THE

PULPIT COMMENTARY,

EDITED BY THE

VERY REV. H. D. M. SPENCE, D.D.,

DEAN OF GLOUCESTER;

AND BY THE

REV. JOSEPH S. EXELL, M.A.

WITH

INTRODUCTIONS

BY THE

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HOSEA.

Introduction

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Exposition and Homiletics

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THE BOOK OF HOSEA.

INTRODUCTION.

§ I. Subject of the Book.

In the Book of Hosea we have a summary of what the prophet taught and felt during his official career of some thirty years. His lot was cast in mournful times. If he did not live to see the actual destruction of the kingdom of Israel, he beheld it in prophetic vision a very short time before the terrible consummation; and the causes that led to the overthrow were plain and open to his clear insight. Under Jeroboam II. Israel had been prosperous and successful, as she had never been since the days of David and Solomon. She had recovered much of the territory which those monarchs had held, and restored the ancient boundaries which had marked out the promised inheritance. As it is recorded in 2 Kings xiv. 25, 28, "He restored the coast of Israel from the entering of Hamath unto the sea of the plain . . . and warred, and recovered Damascus." But the curse of idolatry still remained, accompanied with other sins which defection from the Lord and the worship of strange gods always brought in their train. Impiety, luxury, profligacy, everywhere abounded; and when Jeroboam died, and the strong hand which had checked the open turbulence and lawlessness of the people was removed, a scene of anarchy and confusion ensued, which gave sure token of coming vengeance. His son Zechariah was assassinated, after a reign of six months, by Shallum, who usurped the crown, and, after wearing it for one month, was himself murdered by one of his generals, Menahem. This cruel and wicked tyrant occupied the throne thus gained by bloodshed for ten years. His reign is chiefly remarkable for the appearance of the Assyrians in the Holy Land under Pul, who assumed the name of Tiglath-Pileser. To escape the attack of these stern invaders, Menahem became tributary to the Assyrians, and was confirmed in his kingdom at the price of a thousand talents of silver, which he exacted from the wealthiest of his subjects. His son Pekahiah, after a troubled reign of two years, was murdered by one of his officers named Pekah, who seized the throne, and

held it for twenty years according to the present reading in 1 Kings xv. 27; but there is some error in the number, and probably we ought to read "two" instead of "twenty," as he was conquered by the Assyrians and put to death B.C. 734, which was the second year of his reign. This man, in order to strengthen his position, formed a close alliance with Rezin of Damascus, and the two kings turned their arms against Judah, in the hope of overthrowing the dynasty of David. Jotham, the King of Judah, in his extremity, called in the aid of the Assyrians, who devastated the territory of Damascus, took Samaria, put Pekah to death, and appointed Hoshea king in his place, exacting from him a large yearly tribute. The discontinuance of the tribute, which was effected by the secret machinations of Egypt, under promises of support which were never fulfilled, led to another inroad of the Assyrians under Shalmaneser IV., the successor of Tiglath-Pileser. Hoshea was carried into captivity; and, after a siege of three years, Samaria fell into the hands of Sargon, who had seized the Assyrian crown on the death of Shalmaneser, B.C. 722. Many of the people were deported into foreign countries, their places being partially filled by the introduction of heathen settlers, while much of the land became wholly depopulated. Thus ended the kingdom of Israel, brought to this miserable issue because its rulers and its people had done evil before the Lord continually.

The moral condition of the people, as we conclude from the historical books and from intimations in Hosea's own pages, was exceedingly corrupt; that of Judah indeed was notoriously bad (as we see later from the denunciations of Micah, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah), but it never fell into such a depth of degradation as its northern sister. The very priests, instead of instructing the people in the duties of pure religion, taught the very opposite, encouraging a worship which led to gross excesses, welcoming the spread of any impiety which occasioned them material advantage (ch. iv. 8; v. 1), and even waylaying and murdering those who were passing on their way to Jerusalem (ch. vi. 9). The kings and rulers set an example of drunkenness and debauchery, and delighted in the contemplation of the general iniquity (ch. vii. 3—5). These calamitous results were the natural issue of corrupt worship. The Israelites, indeed, worshipped Jehovah, and observed certain imitations of the Mosaic ritual and festivals; but they used these forms without entering into their spirit and meaning; they confounded Jehovah with the local Baalim, they employed unlawful symbols in their worship, and "the calf of Samaria" (ch. viii. 5) destroyed all the spirituality of their religion, bringing about that gross declension in morals of which we have abundant proof. This formal Jehovah-Baal worship led, as Professor Cheyne has well remarked ('Introduction,' p. 25), to distrust of God, and to reliance on foreign aid as a source of strength. The Assyrians always referred their military successes to the favour of the gods whom they adored; they made a point of depreciating and insulting the deities of conquered nations. This spirit the Israelites had imbibed. They distrusted their own national Divinity; they doubted his power to protect them, and, as Hosea complains

(ch. viii. 9, 10), "hired lovers among the nations"—appealed either to Assyria or Egypt for that assistance which they ought to have asked from the Lord. To these consequences the schism inaugurated by Jeroboam the son of Nebat had inevitably led. And, though this separation was now of long standing, and had been accepted for ages as an accomplished fact, for which no remedy was likely to be forthcoming, Hosea cannot view it unmoved; it is a sin in his eyes, and calls for punishment. He looks forward indeed vaguely to a healing of the schism; but he has no formal revelation to announce on this subject, and speaks rather as his longings lead him, than as directed to foretell a future union of the nation under one head (ch. i. 11; iii. 5). The success and prosperity of Israel, and her temporary immunity from foreign invasion, had never led to a reformation or improvement of religion; the notion of a national repentance and a general purification of worship did not occur to rulers or people as feasible or desirable; and when trouble befell them, instead of seeing therein the punishment of their sin and a motive for conversion, they were only alienated further from Jehovah, and more bent on departing from the national devotion to the one God. They would not see that the wrath of God was ready to fall upon them, and that their only hope lay in averting his judgment by reversing the policy of many years and turning with their whole hearts unto him whom they had virtually rejected.

Such was the condition of Israel when the Spirit of the Lord moved Hosea to utter his warnings, rebukes, and prophecies. We may trace the varying fortunes of Israel in his different addresses. Prosperity, declension, ruin, are severally depicted in his pages. In the two great divisions of the work, the first part (ch. i.—iii.) plainly was written during the lifetime of Jeroboam, and the rest of the book falls into the later years of anarchy and immorality; the former declaring how the way for the judgments of God was being prepared by the laxity, idolatry, and luxury that prevailed, the latter containing threats, denunciations, and exhortations, intermingled with some happy promises to comfort the pious amid the announcements of the punishment whose arrival they had already begun to feel. The book is rather a summary of Hosea's teaching during his long ministry, than an orderly collection of his addresses. It seems to have been gathered into a volume in the beginning of Hezekiah's reign, and committed to writing in order to impress its leading thoughts on his contemporaries. Whether the prophet removed to Judæa in the latter part on his life, and there wrote the substance of his prophecies, is uncertain. It seems probable, at any rate, that the collection soon found its way into the southern kingdom, and was there preserved among the records of the prophets when Ephraim was overtaken by ruin. The analysis of the latter division, which is the chief portion of the work, is very difficult, and many commentators have given up the task as hopeless, while others have divided and subdivided in a way and on a plan of which we may be quite sure the author knew nothing.

The book commences with a symbolical action. To show the unfaith-

fulness of Israel and the wonderful long-suffering of God, the prophet is made to perform a public act which would demonstrate the two truths in the most plain and emphatic manner. He is bidden to take as wife one Gomer, an unchaste woman, or one of such a character that she would be likely to prove unfaithful, and to have children whose legitimacy might well be questioned. From this union are born three children, whose names are significative of the fate of the people. He then announces the chastisements which God is about to inflict, which will bring a recognition of sinfulness and a return to the Lord, who will, in consequence, make with them a new covenant of peace and righteousness (ch. i., ii.); and by another symbolical action, wherein the adulteress is separated from all intercourse, are shown the infidelity of Israel and her coming captivity (ch. iii.). This first part gives the key-note to the whole book, the rest of which is only an expansion and elaboration of the facts and threats previously announced. The corruption and idolatry of Israel are sternly condemned, the destruction of the kingdom is foretold, and the pious are briefly comforted with the hope of eventual restoration (ch. iv.—xiv.). The three stages of the connection with Gomer represent the feeling of God for the unfaithful Israel: there is first the hatred of the sin, and its stern denunciation; there is next the punishment of it in degradation and misery; and lastly there is pity for the repentant and assurance of ultimate pardon.

As there is no logical connection between the several portions of this section of Hosea's prophecy, it is impossible to draw out a regular argument for it. We can give only a summary of the contents of these "scattered leaves of a sibyl's book," as Bishop Lowth calls them. The prophet begins by denouncing the universal immorality of these "children of Israel," and their idolatry promoted by the priests, which led infallibly to moral outrages. Judah is warned not to participate in her sister's sin (ch. iv.). He turns to the priests themselves, who are only a snare and a cause of ruin instead of being wholesome guides, and upbraids them and all the chiefs who thought to escape punishment by invoking foreign aid, but who by this means only rendered it more inevitable (ch. v.). In view of the chastisement threatened, he calls on the people to repent and to turn to the Lord, who punishes in love (ch. vi. 3). He dilates on God's long-suffering and the various ways in which he has tried to lead them to better things. But in vain; all ranks and classes are corrupt; the very leaders are the chief offenders, and Judah follows in their train. They had learned heathen morals, they fly to heathen aid, they seek not protection from the Lord: therefore "woe unto them!" (ch. vi. 4—vii. 16). They have rejected the covenant, set up princes for themselves, and worshipped Jehovah under unlawful symbols; and retribution shall come upon them by foreign invasion, the ruin of their cities, and captivity (ch. viii.—ix. 9). In order to show that the vengeance is richly deserved, the prophet recounts the blessings which God has poured upon them and the ill return which they have made, and announces the overthrow of the centres of idolatry and cruel

treatment at the hands of enemies (ch. ix. 10—x. 15). He returns to the contrast between God's dealings and the people's ingratitude, which merited the severest punishment; but even here God's love and pity protest against his justice: "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel? My heart is turned within me, my compassions are kindled together." They must indeed pay the penalty of their sin, but, when they have profited by this stern lesson, in due time they shall be forgiven and restored (ch. xi. 1—11). And once more Hosea rebukes the degenerate nation, and sadly shows how it is ripe for judgment. He sets before them the example of their father Jacob, and laments that they have fallen away from his obedience and piety into Canaanitish ways which shall bring destruction upon them (ch. xi. 12—xii.). Their obstinate persistence in idolatry, notwithstanding the forbearance and goodness of God toward them, will prove their ruin. But there is hope of salvation (ch. xiii.). Only let Israel return unto the Lord with humility and entire faith, confessing her guilt and casting away her trust in false gods, and God will receive her and bless her largely. "Who is wise," concludes the prophet, "and he shall understand these things? prudent, and he shall know them? For the ways of the Lord are right, and the just shall walk in them: but transgressors shall fall therein" (ch. xiv. 9).

To the question—Does the book contain prophecies of the Messiah? we must return a qualified answer. Hosea seems barely to mention Messiah himself, but he has many allusions to the Messianic epoch, both in its human and its Divine idea. The restoration of Israel is conceived as a return to the promised land after due chastisement and probation, and a return to God's favour under a second David (ch. iii. 5). This restoration is presented under various figures. It is the remarriage of an adulterous wife after a course of severe discipline; it is Israel's resurrection from the dead after she has been fast bound in the chains of judicial death; it is a banished son's recall from weary exile. And this restoration is accompanied with blessings material and spiritual, peace and fertility in the land, an outpouring of God's Spirit upon the people. The writers of the New Testament regarded Hosea's prophecy as containing much that was distinctly Messianic. Our blessed Lord himself twice cites ch. vi. 6: "I desire mercy, and not sacrifice," as containing the true genius of his religion (see Matt. ix. 13; xii. 7). The terrors of the last day are expressed in Hosea's language: "They shall say to the mountains, Cover us; and to the hills, Fall on us" (see Luke xxiii. 30; Rev. vi. 16). Looking on Israel as a type of Christ, St. Matthew quotes Hosea's saying, "I called my son out of Egypt" (ch. xi. 1), and applies it to the Incarnation, the flight into Egypt, and the return to the Holy Land (Matt. ii. 15). For a proof of the calling of the Gentiles in gospel days, St. Paul (Rom. ix. 25, etc.) refers to ch. i. 10; ii. 23. When St. Paul speaks of Christ "rising again the third day according to the Scriptures" (1 Cor. xv. 4), some think that he is alluding to Hosea's prophecy (ch. vi. 2), "After two days will he

revive us: in the third day he will raise us up, and we shall live in his sight."

§ II. Author and Date.

The genuineness of the prophecies of Hosea has never been widely called in question, nor has the book that bears his name been successfully distributed among several authors differing in character, culture, and date—a division of labour which has played a great part in the criticism of other prophets. All we know about Hosea is supplied by himself, and the information is of the scantiest nature. His name, written in the Septuagint Ὡσηέ, and in the Latin Vulgate *Oseæ*, signifies "help," "deliverance," or, if taken as Jerome views it, as an abstract for concrete, "helper," "saviour." It occurs twice elsewhere—first as borne by Joshua, in Numb. xiii. 8, 16 (9, 17, Hebrew), and secondly as the name of the last king of Israel (2 Kings xv. 30, etc.), and is a shortened form of the word "Jehoshea," which would mean, "the Lord is my help." St. Jerome says that in some manuscripts, both Greek and Latin, he found the name written "Ause," which, he adds, is unintelligible. But this variation may be explained by the Assyrian monuments, in which the name assumes the form of "Ausi." Hosea was the son of Beeri, whom the Jews erroneously identified with Beerah, prince of the Reubenites, who was carried into captivity by Tiglath-Pileser (1 Chron. v. 6), and whom they supposed to be a prophet, because they held the opinion that when a prophet's father is mentioned by name, the latter himself belongs to the prophetical class. Pseudo-Epiphanius ('De Vit. Proph.,' xi.) and Pseudo-Dorotheus ('De Vit. Proph.,' i.) assign him to the tribe of Issachar, and assert that he was born at a place named Belemoth, which Jerome calls Bethsemes (Beth-shemesh), within the territories of that tribe, now identified with the ruined site, *Ain esh Shemsiyeh*, in the Jordan valley ('Twenty-One Years' Work in the Holy Land,' p. 223). There is no reason to doubt that he belonged to the northern kingdom, and exercised his office there. Topographical and other allusions make this clear. Thus he says, "Ye have been a snare on Mizpah, and a net spread abroad upon Tabor" (ch. v. 1); Samaria is continually mentioned; the writer is familiar with Gilead (ch. vi. 8), Gilgal (ch. xii. 11), Lebanon (ch. xiv. 5—7), and Beth-el, which he names Beth-aven (ch. iv. 15). He calls the kingdom of Israel simply "the land" (ch. i. 2), and the King of Israel "our king" (ch. vii. 5). He shows an intimate acquaintance with the history and circumstances of Israel. His whole oracle is directed towards Ephraim; and Judah is named only in passing and incidentally. That the kings of Judah are mentioned in the heading (ch. i. 1) is probably owing, as Keil says, to the inward relation which Hosea assumed towards that kingdom in common with all true prophets. Seeing there the only legitimate representative of the theocracy, while recognizing the civil authority of other rulers, he fixes the date of his prophecy primarily by the era of the kings of the people of God.

The only fact in the prophet's life with which we are acquainted is his marriage with a woman called Gomer at God's command (ch. i. 2, etc.): "Go, take unto thee," said God to him, "a wife of whoredoms and children of whoredoms," by which union he was to offer to his people a symbolical representation of their unfaithfulness and of God's forbearance. The transaction has seemed to many so unnatural and revolting that they have refused to admit the literal fulfilment of the command, and relegate the whole matter to the regions of allegory, drama, or vision. But, as Dr. Pusey says ('Minor Prophets,' p. 4), "there is no ground to justify our taking as a parable what Holy Scripture relates as a fact. There is no instance in which it can be shown that Holy Scripture relates that a thing was done, and *that* with the names of persons, and yet that God did not intend it to be taken as literally true. There would then be left no test of what was real, what imaginary; and the histories of Holy Scripture would be left to be a prey to individual caprice, to be explained away as parables when men misliked them." So we must believe that Hosea took this woman as wife, and became by her the father of three children, to whom at God's command he gave symbolical names. The first was called Jezreel, in commemoration of the evil memories attached to that place now to be visited for; the second, a daughter, Lo-ruhamah, "Not pitied," in token of the universal destruction threatened; and the third, Lo-ammi, "Not my people," a warning of the rejection and dispersion of Israel. After a time, the evil of Gomer's nature reasserted itself. She fled from her husband, and proved unfaithful to him. But her paramour did not long care for her; and Hosea, seeking her, found her deserted and despised, perhaps sold as a slave. Yet his love was not yet wearied out. He purchased her freedom, and took her to his house, no longer to enjoy the privileges of an honoured wife, which she had flung away, but to repair the past and atone for the sin by mortification, seclusion, and tears. The chief difficulty in regarding this transaction as real and historical is that it would have taken some years to accomplish. But, on the other hand, it was more impressive for the people to have this acted parable placed before their eyes for a long continuance. Nor were such lengthened symbolical actions unusual in the domain of prophecy (comp. Isa. xx. 3; Ezek. iv. 5, 6, 9). A merely recounted vision must have had a far weaker effect than this piece of real life. If Gomer was known to be of loose character, her conversion into the chaste wife of a holy prophet must have led people to think and to inquire into the cause of this seemingly anomalous proceeding. "Nec culpandus propheta," says St. Jerome, "si meretricem converterit ad pudicitiam, sed potius laudandus quod ex mala bonam fecerit. Non enim qui bonus permanet ipse polluitur, si societur malo; sed qui malus est in bonum vertitur, si bona exempla sectetur. Ex quo intelligimus non prophetam perdidisse pudicitiam fornicariæ copulatum, sed fornicariam assumsisse pudicitiam quam antea non habebat."

We know nothing of the latter days of Hosea. It is probable that he

finished his life in Judæa, as the preservation of his book amid the ruin of Samaria is thus more easily accounted for. The place and date of his death are equally unknown. A tomb is shown as his between Nablus and Es-salt; but there is no ground for supposing that it has ever contained the prophet's remains.

Hosea stands first in the book of the minor prophets, which some have supposed to be arranged in chronological order. But closer investigation does not confirm all the details of this arrangement. We may safely say that the books are distributed chronologically thus far: first are placed those seers that prophesied in the Assyrian period, viz. Hosea to Nahum; then those in the Chaldean era, Habakkuk and Zephaniah; and lastly, those in post-exilian times. To Hosea is assigned the foremost place, because, although not the longest of the twelve (for Zechariah is somewhat more lengthy, the Masorites reckoning one hundred and ninety-seven verses for Hosea, and two hundred and eleven for Zechariah), it is the most important of those in the first cycle. Joel and Amos were probably prior to Hosea; but he exercised his office much longer than any of the others, and this, perhaps, was one reason for giving him the position which he occupies in the Hebrew Bible. A mistranslation has played some part in the matter. The first clause of the second verse, "The beginning of the Word of the Lord by Hosea," which is a kind of heading to the first part of the book, has been rendered, "The beginning of the Lord hath spoken by Hosea," as if the sentence referred to his priority compared with the other prophets, whereas it appertains only to the predictions to which it is prefixed.

In the title, the genuineness of which is generally allowed, Hosea is said to have prophesied "in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam, the son of Joash, King of Israel." The statement seems to be plain enough till it is examined carefully; it is then seen to need some elucidation. Uzziah began to reign (if we accept the dates ascertained by Assyrian monuments) B.C. 792, and died in B.C. 740, and sixteen years each being allotted to Jotham and Ahaz, and Hezekiah's first regnal year being assumed to be B.C. 708,—thus, supposing that Hosea began his career in Uzziah's first year, at the age of twenty (which, indeed, is at least ten years too young), and continued it for a year or two in Hezekiah's time, he must have been one hundred and five in the early part of that monarch's reign, and his ministry must have lasted between eighty and ninety years; while, if we consider that he prophesied till the close of Hezekiah's life, the duration of his ministry is inconceivable and absurd. But it is quite unnecessary to suppose that Hosea's prophetic activity extended over the entire reigns of the kings named in the title. A limitation is added by the introduction of the name of Jeroboam II., who reigned from B.C. 790 to B.C. 749; so that we may conclude that Hosea entered upon his office during some part of Uzziah's reign which was contemporary with Jeroboam, or about B.C. 755, which was

some six years before its close. This reckoning would allow about fifty years for the duration of Hosea's prophetical life. But late discoveries have given reason to suppose that Jotham was joint sovereign with his father, and that Ahaz also was sole monarch for a very short time. This alters Hezekiah's date from B.C. 708 to B.C. 728, and allows for the prophet's ministry some thirty years. Our view of the prophet's date is, however, not dependent wholly upon the title of the book. Further information can be derived from the contents. First, as to the close of his ministry. Though he foretold the fall of Samaria (ch. x. 5; xiii. 16), he does not mention the capture of the city and the destruction of the kingdom of Israel in the sixth year of Hezekiah, B.C. 722, an event of such overwhelming importance that he could not have passed it over unnoticed, had he been alive when it occurred. The predictions concerning this event seem to have been uttered about the middle of the reign of Hoshea, the last king, which would be just at the time of the accession of Hezekiah. Secondly, as to the commencement of his prophetical office. He could not have prophesied long under Jeroboam. The long and prosperous reign of that king, when the fortunes of Israel were raised to an unprecedented height, could never have given occasion to the descriptions of confusion, anarchy, and disaster which frequently occur (comp. ch. vii. 1, 7; viii. 4). Such allusions seem rather to belong to an interregnum that followed on the death of Jeroboam, or to the time of his successors in the kingdom. The first portion of the book (ch. i.—iii.) was written in Jeroboam's time, since it speaks of the fall of the house of Jehu as still future (ch. i. 4), and the kingdom of Israel as still prosperous. But the remainder belongs to times subsequent, when a rapid decline had begun, and events were leading up to the fatal consummation. The prophet, indeed, complains in an early chapter (ii. 16, 17) of the dishonour done to the Lord by confounding him with local *Baalim*, but he does not denounce the gross moral corruption of the people till he is constrained to do so by the view of their condition and actions after Jeroboam's death.

When we said above that the genuineness of the title is generally allowed, we did not mean that it had never been questioned, but that the balance of authority was greatly in its favour. Of late years, Kuenen, Dr. Cheyne in his commentary, and Professor W. R. Smith ('The Prophets of Israel,' lect. iv.), have thrown discredit on the heading as being a careless combination of two distinct traditions referring to different parts of the prophet's writings. The mention of Jeroboam, they say, rightly fixes the date of the first part of the prophecy; the rest of the heading was added by a scribe during the exile, probably the same who wrote the names of the same four kings of Judah at the beginning of Isaiah; and it is argued that, as it is plain that when ch. xiv. 3 was written the Jews had not finally broken with Assyria, the reigns of Ahaz and Hezekiah could not synchronize with any part of Hosea. But the final rupture with Assyria, which led to the fall of Samaria, took place B.C. 722, in Hezekiah's sixth year; and Hosea's

prophecy might have been written in the earliest portion of Hezekiah's reign, which, as we said above, would be sufficient to prove the correctness of the title. The notion of the scribe's blunder is a mere conjecture, in itself improbable, and certainly not required by any internal consideration.

§ III. General Character.

"Osee," says St. Jerome, "commaticus est, et quasi per sententias loquens"—"Hosea is concise, and speaks in detached sentences." This is one reason of the obscurity of his writings. Conciseness, combined with a fulness of meaning which needs much expansion to be intelligible, occasions perplexity and confusion. The truth is that the prophet feels too deeply to express himself calmly; the sorrow and the indignation within him force utterance, without regard to logical connection or careful arrangement. Verse is bound to verse simply by identity of feeling; the prevalence of one pathetic colouring unites the several parts of the picture. He cannot stoop to the niceties of parallelism and to the scrupulous balancing of clauses; his grief, his upbraidings, his pleadings, are artless and untrammelled. In his vehemence he oversteps the bounds of grammatical propriety, and hurries the hearer along, regardless of rules which a less feeling writer would have been careful to observe. Abruptly he passes from one image to another without fully developing either; he draws his figures from the field, the mountain, the forest. God's loud call to repentance, awful and far-reaching, is the roar of a lion (ch. xi. 10); in the fierceness of his anger he is swift as the leopard, furious as the she-bear bereft of her whelps (ch. xiii. 7, 8). At another time he uses mild chastisements, as the moth frets a garment (ch. v. 12); or he sends blessing like the gentle spring and autumn rain (ch. vi. 4) even upon Ephraim, whose goodness is a morning cloud, which glistens in the sun and soon disappears. The repentant Israel shall receive the dew of God's grace, and shall grow pure as the lily, strong as the cedar, ever beautiful as the olive tree, fragrant and sweet as the wine of Lebanon (ch. xiv. 5—7). Such accumulations of figures, unexplained and isolated, tend to obscurity. Another cause that occasions the same result is the use of peculiar words and unusual constructions. Hosea, too, is very fond of paronomasias. "Shoot (*tremach*) brings no fruit (*kemach*)" (ch. viii. 7); the altars in Gilgal are as "heaps of stones (*gallim*)" (ch. xii. 11); Beth-el, "the house of God," has become Beth-aven, "the house of vanity" (ch. x. 5).

Yet, with all his obscurity, how touching and winning is his utterance! Amid all his threats and denunciations his tender love for Israel beams forth. He rejoices when he has a message of mercy to deliver; and his style loses its stern abruptness, and he dwells with placid delight on the prospect before him; his impetuous boldness sobers down into the gentle flow of calm confidence. But this happier aspect of his prophecy is rarely seen. His message is generally full of mourning and woe. The prophets of Judah

could look forward to a restored people and a repaired polity. The ten tribes had no separate future. Their temporal punishment was irreversible. It was only as associated with, and absorbed in, Judah that they could hope for restored vitality. This feeling colours all the prophet's language and darkens his mental view. His love is disquieted and saddened by the prospect; yet his trust in Jehovah triumphs over all. His confidence in the spiritual meroies which are in store for Israel is unshaken, and abides with him as a living certainty. To this confidence he is guided by his unalterable conviction of the Lord's love for his people; he has learned that "God is love." Hosea's wedded life is the outward symbolizing of this truth, and taught that man should in like manner love his fellow. Those who were embraced in the arms of one Father should love as brethren; they should have that filial affection to Jehovah which none could feel for a heathen deity, and that affection for one another which can reign only in a united family. These ideas will be found to run through the whole book, and to underlie each rebuke, prophecy, and expostulation.

If we come to consider what influence earlier Israelite literature exercised upon Hosea, we have but few facts on which to rest. References to past Jewish history, such as the story of Jacob (ch. xii. 3, 4, 12), the wanderings in the wilderness (ch. xiii. 5), the exodus (ch. xii. 9, 13), the destruction of Sodom and the other cities (ch. xi. 8), the transactions connected with Achor (ch. ii. 15), Gibeah (ch. x. 9), and Baal-peor (ch. ix. 10), presuppose acquaintance with Genesis, Joshua, and Judges, as we know of no other sources whence such information could be obtained. Many parallelisms of idiom and language are found in Hosea and the Pentateuch, which show that the latter was extant in the northern kingdom, and can only be accounted for by its existence in a written form. The prophet himself refers to the Pentateuch when he introduces God as saying (ch. viii. 12), "Though I wrote for him my Law in ten thousand precepts, they were counted as a strange thing." The "manifold [or, 'ten thousand,' according to the 'Chethib'] precepts" is a rhetorical exaggeration for the numerous laws contained in the Pentateuch, of which the Jews reckoned two hundred and forty-eight affirmative and three hundred and sixty-five negative. The parallelisms have been noticed by many commentators. The following are a few of them: Ch. i. 2, "The land hath committed great whoredom;" and Lev. xx. 5, "All that go a-whoring after them, to commit whoredom with Molech." Ch. i. 10, "The number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea;" and Gen. xxii. 17 and xxxii. 12. Ch. iv. 8, "They eat up the sin offering of my people;" according to Lev. vi. 17. Ch. iv. 10, "They shall eat, and not have enough;" and Lev. xxvi. 26. Ch. xi. 1, "I called my son out of Egypt;" and Exod. iv. 22, "Say unto Pharaoh, Thus saith the Lord, Israel is my son." Ch. v. 6, "With their flocks and with their herds they shall go to seek the Lord;" and Exod. x. 9, "With our flocks and with our herds will we go; for we must hold a feast unto the Lord." Ch. ii. 17, "I will take away the names of Baalim out of her mouth, and they

shall no more be remembered by their name;" and Exod. xxiii. 13. Ch. vi. 2, "We shall live in his sight;" and Gen. xvii. 18. Ch. xii. 5 (6, Hebrew), "Even the Lord God of hosts; the Lord is his memorial;" and Exod. iii. 15, "This is my Name for ever, and this is my memorial." Ch. ix. 4, "Bread of mourners;" and Deut. xxvi. 14. Ch. xii. 9, "Will yet make thee to dwell in tabernacles;" and Lev. xxiii. 43. Ch. viii. 13, "They shall return to Egypt;" and Deut. xxviii. 68, "The Lord shall bring thee into Egypt again." Ch. ix. 10, "I found Israel . . . in the wilderness;" and Deut. xxxii. 10.

Other books beside the Pentateuch have had some influence on the writings of Hosea. He was certainly cognizant of the Song of Songs. The relation of Israel to Jehovah under the figure of a wife with her loving spouse, which runs through Hosea's prophecy, is equally familiar to us in the Canticles. The expressions at the end of the book, "He shall grow as the lily . . . his beauty shall be as the olive tree, and his smell as Lebanon," recall the description of the bride in Cant. ii. 2 and iv. 11, "As the lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters . . . the smell of thy garments is like the smell of Lebanon." So again, "Plead with your mother, plead," reminds one of the passage (Cant. viii. 2) where the bride desires to lead the bridegroom into her mother's house. Amos, too, Hosea's immediate predecessor, was not unknown to him. He reproduces Amos's allusion to Beth-aven (ch. iv. 15, etc.; Amos i. 5; v. 5). He borrows (ch. viii. 14) the formula with which Amos concludes his seven denunciations (Amos i. 11), "I will send a fire upon his cities, and it shall devour the palaces thereof." He uses Amos's figure of the lion's roar for the voice of God's vengeance (comp. ch. xi. 10 with Amos i. 2 and Joel iii. 16, which is similar).

§ IV. Literature.

As Hosea is the first of the minor prophets, it will be useful to name the chief commentators upon the whole twelve, or many of them, before mentioning those who have treated the particular book before us.

In this category, of the Fathers and early writers we may cite St. Ephraem Syrus, who annotates seven of the twelve; Cyril of Alexandria, followed in a great measure by Theophylact in his commentary on five of the twelve; Theodoretus of Cyrus; St. Jerome, epitomized by Haimon (Migne, 'Patres Lat.,' tom. cxvii.). Of mediæval and later writers, the most useful are: Albertus Magnus, Ribera, Arias Montanus, Rupertus, Cornelius à Lapide, Sanctius (Sanchez), (Lyon, 1621), Luther, Calvin, Œcolampadius, Calmet, Cocceius; Rosenmüller, 'Scholia in Vet. Test.' (Lips.: 1812); J. Lightfoot, 'Versiones,' Works, x.; Stäudlin (Stutg.: 1786); Hitzig, 'Die zwölf Klein. Proph.,' 4th edit. by Steiner (1881); Henderson, 'The Book of the Twelve Minor Prophets' (Lond.: 1845); Archbishop Newcome, 'An Attempt,' etc., new edit. (1836); Hengstenberg, 'Christology;' Umbreit, 'Die Klein. Proph.' (Hamb.: 1844); Keil, translated in Clarke's 'Theol. Lib.;' Dr. Pusey, 'The Minor Prophets' (Oxf.: 1860—1877); Reinke, 'Die Messianish. Weissag.' (Giessen: 1861, 1862); Schegg, 'Die Klein. Proph.' (Regensburg: 1862); Cowles (New York: 1867); Trochon, in 'La Sainte Bible avec comment.' (Paris: 1886); Knabenbauer, in 'Cursus Scripturæ Sacræ' (Paris: 1886); Ewald, 'Die Prophet. d. Alt. Bundes' (1868, etc.); W. R. Smith, 'The Prophets of Israel' (Edinburgh: 1882). There are a few Jewish commentators which will be found useful, viz. Jarchi, translated into Latin by Breithaupt (Gotha: 1713); Kimchi, and Aben Ezra, all

in Buxtorf's 'Rabbinical Bible,' vol. iii. (Amst.: 1724—1727). Of special commentaries devoted to Hosea, we note the following: Origen, 'Selecta in Oseam,' Migne, xi.; Ephraem Syrus, 'Explanatio in Oseam,' Opera, v.; Luther, 'Enarratio;' Abarbanel, 'Comment. in Hos.' (L. Bat.: 1687); Burroughes, 'Exposition' (Lond.: 1643); Schmidt (Francf.: 1687); Pocock, 'Commentary' (Oxf.: 1685); Van der Hardt, 'Hoseas Illustrat.' (Helmsb.: 1702); Neale, 'Transl. and Comm.' (Lond.: 1771); Kuinoel 'Hoseæ Oracula' (Lips.: 1792); Bishop Horsley (Lond.: 1801—1804); Stuck, 'Hoseas Propheta' (Lips.: 1828); Simson, 'Der Proph. Hos. erklärt' (Hamb.: 1851); Schröder (Leipz.: 1829); Wünsche, 'Der Proph. übers.' (Leipz.: 1868, 1869); Drake, 'Notes' (Camb.: 1853); Prof. Cheyne, in the 'Cambridge Bible for Schools' (1884).*

* As Professor Given died while this volume was passing through the press, this Introduction was written by the Rev. W. J. Deane, M.A.

