and chances and uncertainties. But we see this, that the legislation on this subject (as indeed on so many others) was evidently progressive. There was a principle of divine tolerance in it. Along with strong enactment was a gentle forbearance. Hence we find adopted, or *used* at least, for the development of divine purpose, *some* of the very things repudiated and condemned. The witch of Endor calls up the prophet Samuel from the grave. A certain damsel, possessed with a spirit of divination, who brought her masters much gain by soothsaying, followed Paul and his companions, and cried: "These men are the servants of the most high God, which shew unto us the way of salvation." Achan was taken by lot. Jonathan was discovered in a far less crime (if, indeed, it was a crime at all) by lot. Matthias was elected by lot. We see the *progressive* principle in these three last instances. In each successive case the thing to be decided is less and less important. First, the lot is used to find the guilty man who must die. Second, to find one who

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has broken through the unreasonable restriction set up by a king's rash oath. Third, to signify and choose one of two men, *both* of whom, according to the best judgment of those concerned, were eminently suitable for the apostolic office. God's training lifts men away from the region of chance and mere impulse, and brings them into the region of truth and under the guidance of reason. God leads his most advanced children by knowledge, law, reflection. In one word, by their own enlightened faculties exercised in the case—not by impulse or arbitrary voices from the other world.

The last case of lot-casting to which we have referred gives us the type or indication of the legitimate use of the lot among ourselves. It would be fatuous and impious in the highest degree to propose to find out guilt in this way now. Society, in Christian countries, is now so wise through God's grace and training, that usually it is able to discover guilt and crime; and it is so strong, that it can endure the secrecy in those cases where the guilt is never discovered, solemnly leaving it to the ultimate judgment of God.

It would be almost equally wrong to use the lot for acquiring information. However important the matter may be, if information regarding it does not come to us from the usual and legitimate sources, then we may conclude that God does not design us to possess it, and we must act for the best with the knowledge we have.

But there are other cases in which the use of the lot seems perfectly fair, reasonable, religious; as, *e.g.*, where two persons have an equal claim to something which cannot be divided; or where they are under a deep obligation, or have an equal desire, to do a duty which can only be done by one: in such cases the lot may be used. The decision is thus left to providence instead of taking the form of an arbitrary act of the human will. The appeal, however, ought never to be lightly made. Men should not throw mere trifles up for solemn adjudication in the court of providence. Indeed, I imagine that the cases must be *very few* in which anything like necessity can be pleaded for the use of the lot at all.

There yet is a question regarding the

heathen of the present day. There are parts of the world which, alas, have hardly shared as yet in its general progress. There are people no more enlightened than those Phœnician sailors, who still make appeal to the powers above, in modes resembling that which they adopted when they cast lots, and the lot fell upon Jonah. Does God now, *ever*, in any case accept the appeal and give the response? Does he point out persons—does he reveal things in this way? It is sufficient to answer that we do not know. Sometimes it is a vast relief to be able intelligently just to say this—*that we do not know*. Of course much will depend on persons, on circumstances, on character. There are “the righteous” and “the wicked” in modified forms, in heathen countries as well as in Christian. God will act according to his nature. He will be just and merciful to all. So far as we can see, there is nothing in his nature or his word to hinder his doing *now* what he did of old to dark-minded men who were groping and praying for light. We know the main features of the case. Heathenism is darkness; Christianity is light. But how far, and in what

ways God may slide in beams of light amid the darkness, we cannot tell. *Where* he may speak, and *when*, and *how*, we cannot tell. It is an immense relief to leave the whole case WITH HIM. "Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?"

We return to the narrative. It would be interesting to know exactly *in what way* the lots were cast, and how the fatal lot fell upon Jonah. I have, however, been unable to find any exact description of the process. None is given in the Bible. Homer represents the lots, whatever they were (probably small articles of personal possession), as thrown together in a helmet, which was shaken, the eyes of the operator turned away, until one of the lots fell out on the ground :—

" Thus they : great Hector of the glancing helm,
With eyes averted, shook the casque ; and forth
Was cast the lot of Paris."

So, too, in the choice by lot of a Grecian warrior to contend with Hector :

" Thus they : then aged Nestor shook the helm,
And forth, according to their wish, was thrown
The lot of Ajax ; then from left to right

A herald shewed to all the chiefs of Greece
In turn, the token ; they who knew it not,
Disclaimed it all ; but when to him they came
Who marked, and threw it in Atrides' helm ;
The noble Ajax, he his hand put forth,
And standing near, he seized it. Straight he knew
The token, and rejoiced. Before his feet
He threw it down upon the ground, and said :
' O friends, the lot is mine ; great is my joy,
And hope o'er godlike Hector to prevail.' "

How different from the feeling of Jonah when the lot fell upon him ! If the mode was the same, can you not figure the eager swaying crowd on the deck of that reeling ship, each man looking with strained eyes, half-fearing it may be, that some forgotten sin of his own was being thus avenged ; and yet, in the general consciousness of innocence, holding all his comrades in suspicion until arbitrement is made. "Not mine !" "Not mine !" is whispered through the storm—until the dark stranger bends his form and lifts the token. There stands the culprit, "discovered and confessed." A much finer instrument than Ithuriel's spear has touched him. He feels in his soul already the lightning touch of God. He is held in the searchings of omniscience. The fires of justice

are kindling in him. He stands holding by rope or baluster—accused, condemned, by storm, by sea, by ship, by lot, by the sailors.

See how, after a moment's pause, they gather about him. They come about him like bees, crowding, questioning, eager, impatient. "Tell us! Tell us, we pray thee, for whose cause this evil is upon us. What is thine occupation? what is thy country? and of what people art thou?"—"For whose cause?" Have you wronged, injured, or slain some one in wrath, and are you fleeing with the guilt of blood on you? Is there some mourning home that you have desolated? Is there some hidden grave? "For whose cause"—literally, "For what, to whom?" "*What* have you done, and to *whom* have you done it?" "What is thine occupation?" Of what craft, trade, profession? Is it lawful, or is it something hateful to the gods, for which they are thus pursuing you? In the following of that occupation are you *now* on an evil errand, when thus apprehended by the storm and judged by the lot? "And whence comest thou?" What was the last journey you made before you came on board, and why did you make it? Where

were you before we first saw you, and what were you doing? "What is thy country?" Is it far, or nigh—inland, or on the seaboard? Is it flat or mountainous, fruitful, or barren?—protected by many gods, or few?—blessed or cursed of the heavens? "Of what people art thou?" Are you, possibly, innocent yourself, yet suffering because you belong to some unfortunate family, or to some guilty, doomed race?

These are the probable meanings of the several questions, if we think it necessary to find specific and differential meaning in each. But the central meaning in all the questions is just this: "Tell us—tell us *all* we ought to know. We want to know all about you!" The questions are poured in upon him, one after another, with the utmost urgency and rapidity. He has not time, it would seem, to answer one before another is put. And then another, and another still. It is essentially the same question; but each imagines, no doubt, that the form in which *he* puts it will be most likely to elicit the answer. How natural! How striking the scene! You have often seen the like,

although perhaps never in a case so urgent as this. You have seen a person with a letter in his hand or with a message on his face—bearer of good or heavy tidings—surrounded—assailed with eager looks and rapid questionings, each trying to strike nearer than another to the heart of the thing, and to bring out the answer with the least delay. So this poor prophet is surrounded and assailed, because it is known now that he carries in his knowledge, or in his conscience, the explanation of this storm, and possibly some means of deliverance yet from this impending death.

If the questioners had been philosophers instead of sailors, and if they had taken long time and thought in preparing the questions, they could not have shaped them to go more quickly and sharply to the prophet's conscience. "For what cause?" For desertion of duty. "What my occupation?" A prophet of the Lord, called, anointed, honoured. "Whence have I come?" From standing in the great presence. "What is my country?" The goodly land on which are the eyes of the Lord from the beginning of the year to the end of the year. "Of what

people?" Of a chosen people, guided, preserved, and educated by the Lord.

Now it is Jonah's time to speak. He not only *must*: he is ready. With *this* opening of his lips we come, in one sense, to the very crisis and supreme point of the narrative. Here, for the first time, stands the true Jonah in our sight. The man we have seen in flight was but a mocking semblance of this man. This man has been buried, and now there is a resurrection. The words spoken by the ship-master at his berth, the falling of the lot upon him, the hurried questions of the crew, and the howling of the elements around, "*awoke*" him in the highest sense. He rose up as from a hideous dream, and stood once more before God and man in openness, sincerity, and truth. "And he said unto them, I am an Hebrew; and I fear the Lord, the God of heaven, which hath made the sea and the dry land." He said more than this, as we gather from the next verse. He told them all—how he had fled from the presence of the Lord, and how the storm had come for him.

I own that to my mind few scenes in human

history have a darker grandeur than this confession of Jonah to these heathen sailors, when he *knew* that in a very short time he was to be cast into the sea. There is about his conduct a self-abnegation and a moral sublimity which are rarely found among even good men. "Ah," say you, "I do not quite see that. No thanks to him for his frankness now. He cannot help himself. He is caught in a trap. He is obliged to say what he does." I beg your pardon. Not so. On the contrary, there are perhaps no human circumstances more likely to bring out, and even to confirm, the insincerity and duplicity of a really false nature than circumstances of great trial and distress. A guileful nature will wriggle on in suppleness and guile through disaster, misfortune, pain, sorrow—even through death. A dishonest man will try to hoodwink God. A poor man who is untrue, will lie and cheat and steal in his deepest poverty. A dishonourable merchant, when he fails, will be dishonourable in his bankruptcy. A proud, heartless, self-justifying man will probably abide even the searching fires of death, and go away from a formal and false life,

still with a lie in his right hand. A good man is known, not only when *he stands*, like Joseph, Daniel, or Paul, but when he rises after falling, like David, Peter, Jonah. "Thou art the man!" from a prophet's lips recovered a wandering king, and led him by anguish and tears up to a higher and safer elevation than he had stood on before. A look from the suffering Saviour melted the heart of his wayward, over-confident disciple, and sent him out into the black night, weeping bitterly. The falling of a little token on the deck of a lurching ship smote right home to the sleeping conscience of this prophet, and made him just, sincere, and true, as he had been in his best days.

We must note, although briefly, the several expressions used in Jonah's confession, some of them peculiar, and all of them significant.

"I am an Hebrew." The name by which the Jewish people were known to foreigners. The name came to them when as "emigrants" they passed the great river, the river Euphrates. *Passers-by* in life, not settlers anywhere on earth. Men of pilgrim spirit, seeking rest and home beyond death. "I am an Hebrew, and I fear"—i.e.

serve—not I am afraid of—but I serve in reverence, and trust, and love—"the Lord"—Jehovah—the one living and true God—self-existent, self-sufficient, supreme, eternal. "The God of heaven," a lofty title often used in the Scriptures, and nearly always by God's servants in speaking to heathens, signifying the creation, possession, and rule of the whole visible universe—the stars above, the earth and seas below. This is made more plain by the expression, "which hath made the sea and the dry land." The whole truth now flashed on *them* also. They began to feel themselves in the hands—not of some local deity, whose wrath they might evade, whose province they might leave, but in the hands of the only God who could make storm on the sea, earthquake on the land, darkness in the heavens. They felt that all this tumult was the voice of his wrath. "Then were the men exceedingly afraid, and said unto him, Why hast thou done this?"

They asked the question. But apparently they had no answer. If any was made, it is not recorded. A shake of the head, or a deprecating motion of the hand may have been all the

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answer the prophet felt in a mood to give ; as saying, "It is enough ; don't trouble yourselves ; don't distress me any more ; relief will soon be here."

Here we pause to-day. And as we had at the close of the last lecture a captain-preacher calling us all to diligence and wakefulness, so now let us hear the sailors, and take away with us to-day—in memory, conscience, heart—their searching question, "Why hast thou done this?"

Are there any who have been drawn away from God by the business and the cares of life, who have thrown themselves deliberately into a very network of secular entanglement, from which it is now almost impossible to escape, inasmuch as you say you feel the net about you even when you sleep, and have the calculations and the cares flitting and buzzing about you in your dreams? "Why have you done this?" God may have to cast you into a bed of affliction, to deliver you.

Are there any who have been drawn away from the duty, the hardness, the wholesomeness of Christian living, by the siren

strains of pleasure, farther and still farther into her glittering realms, until the nerve of your noblest purpose has been relaxed, the very pith and fibre of your manhood are going, and you can talk no longer of doing and daring for Christ, but only in drivelling accents, which, as coming from *your* lips, make the very world wonder ; of “spending pleasant evenings,” and “mingling in good society,” while the Master looks after you sadly, and waits to see if you will come back. “Why have you done this?” God may have to brew a wholesome storm, to blow the poison out of all this sunshine and stagnant air.

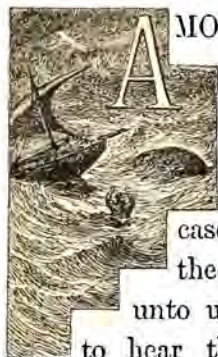
Are there any who have fallen deeper yet, into black unbelief, into sheer unrighteousness, into reckless living ?—lured perhaps by others, respectable men, as the world saith, who do the like. Ah, why have you done this ?

It would take a long morning to describe all the cases of swerving, backsliding, disobedience, which occur among the true children of God. I can only say : Let us all hear those sailor-preachers, and make faithful application of the question to ourselves ; and if we find

ourselves silent as Jonah, it may be well. The soul is often much the better of taking home a question that cannot be answered.

Above all, do *you* take the question, who need to apply it to your *whole* life, because you feel that your whole life has been a departure from God without any effectual return. You have been going away from Him, by as many years as you have lived, by as many faculties as you possess, by as many mercies as you have received. And the sight of the cross has not arrested you yet, and the striving of the Spirit has not detained you. Ah, "why have you done this?" Can you say a word in justification or extenuation of a godless life? You are "speechless." Go, speak by penitence, while yet return may be, at the Saviour's feet. Speak at least by child-look, at length, into your Father's face, who is waiting to clasp you in his arms, and to say: "This my son was dead, but he is alive again; he was lost, but he is found."

## CAST OUT.



**A**MONG the many marvels of this book not the least is the circumstance that Jonah, the discovered culprit, should be constituted judge in his own case. "What shall we do unto thee, that the sea may be calm unto us?" It would be but natural to hear that question debated among themselves in the prophet's absence: "What shall we do unto him, that the sea may be calm unto us?" It would be perfectly natural, too, if, after such consultation apart, they should resolve to do the very thing which Jonah tells them to do when they appeal to him, and which they ultimately did. He was not the first who had ever been thrown overboard to appease the spirit of the storm. It was an obvious resource of the wisdom and conscience of heathen sailors, thus to sacrifice the detected

or suspected person in the ship, in order to secure the safety of the rest; and if he had been an idolator like themselves, it is not so likely that any appeal would have been made to him, or any power left with himself for the ruling of his own fate.

This appeal to Jonah is in fact an appeal to God. It carries in it a reverential recognition of His hand. They have not long known Him. Not many minutes have elapsed since they first heard of his being and attributes. Hints of his existence may have reached them here and there, before. Broken rays of his glory may have fallen upon them. But now, amid the roar of this storm, they have had, for the first time, clear and authoritative intelligence of his creatorship, supremacy, and universal presence. The knowledge is operative and fruitful at once. It bows them down with fear. It fills them with wonder at the strange conduct of the prophet who could flee from the presence and service of *such* a God; and it draws from them this appeal to the transgressor himself—but, as I believe, spoken in their hearts quite as much, or more, to the

transgressor's God—"What shall we do unto thee?"

Also, however, we must see in this question a recognition of the honesty and recovered manhood of Jonah. They seem to feel instinctively that a man who can confess as Jonah has done—who can come out into openness and truth amid such surrounding perils, calmly telling the great facts of the case when they all bear against himself—is not a man to be judged hastily, or hurried out of life without his own consent. They reverence this singular honesty. They recognise the God in the man: "What shall we do unto thee?"

No doubt they had some regard also to his *prophetic* office, and to the fact that he did not seem to be released from it. He might therefore, for all they knew, *still* be carrying about with him some supernatural powers, which, although held for a while in suspense, might perhaps *yet* avail for their deliverance.

But, on the whole, I see chiefly in this language *an appeal to the true God and to the true man*. Wherever the knowledge of God is clearly and truly communicated, heathenism

and idols have no chance. The *habits* of idolatry and immorality may long continue, just as habits of worldliness in mitigated measures are apt to continue in a man's life now, after spiritual conversion ; but idolatry in form and system cannot stand an hour against the knowledge of God. Let God be clearly known as he is revealed, and, with very few exceptions, men cannot *but* believe in him. A few philosophers will still reason and refine, and abide in intellectual disbelief : a few very wicked men will still "believe a lie," that they may work unrighteousness : but the great mass of men, like these sailors from Tarshish, will yield quickly and inevitably, at least by intellectual assent, to the influence of the truth. "What is the chaff to the wheat, saith the Lord?" What are "lying vanities" compared with "the one living and true God?"

So, too, when the true man appears among men—although it may be, as in this case, coming out of untrueness and unfaithfulness, staggering back through the storm of penalty, that he may at least die in the right way—men must yield that man reverence. The image of God

is shining in him once more. He is a living and true man—son of the living and true God. “What shall we do unto thee?”

There seems to have been no delay whatever in the giving of the answer. Quick as men speak to each other and get reply, in the house or by the way, was the question put and the answer given on the deck of that ship, and amid those whirling waves. There was no time given for deliberation. The men might have waited, but the sea was pressing for an answer. “The sea wrought, and was tempestuous.” Literally, “It was going and whirling.” “It was *going*”—like a thing of life; like a courier on a mission, speaking and urging home its message; like an army in a battle, marching up its warrior-waves against the ship, in support of the claim of unconditional surrender of the fugitive. As they put the question, “What shall we do unto thee?” every crested wave, and the hurrying clouds, and the wailing winds, cried for instant reply.

And instant reply was given. “And he said unto them, take me up, and cast me forth into the sea; so shall the sea be calm unto

you ; for I know that for my sake this great tempest is upon you." Is this simply a human answer, dictated by the workings of natural conscience, and expressive of the desire of a despairing heart to have done with life altogether ? Or is it the answer of God himself, to whom really, as we have supposed, appeal was made ? Surely there can hardly be a doubt that the latter is the true supposition. God spake to him, judged him, instructed him what to say and do. He has indeed only to say. The doing is put into the hands of others. If the answer had been only this much, "I know that for my sake this great tempest is upon you," you might imagine that natural conscience, fully aroused, was quite competent to give it, without supposing any express divine revelation. Even in that case you would give a meagre and imperfect interpretation of the expression "*I know*," which seems to carry within it the fact of some recent revelation from God, and which indicates a very sure and express knowledge of the case. But what puts the matter beyond any doubt is the *substance* of Jonah's reply : "Take me up, and cast me forth." If he

had been reckless or despairing, he would have thrown himself overboard. Or, urged by a hasty benevolence even, he might have taken thus the matter into his own hand. He might have said: "Whatever becomes of me, let me at least save, if I can, these innocent men. One spring, and all this turmoil will be at an end to them and to me. *They* may then sail on in peace—I shall leave at least all *earthly* distress behind, solve all mysteries, and know my eternal fate." But no! The words are calmer, juster, diviner. "Take me up, and cast me forth." These words show that he had a proper regard for the inviolable sacredness of his own life—that he recognised the principle, that only its fountain and giver could have the right to say when, and where, and how it was again to be given up to Him. This answer of Jonah is a virtual condemnation of suicide in any—in all circumstances. For I think it would be difficult to imagine any circumstances more suggestive of, more colourably favourable to, the last desperate act, than his at this moment. There are indeed dreadful emergencies sometimes in a human life—times when the soul, filled with an awful

and almost infinite fear and horror, recoils from the black reality of what life must be, if it is prolonged. A man has sometimes to think, "If I live for years, it must be a kind of living death, among these wretches, amid these odious circumstances—in filth, in famine, in sickness, in pain: were it not far better for me to die?" Yes, in itself, far better; but yet *you* must not grasp the key—rather you must not force with a wrench the awful door, but leave Him who has the key, to turn it for your exit when *his* time shall come. A woman has sometimes to think, "If I live, I must live dishonoured, with terrible memories, a victim of unutterable cruelty and wrong: were it not better for me to die?" Yes, truly, according to our human judgment, if God would give release, it were better. But if he does not, then be brave and live. Thou shalt live on in purity although in much sorrow, for there is no sin out of the will. Thou shalt live in honour still, for *a soul* can never be dishonoured except by its own act, or its own allowance.

We have purposely taken cases the most extreme, in order to discover and test the law

of the case—in order to see if in *any* circumstances man has power or right to take away his own life. No, not in any. Well, then, how inexcusable are they who, for reasons much less urgent, abruptly end their only time of probation, and madly fling away the life they have no power to restore ! Mere trifles in comparison induce some men now to take up and cherish the suicidal purpose. Losses in trade, failure of schemes meant for great success and perhaps deserving of it, decline of social position, necessity for stepping down, heavy difficulties, complicated relationship, and such things as these, at which a man, standing in his manhood, should be able to smile, as a traveller can smile at passing clouds, which only shadow his path, but never hinder his progress :—Such things as these can catch some men away (they are so weak and womanly) from their foundations, and whirl them off, what will is left to them consenting, from a thousand things they ought to hold sacred and dear, and indeed, if they could but see it, from the very noblest opportunities of their life.

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But alas ! in too many instances, the working of disease or the pressure of calamity have fatally impaired the power of the will and the perceptions of the reason. "The balance," as we so truly call it, of the mind being thus gone, responsibility going with it, it lies open to the access of the strongest passion or the deepest emotion of the time. Sometimes a spirit, thus dismantled and drifting, is destroyed and pressed down to sinking *by its own most benevolent affections*. By no selfish sorrow, by no cowardly fear of personal hardship, but by a tender, tearful regard for the interests of others—by the action (morbid of course) of a high-souled and sensitive honour, the dark way is chosen *as the best*. In such a case, when life is ended by the abnormal action of some of the best constituents of the mind, and some of the worthiest parts of the character, we have no object of terror before us, but only a spectacle for tears. We can imagine the angels gathering about such a human wreck with far more than the usual interest—as ships on the ocean come around a sinking vessel to save all the life that is there. It is a mysterious sub-

ject, and not pleasant to the thought; but manifestly, as the statistics of every great city will show, a subject of immediate interest to a great number of people. We can but teach principles. Let us abstain from any judgment of individual cases. Let us promote in others, and in ourselves, a high sense of the sacredness of human life. The life is more than meat, and the body is more than raiment. Standing in the fulness of the gift of life, let us hold it simply and loyally for the giver, to be "taken" again at his own time and in his own way.