THE BOOK OF HOSEA.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER I.

Ver. 1.—**The word of the Lord that came unto Hosea, the son of Beeri.** The prophets are divided into the former (*rishonim*, Zech. i. 4) prophets and the later prophets. The writings of the former prophets comprise most of the historical books, for the Hebrew conception of a prophet was that of an individual inspired by God to instruct men for the present or inform them of the future, whether orally or by writing; the *later* were the prophets properly so called, while these, again, are subdivided into the *greater*, consisting of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, and the *lesser*, or minor, including the remaining twelve. The designation "minor" does not imply any inferiority in importance of subject or value of contents, but has respect solely to the smallness of their size as compared with the larger discourses of the others. The twelve minor prophets were added to the canon before its completion as a single book, "lest," says Kimchi, in his commentary on this verse, "a book of them should be lost because of its smallness, if each one of them should be kept separate by itself." They were accordingly reckoned as one book—δώδεκα ἐν μονοβίβλῳ, as Eusebius expresses it. The name Hosea, like other Hebrew names, is significant, and denotes "deliverance," or "salvation;" or, the abstract being put for the concrete, "deliverer," or "saviour." It is radically the same name as Joshua, except that the prefix of the latter implies the name of Jehovah as the Author of such deliverance or salvation; while the Greek form of *Joshua* is *Jesus*, which in two passages of the Authorized Version stands for it. The form of the name in the original is closely connected with Hosanna (*hoshia na*), "save now," which occurs in Ps. cxviii. 25. **In the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel.** The period of Hosea's prophetic activity is one of the longest, if not the longest, on record. It continued during the reigns of the four kings of Judah above mentioned, and during that of Jeroboam II. King of Israel, which was in part coincident with that of Uzziah. Uzziah and Jeroboam reigned contemporaneously for twenty-six years. Somewhere during or rather before the end of that period Hosea commenced his ministry. Uzziah survived Jeroboam some twenty-six years, then Jotham and Ahaz in succession reigned each sixteen years. During all these fifty-eight years Hosea continued his ministerial labours. To these must be added a few years for the beginning of his prophetic career during the reign of Jeroboam, and some two or three years before its close in the reign of Hezekiah; for the destruction of Samaria, which took place in the fourth year of that king, the prophet looks forward to as still future. Thus for three score years and more—probably nearer three score years and ten, the ordinary period of human life—the prophet persevered in the discharge of his onerous duties. It may seem strange that, though Hosea exercised his prophetic function in Israel, yet the time during which he did so is reckoned by the reigns of the kings of Judah. The single exception of Jeroboam II. is accounted for in a rabbinic tradition on the ground that he did not credit or act on the evil report which Amaziah the priest of Bethel preferred against the Prophet Amos, as we read (Amos vii. 10), "Then Amaziah the priest of Bethel sent to Jeroboam King of Israel, saying, Amos hath conspired against thee in the midst of the house of Israel; the land is not able to bear all his words" (see also vers. 11—13 of the same chapter). The real reason for the reckoning by the kings of Judah, and for the exceptional case of Jeroboam, was not that assigned by the rabbins; neither was it an indication, on the part of the prophet, of the legitimacy of the kingdom of Judah on the one hand, and evidence, on the other hand, of the performance of God's promise

to John that his sons would sit upon the throne to the fourth generation, while Jeroboam, Jehu's great-grandson, was the last king of that dynasty by whom God vouchsafed help to Israel, his son and successor Zechariah retaining possession of the kingdom only for the short space of six months. The true cause is rather to be sought in the regicides, usurpations, occasional anarchy, and generally unsettled state of the northern kingdom, inasmuch as such instability and uncertainty furnished no sure or satisfactory basis for chronological calculation. Thus we find that, on the death of Jeroboam II., there was an interregnum of some dozen years, during which, of course, a state of anarchy prevailed. At length Zechariah succeeded to the throne; he had reigned only six months when he was murdered by Shallum. Shallum's reign only lasted a month, when he was put to death by Menahem. During his reign of ten years occurred the invasion of Pul. Menahem's son, Pekachiah, had only reigned two years when he was murdered by Pekah, in whose reign Tiglath-pileser invaded the land. Hoshea slew Pekah. Next followed an interval of anarchy lasting eight years. Then, after Hoshea's short reign of nine years, the kingdom was destroyed. Thus it was only in the southern kingdom that a sufficiently firm foundation for chronological reckoning was available, while under these circumstances Jeroboam's reign was necessary to show the prophet's connection with Israel, and also that the prediction of the fourth verse preceded the event foretold. The general heading of the whole book is contained in this verse; and Divine authority is thus claimed for the whole, as the prophet to whom the word of the Lord came is only Jehovah's spokesman.

Ver. 2.—**The beginning of the word of the Lord by** (literally, *in*) **Hosea.** These words may be rendered at once more literally and more exactly, (1) "*The beginning* (of that which) Jehovah spoke by Hosea." Thus Gesenius translates, understanding *asher*, which is often omitted as a pronoun in the nominative or accusative, indicating relation, and as including the antecedent personal or demonstrative pronoun. When the pronoun thus supplied is in the genitive, the preceding noun is in the construct state, as here. (2) Rosenmüller, without necessity, takes the noun in the adverbial sense; thus: "In the beginning Jehovah spake by Hosea." He also suggests the possibility of *dibber* being a noun of the same meaning as *dabar*, but of different formation; while in two manuscripts of De Rossi and one of Kennicott the regular form of the construct state of *davar* is expressed. (3) Keil takes the noun as an accusative of time, and accounts for its construct state by the substantival idea of the succeeding subordinated clause; thus: "At the commencement of 'Jehovah spake,' Jehovah said to him." But what is the beginning here mentioned? It cannot mean that Hosea was the first of the prophets by whom God made known his will to Israel, or the first of the minor prophets; for Jonah, as is rightly inferred from 2 Kings xiv. 25, preceded him; Joel also is usually regarded as before him in point of time; neither can it denote his priority to Isaiah and Amos, who also prophesied in the days of Uzziah. The plain meaning is that which becomes obvious when we adopt the right rendering of Gesenius, as given above, that is, the beginning of the prophecies which Hosea was commissioned by Jehovah to make known. The peculiarity of the expression, "*in* Hosea," as the word literally means, deserves attention. Maurer compares Numb. xii. 2, 6, and 8, to prove that the expression signifies speaking *to* rather than *in* or *by*; he also cites other passages to the same purpose. But while the verb "to speak," followed by *b*e, and the verb constructed with *el*, may coincide in signification at a certain point, it does not thence follow that they are everywhere and always synonymous. Long ago Jerome drew attention to the distinction which this difference of construction suggests. "It is one thing," says that Father, "for the Lord to speak *in* Hosea, another to speak *to* (*el*) Hosea: when it is *in* Hosea he does not speak to Hosea himself, but *by* Hosea to others; but speaking *to* Hosea denotes communication to himself." So in the New Testament (Heb. i. 1) we find the corresponding Greek expression, viz. ὁ Θεὸς λαλήσας ἐν προφήταις, which the Revised Version rightly renders, "God having . . . spoken . . . in the prophets." The first verse is the general heading for the whole book; the first clause of the second verse is the special heading of the first section of the book, which extends to the end of the third chapter. **And the Lord said to Hosea, Go, take unto thee a wife of whoredoms, and children of whoredoms.** Whether the transaction here enjoined is to be understood as a reality, or a vision, or an allegory, has been keenly debated. To enter fully into the discussion of this point would lead us too far from our purpose; nor could it minister to edification. Though high authorities have maintained it to be a real occurrence, we do not see our way to concur with their view. A canon of interpretation sanctioned by Augustine forbids the literal acceptation of this command, for, according to the canon referred to, if the language of Scripture taken literally would involve something incongruous or morally improper, the figurative sense must be preferred. Again, we

can scarcely understand it of a vision; for there is no mention of or reference to anything of that kind in the passage, nor does the context countenance the notion of a vision. Keil regards it as such when he speaks of it as "an inward and spiritual intuition in which the word of God was addressed" to the prophet. We are, therefore, shut up to that interpretation which explains the whole as an allegorical or imaginary narrative, which is thus constructed in order to impart greater vividness to the prophet's declaration. The Chaldee paraphrase understands it in this sense. "Go," says the paraphrast, "declare a prophecy against the inhabitants of the idolatrous city, who persist in sin." Jerome also explains it allegorically, and urges against the literal sense that passage in Ezek. iv. 4—6, where the prophet is commanded by God to bear the iniquity of the house of Israel, and to lie upon his left side three hundred and ninety days—a thing impossible according to the literal understanding of the injunction; he accordingly concludes, in reference to the particulars here commanded, that "sacramenta indicant futurorum." Calvin rightly understands it in the sense of a parabolic representation as follows: "The Lord had bidden him (the prophet) to relate this parable, so to speak, or this similitude, that the people might see, as in a living portraiture, their turpitude and perfidiousness. It is, in short, an exhibition in which the thing itself is not only set forth in words, but is also placed, as it were, before their eyes in a visible form." Kimchi considers it to be a prophetic vision; while some of the older Hebrew interpreters viewed it in the light of an actual transaction. Kimchi's words are: "And the whole took place in the vision of prophecy, not that Hosea the prophet had taken to himself a wife of whoredoms; although it is found in the words of our rabbins that the meaning is according to the literal signification of the words." By "a wife of whoredoms" we understand a woman addicted to whoredoms, and thus likely to prove an unfaithful wife, as "a woman of quarrels" is a quarrelsome woman, "a man of bloods" is a bloody man, "a man of sorrows" a sorrowful man; while "children of whoredoms" are children who follow in the footsteps of their mother's lewdness, or children on whose birth their mother's licentiousness had left a stigma so that their legitimacy is questionable. The construction of the verb "take," with both objects, is an example of the figure zeugma, by which one word does duty to two clauses, though it undergoes a modification of sense in its application to the second. The meaning here is clearly that the prophet should take a wife of the character indicated, and beget children by her, not take such a wife and such children already born to her. This view is favoured by the Vulgate, *Sume tibi uxorem fornicationum et fac tibi filios fornicationum;* though Keil maintains that Hosea was to take children of prostitution as well as a wife who had lived by prostitution. **For the land hath committed great whoredom, departing from the Lord.** This is more exactly rendered, *for the land hath utterly gone a-whoring from after* (that is, *from following*) *the Lord.* From this we learn the symbolic import of the command, in whatever way that command is interpreted, whether as a reality, or vision, or allegory. The prophet's marriage to an unfaithful wife sets forth Jehovah's marriage to an unfaithful nation. God often condescends—graciously condescends—to represent his relation to his people as a marriage covenant; while unfaithfulness on their part is spiritual adultery. The mother and the children may represent the country and its inhabitants, or the nation as a whole and its several members, or generally the people and their posterity in succeeding generations. The father of the Hebrew race had served other gods on the other side of the flood, that is, in Ur, in the land of the Chaldees, whence God had called Abraham. When taken into covenant relationship, how often had they fallen into the former sin of idolatry! The fearful consequences of their sin is graphically portrayed in the verses immediately following, symbolized in the names of the prophet's children. They are—national ruin, the loss of the Divine favour, and the forfeiture of their proud position as the chosen people of Jehovah.

Ver. 3.—**So he went and took Gomer the daughter of Diblaim; which conceived, and bare him a son.** Kimchi conjectures that "Gomer was the name of a harlot well known at that time;" he also explains the name, according to his view of its symbolic import, as follows: "Gomer has the meaning of 'completion;' as if the prophet said, He will fully execute on them the punishment of their transgressions that he may forgive their iniquity." The names of the children born to the prophet are significant and symbolical; and their symbolic significance is explained. The names mentioned in this verse are also significant, though their significance is not expressly stated, as in the former case; the cause of the omission being the fact that these names were not, like the others, now received for the first time, but simply retained. Gomer denotes "completion" or "consummation," from a verbal root signifying "to perfect" or "come to an end;" and Diblaim is the dual of *d'bhēlah*, the plural being *d'bhēlim*, from the verb

dabhal, to press together into a mass, especially a round mass. The meaning of the word, then, is "two cakes," that is, of dried figs pressed together in lumps. It may be observed, in passing, that the Greek παλάθη seems to come from the Aramaic form *dbhalta*, by the omission of the initial *daleth*. But what is the mystic meaning which the prophet veils under the two names Consummation and Compressed fig-cakes (cakes of compressed figs)? The one may hint not obscurely consummation in sin and in the suffering which is the ultimate consequence of sin; while the other may imply the sweetness of sensual indulgences, especially such as idolatrous celebrants were prone to. If, then, the symbolical interpretation of these names be allowable, we may accept that given by Jerome. He says, "Out of Israel is taken typically by Hosea a wife *consummated* in fornication, and a perfect *daughter of pleasure* which seems sweet and pleasant to those who enjoy it." There is, moreover, an obvious appropriateness in the names thus symbolically understood. The prophet, whose name signifies "salvation," marries a woman who was a daughter of pleasure and a votary of sin; this alliance represents the relation into which Jehovah, with his saving power, had mercifully taken Israel; but that people, unmindful and unthankful for such mercy, and intent on the indulgence of a sinful course, went from bad to worse in apostasy and idolatry till God at length left them in their impenitence and abandoned them to their fate. The conception and birth of Gomer's son to the prophet, though several authorities omit "him," give no countenance to the idea of the child being suppositious; and so far there seems to be some confirmation of the opinion of Keil referred to under ver. 2.

Ver. 4.—**And the Lord said unto him, Call his name Jezreel.** The name which the people inherited from a distinguished ancestor was one of honour and dignity—Israel or Yisrael, "prince with God;" the name imposed by their sins was one of reproach and disaster—Izreel, or Yizreel, "scattered by God." The Hebrews had a peculiar fondness for a paronomasia of this kind; thus Bethel, "house of God," becomes Bethaven, "house of vanity." Keil regrets the appellative sense in this passage, and refers to the historical importance of the place. The latter view seems favoured by the succeeding explanation of the name. **For yet a little while, and I will avenge (*visit*) the blood of Jezreel upon the house of Jehu.** The verb here rendered "avenge" is literally to "visit," and is used sometimes in a good sense, implying a benevolent purpose, as in Ruth i. 6, "For she had heard in the country of Moab how that the Lord had visited his people in giving them bread;" sometimes it expresses a hostile intention, as in Exod. xx. 5, "I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children." In the present passage, as elsewhere in this book (see ch. ii. 13; iv. 9), it is taken in the sense assigned it in the Authorized Version, with which the Septuagint and Syriac are in accord. But what are we to understand by the *blood of Jezreel*, which brought down this vengeance on the house of Jehu? Some suppose that the expression denotes the bloody deeds of Ahab's house, including, not only the murder of Naboth, but also their bloody persecution of the servants and prophets of Jehovah, as we read in 1 Kings xviii. 4, that "Jezebel cut off the prophets of the Lord;" and in 2 Kings ix. 7, "Thou shalt smite the house of Ahab thy master, that I may avenge the blood of my servants the prophets, and the blood of all the servants of the Lord, at the hand of Jezebel." These and like deeds of blood brought down retribution on the house of Ahab; Jehu, the instrument of this retribution, was himself guilty of such enormities that the cry of blood for vengeance was repeated, and the criminality of the preceding dynasty continuing, the *até* of Jehu's was redoubled. This view appears to us both clumsy and far-fetched. The plain meaning is that which refers the blood of Jezreel to the bloody massacres of Jehu himself, when in a single day he put an end to the dynasty of Omri and the wicked house of Ahab. On that memorable occasion he slew the queen-mother Jezebel, the seventy sons of Ahab, and forty-two relatives of King Ahaziah, also all the prophets of Baal, all his servants and all his priests. The royal house of Israel he exterminated, for he "slew all that remained of the house of Ahab in Jezreel, and all his great men, and his kinsfolks, and his priests, until he left him none remaining;" the royal house of Judah he brought at the same time to the very verge of extinction. The slaughter of Ahab's sons, of Jezebel and Joram, and that whole royal line, was, it is true, in compliance with God's express command; and, for the measure of his obedience to that command, Jehu was rewarded by the promise of his family occupying the throne of Israel to the fourth generation. But what was the motive that prompted this performance of the Divine will? Was it really zeal for God, as he pretended, and consequent diligence in obeying the Divine direction? Or did human passion predominate and political advantage hurry him on? We trow not. Certain it is that his subsequent career rendered the purity of his zeal more than doubtful. He exterminated the idolatry of

Baal, but he clave to the calves of Jeroboam at Bethel and Dan—the fundamental sin of the kings of Israel. In what he did, therefore, the act itself was right, for God commanded it; but the motive was wrong, for it was selfish ambition that prompted it. Thus it was with Baasha; he executed vengeance by command of God on the wicked house of Jeroboam I., and for so doing was exalted to be prince over God's people Israel; but the word of the Lord came against him, as we read, "For all the evil that he did in the sight of the Lord, . . . in being like the house of Jeroboam; and because he killed him." The Chaldee regards the blood shed by Jehu in Jezreel, though shed in a righteous cause and for the rooting out of the Baal idolatry, as innocent blood, because Jehu himself and his house turned aside to the idolatry of the calves. Jerome takes a similar view of the matter. Kimchi adopts the same; his words, literally translated, are the following: "And why does he call it the blood of Jezreel? Because it was shed in Jezreel. And though in this matter he did that which was right in the eyes of Jehovah, yet, since he did not observe to walk in the Law of Jehovah, and did not turn aside from all the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, the blood which he shed was reckoned to him as innocent blood." He then adduces as a parallel the case of Baasha already mentioned. **And will cause to cease the kingdom of the house of Israel.** Jeroboam II., the third of Jehu's family, was now reigning; a fourth member of the same was to occupy the throne. That fourth sovereign was Zechariah, whose short inglorious reign lasted only six months, at the expiration of which he fell a victim in the conspiracy by Shallum. Thus ended the dynasty of Jehu; while its overthrow paralyzed the strength of the northern kingdom. And, though the day of its complete destruction was deferred for half a century, yet the disorders, dethronements, anarchy at times, and repeated assassination of the sovereigns, to which Menahem was the only exception, prepared the way for the final catastrophe. The overthrow of the house of Jehu has been aptly termed by Hengstenberg "the beginning of the end, the commencement of the process of decomposition."

Ver. 5.—**And it shall come to pass at that day, that I will break the bow of Israel in the valley of Jezreel.** Here we have a prediction of a most momentous event, with express statement of the place where it should occur, as also the time of its occurrence. The event itself was more than the downfall of a dynasty; it was the destruction of a kingdom. The date of that destruction is defined simply as the period when God would punish the sins of both the princes and people of Israel. The close of Jehu's dynasty was at once the preparation for and the commencement of the cessation of the kingdom of Israel. The place of this calamity was the Valley of Jezreel. This famous valley was the cockpit of Palestine. There Israel conquered the host of King Jabin; there Gideon overthrew the Midianites; there Saul was defeated by the Philistines, when driven up the slopes of Gilboa "the beauty of Israel was slain in thy high places;" there a defeat equally sorrowful and not less disastrous was aggravated by the death of good King Josiah, and proved fatal to the kingdom of Judah; there, too, in later times, the last conflict took place between the Crusaders and the Moslems, in which victory crowned the arms of Saladin; there, also, was fought the battle, as we learn from this passage, which decided the fate of the kingdom of Israel. The situation of this valley was admirably suited for such scenes. This plain, or valley, broad as it is beautiful, begins where the maritime plain, interrupted by the ridge of Carmel, turns aside and extends across the centre of the country from the Mediterranean Sea on the west to the Jordan valley on the east, and from the hills of Galilee on the north to those of Ephraim or Samaria on the south. The form of this plain is triangular; its eastern side or base is fifteen miles, reaching from Engannim, now *Jenin*, to the hills below Nazareth; the north side along the hills of Galilee is twelve miles; the southern, formed by the hills of Samaria, is eighteen miles; while the apex of this somewhat irregular triangle is a narrow pass through which the river Kishon—"that ancient river, the river Kishon"—with its winding stream makes its way to the sea. On the east there are three branches in the direction of the Jordan, which bear a remote resemblance to the fingers of a hand. The northern branch passes between Tabor and Little Hermon, or *Jebel ed-Duhy;* the central one, which is the Valley of Jezreel proper, runs between Shunem and Jezreel, now *Zerin;* the southern between Mount Gilboa and Engannim, now *Jenin*—this branch, having no outlet, loses itself among the eastern hills. The name of this plain was derived from the city of Jezreel, situated near its eastern extremity on a spur of Mount Gilboa, which Ahab chose as a royal residence, and which remained so for three successive reigns, though in the time of Jeroboam II. Samaria had again, as in the days of Omri, become the royal city. In this great plain, called by the Greeks Esdraelon, the bow of Israel was to be broken. The bow (*qesheth*, rad. *qashah*, hard, stiff, unbend-

ing) was the warrior's weapon of offence and defence—strong and powerful; the breaking of his bow deprived him of his chief weapon, and left him at the mercy of the enemy to conquer or to kill; thus we read, "His bow abode in strength;" and again, "My glory was fresh in me, and my bow was renewed in my hand." But while such general references prove the bow to have been an emblem of strength and power, as Kimchi explains it, still there is something very special and suitable in the expression of the prophet here. "In one important respect," says the author of the 'Jewish Church,' "the ancient military glory of Israel was, if not confined to the northern kingdom, yet regarded as eminently characteristic of it. Judah, with all its warlike qualities, had never been celebrated for its archery. The use of the bow was there a late acquisition (2 Sam. i. 18). But in Benjamin and Ephraim it had been an habitual weapon. The bow of Jonathan was known far and wide. The children of Ephraim were characterized as 'carrying bows.' And so the chief weapon of the captain of the host of Israel was his bow. The King of Israel had always his bow and arrows with him. The sign of the fall of the kingdom was the breaking of the bow of Israel." The language employed by the prophet was thus singularly appropriate. An historical basis, though denied by some and pronounced precarious by others, is, we have little doubt, found for this prediction in ch. x. 14 of this very book. The bow, that is, the archery in which Israel excelled so much, was broken in the Valley of Jezreel, when Shalman, identified with Shalmaneser, King of Assyria by Pusey and Stanley, spoiled Beth-Arbel, or Arbela, the city between Sephoris and Tiberias, and near the middle of the valley, and thus crushed Israel in an overwhelming defeat. If the identification be sustained, that day of battle was most calamitous to Israel, and as cruel as calamitous, for neither the helplessness of infancy nor the tenderness of womanhood was spared; the infants were cashed to death against the stones, and the mothers then hurled in mortal agony upon the dead bodies of their little ones. Kimchi explains it generally: "On that day when I shall visit the blood of Jezreel, I shall break the bow of Israel, that is to say, their might and power."

Ver. 6.—**And she conceived again, and bare a daughter. And God said unto him, Call her name Lo-ruhamah.** The first birth symbolized the blood-guiltiness and idolatry of Israel, and the consequent destruction. The other births follow to confirm the certainty of the coming calamity, to develop it further, and exhibit the nation over which it impended under new phases, as also to show the prospect of deliverance to be hopeless. The change of sex may indicate the totality of the nation, male and female, as Keil thinks; or rather the weak and defenceless condition of Israel after their bow was broken and their power crushed by the enemy. They are now ready to be led into captivity, like a female helpless and powerless and exposed to all the insults of the conquerors. The birth of the daughter is thus explained by Kimchi: "After she had borne a son, which is a proverbial reference to Jeroboam the son of Joash . . . she bore a daughter, who refers parabolically to Zechariah and to Shallum son of Jabesh, who reigned after him, who were weak as a female." The name given to the child is *Unpitied*, or Unfavoured, if *ruchamah* be taken as a mutilated participle, the initial *mem* being dropped, though *lo* is not found in close connection with a participle; or, *She-is-not-pitied*, if the word be a verb. In either case, the mercy which if exercised would save her from the miseries of captivity, is clean gone; and the love which, if it existed, would prompt that exercise of mercy, is no longer to be looked for. **For I will no more have mercy upon the house of Israel; but I will utterly take them away** (margin, *that I should altogether pardon them*). Aben Ezra quotes the correct meaning as follows: "Some say that נשא is that I have up till now forgiven their iniquity;" and Kimchi: "Hitherto I have forgiven and pardoned them, because I have had mercy upon them; but I shall continue to do so no more." יסף, *again*, from יע, to return or repeat. The construction of the first clause is peculiar. Rosenmüller cites as parallel Isa. xlvii. 1, 5 and Prov. xxiii. 35; but more exact parallels are 1 Sam. ii. 3 and ch. vi. 3, in both of which, and also in the text, Kimchi and Aben Ezra understand *asher* before the second verb. The last clause of the verse, however, presents a real difficulty, as we may infer from the variety of interpretations to which it has been subjected. The LXX. has Ἀντιτασσόμενος ἀντιτάξομαι αὐτοῖς, "But I will surely set myself in array against them." Jerome, confounding the verb with נשׂא, translates, "But I will entirely forget them." Rashi: "I will *distribute to them a portion of their cup* and of their deeds," viz. as they have deserved by their deeds. Kimchi: "I will *raise up enemies against them*, who shall carry them into captivity and lay waste their land." Aben Ezra: "I will take them away;" he quotes for this meaning of the text Job xxxii. 2, and takes the prefix *l* as the Aramaic sign of the accusative, giving as a notable ex-

ample of the same 2 Sam. iii. 30, *haregu balmer* for *Eth-abner*. The Syriac Version is similar. A more feasible rendering, if the meaning of "take away" be retained, is that of Hengstenberg and others, who translate it: "I will utterly take away *from* them, or with regard *to* them," viz. everything. We prefer the sense of "pardon," as given in the Chaldee; in the margin of the Authorized Version; by Ewald, Wünsche, and Delitzsch; and mentioned by Abon Ezra and Kimchi. Thus it will read: "I will no more favour them that I should verily forgive them." The first verb literally means the pitiful yearning of parental love—the strong feeling of affection which the Greeks expressed by *στοργή*. Paul's rendering of the word with the privative denotes absence of love; and Peter's the absence of mercy. Both notions are contained in the word, and their relation is well explained by Pusey, who says, "It is *tender love* in him who pitieth; *mercy* as shown to him who needeth mercy." Now, the connection between such tenderness of love and forgiving mercy is natural and close. Many an instance of this had been experienced in the previous history of Israel; many a time God's compassion had been extended to his erring people, notwithstanding their manifold provocations; but that day is gone—the Divine long-suffering is exhausted. Once Israel is carried captive, there shall be no return; no mercy to restore them, as in the case of Judah.

Ver. 7.—**But I will have mercy upon the house of Judah, and will save them by the Lord their God.** Thus the contrast expressed in this verse increases the painful feelings with which the threatened abandonment and consequent destruction of Israel would be regarded. The promised mercy to the house of Judah is emphasized by the peculiar form of the expression. Instead of the pronoun, the proper name of Jehovah is employed; instead of saying, "I will save them by myself," he says in a specially emphatic manner, "I will save them by *Jehovah*," adding at the same time the important adjunct of "thy God," to remind them of that relationship to himself in virtue of which he interposes thus personally and powerfully on their behalf. An expression somewhat similar in form occurs in Gen. xix. 24, "Then the Lord [Jehovah] rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord [Jehovah] out of heaven." **And will not save them by bow, nor by sword, nor by battle** (literally, *war*), **by horses, nor by horsemen.** This enumeration is quite in accordance with the prophet's style, as may be seen at a glance by comparing ch. ii. 5, 11, 22; iii. 4; and iv. 13. The manner of this deliverance is very peculiar and unusual; while prominence is given to the absence of those means of defence or deliverance on which the northern kingdom so much relied. The deliverance would be accomplished *without* the ordinary weapons of war—*bow and sword*, in the use of the former of which Israel was so celebrated; also without *war*, that is, without its appliances and *materiel* of whatever kind—*skilful commanders, brave soldiers, and numerous troops*; likewise *without horses and horsemen, a great source* of strength in those days (*parashim*, equivalent to "riders on horses," as distinguished from *rokebhim*, riders on camels). This deliverance, in fact, was to be entirely independent of all human resources. All this points plainly and positively to the deliverance of Judah from Sennacherib in the days of Hezekiah, when in one night the angel of the Lord smote a hundred and eighty-five thousand of the flower of the Assyrian host, and Jehovah thus by himself delivered Judah. Thus the Judah is saved from that power before which Israel had previously and entirely succumbed. (Compare, on this miraculous deliverance, 2 Kings xix. and Isa. xxxvii.)

Ver. 8.—**Now when she had weaned Lo-ruhamah, she conceived, and bare a son.** As Eastern mothers nurse their children some two or three years, the process of weaning at the end of that period would imply a corresponding interval. This may be merely an incident to complete the prophetic declaration, and pleasingly vary the narrative. It is rather, we think, a pause in the progress of the approaching calamity—a pause indicative of the Divine lothness to execute the final sentence. Or the weaning may be referred, with some, to the entire withdrawal of all spiritual nourishment and support, when promise and prophecy, instruction and consolation, symbol and sacrifice, would be abolished.

Ver. 9.—**Then said God, Call his name Lo-ammi: for ye are not my people, and I will not be your God.** Here we have the climax of Israel's fate. The prophet's children, whether actual, visionary, or allegorical, symbolized step by step the sad gradation in Israel's fast-coming calamity. The name *Jezreel*, whether taken to mean their being scattered by God or their suffering the sorrowful consequences of their multiplied delinquencies, in either case denotes the first blow dealt to them by Divine providence. But from that it was possible by repentance to recover; and, though dispersed, they were not beyond the reach of the Divine compassion, nor beyond the power of the Divine arm to collect and

bring together again. But *Lo-ruhammah*, Unpitied, or Uncompassionated, imports another and a still heavier blow; and, though dispersed far and near, and though left in the places of their dispersion without pity and without compassion, still there might be a good time coming in the near or in the distant future, when a favourable change in their circumstances would be brought about so that they would be both collected together, or comforted and compassionated. The name *Lo-ammi*, however, puts an end to hope, implying as it does a total rejection and an entire renunciation of the people of Israel on the part of the Almighty. The national covenant is annulled; God has cast off his people, who are thus left hopeless as helpless, because of their sinful and ungrateful departure from the Source of all mercy and the Fountain of all blessing. The expression of this is very touching: "Ye," says God, now addressing them directly and personally, "are not—are no longer, my people; and I will not be yours." Such is the literal rendering of this now sad but once tender expression—tender, unspeakably tender, as long as applicable; sad, inexpressibly sad, now that its enjoyment is for ever gone.

Ver. 10.—**Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured nor numbered.** The division of the verses at this place is faulty both in our common Hebrew Bibles and in the Authorized Version. The former connects vers. 10 and 11 with the second chapter, and the latter closes the first chapter with these verses, and thus detaches them from the first verse of the second chapter. The correct arrangement combines vers. 10 and 11 of ch. i. with ver. 1 of ch. ii., and concludes the first chapter with these three verses, which are so closely joined together in sense. Here is the usual cycle of events—human sinfulness, deserved punishment, and Divine mercy. Had the last element been wanting, the promise of a countless posterity made to Abraham, renewed to Isaac, and confirmed to Jacob, might appear abolished. Yet, notwithstanding the rejection of Israel, the Word of God remaineth sure. But who are the children of Israel, whose multitude, like sea-sand, defies numeration and measurement? The whole posterity of Jacob or Israel might seem included, as the words of the promise made to that patriarch and those of the present prediction so closely correspond; and Israel is occasionally taken in this wide and general sense. The context is opposed to this; especially does the distinction so sharply marked in the succeeding verse militate against this. **And it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people, there it shall be said unto them, Ye are the sons of the living God.** The place where this great change takes place is either the place where their rejection was foretold, or that where its fulfilment became an accomplished fact. The former was, as is obvious, Palestine; the latter, the place of their exile, and so the lands of their dispersion. Thus the Chaldee, adopting the latter, renders freely as follows: "And it shall come to pass in the place where they lived in exile among the peoples, when they transgressed my Law and it was said to them, Ye are not my people, they will turn and be magnified, and called the people of God." Once this change takes place, their true mission shall be attained and their relations to the living God shall be readjusted. The dumb, dead idols, to which they had bowed down in the days of their apostasy and unbelief shall be cast aside and away for ever. Jehovah the Living One alone shall be the object of their adoration in that day.