"Take me up, and cast me forth into the sea!" Having this allowance, this express instruction from the prophet of the God who had sent the storm, we might think that they would most eagerly and quickly fulfil the injunction. "Nevertheless the men rowed hard to bring it to the land." This part of the scene is fine. These men knew the value of life—and not of their own alone, but also of that life that had brought all their trouble. Also they knew the value of honesty, and the nobleness of the prophet's action now, in thus calmly offering his own life in sacrifice for the preservation of theirs.

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“Take me up, and cast me forth.” “Nay, that makes it more difficult for us than if you had been silent and selfish! That will be to cast forth goodness, thoughtfulness, self-denying regard for us. If you had stood grimly apart from us, taking little heed of our suffering, and giving us no hint of its cause, and if we ourselves had detected you so, the casting forth were easy. But *now*, can it be right to take a life like this? Can it be pleasing to the great God who sends storm and calm? Will he not take his servant back again. Will he not be pleased with his honesty and repentance? Will he not favour and help us, if we try to cast his servant on dry land, instead of into this awful sea, in which no power can preserve him alive?” I do not say that such thoughts would pass distinctly through the minds of these men. But men *have* actuating thoughts, often, of which they are but dimly conscious. They could not set them out before others, or even before their own intellectual perception, very clearly, and yet all the while they are powerfully moved by them. Especially in supreme moments, when life is intense, rapid, condensed, there is

often a great tumult of thought rushing through the mind, or multitudinously living there, and all tending to some immediate practical purpose. So these sailors may have thought all that, and more. At any rate, we know what they *did*: "They rowed hard to bring the ship to land." And we know that they must have been actuated by humane and noble motives.

And thus we alight upon the principle—the beautiful principle of our moral life—that every good thing in our spirit and action has a tendency to reproduce itself in others who are in any way related to it, especially, of course, if it is called forth for their advantage. Jonah is true and noble at length. The sailors, having responsive qualities in themselves, are nobler for his nobleness—are more self-forgetful, because when the moment of stress came he did the bravest thing a man could do for fellow-men—offered his life for theirs. I believe they are doing more for him now than they would have done if he had offered to fill their ship with gold as the reward of setting him on shore. It is a fine, a beautiful sight, to see these men "rowing hard," straining every nerve,

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“digging” into the sea to bring the ship to land. They answer unselfishness by unselfishness—nobleness by nobleness. “As in water face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man.” Ten thousand hearts answer thus, imperfectly, yet truly, to the heart of Christ. And any one who will act as Christ acted—taking up the cross, ready to lose life for Him, or for men that he may be glorified—there will be answering “hearts” and “faces” around him wheresoever he is; “hands,” too, strong and willing, like the hands of these sailors, to work for him in his need. Our nature is such, and such the dispensation under which we are placed, that a good man cannot live without generating goodness in others. Those men, “rowing hard,” with hair tossing in the wind, faces dashed with foam, horny hands dripping brine, constitute a grander sight to the angels than philosophers lecturing on morals, or even than preachers declaring the gospel. They are preaching with every stroke the deepest gospel they know—working up to their last energies on behalf of a fellow-creature in great and awful straits, and hoping that it may be the

will of the Most High at length to favour their endeavour.

All in vain! The sea is still “going and whirling.” Still “working and tempestuous *against* them.” Wearied and panting, they cease at length from the bootless strife; they throw aside the useless oars, and gather about the man whom they cannot save—not vengefully, or under the power of any passion, but calmly and we may suppose sadly, as the ministers of justice, to fulfil the righteous behests of God. And as, when the last sentence of the law is carried out on land, the offices of religion are performed in the presence and on behalf of the culprit, so here there is prayer, most earnest and most appropriate, preceding the last sad act that shall part them and their passenger for ever.

The prayer is to *Jehovah the true God*. They have ceased to be idolators in an hour. This storm and the words of this doomed man have whirled their idols and their idolatry for ever away. They no sooner take in truly the idea of God, than they think of him also as “the hearer of prayer.” To know him and to

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pray to him were in the same experience—were almost parts of the same act.

They prayed *earnestly* : “ We beseech thee, O Lord ; we beseech thee ! ” All the energy which a few moments since they were putting into their work, as each one tugged as for dear life at the oar, they are now putting into the united cry, which they are lifting above the noise and war of the elements, that it may enter into the ear of God. That is the way to work, my brethren ; and that is the way to pray.

They prayed *submissively*, and with a perception marvellously perfect of the nature and extent of the divine agency in human affairs : “ Thou, O Lord, hast done as it pleased thee ! ” There may be some transference into this religious prayer of the fatalistic sentiment of heathenism. But there cannot be much, else they would not so earnestly pray. They would hardly, in that case, pray at all. This is an intelligent recognition of the overruling providence of God. It is tracing all things up to their source in his will, enactive or permissive. It is a childlike profession of *submission* to the

perfect will in this case, now clearly made known.

It is a prayer for *exemption from the guilt of innocent blood*. Either by nature, or by the laws of their country, and by traditional teaching, they knew that to take life was to forfeit life. "At the hand of every man's brother will I require the life of man. Whoso sheddeth man's blood by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God made he man." In some way the knowledge and power of that law was strong in them; and they were afraid that although personally innocent, they might in some way after all be caught and punished with the guilty, and they therefore cry for mercy.

The defect of the prayer, if it has one, is this—that *they do not pray for Jonah*. But could you expect them to do so, in such an age, in such a moment, in such a scene? And yet they may have done in their hearts; or some of them audibly, and he has not recorded it.

And now, at length, all being done that could be done to avert the sad necessity, and

done quite in vain, they proceed to the solemn execution of the sentence. How? Not with pirate rush, not with eagerness or desperation, but calmly, as the ministers of justice. "So they took up Jonah"—lifted him, the meaning is, with respect and tenderness, bearing him as if with some sad honour to his grave, he himself making no resistance—and "cast him into the sea." One firm heave, and he is gone. A plunge, scarcely heard in the hurly of the storm, and the prophet sinks from view.

Who can tell the manly sorrow that would fill those sailor-hearts after they had thus done all? Done what could never be undone. It is sad enough to cast out *the dead* into the sea. Sad to change the gallant ship for the time into the hearse, and the ship's company into the funeral procession. But to cast out *the living* to die among the yeasty waves, and sink down to the unfathomed depths. Ah!

But see; God gives them immediate consolation. They have done right, and he will make them know and feel it. He will sanction all that they have done in the providence of the very hour, and with every element that

formerly cried for the prophet's life. Now these elements are appeased and satisfied. The wind sings less in the cordage. The crest disappears from the wave. There is not much creaking or moaning now in the ship. The sea is "ceasing from her raging." Wonderful; and yet how good, that the lower should thus be so entirely subject to the higher—nature to moral providence, and providence to God! Ah, is it not right that "He doeth as it pleaseth Him," who doeth all things justly, wisely, and well?

"All is of God! If He but wave his hand,  
The mists collect, the rain falls thick and loud,  
Till, with a smile of light on sea and land,  
Lo! He looks back from the departing cloud."

"Then the men feared the Lord exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice unto the Lord, and made vows." They feared exceedingly. The whole scene and transaction brought a great access and increase to their reverence and devoutness. Their faith sprang up, like the gourd, in a day or a night. But it did not vanish like the gourd. It arose in the storm, but it did not melt in the calm. They feared exceedingly, and "offered a sacrifice"—probably some live

creature which they had on board, an ox or a sheep—still acknowledging and glorifying the justice and holiness that had just exacted and received a nobler and more awful sacrifice in the living man; appealing, at the same time, to divine mercy, and placability, and propitious love. For “a sacrifice” appeals to, and witnesses for, *every* divine attribute. “A sacrifice” was the only gospel of the time. A sacrifice is the heart of the everlasting gospel still.

“They offered a sacrifice, and *made vows*” to continue faithfully and steadfastly in the worship and service of Jehovah. In vowing, of course, they looked on to the future. They consecrated their whole future life to God. And there is some proof, or probability, that they *paid* their vows unto the Lord.

They must, at least, have talked about the whole voyage and its issues, and especially about what took place after Jonah was in the sea. *He* knew nothing about that, and could only record it here because he had been told it by others. By whom? No doubt the story was told far and near, and he might have heard of it from any one. But to me the most probable

supposition is, that he heard it from their own lips—from captain and ship's company gathered together, perhaps on the deck of that very vessel. It is not at all improbable that the prophet took a journey to Joppa on purpose ; that he went to the old place ; that he stood once more on the deck of the ship—captain and crew around him—to tell and hear their mutual stories of preservation. You can fancy the meeting. You can see the man. You can imagine how the whole matter would be bruited abroad—as far even as Nineveh ; and how the story, told there, and well-authenticated, would prepare that great and guilty city for receiving as she did the message of the prophet when he actually came.

But of that hereafter. Now we part from this ship's company in a sweet calm, at sea. Whither bound we cannot tell. Perhaps, if the captain judged it safe, like brave men, on to Tarshish ; or perhaps, and more probably, since they had lost at least some of their cargo, and very likely strained their ship, back immediately to Joppa.

Are you not loath to part from them ? We

met them as idolaters ; we part from them as fellow-worshippers. We met them knowing nothing of their metal ; now we know them well. I love those men. If I were making a voyage I could ask for no readier hands to furl or spread the sail—for no truer hearts in every time of need or danger. I could wish for no better captain—supposing, of course, that he shall have the modern scientific knowledge—than he who looked so well to the ship, and roused the sleepers to their prayers.

Yes, I could wish—I *do* wish (I am speaking now for each one of you ; *let* your heart speak in my words)—I *do* wish, whether in making an actual voyage, or in sailing, as I do each day, in the mystic ship of providence over the dim sea of life—I do wish to have the guidance of the great captain of salvation—omnipotent, omniscient, infallible ; at whose single word, “Peace be still,” the angriest sea grows quiet, and wildest storm sinks into “great calm.” I do wish “the Master” with me always and everywhere in the voyage of life—on the glittering sunny sea, and amid the glooms and terrors of midnight ; in all trial, joy, or change ; in the

gladness of health, in the weariness of sickness ; in the struggles of my spirit with sin, and in the last conflict with death. I do wish to have the Master near, that I may cry to Him, come to Him, and put into his sure hands my body, my soul, my fortunes, my sin, my sorrow, my needs, my life, my death, my immortality. And knowing that that is my wish, I will be of good courage. I will look beyond cloud and tempest. I will be a watcher for the unseen shore, and when I stand at length on the dry land of immortal safety, I will meet with a grateful joy all who have helped me. I will go back, if I may, to see the old ship of providence in which I sailed, and talk with fellow-voyagers of the passage and the storms. I will join with the innumerable myriads of escaped souls, who, like myself, have reached the haven where they would be, in praising the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men.

## IN THE DEEP.



WE now come to a part of the prophet's life which is altogether different from anything that precedes or follows in the recorded history, which is very wonderful in itself, and, in so far as we know, is an entirely singular episode in the history of man. For three days and three nights—*i.e.* according to the Hebrew sense of the expression, for *one* whole day and night, and *part* of other two—Jonah lived beneath the waves. Not in some enchanted castle; not in mermaid's cave; but in a living, moving house, in which he was carried, at the will of a creature far inferior to himself, hither and thither "through the paths of the seas," through submarine forests, among the roots of the mountains—"billows and waves" rolling far above his head—and from which at the time appointed he was cast forth again

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upon "the dry land." It is a wonderful and a singular story; and perhaps, all things considered, it is not surprising that the narrative has been abundantly assailed by searching and sceptical comment. And yet, on reflection, one may wonder why *this* miracle (for a miracle it must be, in whatever way explained) should be singled out for the special attentions of the unbelieving. Is it any *more* wonderful, is it in some respects quite *as* wonderful, as the preservation of the three children in the burning fiery furnace? Is it any more surprising than the existence of a mortal man, probably "in the body," in the third heavens? These special attentions of the sceptical, and the still lingering doubts of some of the believing, are probably connected more or less with the readier susceptibility of this miracle than any other to pleasantry and ridicule. It must be allowed, I think, that serious and thoughtful people have an *instinctive* aversion to admit among the number of divine miracles by which the Christian faith is proved and defended, anything light, grotesque, curious—apt to excite amusement. Many of the pretended popish miracles

are just of this description. You say at once : "If true, how strange, how lacking in dignity, in beneficence, in utility—how unlike the miracles of Jesus!" Well, to a hasty, superficial observer (of course it can only be to such) there is some slight appearance of ludicrousness in this miracle of Jonah in the belly of the fish. I suppose any of us would concede, that it is *not* a miracle that we should have thought *likely* to be wrought. And yet, when we look at it more profoundly—considering its causes, purposes, uses, effects—we see as much of divine wisdom and glory in this miracle as almost in any other.

But first let us ascertain, as far as we can, how much is of necessity miraculous. Miracles in their very nature are rare and exceptional. To multiply them is to diminish their value, to impair the strength of the evidence they carry in them. It is a principle of divine administration to use them *only* when they are needed. God, indeed, is the only perfect judge of the necessity. It is not for us to say, "a miracle is needless, or requisite," in any given case. But we may be quite sure that a miracle is not

wrought simply for the sake of working it, or only with the view of raising wonder in the minds of men. And if the thing recorded can be accounted for on natural principles; if a similar thing has happened, however rarely, in the experience of men, then, unless God distinctly says it is so, we have no right to assume the interposition of the miraculous energy.

Clearly, then, it does not seem necessary to suppose any miraculous operation of God in the "*preparation*" of the fish that swallowed the prophet. It is proved beyond all question that fishes have swallowed men, without mutilation, without difficulty. That a *whale* could not swallow a man, without miraculous expansion of its narrow throat, is certain; and if it was a whale which had custody of the prophet, then a miracle was wrought. God "*prepared*" it with parts and dimensions suited to its work.

But the Bible does not say that a whale was the prophet's jailor. The infidel has said that, and then has enjoyed the easy triumph of proving the natural impossibility of it. Jonah says "a great fish" swallowed him. Our Lord

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uses a phrase exactly similar. He uses a generic term (καῖτος), which *includes* the whale, but is never applied to the whale particularly. The dolphin, the seal, the whale, the shark, are all included in the term that is used ; and there is strong probability in the supposition that the white shark is the creature designated as the "great fish." Sharks abounded in the Mediterranean at that time. They have been found there ever since, and are found there still. In length, some of them have attained to thirty feet and upwards, of capacity in other ways amply sufficient to incarcerate Samson of Zorah, or Goliath of Gath, *as well as* the probably attenuated prophet of Gath-Hepher. It is related that a horse was found in the stomach of a shark ; and there are *many* instances of men being swallowed alive—not fabulous and doubtful stories, but instances thoroughly well authenticated. One, of a soldier in full armour. One, of a sailor who fell overboard, and was swallowed in the very sight of his comrades. The captain seized a gun, shot the fish in a sensitive part, which then cast out the sailor into the sea, who was taken up, amazed and terrified, but little hurt.

Every one knows that the shark is a most voracious creature. Its teeth are only incisive. It has no power of holding. It can snap and sever, limb, or trunk, or head, sheer and certainly as though its jaws were a guillotine. But in that case it secures only what is within the jaws. The rest is apt to be lost. Its habit, therefore, is to swallow the prey alive, that it may lose nothing. Thus God made the very voracity of the fish the means of protection and safety to his servant. "He maketh the wrath of man" and beast "to praise him, and the remainder of wrath he doth restrain."

Now let us return to the narrative, and follow the prophet, as far as the dim lights will guide us, through the eventful stages of his subaqueous journey until we see him again on the shore. "Cast forth into the sea"—he sank, fast, and far down. Living usually inland, he probably could not swim. Even if he could, he was in no mood to try. "Cast me forth" he had said to men, and, in his despair, almost to God. "What use to struggle *now*, when I am doomed; *here*, amid the raging of a storm? It is better for me to die than to live." So he "sank to the

bottom as a stone." The popular idea is, that the prophet fell, almost at once, into the maw of the fish. We are apt to picture the creature close by the vessel's side, just waiting to receive him, and hold him as a guest, although it could give him but poor entertainment, and, after all has been said, scant enough room. This supposition is probable enough in itself. Many a luckless one, falling overboard, has been seen entering at once into the jaws of the white shark to come out no more. Many a swimmer, intending but a cooling plunge into the green sea, has leaped from the vessel's side into the living grave. But on that supposition we cannot so well explain some of the expressions used in the prayer. He was "cast into the deep." He was "in the midst of the sea." He was "compassed with waters to the very soul." "The weeds were wrapped about his head." He was down at the "bottom of the mountains." One may say, indeed, that this is a somewhat figurative description of his *imagined* state and course as he lay in the fish. He heard, or seemed to hear, the rush of the scaly creature among the weeds. He felt the undulating sweep of its course as it

rounded the bottoms of the mountains, or passed along the bars of the earth. But there is really no sufficient reason for giving a secondary and figurative sense to the expressions. It seems better every way to take them in their natural and proper significance. Therefore we picture Jonah sinking down, and still down, into the calm depths where storms never come. "The depth closed him round about"—pressing in with still augmenting gravity as he sank. "The waters compassed him about" on every side, so that he could not look or breathe but at the peril of instant death. At length he touched "the bottoms," or "cuttings off" of the mountains. He went groping among the deep hidden rocks which run along the coast of Palestine. They seemed to him like "the roots" of the mountains, like the very "bars of the earth."

Somewhere in those deep and dim recesses he met with the fish that swallowed him. In one moment of time, and very probably without fear, or even knowledge on his part, he would lie in the gullet of the fish. Even if he saw the monster, and knew what was coming, he would hardly be any more afraid than he had been ;

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for it is a merciful law of Providence, which greatly modifies the apparent cruelties and horrors of this economy of life by death, that any sentient creature falling a prey to another in the natural course of things seems to lose fear and sensibility, and to yield without a struggle, almost with a kind of pleasure, to the inevitable fate. As soon as the prophet was entombed, however, he *knew* that he was in a living grave. Then began that new and better experience of his soul which is recorded in the prayer or thanksgiving of this second chapter. The prayer was *written* after his resurrection; but it was actually offered in the belly of the fish. There he had these sacred thoughts, these vehement desires, these "lookings" towards the holy temple, and towards "the presence" of God.

I do not propose an exposition of this chapter verse by verse; at least, not exhaustively or minutely. But I will try to follow, as far as the indications direct, the general course of the prophet's experience. We have no *external* history of those days. Neither he, nor any one else, can tell how far he travelled, how long he rested, what were the aspects of the scenery,

how many "small and great beasts" were met on the journey—that strange but fruitful journey "through the paths of the seas." But we have a very intense and clear history of his *inward* life. I will try to note some of the points of it.

Speaking generally, there was evidently *a great and sudden quickening of consciousness*. The man who speaks in this holy psalm hardly seems the same person whom we have seen in flight—dark, moody, silent, despairing. Now, and all at once, he seems to leap again into life—clear, fervent, passionate life. The burial of his body is the resurrection of his soul! Some glimpses of his proper greatness and magnanimity were given to his fellow-men before he left the ship. But now, beneath the waves, the whole true man reveals himself to God. Men who have been rescued from drowning have told of this quickened consciousness in them during the continuance of the danger. They have told how they have lived again through years of past life in a few moments, how vividly they have realised all existing relations, estimated the possible means of escape, and pierced

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with anticipative thought into the two possible futures—that of time, and that of eternity. What the chill of the waters does to the nerves and powers of the body, the danger does to the soul. There is every reason to suppose that God acted in accordance with this law in the case of his servant. By the first plunge into the roaring waves, and then still more by the second engulfment into “the belly of hell,” he thoroughly *awakened* the prophet. No more sleeping now. He may die in body and soul, but at least he will die awake.

Then rapidly this new consciousness *became distressful*. His soul fills itself fuller than the sea, with “affliction.” The reserved sorrow of long sinning comes all at once. His spirit is overflowed. He feels the roll and pressure of God’s “billows and waves,” as all the universe above him seems to darken and swell into a vast ocean of divine displeasure. His soul “faints within him.” He feels “cast out of God’s sight,” and shivers in the utter loneliness. He had “fled from the presence of the Lord,” really meaning to stay himself somewhere on the rim and outskirts of that presence for a

while, and then, perhaps, to steal back again in some auspicious moment, when his needs were great, and when divine memory was dull. But he had miscalculated the forces. The tremendous gravitation of sin gave such impetus to his flight, and God in his providence so lifted hindering circumstances, that he far overshot his own mark, and went sheer down to "the belly of hell." Awaking there, he makes his moan of the very thing he had left Gath-Hepher to seek—negation of divine presence, complete absence of God. Ah, if sinners did but know what the fruitage of their own ungodliness will be when it is "fully ripe," what the world and the universe will be when divine presence is darkened out of them by sin, and what the bitterness of that realising moment when the soul awakes in the despairing thought, "God is now away, perhaps for ever"—they would stay the beginnings of departure as men keep back the foot from a slippery precipice—as Jonah here shudders and shrinks from "the belly of hell," in which for a while he must lie.

Then he *began to "look"*—upwards to earth,

eastwards to the temple where he knew that the lost presence was richly manifested. "Ah, if I could but be there! If I might see but once again the priest, the altar, and the mercy-seat! If I might stand but a few brief moments amid the symbols of atonement, and see the proofs and signs of divine presence and reconciliation, I could then be content to die. But at any rate I will look again. If I die looking, still I shall look till I die." This is one of the most characteristic acts of a true faith—to *look*, although death may come in the looking. "This is the victory that overcometh the world," and the sea, and "belly of hell," and God's desertion, and the soul's despair, "*even our faith.*" Never surely had faith a tougher battle to fight than this! It is hard enough to fight above ground, when the sun helps us, and the stars, and the voices of nature, and the faces of friends; with the Bible as an armoury, and the Church as a refuge! But to fight away down yonder, as deep as ever plummet sounded, where stretches the shadow of death, a solitary warrior, and a stricken, to fight so! It is grand. This man takes place with wrestling Jacob, with faith-

ful Abraham. Strong in faith, he gives glory to God.

The look soon became a cry. "I cried by reason of mine affliction unto the Lord." It may have been literally a vocal cry. The voice was much used by the Jews, in gladness, in sorrow, in worship—especially by great and impassioned souls. "The depths" echoed David's voice. The sides of Olivet heard the loud sound of his "weeping." The silence of the wilderness and the stillness of midnight were startled by his "cries." If it was Jonah's habit on the land so to express himself, if in times of excitement or depression he told his heart's tale to the outer air, and awoke the echoes slumbering in the mountain-sides of Gath-Hepher by his "calling" upon God, I see no difficulty in believing that he literally *cried* unto God out of the gullet of the shark. In fact, for all we know, this audible cry of the prophet, making unusual commotion and vibration within the narrow receptacle where he lay, may have been among the necessary and appointed means of his preservation; may have acted so upon the sensations of his submarine custodian as to induce at length the disgorge-

ment which set the prophet free. If this were so, it would be an interesting instance of the efficacy of prayer *by means of* the natural laws. But evidently the soul of the cry was this, that *it was the cry of the soul*. Stretched there in helpless silence, if you will—deeper down than dead men in their graves—farther from light and air than men in deepest mines searching for precious ore—cut off from all help of the living—he cried: and that soul-cry of distress and faith thrilled the roots of the mountains, shook the bars of the earth, made “a new and living way” among the old “paths of the seas,” shot upwards in a moment of time through the starry spheres and silent spaces of the sky to the throne of the invisible God. That cry from farthest depths rose in one instant, and that without injuring or even touching one natural law by the way, above all heights, to the primal springs of power, and love, and earthly providence in the mind of God. Then came the answer down as fast as the cry went up. It began at least to come, and the prophet *felt* it so beginning. He felt it even while he was praying, and put some thankfulness into his

cry. At any rate, the thankfulness came. This was probably the next stage of his mental experience in that strange time.

He began to be grateful. Very likely some measure of gratitude mingled with his distress from the first. But it is also very likely that as time rolled on, and he felt himself still alive, miraculously preserved—for although, as we have seen, all the outer circumstances were largely natural, the interior preservation of the living man must have been, so far as we can understand, *super-natural*, miraculous;—and when he felt himself so preserved, while the long hours, seeming longer still through the number and rapidity of his emotions, rolled slowly by—and still preserved—and still,—then would come, stealing in upon his distressed and troubled soul, a blessed feeling of thankfulness. There was daybreak in the land of the shadow of death. The sweet bloom of the morning smote down into the rayless depths, and revealed there the strangest sight those depths have ever disclosed—a living oratory and a thankful worshipper.

Then, apparently, his soul passed into a

more active state of *renewed personal consecration to God*. Religious thankfulness nearly always grows into that. "What shall I render?" is the quick-growing fruit of a due sense of "all his benefits." "The voice of thanksgiving" is yet sounding when the act of "sacrifice" begins. "Vows," when truly made, are "paid." The prophet could only resolve; he could not act until deliverance came. Therefore, he says, "I will"—looking to the future—"I will sacrifice," "I will pay." And, knowing that that future depended all upon God, he finally leaves everything with him.

The *final* state of his mind—that into which all other feelings subside and resolve themselves—is *a state of entire dependence*, involving a quiet and trustful surrender of the whole case to God. "Salvation is of the Lord." I have now done all I can. I need sigh and cry no more. If he will yet accept me for active service, I shall be delivered. If not, I shall still trust in him. This God is my God now, for ever and for ever. "Salvation is of the Lord!"

Now, I do not presume to say that the fore-

going is an accurate sketch of *the order* of the prophet's experience during the time of his incarceration. The correct analysis of human feeling is difficult at any time; and in a time of excitement and stress the emotions become so delicate, quick, and changeful, that even the subject of them "cannot reckon them up in order unto us." It is sufficient that in the recorded prayer we find proofs, or hints, of the things which have been described.

So the time sped on, and the hour of deliverance drew nigh. "The Lord spake to the fish." How he spake—in what language, by the use of what signs and impressions—we are not told. But let us take care that we lose nothing of the full strength of the assertion. God *spake* unto the fish by agencies as perfectly adapted to its nature, and in a manner as direct and clear as when he speaks to us through the medium of our reason, by his works, his word, and his spirit. Of course the old scientific cavil comes in—"How could he?" which we meet in a moment with an answer far more scientific—"How could he not?" Does any one *know*—know perfectly—that God, whose sole

word produced all things at first, who by that "word" made sun, and moon, and stars, the earth, and all that it contains, spoke his last syllable on that creating day, and never can speak again? Does any one know that, having finished his works, he has shut himself up in the centre of them, "like the mainspring of a watch," exercising only a uniform and inarticulate force, but touching no point any longer with express and personal volition? Then, as John Foster says in one of his grand passages, "that man will be God to us." He has dethroned the living God, and changed Him into a dead force. But, by a display of knowledge, which, in the case supposed, cannot be less than infinite, he has *himself* ascended the vacant throne. We yet may worship, for the universe is not without a god. The man who knows, says Foster, that there is no God, must himself be God. And so, we say that the man who *knows* that God cannot speak to beast, or bird, or fish, or worm, or fly, "understands *all* mysteries and all knowledge;" nothing can be too hard for him.

My brethren, this theory which resolves the

universe into mere materialism and force, without an actuating will and the touches of a personal presence, is as hard and as distasteful to all our finer feelings as it is essentially untrue. The truth here, as in everything else, is as *beautiful* as it is real. God "*speaks*" to his whole creation in height and depth. He speaks to the angels. He speaks to the worms. He speaks to the splendours. He speaks to the glooms. He speaks in heaven. He speaks in hell. He speaks and gets reply—quick, true, murmurous or loud, musical or dissonant, according to the word that is spoken. "His angels" answer him (Psalm cxlviii.) with folded or outspread wings. "His hosts" with clang of celestial armour. "Sun, moon, and stars" by their shinings and eclipses. "The waters that be above the heavens," in distillation of the dew and droppings of the rain. The "dragons" come out of the "deeps" to answer him. The "fire" gleams from the thunder-cloud, and the "hail" rattles on our windows, in answer to God. "Snow" whitens the landscape, "vapours" roll through the sky, "stormy wind" blows—all as "*fulfilling his*

word." "Mountains" stand worshipping like priests in a great temple. Little "hills" clap their hands. "Fruitful trees" laugh, and shaggy "cedars" mourn. "Beasts, and all cattle, creeping things, and flying fowl."—Then why not the fish that kept Jonah? Why must *this* poor creature be isolated from its maker, and shut up in the scientific "deeps" which can only shut but never open? Why? "And the Lord *spake* unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land." An old author says with great plainness, but probably with truth, that "the manner of his coming forth seemeth to have been without ease and pleasure to the whale." Very likely. But if it brings "ease and pleasure," thankfulness and usefulness, to Jonah, we shall not mourn much over the whale's discomforts. They would not be great. They would soon be over. And then the great creature would swim back to its home in the depths, there to "seek" and find its "meat from God." The ship sailed better without the prophet than with him; and I daresay the fortunes of the shark would not suffer by losing such a bitter morsel; or, to put it differently,

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by carrying for God through these nights and days one of his prodigal children, and giving him up in safety. One almost feels that the monster would be likely to get compensation for its loss, wages for its labour, and that it would wear a kind of dignity ever after. At any rate, before we part company, before the creature, angry and disappointed, goes rushing back to the deep, let us give it the compensation of our thanks. It preserved to us, and to the world, one of our divine instructors. It carried in its maw this book of Jonah. If God could speak to the fish, we can thank it, and turn our thanks into the form of kindness to *all* creatures. That creature is dead and gone. Perhaps some of its teeth may be among those fossil teeth which have been found in great numbers on the shores of Malta and Sicily, and which are allowed by naturalists to belong to a larger race of fishes than the existing ones. The creature itself, however, is gone. "The spirit" of that beast is gone "downwards," who knoweth whither? But the world is full of living creatures, and we may show our thankfulness by kindness *to them*—to the horse in the street, to

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the cow in the field, to the lost dog, to the bird with the broken wing, to the fly on the window trying all day long to get to the outer air. Never kill a fly—no, nor even the yellow wasp with the sting, if you can let it out. The God who gave you your life, gave life to all the creatures, and each in its own domain has as much right to live as you have in yours. Nor can you ever tell how much you may be indebted to any creature. The fable of the mouse knawing asunder the cords that bound the lion is the fact of daily life. The weak help the strong as well as the strong the weak. An ass can save a seer from an angel's sword. A shark can keep a prophet from drowning in an angry sea. Home again now, scaly monster! You have done your generation work. You have "praised the name of the Lord."

One more thought, and this the last to-day. As you see the foamy track the creature leaves behind, gradually melting into the quiet green of the sea; as you turn and look at the prophet washing himself from the filth of his living grave, and then standing up on the shore, inhaling the fresh breeze, rejoicing in heaven's blessed light,

and—to prove and feel himself alive, to make sure that all was not a dream—shouting, perhaps, in loud voice, “Salvation is of the Lord,”—say, “God helping me, I shall never despair. Never. For I see that the heaviest judgment may brighten into mercy. The darkest night may have a morning. The deepest grave has a resurrection portal. A voyage wrapped in whirling storm, and horrible with engulfing dangers, may yet end in safety on a sunny shore.”

THE SIGN.



NO man liveth unto himself. Every man is living for others, always, and everywhere. A good man in active life and services lives consciously and voluntarily for others. But in his most passive moods, in his most helpless times, in places most abstracted from public view, he is not living unto himself—*may* be living for others more powerfully than ever before. The God of our life not only protects that life through the whole course of its personal development, be that development in “height or depth,” but, often unknown to us, he fills it with unsuspected uses, and draws out of it powers and lessons for other lives and for after-ages. John Bunyan preaching and itinerating is manifestly one of God’s “powers of the world to come” among men.

But shut the door of the Bedford jail on him, and (so his persecutors judge, so also his friends fear) he is no better than a dead man. Dead ! It is then he begins to live—by his cheerful patience through twelve long years, to his people near—by his writings, to posterity and the world. Jonah, above-ground, among men, is a prophet, is a “power” of some kind. But submerge him in a stormy sea, give him a second burial in the belly of a fish, and what is he ? “Twice dead” surely. “Forgotten, out of mind.” Nay. Just the opposite. When disgraced, despairing, embowelled, he begins to live for others as he has never lived before. The days of his burial were probably the greatest of his life. God was then shaping him and his life into a fit “sign” for the Ninevites, into a shadow of that great act in which stands the substance of our redemption—viz. the death, burial, and resurrection of our Lord.

This will be the subject of thought with us this morning—Jonah buried and risen a type of Christ. We shall confine our attention at present to this *one* great reference, leaving the other, the reference to the people of Nineveh, to

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be considered in its historical place when the prophet arrives in the great city.

More than once in the course of our Lord's ministry, among different persons, and for different objects, he makes use of the similitude of the prophet's burial and resurrection. It is plain, therefore, that he attached great importance to it, and that we, in giving some little time to the consideration of it, are not pursuing subtle and doubtful analogies, but following the lights of his infallible teaching.

In what circumstances, then, did our Lord make these allusions to the prophet? He was teaching, and working miracles in attestation of his divine mission. In the early part of his stay in Capernaum he healed a poor demoniac, one held in blindness and dumbness by the devil's power. Apparently he had gone to the house of the man to work the cure, a crowd as usual going with him ; and with the crowd, as usual too, a number of the Pharisees. They are there to watch, to object, to neutralise the growing influence of Jesus in every possible way. There is no denying the miracle, no denying *the fact* at least of the healing of the man. But

they are ready with a sinister and malign explanation. "He has healed the man, not by divine, but by infernal power. The devil has helped him, not God. He belongs to the devil's kingdom. He is in league with those very devils whom he has now professedly driven out. He spake to them as friends; and, true to the hellish covenant which binds them all, they have done as he desired. The ignorant people, deceived, cry, "Is not this the son of David?" We say, "Nay. He is the son of Belial!" Jesus (it is wonderful to think of it) patiently reasoned with such men, showed them the folly of such a supposition, and solemnly warned them to beware of that sin for which there is no forgiveness. Now, as then, the blasphemous rejection of Christ and all the grace of his kingdom will take a man very near, if not into, the state and region of unpardonable sin.

Then, apparently, others, "certain of the scribes and pharisees," as they are called, spoke out, and asked what would seem to many much more reasonable than the blasphemous opposition of that section of them which had just been answered and silenced—they asked

for satisfaction in its highest, clearest form; either because they really wished it, or because they surmised that this would be a more cunning way of cutting at the root of his influence—they asked for “*a sign from heaven*”—a thing clearly supernatural and celestial. It must not be an earthly sign, such as the healing of sickness or the multiplication of loaves. It must not be anything physical and material, and close to us here, in the working of which there may be unseen manipulation, superior scientific skill, the arts of magic, the power of the devil. It must be a clear celestial manifestation, shining out of heaven from God. “Shew us *such* a sign, and then we shall believe.” There is clear evidence that this was the sense in which they used the word “sign” (σημεῖον). It meant something not wrought by man—prophet or messenger—but by God. “HE must work on in our sight before we can be expected to believe.” On another occasion they said, “Moses gave our fathers bread in the wilderness *from heaven*. He did not even profess to make the manna. He had no hand in the matter from first to last. He simply announced and foretold the wonder-

working power of God. The coming of the manna was "the sign that Moses was sent of him." The same general idea is at work here. These questioning Pharisees fall back upon the general belief of their class—upon what indeed was the settled faith of the age—that Messiah, when he came, would have his advent announced and his appearance illustrated by celestial splendours. "It cannot be," thought they, "that this lowly person, who goes among the poor and the sick, helping and healing, driving disease away, and multiplying loaves and fishes, can be the true Messiah. When HE comes the heavens will attest. Some glory will shine about him, at least as bright as that which covered Moses' face when he came down from the presence of God. Some cloud of shade and splendour will attend him on his way, and stand over his abode by day and by night, at least as visible and remarkable as the cloud that covered the tabernacle in the wilderness. Out of the myriads of angels surely *some* will be selected to render to Messiah a visible ministry and to compose the dignity of his royal state. The sign—the sign; shew us the sign." Such

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was the Pharisaic demand. Such, indeed, was the demand of the whole nation at that time. "The Jews require a sign."

Knowing thus the circumstances in which our Lord introduces the reference to the prophet Jonah, we are prepared the better to apprehend his exact meaning. In reply to the Pharisees he says at once and distinctly that what they ask for will never be given. No sign. No sign of that character. Why? Because it was presumptuous to ask it. What right had they—what right had any man to prescribe and dictate exactly the kind and amount of evidence by which he will be persuaded to acknowledge Messiah, and recognise his Saviour? That there shall be *sufficient* evidence is indispensable, because man is rational, and can be saved only through the legitimate exercise of his rational faculties. If teachers are sent to him from God, and truth submitted for his acceptance, the *only* way in which he can properly receive these teachers is by a candid examination of their claims and credentials; the only right treatment he can give to the offered truth is to pass it through

the searching of his most awakened faculties, that it may be "proved," and then "held fast." Nor does the Saviour himself seek to be exempted from these conditions. He works some of his miracles expressly that he may fulfil them. In reasoning with the Jews, he appeals directly and often to his "works." He cannot, therefore, consistently with his own teaching, object that the Pharisees require *a* sign in general—*some* proof miraculous, divine, sufficient—that he is what he says he is. But he may well object to the presumptuous temerity which would lead a creature, limited in faculty, fallen in nature, to tell the all-wise, almighty Creator, beforehand, *how* he must herald and accompany his Messiah's coming—that he must send him with *this* sign, not with that—in this form, not in another. Since we are the creatures to be saved, it is probable that God knows best *how* to save us, and in what form and with what accompaniments the Saviour shall come. Reason and modesty alike require that we should examine the evidences actually submitted, instead of attempting to define and specify by speculation the evidences that might

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be expected in the case. The case is large. Unaided reason is weak. Mistake is fatal.

*Secondly*, The sign they asked for was refused, because they were blind to actual signs already given, and, indeed, constantly existing before their eyes. The economics of divine administration do not allow God to send "the more" when "the less" is slighted. "If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe if I tell you of heavenly things?" He that is unfaithful in his treatment of "little" evidence (supposing for a moment that only little had then been existing) would be unfaithful also in his treatment of "much" (supposing again that a celestial panorama of persons, lights, wonders, such as the Jews expected would be *really* more than the things actually existing before their eyes). If all this might be supposed—viz. that they had only the less, and that God had withheld the more—"still," says our Saviour, in his answer to them, "it is necessary to act so. There *are* signs—do you not discern them? 'The signs of the times.' Do you not see, that the sceptre has departed from Judah? That the lawgiver is coming no

more from that tribe? That the abomination is in the holy place? That the nation is dissolving? That the good are weary? That all the earth waits? You can discern the face of the sky. You are prophets of to-morrow's weather. The sky of 'the times' is as easily read. The moral and political symptoms are apparent. Until you read these, and lay their lessons to heart, you have no right to ask for what you call a higher, clearer evidence. Even if God meant at this time to reveal his kingdom in visible splendour, he would not do so *to you*, until you have received the messages he has already sent."

*Thirdly*, The sign they asked for was refused because the very demand for it was a proof of deep ungodliness, and the concession of it, therefore, would have been a premium on religious disloyalty and impiety. "*A wicked and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign.*" Ah, that is it! This whole people and age have departed from God, and then they ask God to follow them and shine upon them by miracle. They have lost the sense of his presence with them in life, and then they clamour for miracu-

lous signs of that presence coming down from above. They have broken the inward covenant, and then seek compensation by waiting for outward pictures and shows. They wish to be taught as children are. They prefer the carnal to the spiritual—that which meets the eye to that which fills the soul. They are really rejecting the greater and asking for the less. And shall God, to meet their morbid and depraved desire, reverse his whole mode of procedure in this world, and instead of rising from the carnal to the spiritual, from the outward and visible to the inward and conscious, according to the plan, go back to infancy, to first lessons, to pictures? Shall he always speak most clearly by thunders and lightnings on mountain-tops, by chariots of fire going up the sky, by flashes of glory on the human face? Or is he not rather ushering in a higher dispensation—that of the still small voice, that of his own conscious presence, that of lowliness and goodness and universal love? A wicked and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign. A good and faithful generation would feel after God if haply they might find him; would see the signs ex-

isting which point to the coming and near presence of the Messiah, and would therefore have, in their very sympathies and longings, points of contact with Him, would possess in their own moral state adequate preparation for the recognition and reception of "the sent of God." Therefore no sign shall be given. Unfaithfulness so flagrant cannot be condoned, ungodliness so utter and wicked cannot be rewarded. No sign.

No sign except this—the sign of the prophet Jonah, the very opposite of that which you seek. You ask it from above. It shall be from *below*. You ask it from heaven. It shall be from the *belly of hell*. You ask that it may be glorious. It shall be, according to the carnal judgment, *ignominious*. It shall be from a dark sea of trouble, and not from a firmament of brightness. It shall be tempest, sorrow, death, burial ; not sunshine, victory, enthronement. "For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the whale's belly ; so shall the son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth."

Such we understand to be the meaning of our Lord's language in the comparison between

himself and Jonah. It is a comparison resting chiefly on the resemblance *in humiliation*—that of Jonah and that of Jesus. It might easily be branched out into a number of particulars, some striking, some doubtful, some only curious. But the general resemblance is apparent to any one, and *some* of the elements which constitute that resemblance are obvious and undeniable. Jonah was in the heart of the sea ; Jesus was in the heart of the earth. Jonah was in the “belly of hell”—or the grave—or hades ; Jesus was actually traversing, living in the invisible world, and acquiring thus his right to hold “the keys.” Jonah was there in punishment of his sin ; Jesus (himself sinless) was slain and consigned to the darksome grave by the sins of the world, which he bore and expiated on the cross. Jonah was three days and three nights in his living grave ; Jesus was the same time dead and buried. Jonah was restored to light and life ; Jesus was “declared to be the son of God with power, by the resurrection from the dead.”

Of course there are many points, not of resemblance, but of the strongest difference.

Jonah was sinful ; Christ was pure. Jonah was fleeing ; Christ was obeying. Jonah was unwilling to preach the gospel to the heathen ; Jesus was longing for the hour when on the ground of his work *finished*, he would say to his disciples "Go ye into all the world ; and preach the gospel to every creature." There are always more points of difference than of agreement between type and antitype. We are safe when we hold by the manifest teaching of the divine word, rejecting the temptations that arise to pursue accidental resemblances, and analogies only curious, but not designed. The principle of strong common-sense here, as in everything else, is our best guide. The spirit of all truth opening our eyes to behold the wondrous things in God's law is our only perfect interpreter.

Now let us ask, if there was a distinct divine purpose, *in Jonah's time*, to make him and his life during those three days and nights *a type* of the death and burial of our Lord ? Did God *mean* to make his submersion and emergence a figure of the great coming fact of our redemption ? Or was it only that our

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Lord, knowing perfectly what was soon to happen to himself, perceived that there would be a natural and instructive resemblance between the cases, of which he might make use, and which would be more striking to men afterwards because he had calmly foretold it before it was historically established?

Nothing of any vital importance, as far as we can see, depends on this question. But the answer to it is very plain. There was a designed coincidence. The type *was* framed by the foreseen proportions of the antitype. Unless it were so, Jonah could not, properly speaking, be called *a type* of Christ at all. Every type, in the full and proper sense, has its likeness to the thing signified imparted to it, shaped on it, or, if possessed inherently, recognised there by divine intent and purpose. Priest, altar, victim, offering, holy places—the veil, the ark, the mercy-seat;—all these had their sole significance and value by the foreknowing and designed appointment of God, who dropped these shadows of the great reality before it came.

In this way we have explanation of some of the “hardest” and some of the most wonder-

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ful things in Holy Writ; the offering of Isaac, for example. How could that be of God? Some men say "it was cruel, it was even immoral, and never could have been ordained by Him." Are you quite sure of that? If the father was certain, beyond all doubt, of the divine command, or *thought* so, for we grant that, whether God *could* command such a sacrifice, is just the question; if the son himself, instructed in the whole case, was willing—a young man of twenty-five, having, therefore, far more than power enough to resist if he had wished—if he yielded himself freely; if Abraham, and Isaac too, believed, that after sacrificial death there would be immediate resurrection for the fulfilment of divine promise; especially if the whole transaction, as far as it went, was the shadow of a stupendous sacrifice that was coming, in which a father would really offer a son for us men and for our salvation;—was it *still* impossible that God should command and arrange that distressing but most significant scene? Was God immoral in offering his own son? Was He cruel in "not sparing him?" Was Jesus not justified in giving his life a ransom for

many—not when he knew that he could take it again? Not when he looked at the joy that was set before him? Not when in this way he could bring many sons to glory? Alas for us if all this is mythical and impossible. If you look at that “mountain in the land of Moriah,” where the father of all the faithful stands with gleaming knife above the bound body of his only son—the scene is appalling, and our natural sensibilities shrink from beholding it. But when you look up to Calvary, “that great and high mountain of the Lord,” and see the stupendous *fact* enacted, and revealed before the eyes of men, to stand for ever at the centre of this world’s history, and when you see the lights and powers which come out of “the horror of great darkness” which fell upon the sufferer there, and go streaming far and wide—the whole world over;—*then* surely we have explanation sufficient of the mystery of the offering of Isaac.