Ver. 11.—**Then shall the children of Judah and the children of Israel be gathered together, and appoint themselves one head, and they shall come up out of the land.** The phraseology of the older Scriptures is here followed. Thus we read in Exod. i. 10, in the words of Pharaoh, the children of Israel "getting them up out of the land" (comp. also Exod. xii. 38 and Numb. xxxii. 11); and again, on the report of the spies when the people murmured against Moses and Aaron, "they said one to another, Let us make a captain [head], and let us return into Egypt." In this way the scenes of former days were in some sense to be repeated: an exodus of some sort was again to take place; Egypt was to be abandoned and slavery left behind; they might have a wilderness to traverse, but here again the prospect of a land of promise was to cheer them on their journey and compensate them at its close; in fact, another or better Canaan was before them. Nay, more, the breach between Judah and Israel would be healed, and the disruption which had been so disastrous become a thing of the past. Judah and Israel would again unite and rally together under one head. But the important inquiry remains as to the how or when this prediction was to have fulfilment. Even if we admit the return from the captivity of Babylon to be a fulfilment, it would be but a very partial, though literal, fulfilment of such a grand prediction. That restoration was far too meagre in its dimensions to come up to the requirements of, much less exhaust, such a splendid prophecy. Some of Israel—a mere fragment of the ten tribes—united with Judah in the return from Babylon; this poor miniature fulfilment, if we may so say, cannot be regarded, except perhaps typically or

symbolically, as the fulfilment of the prophet's vivid picture. We must look to gospel times and gospel scenes for the realization of the glorious promise under consideration. Jewish interpreters themselves refer it to the times of Messiah. Thus Kimchi says, "This shall take place in the gathering together of the exiles in the days of the Messiah, for unto the second house there went up only Judah and Benjamin that had been exiles in Babylon; nor were the children of Judah and the children of Israel gathered together; and they shall make for themselves one head,—this is the King Messiah;" similarly, in the 'Metsudath David,' by Altschul, we read on this passage, "*They shall be gathered together:* this will come to pass in the days of the Messiah. *One head:* this is the King Messiah. *And they shall come up;* out of the lands of the captivity they shall go up unto their own land." We cannot possibly mistake the objects of this prophecy; they are expressly declared to be "the children of Judah and the children of Israel"—the two distinctive branches of the Hebrew race, the two constituent elements of the Jewish nationality, and comprehending the whole natural posterity of Israel. There can be just as little doubt about the primary and proper application of the prophecy to the conversion of the people of the Jews. For a time they were not to be the people of God; but the testimony of the prophet to their again becoming the sons of the living God is quite unmistakable. They shall appoint themselves one head. "The prophet," says Calvin, "has, by the expression, characterized the obedience of faith; for it is not enough that Christ should be given as a King, and set over men, unless they also embrace him as their King, and with reverence receive him. We now learn that, when we believe the gospel, we choose Christ for our King, as it were, by a voluntary consent." The words are adopted by both Peter and Paul: the former (1 Pet. ii. 10) employs them as an appropriate description, in Old Testament language, of the happy change of condition consequent on the knowledge of the truth; the latter (Rom. ix. 25) quotes them more formally in an extension of their meaning beyond their primary import, and proper and literal application to the Jews, as an exemplification of the principle of *once not my people, now my people.* In this extension of their meaning they embrace, no doubt, the Gentiles, though not the objects originally and chiefly contemplated in the prophecy. (1) If the place mentioned in the previous verse be the place or lands of their dispersion, on the change indicated taking place, namely, their conversion to Christ as King, then their coming up out of the land under the sole headship of the Son of David, the true Shepherd of Israel, may denote their restoration out of all the countries of their dispersion to their ancient territory, again become their own land, and their own in perpetual possession. Thus the Targum understands it of the land of the Jews' captivity; likewise Kimchi: "They shall go up out of the land of their captivity to their own land; for the land of Israel is higher than all lands, and he that goeth thither goeth up, and he that goeth out of it goeth down." The initial and typical fulfilment was the return of Judah, joined by many Israelites, out of Babylon under Zerubbabel. The final fulfilment may be the restoration of the Jews, converted and believing in Messiah, under Divine guidance, to their own land. (2) If, on the other hand, the place of the preceding verse be Palestine, the land of their rejection and subsequent recognition as the sons of God, the going up may refer to the going up of the inhabitants of both kingdoms to Jerusalem, the dwelling-place of their common king of David's line; not in the sense of going up, as Ewald and others understand it, to do battle in order to widen the boundaries of their native land and make room for the returning exiles. (3) But whether the place be the country of Palestine or the lands of their dispersion, the going up may be understood spiritually of their coming up to join themselves to the Church, or rather to the Church's Head, as under the old economy the tribes of Israel went up out of all parts of the land to worship at Jerusalem. It will thus apply properly enough to their spiritual journey onward and upward to the heavenly Canaan. **For great shall be the day of Jezreel.** The names of the prophet's children were names of ill omen—God's sowing in the sense of God's *scattering*, Not-my-people, Not-pitied; now the evil is eliminated, the meaning of the second and third is reversed, and the first is read in a new signification, so that Not-my-people becomes My people, Unpitied becomes Pitied, God's sowing is no longer God's scattering but God's growing. The curse is thus changed into a blessing; great, then, shall be the day so signalized by Divine goodness, so glorious in Divine grace, and so conspicuous for the wondrous works of the covenant-keeping God. Most of the older interpreters take *Jezreel* here, as in vers. 4 and 5, equivalent to "scattered of God." Aben Ezra says, "But the iniquity of the house of Israel is punished. And behold, it is all said by way of reproach, not praise."

Ch. ii. 1.—**Say ye unto your brethren, Ammi; and to your sisters, Ruhamah.** Divine mercy being now received, the recipients are urged to extend to each other the right hand of fellowship, exhorting one

another, encouraging one another, confirming each other in the faith, and mutually provoking each other to love and good works. "Because the comparison deals with a son and a daughter, the prophet therefore adds, 'your brothers and your sisters'" (Kimchi).

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—3.—*The sin of Israel sharply reproved.* The great sin, the root-sin we may call it, of Israel at this time was idolatry. But that sin was not alone; it was aggravated, as usual, by accompanying abominations. All along, from the period of the disruption, idolatry had been their besetting sin. The oft-repeated statement that Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, "made Israel to sin" has a special significance in this regard. As long as Jerusalem remained the gathering-place of the tribes, and Solomon's temple remained the national sanctuary, Judah must have retained the supremacy. To undermine that supremacy, or rather to transfer it to Israel, required a stroke of bold, unscrupulous policy; but the audacity, or rather godlessness, of Jeroboam was quite equal to the occasion. Under pretence of facilitating the religious service of his subjects, as though it was too much for them to go up to Jerusalem, but in reality to prevent the people turning again in their allegiance to the dynasty of David, he changed the place of religious worship, appointing Dan and Bethel at the northern and southern extremities of his kingdom—the one on the Syrian and the other on the Judaic frontier. But this change of place necessitated other changes in keeping therewith. The mode of worship had to be changed from that of the true God to that of the calves, symbolical representations of the true God. With such symbolic representation of Deity he had, no doubt, become familiar in Egypt, as previously Aaron and the Israelites had carried it with them on their emancipation from that land. There was something very insidious in this change; it was only a half-measure, but a preparation for the whole. It was not the introduction of new gods, such as Baal and Ashtaroth, the dual deities of Phœnicia, of which sin Ahab was guilty; it was the worship of Jehovah under an external form. It was not the violation, at least directly, of the first commandment, which forbids the having of other gods; it was the transgression of the second, which condemns the making a graven image; so that Stanley says of Jeroboam that "to keep the first commandment he broke the second." The people took far too kindly to the change, and clung to it with fatal tenacity for two hundred years, subsequently even in the time of the Prophet Hosea, as we learn from several passages in this very book the calves were still objects of idolatrous worship. In our study of these verses we have for consideration the following.

I. THE PERSON OF THE PROPHET. He introduces himself to us by his name and surname, or patronymic. His name, Hosea or Saviour, is one of good omen and happy augury, at least in his case; his patronymic of *Ben-Beeri*, "son of my well," has also a pleasing significance of its own. By the former we are reminded of that Saviour to whom the prophet pointed and to whom he bore his testimony, and thus became an instrument of salvation; while the surname may call to mind him who is the Well-spring of salvation and the Fountain of living water, according to his own words, "Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." Or if the name have reference to the function of the prophet himself, it may denote his pouring out the water of life from the Divine Fountain of life.

II. THE POWER WITH WHICH HE WAS INVESTED. This, of course, touches on his Divine commission, and the corresponding inspiration which qualified him for the proper execution of that commission. Like the apostles in after times, he claims to hold his commission from God, and to be charged with the commands of God. Thus in Luke iii. 2 we read that "the word of God came unto John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness;" and in Gal. i. 1 we find the apostle of the Gentiles speaking of his commission in the following terms: "Paul, an apostle, not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead." Thus in the case of Paul, his apostolic authority was not from (ἀπὸ) *men*, as the source of that authority by whom it is conferred, nor by (διὰ) *man*, the single representative of any body of men, as the

channel of that authority through whom it is conveyed. It was through the two Persons of the blessed Trinity—Son and Father, agent and origin, medium and source—a direct Divine commission. So with the prophet in this introductory passage. But he not only held his commission from God, he had his instructions from God. His position was like that of a diplomatist or ambassador sent out by an earthly sovereign, who is commissioned to represent his sovereign, and in that capacity to adhere faithfully to the instructions he has received, correctly interpreting the will and wishes of his monarch and scrupulously communicating the same. Three several times is the source of Hosea's instructions insisted on. There is the first general statement of the word of the Lord coming to him; then there is the notification of the beginning of the word of the Lord being in Hosea; and next we learn that the Lord spake to him. The conveyance of these instructions is presented under a threefold aspect. They come to him from the Lord and so with Divine authority; they reach him by direct communication, for the Lord himself spoke to him; and they are in him, reflected on his mind and retained in his memory, and ready for present and practical use. God made him a depositary of his truth and thus fitted him for declaring it to others; he revealed his will to him, and by the inspiration of his Spirit qualified him to record it without error for the benefit of present and succeeding generations. Though not possessing or presuming to possess this special inspiration of prophets under the Old and apostles under the New Testament, the preacher of the gospel is truly commissioned and strictly commanded to declare the whole counsel of God, not with wisdom of words, not with enticing words of man's wisdom, not handling the Word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth commending himself to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

III. THE PERSEVERANCE OF THE PROPHET. The official life of Hosea reached the length of an ordinary lifetime, falling little short of the ordinary three score years and ten. The summer's heat and winter's cold of all those long and weary years still found him at his post, as a prophet of the Lord. Many a dynastic change had taken place during that period: sovereigns might rise or sovereigns fall; men might come and men might go, but he went on as ever. Faithful to his God, faithful to his king and country, alike pious and patriotic, he persisted in the work to which God had called him. To most men work long continued at last becomes irksome; the performance of duties in incessant round and for a lengthened period disposes men to seek respite or release; age itself, with its weight of years, brings manifold infirmities; but however it may have been with the prophet, he does not plead age, or infirmity, or length of service, or exhausted energies, or enfeebled strength, or failing powers either of mind or body, in order to obtain exemption from further service, or to secure in the evening of his days that ease or rest which he had so well earned; nay, unceasingly as uncomplainingly he persists in his onerous duties, and plies the task which Providence assigned him.

IV. THE PATIENCE OF THE PROPHET. If our work be pleasant, and especially if it prove successful, we are greatly encouraged thereby, and in some sort enabled to persevere. Want of success, on the other hand, too often paralyzes men's powers and puts an end to their exertions. Not so with Hosea. His efforts for the spiritual amelioration of his people were ineffectual; his labours in that direction were not crowned with the desired success. Yet in shadow as in sunshine, through evil report as good report, whether his work was appreciated or despised, with fruit or wanting it, he had learnt to possess his soul in patience. Many an untoward event, many a froward or perverse action on the part of those to whom he ministered, many a hard speech, discouraged his heart, we are sure, from the history of those evil days and the godless generation among whom he lived and wrought. His patience was tried—sorely tried, yet triumphed over all. What a lesson to all who are engaged in work for God!

V. THE PECULIARITY OF THE PERIOD AT WHICH HE PUBLISHED HIS PREDICTIONS. That peculiarity consists in the fact that it was a period of unwonted prosperity. Had it been otherwise; had it been a time of positive decline or partial disorganization; had disintegration actually and obviously set in as at a later period, it might have been said that coming events were so casting their shadows before that a sagacious calculator of probabilities might readily predict the coming catastrophe. But in the reign of Jeroboam II., son and successor of Joash, and largely by his prowess, the power of Israel was revived. During his reign of forty-one years he had enlarged his kingdom beyond all preceding limits from the time of its separation from Judah; he had recovered

Damascus, the capital of Syria, though that city had been lost even in the days of Solomon, together with Hamath on the Orontes, the key of Eastern Syria, thus checking if not crushing that hostile power. The northern kingdom had reached an unprecedented height of wealth and power; the sovereign had been triumphant in war, and his subjects were now happy and prosperous in peace. But at this very period of material wealth and military glory, after he had "restored the coasts of Israel from the entering of Hamath [the lower part of the Cœlo-Syrian valley, from the gorge of the Litany to Baalbek] to the sea of the plain," amid the splendour of his achievements and the opulence of his subjects, the prophet foretold, not merely the decline, but the actual downfall, of the kingdom of Israel. An important lesson connects itself with this. It is not only the truth of the prediction, so contrary to all calculation, so opposed to all seeming probability, but the warning thus furnished against mistaking temporal prosperity for a proof of Divine favour, or reckoning and resting on the permanence of earthly possessions. In the case before us, however, a worm was at the root of the gourd. The moral progress of the nation was in the inverse ratio of its material prosperity.

VI. THE PAINFUL DECLARATION OF THE NATIONAL SIN. That sin was more than ordinary apostasy, bad as such a state of things assuredly is; it was idolatry which is spiritual adultery. This was expressed by the symbol of the prophet, whether in reality, vision, or parable, wedding an unchaste woman, a wife of whoredoms, by name Gomer, the daughter of Diblaim. If such a union, even in symbol, was humiliating to the pure spirit of the prophet, how dreadful for a people to be in a condition so disgustingly loathsome and fearfully sinful, exposed to the deserved wrath of the Almighty, and obnoxious to the doom he has pronounced against such, "Thou hast destroyed all them that go a-whoring from thee!" If such relationship is repulsive in the extreme to every man of proper sentiments and virtuous feeling, how unspeakably hateful to the infinitely holy God to stand in the position of husband to a people so abominably faithless and impure! Yet their Maker had been their Husband, even the Lord of hosts, which is his adorable name.

Vers. 4—9.—*The sufferings of Israel symbolically recorded.* The three children of the prophet by Gomer symbolize at once a degree of sin and a period of suffering. The forefathers of Israel had been idolaters in their native land and in Egypt, as we learn from the admonition of Joshua (xxiv. 14), "Put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt." But God took them into covenant with himself at Sinai; this new relation may be represented by the prophet's espousing at the Divine command Gomer, notwithstanding her previous impurity and lewdness. But though God took the people of Israel into such a close and endearing relation to himself, yet their posterity, instead of proving themselves children of God, often forsook God and fell into idolatry, this apostasy of the descendants through succeeding generations is set forth by the children of whoredoms which the prophet had by a wife of whoredoms. So with ourselves tainted with original sin; we are stained by many actual transgressions. "Sin," it has been well said, "is contagious, and, unless the entail is cut off by grace, hereditary."

I. THE NAME OF THE FIRST CHILD IMPLIES DEGENERACY. Jezreel, if taken in its local sense, reminds of bloodshed as also idolatry, and of the *nemesis* that in due time followed; but if understood appellatively, the name of dominion implied in Israel degenerates into that of dispersion included in Jezreel. 1. *Imperfect work is imperfectly rewarded.* No work done for God can make him our debtor, yet he is graciously pleased to reward honest work in his service, the reward being entirely of grace and not of debt. Jehu executed God's judgment on the house of Ahab, and had his reward in the succession of his family to the fourth generation. Though he pretended zeal he did not do the Lord's work *sincerely;* his own selfish interests and his own base designs mingled largely with his motives, and marred the worth of his work. The obtainment of a kingdom for himself rather than obedience to God was the chief end on which his heart was set. Neither did he perform the Lord's work *thoroughly.* He abolished the idolatry of Baal, but he adhered to the idolatry of the calves; obviously because the former served his own ends and helped to establish him in the kingdom, while the latter tended, as he thought, to secure his interest in the kingdom and keep his subjects detached from Judah. 2. *Punishment, though slow, is sure.* Yet a little while and the

dynasty of Jehu became extinct; while fifty years afterwards the very kingdom over which that dynasty had ruled ceased altogether to exist. In the interval that elapsed between the extinction of the dynasty of Jehu and the total cessation of the kingdom of Israel a crushing defeat had been sustained in the valley of Jezreel, when the military strength of Israel was completely broken. Whether this was the battle of Betharbel, in which Shalmanezer was victorious, or some other reverse sustained in the invasion by Tiglath-pileser, to the success of which the inscriptions of that monarch testify, we have not perhaps sufficient means of ascertaining. This was the beginning of the end, and a premonition of what was near at hand. The sins of princes and people had gone on accumulating till at length the day of vengeance came. As with nations, so with individuals—

> "Though the mills of God grind slowly, yet they grind exceeding small;
> Though with patience he stands waiting, with exactness grinds he all."

3. *The unexpected often happens.* Nothing could have appeared more unlikely in the reign of Jeroboam II. than the destruction of his kingdom within such a comparatively short space. He had proved himself a man of prowess and of power; he had extended the boundaries of his kingdom outwardly, and had consolidated its resources inwardly. He had restored the northern boundary of Israel to what it was in the days of Solomon; he had extended his kingdom southward by the sea of the plain, and to the valley of willows (Isa. xv. 7) between Moab and Edom; he had recovered what had been lost by the victories of Hazael; he had recaptured Damascus. He was, in fact, "the greatest of all the kings of Samaria. As if with a forecast of his future glory, he was named after the founder of the kingdom—Jeroboam II." Yet then, while King Jeroboam was at the zenith of his fame, and the kingdom at the height of its prosperity, the word of the Lord went forth against it. God, who seeth not as man seeth, directed the eye of his servant the prophet to sin unrepented of and unforsaken—that internal moral weakness and rottenness which no amount of material prosperity or power could either rectify or remove.

II. THE NAME OF THE SECOND CHILD IMPORTS EXTREME DESOLATENESS OF CONDITION. Israel is pictured as Lo-ruhamah, and thus represented as a woman, worthless; for she is one of the children of whoredom, weak, an easy prey to the spoiler, a victim of injury and insult, unpitied and unprotected, impenitent and unpardoned. Applied nationally, the conquered people are uncompassionated, and waiting to be carried into captivity. Applied personally, how dreadful is the state of that individual who, by a long course of iniquity, has sinned away the day of mercy, and against whom God has shut up the bowels of his compassion! 1. To Israel as a nation, so to each of us God has showed great and manifold mercies; let us *beware of abusing* our mercies, and thereby forfeiting them. If we forsake our own mercies for lying vanities, as, alas! so many do, we may expect that those mercies will forsake us, being withdrawn in the providence of God. How sad the condition of those who are in affliction, and yet can have no reasonable assurance of the mercy of God; who are afflicted, and yet cannot plead the Divine pity, or hope for Divine sympathy and succour! Sadder still is the case of those whom death surprises in the condition indicated as not having obtained mercy! God, it is true, is infinite in compassion, and his mercy everlasting to them that fear him; but to the impenitent and unbelieving there is a limit to his mercy somewhere; while to such nations and individuals alike the time may come when he will say, "I will have no more mercy upon them, no more pity, and no more pardon." 2. An *aggravation of their misery* is the natural consequence of the contrast with Judah in ver. 7. Our blessed Lord very touchingly applies a similar contrast when he says, "There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out." The Revised Version, which has "cast forth without," makes it yet stronger and more striking. 3. The salvation of Judah at this time was their *deliverance from Sennacherib.* To this great event of Jewish history we find frequent reference elsewhere. Thus Isaiah, at the close of ch. x. and the commencement of ch. xi., has a very striking contrast between the crash of mighty cedars and the springing up of a young shoot from a withered stump—the downfall of the great conqueror with his men of might, and the uprising of a righteous Saviour out of the

lowliness of the royal house of Judah; in other words, the Assyrian and the Saviour. This contrast is couched in the following poetic language: "The Lord of hosts shall lop the bough with terror [*i.e.* terrific force]: and the high ones of stature shall be hewn down, and the haughty shall lie low; and he shall cut down the thickets of the forest with iron, and Lebanon shall fall by a mighty one. And there shall come forth a shoot out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots." The same prophet, in ch. xxix., pictures the formidable military operations of the Assyrian, together with the suddenness of the disappearance and completeness of the destruction of his mighty host. Of the former he speaks in the first person, as the Assyrian was only the rod of his anger for the purpose of chastisement, and says, "I will camp against thee round about, and will lay siege against thee with a mount, and will raise forts against thee;" while of the sudden disaster that would overwhelm them he adds, "And the multitude of all the nations that fight against Ariel [Lion of God], even all that fight against her, and her munition, and that distress her, shall be as a dream of a night vision;" a little before he had said, "The multitude of the terrible ones shall be as chaff that passeth away: yea, it shall be at an instant suddenly." In the following chapter (xxx.), naming him by name, he intimates that he had been a rod of chastisement in the Lord's hand, and when that purpose had been served, the rod itself would be broken by the voice of the Almighty: "And through the voice of the Lord shall the Assyrian be broken down that smote with a rod"—the latter was chastisement and discipline, the former destruction. Several of the psalms also contain allusions to the events of Hezekiah's reign connected with this great deliverance —the forty-fourth to Rabshakeh's blasphemy in the words, "The shame of my face hath covered me, for the voice of him that reproacheth and blasphemeth;" the seventy-third, a psalm of Asaph, to Sennacherib's destruction, "How are they brought into desolation, as in a moment! . . . As a dream when one awaketh; so, O Lord, when thou awakest, thou dost despise their image." In like manner the whole of the seventy-sixth applies. The third verse enumerates the peculiar weapons of the Assyrian, and affirms their destruction: "There brake he the arrows of the bow, shield and sword and battle;" the fifth and sixth depict that sleep of death that overtook them so calmly, so noiselessly, and so awfully: "They slept their sleep, and none of the men of might found their hands. . . . Both chariot and horse fell into a deep sleep;" the eighth verse adds the solemn awe in which all at last was hushed: "The earth feared, and was still." The ninety-first psalm, which mentions the terror by night and the pestilence walking in darkness, and thousands perishing, may, whatever was the actual occasion of its composition, apply to the destruction of the Assyrian army at the eventful time when Judah was so miraculously saved.

III. THE NAME OF THE THIRD DENOTES DEPLORABLE DEGRADATION. Before this third and last stage is reached there is a respite—some time intervenes. 1. Speaking after the manner of men, we may say with reverence that God seems to repent of his resolution to cast off his people; he shows *reluctance* to renounce them at once and for ever. Hence the delay. So in this very book he questions with himself: "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel? how shall I make thee as Admah? how shall I set thee as Zeboim? mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together." He pauses before proceeding to extremities. 2. Once they were the people of God, a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; now they have lost that high position—they are *degraded*, and that degradation must ere long issue in destruction. God, addressing them directly and, as it were, face to face, tells them plainly, "Ye are not my people, and I will not be your God." The word "God" is here supplied, and the original expression is peculiarly tender. It is literally, "I will not be *yours*—your Father and Friend, or your Husband and Head, or your Sovereign and Saviour, or your Patron and Protector." "I will not be to *you*," as the words still more literally taken mean, "I will not be to you what I once was, what I long continued to be in spite of your numberless provocations, what I would still be but for your gross unfaithfulness, what you need no longer expect me to be in consequence of your base ingratitude. The bond is broken. I have no interest in you nor you in me; I have no honour from you, nor shall ye have benefit by me. You have withheld from me the observance that was due to me and the obedience which I claimed; I shall withdraw all my mercies and loving-kindnesses from you. No more

shall I send you my prophets, no more make known to you my promises; in a word," and including the whole, "I will no more be your God." Similar to the original words is that beautiful expression in Canticles, "My beloved is mine, and I am his" (*ani l'dodi v'dodi li*).

Vers. 10, 11.—*There is salvation in store for both Israel and Judah.* 1. We must here premise our belief that the two divisions of the Hebrew people—the ten tribes and the two—have been long amalgamated. Even during the Captivity a considerable amalgamation of tribes may have taken place. Though we have the list of families that accompanied Zerubbabel and Ezra from Assyria and Media to Jerusalem, yet the tribal heads of those families are not given, as though their genealogy had been already lost. It has been conjectured, with some degree of probability, that the somewhat indefinite phrases, "Judah and Benjamin" are used by Ezra to denote "the more prominent actors;" while "Israel" designates "the whole nation collectively," including persons belonging to all the tribes. It is certainly remarkable that in the Book of Esther the Hebrews belonging to all the tribes are no longer called "children of Israel" or "children of Judah," but simply "Jews." But besides this fusion of tribes during the Captivity, there would be a considerable admixture of such Hebrews as remained behind with their heathen neighbours; this might be expected from their readiness to contract heathenish intermarriages even in Ezra's time. Many of the original stock of Israel may thus be found in Chaldea and the adjacent countries whither they had been carried captives, while others migrated into regions more remote. The so-called lost tribes may thus comprehend, not only those Israelites that were at so early a period as that of the Captivity incorporated with the children of Judah, but also those that intermingled with or were absorbed among the inhabitants of the Chaldean provinces, and whose descendants are represented by the Nestorians, Yezidees, and other tribes; and in case of those who had removed to greater distances, by the inhabitants of Afghanistan, the Jews of Malabar and elsewhere in India, the black Jews of Cochin China, the Jews of Tartary, and even the North American Indians. 2. This passage of Hosea before us, and that in the second chapter towards the end, which refer to the natural posterity of Abraham, consisting of Israel and Judah, and composing one nationality, are applied in the New Testament to Gentile believers. Hengstenberg draws attention to the paradoxical fact, that, notwithstanding the disinheritance of the natural Israel and in spite of their vast excision, yet "the number of the children of Israel should be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured nor numbered; who, from being not God's people, should be called sons of the living God; that the children of Judah and the children of Israel should be gathered together and appoint themselves one Head, and come up out of the land [of their captivity]; and that great should be this day of Jezreel [or sowing]." He then proceeds to explain this as "first fulfilled in the Messianic time, and as in part still to be fulfilled, when the family of Abraham receives, and will yet more fully receive, an innumerable increase, partly by the reception of an innumerable multitude of adopted sons [Gentiles], and partly by the exaltation of [Israelitish] sons in an inferior, to sons in the highest relation," in other words, by the incorporation of the multitudinous believing Gentiles with the faithful remnant of Israel, thus constituting one sublime Israel of God; one family of Abraham, now the father of many nations, the heir of the world. 3. But the sense of the passage is not thus exhausted; more is to be expected. At present Gentiles supply the place of the rejected portion of the natural seed; the ultimate recovery, however, of this rejected and disinherited, because still unbelieving, portion itself is also included, as we believe, in this passage. But whether, with their conversion to God and submission to Messiah, they shall be restored to the "covenant land" from which their sin expelled them, is another question, and one not so easily answered. Indeed, there has been much conflict of opinion in regard to that answer. There is, at least, a presumption that with the pardon of their sin they shall be favoured with the "ancient token of reconciliation—their return to the delightsome land." 4. In an able work on 'The Future of the Jewish Nation,' we find the following statement: "The connection uniformly held forth in Scripture, in the case of the Jews, between *defection* and *dispersion*, and between *reconciliation* and *restoration*, constitutes strong ground for expecting that the final conversion of the Jews will be accompanied by a final restora-

tion to their fatherland." It is also added in the same work that the restoration advocated is "no voluntary return in a state of unbelief," but "a restoration regarded as God's public token of reconciliation to his ancient and now *believing* people . . . neither are we contending for such a restoration as involves *separation* and *seclusion* from other nations in the little nook of Palestine . . . but while the head-quarters, the proper home of the nation, will be in Palestine, there may be an abundant representation of the roving race in all the places of their present dispersion."

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Ver. 1.—*The prophet and his work.* This subject may be appropriately introduced with some remarks about the minor prophets. They are "minor," not because their work was of less consequence than that of the four major prophets, but simply because the Scriptures which they wrote are shorter. The contents of the minor prophets are very unfamiliar to many Christians. Possibly the pulpit is partly to blame for this.

I. THE PERSON OF HOSEA. 1. *His name and descent.* Our names are mere arbitrary labels affixed to us; but, among the Jews, names were often given in allusion to circumstances in character or destiny. "Hosea" means "salvation." To some readers this name may appear to stand in direct contrast to his message, seeing that he denounced national ruin. Yet it was appropriate, after all; for Hosea's ultimate prophetic word was the redeeming mercy of Jehovah. We know nothing of his father, Beeri; or of his own life, except as reflected in his book. He was a native and citizen of the kingdom of the ten tribes (ch. i. 2; vii. 5). He loved his fatherland with the deep love of a patriot; and his life-message was to "Ephraim." He is the only prophet of that kingdom who has contributed to the Bible a book which is really a prophecy. 2. *His lengthened ministry.* Hosea must have been a young man when, during the powerful reign of Jeroboam II., he began his life-work; and he maintained his testimony throughout the turbulent period which ensued after the death of that prince, and indeed nearly to the time of the deportation of Israel into Assyria. He thus laboured bravely during more than two generations. He did not withdraw from his ministry after thirty or forty years' work, upon the plea of long service. Nor did he retire on the ground of his non-success, although it does not appear that he ever made a convert, or enjoyed the sympathy of even "a very small remnant" of his fellow-countrymen.

II. HIS TIMES. Hosea lived in the eighth century before Christ, about the time when Rome was being built. He must have begun his labours some years before Isaiah in the southern kingdom. His times were characterized by: 1. *Deep spiritual apostasy.* Indeed, his life extended over the darkest period of the whole history of Israel. God had, in great grace, espoused the Hebrew people to himself, and had called himself their Husband. But they had been miserably unfaithful to him. The kingdom of the ten tribes, especially, had "committed great whoredom" (ver. 2). Its very existence as a separate kingdom was a course of adultery. Its political flirtations with Egypt and Assyria, when it ought to have relied wholly on Jehovah, were acts of adultery. The calf-worship at Jeroboam's two "chapels of ease" was adultery. The Baal-worship introduced by Jezebel, with its shameful rites, was adultery. The nation, in fact, had cast off all fear of God, and lost all knowledge of him. 2. *Fearful moral corruption.* Wherever the foundations of religion are undermined, immorality becomes gross and rampant. Hosea contemplated almost with despair the universal secularity and violence and dissoluteness (or rather, dissolution) of society in his day. Riot and drunkenness prevailed everywhere. Sensuality was observed as a sacrament in the temples of Baal and Ashtoreth. Rivers of blood flowed through the land (ch. iv. 1—3). 3. *Hopeless political anarchy.* After the death of Jeroboam II., the flames of revolution burst forth, and were never entirely quenched until the nation was suddenly carried into captivity. There was often confusion in the government, and sometimes utter anarchy. Kings perished by the hand of the assassin, and factions strove one with another until they were mutually devoured. Soon came the final rush of ruin; and Hosea must have lived almost to see it.