So Jonah’s immersion and imprisonment below is in itself curious and strange, and not *likely* to be the result of any divine thought or purpose. The feeling of many is, “believe it or

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disbelieve it according to the evidence, but at least do not connect God with it. It sinks the dignity of religion to associate things so strange and almost repulsive with His name." On the contrary, we say connect his name with it very closely. See his hand in it very expressly. Regard it as a designed shadow of Gethsemane and Calvary, and then the peculiarity becomes the sublimity, and what would be in itself only curious and grotesque becomes serious and divine.

The question comes really to be this—*What does God need* in the way of human language, figure, action, to signify and describe sin, to typify and foreshadow redemption? Will it be enough that philosophers reason on the nature of virtue and vice; that moralists do their best to settle the foundations of responsibility, and to show the supreme obligations of duty; that poets and polite writers shall adorn the ways of goodness with flowers and sunshine, and darken the paths of vice with the glooms of disaster and despondency? Will these be enough? No. God needs to break through all the laws of taste, and to use language, and

bring in figures, and perform typical actions, which are quite shocking to the sophisticated sensibilities of men. He needs a flaming sword at the gate of every earthly paradise to keep men out of it until they are fit to enter ! He needs priests, all bloody and smeared, ministering at the altar, without intermission of service, through long ages ! He needs a father standing with gleaming knife above the bound body of his son ! He needs to cast a prophet away down to the depths of a churning sea, and then into the noisome gurgling belly of a great fish ! Not polite figures these. But sin is not polite. Terrible actions these. Yes—because our redemption is a stupendous thing.

On these grounds we may say that the three days in the deep were the greatest days of his life. He got his power then to speak with effect in Nineveh. Unknown to himself, he then became a figure and image of the Redeemer of the world.

Let the men of this generation take heed lest the men of Nineveh should rise in the judgment to condemn them. To them the prophet was a sign—to some men now he is only a scoffing.

They believed his story on sufficient evidence, while some men now are so impiously bold, and so incurably foolish, as to declare that no amount of evidence can prove it. They repented at his preaching, while some men now only make merry with his claims. "Behold a greater than Jonah is here." We have Christ—Christ incarnate, dead, buried, risen, living evermore ; who died for our sins according to the Scriptures ; who rose again for our justification ; who ever liveth to make intercession for us ; who is able to save unto the uttermost all who come unto God by him ; who saith, "Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

He speaks to us by miracle and mighty work, by cross and passion, by death and burial, by resurrection and ascension, by second coming and judgment, by eternal life and death. Let us flee, then, without delay to the shadow of his name, and trust to him who is "greater than Jonah" our whole salvation.

TO NINEVEH.



THE Bible is, in great part, a record of human lives. And yet we have not one complete biography. There are large blank spaces in the lives of the most distinguished. It would seem that no human life is good enough, or at any rate suitable to be taken in its entirety, as an organ of divine revelation. Scenes and sections simply are filled with divine meanings, and then touched with the light of divine explanation. Then they shine and speak as revelations of the divine will. But other parts are left dark. God seems to say: "I do not need these, at least at present. I do not need the life of Abraham in Urr; or that of Jacob in Padan-Aram—I can drop twenty years of it; or that of Moses in Midian; or that of Paul in

Arabia ; or that of *Jonah* between the time of his deliverance from the sea and the beginning of his journey to Nineveh. Strange that *the one* perfect human life that has been upon the earth is presented to us in the same way ! After his celestial introduction among men the Saviour of the world makes but *one* appearance for thirty years. Here is loss indeed. And how is this ? Is it, in part, that we are not yet worthy of having the holy life displayed in its wholeness before us ? Is it that God designs to make heaven out of earth even more than we suppose ? That we shall find in the records of heaven what blind man never saw upon the earth, although it happened before his eyes ? That we shall spend long happy days in following the sacred footsteps of the *young* "man Christ Jesus ?" Then, too, we may be able to catch up the lost links and illuminate the dark spaces in the lives of the saints. We may be able truly to read our own.

After God set Jonah on the shore a delivered man, where did he go ? The miraculous care of course was ended. God did not "prepare" a great bird to bear him home on its

wings. Probably he went to some house that was near, for rest after sleeplessness, for food after fasting. It is not at all improbable that in a little while, after due refreshment, he lay in some house near by, as Sisera lay in the tent of Jacl, locked in the sleep that comes after great fatigue or sorrow. And if he told his story to the hospitable master or mistress, which is also quite likely, you can fancy the peculiar interest they would feel in their mysterious guest, and what a hush of fear and solemnity would be shed through the house as he slept. Or perhaps he was cast up on the shore so near Joppa that he made his way thither easily and soon. In any case it is likely he went to Joppa, if for no other reason, in order to get farther. Did he present himself at the place where he had paid his passage not many days before? Did he go down to the harbour to see if the ship had been driven back? *Was* the ship there, needing repairs? Did the shipmaster and his sailors know their passenger again? Was the thing bruited abroad? On these and many such like points we have no certain knowledge. But it seems

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more likely than anything else that Jonah returned to Joppa, made himself known, and told his tale. We may be sure that the story would run no risk of extinction for want of telling again. A thousand tongues would spread it far and wide.

From Joppa the prophet probably went up to Jerusalem, to appear in the temple, to which he had "looked" from the deep, to "sacrifice to God with the voice of thanksgiving," to "pay what he had vowed." His appearance there would increase the sensation, and give a much wider currency to the marvellous tale.

Then probably he returned to Gath-Hepher, his former home. And there, as it would seem, he was living when he received the second commission to go to Nineveh. Suppose him thus at home, living in quietness, the wonder that his return awoke gradually subsiding, while at the same time it would be spreading itself into *distant* places, and arousing a special interest in Nineveh. What is the prophet thinking now? He is thinking of the past of course. He never can forget the nights and days he has been in the deep. But what of

the future ? Does he know that the commission to Nineveh will be renewed ? Is he hoping that it will ? Or fearing ? There is but one word in the narrative that gives any answer, and that answer is inferential rather than direct—the word “Arise.” It is a term of incitement, the same in fact that had been used on the former occasion, and seems to imply that he was not girded and ready, but resting and content. “I hope I may now be excused. God may not need a messenger now. Or, needing, He may find another. I have suffered enough for Nineveh ; He may now lay the burden upon other shoulders, or He may carry the message Himself, delivering it in the roll of the thunder, in the throbs of the earthquake, in gleams of consuming fire.” “And the word of the Lord came unto Jonah the second time, saying, Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee.” This is substantially the same commission. The same, and yet different. The “second” call to a man is never exactly the same as the first. The third is never a repetition of the second. Another

tone is in the voice of the speaker, firmer or milder. Other shades of meaning are in the message. If it is "the second time," still more if it is the seventh time, or the seventy and seventh time, there will be changes in the message corresponding with the changes which time has brought in circumstances and in character. It may seem a refinement; properly understood, it is but a simple truth, that we never receive exactly the same command or invitation from God *more than once*. "If slighted once, the season fair, can never be renewed." The wheels of providence never stop; and as they roll on, new scenes arise, or new lights fall on old scenes. Human character *must* develop and grow. Men are apt to put forward the intended performance to some "more convenient season," without seeing—for how *can* they see?—the changes, internal and external, which will make that "season," when it comes, largely different from all that it now seems. The probabilities are overwhelming, that, after delay or disobedience, the "season" will be *less*, and not "*more convenient*" when it comes.

In the case before us, let us glance, if only for a moment, at the points of identity, and then at the points of difference, between the first and the second commission.

God still needs to speak. As the ruler of this world, and the Father of human spirits, he needs to show in a conspicuous and extraordinary manner his presence, and especially his justice and his mercy, among men. Men are still blind and deaf, and God must *speak* in louder tone, and lighten and flash his presence among them. Anything rather than a world without God.

Nineveh is still a great city, great even "to God," or "of God," as the third verse hath it. Therefore that is the place for him to speak. A great city is a city "great to God." Large trees such as the cedars of Lebanon, are called "trees of God." High mountains are called "mountains of God," and great cities are cities "great to God." He rejoices in the stupendous growth of the vegetable world ; in the mountains whose summits pierce the clouds, whose shadows stretch far over the extended plains ; and in the cities which hold the vast multi-

tudes of living men. Things great to us in simple, natural greatness, are great also to God. On *some* of the human ideas of grandeur God pours pity and scorn. Of others, however, he must approve, for they are really the reflected image of his own. No man *could* think of a hamlet or village as he does of a vast and populous city. His emotion is vaster and more profound as he looks at the larger object. Even if the village had a great man in every house, the great city, with its rising and ebbing tides of immortal life, would of necessity project itself before his imagination into a vaster sublimity. So it is with God. He venerates the human being everywhere, in whom he sees still, often through stain and shadow, his own awful image. Alas! it too often shines with but pale and broken rays. The splendour is gone. Only flickerings of the glory are left, and they sometimes are invisible to all but him. But so long as one ray of that glory is left—be it light of reason, or stir of conscience, or tenderness of memory, or yearning of faith—God venerates the man. Suppose him a dusky degraded creature, in some miserable hovel or on some

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solitary shore, the place is in a sense holy ground by the presence of a being who carries in him, although darkened and shattered, the awful image of God! and God must have thought and emotion about that being altogether different in kind from those with which he beholds any other object beneath the sun. The wide rolling sea, the vestal mountains, nor the glittering stars, are equal in his esteem to the one immortal man. Then think of a whole vast city—full of this humanity, of this God-breathed life, and is it surprising that a great city should be *great unto God*? What flashings of intellectual lights in one day!—as many almost as the separate rays of the sun. What throbbings of moral, or immoral purpose, the moral faculty acting in each! What a sighing of wandering spirits, unconsciously or blindly seeking the lost portion! What a swell and heave of the great tide of immortal life, composed of the blended individual streams! London is like a great and wide sea of life. The daily agitations which stir in her bosom are felt in feeblér pulsings even on far-off shores; and in multitudes which no man could

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number, her thoughts and acts, and in these her chequered moral history, are going up to God's heavens. Such was Nineveh of old, and for such reasons as we have named, it was still, as at first, a city *great to God*.

These are some of the points of identity. But there are also *points of difference* between the first and the second commission.

One respects Jonah himself, and glances, not reproachfully, but still in a spirit of fatherly faithfulness, at his recent disobedience: "Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach." So far there is identity. Then comes the difference—"the preaching that I bid thee." Formerly he knew the message that he was to deliver. Now he is simply told that a message will be given him, but he is not to know it until he arrives at the place. It may be the same. It may be milder. It may be sterner. It may be less or more. He shall know when the time comes, but not before. Undoubtedly this change has reference to his former disobedience. He is relegated, as it were, from the position of the "friend who knoweth his Lord's will," to, or towards, that of "the servant who knoweth

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not." He is gently reminded of the lapse, in order that he may look to his goings, and walk in a plain path. So it is always. When we obey—do as we are "bid"—God tells us his secrets, shares with us the knowledge of his will, makes us free of his great realm of truth. But when we refuse and turn away from him that speaketh, he darkens the lights of revelation—or *we* do it by the shadow of our own state, which is the same thing—he shuts the doors, and we grope about them as the blind. He locks the secrets from us, the sweet secrets of love. He changes the voices of Spirit, Word, and providence, speaking to "servants" who once were "sons." He says, "You must now do as you are bid! and so rise again to the state in which you will not need the master's command, but be guided by the Father's eye."

But the message was not only different in its form to suit the change in the prophet, but different in its *substance* also, to meet the change in Nineveh—as we shall see when the prophet arrives in the city.

Meantime we want to see him leave Gath-hepher and take the road to the great Assyrian

capital, which was also the seething centre of this world's life at the time. Happily we have not now to wait. We have not now to look seawards mournfully. There is no Lot-like lingering. There is no Moses-like reasoning. There is no reluctance, or it is soon quenched. No delay which is not soon kindled into haste. He is not girt, but he girds himself. He is not waiting, but he soon makes himself ready. He makes his life into an echo, quick and true, of the word of God. The word says, "Arise," and "Jonah arose." The word says, "Go," and Jonah "went." It is beautiful. It is grand. We must not indeed exaggerate. For we know that there is something dark and bitter in this man still, which will break out again. But meantime, and in this act of obedience, so far as we see it, there is a grandeur like that of an angel—a simplicity like that of a child. The servant becomes a son once more in our sight. Some of the grandest human actions which have ever been performed are described in the Bible in the very simplest language that could be used. When Abram left Urr of the Chaldees—away up, as some suppose, nearer the moun-

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tains than Nineveh—going out from the home of his youth, from the society of his kindred, and from the graves of his fathers, to wander to distant unknown lands, and be a homeless pilgrim there ; all the record we have in the Bible of this sublime act of voluntary expatriation in obedience to the divine will, is in these simple and few words : “ So Abram departed, as the Lord had spoken unto him.” All that Jonah records of an act which certainly was one of the greatest of his life, and which stands to us as one of the fairest, when he left Gath-hepher and set face to the far-off Nineveh, is this : “ So Jonah arose, and went unto Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord.” We have mentioned these cases before in contrast. Now, happily, they stand in a twin-like resemblance.

Not a word is said of the journey. We are not told whether it was made in summer or in winter—in company and under protection, or alone and “ kept ” by the angels only ; whether he went quickly, arriving before any forerunner could tell of his approach, or lingered by the way, that reports might reach the city that “ the prophet is coming at last ! ”

Not a word about the natural scenery either. An ordinary traveller would fill his book with descriptions of it. He would point out to us the snowy whiteness of Lebanon ; he would refresh our sight by the green meadows of Damascus, and lead us beside her “golden streams ;” he would make us see the roll of “the great river, the river Euphrates” in crossing over ; and very likely detain us—Nineveh in sight—with some description of the Tigris. But “Jonah arose and went.” Mountain and river, plain and wilderness, are things of small account compared with that God’s message, although as yet unknown, which he is going to deliver in the great city. The true sublimity here is not what may be seen by an appreciative eye on earth, or in the sky,—but *this man*, sleeping in the caravan, or weary and resting under a tree. He is rolling eastwards like a thunder-cloud. God’s fire is hid in him. In a little while the gleam of it will fill the air, and bring the city to its knees.

There it is now ! We have come up to it. We cannot see it all. It is too “great” for that. We can look only, from one place, at a wall, or

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a suburb, just as we do in entering London or any other great city. "Nineveh was an *exceeding* great city of three days' journey." This would make about sixty miles either for diameter or circumference. That the circumference is meant there can be little doubt. Even then the dimensions seem great, as indeed they were. But so the dimensions of London would, and do, to many a villager and peasant who has not seen it. So they do to the dwellers who *think* of what they see. If the walls of London were *now* built, and taken through the points which military men have fixed on as the proper points of defence in case of a foreign foe getting footing on our shores, they would describe a circuit of far more than sixty miles. And London now actually contains population greatly exceeding that of Nineveh, although in her denser parts, exclusive of her far-stretching suburbs, she does not cover nearly so much space. But then no part of Nineveh was so dense as the heart of London, or anything approaching to it. In those Eastern cities they had gardens with all manner of fruit in them, and fields under tillage ; so

that, if besieged by a foreign foe, the city might live upon itself—upon the fruits of its own soil.

The really wonderful thing about those ancient cities was the enormous masses of masonry—pyramids of Egypt, palaces of Babylon, walls of Nineveh. One would think that Briareus must have been contractor, that Argus must have been overseer, that the Titans must have laboured at the works! But it is really not surprising when we consider the structure of ancient society. All these marvels of antiquity were produced by enforced labour. Slaves built the walls of Nineveh and the pyramids of Egypt. No doubt that is one reason why those ancient cities have passed so completely away. God does not mean palaces for tyrants: crumble them into ruin, cover them up with dust. God will break down the strongest walls if freemen do not man them. Let the foxes go up on them, let the leopards growl over them, let the hyæna laugh to the moon, as with uncleanly appetite he goes gliding among the silent ruins. The pyramids may stand; they cover nothing, protect nothing, mean nothing that anybody knows.

Civilisation may use them, liberty may crown them yet. But let the name and fame and far-reaching purpose—whatever it was—of their kingly builders perish and be forgotten with the unrequited toils and unsoothed pains and sorrows of the weary builders.

“And Jonah began to enter into the city a day’s journey.” The warder does not question him at the gate. If he does, *his name* is his passport. That name was already well known through the city. It was a terror to those evil-doers. Like the name Bonaparte to England in the days of our fathers, so was the name Jonah to the Ninevites, although for different reasons. They knew it well. From the king on the throne to the captive in the dungeon, they knew it. The very cattle would almost know the sound from hearing their keepers so often pronounce it. “Open the gates! Watchers, stand back! Let no man touch the hairy mantle! Let no one speak to the mystical and heaven-sent man! It may be he has a message of mercy. And if he brings a message of judgment, it may perhaps be yet averted. In any case, a silent and reverential

reception of the messenger will be most becoming."

Behold, then, the solitary figure, clad in the one garment of hair, marching steadily into the city. See the lifted hand, and listen to the startling cry: "Ōd arbaim yom venineveh nehpacheth"—"Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be destroyed." "Forty days and Nineveh overthrown" literally. The work of destruction shall be then complete. It may begin before the forty days are over. But when they are ended, Nineveh shall be as Sodom and Gomorrah—"turned upside down." He traverses the principal streets, making his way across the city, pausing now and again at conspicuous points no doubt—before the houses of the great, in the haunts of the busy, where the slaves are working, where the prisoners are bound, where "violence" inflicts her cruelty and devours her prey; pausing, however, only for a few moments, and never varying the cry: "Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be destroyed!"

But did he not preach, explain the message, expatiate thereon? We have in the gospels recorded discourses of our Lord; but no one

imagines that we have in these precious records *every* word he uttered. We have sermons of Peter and Paul in the Acts of the Apostles ; but interpreters are agreed that we have only an epitome—the pith and marrow—of the preaching. “ With many *other* words did they testify and exhort.” Did not Jonah likewise ? Some incline to that view. They think that the cry which is recorded is but the condensed expression of a great deal more than was uttered. He charged their sin home upon them, denounced divine judgment, explained the ground and reason of that judgment, answered questions if they were put to him. But I think we must all feel that such a view is inconsistent with the facts of the case, with the character of the crisis, with the nature of the prophet’s mission. He was not sent to preach, in *our* sense of the word—*i.e.* to unfold the deplorable case before their own eyes, to reason with them, to persuade them, to invite them to the shelter of divine mercy. Their cup of iniquity was full. Their wickedness had gone beyond all ordinary bounds—all measures of reserve and moderation—if we can apply such terms to wickedness

at all. It was going up before God as a cry ; and the only answer from him, proper to the case, suitable to his government, his dignity, his very mercy, was the cry of coming judgment, brief and plain, startling, stern, unalterable, except by quick and unfeigned repentance. Even that possibility was known only to God. It was not hinted at in the message. Jonah may have been *thinking* of it now and again, as he made his way through the city, for he "knew" the gracious character of God. But he is not told to add it by faintest hint or suggestion to the message. It is not even to soften the cry, which goes up at intervals all day long, in street after street, from one side of the city to the other. Thus the simplest interpretation is the truest. The graphic picture of the solitary prophet is the historical fact. From dawn till sundown the hair-clad figure moves on, crowds collecting about him as he goes, yet keeping respectful distance, lest the threatened judgment should leap out upon them from the hand or glance of the man himself ; crowds falling off, after following a little while, struck with terror, amazement, shame. From west to

east—from the banks of the Tigris, moving, not in a straight line, but to right and left as need might be, yet in the main holding eastwards all day long, he goes twenty miles nearer the mountains; and there, wearied in body, hoarse with perpetual crying, and sorrowful in spirit no doubt, but happy in the consciousness that he has done exactly as he was “bid,” he rests.

There, too, let us rest to-day. With Jonah let us “go out of the city on the east side and there make us a booth, and sit under it in the shadow till we see what shall become of the city.” How solemn and awful is the shadow over them and over us! Such a darkness never fell upon any city before. So great a judgment never hung over so many men. Sodom and Gomorrah actually suffered what is here only threatened. But no prophet went through their streets, no terror seized her inhabitants, no awful gloom from God gave warning of the swift-coming catastrophe. The guilty, careless men went to sleep—knowing nothing, fearing nothing—and awoke in the early morning to be suffocated with the brimstone, scorched and

covered with the furious fiery storm. But how solemn is the deepening of the night over Nineveh! In the next lecture we shall see what *they* think who dwell in it, and what they feel and do, in the king's palace and in the beast's stall; meantime, what do *we* think, sitting in the booth and looking at the city?

It is meet time and place to think of the *exceeding sinfulness of sin*. This horror of great darkness which settles down with the night upon Nineveh is all brought by sin. This great shadow of death hanging in the air above the heads of nearly a million of living souls, or rolling in fiery waves in the earth beneath their feet, is all spread by sin! There is no physical necessity in the condition of the elements, for the storm did *not* fall. There is no political necessity in the state of the nations. There is no philosophical necessity arising out of the nature of God. It is a moral necessity for judgment, *made* by man's sin. Ah! sin is a terrible thing, whether it ripens a city for divine vengeance, or whether it only ruins a soul! No night can be so dark as its shadow. No misery so bitter as that which it breeds. No

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earthly misfortune so appalling as the stupendous and remediless disaster in which it ends ; for "sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death."

We may well think also *how inflexible is the justice of God*. There is indeed a light way of reading the narrative which would put this reflection aside. "God is but acting a politic part. He threatens, but he does not mean exactly what the words convey to us. He is seeking the reformation of the people. In his prescience he sees that they *will* repent. But if they did not he would never bring such an awful destruction upon the greatest city of the earth." Brethren, let us take care that we do not "wrest" the Scriptures, that we do not misread and then misreport the character of God ! He means what he says. He will do what he threatens, unless the conditions of the problem are changed. If this far-stretching city, on which we are looking down from Jonah's booth, does not quickly and mightily change in a few days ; then, just as surely as the king sits in his palace, as the wall guards her treasures and hides her violence, she will lie in ruins at the end of forty days. Listen to the awful

words of another prophet who succeeded Jonah, and carried another "burden" of this very Nineveh on his spirit : "God is jealous, and the Lord revengeth ; the Lord revengeth and is furious ; the Lord will take vengeance on his adversaries, and he reserveth wrath for his enemies. Who can stand before his indignation ? and who can abide in the fierceness of his anger ? his fury is poured out like fire, and the rocks are thrown down by him." Let not men tamper with the lightnings of his justice, or seek to bend its everlasting integrities ; but let them flee rather to the place where the flames of justice play harmless, where the airs of mercy blow, where the whole character of God will be their pavilion and their defence.

We may well think, as we sit and look at the city, *what a stupendous power a city has*—power for good and power for evil. It is natural to think now of its power for evil, its power to breed sin from less to more, from more to greater still, until it fills the city as the ocean fills its bed, and rises up from it in black and murky shadows such as mountains never cast, and threatening the very light of the stars.