III. HIS LIFE-WORK. Hosea is the Jeremiah of the northern kingdom. But his

isolation was more complete, his sorrow more tragic, and his prophetic work more barren of results than even Jeremiah's. 1. *He denounced Ephraim's sin.* The nation had rejected Jehovah as its Husband, and gone a-whoring after other gods. So Hosea was raised up on purpose to rebuke this unfaithfulness in all its forms: the Baal-worship, the calf-worship, the rampant licentiousness, the revolt from the house of David, and the leaning for aid upon heathen powers. 2. *He pronounced Ephraim's doom.* When he began his ministry there were as yet no signs of ruin. Hosea's thunderbolts dropped at first out of a clear sky. It was the time of Jeroboam II., when the kingdom was in the zenith of its prosperity. But from first to last the prophet warned the ten tribes that their commonwealth would soon become a total wreck. They would be carried away into perpetual exile. God would set their kingdom aside on account of its sins, and not for seventy years only (as would be the case with Judah), but for ever. 3. *He announced redeeming love in store for Ephraim.* For, after all, Hosea was not a despairing pessimist. He spoke with confidence of the continuance of the Divine tender mercy towards Israel. The northern kingdom, as such, must perish; but, notwithstanding, Jehovah will yet have a people for himself, who shall be gathered out of all the twelve tribes. So Hosea mingled with his menaces urgent calls to repentance. His appeals are surcharged with the tenderest pathos. It has been pointed out that he is the first of the Hebrew prophets who calls God's affection for his people by the name of "love;" the first clearly to forecast the Christian conception of the fatherhood of God, with the infinite tenderness implied in it. Hosea's message of grace was that God has still the heart of a husband towards Israel, and the heart of a father towards her children.

IV. HIS BOOK. It is important to distinguish between a prophet's life-work and his contribution to Holy Scripture. 1. *The arrangement.* This book is by no means a methodical record of Hosea's long ministry. It comprises only a few notes indicative of its burden and spirit. Yet the order of the book seems to be chronological. The first three chapters tell of the "word" given him before the fall of Jehu's house, and while the kingdom still seemed strong and flourishing. The other chapters reflect those vicissitudes of frightful anarchy and feeble misrule which characterized the fifty years that followed (see Pusey's Introduction, p. 5). 2. *The speaker.* It is worthy of notice that throughout the book the speaker is generally the Lord in his own person. The whole prophecy contemplates Israel's disobedience to "the first and great commandment;" and so the first personal pronouns usually refer to God himself. The Lamentations of Jeremiah is a sad book, but the Book of Hosea reverberates with even a profounder bass of sorrow; it is the saddest book of Holy Scripture, being in effect the lamentations of Jehovah. Hosea shows us the Divine heart as it were agitated with such conflicts of passion as a good man might experience whose conjugal and parental love had been cruelly blighted. 3. *The style.* Hosea is really a poem. It is so even in literary form; for only ch. i. and iii. are written in prose. The first three chapters constitute a symbolical introduction, while the body of the book (ch. iv.—xiv.) is a dirge, composed of mingled wailings, entreaties, threatenings, and promises. The style is abrupt, sententious, laconic, and "rather to be called Hosea's sayings than Hosea's sermons" (Matthew Henry). But "a verse may find him who a sermon flies." 4. *The profitableness of the book to us.* Although Hosea was raised up primarily for Israel, his prophecy has its place as an elect stone in the temple of Divine revelation. It teaches the politician that only "righteousness exalteth a nation." It reminds the moralist that a sound and pure ethics can rest only upon a foundation of living religion. It warns the Christian the danger of harbouring idols within his heart. Hosea is by no means a shallow book. It is not for superficial minds. It requires—as its epilogue (ch. xiv. 9) suggests—very deep and diligent study.—C. J.

Vers. 2, 3.—*Hosea's marriage and prophetic training.* When this text is announced, possibly some may say, "What a shocking subject to preach about!" Well, it is shocking indeed. God intends it to be so. But to our feelings spiritual adultery should be even more revolting than the literal whoredom which the Holy Spirit presents here as its prophetic symbol. And we must not forget that this painful passage records "the beginning of the word of the Lord by Hosea."

I. HOSEA'S CONJUGAL DISHONOUR. How are we to explain the narrative portions

(ch. i. and iii.) of this book? The most interesting problem of Hosea's life, and the "vexed question" in the exposition of his prophecy, lies in the meaning of this story of his domestic experiences. There have been three principal interpretations. At the one extreme is the severely literal view; viz. that Hosea, in obedience to a Divine command, united himself in marriage with a woman notorious for her impurity (Augustine, Pusey, Dean Stanley, etc.). At the other extreme is the purely allegorical view; viz. that the narrative is to be regarded merely as a parable; or, at most, that the marriage took place in prophetic vision only (Jerome, Calvin, Hengstenberg, etc.). The exegesis which the writer of this homily prefers lies between these two; viz. that Hosea's marriage was real, but that Gomer did not become profligate until after she had borne the prophet's three children (Ewald, Professor A. B. Davidson, Dr. Robertson Smith, etc.). No view which it is possible to take is free from difficulties; but this last one is not exposed to the insurmountable objections which, in the writer's judgment, adhere to the two extreme interpretations. It also furnishes an appropriate parallel in Hosea's experience to the love of God for his people Israel. The prophet, accordingly, contracted a marriage which turned out to be unhappy. Gomer did not love God. Her heart became contaminated with the moral miasma which was poisoning the social life of the whole nation. Hosea's quiet home, his simple occupations, and his devout sabbath-keeping, grew distasteful to her. She felt her life intolerably slow. After the birth of her third child she was directly tempted, and wandered and fell. Gomer joined the throng of the priestesses of Ashtoreth, took part in the abominable rites of the Phœnician idolatry, and left her poor husband to "cry to vacant chairs and widowed walls" that she had made his home desolate. Hosea's love for his spouse had been very deep and tender, and he felt that he loved her still, despite the fierce conflict which his affection had now to wage against his outraged honour. It would almost seem too, from the ominous names given to the children, that they also, as they grew up, followed for a time in their mother's evil ways. So Hosea begins his book by showing that it was the blighting of his fireside joys and the breaking of his household gods that first made him "a man of sorrows."

"Now I sit
All lonely, homeless, weary of my life,
Thick darkness round me, and the stars all dumb,
That erst had sung their wondrous tale of joy.
And thou hast done it all, O faithless one!
O Gomer! whom I loved as never wife
Was loved in Israel, all the wrong is thine!
Thy hand hath spoiled all my tender vines,
Thy foot hath trampled all my pleasant fruits,
Thy sin hath laid my honour in the dust."

(Dean Plumptre.)

II. GOD'S PROVIDENCE IN THIS DISHONOUR. The shipwreck of his home-happiness taught Hosea very solemn spiritual lessons. He heard in it the voice of Jehovah pointing out to him his life-work. Looking around, he perceived that his experience was not an isolated one. Rather, his home was a picture of the moral state of the entire northern kingdom. The land was reeking with sensuality. And with that sin the sin of idolatry was closely intertwined. So Hosea became very deeply convinced that all the crime and vice of the age sprang from one spiritual root: "The land had committed great whoredom, departing from the Lord." He reflected that his own bitter experience was but a parable of God's experience. What Gomer was to him, the Israelitish nation had been to Jehovah. She had been betrothed to God "in the days of her youth, when she came up out of the land of Egypt;" and the nuptials had been celebrated at Mount Sinai. But, alas! she had fallen now into foul and shameless idolatry. Hosea, from his own sad experience, could have sympathy with God. Himself a victim—and not an eye-witness merely—of the wickedness of his age, he realized more fully than he could otherwise have done the odiousness of Israel's apostasy. When he thought of Gomer, he could understand the words of the second commandment, "I the Lord thy God am a jealous God." And thus his conjugal dishonour was his birth as a prophet. It was "the beginning of the word of the Lord *in* Hosea."

The Book of Hosea is a poem; and while, of course, "the poet is born, not made," events in his own life are oftentimes needed to strike from him the poetic fire. Although the poet is "*dowered* with the hate of hate, the scorn of scorn, the love of love," it is also true that

> "Most wretched men
> Are cradled into poetry by wrong:
> They learn in suffering what they teach in song."
> (Shelley.)

It was notably so with Hosea. Affliction was his one prophetical school. So, when he now sits down to begin his book, he recounts at the outset his domestic wrongs, in the light of his ripe experience of their Divine meaning. God had "girded" him, though at first he had "not known" it. The Lord had said, in his own Divine plan of Hosea's life, "Go, take unto thee a wife of whoredoms, and children of whoredoms." The event had taught him that his desolate home was a type of Israel's ruin; and his pity for Gomer—which longed to restore her from her wasted life—a faint shadow of the yearning love of God for his apostate people.

III. LESSONS FOR OURSELVES. 1. *God himself is the supreme end of our life.* He is so: (1) To the *individual.* "Man's chief end is to glorify God." The life which does not do this is a failure. (2) To the *family.* This sad story reminds us of the blessedness of household piety, and of a pure family life. Holy Scripture everywhere magnifies the family, and enjoins that the fear of God be enthroned in its very heart. "Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it." (3) To the *nation.* National religion, on the part of a self-governing people, depends upon the spiritual state of the persons and households which compose the nation. "Departure from the Lord," whether in the case of the individual, or the family, or the commonwealth, is idolatry and adultery; and it leads inevitably to ruin (Ps. lxxiii. 27). 2. *All of us require to repent of Gomer's sin.* Our evil hearts have gone a-whoring from our God; our wrong words and actions are the children born of our adultery. Each of us may say—

> "Thou, my soul, wast loved,
> As bride by bridegroom, by the eternal Lord;
> And thou, too, hast been false."
> (Dean Plumptre.)

3. *A course of affliction affords a valuable prophetic curriculum.* There is a sense in which "all the Lord's people" should be "prophets." But, before we can be fully qualified and accomplished to teach the truth as it is in Jesus, we must be washed, not only in his blood, but in our own hearts' blood also.—C. J.

Vers. 3—9.—*Hosea's children.* Not only was the prophet's marriage to be a sign; the children were to be for signs also. So, afterwards, were Isaiah's sons in Judah (Isa. vii. 3, 14; viii. 3). Hosea's ill-starred children were cursed in the very names which they bore; and each of these was to be as a sermon to the nation. It may be that they personally walked for a time in their mother's evil ways; but whether or not, the names which they received concentrate into a focus Hosea's message of judgment.

I. JEZREEL. (Vers. 3—5.) "Jezreel" was the name of the great plain in the heart of the northern kingdom which was the glory of Palestine for its beauty and richness, and which has been in all ages a battle-field of nations. It was also the name of the fair city which stood near the eastern end of the plain, where Ahab had his ivory palace, and where Jezebel and he committed so many infamous murders. Now, Hosea's firstborn was called "Jezreel:" 1. *To recall the blood spilt there, which was still crying for vengeance.* (Ver. 4.) This must mean the blood shed by Ahab and Jezebel—the murder of Naboth and his sons, and the massacre of the Lord's prophets. But it probably includes also the revolting cruelties of Jehu, by which he exterminated the whole family of Ahab. Divine retribution may slumber for many generations; but it will awake some day, and do its dreadful work. Jehu had destroyed the house of Ahab in obedience to a Divine command, and God had commended him for it (2 Kings x. 30). But, while his act was in accordance with his commission, his motive was not. He had complied with the will of God only in so far as he judged that

compliance would advance his own political ends. His "zeal for the Lord" (2 Kings x. 16) was only a thin veneer overlaying his zeal for Jehu. So, although he overturned the altar of Baal, he clave to the calves of Jeroboam. Calvin refers here to Henry VIII. of England as having been a modern Jehu. Henry broke with the pope, not that he might repudiate the errors of the papacy, but because he was determined to divorce Queen Catherine. He suppressed the monasteries, not because they were dens of vice, but that he might deliver a blow at the papal power, and at the same time fill his own coffers with the treasures of the monks. But, again, Hosea's firstborn was called "Jezreel:" 2. *To suggest that Israel was about to be scattered by God for its sins.* (Vers. 4, 5.) "Jezreel" in Hebrew sounds and spells like "Israel;" and the play of sound suggests the thought that the nation which had "seen God," and been a "prince that prevailed with God," was to become "Jezreel" in the sense of being "*God-scattered*" among the heathen. The impending ruin of Jehu's dynasty was to be the beginning of the end. For although the northern kingdom continued for half a century afterwards, it was constantly distressed with civil war, or distracted with revolution and anarchy, until at last Assyria came and subverted it altogether. Not only so, but Israel was to lose its prowess and meet its overthrow "in the valley of Jezreel" itself, hitherto the theatre of its military glory. That smiling plain had been to Israel what Marathon was to Greece, or what Bannockburn is to Scotland. Deborah and Barak, Gideon, Saul, Ahab, had all gained great victories there. Yet "in the valley of Jezreel" "the bow of Israel," which still seemed so strong, was to be irreparably broken. Hosea himself lived to witness, at least in part, the fulfilment of this oracle (ch. x. 14). And illustrations may be readily multiplied from history of how God can break the pride of an ungodly nation at the innermost shrine of its glory. He did so with Nineveh, with Babylon, with Tyre. He did so again and again at Jerusalem. He did so a few years ago in France, when the victorious German army entered Paris by the Arc de Triomphe, and when King William of Prussia was crowned the first Emperor of United Germany in the palace of Versailles.

II. LO-RUHAMAH. (Vers. 6, 7.) This second child of Hosea and Gomer was a daughter. Her name, meaning "*Not-pitied*," brought a still sadder message to the guilty nation than the name "Jezreel" did. To be unpitied by God is a worse calamity than even to be "God-scattered." Hitherto Jehovah had at least always compassionated his erring children. And does not the whole of revelation tell us that the heart of God yearns with infinite tenderness over frail, suffering humanity? "Can a woman forget her sucking child?... Yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee." Why, then, was Israel called "Lo-ruhamah"? Not because the Divine heart had changed, but simply because she herself insisted upon not being "his own." She persistently "would none of" him. And so, at last, there was nothing for it but to allow her to "eat of the fruit of her own way." Hosea's daughter was to be a living witness by her name that the Divine patience was now at length exhausted. And the presage of this name would be fulfilled in the total and irremediable deportation of the ten tribes into Assyria. In case, moreover, the people should cling to any false hope, the opposite lot of the kingdom of Judah is referred to (ver. 7) by way of contrast. Judah was not so thoroughly and hopelessly dissolute as Israel. The southern kingdom had not deserted the temple and the sacrifices. When it was spiritually at the worst, it possessed at least "a very small remnant." So Judah would receive chastisement rather than judgment. And God would "save" Judah, although not "by bow, nor by sword." There would soon be the marvellous deliverance from Sennacherib. Then, after the seventy years' exile, the return from Babylon. And, last of all, in the fulness of the time, the spiritual salvation of Jesus Christ. But all the while, alas! the northern kingdom, as such, was to be unsaved. For Ephraim's apostasy had been unanimous and universal. Not one of its kings was a godly man. And the people would not hearken to God's prophets, but settled down in confirmed wickedness and impenitence. So now at length there was no refuge for Israel even in the compassion of God itself.

III. LO-AMMI. (Vers. 8, 9.) The name of this third child, meaning "*Not-my-people*," presaged still worse disaster than either of the preceding. The third instalment of judgment would plunge the nation into the lowest depth of all. The withdrawal of the Divine favour could only lead to positive rejection. What though the Jews kept boasting that they were the Lord's chosen people, when "by their works they denied

him"! The life of the nation was such as at length to allow him no alternative but to declare that he would not be their God. Jehovah must dissolve his covenant relation to them. He is compelled to disown and disinherit them. Henceforth they are to be no longer a sacred people; they are to differ in nothing from the profane Gentiles. A dreadful doom! Yet still that nation is finally cut off, and that soul is lost for ever, to whom God says these withering, woeful words (ver. 9), "I will not be yours."

CONCLUSION. If we can conceive what a dreadful trial it must have been to Hosea to give his children these mystic names, so ominous of woe, we shall be enabled in some measure, as he was, to sympathize with the Lord's sorrow for those in his human family who live and die in obdurate impenitence, and over whom his wailing, despairing lament is, "How often I would have gathered you together, but ye would not!"—C. J.

Ver. 10—ch. ii. 1.—*The curse reversed.* The "yet" with which this passage opens is a blessed *yet.* It introduces suddenly an announcement of salvation for Israel. Hosea cannot think of everything as being always for the worst. His children are not to be living witnesses merely of approaching vengeance. So the prophet's sobs of agony are stilled for a little, to give place to the inspiring strains of Messianic promise. He points out three blessings which lie on the other side of the dreadful doom of the northern kingdom.

I. REALIZATION OF THE COVENANT PROMISE. (Ver. 10.) Some one might naturally ask the question—If Israel is to be "scattered," "unpitied," and "rejected," what is to become of the promises given to Abraham and the fathers of the Hebrew race (Gen. xxii. 17; xxxii. 12)? The prophet replies that these will be in no wise cancelled by the rejection of the ten tribes. The people of the northern kingdom are to be dispersed among the nations; but God's purpose is to gather his Church from the Gentile world as well as from the Jewish. The promises given to Abraham were not so much national as spiritual. While, therefore, the symbolic one hundred and forty-four thousand shall be "sealed," there shall stand with them before the throne the "great multitude, which no man could number" (Rev. vii. 4, 9).

II. RECOVERY OF THE NATIONAL UNITY. (Ver. 11.) In the past there had always been more or less of enmity between Judah and Israel. Long before the disruption of the kingdom, Ephraim "envied" Judah. And for two hundred years now these tribes had also been sundered politically. But, in the good time coming, the twelve tribes shall again become one rod in the hand of the Lord (Ezek. xxxvii. 16, 17). The oracle before us implies, further, that prior to this reunion Judah also shall have been rejected and carried into exile for its sins. To whom are we to refer this notable prophecy of the "one head"? 1. It refers typically to *Zerubbabel*, the head of the tribe of Judah at the return from the exile. Among those who went up with him were, at least, a few belonging to the ten tribes; so that a partial miniature of this union was presented in the return from Babylon. 2. It refers antitypically to *Jesus Christ*, the "One Head" of redeemed humanity. The literal Judah and Israel shall be reunited in him, along with the spiritual Israel of the whole Gentile Church. He receives the appointment, of course, from his Father; but also from his people, in the sense that they accept and rejoice in it. The lesson here is that only in the gospel of Christ is to be found the true basis of the brotherhood of the human race. The name of Jesus is the one adequate symbol of life and liberty. Only his body, the Church, can communicate to the world the blessings of the ideal republic—liberty, equality, fraternity. Union among men can only spring from their common union with God.

III. RESTORATION TO THE DIVINE FAVOUR. In the names of Hosea's three children God had denounced woe upon Israel. But these very names may also be understood so that they shall convey an assurance of mercy and redemption. It may be, indeed, that after following for a season in the evil ways of their mother Gomer, the three young people were themselves converted, and thus became qualified in character to illustrate their father's prophetic message on its side of promise. 1. "*Jezreel*" *will mean* "*God sows.*" (Ver. 11.) This name shall be purified from its baser associations, and be understood again in accordance with its richest meaning. Originally suggestive of the beauty and fertility of the plain of Esdraelon, its application shall be extended, in the spiritual sense, to the whole of Palestine and of the world (Isa. xxxv. 1, 2). When God sows

there is sure to be a glorious harvest; hence the Messianic promise, "Great shall be the day of Jezreel." 2. "*Not-my-people*" *will become* "*My people.*" (Ver. 10 and ch. ii. 1.) In the good time coming, the men of Israel are to salute one another no longer as "Lo-ammi;" but, joyfully dropping the negative, as "Ammi," *i.e.* those whom the Lord has again called to be his people. This name anticipates "the adoption of sons" under the New Testament. Hence we find the Apostle Peter applying this passage to the Jews of the dispersion (1 Pet. ii. 10); and the Apostle Paul to the reception of the Gentiles, in opposition to the Jews (Rom. ix. 25, 26). The words of the latter are not merely an ingenious adaptation of the prophecy to the heathen nations; they are an argument based upon the fundamental thought of it. Israel, through its apostasy, had fallen from the covenant of grace, and had taken its place spiritually as part of the Gentile world, which served dead idols. So the re-adoption of Israel carried with it the adoption also of the Gentiles as the spiritual children of God. 3. "*Not-pitied*" *will become* "*Pitied.*" (Ver. 1.) The word "Ruhamah" will be applied to the daughters of the people, to express the climax of the Divine love. Israel is again to be the object of the Lord's tender and yearning affection. On the other side of all the sin and doom Hosea discerns the sovereignty of Jehovah's compassion and loving-kindness, and he calls upon the people rapturously to celebrate it.

CONCLUSION. How great the encouragement which these three verses afford to any of us who feel that we have, in our own lives, grievously departed from the living God! We, in this age, should understand more clearly than even Hosea did the unspeakable mercy of Jehovah. The prophet says nothing, for example, about the ground or method of the Divine forgiveness. But God has unfolded this "in these last days" in speaking "unto us by his Son" (Heb. i. 2). The Lord Jesus Christ has come as the Prophet of the Church to emphasize and carry forward Hosea's message—"Jezreel," "Ammi," "Ruhamah."—C. J.

Ver. 11.—"*Great shall be the day of Jezreel.*" Jezreel means "sown of God," or "God's sowing" (ch. ii. 22, 23). These words embody a rich Messianic promise which has already been partially fulfilled, but the complete realization of which is yet in the future. The import of this oracle was not exhausted by the return from Babylon; we may reasonably apply it still to every "high day" in the history of the Church. Some of these "days of Jezreel" are as follows:—

I. THE DAY OF THE INCARNATION. On that day Jesus Christ was sown in the earth, "the Seed of the woman." He fell into the soil of our humanity, that he might make it bring forth and bud, and fill the face of the world with fruit. The manifestation of God in the flesh has cut history in twain. Behind the Incarnation lies a moral wilderness; before it stretches the summer and harvest of the world.

II. THE DAY OF THE PASSION. Then the "corn of wheat fell into the ground and died," that it might "bring forth much fruit." And has not the Lord's death been fruitful indeed? It possesses healing virtue for every sin-wounded soul. It is the spring of all right thinking and of all noble living among men. Jesus "with his pierced hand has lifted empires off their hinges, has turned the stream of centuries out of its channel, and still governs the ages" (J. P. Richter).

III. THE DAY OF THE RESURRECTION. Christ is "the First-begotten of the dead," and "the Firstfruits of them that slept." Because he lives, his people shall live also. His resurrection both secures and illustrates the quickening of the souls and bodies of the saints. The weekly return of the Lord's day commemorates the great truth that His resurrection has brought with it the new creation of the world.

IV. THE DAY OF PENTECOST. That was the birthday of the New Testament Church. The events which took place on it presaged an illustrious career for the cause of the Redeemer. On that day the Holy Spirit descended in the fulness of his saving power; and the gospel seed which was then sown yielded an immediate and copious harvest, typical, too, of its destiny ultimately to cover the earth (Acts ii. 9—11).

V. THE DAY OF SALVATION. This day has already lasted for eighteen centuries. We are living in the streaming noontide of it. "Now is the accepted time" (2 Cor. vi. 2). The day of grace embraces every occasion regarding which it may be said, "Behold, a sower went forth to sow." And, as the result of all, "a seed shall serve him." "He shall see his seed."

VI. THE DAY OF REVIVAL. Sometimes the Church loses its spiritual freshness. It becomes parched and barren and desolate. But God pours out upon it the plentiful rain of his Spirit; and soon conversions are multiplied, and the whole Church smiles again with the verdure of piety and righteousness, like a spiritual valley of Jezreel. "I will pour water upon him that is thirsty," etc. (Isa. xliv. 3, 4).

VII. THE DAY OF MISSIONARY TRIUMPH. It is the special function of the Church to bring the heathen nations to the knowledge of the truth. This work God will bless. "They that sow in tears shall reap in joy." The fruit of the "handful of corn" "shall shake like Lebanon." The spiritual wilderness "shall blossom abundantly;" and in our times we see the fields "white already to harvest."

VIII. THE DAY OF MILLENNIAL GLORY. The Church is to enjoy a lengthened period of prosperity in the latter days before Christ's second coming. While the millennium lasts, "the fulness of the Gentiles shall come in," and the Jews shall be reingrafted into their own olive tree. Over all the world "Not-my-people" shall become "My people," and "Not-beloved" shall become "Beloved." The whole earth shall be God-sown, and shall "yield her increase."

IX. THE DAY OF THE NEW CREATION. At the "great and notable day of the Lord" the Church will be conducted, through the final baptism of fire, to "the restitution of all things." There are to be "a new heaven and a new earth," adapted to the resurrection-bodies of the saints, and fitted for the habitation of the glorified Church. What a great day that shall be, when Paradise shall be restored, and the garden-city of the New Jerusalem shall come down out of heaven from God!

> "There falls not hail, or rain, or any snow,
> Nor ever wind blows loudly; but it lies
> Deep-meadowed, happy, fair with orchard-lawns,
> And bowery hollows crowned with summer sea."
>
> (Tennyson.)

CONCLUSION. This grand picture is only still beginning to be realized. But the work is God's, and so we are confident that no part of it shall fail. "Jezreel" is "*God's* sowing." The seed is his. He is also the Sower. He will bless the springing thereof. He will fill the face of the world with fruit, and at last gather the wheat into his garner.—C. J.

Vers. 4, 5.—*Divine retribution.* The political anarchy and social degradation of the kingdom of Israel during the time of Hosea arose from causes too deep to be reached by the panaceas of politicians, or by the nostrums of political economists. Wilful and persistent disobedience to Divine Law was the secret source of these disorders, which called for a radical change in the hearts of the people. This, however, it seemed hopeless to expect from the nation at large. It was given over to its impenitence and hardness of heart. Hence, while there are words of promise for individual penitents, which break upon our ears like songs in the storm, there are none for the nation. Over it was creeping the darkness of a night which would have no dawn, the dreariness of a winter which would never be followed by a spring. The intensity of feeling with which a patriot like Hosea would utter such denunciations accounts in some degree for his obscurity, his sentences sounding sometimes as though broken by sobs. The degraded condition of those he addressed, demanding as it did a style of teaching which would compel attention, necessitated the bold sketches and glaring colours which abound in his prophecy. From the passage before us we learn the following lessons:—

I. THAT A LITERAL OBEDIENCE TO A DIVINE COMMAND MAY ULTIMATELY BRING PUNISHMENT INSTEAD OF REWARD. "I will avenge the blood of Jezreel upon the house of Jehu." The reference is to one of the greatest tragedies in history, recorded in 2 Kings ix. and x. Jehu destroyed the guilty house of Ahab, and the powerful hierarchy of Baal and Astarte, in obedience to God's command. Why, then, was this blood to be avenged upon his house? Because, as Calvin puts it, "the massacre was a crime so far as Jehu was concerned, but with God it was a righteous vengeance." In other words, an act which is commanded by God may be so done as to become a crime to the man who does it. Let us take Jehu as an example of this. 1. *Jehu*

sinned in his obedience because he was seeking his own ends, and not God's. He slew the princes of Ahab's house because they might rebel against himself; and destroyed the priesthood of Baal and Astarte because, as they owed their position to Jezebel, they would foment dissension, and use their influence against his usurpation. God does not seek such obedience as this. He teaches us to pray, "Thy will be done on earth, as it is done in heaven," though the answer to the prayer may destroy our own cherished plans. The highest exemplification of this spirit we see in our Lord, who, being in an agony in Gethsemane, prayed, "Father, *not* my will, but thine, be done." In later times the Pharisees sinned just as Jehu had done; and Christ, who read their hearts, declared that, although they obeyed the Law, they were condemned by God in their obedience, because they sought not his honour, but their own. Such sin is possible to you. If you do what is right in business merely because "honesty is the best policy," and trade depends on a good reputation; if you give to the poor for the sake of the popularity you can win; if you abstain from a sinful indulgence because you can no longer afford it, or fear you may lose some prestige;—you *have* in all these things "your reward;" you will gain what you seek, but nothing more. Yours is the sin of Jehu, who won the throne because he obeyed; but at last had this curse because he wrongly obeyed. Seeing, then, that you have to do with him who decides unerringly about the motive of every act, put up the constant prayer, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me." 2. *The sin of Jehu also appeared in this, that he loved and practised the very sins he had been called upon to punish in others.* (2 Kings x. 31.) He refused to worship Baal and Astarte, not because they were idols, but because their worship was associated with the house of Ahab. But he did worship the calves (and so was equally idolatrous), because this cultus served his political ends, and seemed essential to the independent existence of the kingdom of Israel (see 1 Kings xii. 25—33). He hated the sinners, but he loved their sins; the very reverse of what was true of our King, who hated sin, but loved us and died for us "while we were yet sinners." Now, if we punish a person for wrong-doing, and yet do the wrong ourselves, we are not only inconsistent, but we prove that we are sinning against the light, and so aggravate our offence. Suppose, for example, that a parent rebukes his child for swearing, while he himself is guilty of that sin, though right in the actual reproof, he is wrong, as Jehu was, in its insincerity. Paul contemplates this in Rom. ii. 3, where he asks, "Thinkest thou this, O man, that judgest them which do such things, and doest the same, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God?" Such were the two elements of sin in Jehu's outward obedience, which called for the threat, "I will avenge the blood of Jezreel upon the house of Jehu."

II. THAT DEPARTING FROM GOD IS THE BEGINNING OF ALL SIN. Calf-worship (a modification of Egyptian idolatry) was less hideous and degrading in its ritual than that which desecrated the groves of Astarte or the high places of Baal. But it paved the way for these grosser idolatries. Indeed, even in itself it was not so innocent as some declare it to have been; for the calf did not represent Jehovah, but "nature," so this was the worship of the creature, as opposed to that of the Creator. In less gross forms this idolatry appears in modern times. Many talk of "nature" till they forget God in his works, and are in spirit followers of shrewd, irreligious Jeroboam, who set up the calves at Dan and Bethel, and so made Israel to sin. In that false worship were found the germs of other sins. Spiritual adultery was followed by carnal adultery. Faithlessness towards God led to unfaithfulness towards man. So men became entangled, as they ever do, in the meshes of sin, till they were "drowned in destruction and perdition." It is because we are fearful of the consequences of departure from God that we are anxious about many who are dear to us. They have contracted no notorious vices and are unstained in reputation; but they have no safeguard against the worst sins and woes, so long as it is true that "God is not in all their thoughts." They are as much exposed to danger as the sheep on the fields of Bethlehem were before David, their shepherd, rich in his heroism and strength, slew both the lion and the bear. An estranged life is an endangered life.

III. THAT A TIME OF OUTWARD PROSPERITY MAY BE A TIME OF APPROACHING DESTRUCTION. "I will cause to cease the kingdom of the house of Israel." Never had the realm seemed more prosperous than when Hosea uttered this prophecy. It was during the reign of Jeroboam II., a brave and able man, who had regained all that

Hazael had conquered, had subdued Moab and recovered Damascus. The kingdom seemed strong, but it was on the eve of disruption. So has it often been. When the King of Babylon was feasting with his nobles, Cyrus was marching up the bed of the river, transforming the city's means of defence into its means of destruction. When the people of the Roman empire were giving way to luxury, as men who could afford to relax the old toil and strain, the Goths were at their gates. Let any nation fail in moral strength amidst material prosperity, and forget that it is "righteousness which exalteth a nation;" let it in spirit say to itself, "Thou hast much goods laid up for many years," then there sounds from heaven the warning words, "Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee!" Nor ought a Christian Church to consider that its wealth and numbers constitute a gauge for its stability and spiritual strength, for not infrequently its truest prosperity has been seen in the days of persecution for righteousness' sake. To ourselves also let us fearlessly apply the same principle. Our peril may be greatest in our hours of success and prosperity. Woe is nearest when all men speak well of us; for it is when we have eaten and are full that we must beware lest we forget the Lord our God.

IV. THAT A SCENE OF MEMORABLE VICTORIES MAY BECOME THE SCENE OF FINAL DEFEAT. "I will break the bow of Israel in the valley of Jezreel." The "bow" is always in Scripture an emblem of strength, and here denotes the military and political power of Israel, which would be broken in the valley of Jezreel. No place was more distinguished than this for the execution of Divine judgments against the foes of his people. There the hosts of Sisera were scattered by Barak, and there the Midianites slept securely in their camp till, in the dead of night, Gideon with his three hundred swept down the hillside like an avalanche and overwhelmed them. This place, made memorable by former victories, was to become the scene of final defeat to God's people who had become God's foes. This dreadful change was strikingly set forth by the two contrasted names, "Israel" and "Yidsreel," names which implied that it was brought about by change in character; for the people were no longer "Israel," having *power with God*, but had become "Yidsreel," *scattered* by God, from him and from each other. Israel's bow should be broken in the valley of Jezreel. What is the bow of our strength? If it be not in Jehovah it will be broken; for the day of retribution must come upon all that sets itself against God, or dares to take his place. We are hastening on to a final conflict which will test us to the utmost. In the valley of the shadow of death our fathers have exclaimed, "Now thanks be unto God which giveth us the victory;" but if we forsake God as Israel did, that place of holy memories will be to us, not the place of conquest and song, but of defeat and shame, for there that in which we have foolishly trusted will be broken, like the bow of Israel in the valley of Jezreel.—A. R.