We dwell in "a great city"—the greatest in the world, the greatest of any age. What a stupendous power this city has to be one thing or the other; to be partly one thing and partly another! What forces lie in her bosom—some of them latent, but most of them active. What patriot, what Christian, will not lament with heavy and dolorous sorrow the strength and increase of the great sin-force of this city of our habitation! "The violence" of Nineveh would not be suffered in it. The vices of the cities of the plain, or some of them, would be hunted out of public sight as men hunt wild beasts. But for all that, the terrible sin-breeding force is active and fruitful in a hundred ways. A luxury as enervating as that of Babylon is lolling or revelling in too many of her great houses. Impurities like those of Corinth, stain, and consume while they stain, large portions of her society. A flippancy like that of Athens rules the most pretentious and popular parts of her literature. The selfishness of Cain walks the streets of London, saying all day long, "Am I my brother's keeper?" The rapacious greed of Ahab works along the lines of her commerce.

The folly of the worst fools of old still laughs in her giddy, godless multitudes, who say, "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die."

I know the salt of the earth is here, working as potently in this great city as anywhere in the world. But the thing to be salted is wide and deep. Worlds upon worlds of human life and interest are within this city. When you touch one world, you are far from another. The resistance of sin is terrible. The putrescence of sin is swift. Are we gaining or losing? That is the awful question. Is the salt arresting the decay, and nourishing the springs of life? Or is the decay eating up the salt?

If we are gaining, although it may be very little, so little as often to be imperceptible, then there is life for the great city in the future, and hope for England, whose deepest roots and springs are here. If we are losing—losing here, and in the other great cities of the land, where the pulse of national life beats most strongly and most symptomatically of the nation's state—then *all* is being lost. The nation's life is ebbing. The judgments of God are mustering unseen, and—supposing the process of degeneracy

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unchecked—will expend themselves in swift calamities, or by slow decays, until London, with her sister cities of England, shall have passed away like so many cities once “great to God,” now little more than shades and names in human history.

## NINEVEH REPENTING.



IN the last lecture it was assumed that the name of Jonah was well known in Nineveh before his arrival. Unless we assume this, how can we account for the marvellous effects of the one day's preaching, or rather of the one day's "crying," through the city? That *such* a city—the mistress of the world at the time—the seat of intelligence, we must remember, as well as of "violence"—should be entered and seized in such a manner as this history records, by a solitary stranger, about whom no one previously knew anything whatever, is really hardly credible. True, the entrance and action of that day were *in themselves* very impressive. The solitary man moving on through the city, not as the herald of an army, or as the representative of an

earthly government, but speaking in the name of the King of kings—hair-clad but majestic ; alone but fearless ; startling streets, palaces, prisons, with the one unvarying cry ! No *one* man, perhaps, could do anything more simply and grandly impressive !

Nor should we forget that the Eastern nations have always paid regard to such visitations. Even the Jews were universally stirred by the ministry of John the Baptist, which consisted in little more than a cry—"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand !" Conscience, also—the conscience of the people of Nineveh—would be a quick and alarming interpreter of the prophet's cry, and would contribute more to the success of his mission than could the march of an army behind him.

Still, when making allowance for all this, we think it is hardly credible that this one man—a stranger, a foreigner—should be able so to seize and subdue the city as he does, if they had known nothing whatever of his mission or his name.

But we are not left to conjecture and probability on this matter. Our Lord says that

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“Jonah was a sign to the Ninevites.” How? How *could* he be a sign unless they knew something of his previous history, and especially of that part of it which affected themselves? Would any city, ancient or modern, be justified in taking a man as “a sign”—invested with supernatural significance, clothed with divine authority—simply on his own profession, and because he appeared “crying” in its streets? Any political demagogue could accomplish his objects in this way; any religious enthusiast could put the fevered visions of his own fancy before men as the revelation of divine truth; even the maniac might for a time be the ruler of the wisest of men. In order, therefore, to preserve the necessary and perpetual distinction between faith and credulity, between religion and superstition,—we must suppose that this repenting city had rational and intelligible grounds for taking Jonah as “a sign.” We must suppose that the man, and his history in that part of it at least which related to themselves, were very well known to them. Nor is there any difficulty in making the supposition. Nothing more

likely than the arrival in Nineveh of reports—vague at first, but growing more definite, and at length distinct and clear—of the whole story of the prophet's flight and preservation. Nothing more likely, they would be ready to think in lucid and relenting moments, than the coming some time of a man thus divinely disciplined and saved on their account. He is come, and they receive him as "a sign." How a sign? A sign of what?

He was a sign—a proof and actual presentation to them—of *the impartiality and inflexibility of the divine justice*. Prophet though he was, raised to a higher plane of life than common men; admitted to a knowledge of some of the secrets of the divine government of the world; in favour, as might be supposed, in the celestial court—he no sooner swerves and turns from the way of obedience, than God turns upon him the arrestive and vindictive powers of his government. He is pursued, convicted, cast into the deep. It will appear manifest to them that all nature serves God for his just occasions; that the nets of capture are already woven and spread wherever there can be the footsteps

of flight; that storms are brooding in the air, and vengeance sleeping in the sea, for those who choose to awake them. It will be equally manifest that "He is no respecter of persons," since he has not scrupled to condemn his own selected servant in sight of the whole world; to cast a luminous and heaven-looking prophet down through the churning sea into abysmal depths and the vileness of a fish's belly. "How then shall we escape?" they think. "The gods of Asshur may keep silence—this God, the great, the living God, will speak. If He chastens his friends, what will He do with his enemies? If failure in duty simply provokes His indignation, what will the continual perpetration of wrong do? If He has a prison at the roots of the mountains for a fleeing servant, what has He in the magazines of air or earth for a wicked city?" So he was "a sign" unto them of divine justice.

He was also, however, a sign of *divine mercy*. For he is alive! "He has been delivered. From sea, and grave, and death, and hell, he has come forth. He cried from the depths and was heard. He is not merely in life—he is in

favour, once more, with God. He has been in the temple. He has paid his vows, and the incense of his sacrifice has gone up with acceptance from the altar. His disaster spoke of justice, his deliverance speaks of mercy. And his coming hither surely has a merciful, as well as a monitory, aspect to us. In his 'cry,' indeed, there is no word or syllable of mercy. But why *should* he cry at all if mercy be indeed clean gone? God could have destroyed us without the warning. The warning is like the opening of a door of mercy. The further fact that he who gives the warning has been himself saved, seems to open that door a little wider. It is not much. 'Who can tell?' is the length and breadth of it. But that is better than the darkness of despair. Let us take this man as 'a sign' of mercy, and repent, and pray, and press towards the gate, and see if it will not open a little wider." So the prophet was "a sign" unto them.

Now let us see how quickly and how effectually they made interpretation of all this, and application of it to themselves. We have already gone through the city with the prophet,

keeping our eye *upon him*. Let us now go through again, and watch the effects which are produced *on the city* by his progress. They are such as no one man ever produced in a single day, either before or since. They are such as could flow *only* from the presence and action of the mighty power, and the still mightier grace of God. He is like a flame of fire kindled in the heart of the forest—he sets the whole city in a blaze. You will see that the narrative has a certain fervour and rapidity in it, corresponding to the anxieties and excitements of the scene. “They believed God, they proclaimed a fast, they put on sackcloth, they sat in ashes.” We read (verse 5), that “*the people*” did all this spontaneously, and then in the following verses that the king “decreed” that it should be done. Both are true, and probably occurred just in that order in which we have the relation of them. The government seems to have been not an absolute despotism but a limited monarchy, for the king *and his nobles* joined in the decree. As when Daniel was put into the lion’s den, the king sealed the stone that closed it “with his own signet, and

with the signet of his lords." But God's prophet is not sent to the king or nobles on this occasion. He speaks to the people. On them the first impressions are produced. Through them they are propagated upwards, to the higher classes. The king is probably among the very last who is reached. "Not many wise, not many noble, are called." When they *are* called, it is apt to be late. The messenger knocks first at the humbler doors. The message first kindles in the humbler hearts. Poor men and humble men do not think what immense compensation they thus have for poverty, straits, and toils, in being kept, as to natural condition, so much nearer God and the powers of his gracious kingdom. God's messengers reach them easily. His spirit works quickly, and as in kindlier soil. Rich men, and those standing on the elevated places of society, do not think how the earthly advancement is apt to be counterbalanced by the spiritual disadvantage. It is a startling thought for all who are *rising*, in place, profession, popularity, that by *that* movement they are not coming nearer God and the everlasting altitudes, but rather, according to

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natural law and probability, going so much farther away from him. God will have to bend farther down to reach them. He will have to take another step to find them. The first appearance of God in this world was *in a garden* to *workers* there. When the Saviour of the world was born, the first who looked on him were shepherds from the fields, and humble people in a village street. When angels have come, they have spoken to a patriarch in the door of his tent—to a distressed husbandman threshing his wheat under an oak—to persecuted apostles in prison. But can you think of an instance of divine or angelic visitation to a king on his throne, to a noble in his palace, to a rich man surrounded with splendours, to a sage amid his books? An angel once came to a seer who was trusting to his wisdom and trying hard to outwit omniscience, but it was with a drawn sword, and the far-seeing prophet or necromancer owed his salvation to an ass. An angel *once* came to a king on a throne, but it was to smite him with worms so that he gave up the ghost.

How few of the great religious movements

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have come down from the upper to the lower circles! They have nearly all begun in the lower and gone up to the higher classes. The Countess of Huntingdon, Lady Glenorchy, and a few others of noble blood shine the more brightly because they are so much alone. Lady Glenorchy used to say that she owed her salvation almost to the letter M. If it had been "not *any* wise, not *any* noble," she could not have been saved. There is no *law* restricting salvation to any outward condition or state. But there is, apparently, a permanent historical fact of a very admonitory kind, in the light of which we may be thankful that we are no higher than we are. Up yonder the footing is more slippery. The lights are dazzling to the eyes. Those are not the splendours that fall from heaven's gates. Down here, or even lower than where we stand, there is greater safety: "He giveth grace to the humble." "*The people* of Nineveh believed God" before the king and the nobles did. *The people* of London, or of any other city, are, in ordinary circumstances, nearer divine favour and grace

than those in the upper ranks, and in the better material condition.

The effects of the appeal to this people of Nineveh, as we have said, were wonderful. A sense of God soon filled the city. It was shed from group to group, from street to street. It was awful, painful at the first, like "a resurrection of condemnation" to their spirits. It turned them away from their own gods as effectually as the sailors in the ship were turned from theirs; for this man Jonah seems to have a stupendous power, whether he serves or whether he sins, of making men conscious of the living God. "They believed God."

Possessed of *that* faith, all that follows is natural and inevitable. To believe in Him in the state in which they were, was not to rise at once into gladness, but rather to sink into shame and distress. His great life realised, for the moment seemed to quench and almost annihilate their own. They were bowed before the infinite majesty and blinded by the purity on which they had as yet no eyes to look. They stood aghast at the sudden apparition of their own sin, and fled, shivering, into sackcloth and

ashes, if haply they might find mercy. "Who can tell if God will turn and repent?"

Alarm and sorrow are thus filling the city, and the king and his courtiers as yet know nothing of it. It would ill beseem the monarch's greatness to have messages sent to him concerning every vagrant who enters the gates of the city, or concerning every visionary who cries in the streets! Even when masses of the people are filled with fear and grief, the tale of their suffering is not fit for kingly ears! If the city were resounding with joy, if new victories were being celebrated, and bands of fresh captives led in chains to toil and slavery—these things might have rehearsal in the palace, for they would be regarded as adding fresh lustre to the monarch's reign. But—keep sorrow and terror away. Let them break their dark waves on the shores of the outer world. Let them roll along the common streets. Let them fill the houses of the poor. Fill the palace with glory! Let the monarch be throned in peace!

So he sits, as monarchs have often sat, in a foolish security. The floods have come, and

are rolling around his house, but he knoweth it not. The fire is kindled in every part of the city, and the lapping flames will soon play upon castle-turret and palace-wall. What a mockery human power sometimes becomes! This king of Assyria sits on his throne (literally, for apparently it is a day of some state ceremonial), wearing the crown probably, and holding the sceptre—certainly clad in “the imperial purple,” the magnificent kingly “robe,” which was worn on high occasions. So the great monarch sits—ruling? Nay, nay. The glory even now has passed from him. He is but an empty show—the mere image of a king. His throne is sand. His robe is tinsel. His sceptre, a reed shaken with the wind. The monarch is in the street in a rude hairy garment, and although he has not a friend in the city, nor a house to shelter him, he sways the hearts of the people as the trees of the wood are bent with the wind.

Now at last comes the messenger to the king. One and another of “the nobles” have heard of the things that are going on—how the excitement is spreading—how the people cry,

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“A Fast! a Fast! proclaim a Fast!”—how they have begun to appear, wearing the sackcloth, and sprinkled with the ashes. They hold hurried discourse among themselves. “Is it but a thing of a day? Will it be all gone to-morrow? Shall we tell the king?” Even while they speak the air seems to grow darker about them; and in some mysterious way they too are seized with penitential pangs. He *must* be told. He must be told *all*.

“Word came to the king;” the meaning is that the *whole matter*, as far as it had yet gone, was related to him. The effect on him too is instantaneous, for the whole air is full of a spiritual electricity. As soon as the great dimensions and dark features of the case are revealed to him he does not hesitate. He feels in a moment that this is no time for state ceremonial and gaudy show—for song, and feast, and revelry. No time even for repose and quietness. It is a time for *instant* action, if haply anything may yet be done to avert the dreaded calamity.

There is probably but a brief consultation of

the king with the nobles. The case is plain to them all. The wave of fear sweeps over them just as if they were common men. In that very fear there is the breeding and stirring of a higher faith. They too "believe in God." The happy decision is, "The people are right. We share their alarm; we must join them in humiliation, and put out a decree immediately to that effect."

"Take the robe from me, the glitter of which is painful to my sight. Lay by the sceptre; and this crown, which perhaps I may never wear again. Darken the rooms, hush the babbling tongue, and soften the step of the busy foot. Bring the sackcloth. Sprinkle me with the ashes!"

How beautiful seems the monarch in this swift and happy descent! Beautiful almost as the feet of those who are passing along the mountains to publish salvation. In this humbling of himself he is going to exaltation. In lowliness he rises. By abdication he reigns. By fasting he prepares a feast of joy for other days. By bending low in a sinner's sorrow he secures for himself and for his people God's

rich and free forgiveness. Never in any battle has he made a conquest like this. By timely humiliation and repentance he reverses the currents of providence—he changes the very mind of God!

Now the proclamation is out. The clerks and scribes would not be long in writing out copies enough for the criers. Red tape would not bind them *that* day. Now, if ever, the king's business requireth haste. It receives a singular impulsion of urgency by the king's *own cry*. The narrative imports, literally, that the monarch himself “cried, and said, Let proclamation be made.” Either before he went down into the dust, or perhaps while sitting there, again and again “he cried”—as though answering the prophet many miles away. And the messengers go quickly through the streets, each with his cry. It is a city of cries. The prophet's voice has a thousand echoes before the day's journey is done. And what echoes! Not of wild alarm simply; not of black despair; not of cursing and defiance—although such echoes would not have surprised or disappointed *him*; but echoes of godly fear, and

living faith, and unfeigned repentance, as far as it went.

The proclamation, which was the faithful exposition of the true sentiments both of king and people, bears prominently certain marks which we may briefly note.

We cannot fail to be struck with the *comprehensiveness* of it. The very first words of it are these—"Let neither man nor beast." The prohibition is over every human being, and over all the animals possessed by and related to man. This world is one system. Each is related to all, and all to each. In the creation the animals had their "day." Ever since, they have waited on man, willingly or unwillingly, receiving kindness or cruelty at his hands. The horse has given him its fleetness, the ox its strength, the ass its patience. The sheep have clothed him with their wool. The birds have sung to him in their cages. It is a part of man's state and glory to own, to feed, to display the inferior creatures. Therefore, when the master is in the house of mourning, the creature servants must mourn with him. "Keep corn from the horse's manger, and fodder from the beast's

stall ; let the sheep bleat for the pasture, and the dogs howl for hunger—as if helping *our* ‘cry ;’ let the sleekness of the stud be hidden by the sackcloth, and let the ashes be sprinkled on all the glory.”

*Fasting was the first part of the decree.* Fasting has been a religious observance in the East as far back as history takes us. It has always been associated with humiliation and affliction. The purpose of it, as stated in some parts of Scripture, was “to afflict the soul ;” reaching it through the body, to reduce it to weakness, lowliness, and susceptibility. The idea was and is, by abstaining from food to raise the soul into a more abstracted and refined condition, in which it might more easily apprehend divine things and come into communion with God. The efficacy of it will be more or less, according to climate, individual temperament, and other circumstances. Our fathers used to fast. But I imagine the practice is now almost universally discontinued. We are really hardly in a condition to say whether it is a beneficial ordinance or not. For I should think there are very few of the

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present generation who have ever tried it *as a religious exercise*. You have fasted from sickness, from fancy, from want of appetite; but not many of you, I imagine, from a serious desire and purpose to accomplish a more unfeigned repentance for sin, and to come nearer to God. Some have tried it and made little of it. It has only relaxed and enfeebled body and soul, without any conscious attainment of good. But it might be well for others to try the experiment—if not that of entire fasting, yet that of a very great abstinence for a season. When there is a lusty strength in the constitution; when force, and fire, and passion are abundant; it might be well occasionally to assuage and modify the fulness of life by slackening the sources of supply. The only permanent safety, however, is a habit of full daily consecration of all the power that is generated in the constitution. Repression by mortification will not do. Denial by fasting will not do. Even diversion into miscellaneous activities will not do so well as the full consecration of the full strength, just as it is bred. “Every creature of God is good, and nothing

to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving." That is the rule. Each must judge when the exception arises in his own case.

In the case before us surely, if ever, fasting is most appropriate. With many of them, during the first days at least, it would be almost involuntary. Fear would take appetite away. The habit was to fast each day until the evening, and then to eat sparingly. The fasting seems to have been continued through the forty days. One sympathises approvingly with the men, but pities the poor animals looking round in vain for the accustomed fodder, and lowing at their stalls.

The covering with sackcloth was the next part of the decree. In its nature and purpose it is closely allied to fasting—with this difference, that *it is visible*. One may fast and "be of a cheerful countenance," so that no one but God shall know. But if a man wears sackcloth all who see him must know that he is in the valley of humiliation. The sackcloth was made of coarse hair, and was very irritating to the body. Think of pampered and proud men, delicate and haughty women, throwing aside their

gorgeous clothing—stripping horse, and mule, and dromedary of their glittering caparisons, and clothing themselves and their animals with the black sackcloth! They were intensely in earnest. To wear the literal sackcloth now would be an odd, a meaningless, and probably a useless peculiarity. But it might be well for those who love gaiety, and have the means of getting what they love; who, like the tropical birds, wear the bright colours; who run even with fashion herself, sometimes winning the race—to come down for a while, or for ever, from the superlative degree to the plane of a comparative moderation.

There is a sackcloth of sorrow still worn, and it is touching enough to see the *poor* widow and the fatherless children clad with it. The plain black, when worn and soiled, looks not unlike the Eastern garment of penitence and grief.

The next mark on this decree is not a visible, but an *audible* one. *Each is to utter a mighty cry.* “Let man and beast cry mightily unto God”—man in his distress, the beast in his hunger. The Eastern nations have always

been addicted to vocal demonstration for the expression of the stronger emotions. Citizens welcomed conquerors home with shouts; women wailed at funerals; prophets came crying among the people to whom they were sent; even Jesus, "on the last day, that great day of the feast, *stood and cried.*" It is then simply natural to the men, and proper to the occasion, that they should now "cry mightily unto God." The "might," no doubt, is to be in *the desire* more than in the mere voice that utters it. But yet the cry, 'as well as the prayer which it carries, is to be mighty. What a city it must have been with a cry ascending from every house!—coming even from children's mouths! wailing out of sick-beds! breaking from the lips of affrighted men as they went gliding, like ghosts, along the street! The *substance* of the cry is no doubt recorded in the 9th verse: "Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?" Or it may have been put in the form of direct invocation. At any rate we may be sure it was short, plain, passionate. The strongest desires and intensest moods of the

soul are never more appropriately expressed than in a simple cry—"Lord, have mercy upon us! Christ have mercy upon us!"

But by far the most striking and satisfactory characteristic of this proclamation is the last—that which requires from every man *a personal and practical reformation*—"Let them turn every one from his evil way." The other marks are all outward, and in themselves comparatively formal. The fast, the sackcloth, the ashes, the cry—these are all possible to hypocrites, or to men who are simply carried away by natural terror. But here is a firmer test and clearer proof of sincerity. "Let a man turn from his evil way;" and not merely in general, by some supposed comprehensive renunciation of sin, but most particularly from *the* sin which has brought the wrath and the danger. "Let them turn from *the violence* that is in their hands." That was the particular wickedness that had gone up to God, and now, in seeking mercy and favour at His hands, *that* is the sin which, before all sin, must be renounced. The proclamation says in effect: "When you fast, undo the heavy burdens; when you put

on the sackcloth, strike off the slave's chain and open the prisoner's door ; when you cry to God, cease to do wrong to men, and, as far as possible, repair the injuries done already." There can be no repentance without reformation. Repentance is a change of mind ; reformation is a corresponding change of life. To dissociate them is to encourage sanctimony and hypocrisy. It is to take all the robustness and honesty from religion, leaving nothing but wavering sentiments and moods as fitful as April weather. A puling, piteous thing is that religion (so called) whose chief elements are sighs, and groans, and tears, and personal humiliation. These are beautiful when they grow into self-denial, obedience, habits of daily service. Alone and of themselves they are worse than worthless. Our sin puts us in the wrong—miserably, wickedly in the wrong. God by His grace gives us the means of coming altogether right. In his just authority he requires this at our hands ; and unless we are really coming right by an honest endeavour to meet every point of practical duty, it is as clear as the Scriptures can make it, and as anything can be in reason,

that we are not receiving the saving grace of the gospel. Jesus saves his people from their sins. He came to save us by turning every one of us away from his iniquities.

Such was this proclamation. We can hardly say, I fear, that it was perfect, that it met all the necessities of the case. It was a shield against the one overhanging danger. If it had struck still deeper notes, and if those had been responded to by the people, there would have been something more than a present deliverance : the city might have been saved in perpetuity. But, *so far as it goes*, it meets the case. It is accepted by the people, and faithfully observed by them through the forty days. It is approved by Him who weigheth actions and knoweth hearts, for "God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil that he had said that he would do unto them, and he did it not."

GOD REPENTING.