Ver. 7.—*Divine deliverance.* "But I will have mercy upon the house of Judah, and will save them by the Lord their God, and will not save them by bow, nor by sword, nor by battle, by horses, nor by horsemen." The contrast between the kingdoms of Judah and of Israel, in their nature and destiny, is here expressly declared. For Israel there was no hope; although pardon awaited any man amongst that people who turned unto the Lord, for no nation has been so godless, no family so vicious, but that every penitent in it may come with confidence to God. As for the kingdom, however, it was founded in rebellion against David's house, and therefore against the Divine purpose. Its distinguishing mark was idolatry; the calves at Bethel and Dan indicated its limits, and the counsels of God, through his prophets, had been ostentatiously rejected. Hence the time had come when the people should be given over to the heathen whose worship they had chosen, and the words of the preceding verse announced their irrevocable doom. "I will no more have mercy upon the house of Israel, but I will utterly take them away." Very different was the position of the house of Judah. With all their imperfections and sins, the Jews still frequented the sacred temple, and there by appointed worship bore witness to the existence and unity of the living and true God. Judah was, therefore, still to be God's ark, borne down the stream of time amidst the *débris* of fallen empires, until he should come forth from it who was the King of Judah, the Son of David, the Redeemer of the world. The Jews were to be humiliated and punished for sin, yet they should not as a people be destroyed; and so

they were cheered by the promise, "I will have mercy upon the house of Judah, and will save them by the Lord their God." The earlier fulfilment of these words is recorded in 2 Kings xix., where we read of the deliverance of Jerusalem, not by brave defence, nor by bribes, nor by auxiliaries, but by the unseen pestilence which slew a hundred and eighty-five thousand in the crowded camp of the Assyrians. Nor was the promise exhausted then, but was again fulfilled when the Jews of the Captivity, to their own amazement, were restored, not by revolt or stratagem, but by the free offer of the magnanimous Cyrus (Ezra i. 2, 3). Our text, however, has more than a local and temporary interest. *The principle of Divine deliverance, through other than human means,* perpetually asserts itself in Old Testament history. It was the first lesson the Israelites were taught after leaving Egypt, when at the Red Sea Moses said, "Stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord! He shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace." And this lesson, emphasized in the wilderness, was repeated immediately Canaan was entered, when the walls of Jericho fell before the strength of an army which lifted up no weapon against it. In elucidating this principle of Divine deliverance we observe—

I. THAT IT IS MAN'S NATURAL TENDENCY TO TRY TO DO WITHOUT GOD, to trust the bow, and the chariots of human providing. The story of the prodigal is repeated constantly. Every man says in effect, "Father, give me my portion; let me see how I can do for myself without thee." It is only by-and-by, when he finds that there are worse friends than the Father, and wearier places than the home, that, clothed in rags, with failing heart and many a tear, he says, "I will arise, and go to my Father." 1. *Israel showed this tendency.* They confided in their bravery and patriotism and in the strength of Egypt, believing that unitedly they could construct a dam against which this great sea of Assyria, surging in so ominously, would break in vain. It was not an unreasonable expectation from the human point of view; for it seems still accepted as an axiom that "Providence is on the side of big battalions," and that the destinies of peoples are decided by their material resources. Hosea would be rebuked as a prating preacher who was going beyond his province, when he urged that righteousness and godliness were elements which demanded consideration; by the lowest subaltern and by the highest general his counsels would be laughed to scorn, though events showed that he was right. 2. *Temptations to this were never stronger than now.* In proportion as our powers develop, our liability to trust to them, and not to him who gave them, increases. In our day physical sciences have grown, and the principles so educed have been swiftly and boldly applied to our necessities. We are pointed to evidences in every direction of the constancy of law and the absence of fortuity. Indeed, the religious fallacy of Judah has been formulated into the philosophy of Positivism, which recognizes nothing but that which the intellect can prove, and excludes everything spiritual and supernatural. It points out that in human distresses we should turn to science, not to God; and that the study of political economy and natural science may fairly supersede the preaching of righteousness as a means of salvation to a people. We do not disparage scientific discoveries, but rather rejoice that they are made so frequently and fearlessly. We only ask men to recognize that there is another sphere not discoverable by the intellect, which underlies and impinges upon the sphere of sensuous life, and that, while things seen are temporal, there are things unseen which are eternal. Well may one of the characters in 'The New Republic' be represented as saying to such teachers, "Your mind is so occupied with subduing matter, that it is entirely forgetful of subduing itself—a thing, trust me, that is far more important." But the disappointment of men's shrewdest anticipations proves that the race is not always to the swift, nor the battle to the strong. "The shields of the earth" (the means of defence, temporal and spiritual) "belong to the Lord."

II. THAT THE DISCIPLINE OF LIFE IS INTENDED TO ERADICATE THIS TENDENCY TO FORGETFULNESS OF GOD. God rarely disappoints expectations which are founded on a study of natural law; for to act in accordance with natural law is to put ourselves in harmony with the Divine will, law being the expression of will. Yet there should be no idolatry of law, because it works in an orderly way. Law without God is a body without life, a machine without motive power. To bring about a belief in this, "time and chance happen to all;" in other words, things occur which are not

expected and could not have been foreseen. 1. *In history we see that God has often baffled man.* He has defied probabilities, and chosen things which were weak to confound things which were mighty. Take as an example the destinies of Assyria and Judah, which were utterly unlike what man would have predicted. Assyria, in Hosea's time, was the strongest creation of military force, and political genius. In the magnificence of her wealth, and the splendour of her palaces, she rose before men's thoughts gloriously as the image Daniel saw in his vision. But no politician would have expected what the prophet foresaw—that a stone cut without hands would come from the mountain and smite that gigantic fabric to the dust; that those richly peopled plains would become the haunts of the bittern and owl, and the lair of wild beasts. Meantime Judah, a little despised kingdom, tossed helplessly between the opposing forces of Egypt and Assyria, like a piece of seaweed between two enormous waves, was to be "saved by the Lord her God." And thence, in the fulness of time, there came forth One whom men recognized as possessing the highest power, and amidst the ruins of a greater empire than Assyria herself, Christ, the true Ruler, founded a kingdom which never shall be moved. The world's expectations were set at nought. 2. *Have not our previsions often been falsified,* and our best plans frustrated, so that the old adage has reasserted itself, "Man proposes, God disposes"? Happy is it if, amidst the ruins of our enterprises, we can say, "It is the Lord: let him do what seemeth him good."

III. THAT MORAL VICTORIES ARE PREPARED FOR BY QUIET WAITING. God appoints quiet times for the recuperation of all life. The winter prepares for the spring. Sleep makes us ready for toil, and without it the world would go mad. So in the moral world. Work has been done most bravely and successfully by those who have had seasons of trust and waiting. Elijah had to learn that there was more power in the "still small voice" than in wind, or earthquake, or fire. Saul of Tarsus had to rein in his fiery spirit, and for three years was learning God's answer to his question, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" Neither Luther in the Wartburg nor Bunyan in the prison was wasting time, but gaining strength. Let us learn to wait as well as to work; and instead of being careful and troubled about many things, sit at Jesus' feet to hear his word, and "in quietness and confidence will be our strength." It is not by our subtle reasoning that we shall conquer our doubts, nor by our doings that we shall win salvation, nor by our efforts of speech that we shall save souls; for "the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God." He has mercy upon the house of Judah, and will save them neither by bow, nor sword, but by the Lord their God.

IV. THAT ITS HIGHEST EXEMPLIFICATION IS SEEN IN CHRIST'S REDEMPTION OF THE WORLD. Had he come in manifested glory, the sceptic would have been silenced and the wrong-doer abashed; but he was made lower than the angels, that he might suffer death upon the cross. Born in a stable, he was nursed by the poor, depended on the wages of a carpenter for his food, and played with the common children in Nazareth. Having begun his ministry, he called to himself none of the leaders in the ecclesiastical, or intellectual, or social life of his age; but appointed Galilean fishermen as his representatives. Then he let his foes do their worst. No angelic forces hurled back his assailants, no trumpet-peal startled the court during the mockery of his trial; but he was taken "by wicked hands, crucified and slain." And when he had passed away from earth, his disciples, without human advantages, won the world's attention and established the kingdom of the Lord amongst all peoples. "It pleased God through the foolishness of preaching to save those who believed." Consider: 1. *The principle which underlies our text has its application in the experience of every Christian life.* We are justified, not by the works of the Law, but by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. We conquer our easily besetting sins, not by strenuous resolve or Christian association, but by him who, working through these, says, "Without me ye can do nothing." We are saved from the fret of care, not because we are strong and brave to bear it, but because we have learnt to cast all our care upon him. We obtain rest from mental difficulties, not by reasoning, but by trusting, and leaving much contentedly to God's future revelation. And in our last conflict salvation will be ours, not through the memory of past service, nor through our clear perception of what awaits us in the unseen world, but through the realized presence of him who came to receive us to himself and

to *give* us the victory. 2. *And finally let us apply the principle to the accomplishment of Christian work.* The foes of Christ are still around his Church, and they will be conquered, not by the bow of intellectual, or social, or civil power, but by the Lord our God. You will never conquer scepticism by logical demonstrations; nor cast out heresy by persecution or the thunders of excommunication; nor put down vices by civil law; nor compel the heathen to submit at the point of the sword. But against these evils they will prevail who trust, not in men, but in God; who, conscious of human helplessness, look beyond all that is seen as those who can re-echo the psalmist's words, "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help." For beyond the reach of mortal weakness and transient power he reigns who of old uttered this promise, "I will have mercy upon the house of Judah, and will save them by the Lord their God, and will not save them by bow, nor by sword, nor by battle, by horses, nor by horsemen."—A. R.

Ver. 1.—*The word of the Lord.* It is characteristic of the inspired Hebrew prophets that they sank themselves, their own individuality, in their Divine commission, and in the authority which accompanied it. In reading their prophecies we feel, as those to whom they were first addressed must have felt, that there was no desire on their part to speak their own thoughts, their own words.

I. FROM WHOM THE WORD CAME. Their formula was this: "Thus saith the Lord." Their word was "the word of the Lord." This is witness: 1. To the *personality and spiritual nature of God.* Words are the clothing of thought. He who speaks first thinks. The Divine mind is presumed in the Divine utterance. Language like that of the text could not be used of a principle, an abstraction, a law, an unconscious force, such as some would thoughtlessly substitute for the living God. 2. To the *interest of God in the moral state and welfare of men.* Why should the Supreme concern himself to address the members of our race? That he has done so is evidence of his grace and benevolence. And to this the mission of the prophets bears witness only less powerfully than the advent and ministry of the incarnate Word.

II. BY WHOM THE WORD CAME. 1. By the *medium of human spirits.* There might have been other methods of communicating with mankind; but infinite Wisdom made choice of this. Man has ever been the minister of God to man. 2. The appeal of Heaven is thus seen to be to the *human reason and conscience.* It is plain that the Divine intention was not to overwhelm with an irresistible impression, but to convince and to persuade. 3. The Lord made choice of *agents morally in sympathy with his holy character and aims.* The prophets uttered the word of God, but they made that word their own. They plainly felt indignation with rebellion and unfaithfulness, and commiseration for wretchedness, and joy in every righteous endeavour and aim. In a word, they were what their designation implies—inspired *utterers* of the Divine mind, *voices* to all who would hear.

III. TO WHOM THE WORD CAME. 1. In every case it came to *beings naturally capable of understanding it,* and therefore responsible for the manner in which it was received. 2. To *Israel* the word came with an especial emphasis and adaptation; for the people had already received from the Lord such revelations as rendered them peculiarly qualified now to hear and to obey. 3. The especial circumstances of the *northern tribes,* the northern kingdom, were such as to make it peculiarly appropriate that Hosea should address to them language, first of severity, and then of consolation and encouragement. 4. The fact that these prophecies form a part of the canon of the Old Testament is an evidence that these words are profitable to all; and of this the experience of the Church is a sufficient confirmation.—T.

Ver. 2.—*Spiritual infidelity.* The figurative language in which Hosea was inspired to expose and denounce the sinful idolatry and apostasy of Israel is startling, and the symbolic act in which these sins were set forth in their abomination and horror is evidently intended to shock the mind of every reader.

I. GOD IS THE HUSBAND OF HIS PEOPLE. Human relationships are pressed into the service of religion; and the fact that God created man in his own image is the justification of such similitudes as that of the text. The Creator is represented as the King, the Father, and the Husband of the children of men. Under each relationship some

new aspect of religious life and duty is brought into prominence. Jehovah declares that he espoused Israel in selecting her from among the nations, admitting her to special intimacy, and conferring upon her peculiar dignity and favours.

II. GOD'S PEOPLE ARE UNDER OBLIGATION TO FAITHFULNESS TO THEIR LORD. The wife who has accepted a man as her husband binds herself to "keep to him only." Adultery has ever been regarded as a shameful vice and crime. How much more are those, whom the eternal Supreme has favoured with the revelation of his Law and his purposes, bound to render to him the most loyal and faithful service! He alone is to be worshipped, adored, obeyed, and served. Israel was distinguished among the nations by many events in the national history; and "in these last days" all to whom the gospel has come are signally honoured, and are placed under a sterner responsibility.

III. IRRELIGION AND APOSTASY ARE NOTHING LESS THAN FLAGRANT INFIDELITY. When Hosea wrote, the northern tribes, constituting the kingdom of Israel, were again and again guilty of idolatry, and even those who were free from this stain in many instances fell into gross ungodliness and disobedience. Such conduct was represented as equivalent to spiritual adultery. Israel forsook her espoused husband and went after other lovers, and attached herself guiltily and disgracefully to the worthless rivals who wooed her. And all who depart from God are guilty of infidelity of a flagrant kind, such as the Lord cannot overlook or treat with indifference.

IV. THE UNFAITHFUL ARE SUMMONED TO REPENTANCE, AND ARE INVITED TO RETURN TO THE LORD. Conscience witnesses to the justice of God's claims and to the sinfulness of neglecting and outraging them. And the word of the Lord comes to the unfaithful in mercy and compassion. For, whilst he might righteously cast off his unfaithful spouse, he graciously opens the arms of his love and welcomes back the penitent and the contrite.—T.

Ver. 6.—*Mercy denied.* The iniquity of Israel surpassed that of the sister kingdom of Judah. Hence the awful message of the Lord to the former, contrasting with the declaration of favour made towards the latter. There is perhaps nothing more terrible in the whole of revelation than the name symbolically given to the daughter of Hosea, regarded as representing the idolatrous and rebellious nation of Israel—the Unpitied!

I. HERE IS A WITNESS TO THE ENORMITY OF HUMAN SIN. Men sometimes imagine that God is indifferent to the conduct of man. But the truth is that while he is merciful, while his mercy endureth for ever, he is not on this account an unobservant Governor. If he were not righteous, his mercy would be unmeaning. If he forgets to be gracious, if he lays aside his compassion, that which provokes him to such action must be iniquity of the deepest dye.

II. THIS WITNESS IS ALL THE MORE STRIKING BECAUSE OF GOD'S MERCIFUL NATURE AND DISPOSITION. That some kings show no pity to their enemies, to rebels and traitors, seems only natural; their character is stern and unforgiving. But this is far from being the case with Jehovah. All Scripture concurs in exhibiting him as rich in mercy, as delighting in mercy, as unfailing in mercy. If, then, he in any case refuses or withholds mercy, his most glorious attribute seems to be in abeyance. He does not refuse mercy for his own pleasure, but only when its exercise would lead to anarchy and encourage rebellion.

III. THE REFUSAL OF MERCY IS NOT IRREVOCABLE. It is not for us to question the consistency of contiguous representations of the Divine government and purposes. We take them as we find them. And we observe that even when denunciations so terrible as that of the text have been uttered, after all they are followed by promises of deliverance and blessing.

IV. ACCORDINGLY THE THREATS OF GOD SHOULD NOT LEAD THE SINNER TO DESPAIR, BUT RATHER TO REPENTANCE. To some temperaments especially, language like that of the text is productive of great depression as well as of serious concern. Let it, however, be remembered that to dread the Divine displeasure is one step towards the Divine favour. It is the insensible and impenitent who are working out their own destruction; whilst the man who trembles at God's word is in the way for blessing. They who deserve no mercy may nevertheless obtain mercy; but only by sincere contrition, unrestrained confession, deep repentance, and a confidence in the Divine grace, which is warranted by the gospel of Jesus Christ.—T.

Ver. 7.—*Salvation, not of man, but of God.* It may well be that there was in this verse a prediction of one certain definite interposition of the Lord on behalf of Judah. Whilst the northern kingdom should be forsaken, and consequently conquered and desolated, Judah, it was foretold, should experience a very signal instance of Divine delivering mercy. The destruction of the host of Sennacherib, when

> "The angel of death spread his wings on the blast,
> And breath'd in the face of the foe as he pass'd,"

exactly corresponds with the language of this verse. Human power and bravery were not the means of the deliverance of Jerusalem; this was due to the intervention of a Divine and omnipotent hand. It is well that pious minds should recognize the wisdom and the power of God in every work of deliverance, and especially in the unparalleled interposition wrought on behalf of our humanity by Jesus Christ our Saviour.

I. MAN'S SALVATION IS NOT WROUGHT BY HUMAN MIGHT. 1. History records the insufficiency, the vanity, of all human endeavours to effect the deliverance of man from sin. Rulers by legislation, warriors by arms, philosophers by systems of thought, poets by emotion and imagination, have all essayed the reformation, the moral elevation, of the race; and all who have tried have failed. The wisdom of the world has been proved folly, and its strength weakness. 2. The explanation of this failure is not far to seek. All human means are powerless in affecting the government of God; whatever is to affect that must of necessity originate with the Divine Governor himself. And all human means fail to reach the root of the mischief in man's spiritual nature. They deal with the surface, but do not penetrate to the centre; they do not reach the heart of the individual; they do not, consequently, prove able to reconstitute society.

II. SALVATION IS FROM THE LORD OUR GOD, AND FROM HIM ONLY. 1. It might be presumed that such is the case, from the infinity of the Divine resources. God is not baffled in the execution of his purposes, as men constantly are, by insufficient power. On the one hand, the nature of his creatures is accessible to him, and is known perfectly by him; on the other hand, the means of affecting that nature are all at his disposal. 2. We observe the supreme proof of this in the gospel of Jesus Christ. (1) The Saviour himself was from God. (2) The Spirit, who effects the internal change, is the Spirit of God. (3) The gospel itself is "the glorious gospel of the blessed God." Thus it is apparent that the whole provision for man's redemption and recovery is nothing less than Divine.

APPLICATION. This declaration is especially encouraging to those who feel profoundly at once their own need of salvation and the insufficiency of all human provision; a Divine interposition satisfies all the conditions and necessities of the sinner's case.—T.

Vers. 9, 10.—*Rejection and restoration.* Paradox is often the highest truth. Consistency is the idol of the logician. And not only is the course of the wise and good man now and again at variance with itself; God's ways sometimes appear to us as returning upon themselves. Yet there is a moral unity and order observable, even when the "dealings" of the Divine King with his subjects seem inexplicable and at first sight irreconcilable.

I. THE UTTER REJECTION OF ISRAEL FORETOLD. Stronger language of repudiation could not be used than that which is used here. Israel is completely disowned. "Ye are not my people, and I will not be your God." The adulterous spouse is divorced, cast out, and forgotten. The idolatrous nation is joined unto idols, and the aggrieved Husband of the adulteress pronounces the sentence, "Let her alone." In all this we discern the degradation into which sin plunges the ungodly. And we discern, too, the righteous rule of the Lord of all, who will not treat evil as good, and who will vindicate his Law.

II. THE GLORIOUS RESTORATION AND PROSPERITY OF ISRAEL ASSURED. In startling contrast to the denunciation of ver. 9, is the gracious and generous promise of ver. 10. 1. Increase and prosperity are denoted by the common expression, "as the sand of the sea." 2. Favour is expressed in the assurance that those who had been disowned as the subjects of God shall yet be regarded as his sons. The very spot that had echoed

with the thunder of wrath should resound with the language of fatherly complacency and affection.

III. THE RECONCILIATION BETWEEN THE TWO DECLARATIONS. In several places in this prophecy similar paradox is met with; there is a strange and sudden reversal of tone and language. 1. The change is not in the principles of God's government, but in the condition and character of God's subjects. Repentance and renewal are undoubtedly presumed. 2. The two sides of religion are thus harmonized. The law threatens, the gospel promises; but both alike tend to the moral good of men and to the glory of God. 3. The reconciliation is supremely effected in the gospel of Jesus Christ; by him came grace and truth, and he made peace.—T.

Ver. 10.—"*Sons of the living God.*" It is both singular and instructive to observe that this expression, which is one of the richest and sweetest in revelation, is found in closest connection with language of severity, rebuke, and threatening. The contrast enhances the preciousness of the doctrine. Children of wrath become members of the Divine family, rejoice in a Father's love, and inherit a Father's home.

I. THE LIGHT HERE CAST UPON THE NATURE AND CHARACTER OF THE SUPREME. It is a gospel needed by our age as much as by any that has ever existed—the tidings that the living God is the Father of the sons of men. 1. He is the *living God;* neither an abstraction nor a law, nor a Being uninterested in his works or indifferent to the fate of his spiritual creation. 2. He is *the Father;* which is something more, for it denotes his personal regard, his affectionate disposition, his benignant and bountiful care. To take any lower view than this of the Divine Being is to go back from the enlightened teaching of revelation to the effete and degraded paganism of the past.

II. THE LIGHT HERE CAST UPON THE CALLING AND DESTINY OF MAN. 1. Here is witness to our spiritual nature. This language could not be applied to the irrational and unmoral brutes. Only man, among the inhabitants of earth, is capable of the dignity and blessedness involved in Divine sonship. 2. Here is witness to the transforming power of religion. The context shows that sinners have forfeited all claim to a hallowed relationship such as is here described, with its privileges and immunities. The grace of God, especially as revealed in the gospel of Christ, secures *adoption.* Christians are "children of God by faith in Christ Jesus;" they have "received the Spirit of adoption." 3. Here is witness to the duties of the new and spiritual life. What dignity clothes the sons of the living God! What relationships, what prospects, what services, are theirs! Surely it is obvious that those so honoured are summoned, and are bound, to cherish filial sentiments, to render filial obedience, to offer filial devotion. A holy Father looks for holy sons.—T.

Ver. 11.—*One body and one Head.* This prediction may be regarded as having been literally fulfilled, when, after the Captivity, all distinctions among the Hebrew people came to an end. It may be regarded as still waiting for fulfilment in the restoration of Israel to the Holy Land. But it seems more just and more profitable to turn attention to the *moral* lesson of this text, and to come under the influence of this inspiring representation of spiritual felicity. Elements in true well-being are here strikingly combined.

I. UNITY. Judah and Israel were often at enmity, and always envious and discordant; their reconciliation was represented as a marvellous work, attesting Divine power and grace. The work of Christ was one of reconciliation; he harmonized Jews and Gentiles, "making of twain one new man." And the ultimate realization of his purposes of mercy shall be attained when there shall be "one flock and one Shepherd."

II. SUBJECTION TO ONE HEAD. From the day when Rehoboam and Jeroboam became kings of the two sections respectively into which the Hebrew people divided themselves, onwards for many generations that people was a disunited and discordant people. In Christ Jesus a disunion, a discordance, far more widespread and far-reaching, was abolished. He is the one Head, in subjection to whom the several and separate members realize their true and proper unity. History shows us the vanity of merely human principles and powers of unity. But there are signs that a Divine headship is destined by the supreme Ruler to be the means of reconciling those who are severed, and of preserving the unity of those who are at one.

III. A SPIRITUAL EXODUS LEADING TO ONE SPIRITUAL HOME. The chronicles of Israel revealed the fact that it was the Exodus which made the nation. When brought out from Egypt, Israel felt the pulses of national life. A symbol this of the effects of a spiritual deliverance; a promise this of a spiritual and eternal rest. The Church is led forth by her Saviour, by him is guided through the wilderness, and by him will be gathered into the unity of the heavenly Canaan.—T.

Ver. 1.—*Scripture, kings, and truth.* "The word of the Lord that came unto Hosea, the son of Beeri, in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, Kings of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, King of Israel." This verse leads us to consider three things.

I. THE ESSENCE OF SCRIPTURE. What is the essence of the Bible? It is here called "The word of the Lord." Analyze the expression: 1. It is a "*word.*" A word fulfils two functions; it is a *revelation and an instrument.* A true word reveals the mind of the speaker, and is at the same time an instrument to accomplish his purpose. The Bible is the manifestation of God; it shows his intellect and heart; and is his instrument as well, by which he accomplishes his purpose on the human mind. By it he is said to *enlighten, quicken, cleanse, conquer,* etc. 2. It is a *Divine* word. "The word of the Lord." Words are always powerful and important according to the nature and character of the speaker. The words of some men are unclean and weak, the words of others pure and mighty. Because the Lord is all-mighty and holy, his word is all-powerful and pure. 3. It is a Divine word *concerning men.* The prophecy came to Hosea in relation to Israel. The Lord has spoken many words, words to other intelligences unknown to us. If all the words he has spoken in the universe were written in books, what globe or system would contain them? But the Bible is a word *to* man. 4. It is a Divine word concerning man *coming through men.* The Lord's word came now through Hosea to Israel. In the Bible God speaks to man *through* man. This gives the charm of an imperishable humanity to the Bible.

II. THE MORTALITY OF KINGS. Several kings are here mentioned who appeared and passed away during the ministry of Hosea. He prophesied "in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, Kings of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, King of Israel." Uzziah was the eleventh king of Judah. His example was holy, and his reign peaceful and prosperous. Ahaz was a son of Jotham; at the age of twenty he succeeded his royal sire. He gave himself up to idolatry, and sacrificed even his own children to the gods of the heathen. Hezekiah, the son and successor of Ahaz, was a man of distinguished virtue and religion, animated by true piety and patriotism. Jeroboam was the son of Joash, and great-grandson of Jehu, and followed the former Jeroboam, the man who made Israel to sin, and, like him, sank into the lowest idolatry and corruption. Some of these kings had come and gone during the ministry of Hosea;—*Kings die,* etc. 1. *This fact is a blessing.* Royalty has a tendency so to feed and fatten the depravity of human nature, that, were not death to interpose, the lives of men would become intolerable. When we think of such kings as those of which Ahaz and Jeroboam were types, we thank God for death, and rejoice in the "king of terrors," who comes to strike the despots down. 2. *This fact is a lesson.* What does the death of kings teach? (1) The rigorous impartiality of death. Death is no respecter of persons; it treats the pauper and the prince alike.

> "The black camel death kneeleth once at each door,
> And mortal must mount to return never more."

(2) The utter powerlessness of wealth. The wealth of empires cannot bribe death, nor can all the armies of war ward off his blow or keep him at bay. (3) The sad hollowness of worldly glory. Death strips sovereigns of all their pageantry and reduces them to common dust.

> "It is a monitory truth, I ween,
> That, turning up the ashes of the grave,
> One can discern no difference between
> The richest sultan and the poorest slave."

III. THE PERPETUITY OF TRUTH. Although these kings successively appeared and passed away, the ministry of Hosea kept on. 1. The "Word of the Lord" is *adapted*

to all generations. It is congruous with all intellects, it chimes in with all hearts, it provides for the common wants of all. 2. The "Word of the Lord" is *necessary* for all generations. All men in all ages and lands want it; it is as indispensable to their happiness as air is to their life. Generations may appear in the distant future who may not require our forms of government, our social institutions, our artistic devices, our mechanical inventions, and who may despise our literary productions; but no generation will ever appear who will not require the "Word of the Lord."—D. T.

Ver. 5.—*Retribution.* "And it shall come to pass at that day, that I will break the bow of Israel in the valley of Jezreel." The word "Jezreel" means "God's seed," or "sowing." The tract of land called by this name was an extensive plain, computed by modern travellers to be about fifteen miles square, stretching south and south-west from Mount Tabor and Nazareth; the hills of Nazareth and those of Samaria on the south, those of Tabor and Hermon on the west, and Carmel to the south-west. It was called by the Greeks, Esdraelon: it had also a royal city, where the tidings of Saul's death in the battle of Gilboa was first announced. In this Ahab and Joram presided, and here Jehu slew both Jezebel and Joram. It was the scene of many battles: among them, those between Deborah and Barak and Sisera the commander of the Syrians; one between Ahab and the Syrians, and one between Saul and the Philistines, and another between Gideon and the Midianites. Indeed, it seems to have been a chosen place for battles, from Barak to Bonaparte: Jews, Gentiles, Egyptians, Saracens, Christian Crusaders, and anti-Christian Frenchmen, Persians, Druses, Turks, and Arabs. Warriors out of every nation which is under the heaven have pitched their tents upon the plains of Esdraelon, and have beheld the various banners of their nation wet with the dews of Tabor and Hermon. The text leads us to make a few remarks concerning God's retribution. Here the Eternal threatens to break the bow of Israel in the valley of Jezreel. The language suggests that—

I. GOD'S RETRIBUTION TAKES AWAY THE POWER OF ITS VICTIM. The bow of Israel is to be broken. The language means the utter destruction of all their military power. Israel fought many battles, won many victories, and trusted in its "bow"—military force—but now that very thing in which it trusted is to be destroyed. It is ever thus, when retributive justice comes to deal out suffering to the sinner, it strips him entirely of his power; it breaks his bow, and cuts his spear asunder. Thus he is left to the mercy of his enemies. What are the great enemies of the soul? *Carnality, prejudice, selfishness, corrupt impulses,* and *habits.* Retributive justice leaves the sinner at the mercy of these—breaks his bow, so that he cannot deliver himself. He becomes their utter and their hopeless victim, and their "bow" is gone. The Word of truth, the Spirit of God, and all the ministers of religion are taken from him, and he is left morally powerless. What "bow" have the victims of retribution in eternity by which to deliver themselves from their crushing tyrants? No bow at all—all redemptive instrumentalities are taken from them. Thank God, we have a bow now in our hands; the Bible, the Spirit, the ministry, are all with us.

II. GOD'S RETRIBUTION DESPISES THE PRESTIGE OF ITS VICTIM. The bow is to be broken in the valley of Jezreel. Perhaps no spot on earth did Israel think of so much as Jezreel. It was the scene of their grandest military exploits; the scene, too, where Jehu their king had slain all the worshippers of Baal. It was to Israel what Marathon is to Greece, what Waterloo is to England. In this very scene the punishment shall come; the place of their glory shall be the place of their ruin and shame. Thus it is ever; when retribution comes, it seems to despise the very things in which its victim gloried. A noble lineage, great wealth, patrimonial possessions, elevated positions, brilliant genius, and distinguished abilities,—these are the modern Jezreels of sinners. In these they boast. But what are these? God, when he comes to judgment, will strike them in those very places; he will break their bow in the valley of Jezreel.

III. GOD'S RETRIBUTION DEFIES THE OPPOSITION OF ITS VICTIMS. Jezreel was well fortified. Israel had great confidence in the protection which it had. When the prophets foretold the ruin of their kingdom they would think it perhaps impossible; they would think of the victories won in Jezreel and the protection offered there. But retribution will take the sinner in his strongest place, strike him down on the spot where he feels himself most fortified. Notwithstanding Jezreel, the kingdom of Israel

was broken; the ten tribes were scattered upon the hills as sheep that had no shepherd. What defence has the sinner? "Though hand join hand, iniquity shall not go unpunished."

CONCLUSION. Retribution must always follow sin. It may move slowly and silently, but its pace is steady, resolute, and increasing. Swifter and swifter it moves towards the victim. Sooner or later it will reach him, break his "bow," and overwhelm him in shame and confusion. "Be sure your sin will find you out."—D. T.

Vers. 6, 7.—*God's mercy.* "For I will no more have mercy upon the house of Israel; but I will utterly take them away. But I will have mercy upon the house of Judah, and will save them by the Lord their God, and will not save them by bow, nor by sword, nor by battle, by horses, nor by horsemen." This passage leads us to contemplate God's mercy. Mercy is a modification of goodness. God is good to all, but is only merciful to the suffering sinner. Mercy not only implies suffering, but suffering arising from *sin*. If suffering were a necessity springing out of the constitution of things, its removal or mitigation would be an act of justice rather than mercy. Earth is a sphere where God shows his mercy, for here is suffering springing from sin. Here we have—

I. MERCY WITHHELD FROM SOME. "For I will no more have mercy upon the house of Israel; but I will utterly take them away." "There are," says Burroughs, "three estates of the people, signified by the three children of Hosea: First, their scattered estate, and that was signified by Jezreel, the first son, and the story of that you have in 2 Kings xv. 9—19, where you may read their woeful seditions; for Zachariah reigned but six months, and then Shallum slew him, and reigned in his stead; and he reigned but one month, for Menahem came and smote Shallum and slew him, and reigned in his stead; so here were nothing but murders and seditions amongst them. A scattered people. The scattered state of the people of Israel was their weak condition signified by the daughter; and the history of that you have from ver. 16 of that chapter onwards, where, when Pul, the King of Assyria, came against Israel, Menahem yielded to him his demand, gave him a thousand talents of silver to go from him, and laid a tax upon the people for it. Here they were brought into a very low and weak condition. And afterwards this King of Assyria came to them again, and carried part of them into captivity. The third child was Lo-ammi, and the history of the state of the people signified by what you have in 2 Kings xvii. 6, where they were fully carried away and wholly rejected for ever. And because they were a little before that time grown up to some strength more than formerly, therefore this last was a son." God now threatened to withhold mercy from Israel, and we know that when he did so the consequence was national ruin. Where mercy has been abused the time comes when it is withheld, and the subjects are left abandoned of God. When mercy is withheld from nations they perish, from Churches they decay, from families they sink to corruption, from individuals they are lost. "My Spirit shall not always strive with men;" "Ephraim is joined to idols: let him alone."

II. MERCY BESTOWED UPON OTHERS. "I will have mercy upon the house of Judah." This mercy was signally shown to Judah. "When the Assyrian armies had destroyed Samaria, and carried the ten tribes away into captivity, they proceeded to besiege Jerusalem; but God had mercy on the house of Judah, and saved them; they were *saved by the Lord their God* immediately, and not by sword or 'bow.' When the ten tribes were carried into captivity, and their land was possessed by others, they being utterly taken away, God had mercy on the house of Judah and saved them, and after seventy years brought them back, not by might or power, but by the Spirit of the Lord of hosts." And truly most signal was the mercy shown to Judah, when in one night one hundred and eighty-five thousand of the Assyrian warriors were slain.

"The angel of death spread his wings on the blast,
And breath'd in the face of the foe as he pass'd;
And the eyes of the sleepers wax'd deadly and chill,
And their hearts but once heav'd and for ever grew still!

"And there lay the steed with his nostril all wide,
But through it there roll'd not the breath of his pride,

And the foam of his gasping lay white on the turf,
And cold as the spray of the rock-beating surf.

"And there lay the rider distorted and pale,
With the dew on his brow and the rust on his mail;
And the tents were all silent, the banners alone,
The lances unlifted, the trumpet unblown."

Looking at the words in their spiritual application, they suggest two remarks in relation to man's deliverance. 1. *It is of mercy.* "I will have mercy upon the house of Judah, and will save them by the Lord their God." The deliverance of man from the guilt, the power, and consequence of sin is entirely of God's mercy—free, sovereign, boundless mercy. 2. *It is by moral means.* "Will not save them by bow, nor by sword, nor by battle, by horses, nor by horsemen." No material force can deliver the soul from its spiritual difficulties and perils. Moral means alone can effect the object. "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord."

CONCLUSION. Use mercy rightly while you have it. Its grand design is to produce reformation of character and meetness for the high service and lofty fellowship with the great God, here and yonder, now and for ever.—D. T.

Vers. 10, 11.—*The destiny of the race.* "Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured nor numbered; and it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people, there it shall be said unto them, Ye are the sons of the living God. Then shall the children of Judah and the children of Israel be gathered together, and appoint themselves one head, and they shall come up out of the land: for great shall be the day of Jezreel." Biblical critics of all schools use the natural Israel as the emblem of the spiritual. Paul does so, and therefore it is just and right. We shall take Israel for *mankind*, and use the text to illustrate the destiny of the race.

I. The race is destined to an INDEFINITE INCREASE in the number of good men. "The number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered or measured." The good, the *spiritual* Israel, have been comparatively few in all ages, though perhaps there is a larger number now than in any preceding period. But the time will come when they shall be *innumerable*. What mean such passages as these?—"He shall have dominion from sea to sea, from the river to the end of the earth." Again, "All kings shall fall down before him." Again, "The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ." Numerous as the sand on the sea-shore! A Jewish rabbi regards the good as the sand, not only in relation to number, but to usefulness. As the sand keeps the sea from breaking in and drowning the world, so the saints keep the world from being drowned by the waves of eternal retribution. This is true. Were it not for the good the world would not stand long. But it is to represent *number*, not protection, that the figure is employed. Who can count the sand which is upon the shore? Do you say that to all appearances such an increase is impossible? When God promised to Abraham that his seed should be as the stars of heaven and the sand upon the shore, what could seem more improbable than the fulfilment? It was twenty years after the promise that he had any child, and that only child he was commanded to destroy, and though Isaac was preserved, he had no offspring until twenty years after his marriage. How improbable the fulfilment of such a promise; but nevertheless it was fulfilled. How numerous the descendants of Abraham became! Do not judge from appearance. Trust God's Word; it will come to pass. There is a glorious future for the world.

II. The race is destined to a TRANSCENDENT PRIVILEGE. "And it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people, there it shall be said unto them, Ye are the sons of the living God." 1. They are destined to a *general conversion to God.* From not being his people they are to become his people. The places of the earth now populated with the enemies of God will one day be crowded with his friends; places where idolatry, superstition, worldliness, and infidelity prevail shall in the bright future be consecrated to Heaven. 2. They are destined to a *general adoption into the family of God.* "Ye are the sons of the living God." They shall be endowed and animated with the true Spirit, the spirit

of reverence and adoring love. They shall "worship the Father in spirit and in truth." "The *living* God." The world has abounded with dead gods; there is but one *living* God. He is the Living One. He is Life, the primal Fount of all existence. Christ calls him the living Father. "As the living Father sent me . . . I live in the Father, so he that eateth with me shall live by me."

III. The race is destined to a COMMON LEADERSHIP. "Then shall the children of Judah and the children of Israel be gathered together, and appoint themselves one head, and they shall come up out of the land: for great shall be the day of Jezreel." 1. This leadership shall unite the most hostile. "Then shall the children of Judah and the children of Israel be gathered together." Great and long-enduring was the hostility existing between these people. The time will come when all antipathies existing amongst peoples shall be destroyed. "Ephraim shall not envy Judah: they shall be of one heart and one mind." 2. This leadership shall be by common appointment. They shall "appoint *themselves* one Head." Their Leader will not be forced upon them contrary to their consent, nor will he force himself. Who is the Leader? Christ. He is the Leader of the people. He is the Commander-in-chief, he is the Captain of our salvation. All shall unite in him. He is the Head of the Church. 3. This leadership will be glorious. "They shall come up out of the land: for great shall be the day of Jezreel." As Moses led the Jews out of the wilderness, as Cyrus delivered them from Babylon, Christ will lead them out of Egyptian darkness and Babylonian corruption. "Israel is here called Jezreel," says Matthew Henry, "the seed of God. This seed is now sown in the earth, and buried in the clods, but great shall be its day when the harvest comes."

> "For I dipt into the future, far as human eye could see,
> Saw the vision of the world, and all the wonders that would be;
>
> Saw the heavens fill with commerce, argosies of magic sails,
> Pilots of the purple twilight, drooping down with costly bales;
>
> Heard the heavens fill with shouting, and there rained a ghastly dew
> From the nations' airy navies grappling in the centre blue;
>
> Far along the world-wide whisper of the south wind rushing warm,
> With the standards of the peoples plunging thro' the thunderstorm;
>
> Till the war-drum throbb'd no longer, and the battle-flags were furl'd
> In the parliament of man, the federation of the world.
>
> There the common sense of most shall hold a fretful realm in awe,
> And the kindly earth shall slumber, lapt in universal law."
>
> (Tennyson.)
>
> D. T.

Ver. 1.—*Superscription.* Consider here—

I. THE PROPHET. "Hosea, the son of Beeri." Hosea, whose name (Hoshea, "salvation") reminds of Jesus (Matt. i. 20), was: 1. *A native of Israel.* One, therefore, who lived in the midst of the evils which he describes, and felt a patriot's love for his people. 2. *A man of gentle, pensive, and confiding nature.* This made his anguish at the thought of the nation's sins and impending ruin the more poignant. There are striking resemblances between this prophet and Jeremiah, who sustained a relation to Judah similar to that which Hosea sustained to Israel. 3. *A man sorely tried by domestic sorrow.* Hosea was no mere spectator of the evils of the time. The iron had entered his own soul. He had been tried in the sorest way a man can be tried, by the unfaithfulness of his wife. It was, however, in connection with this sorrow that God's word came to him (ver. 2). It was his own experience which enabled him to enter so deeply into the mystery of God's love to Israel.

II. HIS TIMES. "In the days of Uzziah, Jotham," etc. He dates by the reigns of the legitimate kings of the house of David. Israel, after the fall of Jeroboam's house, was governed by usurpers (Menahem, Pekah, Hoshea, etc.). 1. *The chronology of the times.* This has important bearings on the duration of the prophet's ministry, and on the time which elapsed before the downfall of the kingdom. We cannot here, however, enter at length into the tangled questions raised by the apparent conflict of Hebrew and Assyrian dates (cf. Robertson Smith, 'Prophets of Israel,' Lect. iv. and notes).

It seems to us (1) that the biblical data do not warrant us in assuming the identity of the Pul of 2 Kings xv. 19, 20, to whom Menahem paid tribute, with Tiglath-pileser (cf. 1 Chron. vi. 26); and that insuperable difficulties attend the lowering of the dates of the kings to the degree necessary to bring them into entire accord with the dates in the Assyrian canon. We believe it will be found that there is a break in the canon at B.C. 745, sufficient for the insertion of the reign of Pul, and that the Menahem of the monuments, who paid tribute to Tiglath-pileser in B.C. 738, is not the Menahem of Scripture, but probably a second Menahem, a rival of Pekah's, whom Tiglath-pileser, after putting down the revolts of B.C. 743—748, attempted to set on the throne in his own interest. We have a Menahem of Samaria, clearly an Assyrian viceroy, as late as B.C. 702, in the reign of Sennacherib (Smith, 'History of Assyria,' p. 113). (2) On the other hand, there are strong grounds for believing that the interregna commonly assumed to have existed between the death of Jeroboam II. and the accession of Zachariah (eleven years), and again, between the murder of Pekah and the accession of Hoshea (eight or nine years), must be abandoned as untenable. Scripture does not recognize them, and, as shown by the monuments, Pekah and Rezin of Damascus (2 Kings xvi. 5; Isa. vii. 1) were certainly at war in B.C. 734. The numbers are probably to be harmonized by assuming that the regnal years of Uzziah and Jotham include, the former, eleven years of association with Amaziah, and the latter, eight or nine years of association with Uzziah (cf. 2 Chron. xxvi. 21). For an example of this mode of reckoning, see 2 Chron. xxi. 5 compared with 2 Kings viii. 16. This lowers the dates by nineteen years, and assuming a break of twenty-eight years in the canon at date of Pul (Rawlinson, 'Ancient History,' allows him twenty-five years), we bring the two chronologies from Ahab downwards into harmony. A formidable objection to the theory of a break in the canon is the mention, under date June, 763 B.C., of an eclipse of the sun, known to astronomy to have taken place at that date; but it is noteworthy that a similar eclipse took place June, 791 B.C., that is, twenty-eight years earlier, which exactly satisfies the conditions of our hypothesis (see Pusey on Amos viii. 9). The seventeenth of Pekah, given in 1 Kings xvi. 1 as the year of the accession of Ahaz, must, on this theory, be corrected to the seventh, and this is the only change required in the biblical numbers. Accepting these dates, it will follow that Jeroboam II. died about B.C. 762 or 763, a little more than forty years before the fall of Samaria (B.C. 721). If, further, we assume ch. i.—iii. of this book to be based on real history, and to have been composed before the downfall of the house of Jehu, we must suppose the prophet to have commenced his ministry about the middle of Jeroboam's reign, and to have laboured for nearly sixty years. 2. *The character of the times.* They were evil exceedingly. The state was tottering to its downfall. Revolution succeeded revolution (ch. vii. 7). The land was filled with idolatry and with every species of wickedness (ch. iv. 1, 19). Priests and prophets, instead of reproving sin, openly encouraged it (ch. iv. 5—9). The result was a general dissolution of social ties (ch. iv. 2). To internal miseries were added the horrors of foreign invasion (ch. v. 8—11). Yet in their distress the people sought not to God, but turned instead to Assyria and Egypt (ch. v. 13; vii. 11; viii. 9; x. 6; xii. 1). The nation, in short, was reeling to its ruin, and remonstrance and warning had no longer any effect upon it. The blow fell in the capture of Samaria, followed by the captivity of the people (ch. xiii. 16).

III. HIS MISSION. "The word of the Lord that came unto Hosea." Hosea's task in Israel was: 1. To testify against Israel for its sins; to hold up to the people a mirror which should show them to themselves. 2. To show them the root of their transgressions in apostasy from God. 3. To show them how God felt to *them* in their backslidings—how strong, pure, consistent, and unchanging was his affection towards them. 4. To warn them of the inevitable destruction they were bringing on themselves by sin. 5. To blend promise with threatening, and declare how grace would triumph even over Israel's unfaithfulness. Though sharing in many of the calamities of the latter days of the nation, Hosea seems to have been removed before the final stroke fell. This was God's mercy to him; he was "taken away from the evil to come" (Isa. lvii. 1).

IV. HIS BOOK. Hosea's prophecy preserves to us the substance of his public teaching. The materials wrought up in it belong to different periods of his ministry.

Ch. i.—iii. belong to the reign of Jeroboam (ch. i. 4). They show no traces of the anarchy which set in after that monarch's death. Ch. iv.—vi. belong to the succeeding period, the reign of Menahem, and earlier years of Pekah. Ch. vii. and viii. may be a little later. They speak of a time of busy political intrigue, and of chastisement by the Assyrians. We are disposed to refer them to the middle of the reign of Pekah, when the Assyrians were frequently in Palestine (B.C. 743—738). The key-note of ch. ix., "Rejoice not," suggests a gleam of returning prosperity. This answers to Pekah's later days when at war with Ahaz (2 Chron. xxviii.), prior to the crushing of his power by Tiglath-pileser (1 Kings xv. 29). Ch. x. plainly takes us unto the times of Hoshea, while ch. xi.—xiii. refer to the very last days of the kingdom. The abruptness, pathos, and quick emotional transitions which have been noted as characteristic of the prophet's style appear in these chapters in an exceptional degree. Ch. xiv. is the fitting conclusion to the whole. Calm succeeds to storm. The language is soft, gliding, peaceful, and laden with tenderness; the imagery is idyllic; glorious vistas open themselves into the future. Keil's division of the second part of the book into three sections, viz. ch. iv.—vi. 3; ch. vi. 4—xi. 11; ch. xii.—xiv., each section rounded off by promise, is as good as any.—J. O.

Vers. 1—3.—*The "wife of whoredoms."* We cannot doubt but that real incidents in the prophet's history underlie the representations of this chapter. Hosea, in obedience to what he recognized to be a word of God, took to wife Gomer, the daughter of Diblaim. The names (Gomer, "completion;" Diblaim, "fig-cakes") may possibly be symbolical, the real name of the prophet's wife being concealed (cf. ch. iii. 1, "The children of Israel, who look to other gods, and love *grape-cakes*"). We need not suppose Gomer to have been unchaste at the time of her marriage, though she soon afterwards fell into light ways. Ver. 2 is not to be pressed too literally. The prophet, in the light of his later knowledge, reads back into the beginning of his relations with Gomer a meaning which could hardly have been obvious to him at the time. Children were born of the marriage, to whom, by Divine command, the character of the mother having by this time revealed itself, Hosea gave prophetic names. These, as they grew up, appear to have followed only too faithfully in their mother's footsteps. "Wife of whoredoms," "children of whoredoms." Hosea did all he could to reclaim his wife from her sinful ways, but without success. The sequel of the story is given in ch. iii. The present section yields the following lessons:—

I. A DIVINE LEADING IS TO BE RECOGNIZED IN THE EVENTS OF LIFE. In what befell Hosea there was, as the prophet came afterwards to see, a clear Divine purpose. He was bidden take Gomer, for "the land hath committed grievous whoredom, departing from the Lord." The object of the union was to afford a symbol of the unhappy relations subsisting between Jehovah and his people. The prophet, further, was to be trained through his own great personal sorrow to sympathy with God in his. The human heart was to be made an interpreter of the Divine. Life is shaped for us by a power higher than our own. Its events embody words of God. The meaning hidden in them is often not manifest till afterwards. They are shaped for our instruction. They are parables to us and to others of Divine things. The teaching of the Spirit should be sought to aid us in understanding them.

II. THERE IS A NATURAL ANALOGY BETWEEN EARTHLY MARRIAGE AND THE AFFIANCE OF THE SOUL WITH GOD. It is this analogy which underlies the representation of Israel's apostasy from God as whoredom. "The whole Jewish Scriptures," says R. H. Hutton, "insist with a strange and almost mystical monotony on the close connection between the constancy required in marriage and the constancy which God demands in the spiritual relation of worship to himself. Sometimes there appears to be almost a confusion between sins against the one kind of fidelity and sins against the other, as if it were implied that he who is incapable of appreciating duly the sacredness of the human tie, will necessarily be incapable of appreciating the sacredness of that which is at once more awful and more intimate. It is clear that the Jewish prophets regarded constancy in the most intimate of human relations, as a sort of initiation into the infinite constancy of God." God claims our heart-whole love. The least wandering of desire from him is sin. Paul warns against the slightest deviation from perfect simplicity of affection towards Christ as a species of unchastity (2 Cor. xi. 1).

III. THE BEST-GUARDED HOMES ARE NOT SAFE FROM THE INFECTION OF SURROUNDING EVIL. No home would be more jealously guarded than Hosea's. Yet the infection entered it. In a dissolute state of society it is almost impossible to exclude the pestiferous germs with which the moral atmosphere is loaded. They find insidious lodgment in places and hearts where we would least suspect their presence. Our safety lies in vigilance, and in doing our utmost to resist the spread of moral corruption.

IV. CHILDREN TEND TO FOLLOW IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF THE PARENTS. Especially of the mother. A mother's influence is greater than a father's. A pious mother is the best of blessings, as a wicked mother is the worst of curses.—J. O.

Vers. 3—9.—"*Children of whoredoms.*" Hosea's children, like Isaiah's, were to be "for signs and wonders" in Israel (Isa. viii. 18). Their names—Jezreel, Lo-ruhamah, Lo-ammi—were significant. A prophetic word was attached to each.

I. JEZREEL. (Vers. 4, 5.) This first name—"God will scatter"—foretells Israel's scattering. Through it judgment is denounced (1) upon the house of the king—"Yet a little while, and I will avenge the blood of Jezreel upon the house of Jehu;" and (2) upon the kingdom—"I will cause to cease the kingdom of the house of Israel." The lessons taught are: 1. *The character of an action is determined by its motive.* By the "blood of Jezreel" is meant the slaughter of the seed of Ahab (2 Kings x.). God had commanded the extermination of Ahab's house (2 Kings ix. 7). Jehu was his chosen instrument in executing the judgment. Yet God says, "I will avenge the blood of Jezreel upon the house of Jehu." The apparent contradiction is solved, by remembering the unsanctified spirit in which Jehu went about his work of bloodshed. He did what God commanded, but there was no purity of motive in what he did. His "zeal for the Lord" was mere pretence, covering the seeds of personal ambition. He served God only so far as he could thereby serve himself. The massacre of Ahab's seed opened his own way to the throne. When, therefore, having extirpated Ahab's house, Jehu and his successors showed themselves heirs to Ahab's sins, the bloodshed of Jezreel was justly imputed to them as guilt. Actions formally right may yet become sin to us through the motives which prompt them. 2. *Partners in guilt will be made partners also in punishment.* The kingdom had followed in the steps of its guilty rulers. The doom of excision, therefore, which is denounced against them—the same doom as had been denounced formerly against the house of Ahab—will fall on it also. Judgment is impartial. 3. *There is a law of symmetry in the Divine visitations.* It was the "blood of Naboth," shed in Jezreel, which brought down on Ahab's house the sentence of extermination (1 Kings xxi. 17—25). It was in Jezreel that the doom was inflicted on Ahab (1 Kings xxi. 19; xxii. 34—38), on Jezebel (2 Kings ix. 30—37), and on Ahab's sons (2 Kings x. 11). Jezreel was the head-quarters of the wickedness for which the whole nation was now to be punished. And now Jezreel is again chosen as the place of vengeance. "I will break the bow of Israel in the valley of Jezreel." A similar correspondence of sin and punishment may be traced in very many of God's dispensations. God would "break the bow." When he smites, weapons of defence afford but small protection.

II. LO-RUHAMAH. (Vers. 6, 7.) The first name spoke of external judgment. The second, "Unpitied," lays bare the ground of the judgment in the withdrawal of the Divine pity. It tells that Israel has nothing to hope for from God's mercy in the dire hour that was so rapidly approaching. "For I will no more have mercy upon the house of Israel," etc. (ver. 6). The fact that mercy was no longer to be shown to Israel implied: 1. That *mercy had been shown to Israel hitherto.* This was the case. No attribute had been more conspicuously displayed in the history of God's dealings with the nation. Mercy was to be shown to Judah still (ver. 7). God's end was merciful, even in the threatened rejection. 2. That *there are limits to the Divine mercy.* Not, indeed, to the mercy itself, but to the exercise or manifestation of it. Righteousness sets limits to mercy. There comes a time when, consistently with righteousness, punishment can no longer be postponed. Even love sets limits to mercy. Paradoxical as it may seem, there are times when the only mercy God can show us is to show no mercy. It is no kindness to the incorrigible transgressor to continue sheltering him from the results of his transgression. God's very love for Israel compelled him to exchange kindness for a holy severity which would not spare. This was needful, as ch ii.

shows, for Israel's salvation. The experience of the bitter fruits of sin may be the only thing which will bring the wayward one to repentance (cf. Luke xv. 11—32). 3. *God would pity Judah while rejecting Israel.* (Ver. 7.) The distinction made was not arbitrary. Judah, too, had deeply sinned, but she had not yet filled up the cup of her iniquity. Mercy, therefore, was still to be extended to her. The ground of this mercy, however, was to be sought, not in Judah, but only in God. "I will save them by the Lord their God." There is indicated here (1) the long-sufferingness of the Divine mercy; (2) the sovereignty of the Divine mercy; (3) the omnipotence of the Divine mercy. "Will not save them by bow, nor by sword, nor by battle, by horses, nor by horsemen." We read of many such signal deliverances granted to Judah (Isa. vii. 7, 8; xxxvii. 6).

III. LO-AMMI. (Vers. 8, 9.) The third name, "Not my people," is most significant of all. It bespeaks a present, though, as the sequel shows, only temporary, dissolution of the covenant bond subsisting between the people and Jehovah. Through this rejection Israel would cease to be God's people—would sink to the level of the Gentiles. 1. *In declaring Israel to be not his people, God but ratified the choice of the people themselves.* They had refused to be God's people. They had resisted all attempts to bring them back to their allegiance. God at length ratifies their choice. It is the same with every sinner. He chooses his own position. He makes his choice, and God confirms it. 2. *In declaring himself to be not their God, God took up the only attitude now possible to him.* Many would gladly have God as their God, *i.e.* would retain the benefits of his favour, friendship, and protection, while refusing the counter-obligation of living as his people. This cannot be. If we refuse to be God's people, he has no alternative but to refuse to be our God.—J. O.

Ver. 10—ch. ii. 1.—*Mercy triumphant over judgment.* This which has been described would fall (and did fall) on Israel. Yet would not God's purpose in the calling of the nation thereby be defeated. Woeful as was the apostasy, it did not take God by surprise. It had been foretold (Deut. iv. 25—28; xxxi. 16—19). But the same word which had predicted the rejection, predicted also the recovery (Deut. xxx. 1—16). Hosea, in this new word from God, repeats and confirms the promise. The blessings predicted are—

I. NUMERICAL INCREASE. "Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea," etc. This was the original promise to Abraham (Gen. xv. 5). Israel's unfaithfulness could not make it void (Rom. iii. 3). Neither did it. 1. God has made up for the rejection of Israel *by giving Abraham a spiritual seed vastly outstripping in numbers the natural seed.* The spiritual seed was included in the promise: "And in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed" (Gen. xii. 3). God has given Abraham this seed. Even now, while Israel's rejection lasts, a vast seed has been raised from the Gentiles, "which in time past were not a people" (1 Pet. ii. 10). God has, as it were, from the stones raised up children to Abraham (Matt. iii. 9). This seed will go on increasing till it embraces all peoples of the earth. 2. *Mercy waits even for the natural Israel*, who will yet, in great numbers, enter the kingdom of God (Rom. xi.).

II. RESTORATION TO SPIRITUAL HONOUR. "In the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people, there it shall be said unto them, Ye are the sons of the living God." 1. *The privilege.* "Sons of the living God." Formerly they were called God's "people;" now they are called his "sons." The last honour is greater than the first. Sonship, which formerly was predicated of the nation, is now predicated of the individuals composing it. 2. *The heirs of the privilege.* Gentiles as well as Jews (Rom. ix. 26; 1 Pet. ii. 10). For Gentiles are now admitted to Israel's privileges. They are part of the spiritual seed. Israel, in its state of rejection, stands towards God on no higher a footing than the Gentiles. "Not my people." Conversely, the scheme of grace through which it is recovered has a range wider than the natural Israel; it applies to the whole class of "Not-my-people," and includes Gentiles as well as Jews. The middle wall of partition is broken down (Eph. ii. 14); there is no more any difference (Rom. iii. 22, 29). 3. *Greatness of the privilege.* (1) Great, in contrast with former condition. "Once," not the people of God; "now," not his people only, but his sons. (2) Great in its own nature. "Sons of the living God." What honour, what dignity, what favour, is implied in this! We have this sonship in Christ, the

beloved Son. Angels do not possess this honour. It is reserved for sinful but redeemed man. "Behold, what manner of love," etc. (1 John iii. 1).

III. REMOVAL OF DISUNION. "Then shall the children of Israel and the children of Judah be gathered together," etc. The words imply: 1. That Judah, like Israel, would be found at length in exile. 2. That mercy was in reserve for both. 3. That a new Head—a King—would be given, under whom both would return from captivity. The return will certainly take place, in a spiritual sense, in Israel's conversion; whether also in a literal sense remains to be seen. 4. That the leadership of the new King would be voluntarily accepted—"appoint themselves one Head" (cf. Ps. cx. 2). 5. That in the restored kingdom of God no place would be found for existing divisions. The old enmities would disappear. Enmity has already disappeared between Judah and Israel. The present Jews have in them the blood of all the twelve tribes. We may learn (1) that in the kingdom of God there *ought to be* no disunion; (2) that in the perfected kingdom of God there *will be* no disunion; (3) that in the kingdom of God *the Centre of unity is Christ*—"One Lord, one faith, one baptism" (Eph. iv. 5).

IV. GLADNESS AND REJOICING. "Say ye unto your brethren, Ammi; and to your sisters, Ruhamah" (ch. ii. 1). 1. Because of God's great goodness in the extension of his Church. "Great shall be the day of *Jezreel*," this time in the sense, "God will sow." 2. Because of reversal of former rejection. No longer Lo-ammi, but Ammi—"my people;" no longer Lo-ruhamah, but Ruhamah—"pitied." This joy will be universal. Will fill all hearts, will occupy all lips. Each will greet, rejoice with, and congratulate the other.—J. O.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER II.

Ver. 1.—(See p. 9.)

Ver. 2.—**Plead with your mother, plead: for she is not my wife, neither am I her husband.** In this second chapter the same cycle of events recurs as in the first, with this difference, that what is expressed by symbol in the one is simply narrated in the other. The cycle is the common one of sin: its usual consequences of suffering and sorrow; then succour and sympathy in case of repentance. The persons addressed in the verse before us are those individuals in Israel who had still retained their integrity, and who, notwithstanding surrounding defection and abounding ungodliness, had continued steadfast in their loyalty and love to the Lord. They might be few in number, widely scattered, perhaps unknown to each other, and of comparatively little note; yet they are here called on to raise their voice in solemn warning and earnest protest against the national defection and wickedness. "The congregation in its totality, or whole people taken conjointly, is compared to the mother, but individual members to the children, and the sense is that they are to plead with each other to bring them back to the way of goodness" (Kimchi). The nation as such, and in its impiety, is the mother; the pious persons still found in it are here required to testify for God both by exhortation and example. "The congregation of Israel is compared to an adulteress, and the children of the different generations to the children of whoredoms. Before them the prophet says, 'Plead with your mother'" (Kimchi). Adultery *per se* is a virtual dissolution of the marriage-tie; idolatry is spiritual adultery; the close and tender relationship into which God has graciously condescended to take Israel is rendered null and void, and that through Israel's own fault. God threatens the renunciation of it, unless perchance the pleading of the still faithful children might recall the erring mother to penitence and purity. A case the converse of this is that presented in Isa. l. 1, where the mother's divorce is attributed to the unfaithfulness of the children. "Where," asks the Lord in that passage, "is the bill of your mother's divorcement, whom I have put away? . . . for your transgressions is your mother put away." *Ki* before the second clause is either recitative, introducing the words of pleading, or assigns a reason; the latter seems preferable. **Let her therefore put away her whoredoms out of her sight, and her adulteries from between her breasts.** The word *mippaneyha* is rather to be rendered "from her face" than "out of her sight." The expression is to be taken literally, as the word "breasts" in the parallel clause proves. Thus Kimchi rightly explains it, saying, "Since he compares her to a harlot, he attributes to her the ways of harlots; for the harlot's way is to adorn her face with various kinds of colours, that she may appear fair in the eyes of her paramours." But in addition to ornaments such

as ear-rings or nose-rings, and other ways of decking herself, as by painting, the expression may imply lascivious looks and wanton expressions of countenance; while the mention of breasts may indicate the making of them bare for the purpose of meretricious blandishments, or as indicating the place of the adulterer (comp. Ezek. xxiii. 3 and Cant. i. 13). The Jewish commentators adopt the latter sense. Aben Ezra comments on the grammatical form of the words *z'nuncha* and *naaphupheha* (the former by duplication of the second radical, and the latter by that of the third) as intensive; while Rashi and Kimchi refer to the pressure of the breasts. But others understand them figuratively, the countenance indicating boldness, and the breasts shamelessness. Thus Horace speaks of the brilliant beauty (*nizor*) and coquettishness (*proterritas*) of Glycera.

Ver. 3.—**Lest I strip her naked, and set her as in the day that she was born.** The Lord, by his servant the prophet, enforces the preceding exhortation by a stern denunciation, and the threat of further severities unless averted by repentance; as an injured husband withdraws from a faithless wife all the gifts and presents he had made for her adornment, leaving her poor and bare. Not only the removal of her garments by way of degradation and disgrace, but exposure in that position to insult and ignominy would ensue. In other words, the nation is threatened with deprivation of all the blessings previously lavished upon them—property, prosperity, population, and privileges; while dishonour of the deepest dye would aggravate the misery. The day of the nation's birth denotes the weakness and wretchedness of their infant state. To this corresponded their servile, suffering condition during their bondage and oppression in Egypt. Rashi thus explains it; Kimchi says, "The figure of birth is the time they are slaves in Egypt;" so also Theodoret,—the latter calls the day of her birth the sojourn in Egypt. The Prophet Ezekiel (xvi. 4) expands the idea, occasionally employing, as Rosenmüller remarks, the very words of Hosea. **And make her as a wilderness, and set her like a dry land, and slay her with thirst.** This part of the verse is susceptible of two explanations. The faithless female, under which character the northern kingdom is personified, may be compared to a wilderness, that is, according to Cyril, fruitless, parched, and productive only of thorns, thirsty and waterless. This comparison of a woman to a desert is wanting in suitability, and seems in some degree awkward in itself, beside being out of harmony with the closing clause; for to "slay with thirst," however applicable to a person, cannot with any propriety be said of a place, whether desert or otherwise. No doubt the wilderness may stand for those dwelling in it. We prefer, therefore, the alternative rendering, "make her as *in* a wilderness, and set her as *in* a dry land." Rashi aptly explains the threat to mean, "Lest I pronounce against them such a sentence as of old in this desert (Numb. xiv. 35), 'In this wilderness they shall be consumed, and there they shall die.'" There is, moreover, a natural connection of ideas between a wilderness, a dry land, and thirst. The nation's birth, represented by or compared to their sojourn in Egypt, naturally suggests the idea of their wandering in the wilderness after their exodus from that country; a wilderness, again, suggests what is an ordinary feature of such a district, namely, a dry land; while a region thus without water is suggestive as well as provocative of thirst. The former explanation, however, is given by Kimchi: "I will make thee like the wilderness which is open to every one, and in which, moreover, one finds no means of subsistence, nor anything that man needs; so I'll withdraw my goodness from them, and they shall be surrendered as a prey to every one."