IN the last verse of the third chapter we come upon a difficulty which has exercised the faith and called forth the ingenuity—the ingenuity more than ingenuousness—of interpreters. The difficulty is this:—There are certain passages of holy Scripture which assert in the strongest way that God *cannot* repent, and that he never does. There are certain other passages (of which this last verse of the third chapter is one) which assert, just as strongly, and with as little qualification, that he *can* repent, and that, in fact, he has often done so. Here is some apparent contradiction. But of course it is only formal and not substantial. The explanation and harmony of the passages will be reached by just giving a faithful and full exposition of *each*

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passage as it stands. It is said, *e.g.* (Num. xxiii. 9), that "God is not a man that he should lie; neither the son of man that he should repent. Hath he said it, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?" Balak is here informed that it is vain to seek by cunning the reversal of a divine word, purpose, or plan. God is not like fickle and changeable man. He keeps his word, He carries his plans into execution. As Job saith (Job xxiii. 13): "He is in one mind, and who can turn him? and what his soul desireth, even that he doeth." As the Lord himself saith by his prophet (Mal. iii. 6): "I am Jehovah, I change not." All this is plain. His unchangeable *nature* is the ground, necessity, and proof of unchangeable practice. He cannot fail through weakness—He is omnipotent. Nor by mistake—He is all-seeing. He cannot be bribed; for He is incorruptible. He cannot take a better plan, for his plan is perfect. "The gifts and calling of God are without repentance" (Rom. xi. 29).

And now we meet the other class of passages, of which the one before us is a represen-

tative, which tells us that God can and does repent. There is a passage in the book of Jeremiah which we ought to connect closely with the present (Jer. xviii. 7): "At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it; if that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them." That is the abstract principle of the divine government, and here in Nineveh is the faithful application of it in the individual case. If the nation shall turn, God will turn. If the city shall repent, God will repent. But is not this inconsistent with the former assertions? No. Not as we interpret both. In the sense meant in the former passages God *can not* repent. In the sense meant here, he not only can and does, but this of necessity, in order to be and continue what he is. It would hardly be too much to say that He changes, because he is unchangeable; that He repents, because with him "there is no variableness or shadow of turning."

The ordinary method of interpretation ap-

plied to such texts as this is, to my mind, eminently unsatisfactory, and in fact involves erroneous and pernicious views of the divine nature. We are told that the passages which speak of God's repentance are simply forms of speech to indicate a change of outward procedure, but do not imply any change whatever of interior feeling. This declaration is an anthropomorphic, or anthropopathic expression, meaning nothing concerning God Himself as to thought, feeling, emotion—telling us only that the great chariot of providence is rolling *that* way, when we thought it was coming *this* way; that his will—secret once, now revealed—means *that*, and not *this*, as some of his words had led us to suppose. This theory, in order to exempt God from those imperfections which are connected with the exercise of the affections and passions among men, virtually denies to Him the possession of any affections at all. It makes Him simply a being of pure thought and unrelenting will. From eternity He formed a plan, complete in all its parts, and, amid the revolutions of time, He is but watching and ruling it on to its final form. He never has a thought, He

never has a feeling, that He had not from all eternity. He sits, far on high, on the invisible throne—calm, passionless, apart. Birth and death of immortal being all over the world; sin and sorrow, strife, and agony, and cry, never move him, never touch him! These are but waves of creature-life; they make no ripple, even on the rim, of the ocean of divine tranquillity. These are but petty storms of a lower world, which never cast the shadow of a shade upwards towards the land of eternal lights.

Thus, as you will see, complete escape is made from the supposed difficulties of interpretation. The one class of passages is completely extinguished in order that the other may live. But do you not see what a stupendous inroad is thus made on the fulness and beauty of “the glorious gospel of the blessed God?” On this principle what becomes of those priceless declarations of holy Scripture which tell us of the divine love—of mercy, compassion, sympathy, solicitude, fatherly pity, and motherly care? This theory draws the life and soul from every one of them. They are mere sounds without corresponding inner sense—fallacious,

misleading expressions ; or, on the most favourable supposition, empty and meaningless. And is this a little matter ? Is it a small thing that God is *not* love ? Can we turn without discomposure to the passages of the Bible which are most full of the divine affections, which are suffused with the glow of God's earnestness, which vibrate and seem almost alive when we read them in simple faith, taking them for true, and say—"Ah, these are but withered leaves. The meaning is quite different. God has neither love nor pity, nor sorrow nor anger. He is perfect, and therefore He cannot feel. He is God, and therefore He can be in nothing like man ?"

When we thus carry out the theory to its fair and logical issues, we all start back from the consequences. No Christian *can* relinquish his soul's faith in the love of God. By reasoning he may relinquish, but by emotion he immediately recovers the property. But, if it be thus allowed, without any damaging qualifications, that "God is love," then it follows irresistibly that He has all the particular emotions which are involved in, or related to, love. He

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has them indeed, without the limitations, admixtures, imperfections, which attach to them in the human being. This is granted on all hands. We must liberate our conception of the divine emotion from error, infirmity, defect. But we must not, we cannot, make it different *in kind* from our conception of human emotion. As we cannot know the divine intelligence but through the medium of our own, so we cannot apprehend the divine emotion in any other way than by making the human emotion the image and figure of it. "The Father of our spirits" puts in the claim of paternity over human *hearts* as well as over human heads. He sees his own image as much (or even more) in the affinities and endeavours of our affections as in the actings of our thought.

Then how can we explain away a passage like this, and say that it means nothing?—That God never *did* repent concerning Nineveh? I cannot. I dare not. I take the words to mean what we naturally understand by them—that God did really repent—*i.e.* changed his mind, which is the meaning of repentance. When He sent the prophet He meant destruc-

tion, just according to the cry ; and when the city was humbled, He changed his mind, put a seal upon the fountains and forces of ruin which were throbbing in readiness to break forth, and waved the destroying angel home. Did He *not* mean to destroy ? Then how can we reconcile the prophet's cry with the divine veracity ? If He was merely holding out an empty threat, "a terror of the Lord," which in fact was no terror at all, but only a cunning expedient to produce a beneficial end, then what threatening has truth in it ? Is there a judgment ? Is there a hell ? Are not pangs of conscience, and penalties of law, and pointings of justice to a future life, *all* baseless and illusory ? If God means to condemn unbelieving and disobedient men for the sin they have done, and for the rejection of his gospel, then He meant to destroy Nineveh.

And if the question is put—"Why, then, was it *not* destroyed ? how can we reconcile the *sparing* of the city with divine veracity, since there is no condition or qualification in the denouncing cry ?"—The answer is, that the condition was involved, *and* understood. The

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possibility of mercy was clearly understood by Jonah, for he was displeased with it. It was understood also by the Ninevites, for they cried for long days and nights, "Who can tell?" If God had made unreserved announcement of destruction, the city *must* have been destroyed, "for he is in one mind, and who can turn him?" "Hath he said it, and shall he not do it?"

"But He *knew* that the city would repent. Why then did He threaten without any expressed reference to this eventuality?" The answer is, that He knew that the city would repent under the shadow of the divine commination. Not otherwise. The commination was uttered because it was deserved, because it suited the moral condition of the people, because it was necessary in the perfect government of God. Also, God foresaw its good effect, and therefore in all truth and sincerity it was put forth. God knows that his believing children will persevere unto the end. Why then does He speak to them as if they might not? as if they might apostatise and draw back unto perdition. The answer is, "Because they might." It is a clear possibility that they might;

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and, very likely, the *realisation* by them of this awful possibility is *one* of the elements which compose and complete the certainty of perseverance unto the end. Some metaphysical objections no doubt lie against this reasoning; but not more than, not so many as, lie against any other theory that may be formed. It has the inestimable advantage of saving the divine veracity and sincerity in all the utterances of the Bible.

Why should it be incredible that God “repents” or changes? Would it not be more incredible if it were asserted that He never does? Would it be to the honour of God if it could be said with truth that He thinks and feels concerning us *in one condition*, exactly as He would if we were in a condition the very opposite? Among men, a good father, a just master, will treat son or servant according to their works and their state. When they wickedly transgress he is grieved and angry. When they repent and reform he is glad and pleased. Such a man is not called fickle and changeable in nature on account of these changing states. Because he has integrity and love in his nature as unchanging principles, therefore, as the ever-

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varying facts and scenes of life arise and pass before him, as the different acts and moral states of men are perceived, there are emotions corresponding with them excited in his mind. And are we to suppose that what constitutes a special perfection in the moral character of a man is an imperfection in God? Surely not. His mind is the one perfect mirror, reflecting, without the least distortion or refraction, every object, act, state, being, in the universe, just as it is. This is the heart and core of what we are now saying—that God morally regards us at any one moment *just as we are*. He does not look on hypothetical beings, whose image and proportions he has written down in his plan, but on the living men, women, children, and cattle, just as they are. Of course he considers our future, and has provided for it all. He sees the germs in us of all that, by his grace, will make that future blossom into eternal beauty. But what we are *now* God regards us as being. If we repent of all sin and grow into all goodness, his thought and feeling will rise with us; and as, repenting, he spared Nineveh, so will he spare us, and we shall live and not die.

## IN THE BOOTH.



LET us now follow the few remaining steps of this history. We go up to Jonah in his booth on the east side of the city. We seem to fancy that it must have been built on elevated ground, from which he could “see what would become of the city” (verse 5).

The chronology of the history is not intended to be always strictly observed in the arrangement and succession of the verses. The prophets wrote freely. We are therefore at liberty to suppose that Jonah built his “booth” long before the expiry of the forty days. He may have begun to build it soon after the one day of terrifying ministry which produced effects so wonderful. No doubt hospitality would be offered to him in the city. He would be free of the king’s palace if he chose to live in

it. But "prophets' chambers" have not often been found "in king's houses." The "soft clothing" suits the king's house. The "rough garment" is better adapted to the cave, the shadow of the juniper-tree, or the booth on the hill-side. Nor was Jonah in a mood of kindness and compliance. He wanted no welcome from them. He was faithful and true, but he was grieved and angry. So he took his way out of the city, and there built a home for himself. I think it is very likely he did it with his own hands. Booth-building was well understood among his people. "Jacob" (Gen. xxxiii. 17), on his way to Canaan from Padan-Aram, "built him an house, and made booths for his cattle; therefore the name of the place is called Succoth." His "house" was probably just a more complete booth than the rest. The whole Jewish nation lived in booths at the Feast of Tabernacles every year. The booth was just a little hut composed of green branches, making no pretensions to the size or dignity of a tent. A man of strength and expertness would soon rear the little structure, and in some way we seem to have the impression that Jonah was

such a man. Apparently he has a great consciousness of power and personal resource. He is dauntless, almost defiant, in his self-reliance. And I think I see him working—as strong men do work when passion is in them, or some great wave of excitement is touching them—driving the stakes into the earth, bending the branches, wattling the twigs, seating himself for a moment under the shadow, looking to the city, thinking of native land and home.

It is interesting to remember how many of the world's great men have been able to work, literally "with both hands earnestly." There is a particular kind of greatness which seems rather, in its development, to exhaust and damage the physical powers. Some great men have had neither hands nor eyes. They have lived in the past, oblivious of the present, in a world of abstraction and imagination, unconscious of the need for a present activity and care. But the greatness that has moved the world, that has stirred the souls of men with divine ideas and moral impulses, has, I imagine, been generally associated with great ocular clearness, with tactual sensibility, with mani-

pulative skill. I question if there was one apostle among the twelve who could *not* do a good day's work. One can do better than Jonah, for he can make a tent; another can drag a net over-full of fishes so skilfully that the net is not broken; another surely knew something of the work of husbandry, if not by settled occupation, yet by occasional personal endeavours, else he could hardly describe to us so feelingly the "*long* patience" of the husbandman in waiting for the precious fruits of the earth. The prophets—don't you see Elijah, tall, strong, fearless; a splendid instance of incarnate capability and human completeness, running before Ahab's chariot, standing on the wild rocks of Horeb, while the wind waves his mantle and plays with his locks? And Elisha at the plough! And Amos dressing his sycamore-trees and keeping his cattle! And Jonah working at his booth beside Nineveh! Work, of every kind, is kingly, if men knew how to do it well. The pride that despises it is beggarly.

Nothing, then, can be laid to the prophet's charge as to the making of the booth. Since he did *not* take up his abode in the city, and

probably shunned all society, it was simply a matter of necessity that he should have a place—a home, however humble—of shelter, and for sleep. It isn't the house that we can find any fault with. It is the spirit and temper of the occupant. If Jonah, in his little booth, were in full sympathy with God, and in brotherly-kindness with man, his leafy shed would be great as a king's palace, sacred as the temple of the Lord. Alas! it is far otherwise.

Here he keeps watch through the forty days. We are not told whether any intimation was made to him, before the expiration of the time, of the intended exercise of divine clemency. Surely there was. But still he waits, thinking that possibly the repentance of the city might be superficial or transient, and that God might possibly yet resume his purpose of judgment and destroy the city. A terrible thing for a prophet to wait for! Happily he waits in vain. Day follows day in peace. Night after night closes quietly in. There is no movement in the earth or air;—no portents of the sky. It becomes clearer each day that “mercy has triumphed over judg-

ment," and that the prophet must return to his own land soon, and tell that Nineveh was *not* destroyed.

So he sat in his booth, dark and moody—plunged into deep distress by the very thing which brought relief and hope to the great city. It is a sad and humiliating picture of a good and great man, lighten it as we will. Yet *not* so sad and dark as has been generally supposed. Let us try now, honestly, to ascertain his real state of mind. No doubt we shall find much to be sorry for, and to blame; but also something to soften the picture in its darker parts, and something too that wears the aspect of grandeur and unusual sublimity.

Take the words as they come. Displeasure : "It displeased Jonah exceedingly." The reasons or causes for the displeasure were manifold. We have referred to them in a former lecture. He was jealous, with a needless jealousy, for the honour of God. His own reputation as a prophet was touched. His country was in danger from this Assyrian power which he had hoped was now to be utterly humbled and

smitten. The course of providence had seemed right to him, although dark, while justice had held the awful scales, and looked at the glittering sword. But now, when mercy—fairer form than justice—had sheathed the sword, and thrown vast forgiveness into the scale to outweigh all terrors and penalties, he sees, with jaundiced eye, the whole course of providence running in a wrong direction. “The times are out of joint.” Perils throng into the womb of the future. Sorrows wait for him and his. Surely the Lord is not taking the best plan!

Very sad is all this on his part; but *not* so very singular. Have *you* never been “displeased” with the course of things? Have you never spoken a murmuring word? Have you never offered an unbelieving prayer? Have you never been depressed in sickness, despondent in failure, hopeless of success? Or, to make the analogy a little closer, have you never tried to mend God’s ways, to rectify his providence, to turn the course of things this way instead of that, after it was manifest that the great ruler had chosen *that* way and not this? Have we, as English people, never looked with an eye far

too sensitive and jealous upon other nations when their prosperity or their proceedings have seemed, even by remote construction, to affect our progress or our supremacy? Blame the prophet, and moralise upon him if you will. But forget not that you are yourself in the same condemnation, and that (with perhaps less occasion than he sometimes) you have been wilful, and "exceedingly displeased."

There is yet a stronger word. The word *anger*: "He was very angry." But we must soften this. In our sense of the word anger, it would show a state of mind very alarming, and even wicked. That any man should presume to be angry with God in a personal conference is hardly conceivable. Such a passion, moreover, would be inconsistent with that feeling of devoutness which still possessed the prophet, and which comes out in the "prayer" of which we have account in the next verse. "Very grieved" would be the proper rendering, according to the view of the best Hebrew scholars—the words expressing the emotion of a burning grief. So David was "displeased" or deeply grieved (2 Sam. vi. 8), when the Lord made a breach upon

Uzzah. This great grief was no doubt from the same causes which produced the displeasure, was in fact the same thing, only in a deeper and more emotional character.

Then came the prayer. "He prayed unto the Lord, and said, *I pray thee, O Lord.*" This devout and reverential tone, you will perceive, is inconsistent with the view which attributes to him thoughtless peevishness and petulance—the wayward temper of a spoiled child. I think this verse shows us that his "displeasure" and "grief" were just such as come to men amid the reverses and thwartings of life. It was the sighing and fretting of a wounded spirit amid "things;" but not the personal and conscious revolt of the soul against the living God. Here, when he comes into God's presence by an act of devotion, he catches in a moment some breathing of reverence; and, although yet far wrong, he takes one step towards rectification and recovery. No place is so healing and wholesome for a sick soul as God's presence. No act is so powerfully and universally curative as an act of prayer. The danger to a man is far more when he grows silent to God,

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and wanders away, distrustfully, than when he comes to God to speak and tell him all, although it may be with the heat of a sinful vehemence in him.

But what is the meaning and spirit of the prayer? Does the suppliant remonstrate with God, and complain to him before his face of his own providence? I cannot think so. So the matter is represented indeed; one commentator, who may speak for others, saying:—"When he designs to pray, his turbulent affections hurry him into unseemly contests and quarrels with God"—(Pool). Not so. I take this contest and quarrel to be rather with himself. It is not, indeed, a penitential prayer. It is by no means a model of evangelical devotion. But it is not presumptuous. It is delicately self-accusatory. It is the moaning of a Jonah—a mourning dove. "I knew it would be so, and that I should probably be unequal to the trial. 'Was not this my saying' long ago? Knowing well, as I did, that 'thou art a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil,'—having seen the manifestations of that mercy among

my own people, and also to others, I judged, and felt in myself, that it *must* overflow even upon the Ninevites. Foreseeing such an issue, I pleaded then for exemption and release. I felt unequal to the personal trials which would come to me as the messenger, out of such a state of things. ‘O Lord, was not this my saying?’ And now all has come to pass just as my instincts foretold, as my fears foresaw. My name, once a terror, may soon become a by-word. I shall be called the false prophet—the idle dreamer. My people, who are also thy people, may yet suffer loss of liberty and country by this great tyrant people, whom thou hast spared. Thine own honour will now be a slighter thing among men. ‘O Lord, was not all this my saying’ before I fled? Consider that my present heat of grief and disappointment is no sudden or intentional rising against thy supreme authority. I have now obeyed thy will in coming hither, in crying against the city—but I cannot prevent the uprising of the old feelings; they have been the feelings of my lifetime; they will probably go with me to my grave. Think of all this, and treat me accordingly.”

Thus, if we interpret rightly, this prayer is not, on the one hand, conceived in the spirit of rebellion, but rather has in it, though faintly, the tone of true submission ; nor, on the other hand, can we say that it is the prayer of evangelical trustfulness and love. How can it be, when God's evangel for the time was so little esteemed ? There is a tendency of interpretation which would constrain us to make clear divisions and strong distinctions. Every prayer, person, state, is either this or that, is either right or wrong. If right, then interpret the whole passage with a view to find rightness in everything. If wrong, then do not expect to find rightness anywhere. But no such strong distinctions are made in the Bible histories. We are taught, indeed, as we are taught in no other book, that there is a radical and everlasting distinction between right and wrong ; and that each man *is* good or evil in his soul, *is* "with" or "against" the Lord. But we are also taught that a good man carries in him, and feels, and speaks, and shows much evil ; and that an evil man may come at any time (as came the Ninevites) quickly from the evil to

the good. We are taught that even saints and prophets may hold in their nature, and speak out in their prayer, both good and evil, mingled in proportions which defy analysis by human thought, and which only the searcher of hearts can know.

And when you reflect, and look in upon the mysteries of your being, and recall the dubious hours which have come and gone, and the states of moral incertitude through which you have passed, and the struggles of your spirit, the issues of which you never knew, and the strange flickerings within you of faith and fear, of love and selfishness, and the perfectly incomprehensible combinations of submission to God, and resentment against his providence, of which you have been conscious *at the same time*—When you think of all this, you may be thankful that we have such a prayer as this on record, which perhaps no man can perfectly interpret, which perhaps Jonah himself did not perfectly understand: “God is greater than the heart and knoweth all things.” He takes us as we are. He lets us pray as we feel, and out of what is strangest, darkest, most distressing in our expe-

rience, He calmly works out for us a higher good. For indeed "He is a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness."

But the Prophet's prayer has a practical purpose in it. It is not merely for the sake of speaking out what is in him that he prays. All his anxieties now tend into one last request—that *he may die*. He prays that he may die. "Therefore, now, O Lord,"—seeing that these things of which I have spoken are so, and that I am as I am,—“take, I beseech thee, my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live.” I have obeyed. I am submissive still. But I am disappointed and full of grief. I know not how I shall return to my country. My life now can be of little use to any one. It can only be a burden to myself. Take it from me. Thou Giver of Life resume the gift, and let thy weary servant have rest.”

There is a certain wild majesty in this desire from which we can hardly withhold the tribute of our admiration. He wanted to die *there*, and *then*. In the booth that he had made, in the environs of that heathen city, far from home and the graves of his fathers, a

stranger in a strange land, to be buried among the heathen dead—unless he has hope that God would take him up in miraculous assumption, body and soul, which is not very likely. Here at least is no craven love of life! no clinging to meat and drink, and mere foothold on the ground! This wounded spirit, realising its immortality the more amid change and adversity, rises disdainfully above the mortal pathway, above the whole round of earthly toil and care—ambition and its reverses, honour and its shadows, joy and its close attendant grief—beats its wings in the higher air, and asks to be liberated for the last flight, up into immortality and heaven. Judging by the natural standard, this is something to admire, something to strive for and seek in itself, although not as associated with the motives that led Jonah to seek it. Hezekiah “wept sore” when the message came to him, “Thou shalt die and not live.” Jonah here prays, “Let me die—of life I have had enough. Life is nothing to me without its uses!” The prophet’s attitude is nobler than the king’s.

We must not, however, disguise the fact

that this prayer shows weakness as well as strength. Even an *unusual* weakness, although (as we shall presently see) a weakness to which great natures with peculiar temperament, or in rare circumstances, are much exposed. There is in it, you would say, after all, *something* of a child's waywardness. "Things have gone all awry, and nothing can ever be right again. Let me get away from such a disjointed world."

Elijah had offered the same prayer nearly a hundred years before, and for much the same reasons. He was disappointed and grieved in his best affections. His patriotism was wounded. He saw wickedness in high places—on the throne itself; a universal degeneracy among the people; ruin brooding over the state. His prophetic mission seemed a failure. His life, to himself, seemed to be at its proper end. He had that yearning which sometimes comes to good men at the close of life, and sometimes too in its troubles and pauses, to join the assembly of "the fathers." Thus, wearied in body and fainting in spirit, he "sat down under a juniper-tree in the wilderness; and he requested for himself that he might die; and

said it is enough. Now, O Lord, take away my life ; for I am not better than my fathers."