Ver. 4.—**And I will not have mercy upon her children; for they be the children of whoredoms.** The connection of this verse is carried on from the preceding, viz. *and lest I will not have mercy upon her children.* An exceedingly apt illustration of this verse is given by Jerome. It is to this effect: When the children of Israel were brought out of Egypt, the parents perished in the wilderness; but the children of those who had thus perished, and whose carcases had thus fallen in the wilderness, were spared and permitted to enter the land of promise. Now, however, the case is different, and the punishment aggravated. The adulterous parent perishes, and the children of that parent perish also. Further, the reason is assigned in the concluding clause. The children proved themselves no better than the mother that bore them; they were the worthless progeny of a worthless parent.

Ver. 5.—**For their mother hath played the harlot: she that conceived them hath done shamefully: for she said, I will go after my lovers.** The charge of idolatry under the figure of harlotry, spiritual harlotry, is reiterated. "Mother" is repeated in and emphasized by the parallel words, "she that conceived them." A somewhat similar form of expression is that in Ps. lviii. 3, "The wicked are estranged from the womb: they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies." To *bosh*, to be ashamed, belong the Hiphil forms, *hebhish* and *hobhish* (the latter formed from *zabhish*), properly "to put to shame," but also "to practise shame or do

shameful things." The nature of her shameful conduct is more definitely and distinctly expressed in the clauses which follow; and consisted of several particulars. There is the persistent pursuit of her lovers; then the unblushing boldness with which she avows her determination to continue that course; and next come her expectations from them. **That give me my bread and my water, my wool and my flax, mine oil and my drink** (margin, *drinks*). The original word here rendered "lovers" is the Piel participle, which may have either its usual intensive sense or its occasional causative sense in which it is taken by Rosenmüller, who has "amare me facientes," equivalent to "wooers." It matters little which way we understand it. The more important point is to determine who or what are here meant by lovers. Most commentators understand them to be those nations whose friendship Israel set such store by—the Assyrians and the Egyptians. Thus Grotius and Jerome,—the latter explains them of the Assyrians and Egyptians and other nations, with whose idols Israel committed fornication, and from which in distress they vainly hoped for help; so also Kimchi, in the following comment: "By 'friends' he implies the Assyrians and Egyptians joined in alliance to the Israelites, who delivered them from their enemies, so that they lived safely, in return for the gifts (tribute) which they (the Israelites) were in the habit of giving them. And as they lived in tranquillity in virtue of the compact entered into with them, the prophet represents it as if they supplied them with all the necessaries of life. For with their help they tilled their land without fear and in safety traded from country to country." Kimchi quotes at the same time his father's (Joseph Kimchi) interpretation: "But my lord my father of blessed memory explained 'after her lovers' of the sun and moon and stars, which they worshipped; while their intention was that they gave them their food and their sufficiency, as they said, 'But since we left off to burn incense to the queen of heaven, and to pour out drink offerings unto her, we have wanted all things, and have been consumed by the sword and by the famine.'" This exposition of Joseph Kimchi is much nearer the truth than that of his son David; it is, however, too restricted. The "lovers" were the idols on which the people of the northern kingdom so doated, and on which they placed so much dependence. The blessings which they vainly expected from these idols are enumerated: they were—food and raiment and luxuries; the bread and water were the articles of food, as it is written elsewhere, "Bread shall be given him; his waters shall be sure;" the wool and flax were the materials for clothing; while the oil and drinks were, the former for ornament, the latter for refreshment, and so included all luxuries; thus in Ps. xxiii. 5, "Thou anointest my head with oil;" and in Ps. cii. 9, "And mingled my drink [literally, 'drinks,' the same word, *shigguyar*] with weeping;" also in Ps. civ. 15 we read of "wine that maketh glad the heart of man, and oil to make his face to shine, and bread which strengthened man's heart."

Ver. 6.—**Therefore, behold, I will hedge up thy way with thorns, and make a wall, that she shall not find her paths.** The sudden change of person from the third to the second is very observable. This directness of address is, in this instance, expressive of deep indignation. She had avowed her determination to pursue her evil courses shamefully and sinfully, as if in despite and defiance of the Almighty. In deep and undisguised displeasure, and with a suddenness springing from indignation, he affirms his determination to thwart her course of sin and shame; as though addressing her personally and promptly, he said, "Then thou shalt not be able to carry out thy plan or accomplish thy purpose; I will see to that." The hedge and wall are elsewhere, as in Job i. 10 and Isa. v. 5, used for protection and defence, here for prevention and obstruction, and similarly in Job xix. 8, "He hath fenced up my way that I cannot pass, and he hath set darkness in my paths;" and in Lam. iii. 7, "He hath hedged me about, that I cannot get out," and ver. 9, "He hath enclosed my ways with hewn stone, he hath made my paths crooked." Thus Kimchi: "I will hedge thy way with thorns, so that they cannot go out of the city because of the devastation; and her lovers shall not be able to help her, and they are Assyria and Egypt." After quoting his father's explanation of lovers, he proceeds: "So their way is as if there were in it a thorn hedge, and thorns that she could not pass through it, and could not find her paths in which she walked." The fence here is double—one a hedge of thorns, sharp, prickly, and piercing, such as forbid her forcing a way through; the other a wall of stone that cannot be climbed, or leaped, or otherwise got over. We need not try to specify the particular circumstances that thus hedged in and walled about the adulteress—whether fightings within or foes beleaguering without, whether straitened means or stress of circumstances raising an impassable barrier against the practice of idolatry, or an enforced conviction of its futility. "If," says Kimchi, "she seek to Assyria and Egypt, they will not give her their friendship and their help."

Ver. 7.—**And she shall follow after her**

lovers, but she shall not overtake them; and she shall seek them, but shall not find them. This portion of the verse expresses the consequence of the preceding. However eagerly she follows after them—and the form of the verb (Piel conjugation) expresses that eagerness—she shall only experience the ineffectual nature of her efforts, and feel the impossibility of overtaking the darling objects of her pursuit. However earnestly she seeks them (here the Piel is used again), she shall find every passage barred and every outlet obstructed, so that, unable to find them, she shall be forced to abandon her search as utterly vain and impossible. **Then shall she say, I will go and return to my first husband; for then was it better with me than now.** The difficulties of her position, the distress in which she found herself, stimulated her to increased eagerness in pursuit of her lovers; but it was only for a brief space, and the efforts were unsuccessful; the means as well as opportunity for the sacrifices and services of idol-worship failed, the obstacles placed in her way were insurmountable. Or, rather, the disappointment was so great and grievous, when all the fondly cherished hopes of help, or succour, or support from those idols were frustrated and found entirely vain, that, heart-sick and chagrined by unsuccess, she resolves on a change of course. With mingled feelings of remorse and penitence she makes up her mind to retrace her steps. She recalls the better days, the happier time, the more prosperous circumstances, of fidelity to her first and rightful husband and head; and now she is just ready to return to him. She is just now at that stage at which the prodigal in the parable had arrived "when he came to himself," and when he said, "How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father." Kimchi remarks, "She will not say this until she has borne the captivity a considerable time."

Ver. 8.—**For she did not know that I gave her corn, and wine, and oil, and multiplied her silver and gold, which they prepared for Baal.** From vers. 6 to 13 inclusive, the suffering and sorrow consequent on, and occasioned by, her sins are enumerated; yet now and again certain aggravations of her guilt crop up. Here we have an account of her ignorance of, and ingratitude to, the true Author of her mercies, together with her sinful misuse and sad abuse of those mercies. The products of the earth which God bestowed on her were corn and wine and oil—all that was needed for food, refreshment, and even luxury; the prosperity in trade or commerce with which he favoured her resulted in the multiplied increase of silver and gold. The perversion of these blessings consisted in her employment of them in the service of Baal or of idolatry in general. The sin of refusing to acknowledge the Author of such manifold mercies was grievously augmented by this gross abuse of them. The last clause is a relative one, *asher*, as frequently being understood; while the words *asu labbaal* do not signify that they made those metals into images of Baal, as implied in the Authorized Version; nor yet that they offered them to Baal, according to Gesenius; but that they prepared or employed them in the worship of that idol and the service of idolatry in general. רנן, *rad.* רנה, to cover, multiply, *i.e.* multitude and plenty covering over everything; comp. *tego*, תירוֹשׁ, *rad.* ירשׁ, take possession of the brain in intoxicating: יצהר, *rad.* צהר, to shine. Kimchi remarks as follows: "All the goodness in the possession of which she was, she had not except from me; because I sent my blessing on the corn and wine and oil, and sent my blessing upon the work of their hands, so that they had abundance of silver and gold; but Jeshurun waxed fat and kicked."

Ver. 9.—**Therefore will I return, and take away my corn in the time thereof, and my wine in the season thereof, and will recover my wool and my flax given to cover her nakedness.** The abuse of the Divine bounties mentioned in the preceding verse fully justifies the series of punishments that follow. God thus vindicates those penal inflictions. Accordingly he threatens them in this ninth verse with the deprivation of the bounties which they had misused as the means of idolatry and sin; in ver. 10 with disgrace; in ver. 11 with the departure of all her merry-makings; in ver. 12 with the destruction of the sources whence the means of idolatrous worship were supplied; and in ver. 13 with days of visitation proportionate to the time of declension and apostasy. The first clause of the verse under consideration is better rendered (1) according to the common Hebrew idiom, which employs two verbs to express one idea in a modified sense, the first denoting the manner, and so equivalent to an adverb with us, and the second signifying the matter; and it is thus translated by Keil: "Therefore will I take back my corn." (2) We admit the *vav* consecutive is opposed to this; and the LXX. has ἐπιστρέψω καὶ κομιοῦμαι: and Jerome, "revertor et sumam." The manner of the dispossession intensifies the punishment, just as their abuse of those possessions had augmented their guilt. The food, refreshment, and raiment are to be taken away; this certainly would be bad enough by itself, but the suddenness of the stroke adds poignancy to the infliction. The prospect

of an indifferent harvest and of a bad vintage for weeks previously might have prepared them in some sort for the disaster. But when the time of harvest has already come and the season of vintage just arrived, by some sudden, unexpected calamity, whether tempest or hostile invasion, the bread-corn perishes and the wine-grapes are destroyed. The food is thus snatched, as it were, from their mouth, and the cup dashed from their lips; the sadness of the catastrophe is immensely increased by the sudden rudeness of the stroke by which it comes. Nor is this all. In the case of the raiment, or rather the material, the wool and the flax out of which it is formed, its removal reduces the intended wearer to perfect nudity, or, if we understand it as figure, to abject poverty and absolute penury. Aben Ezra attributes this disaster (ver. 9) to hostile invasion: "At its season when I shall bring the enemies, to take away the corn and the wine;" Kimchi, on the other hand, sees in it a misgrowth: "I will return and take away my corn in its season, and my wine in its appointed time, because I will send a curse upon them in the time of harvest and at the season of vintage, instead of the blessing I used to send upon them. And so on all the work of their hands I shall send a curse, and all their gain shall be put into a bag with holes; and they shall not have bread to eat nor raiment to wear."

Ver. 10.—**And now will I discover her lewdness in the sight of her lovers, and none shall deliver her out of mine hand.** Deprivation is followed by disgrace, dispossession by dishonour. The figure of a faithless female being continued, the calamities of Israel are pictured in the extreme deplorableness of her condition. The word *navluth* does not elsewhere occur, but its meaning is not difficult to ascertain. It denotes literally, "slackness," "laxness," or a withered state, from *navel*, to be withered, and may be translated either "her shame" or "her turpitude." The LXX. has ἀκαθαρσίαν, while Jerome renders it *stultitiam*. Thus she is exposed to the derision and disgust of her former admirers and paramours; while deliverance is out of the question. Her lovers are the idols, or, according to Kimchi, "Egypt and Assyria, which cannot deliver her." She who once was the object of delight is become the object of disdain and contempt; nor is there any of her quondam lovers desirous of or able to deliver her out of the hand of him who administers the justly deserved punishment.

Ver. 11.—**I will also cause all her mirth to cease, her feast days, her new moons, and her sabbaths, and all her solemn feasts.** The enumeration is complete. "Her feast days" were the three annual festivals of Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles. "Her new moons" were the monthly celebrations at the commencement of each month. "Her sabbaths" were the weekly solemnities of one day in seven, dedicated to the Lord. Then there is a general summing up of the whole by the addition of "all her solemn feasts,"—all her festal days and seasons, including, besides those named, the beginning of the years, the solemn assembly or holy convocation on the seventh day of the Passover and on the eighth day of Tabernacles. Preceding the enumeration is the general *characteristic* of all Israel's festivities. They were times of joy, as we read in Numb. x. 10, "In the day of your gladness, and in your solemn days, and in the beginnings of your months, ye shall blow with the trumpets;" and in Deut. xii. 12 it is expressly declared, "Ye shall rejoice before the Lord . . . ye, and your sons, and your daughters, and your menservants, and your maidservants, and the Levite that is within your gates." All this was to cease; the coming captivity would render all such celebrations impossible. Kimchi remarks on this (ver. 11): "For in the distress there is no new moon and no sabbath; and the beginnings of months and sabbaths on which offerings were presented were days of joy. And so with respect to the feast days and solemn assemblies, which were days of rest and quiet joy, they shall not have in them any joy in consequence of the greatness of their distresses." He subsequently adds, "There is a *chag* which is not a *moed*, but joy wherewith men rejoice and eat and drink; and it is called *chag*," referring to Solomon's feast of dedication; "and there is also a *moed* which is not a *chag*, as for signs and for seasons (*moedim*), and at the appointed time I will return unto thee" (*moed*, from יעד, to appoint as time and place).

Ver. 12.—**And I will destroy** (*make desolate*) **her vines and her fig trees, whereof she said, These are my rewards that my lovers have given me.** God had already threatened to deprive Israel of the means of support—the corn, wine, wool, and flax; he now threatens the removal of the very sources whence that support was derived. The vine and fig tree are usually conjoined, and by a common synecdoche convey the idea of all those sources that combine to support life and supply its luxuries. When the united kingdom of Judah and Israel, before the disruption, had obtained the zenith of prosperity in the reign of Solomon, it is thus expressed: "Judah and Israel dwelt safely, every man under his vine and under his fig tree, from Dan even to Beersheba, all the days of Solomon." Yet Israel knew not the time of her merciful visitation, and not

only turned aside to idols, but most stupidly and most inexcusably attributed the many mercies she enjoyed to the idols which she worshipped. Like a foul adulteress despising the tokens of her husband's affection and delighting in the rewards of lewdness received from licentious paramours, Israel forfeited all her privileges, and forced the Lord to withdraw his bounties and destroy their very source. גֶּפֶן, *rad.* גפן, equivalent to גבן, to be bent, from the arch made by its drooping boughs. תְּאֵנָה, *rad.* תאן, equivalent to תנן, to extend from its length. **And I will make them a forest, and the beasts of the field shall eat them.** The places where fig trees flourished and vines abounded shall be stripped of those trees, with their pleasant fruits—shall become a forest. The vineyards being no longer hedged or fenced, no longer cultivated or cared for, the beasts of the field shall, in consequence, find free ingress and roam there at large, devouring and devastating at pleasure. The Septuagint translates the first part of the above sentence by *καὶ θήσομαι αὐτὰ εἰς μαρτύριον*, "and I will make them a testimony," thus reading, according to Jerome, עֵר, instead of יַעַר; while Cyril comments on the words so read as follows: "For these things being taken away shall testify as it were against Israel's depravity, and render their punishment more signal, and make the wrath conspicuous." The context, however, militates against the reading in question, for in time of war or general devastation places, through neglect, grow trees and brushwood, where wild beasts lair and lay waste. The explanation of the verse is well given by Kimchi in his commentary: "Because she said, 'These are the hire of my harlotry;' because she said that from the hand of her lovers came the corn and must and oil and all good things;—I will make them a desolation, that she may know whether she had those good things from me or from them. אתנה, because he has compared her to a harlot, he calls those good things אתנה, equivalent to אתנן וישה; while their signification is identical with תנאי, and their root, תנה [extend, reach, give], the *aleph* being prosthetic. But Jonathan renders אתנה by יְקָר, precious things. And he mentions the vine and the fig tree because grapes and figs are the best part of the food of man after the produce of the earth (*i.e.* corn); and already he had said, 'I will also take away my corn in its season.'"

Ver. 13.—**And I will visit upon her the days of Baalim, wherein she burned incense to them, and she decked herself with her earrings and her jewels, and she went after her lovers, and forgat me, saith the Lord.** The name of Baalim, that is, Baals in the plural, has respect to the various forms of the Baal-idolatry, or modification of the Baal-worship; for example, Baal-peor, Baal-berith, Baal-zebub, Baal-perazim, Baal-zephon, Baal-zamar, Baal-shalishu. The name of Baal came to be used generally as the designation of any idol or false god. The days of the Baals were the days consecrated to Baal, and on which the worship of the true God was transferred to that idol. It matters little whether we render "wherein" or "to whom," referring to ימי, in which case, however, we should expect בם, though the latter answers better to the meaning of the preposition *l'* in להם. After mentioning the object of their idolatrous worship, he specifies the manner of it, which was the burning of incense, the part of the process being employed by synecdoche for the whole. Every *mincha*, or meat offering, which was presented by itself as a free-will offering was accompanied with frankincense; every day, morning and evening, incense was burnt in the holy place; while on the great Day of Atonement the high priest carried a censer of coals from the golden altar into the holiest of all and there burnt incense before the mercy-seat. But the word has often a wider sense than that of burning incense, and is applied to the offering of any sacrifice whatever. Just as the festivals of Jehovah were transferred to Baal, so his service was turned into that of Baal. Thus Israel prostituted herself and acted the part of a spiritual adulteress by her worship of idols. The same unsavoury figure is resumed; and her assiduous efforts to worship the idol acceptably and propitiate his favour is presented under the figure of a whorish woman decking herself with meretricious ornaments—nose-rings and jewels, thus making up by artificial means for the lack of natural beauty—to attract the attention and gain the admiration of her lovers. Thus Aben Ezra: "The meaning of ותעד is metaphorical in allusion to a whorish woman who puts a nose-ring in her nose and a necklace on her neck to make herself beautiful, in order to find favour in the eyes of the adulterer." The word עָדָה has for its verbal root עדה, to overstep the boundary, transgress, plunder, draw to one's self, put on; while חֲלִיָּה (masculine חֶלְיִי) is from חלה, to rub, polish, be smooth. But when all fails to draw lovers unto her, she casts aside the last remaining fragment of female delicacy, and goes in pursuit of lovers. Thus did Israel. She put Baal or other idols in place of Jehovah; she made a transfer of Jehovah's festivals to Baal; she burnt incense or offered sacrifice to her idol instead of the true God; she went to great pains to secure the acceptance of her false deities; "*and me*," says Jehovah

very emphatically, "*she forgat;*" that is, me the true God, her bountiful Benefactor, her gracious Lord, and loving Husband, she forgat. The visitation expressed by פקד with accusative of the thing, and ב before the person, is commented by Kimchi as follows: "For the transgressions of her (Israel's) iniquity in the exile I will visit upon her the time that she served Baalim; and I will let them remain long in exile for punishment, because they have left my service and served other gods. And even upon children's children shall come this punishment, although they do not serve strange gods in exile; thus is the sentence [literally, 'judgment'] of their punishment, because their children's children shall not be perfect in the service of God and in his commandments in exile, therefore thus shall the iniquity of their fathers who served strange gods unite with their own punishment."

Ver. 14.—**Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her.** As in vers. 2—5 we have an exposure of Israel's sin, and in vers. 6—13 an enumeration of her sufferings by penal inflictions; so vers. 14—23 contain a touching exhibition of Divine succour and support. The transition is abrupt. Vers. 14—17 exhibit the gradual change wrought in Israel through the progressive means of improvement employed by Jehovah. Israel's future is here reflected in the mirror of her past history. The events of that history are elegantly employed to represent as by type or symbol the mercies in store for Israel, wayward and rebellious though she had proved herself to be. *Laken* (from *l*ᵉ causal, and *ken*, so, equivalent to "because it is so") at the beginning of this verse (14) is rendered by some, (1) "but" or "yet;" but its natural signification is (2) "therefore." It is like the Greek οὖν (from ὦν, Ionic ἔων, neuter ἐόν, contracted οὖν); it being so, therefore, and similar to the Latin phrase, *quæ cum ita sint*, "therefore" implies because Israel can only be turned from her foolish idolatry by the penal measures named. Aben Ezra also understands it here, as elsewhere, in its literal sense; thus: "After she [the unchaste wife representative of Israel] shall know that all this evil has come upon her because that she had forgotten me, and had not known at the beginning that I dealt kindly with her; and when she will say, 'Yet will I go and return to my former husband;' then will I allure her with words." פתה is from the root פת, cognate with the Arabic in the sense of "dividing," "being open," "standing open;" thence it signifies "to be susceptible of outward impressions," "allow access and entrance;" in Piel, "to make one open," "be susceptible or inclined," "induce by words." The word *laken*, "therefore," has somewhat puzzled commentators, because the connection between the judgments threatened in the preceding verses and the mercies proffered in what follows is not to a superficial view at once apparent. Yet it is mercy and truth meeting together, righteousness and peace kissing each other. It is (3) the connecting link between the enormity of our sins and the greatness of the Divine mercy; between the vileness of our iniquities and the riches of Divine grace. In like manner the psalmist prays, "Pardon mine iniquity, for it is great;" and God promises by the prophet, "For the iniquity of his covetousness was I wroth, and smote him: I hid me, and was wroth, and he went on frowardly in the way of his heart. I have seen his ways, and will heal him; I will lead him also, and restore comforts unto him and to his mourners." Long previously God had said, "I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake; *for* the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth." The secret of such striking contrasts is that where sin abounded grace did much more abound. Egypt having been to Israel the house of bondage, the exodus from that land represents deliverance out of a servile, suffering condition. (1) The wilderness or Arabian desert into which they were brought on leaving that country was a place of *freedom*. They were emancipated, and breathed the free air of the wilderness; they were exercised with salutary *discipline* after their emancipation; as they traversed the wilderness they were trained and tried. The allurement which prefaces their deliverance refers to the persuasion of Moses and Aaron, who found it necessary to persuade and even coax their countrymen to turn their back on their bondage and follow the leaders whom God had sent them. The "comfortable words" mentioned in the close of the verse were addressed to them at a subsequent period, when, allured out of the strange land where they had sojourned so long, they were led forth into the wilderness. The "comfortable words" comprehended both temporal and spiritual mercies—relief in every time of emergency, deliverance in danger and distress, a plentiful supply of their necessities, with pardon of their sins, assurances of grace, and renewed tokens of God's favour on repentance. A difficulty has been found in the words, "and bring her into the wilderness," being interposed between the alluring and the speaking comfortably. The difficulty is removed (2) by translating *vav*, not by "and," but by "after," as if equivalent to *acher*; thus: "After I shall have brought her into the wilderness I will allure and comfort her." Then the meaning would be, "After I have humbled them thoroughly as I did their

forefathers in the wilderness, then will I speak comfortably unto them." God humbled their forefathers in Egypt, yet that did not suffice; he humbled them afterwards in the wilderness, and then brought them into Canaan. Many times God sends successive *afflictions* upon his own people, to break their hearts, to humble them thoroughly, and at last "he speaks comfortably unto them." But (3) the wilderness may be viewed in another light. Besides the distresses experienced in the wilderness, there were *deliverances* enjoyed. The reference here may be to the latter, and all the more as this part of the chapter deals with merciful providences. The particle *vav* and other words of the verse then retain their natural sense; and, instead of a denunciation of further afflictions, God declares to Israel that he will perform on their behalf such works of power, wisdom, and goodness, at once great and glorious, merciful and wonderful, as he had wrought for their forefathers in the wilderness after their deliverance from Egypt. Thus the Chaldee: "I will work miracles and great works of wonder for them, such as I wrought in the desert;" as though he said, "Whatever the condition may be into which you shall be brought, yet you shall have me working in as glorious a way for your good and comfort as ever I did for your forefathers when they were in the wilderness." The explanation of "wilderness" under number (1) above, combining, as it does, *deliverance* yet *discipline*, care yet chastisement, deserves the preference; it is neither to be explained with Keil exclusively in the sense of *promise*, nor, on the other hand, exclusively in the sense of *punishment* with Rashi, who comments as follows: "I will lead her into the wilderness, which for her is like a wilderness and a dry parched land; and there she shall lay it to heart that it was better with her when she did my will than when she rebelled against me."

Ver. 15.—**And I will give her her vineyards from thence, and the valley of Achor for a door of hope: and she shall sing there, as in the days of her youth, and as in the day when she came up out of the land of Egypt.** The consolations of God are not confined to words; they comprise works as well as words. Friendly doings as well as sayings are embraced in the Divine goodness, and manifest the Divine mercy. On emerging from the wilderness, fruitful vineyards, such as Sibmah, Heshbon, and Elealeh, east of Jordan, and fertile valleys, like that of Achor near Jericho, to the west of Jordan, as soon as they have crossed the river, shall be given them. These vineyards and valleys would thus be the first instalments of God's promise, and a prelude to the possession of the whole, so that the door of hopeful expectation and of joyful anticipation would be thrown wide open to them. The verb עָנָה has three meanings—"humble one's self," "answer," "sing." Hence the LXX. and older interpreters adopt ταπεινωθήσεται: Calvin, "respondebit;" and Aben Ezra and Kimchi, "she shall sing and play." The last deserves the preference. No wonder if, under such circumstances, Israel responded with songs of praise and thanksgiving, as in that early day of the nation's youth, when, coming up out of Egypt, they sang the song of Moses by the Red Sea's margin, while Miriam and the maidens of Israel in full chorus completed the harmony. Now, all these experiences of the past were to repeat themselves in the future history of Israel. Their past captivity or dispersion was obviously implied in this promised deliverance and God's gracious dealings with them in the future. There is a different explanation of one expression in this verse, which deserves careful consideration—an explanation which turns on what once transpired in that valley, and the meaning of the name of it, *troubling*, derived from that transaction; we refer, of course, to the affair of Achan. The punishment of the transgressor in that case, and the putting away of sin in connection with penitence and prayer, reopened, after defeat, the door of hope, and restored the enjoyment of Divine help. The discomfiture that so troubled the host of Israel was immediately followed by the victory at Ai, which inspired them with the hope of soon possessing the whole land. So with Israel after the captivity—a dreary night of weeping was followed by a bright and blessed morning. So, too, in time to come, when, after a long and sorrowful expectation, Israel shall return from the lands of their exile to their fatherland, or by faith and repentance to the paternal God, the light of better and more hopeful days shall dawn upon them. To the idea of troubling Kimchi attaches the notion of *purification*, quoting with approval Rashi and Aben Ezra to the same purpose. His comment is: "Because at the beginning, when they went into the land in the days of Joshua, this misadventure befell them, namely, the matter of Achan, he gave them confidence that they should not fear when they assembled in the land, and that no misadventure would occur to them, as they would all be refined and purified because, in the wilderness of the peoples, they would be purified. And that valley of Achor shall no more be called so, for its name is for depreciation; but a name of honour shall be given to it, and it is a door of hope. And inasmuch as he says 'door,' and not

'valley,' as it should be, it is because it shall be to them as a door, since from there they shall enter into the land as they did at the first, and it shall be to them hope and the aim of what is good; consequently they call it the door of hope. And the sage Rabbi Abraham explains the valley of Achor to be the valley of Jezreel, viz. 'because I [Jehovah] troubled her there, it will turn to a door of hope.' And R. S. I. (Rashi) of blessed memory explains it as the depth of the exile, where they were troubled; so 'I will give her a door of hope, the beginning of hope, that out of the midst of those troubles I will give her a heart to return to me.'" To the same purpose he quotes a brief comment of Saadia Gaon. כֶּרֶם, cognate with Arabic *karma*, to be noble, equivalent to "the more fruitful and productive." The word *mishsham* is, according to some, (1) an expression of time, equivalent to "from the time of their departure from the desert,"—so Keil; others explain it as (2) "thereout," *i.e.* "I will make their vineyards out of it,"—so Simson; and others, again, explain it "from there or thence." It is taken in the last-mentioned sense by Kimchi, as follows: "From the wilderness I will give the whole land, which she formerly possessed, as if he said, 'I will constitute her there in the wilderness to do good to her in her land,' because that in the wilderness of the peoples he will purify them and consume the rebellious and the transgressors, so that the remainder shall fear (or flock reverently to him). Consequently they shall need consolations, and he shall speak to their heart. Because God—blessed be he!—shall give them their land as at the first; therefore he says, 'And I will speak to their heart.' And although we have explained that the consolations shall spring out of the distress which they endured in exile, yet will the whole be as well for the one (viz. the consolation) as for the other (the trouble)." It is aptly remarked by Aben Ezra, in relation to the vineyards, that "the words form a contrast to the other words of the prophet, 'And I will destroy their vine;'" likewise Kimchi asking, "And why has the prophet only mentioned their vineyards (*i.e.* when purposing to give them the whole land)? Because he had mentioned in their punishment, 'I will destroy her vines,' he mentions in the promised consolation her vineyards."

Vers. 16, 17.—In these verses a renewal of God's covenant with Israel, under the figure of a marriage contract, is predicted. The name by which Israel shall address her beloved shall be henceforth *Ishi*, not *Baali*; that is, a term of tender affection, not of stern authority. (1) The title of "My Husband" will take the place of "My Lord." Some suppose that the latter title was the idol's name, which, in the lips of Israel, had superseded that of the true God, the meaning being (2) "Thou wilt no more call to me, My Baal." Nay, the names of Baals shall become so abhorrent to their better feelings, as well as hateful to Jehovah, that they shall pass away at once from their mouth and from their memory, never more to be mentioned and never more to be remembered. Rashi's comment favours (1); thus: "Ye shall serve me out of love, and not out of fear; *ishi* denoting marriage and youthful love; *baali*, lordship and fear."

Ver. 18.—A state of tranquillity was to follow, a sort of golden age was to ensue. With both the rational and irrational creation they would be at peace, enjoying security from the one and safety from the other. Peace would be established with the hostile forces of the outer world, and peace at the same time national and political. **With the beasts of the field**—viz. the wild beasts, as contrasted with *b'hemah*, tame animals—**and with the fowls of heaven**—*i.e.* birds of prey, destructive of the fruits of the field—**and with the creeping things of the ground**, detrimental to the products of the earth, they would be in league; while weapons of war would be devoted to destruction, **the bow and the sword and the battle** being broken, and not only so, but banished out of the earth, so that Israel, free from the alarm of a night attack, and protected by night as well as by day, would be made to lie down safely. *Milchamah* is constructed with *eshbor* by zeugma; or it includes, as Kimchi explains it, "all the implements of war except the bow and sword, which he has already mentioned."

Vers. 19, 20.—Much as was included in these promises, more and better was to follow. The divorced wife was to be taken back; the marriage contract, which her shameful adultery had vitiated, was to be renewed, and past offences condoned. This certainly evidenced extraordinary forbearance and affection. But it was not all. A new and higher relationship was to be entered on; so entirely had God forgiven and forgotten, if we may so say, all the multiplied and aggravated transgressions of Israel against him, that that people is not to be received back as a repudiated wife, but to be henceforth regarded and treated as a chaste virgin, and in that capacity betrothed unto the Lord. **And I will betroth thee unto me** is the gracious promise thrice repeated, and each time with an additional element of mercy; nor is this betrothal of a temporary character and of short continuance, like the previous marriage compact which the wife's guilt a short time had rendered null and void. It is a durable betrothal, lasting for ever. Next to the time during which this betrothal shall

continue is the manner in which it is effected, or rather, the basis on which it is established. Justice and judgment present righteousness under two aspects—subjective and objective. *Tsedeq*, equivalent to *tsdaqah*, being right, is subjective righteousness and an attribute of God. *Mishpat*, equivalent to objective right, either as executing judgment or as existing in fact Some attribute these characteristics to God and some to Israel, while others to both. Rashi and Kimchi understand both words *tsedeq* and *mishpat*, subjectively and in relation to the Israelites. The former: "In righteousness and judgment wherein ye shall walk;" the latter: "In righteousness which the Israelites shall practise." Wünsche and Hengstenberg understand the righteousness and judgment of God's doing justice and faithfully fulfilling his covenant obligations to Israel. The latter has well remarked in relation to *mishpat* when distinguishing it from *tsedeq*, that a man may render what is right to persons and yet not be righteous; that is, there may be objective apart from subjective righteousness. Keil attributes the attributes in question, not only to God fulfilling his covenant engagements to his people, but purifying them through just judgment, and thus providing for their righteousness. That God possesses these is undeniable, but it is equally obvious that he bestows righteousness on his people both by imputation and impartation; he also executes righteousness in their case, purifying them by salutary chastisement, his object being, not only to cleanse, but to keep clean. And yet such is the frailty of man's fallen nature, and so many are the faults and the failings to which he is liable, that loving-kindness (God's condescending love, *chesed*, equivalent to ἀγάπη) and mercies (inmost compassion on man's weakness, *rachamim*, σπλάχνα) on God's part must be added to righteousness and judgment in order to secure the stability of those whom he takes into covenant, and the continuance of the contract. Nay; for the attainment of the desired end still more is requisite, for, after all his bestowments and all his discipline, and in addition to all his favour and forbearance, his faithfulness (unwavering steadfastness, *emunah*, corresponding as the reverse side to and securing the *'olam*) is indispensable to Israel's perseverance; and thus, notwithstanding Israel's failures, Jehovah's faithfulness guarantees ultimate and lasting success. The special quality on Israel's side is true knowledge of God.