We can hardly doubt that Jonah thought of Elijah in offering the selfsame prayer, and that, in his own mind, he justified the presentation of it by the force of so great an example. Thus "the evil that men do," even in their prayers, "lives after them." Thus one man connects himself in his speech and action with another, who perhaps is not yet born." If Elijah had "endured" in the wilderness of Beer-sheba, Jonah might have held on without fainting in the suburb of Nineveh. If the prayer for death had not been offered under the juniper-tree, it might never have been offered under the booth. Great men, when they err, are great tempters. A prophet can beguile a prophet. A cry from a desponding spirit, uttered in the lone wilderness, can sustain itself in the air for a century, and then call out its echo from another desponding soul many hundreds of miles away. "We are fearfully and wonderfully made." We inherit the thoughts and passions, the virtues and infirmities, of our forefathers. We transmit our own to our children.

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We cannot live in seclusion if we are living to any purpose. Space and time refuse to keep our chief secrets. We are speaking in our whispers, we are speaking in our prayers, to the third and fourth generation. Birds of the air will carry the chief voices of our life, and that which hath wings shall tell the matter. To live by faith, and hold on our way strongly, notwithstanding seeming reverse and failure, in spite of depression and weariness, is to “sow” courage and “light” for the righteous of the coming time. To be “of little faith,” to sink under each new discouragement as it comes, to allow the mood of the moment to push away from the helm the right principle for the time, to set our speech in vain sighs, to end our labour before the day is done, and before the work is done that we can do, to say we are useless before God has done with us—all this is, more or less, to enfeeble, hinder, damage those who come after us. We may not will it so, but it will be so. We may not see the connection, but God’s laws go on with or without our observance. “For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself.” Whether we live, therefore,

or die, let us be wholly the Lord's. By adopting the very simple, although also the very grand and comprehensive principle of entire loyalty to HIM, we shall put ourselves in just relations, in beneficent and best relations, with all others, and our life will be a clear, sweet note in the harmony of the ages.

## THE GOURD.



**T**HEN said the Lord, doest thou well to be angry? The gentleness of this inquiry is truly surprising in the circumstances. A man in a vehement heat is asking an awful thing—that his own life shall come to an end. He is asking this, not because he is suffering intense bodily pain, or because he is threatened with death by his enemies, but because a condemned city is yet to live, and because God's plan is going to be widely different from his servant's expectations. Surely God will answer him with thunder! He will draw aside the veil for a moment and show him, not the felicities, but the terrors of that world to gain which he is so thoughtlessly importunate. Nay, he comes as "the God of all peace." He approaches the grieved, hot spirit

of His servant as' comes the cool breeze of the evening over the panting, heated earth. "Doest thou well to be angry?"

There is here no condemnation of anger or grief as such. The organic emotion is quite legitimate. "Be ye angry, and sin not." It is, happily, impossible for noble and pure spirits to dwell in a world so full of sin as this, *without* anger. "God is angry with the wicked," and, morally, men ought to be as God. If Jonah's feeling now were akin to that of David when he said, "I beheld the transgressors and was grieved," there would be nothing in it worthy of blame. The blame so gently hinted here is not against grief or anger considered as a natural feeling of the mind; nor against the vehemency of the emotion, for in its very nature it is a vehement thing; but against the *occasions* and *causes* from which it springs, and therefore against its *quality*. It is not excited by the sight of evil, like the anger of God. It is not a holy impatience and indignancy of spirit with wickedness and wicked men; or, if something of this nature be in it, it is only in small proportion to other and more mixed

elements. It is grief provoked by a notable act of divine clemency ! It is anger excited by a majestic, but unexpected, turning of the great providence of God ! It is the heat of a disordered patriotism ! It is the cry of wounded self-regard. Therefore wrong. Therefore reprehended. But how gently ! “Doest thou well to be angry ?” Is not this, too, all the reproof we receive oftentimes during our moments of vehemency and our moods of impatience ? While we strive angrily, God waits. When we sink down despairingly, he but hints to us, in some indirect and silent way, the grievousness of our mistake, the causelessness of our folly and sin. By some new turn of affairs, by the coming of a friend, by the brightness of a morning, by sliding into our life some unexpected help, quick as the upspringing of the gourd over Jonah’s head, he seems to say to us, “Doest thou well to be angry ?”

What *was* this “gourd” which sprang up so quickly, making so pleasant a shade ? Was it the English gourd or cucumber which came creeping rapidly over Jonah’s booth, twining its tendrils, and shedding its fresh green among

the withering leaves? Or was it the ivy, stronger still in fibre, in grip more tenacious, more abundant in leafage, of deeper and more refreshing green? Or was it the palm-christ, a loftier and more independent plant, but still better adapted than either of the others for the end it was designed to serve? All but certainly it was the palm-christ; so called because it is a five-leaved plant, one leaf of which outspread resembles a man's hand. It was thought to represent the hand of Christ. This plant is indigenous in nearly all the eastern countries. It grows to the height of eight, ten, twelve feet. It has but one leaf for a branch, but the branches are numerous and the leaves are broad. Branch rising above branch, nothing could be better adapted for making a screen and casting a relieving shadow.

The growth and disappearance of this gourd might, perhaps, without any very manifest violation of the laws of language, or of the probabilities of the case, be explained on natural principles. It was a quickly-growing plant, which sprang up during the forty days, and was ready with its shade for the Prophet's time of

need. By a poetic figure it is called in the 10th verse "the son of the night." That, however, might simply mean that it arose and perished with very great rapidity. I say it is legitimate to give such an exposition of the passage if it is conscientiously entertained. But the ordinary explanation is greatly to be preferred, as taking the language in its most natural sense, and as agreeing best with the whole character of the book.

The Lord "*prepared*" this plant, as the "wind" had been "prepared" for the storm, as the "great fish" was "prepared" to keep the Prophet. Here, again, however, we see God careful, as it were, to honour his ordinary laws and agencies, *while* working above and beyond them. There was nothing miraculous in the appearance of such a plant in such a place. They were common; and many a fainting traveller blessed their shade. To this day they grow in abundance around the Tigris. They will grow anywhere, amid stones and rubbish; out of a dry dusty soil. Nor was there anything miraculous in *a very rapid* growth. The growth of the plant is always rapid. The miracle, apparently, lies simply in *the hastening*

of the natural process. In one night God quickened that seed, or root, which lay behind the booth unknown to the builder of it, built up that hollow stem, radiated the branches by the accelerated vegetative force, spread out the large, smooth, deep-green leaves, shadowed and covered the Prophet with a hundred hands. This is the miracle. It is really as great as if the plant had been utterly unknown, as if an angel had brought the seed from some far-off land, or as if God had created a new seed for the occasion. If God put into the plant a force it had not organically in it, or if He so hastened the action of the organic force that the normal development of weeks was crowded into a single night, this was undoubtedly a miracle. We are not hungry for miracles. But neither are we hungry for natural laws. What we want is the truth, and this seems the truth.

Behold, then, the tall, flourishing, deep-green plant, standing in the morning sun, and the pleased Prophet seated in the alcove of its leaves! The heats of yesterday are forgotten. His grieved and panting spirit has found rest. Life kindles once more with a living interest,

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and the hand that has just been knocking with a horrid importunity at the black gate of death is lifting the cup of life to be quaffed once more with a full enjoyment. He is glad—he “is *exceeding* glad of the gourd.” It is a striking contrast. “*Exceedingly* grieved”—*exceedingly* glad! From the one extreme to the other within a very short time. “It seems almost incredible” say some. On the contrary, it is very credible. It has an aspect of verisimilitude which one writing from fancy would hardly have thought of imparting to it. It is simply a fact in the natural history of the human mind, which I daresay we have all verified often in others, or in ourselves, that the susceptibility of quick and profound depression is the very faculty by which, when the wholesome spirit-gales are blowing, we mount upwards to the heights. It is David who “cries out of the depths”—who is set triumphant “on the rock” and sings. It is Peter who sinks in the waves and cries, “Lord save me”—who stands enraptured on the mountain-top and murmurs, “Lord, it is good to be here.” Jonah, yesterday, was groping along the dim

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way to Hades, leaving life all withered and dead behind him. To-day he is looking out on a sunny world as he sits in his booth overshadowed by the bowery plant. Never despair of a friend, nor of yourself, although immersed in the deepest gloom, or weltering amid the dark waves of spiritual sorrow. Nor, on the other hand, allow yourself to think too confidently of a friend, or of yourself, although, for the time, lifted up "on wings as eagles."

But *why* was he so exceeding glad of the gourd? Partly, no doubt, for the simplest and most obvious reason—because it was an immense physical relief and protection. To be effectually shaded from the burning sun of Assyria would be a blessing to him, which perhaps no one who has had experience only of a latitude and climate like ours could ever understand. But is it not strange that a prophet and a great man should be so susceptible of these external things? No; it is exactly what we should expect of *this* man. He has the simplicity and the susceptibility, the greatness and the weakness of a child. Many great men have been like him in this—rising at times in pure

soul-strength above the whole realm of materialism ; at other times touched and tortured with summer heat and winter cold, with unpleasant sights and nauseous smells, with dark days and thick weather. Elijah's despondency was partly physical, and therefore the angel brought him food. He did not need shade—he had the juniper-tree ; he needed nourishment, and the angel made him eat twice. From these things we may legitimately infer the duty and necessity of looking well to the materialism that is about us, and of judging rightly our own physical conditions, in estimating the health of the soul and seeking spiritual nourishment. God, in preparing that gourd to shadow his servant, seems to tell us that while we are in the body we must care for the body, and seek better states of mind and a higher soul-health by means of the best possible conditions of the physical frame.

This exceeding gladness on account of the gourd, however, could not well be justified on physical grounds alone. A man is very carnal if high mental emotions spring directly and exclusively from sensations. The bodily equa-

bility and comfort are valuable, chiefly as furnishing inlet and scope for the play of the higher affections—as the mild summer air is the nourishing background of floral fragrance and beauty. We can hardly doubt, therefore, that the gourd was *a gift from God* to the prophet, and accepted by him as such. He sat there under His shadow with great delight. If he really did see God in it (and I see not how we are justified in forming a contrary supposition), we can easily understand how the joy would be exceeding great. For I think we are never more caught away in a grateful surprise than when God brings his gifts to us amid our murmurings, or manifestly helps us in some silent and tender ways just after we have been mistrusting or opposing him. We stand in wonder. “Is this the manner of man, O Lord God?” So Jonah might think—“Here have I been despising my own earthly life, grasping it rudely to shake it to its dissolution, and—lo! God, its giver, comes to protect and nourish it, as if it were *to him* a dear and precious thing.” True, this is not said. Indeed, one commentator, who may be regarded as speaking for many

more, says, "I observe that there is no mention made of Jonah's seeing God in it." No. But neither is there any mention of Jonah's *not* seeing God in it until *you* mentioned it, which perhaps you had better not have done. "Charity believeth all things." Criticism believeth nothing. Surely it is hard measure to a good man to make his own silence concerning his goodness the symbol and proof of impiety. Surely it is every way likely that a tree miraculously raised, and quickly formed into a leafy house above the prophet's head, would speak to his heart of the God who had raised and given it. If he was glad of *it*, he would be glad of Him who had raised it up. He would take it as a proof of continuing love, of watchful, patient care.

More still (this not so good). He would probably take it as a divine indication that he had done right in waiting to see what would become of the city. "Here nature, obedient to God, has thrown up a house for me or she hath walled and roofed the one I myself threw up, with the cool whispering leaves of living green. It must be intended that I should stay for a

while. If I am to stay, it must be for an object. What can that object be but the destruction of the city? This repentance may be only superficial and hollow. God may fall back upon his former purpose; or, if not upon the whole purpose, upon a part of it. He may punish if he does not destroy. Then I shall go home justified." So ready are men always with interpretations of Providence to match their desires and dispositions! "Do you not see that Providence favours my design, means me to do it, is throwing up these protections to hold me harmless? If I were fighting *against* Providence it would be a different matter; if I were buffeting the stream, I might fear being overwhelmed. But I am floating *with* the stream. I am going where I am carried!" True. Yet you may not be *sent*. Supreme duty may require you to stem the current to which you are yielding. The *real* voice of Providence may be, as interpreted by Scripture and conscience—"Swim, do not float; resist, do not yield!" Or, again, you may be called and carried by Providence whither you wish to go, but *for objects* the very reverse of those

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which you desire to accomplish. God *did* intend that Jonah should stay for a while on the east side of the city, else he never would have hastened his busy builders in the earth and in the air to ply their task with airy hands and nimble feet through the night watches, and have the structure finished by the morning. He was to stay in the leafy house—not, however, to see the descending fire, the billowy earthquake, the sinking city ; but to see the preservation of the city and the dispersion of all the clouds of danger ; to see the triumphs of divine mercy ; to be taught to value and exercise mercy as he had not yet done. How often is it thus in life. Providence and our inclinations are concurrent. We seem to catch the trade-winds of life ! We set every sail. God is with us. We are “exceeding glad.” Health is in the breeze. The sea has not an angry wave. When lo ! there is a sudden change. The Providence that seemed so simple, is complex ; that seemed so favouring to our wishes, is adverse to them ; that seemed constructed expressly to befriend and shelter us, suddenly hurts and hinders us, fills all the

air with blackness and terror. Ah, my brethren, how pitiable is our case if we are mere hangers-on by the outer providence of God ! If we have no immoveable reliance, no invincible hope ! If we have not found the grand soul-current that never changes, that never stops, but rolls on to eternity like time, like being itself.

A man in trade, not yielding at all to the spirit of speculation, but trusting to others, and guiding his affairs with discretion, is led, is almost compelled, to embark all his resources in a single venture. Then comes a change, and all is lost. What is the man then to say or do ? Is he to say that he misinterpreted Providence ? Certainly not. That cannot be truly said if he made the same interpretation of it which just men usually make in the like circumstances. His venture was open, fair, discreet. God meant him, therefore, to make it, and meant him to lose it, and above all, meant him to be superior to the loss—the better and the richer for the loss.

A family, in the summer-time, goes to the sea-side for health, where one of the children, catching disease from a neighbour's child,

sickens and dies, or falls into the sea by accident and is drowned, and the family comes home in sorrow, with the dead child in the little coffin. Are they in such a case to indulge unavailing regrets? to wish they had gone elsewhere, or never left home at all? Certainly not. They are to suppose that, in as far as they acted discreetly and for the best, they made the right interpretation of Providence. They went where God led them—to the very place which he had selected and fixed for the close of the little pilgrim's journey—to the very place where the angels were waiting to make convoy up the sky for the little conqueror.

A man going to a distant land selects a large and well-built ship, officered and manned as well as ship can be. She is caught in tremendous gales. Her sails are torn to ribbons. Her masts go by the board. Her machinery is but child's play against the giant storm. Deeper and still deeper she sinks in the waves, then plunges to the depths to rise no more, making that moment and those depths the gate of eternity to the hundreds of immortal

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men whom she coffins in her cabins, and takes down to her grave. Are the surviving relatives and friends of such an one to think they did wrong in selecting such a ship? By no means. It is a terrible calamity—a heart-breaking sorrow. But it has come in the providence of God, which, however mysterious sometimes, is always right.*

In short, we should follow the leadings of providence when they concur with the higher leadings of truth and righteousness, and then calmly wait without fear of consequences. If these consequences are such as appearances seemed to promise—well. If not—well. “The foundation of God standeth sure.” “His mercy endureth for ever.” “He will keep that man in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on HIM.” While he who stays his mind on schemes, hopes, circumstances, must move with shifting scenes, and change with changing skies, he will be “exceeding glad” when the gourd is green and high, and when it is withered and gone, he will be downcast and desolate.

* This lecture was delivered just after intelligence had come of the loss of “The London,” and in the hearing of some in my congregation who had been bereaved by that sad and awful loss.

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“He means me to stay,” thought the prophet. Yes. To see the withering of the gourd, to feel the fierce beating of the sun, and to pass once more through a great deep of despondency, and so come at length, as we may hope, to a happier and more merciful temper, to a frame of permanent moderation, and to a higher and fuller knowledge of God’s character and ways.

For one day, only for a day, the gourd flourished, and Jonah was glad: “When the morning rose the *next* day”—just after the dawning, and when the hot sun began to travel up the sky—“a worm,” “prepared” of God, “smote the gourd” on some sensitive and vital part, touched the main roots, or ate its way during the night through the fibres of the stem, and stopped the upward flow of the nourishing juice, and lo! like the fig-tree cursed by our Lord, it withered.

It is impossible to help “moralising,” as some would call it, on the worm and the gourd. They have served the occasions of the preacher well, from Jonah’s time to ours. Who can wonder at this? They are felt universally to be emblems, too faithful, of the swift-coursing,

closely-linked joy and sorrow of this mortal life.

The *fine plant*, leafy green, types so well our comforts, successes, joys.

The *single* day of shade it furnished to the heated prophet, speaks touchingly of the transiency of our pleasures.

The *worm* reminds us that a small and mean creature may be a very formidable enemy.

The *place* of its operation, probably under the soil, shows us how powers and agents, invisible and unknown to us, can touch and smite in secret the springs of outward prosperity.

The *time* when decay began—at the rising of the morning—makes us think mournfully how human helps and comforts often wither at the very season when they are most needed. How often when “the morning” of family life is “rising” are comforts swept away! Ah, how often is there removal of sheltering fatherhood even, or nourishing motherhood, or both!

The *utter loss* of what had given such intense enjoyment warns us not to set our affection passionately upon anything which *can* be utterly lost, but to lift our supreme affection to

things above the sphere of the "worm" and the "moth," beyond the reach of the "rust" and the "thief."

The *divine* "*preparation*" of the destroying insect to feed upon the plant which had been as divinely prepared, to a believing soul, sheds some light amid the darkest mysteries of life, and brings a strong relief and assuagement to us amid the natural fears and doubts of our experience. Destruction is "prepared" by God as well as life; trouble as well as joy. And both are divinely ruled with a view to the education and purification of human souls.

Then came the sun up the sky, hot and fiery, pouring down upon the earth—upon mountain, plain, and city—floods of scorching heat, as well as living light. Even the natives of Assyria, and the seasoned Arabs of the desert, are accustomed to seek the shade during hours in the middle of the day. At such a time nothing less than the excitement of war or the prospect of plunder can tempt them out. The shelter of bush or tree is apt to be insufficient and precarious in the height of summer; men seek "the shadow of a great

rock in the weary land," or the coolness of the cave or house. The heat withers the grass and every slender plant. The gourd *might* have held out for a few days, unsmitten. But with the worm gnawing its vitals, and the sun beating on its leaves, it can but pant and die. As it withers, the Prophet can hear the crackling of the leaves, and he can feel the streams of heat passing through his whole frame, irritating, relaxing, sickening body and soul. Heat in such a climate is so overpowering, and protection from it so great a mercy, that the prophet Isaiah makes such natural relief the figure of spiritual and divine salvation—"Thou hast been a refuge from the storm, *a shadow from the heat.*"

But the heat in itself is not the worst. There is "the vehement east wind," rushing madly, or flowing quietly but not the less oppressively, about the devoted man. If we take the word "vehement" to signify rapid, rushing, boisterous, then it was the tornado, simoom, or "great wind from the wilderness" which smote the four corners of the house where Job's children were, which now came dashing upon this house-

less and homeless man in tumult, and fury, and consuming heat. The root of the word used signifies "to cut." A cutting wind with us is a *cold* wind. But heat and cold in their extremer degrees produce much the same effects on vegetation and on the human frame. The wind from the eastern wilderness is a very cutting wind. It is generated on the vast sandy deserts or plains. The whole air becomes red and delirious; it pants with fierce excitement; and then, at maddening speed, rushes away for relief towards cool valleys and snowy hill-sides. It lifts, as by absorption, the finer particles of sand, and darkens all the air with them. It turns the green of the field to yellow in an hour, strips the bower and the grove of their leafy covering, drinks up the water from the pools, draws it by evaporation even out of the leathern bottles in which travellers try to preserve it, extracts the moisture from the human frame, until the palate is dried up, and the tongue rattles in the mouth, and the feeble knees knock against each other, and life palpitates and trembles in its citadel. When that wind is seen coming, cattle flee for shelter, and

men cast themselves prone to the ground like penitents, that they may not be choked with the whirling sand. If *that* was the “vehement east wind,” we can easily enough imagine how torturing and depressing its effects would be on the Prophet.

But some take vehement here as signifying *silent*. This is the derived sense of the term, but perhaps quite as likely to be the sense intended here. “Silent,” but hot to burning, and withering, and exhausting, and irritating to the last degree. The skin is dry. The mouth is parched ; and although there is no perspiration or moisture, the whole frame seems relaxed almost to melting away.

Now, see how desolate the Prophet is ! The sun is beating on his head. His booth destroyed or useless. His gourd withered—and nothing left to which he can betake himself. He knows no house. No rock or cave is near. He trusted to things which have gone from him like shadows and dreams ; and his affliction now is far deeper than if he had never had them. To suffer hardship and privation, with but little change or intermission, is doubtless an unhappy lot. But

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to have, enjoy, and then lose, is a deeper misery—unless higher thoughts and things come in as correctives and consolations. Alas, our prophet has none! He has a desponding soul within a fainting body. His hopes have withered with his gourd. The gleam of light which touched his country while the plant flourished, is swallowed up of darkness, now that it is dead. Nineveh is spared—Israel is doomed. There is no possible future now worth desiring, worth living for—"he wished in himself to die, and said, It is better for me to die than to live."

"He wished in himself to die." The meaning is, that he *prayed for death*. He was not indulging a reckless and impious contempt of life. He was by no means in the mood of one who would cast it away, utterly regardless of the consequences. In his judgment, what judgment was left to him, he was convinced that it would be *better* to die than live, and therefore he prayed that he might die. Let us do him justice, once more, before we leave him—we shall soon part from him now. This is not open murmuring against the will of God. It is not asking the reversal of anything that has been

done. There is even a kind of gloomy submission in it—"Do as Thou wilt, only let me away. Scourge Thy people, and spare their enemies, if it be best, but take me home to my fathers, that I may not see it." In short, he fell once more into the state of mind from which God, in mercy, had delivered him by the gourd; only now he is more *deeply* in the state than formerly. This is just what we might look for, since he came into it with his *will* and *judgment*. We are always—all men are—falling into former states, moods, habits, ways. This is nature. Men must be themselves, they cannot be other men. Even while travelling upwards they must look to be caught sometimes in "the courses" out of which they are only rising as they can. With the memories of other days come, almost insensibly, the inclinations. When circumstances repeat themselves, the mental states and feelings once associated with them are apt to do the same. But observe, when men are gracious, and growing more so, the lapses into evil and defective states and ways are not greater and deeper, but rather less and slighter. They lay aside their "weights" and "besetting sins" by degrees. They put off

the old man as one stripping himself of his garments, piece after piece. They “learn,” but slowly, “in whatsoever state they are, therewith to be content.” They “humble themselves under the mighty hand of God” only after many an admonitory touch of that hand. They grow in grace as the corn grows in the field, or the flowers along the garden-walk—not by a rush and leap, but gently, and invisibly except to the sight of comparison and the vision of days. But they *do* grow. The stalk is not shorter to-day than yesterday. The flower-colours are not fainter. Therefore when you see a man plunging, or sliding, as Jonah seems to do here, a little more deeply into a former evil state—although it may not be a wicked state—it is not a good sign. The movement is ominous, and may be full of peril. A man ought not to be weaker, but stronger, as he approaches the final “strength.” He ought not to be more but less despondent as he nears the land of lights. One who knows that he has been led and oftentimes delivered of God—led “like the blind by a way which he knew not”—surely should have, and should feel that he has, a strengthening trust in his Almighty Father, and in the ulti-

mate outcome and issue of that providence which He makes and rules. The "booth" may fall—all the work of a man's hand may come to ruin before his eyes. The "gourd" may wither—all that God has done for him may seem to be countermanded and reversed. But his "foundations" are not touched. His "portion" is for ever. All that is but as the hurrying skiff of cloud and rain, which for a little darkens the landscape. It will pass. The light will shine on every field, and not a footbreadth of the land will be gone. God is the portion of the good—His possessions, resources, everlasting love. Having Him, "we have all, and abound." It is better to live than to die. Life is his gift—let us make it his glory. Since Jonah fails us for a moment, let us take our key-note, and indeed our whole song, from another prophet—"Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation."

SELAH.



IF the divine gentleness was conspicuous and beautiful in the treatment of the prophet in his first heat and unreason, when he wilfully sank himself in a sea of despondency, it is certainly still more serenely and surprisingly beautiful appearing here again: "Doest thou well to be angry?" God shows us, by his own example, how good it is, and how easy, to be calm, to be patient, to forgive.

This is the more wonderful, because there *seems* to be more sin, and not less, in his servant than formerly, more self-will, and more resistance to divine will. Jonah is in the same

state as formerly, but, as we have already said, he is more *deeply* in it than before. Formerly God's question seems to have shamed—at any rate, it silenced him. Whatever he thought, he *said* nothing. “He was dumb with silence; he held his peace even from good; his ‘sorrow was stirred,’ and his ‘heart was hot in him,’ but he spake not with his tongue.” Now, he speaks, to defend his state, to justify his excessive grief, and to enforce the audacious desire to reach, uncalled, the end of his life—“I *do* well to be angry, even unto death.”

Yet it is not so clear that we ought to consider the “latter state” much worse than the first.” These modifying considerations should be borne in mind: First, that silence *may* be almost as sinful as speech; although it must be granted that, generally, it is more sinful *to speak* what is wrong than only to think or feel it. The unbelieving, or untrue, or unholy word *spoken*, is sometimes the breaking of a great barrier. It is very solemn, it is startling to think how the utterance of a few intelligible sounds, a momentary vocal vibration of the air, may be the very crisis of a soul's history; may

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be the removal of all the outward hindrance that exists to a downward and desperate career. So true is it that "by *our words* we shall be justified, and by our words we shall be condemned." Still, there are cases in which the speaking of evil is scarcely worse than thinking or feeling it; as, *e.g.* where there is a mistaken but yet *honest* judgment of things, where the evil, therefore, is the result of unconscious prejudice. As a general rule, what is conscientiously held or felt had better be expressed. If it is right, the word will help the thought. If it is wrong, the interior honesty, at least, is preserved, and the mind left the more open for the correcting truth and the guiding spirit of God. How far Jonah had conscious honesty and real conviction to justify his bold speaking, God only knoweth. We certainly, in attempting to judge the two states—and this only that we may correct and improve our own—ought to make full allowance for all the honest conviction that lies in the phrase, "*It is better to die than to live.*" Secondly, we cannot but observe that God expressly arranged to bring out the expression of Jonah's inward state. He increased, so to

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speak, the spirit-pressure on his servant in such a degree that he *must* speak for mere relief. Not only sigh and prayer as formerly, but now answer, quickly given, to divine question, "Yes, I do well." The Lord gave and then took away, and the blank was awful, and life more desolate than ever. This led, suppose we allow, to more *actual* sin than formerly, but not necessarily to more, relatively to the circumstances. Or let us state it thus. God worked his providence so as to bring out the potential and inwardly fermenting evil into uttered prayer and sentiment. He invited—he, as it were, compelled the prophet to speak out, that his words might stand recorded in his own memory, and in the world's book for after-use, and most chiefly that HE might have an opportunity of answering, not merely to the conviction and satisfaction of the prophet, but to give the whole world better knowledge of his ways.

The divine argument for mercy in these last verses is, if we may say so without irreverence, a masterpiece of divine skill and simplicity. It is one of those perfect things in its

kind which hardly admits even of illustration without detriment to its beauty. I know not its fellow in all the Word of God. There are many single texts of the New Testament which express quite as strongly the unfailing readiness of the mercy of God to sinful men. But the beautiful peculiarity of this passage is, that it is *an actual instance* of the exercise of that mercy. We see the whole process going on before our eyes. We see the judgment set, the books opened, the criminals arraigned. We hear the condemnation pronounced, and, in imagination, the mustering of the thunders by which it will be put in execution. When all at once, as we gaze upon the darkening scene, and listen to the penitential cries, fearing that they arise too late—the darkness melts away, the bitter doom is reversed, and sweet mercy smilingly presides over the scene. Then, lest we should suppose that this exercise of mercy is rare and exceptional, the result of some transient or chance emotion of the divine heart, there is in these closing verses a revelation to us of the laws and principles of the whole case—“*Should not I spare Nineveh?*” Is it not

worthy of my nature and my government? Is it not necessary, being what I am?

We must now try to look at the argument, and do our best not to spoil it. See how simply it begins, and how easily God can raise up the great argument of his mercy before men, from almost any foundation! As a lily was text enough for our Lord for a sermon on providence, so a "gourd" serves this occasion for a proclamation to all the world of mercy. "Thou hast had pity on the gourd." The flight of a raven across the sky, the flutter of a sparrow on the twig, the blooming of a lowly lily on the ground, are clear enough emblems to God, and beginnings sufficient, of the loftiest truths. The whole material world is one unconscious symbolism. Each object holds hidden gospel in it, or at least lights and leadings towards gospel, which will shine when God says "let there be light." When the maker becomes the interpreter, each several thing has voice and message. The plant that grows in a night, and lives but a day, exercises a function which an angel would not disdain.

And yet we must observe that the plant

here does not, strictly speaking, form a part of the divine argument. It is the introduction to the argument. It is the material groundwork on which the argument is raised. It is not the life of the plant, but *the feeling of the man about it*, that constitutes the true symbol of the divine love. "Thou hast had pity on the gourd:" may I not have pity too? Pity! It is not too strong a word to express the feeling which a sensitive and impressionable man has, on beholding the swift decay of a beautiful plant or flower; certainly not too strong to express the prophet's feeling for *this* plant. We are conscious almost of fellow-feeling as we see the greening and the withering, colouring and fading. No doubt it is the subtle sympathy of life with life, of living men with living things, and of death with death—dying men with dying things. "Thou hast had pity on the gourd"—you hailed its fresh greenness in the morning, sat through the day under its cool shade, became familiar with branch and leaf and blossom, as men do with the beams of their own houses or the pictures on their walls, slept in contentment through one brief night,—then, in the morning,

saw with apprehension the faintness and sickness begun, and, as the day went on, the ruin and death of the fair and useful plant complete. All this has filled thine own spirit with sickness, and made thee think of death.—“Thou hast *had pity* on the gourd.”

Now it is on this feeling—instinctive, appropriate, good—of the human mind, that God builds up the argument for the exercise of mercy in the divine mind, and the manifestation of it in divine procedure. It is much to have, thus, direct sanction given to the validity and rightness of our instinctive feelings. Our natural pity, our sensibility, our sympathy with all life—these are right and good. *We* are wrong as to our moral condition, but these are right. We may have many right things in us, while yet we are in a wrong and fallen state. Exactly the same principle is involved in the well-known passage of the New Testament in which our Lord says—“If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give good things to them that ask him?” Your state is evil, but your parental feelings are

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good ; your natural sensibilities for plants, and animals, and fair forms of nature, are good. In these you have the best shadows and types of divine sensibilities and affections ; when you nourish your children, think of my fatherly and motherly care ; when you have pity on your withering gourds, think how I have mercy on my perishing creatures."

It is an argument from the less to the greater. "*How much more*" seems to sound in these two last verses, and all through them. In every point there is contrast, clear and strong. And the points are many. Each heightens the effect, strengthens the argument, adds a new rivet as it were to the fastenings and firmness of this logic of mercy. Look at them.

You have had pity on a gourd. *Should not I have pity on a man?* What is a plant to a human being? What are the roots of a vegetable struck into the soil, to the fibres and foundations of a spiritual creature? What are deciduous leaves to perennial affections? What "the grace of the fashion" of the plant in its highest perfection, compared with the

grace and grandeur of a human soul made in the image of God ?

There is also a comparison or contrast *in numbers*. It is not merely that there is such a vast disparity in the kind of existence, but the plant is only *one*, while the human beings (to say nothing of the cattle) are many hundreds of thousands, according to a reasonable calculation 600,000. "*The gourd.*" There was but one. Not a far-stretching forest of the plants. Not even a little grove. The solitary creature flourished and died with, perhaps, no companion in sight—none at least with which the prophet had any relation. But lo! "a whole cityful" of living men, women, and children. Would you spare the *one*, and must I slay the *many*? If one man, in worth would excel the whole vegetable world, how tremendous becomes the disparity when there is but a single plant, as against a vast multitude of human beings ?

Further. The contrast touches the quality of *relative permanence*. The gourd, as the event proved, was as frail as it was welcome. Children are sometimes baptized just before

they die. God as it were baptizes the dying plant with its proper name, "son of a night." *That* mere spectre-plant set against the teeming myriads of immortal beings! *That* apparition of a day, which, perhaps, no one ever saw except the man whose head it shaded—can you reckon it by any measure of comparison along with beings whose existence must run coeval with that of God? A vanishing vapour is far more to a vast mountain, a gleam of a dying taper more to the ever-burning sun, than that gourd to those ever-living souls.

Again. *Jonah had not laboured for it.* For his booth he had laboured—not, indeed, to make the materials of it, merely to bend them into shape. But the gourd had come—as comes the sun or the moon in the sky! Men can neither help nor hinder their progress; they can but say they are there. The prophet had not even helped the plant by his expectation. It forestalled his hope, and stood to his waking sight in the morning, dressed in green completeness. But all these living souls had come, not only in birth-pangs from

mothers' wombs, but from the fountains of eternal being in "the Father of Spirits." The existence of each had been predestined in divine purpose. The image of each had stood from eternity in divine thought. The "time" for each "to be born" had been fixed and recorded in those annals which contain no erasure or mistake. God had waited for the coming of each, and "laboured" with all the energies and harmonies of his providence that each might come in his own "fulness of time."

It is but another branch of the same general idea which is expressed in the phrase, "*neither madest it to grow*," yet it has its own distinctive meanings. He did nothing to the plant except sit under its shade, and that would not help its growth. Whether some influence, malign or wholesome, as the case may be, may not proceed from character and moral states even to outward things, and especially to living things, is more than man can tell. Natural philosophers would be apt to sneer at the very suggestion. Let them. *If* there is any such influence as this, Jonah would in his then condition be so far from "making the plant to

grow," that he would be much more likely to wither its green innocent leaves. Guileless Nathanael might unconsciously nourish his fig-tree. But surely Jonah, although during that day in a sweeter mood, would hardly help his gourd. Let that pass as but a fancy. The fact is, he did *not* make it grow. The other fact is, that God had nourished all these creatures during the whole period of their existence, with food, and raiment, and sleep, and all the manifold and incessant gifts by which their complex being had been sustained and developed. There is a secret touch of divine tenderness here. Just as our care and toil and anxious watching will endear to us the being or thing on which they are bestowed, making a poor sick child, or an erring friend, or a drooping plant, more to us, in some respects, than if they were wholesome and well-doing, and consequently more independent; so God, by his own tender compassions, endears the relation between Him and His dependent creatures, and *then* holds such endeared relation and alludes to it as one sufficient reason for still further and fuller compassions. The *mode*

of the allusion, too, is very delicate and beautiful. He does not say categorically, "I have laboured for them, I have made them grow." He says it allusively and by suggestion—"You have not laboured for your now lamented gourd; *you* did not make it grow." Think of the difference!

Another touch of God's thoughtful tenderness is *the mention of the children*; for no doubt *they* are the "sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand." This is very striking. Any human observer would, in estimating the population of a city in view of a great judgment, think of the infants—not at all, or last of all, and as the least of all. They would number the persons of consequence, look at the crowds in the streets, the slaves in the markets, the battalions of fighting men. God goes into every house, looks into the cot where the infant lies asleep, counts the hands that play among the toys, and the feet that patter on the floor, and the sweet open faces where the light of innocence yet lingers, and where sin has set as yet no brand! Not the king, not the nobles,

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not the marching armies, not the heaving masses of the people, not the bleeding slaves—but the infants are nearest heaven, first and clearest in divine sight! They are, in fact, the only persons named. The others are numbered by them; not they by the others. This priority and leadership given to them in the numbering and procession of the people is very remarkable. If the city were going to war, the army would be called. If it were performing some grand ceremony of historic fame, the king and his courtiers would ride forth. If gains were to be made, the merchants would throng the streets. If walls or towers were to be built, bands of slaves would be driven panting to the work. If families were to be numbered, fathers and masters would appear. But when the most powerful intercessors with heaven are needed, *the infants* are called! “Sixscore thousand” of them pass before our sight, in all states and stages of infant life—asleep, awake, weeping, laughing, healthy and growing, suffering and dying. They are God’s nobility, only a little lower than the angels. Bow to them. Do them honour. Stand uncovered while this

vast although unconscious priesthood goes up to the altar and is accepted there in the mercy of our God. "Out of the mouth of these babes and sucklings God perfects his praise," and the city's salvation.

Many great and fruitful truths lie couchant here. It is manifest, for example, that infants are regarded by God *as personally innocent*. They are not chargeable, and they are not charged with *the guilt* of Adam's sin. They inherit many of its consequences, but they do not share its guilt. It utterly perplexes and confounds our moral perceptions to say that they do. God here seems to say the very opposite ; seems to say—"What have *they* done? They have not had part in the guilt of the city. They have no conscious, voluntary guilt at all. Would you bring a storm of judgment upon *them*?"

It is manifest also that unconscious beings may have—really have—a great moral power and place in the universe. When the men or women all through the city and in every grade of life were "crying mightily to God" for arrest of judgment, and "repenting" while they

cried, there was a cry still mightier in some respects, although inarticulate, going up from sixscore thousand unconscious suppliants. These are all little "princes"—incipient Jacobs. They have had "power with God." They have "prevailed." So little is there in one of the chief objections to the baptism of an infant. You may baptize them or not as you will ; but you cannot put them out of office. You cannot lower their place. "Of such is the kingdom of Heaven." The infants of Nineveh did what all her armed men could not do—they helped to turn away the wrath of God and to draw down his mercy.

This reference to the infants tells us that *life is good*. It is implied surely that it is in itself a blessing—a thing to be desired to make one wise. The Prophet had said, "It is better for me to die than to live." In an indirect and occult manner God here says, "It is better to live than to die"—better even for infants to live, although *they* might die without tasting the bitterness of death. Better to live even in such a place as Nineveh, where, alas ! the wickedness is only arrested for a

little, and not extinguished, than not to live at all. God the Creator, in creating the successive generations, says life is good. God the Preserver, in preserving, says life is good. God the Forgiver, in turning away his judgments, says life is good. True, the world is hard and rough to many—chequered to most; the pathway through it planted with thorns, and often darkened with tempests, insomuch that in many a case, if parents bending over the cradle of a beloved child could foresee all the buffetings and bitter sorrows of its career, they would be apt, in their human weakness, to wish it in the grave. But the great Father knows better. He still says, life is good, although so full of our evil, and he fills this world fuller, and still fuller, with immortal spirits on probation, and by all the arrangements of the world, by the beauties of visible nature, by the keen interests of social life, by the instinctive love of parents to their children, by the instinct of self-preservation planted even in the young, by the universal antipathy to death, and, above all, by the grace so freely offered to us all, which we may win in prayer and prove in conflict, he

seems to tell us that it is better that our children should live than die. We may rise above the world, not merely in the transcendency of faith, but in the fearfulness of pusillanimity, and in the repulsion of misanthropy. We may grasp at Heaven too eagerly. We may be too readily reconciled to death, and especially to the death of infants and the young, persuading ourselves that it is even the highest attainment of religion to rejoice in their being advanced into a better world. And truly, my brethren, it is a consolation which words can never express, to know that the little pilgrims, in wandering away from us, have not stumbled, but gone in at the gate—that the little lambs are treading desert ways no more, but have been carried in the shepherd's bosom up into the fresh greenness of the heavenly fold. Still it is true, in general, that He sends them here *to live*, and that Heaven, if they win it after many a tough conflict, and after long and hard travel, will be better far than it can be to those who are almost born in it, who win it without effort, pang, or tear. "Should not I spare?" saith the Lord. For what? Not surely to corrupt

and be corrupted. Not to feed hell. No, but to meet God's grand opportunity, to pluck safety out of danger, to win the victory in the morning, and have the long day of eternity for joy; to carry the gratitude of a saved sinner up to the realms of salvation, and the strength often tried sorely here, but so perfected, to work without weariness in the service of the skies.

There is yet another link in this chain of divine argument. Not, you would say, a homogeneous link—made in fact of another metal. "*And also much cattle.*" The condescending God, stooping down to the children, sees and reaches far below them. But the cattle, although below the children, are far above the gourd. The link is strong, and the argument is good. They, too, in their dumb dull way are suppliants. He who makes them feeds them, and recognises their natural right to be fed. He who owns "the cattle on a thousand hills," has the thousand hills *for* the cattle as well as for the service of man. The cattle are often in the Scriptures closely associated with man, and that, too, in times of the very greatest significance. In

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the great process of creation one whole "day" is given to the cattle, using the term as embracing all the inferior creatures, and *then* the work is not complete. The "winged fowl" is in the air, and the finny tribes and "moving creatures" are sporting in the deep, but "beast of the earth" there is none when the morning of the sixth day dawns. The beasts "appear" with man. They share his natal day. They take the morning of it. The lion, the ox, the dog is avant-courier to the man. The beast can look in man's face and say "We were born on such a day!" Then, once more, the cattle are associated with the human being in the ark of preservation, and they ride together over a dead world, that they may *begin together* again when the waters shall subside. A wonderful structure is that slow-moving ark! It holds in it a vast economy of linked life. Again, surely we never can forget the fact that the true worship in this world, before the time of Christ, could not, as to its form, be truly celebrated without the sad and touching aid rendered by the cattle. On them fell the signal, although mournful honour of yielding sacrificial victims, to keep fresh in

man's memory the exceeding sinfulness of sin, and to type to his faith the great sacrifice that should "take away the sin of the world." In fine, although I know not what may be the significance of the circumstance, I remind you of the fact that Jesus, in his temptation, was in the wilderness "with the wild beasts." With the wild beasts "*and the angels!*" Was not this a glimpse of Eden once more, and a pledge that it was to be restored? The perfect man, the ministering angels, the attendant creatures. A pledge too—who can tell?—of that immortal world where there may be a scale and chain of life more vast and more varied than there is even in this world.

When we think, then, of these things as indicating the relative position of the animated creatures who are in this great world-house with man, and of many other things affecting them or pertaining to them—their joy in existence, their patience of suffering, the manifold and never-ending help they give to those who will but use them aright, and even to those who abuse them—and above all, when we think of the pity and love of the living God to all

the life that lives, we may cease to marvel, and we may be led only to a deeper love and trust, when we hear him say "and also much cattle."

Such is this divine argument for the exercise, and indeed we might say in defence of, the very attribute of mercy which the prophet (perhaps without knowing it) had impugned. It is very beautiful. If you linger over it, planting your feet in the steps of it, touching the several links of it as you pass along, you will say it is beautiful. The skilfulness with which it is introduced; the forbearance with which it is conducted; the condescending regards to the prophet's infirmities; the recognition of human excellence; the delicate allusions; the precious truths hidden in them; the accumulation of force as the argument goes on; the comprehensive linking of the different worlds of life to each other—plants, animals, infants, men; the easy transition from one to another; the abruptness of the close too, indicating in its own way the completeness of the triumph;—all these proclaim the argument divine.

It seems to have been as successful as it is complete. It silenced the prophet. He made no reply. He uttered no word more, and we never hear of him again. Probably he returned to his own country a wiser and a better man ; and we may hope that he spent the evening of his days in his native place in peace. Tradition has not varied in assigning his death there, and in designating his tomb. In this after-time, calmly, and away from the times, places, and events, he must have written his own story—the wonderful story we have considered, in which we have such a graphic and honest delineation of his fortunes and his failings, and in which, happily for us and for all men, we see such a triumph of divine liberality over human narrowness, of divine mercy over human wickedness.

We have said that the book ends abruptly. But how could it end better ? What success in argument and fact could be more complete ? And, my brethren, it concerns *us* infinitely. We are interested personally in this argument and in this demonstration as much as Jonah, as much as the Ninevites. Is there anything else

in which we have half the interest that we all have in this? This is the very foundation of our hope. It is the bright charter of our salvation. We enter only by this door. Without the mercy of God we are clean gone for ever. By this mercy we are spared. By this mercy, in its forms of forbearance and forgiveness and renewal, we hope one day to reach complete redemption. Ah then, let us avail ourselves of it honestly and fully, and with grateful hearts. Let no man tamper with it, let no man dally and play with it, as if it were a thing he could secure for ever—at any time, in any place. It is not so. The door of mercy has hinges, and it may be shut, and then locked with the adamant key of justice. The day of mercy has an evening, when the light of it begins to vanish away, and a *night* beyond—after which—when cometh morning?

Well for us all will it be to join the prophet in his silence, if only it be in our case, as we may hope it was in his, the still, restful silence of conviction and trust. Calm and dewy as the soft stillness of the summer night is the silence into which we are led, when at last we

yield ourselves wholly to God. When we can trust him with ourselves, and with all men, and, whatever happens, praise him because "his mercy endureth for ever," then indeed we enter into rest. Then heat is quenched in sacred coolness, and "anger" sinks into shame, and wilfulness yokes itself to the car of duty, and perfect "love casteth out fear." May we all enter now into this silence with God, into this "peace which passeth all understanding;" and when, in a while, we come to the end of life here, may we feel that, through grace, all is so well that we need not break the silence even then, but quietly, as tired children do, go to rest without a murmur.

While Death, as lovingly as if he were a brother or a sister, shall gather about us the garments of our mortality, and leave us in our sleep until the morning.

SELAH.