Vers. 21—23.—The eighteenth verse pictures a scene of peace for Israel's future; the verses following warrant the expectation of its perpetuity, owing to the higher and holier relationship; the verses before us are a vivid description of unlimited prosperity. The corn and wine and oil appeal, by a graphic personification, to mother earth; earth appeals to the over-canopying heavens; and the heavens appeal to him whose throne is in the heavens, but whom the heavens and heaven of heavens cannot contain. Soon the floating cloud is seen and the falling rain is heard; the parched earth drinks in the moisture; and its products, being nourished and refreshed, supply to the utmost the wants and wishes of Jezreel. Kimchi comments on this picture as follows: "He says that then, in the season of salvation, the heavens shall give their dew, and the earth shall give her increase. And he says, 'I will hear the heavens which were shut up when they were in the land, as in the days of Ahab; on their return to the land at the time of salvation they shall no more be shut.' And he says, 'I will answer,' as if the heavens asked that they might give rain according to their manner, and I will answer; [as if] their earth [asked] that they [the heavens] might give rain after their manner, even showers of blessing. And this 'I will answer' denotes that my favour shall be on them [the heavens]. 'And they shall answer the earth,' as if the earth asked rain and longed for it. 'And the earth shall hear' when it shall give its increase, and the tree of the field shall give its fruit. 'And they shall hear Jezreel,' for in the multiplying of good things the eaters thereof multiply, for the steppes shall be full of the sheep of Israel. In the punishments he called the name of Israel Jezreel, because they were scattered among the nations. In the time of salvation he likewise calls them Jezreel, because they were sown in their land; accordingly, he says afterwards, 'I will sow them to me in the land.'" Such is the prophet's pictorial representation of a prosperity including food in abundance, refreshment limited by moderation, and even luxuries without stint. Old things are passed away; sinful things have ceased; there is a complete reversal of the sorrowful circumstances into which sin had plunged Israel. God's scattering has now become God's sowing. "I sow her" is the remark of Aben Ezra, "that they may multiply and be fruitful as the seed of the earth." The unpitied one has found mercy; the rejected one is received with rejoicing. **I will say to them which were not my people, Thou art my people; and they shall say, Thou art my God."**

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 2—5.—*The prophet exhibits the gross sin of idolatry.* The prophet in this section exposes the shame as well as sin of idolatry. It is a mistaken notion to suppose, with some, that the tribe of Judah is here urged to plead with the tribes of Israel; for Israel cannot, with any propriety of speech or figure, be spoken of as the mother in this case, however possibly they may be addressed as brethren and sisters. The Church or nation is the mother, and the individual members, as nursed and brought up by her, are the children. The doctrines symbolized in the preceding chapter are here more fully developed and plainly set forth.

I. PLEADING COMMANDED. The explanation which Calvin gives of the first clause of this second verse is ingenious, yet we must regard it as rather specious than sound. Instead of "plead," he employs the word "contend;" and interprets the contention to imply that Israel, instead of censuring the seeming severity of God's dealings with them, should rather condemn their mother's sin as the guilty cause of that severity, and thus cast the blame of their sufferings, not on God, as though he had falsified his covenant, but upon their mother, the Israelitish Church or kingdom, that had fallen away and fallen far from fulfilling the conditions of the covenant. After referring to the mark of disgrace fixed on the children born by a marriage with a wife who has been repudiated by her husband, he says, "When a husband repudiates his wife through waywardness, the children justly regard him with hatred. Why? 'Because he loved not our mother as he ought to have done; he has not honoured the bond of marriage.' It is, therefore, usually the case that the children's affections are alienated from their father, when he treats their mother with too little humanity or entire contempt. So the Israelites, when they saw themselves rejected, wished to throw the blame on God. For by the name *mother* are the people here called; it is transferred to the whole body of the people, or the race of Abraham. God had espoused that people to himself, and wished them to be like a wife to him. Since, then, God was a Husband to the people, the Israelites were as sons born by that marriage. But when they were repudiated, the Israelites said that God dealt cruelly with them, for he had cast them away for no fault. The prophet now undertakes the defence of God's cause, and speaks also in his person. '*Contend, contend,*' he says, '*with your mother* [your dispute is not with me].' . . . He brings this charge against the Israelites, that they had been repudiated for the flagitious conduct of their mother, and had ceased to be counted the children of God . . . the blame of their rejection belonged to the whole race of Abraham (*i.e.* the mother); but no blame could be imputed to God." We rather understand the pleading mentioned as that which the pious remnant of the nation, who had still kept themselves separate from idolatry and the general degeneracy, are exhorted to address to their mother, that is to say, to the bulk of the people with the heads of the congregation and rulers of the nation. It is the duty of believers to plead for God and his truth, even though the great body of Church or nation should be opposed to them. This is specially the case in times of spiritual leanness, and in days of deep declension or entire apostasy. Thus our Lord and his apostles pled with the people of the Jews in their days, charging their rulers, the chief priests and scribes and Pharisees, with the gravest dereliction of duty. Yet there must be tenderness in this pleading. It is remarkable that, as Jerome remarks, he commands "the sons (children) to speak not at all to the wife of their father whom she forsook, but to their mother who bare them." Neither is there, on the other hand, any impropriety in thus pleading with an erring parent, for we find that Jonathan thus pleaded with his father, Saul, on behalf of David. Humble and modest, yet firm and faithful pleading, is not only lawful, but dutiful even on the part of private persons against national corruptions or public profanations, as of God's Name, or Word, or day, or worship.

II. PENITENCE ENJOINED. Though Israel had forfeited her right to the name or privilege of wife since she had so grievously fallen away from faithfulness and affection, and though God disowned the relationship as she had virtually dissolved her marriage union by her unfaithfulness, yet she had not actually and formally received the bill of divorce putting her away; in other words, her outward and public rejection. There was thus still left space for repentance, and room for hope in case of repentance.

So great is the mercy of God, that if she lent an ear to the pleadings of her children orphaned through her misconduct, and put away her whoredoms or defilements with many lovers, and her adulteries or departures from her rightful Husband and Lord, she might hope for restoration. Thus God deals with sinners in general, if they will only hearken to the admonitions and invitations of his Word, and put away from them the objects, one or many, of their sinful attachment, which withdraw their affection from him who is their true and proper Object. There is a practical comment by Matthew Henry on the close of this verse which appears to us well worth quoting. He says, "Every sinful course persisted in is an adulterous departure from God; and here we may see what it is truly to repent of it and turn from it. (1) True penitents will forsake both open sins and secret sins; will *put away*, not only the whoredoms that lie *in sight*, but those that lie in secret *between their breasts*—the sin that is rolled under the tongue as a sweet morsel. (2) They will both avoid the outward occasions of sin and mortify the inward disposition to it."

III. PUNISHMENT THREATENED. The punishment threatened in case of impenitence consists of several particulars. 1. There is *destitution* of the extremest kind. Israel would be stripped of all the favours, temporal and spiritual, which God had bestowed, and be so situated that she could not help herself. The idea is more fully developed by Ezekiel, who in ch. xvi. presents us with a most pitiable picture—that of an infant exposed, neglected, nude, and helpless: "As for thy nativity, in the day thou wast born thy navel was not cut, neither wast thou washed in water to supple thee; thou was not salted at all, nor swaddled at all. None eye pitied thee, to do any of these unto thee; but thou wast cast out in the open field, to the loathing of thy person, in the day that thou wast born." 2. Next to destitution is *desolation*. In this particular the representation is that of a wilderness and a dry land, or rather of a traveller in such a district. The nature of the wilderness or of the way through it is easily inferred from other Scriptures; thus we read of Israel's departure from Horeb: "We went through all that great and terrible wilderness;" again it is written, "He found him in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness." A traveller, in journeying through that waste and howling and terrible wilderness, would meet with many a rough road, many a rugged way, many a rocky ascent, many an uncultivated waste, many a harsh sound, many a scaresome sight, many a tangled spot, many a thorny place, many a toil, and many a trial. Travellers passing through such a scene of desolation are said to wander "in the wilderness in a solitary way." 3. The *dangers* of the wilderness are manifold. There is the place of lions' dens, and of the mountains of the leopards. There, too, the Israelites of old encountered the fiery serpents that infested it. For a time they had been restrained, but afterwards they were uncontrolled, and even commissioned to chastise the erring Israelites. 4. *Death* itself is included in the threatened punishment: "And slay her with thirst." There is no water to cleanse, no thirst-satisfying fountain, no life-giving spring. Of wayfarers in such a region it is written, "They were hungry and thirsty; their soul fainted in them."

IV. POSTERITY INVOLVED IN THE THREATENED PUNISHMENT. The repetition of "lest" at the beginning of ver. 4 is needed to make the meaning plain and carry on the connection. Particular members of a Church or nation too often share the sins of the general body or rulers of the people; so too children, frequently following in the footsteps of godless parents, suffer by the sad heritage of those parents' guilt; for God "visits the sins of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation of them that hate him." It has been well said that "God visits the sins of the parents upon the children until the entailed curse be cut off by repentance."

V. PERSISTENCE IN SIN. The harlotry and shameful conduct of the libidinous woman, who represents Israel in this passage, evidence the greatest perversity. In spite of warnings and threatenings, in spite of entreaties and exhortations, and in spite of inducements and invitations, Israel persists in her iniquitous idolatry and perseveres in her shameless conduct. Like an abandoned woman, who has renounced all the instinctive modesty of womanhood, and who, instead of waiting for the addresses of paramours, actually takes the initiative, and pursues them with her unwomanly appeals, Israel goes after her lovers, that is, her idols, or, as some think, her idolatrous allies. We may not, however, overlook the fact that, besides the gross idolatry of Israel, there is a spiritual idolatry, to which all are exposed, and to which many are addicted. Any-

thing that draws away our thoughts and affections from God, or that occupies that place in our heart that belongs to him, is an idol—not so rude as the image of wood, or stone, or metal, but not less perilous, not less pernicious, not less insidious. Let us beware of following such lovers; let us beware of spiritual harlotry, and of shamefully pursuing wealth, or fame, or power, or pleasure, and of turning aside from God!

VI. PROSPERITY REGARDED AS THE BESTOWMENT OF IDOLS. Israel in time of plenty forgot the important lesson that her prosperity came from God. Her sottish stupidity was only equalled by her ingratitude, when she attributed all she had to those miserable idols on which her heart was fixed, and of which she showed herself so dotingly fond. Put by Jehovah into the possession of such a lifesome land, of food in abundance, of raiment—garments inner and outer—and of the luxuries as well as the comforts of life, she forgot—basely forgot—that she continued a pensioner on his providence and blessed by his bounties. Bad enough and base enough as such ingratitude was, it was still worse to transfer her love and her gratitude to idols dumb such as blinded nations fear. How unspeakably mean it was for Israel to form such a low estimate of religion as to value it according to the worldly advantages to be derived from it, or in proportion to the selfish interests served by it! How much worse still to depend on idols for such advantages, and in hope of furthering those interests!

Vers. 6—13.—*The pains and penalties that are attached to sin.* In the Book of Judges it is stated once and again that, when the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord, he delivered them into the hand of their enemies. "They forsook the Lord, and served Baal and Ashtaroth. And the anger of the Lord was hot against Israel, and he delivered them into the hands of the spoilers that spoiled them;" "The children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the Lord. . . . And the Lord sold them into the hand of Jabin King of Canaan;" "And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord: and the Lord delivered them into the hand of Midian."

I. THE DIFFICULTIES PLACED IN THEIR WAY. First there is a hedge, which no one can crush through without risk of painful lacerations. God frequently draws round sinful pleasures, as a fence, severe sufferings to warn men against their indulgence. But when all restraints are cast aside, and men will force their way through all such fences, there is another mode of Divine operation which opposes an insurmountable barrier to men's lusts. If a hedge may be broken through, a wall cannot; if a hedge fail to check men in their onward career of sin, a wall will effect the purpose. If thorns in the flesh do not deter men from sinful gratifications, a wall is raised up that cannot be passed over, when, through failure of bodily strength, the crippling of worldly resources, the removal of opportunity or occasion, or otherwise, those gratifications become impossible. The sorrows which Israel suffered by their idols and idolatrous alliances were only the hedge, and served merely for a partial and passable fence; the wall was a complete separation between them and their sins.

II. THE DEFEAT OF HER DESIGNS. The most vigorous pursuit fails, the most minute search is frustrated. For years and centuries the Hebrew race has had their eyes directed to a temporal Messiah, who would lead the armies of his people, fight their battles, triumph over all enemies, and raise them to the highest pinnacle of human greatness, and their nation to a proud pre-eminence among the kingdoms of the earth. We know the result. God has hedged up their way and walled up their path. So, too, with sinners in general. God often seeks by cross providences to withdraw man from his purpose. He places thorns and snares in the way of the froward, making the way of sin difficult, sometimes impossible, so that they follow after their beloved lusts but do not overtake them, and seek them but cannot find them. How different with the search after gospel grace! It is "ask, and ye shall receive; seek, and ye shall find."

III. THE DETERMINATION AT LENGTH ARRIVED AT. The disappointments which Israel meets with bring them to a sense of sin and its sorrows. Having long and eagerly sought satisfaction in the pursuits of the world and in the pleasures of sense, they are forced at last to acknowledge their mistake. Such things do not and cannot satisfy; they are husks that starve but do not support a hungry soul; their idols cannot succour them in the time of need. They recall the early history of their nation, and, contrasting the past with the present, are convinced of the better days that

had long gone by. They thought of the time when Jehovah was the God of Israel, sitting between the cherubim, and when the prosperity of the people had kept pace with their piety. How different now! How different ever after Jeroboam seduced them to the idolatry of the calves, or Ahab indoctrinated them in the heathenish rites of the dual deities of Phœnicia! The retrospect persuaded them of their sad mistake in departing from their true Husband and Head. Finding themselves hardly bestead, their condition desperate, and their hopes blighted, they determine to retrace their steps, and with sentiments and language closely akin to the prodigal in our Lord's parable, they set about the accomplishment of their purpose.

IV. THE SAD MISTAKE OF ISRAEL. In the time of their plenty and prosperity they mistook the source of their blessings, as also the right use of them. They attributed them to their idols, and abused them in their service. Worldly prosperity was what Israel, in the period of degeneracy, most cared for. What contributed to bodily gratification, luxurious living, and worldly wealth, was most esteemed by them. These they counted blessings, and regarded as the bestowments of their idols. Just as in Jeremiah's time their brethren, or rather sisters, of Judah clung obstinately and stupidly to the evil and error of their ways, saying, "We will certainly do whatsoever thing goeth forth out of our own mouth, to burn incense unto the queen of heaven, and to pour out drink offerings unto her, as we have done, we, and our fathers, our kings, and our princes, in the cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem: for then had we plenty of victuals, and were well, and saw no evil. But since we left off to burn incense to the queen of heaven, and to pour out drink offerings unto her, we have wanted all things, and have been consumed by the sword and by the famine." Whatever excuse the heathen may have had when they spoke of their corn as coming from Ceres, and their wine as the gift of Bacchus, and their wealth as bestowed by Plutus, Israel had none; for they had early been instructed in the knowledge of the one living and true God, and early as well as impressively reminded that the good land, which yielded the corn and on which the vine and olive grew, was God's gift; and that it was God, moreover, who gave them power to get wealth, so that however plentiful the silver and abundant the gold, they owed all to him. Worst of all, they not only mistook the Author of these mercies, but perverted them to the service of a rival deity, thus provoking Jehovah to jealousy with that which was not God, but the miserable idol of Sidon, Tyre, and Phœnice.

V. SEVERE CHASTISEMENT WAS THE CONSEQUENCE. This was to be expected. Created things are given to man for his service, and man himself was created for God's service; but when man perverts the creatures which God has given him, and, instead of serving and glorifying God by means of them, actually employs them in ways and for purposes derogatory to the Divine glory, no wonder the Almighty, in just indignation, should snatch them from him who so misuses and abuses them. As in ver. 8 the addition of the personal pronoun to the verb gives emphasis, so in ver. 9 the repetition of the possessive pronoun with the nouns serves the same end. "She did not know, not she, that I even I it was that gave her corn and wine and oil, . . . therefore I will take away *my* corn, *my* wine, *my* wool, and *my* flax." God requires two things at least in return for his mercies: (1) that we gratefully acknowledge the Giver in the gifts; and (2) that we employ them in his service or to his glory. Men praise the fruitful earth, but it is God that makes the earth fruitful; men talk learnedly of the laws of nature, but it is God that invests nature with those functions, or arranges those natural sequences called laws; men boast of good fortune, but such fortune is only the bounteous providence of God. Whether, then, it is articles of food, or materials of raiment, or the precious metals which represent wealth that men possess, it is God that either gives or withholds at pleasure. How beautifully this lesson is inculcated in that precious chapter, the eighth of Deuteronomy! "When thou hast eaten and art full, then thou shalt bless the Lord thy God for the good land which he hath given thee;" and again, beware that "thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth. But thou shalt remember the Lord thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth." Further, the question with Israel, as with the heathen both then and now, is, "What shall we eat, and what shall we drink, and wherewithal shall we be clothed?" whereas the question should be, "How shall we use God's gifts to God's glory; so that whether we eat or

drink, or whatever we do, we may glorify God?" The abuse of God's mercies abridges the time of their enjoyment; when we misuse or mismanage our stewardship, he turns us out of office, and tells us we may be no longer stewards; when we forget the Giver and forsake his service, we forfeit our interest in his gifts. The manner, too, of their removal adds justly merited severity to the stroke. Just as the time of reaping arrives, the harvest becomes a heap; just as the ship reaches the port, it becomes a wreck; just at the season when all seems sure and hopes are highest, the blight descends and expectation ends in bitterest disappointment.

VI. SHAME AGGRAVATES THE CHASTISEMENT. A sense of shame is sometimes the most painful punishment; men of greatest physical courage have often been found devoid of sufficient moral courage to bear up against a laugh or resist a sneer. Besides, when insult is added to injury, the indignity is complete. When Israel prospered, her folly was covered and her sin cloaked; her lewdness was long concealed, being unseen, or overlooked, or thought lightly of. But when the prosperity is withdrawn, the covering is cast aside and the cloak torn off. Outward prosperity, while it lasts, is like gilding over many a lewd life, or like veneering over a loose character. But when, in the providence of God, the day of adversity comes, the inward vileness becomes transparent; when Israel fell from her prosperous state, her corruption was made manifest, even in the sight of the idols she loved, and whose love-tokens she fancied herself to have enjoyed, or of the idolatrous nations whose alliance she courted, or of the sun and moon which as deities she worshipped; she is stripped naked, and exposed to shame, contempt, and insult. Nor is there any hope of remedy or prospect of recovery. It has been well remarked that "those who will not deliver themselves into the hand of God's mercy, cannot be delivered out of the hand of his justice."

VII. SORROW FOLLOWS SHAME IN THE DAY OF ISRAEL'S DISTRESS. Israel continued to keep up the outward ordinances of religion, but the inward essence had long departed; there was the semblance of worship, but the reality was altogether absent; there was a form of godliness, but it was destitute of the living power. Jeroboam had made the worship of Jehovah a state religion. The changes he introduced were with the view of furthering his political interests. The worship he established was a sort of rival worship, so that the breach between the ten tribes and the two might become wider and still widening. He changed the *manner* of worship by the introduction of images or symbols, so that Jehovah was worshipped under the form of a calf, as though in allusion to the cherubim over the mercy-seat; he changed the *place* of worship from its central seat at Jerusalem to Dan in the north and Bethel in the south; he changed the *time* of worship, at least in the case of the Feast of Tabernacles, from the seventh month to the eighth, as though the harvest was later in the north than in the south; he changed the *ministers* of worship, taking the priests out of all the tribes without distinction, and not from that of Levi, which had resisted his innovations and refused to sanction his godless novelties. But notwithstanding these changes—and important changes they were—he retained so much of the national worship as suited his purpose, and did not clash with his usurpation or tend to weaken his authority. Israel still had the weekly sabbath, memorial of creation work completed; and the month-sabbath, a monthly dedication to God. They had the three yearly festivals—the *pesach*, with the *chag ha-matzoth*, to commemorate the deliverance from Egypt; the *chag ha-sh'bu'oth*, or feast of weeks, called also *chag ha-gatzir*, the feast of harvest, and *yom ha-biccurim*, day of firstfruits; and the *chag ha-asiph*, the feast of ingathering, or *chag ha-succoth*, feast of tabernacles, or simply *chag*, the feast by way of eminence, the completion of the ingathering of fruits and vintage, and commemoration of Israel dwelling in tents in the wilderness; they had all the other solemn feasts of thanksgiving to God for special providences or particular blessings. With all these feasts were associated merry-makings, especially with that of tabernacles; but now God takes all these away. The outward joy had for long been severed from that inward spiritual joy of true religion; only the semblance remained, for the substance was gone. And now shadow as well as substance is to pass away. God in judgment turns their joy into sorrow, their mirth into melancholy. "Sin and mirth," says an old writer, "can never hold long together; but if men will not take away sin from their mirth, God will take away mirth from their sin."

VIII. RUIN OF THEIR PROSPECTS AS WELL AS OF THEIR POSSESSIONS. The threatened

destruction of their vines and fig trees affected, not only their present and actual possessions, but also their future and possible prospects. The fruits of one year, or even of several, might fail; but other years of better harvests and other seasons of greater fruitfulness might repair in some measure the loss. The destruction here threatened, however, is not only that of one year's fruits or of one season's produce, but the cutting off of all future hope. It is not only the destruction of the *fruits*, but of the *trees*, and so a ruin without remedy. Neither is it a partial destruction—some of those fruit-bearing trees being still spared—but total; the country would be laid waste, the fences would be broken down, the enclosures taken away, and the vineyards left as a common; the fig trees would give place to forest trees, and wild beasts devour and dwell amid the ruins. Yet Israel could not say that this ruin was unmerited, for the prophet is careful to remind them how foully they had abused the favours of God's providence, and scandalously regarded them as the fruits of their idolatry, the gifts of their idols, or the hire of their spiritual adultery.

IX. RETRIBUTION COMMENSURATE WITH THEIR WRONG-DOING. God's chastisements in this, as often in other cases, bear an obvious proportion to the heinousness of men's sin and the time of its continuance. Like wicked men and seducers in general, idolaters wax worse and worse. From the wrong way of worshipping God under the images of the calves according to their own devices, they had proceeded to the grosser sin of setting up an idol in his place. This idolatry had long continued, and that continuance made an era in their history here named the days of Baalim. 1. The variety of this idolatry is specified. They worshipped Baal under divers forms, for divers purposes, and in divers places; and hence the plural, Baalim. 2. We may notice the devoutness of their idolatry. The burning of incense preceded the morning and succeeded the evening sacrifice of a lamb in the temple. It was symbolical of prayer and thanksgiving; it was, in fact, the highest and holiest of the priest's functions, as we may infer from Luke i. 9. 3. Further, the preparation and pomp of this service to which Israel prostituted the wealth she possessed, decking herself, adulteress-like, with her ear-rings and her jewels; and lavishing the good gifts of God's providence on contemptible and filthy idols. 4. Her eagerness for idol-worship is as noticeable as it is lamentable. Unsought, unsolicited, without inducement or allurement, she takes the initiative, and with unblushing importunity makes advances to her lovers. 5. The blackest sin of all, and in some sort the source of all, was her forgetfulness of God. Alas! how often do men and women abuse the best gifts of God, and pervert them to the vilest purposes! How often are they far more zealous in a wrong course than in the right! How often do sinful pursuits engross their noblest powers! How often does the storm of evil passion sweep away all thoughts of God out of their mind! How often, amid the lusts of the flesh, the lusts of the eye, the pride of life, grovelling avarice, soaring ambition, and schemes of worldliness, do men forget God altogether; or at least how often do they consecrate to self, or sensuality, or sin in some of its countless forms, the thoughts, affections, and love which God claims as justly his due! How often, too, does God visit with terrible retribution the sins of such!

Vers. 14—23.—*Sympathy with Israel in spite of their sins.* The *laken* which introduces ver. 14 is rendered by some "notwithstanding," and this is what we might expect; but it is opposed by linguistic usage. We must adhere to the ordinary translation, which is "therefore." The word thus translated tends to exalt our idea of God's goodness. Israel had sinned and forgotten God; the "therefore" we would expect, and the inference we would draw is God's final and for-ever abandonment of such a sinful, God-forgetting people. Not so, however. Israel had sinned by idolatry, and sunk into a depth of misery from which they were utterly unable to extricate themselves. But their extremity is God's opportunity; their misery appeals to God's mercy; and what man could not do, and man would not do if he could, God does, lifting Israel up out of the pit of misery into which, through sin and forgetfulness of God, they had plunged. Not their desert, but their distress, turned the eye of Divine compassion upon them. "His ways are not as our ways, neither are his thoughts as our thoughts." "He hath not dealt with us," says the psalmist, "after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities." He had indeed dealt with Israel in wrath, and prepared the people to put away their idols, and now, to prevent them giving way

to despair, he deals with them in mercy. 1. "This 'therefore' has a strange and wonderful 'wherefore' if we dwell on what precedes: 'She went after her lovers, and forgat me, saith the Lord. Therefore, behold, I will allure her:' there needs, indeed, a 'behold' to be put to this 'therefore.' . . . The right knowledge of the fulness and riches of the grace of the covenant will help us out of this difficulty, and tell us how these two, the greatness of man's sin and the riches of God's grace, may have a connection one with another, and that by an illative 'therefore.'" 2. The allurements of God are (1) those manifestations which he makes of himself to his people, when he displays to them the beauty of his holiness, the goodness of his grace, the greatness of his mercy, and the glory of his power. Again, (2) he allures men when he draws them away from the specious blandishments and subtle snares of sin and Satan, the world, and the flesh. He counteracts the enticements of things temporal, and turns the affections to things spiritual and eternal. From earthly gain he allures them to godliness, which, with contentment, is great gain; from the pleasures of the world he allures them to delight themselves in God and in the things of God; from all sinful pursuits and from all unworthy ambitions he allures us to seek our satisfaction in himself, and to set our affections on things above, where Jesus sits at God's right hand. 3. He speaks comfortably to his people, literally, to their heart. Man can only speak to the ear, God speaks to the heart; yet God's words in man's mouth are brought home by the Holy Spirit to the affections, and so to the comfort of man's heart. 4. Whether, then, the wilderness state be one of afflictive dispensations or of merciful deliverances, the power of Divine attraction is experienced and Divine consolations are enjoyed. (1) Days of even painfully afflictive dispensations are often days of spiritual consolations; whereas in days of outward prosperity there are many obstructions barring the way to man's heart and preventing the entrance of heavenly comfort. (2) Again, what comfort we derive from the record of God's merciful manifestations to his people in the past! "We may read the stories of God's wonderful power displayed in delivering his people out of their straits in the wilderness, and make them our own; and plead with God that he would show forth that old, that ancient power and wisdom and goodness of his, as he did unto his people formerly." Hence the prophet prays and teaches us to pray, "Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord, awake as in the ancient days, in the generations of old."

I. RELIEF IS THE FIRST MANIFESTATION OF THIS MERCY. That relief is described in terms calculated to remind them of God's gracious dealings with their forefathers, and to recall his merciful deliverance of them out of Egypt. 1. Several incidents connected with their *redemption* out of the land of bondage are laid hold of by the prophet and impressed into his prediction, which is thus rendered beautifully vivid and picturesque, of future deliverance. Among these incidents, which give such a life-like colouring to the prophecy, are God's persuasion of Israel through his servants, Moses and Aaron; their exit from Egypt, and entrance into the wilderness on the way to Canaan; his cordial and comforting dealings with them in the wilderness, when he gave them that fiery, yet just and good and holy Law, instructed them in the ways and means whereby they might worship him acceptably, and took them into covenant with himself. 2. The Prophet Isaiah speaks of the wilderness becoming a fruitful field, and again of the wilderness and solitary place being gladdened, and of the desert rejoicing and blossoming as the rose. Whether, then, the wilderness itself shall bloom with vineyards for Israel, or whether, on emerging from the wilderness, they were to be put in possession of vineyards in the promised land, the promised blessing of *restoration* remains the same; while the responsive song of praise and thanksgiving, such as Moses and the men of Israel sang for the glorious triumph at the Red Sea, and in which Miriam and the women of Israel responded, shall be repeated on the occasion of Israel's rehabilitation in their former inheritance. 3. A remembrancer of a practical kind is interjected, if we are to understand Achor rather appellatively than locally. That remembrancer of Achan's sin, and Israel's suffering in consequence, teaches the lesson sometimes difficult to realize, that the bitterest sorrow becomes the source of sweetest comfort to penitent souls. God subjects his people to humbling providences in order to make them contrite; he awakens within them painful convictions, to prepare them for heavenly consolations; he tries them by distressing circumstances, but it is by way of wholesome discipline; by all their wanderings in the wilderness he humbles and proves them in order

to do them good at the latter end. If, too, like Israel, we put away sin, the accursed thing within us, we may confidently hope for God's presence with us, and power to prevail over all enemies around us. Mortifying sin expels the troubles from the camp; "trouble for sin, if it be sincere, opens a door of hope, for that sin that truly troubles us shall not ruin us."

II. REVIEW OF GOD'S DEALINGS WITH ISRAEL. In the strong language of prophecy, Israel had been married to God, but had proved unfaithful; going after other lovers, and thus committing spiritual adultery, which is idolatry. Her unfaithfulness had exposed her to the just judgments of God, issuing in her captivity. 1. From the fourteenth verse to the close of the present chapter, however, *promises of mercy* take the place of denunciation and reproof. Because of Israel's adultery God had threatened her with a bill of divorce; but now he allures her, that is, woos her again, as a young man a maiden whom he means to make his wife, and in the sequel actually renews that relationship, as we learn from the words, "At that day thou shalt call me Ishi"—"my Husband." He here dwells with complacency on his manner of dealing with her when alluring or wooing her in order to make her his wife. Having brought her into the wilderness, or a state of trouble and distress, and thereby humbled her, he wins her heart, not merely by pleasant words, but by most valuable presents. 2. These *precious gifts* are comfort, hope, and joy. These are the present manifestations of his love which he promises to bestow on Israel. He gives, or rather restores, the vineyards which had been forfeited; that is to say, he gives not only necessaries but delights, not only subsistence but abundance. Vineyards affording wine, which comforts and makes glad the heart of man, imply *comfort*, with the subsidiary notion of rest and peace, from the figure of men sitting restfully and peacefully under their own vine and fig tree. The second gift is *hope*. A door of hope, wide and effectual, is opened before God's people, and they are privileged to enter in. The third is *joy*, spiritual joy, so that they have good ground and a right disposition to celebrate with songs of joy the praises of their Maker, who is at once their heavenly Husband and gracious Benefactor. 3. We must, however, note the manner of bestowal. It takes place after much trouble and great abasement. He gives "her vineyards from thence," the reference being to the wilderness mentioned in the preceding verse. After difficulties and distresses in a land where they had been hardly bestead, and a condition in which they had been much straitened, they would have comforts of a most valuable kind. Further, the valley of Achor denotes the valley of trouble, and derives its name from having been the scene where God troubled the troubler of Israel, when Achan, who by his sin had troubled the host of Israel, was stoned to death. Sin is the soul-troubler still; and when sin is slain and forsaken, with sorrow of heart and bitterness of repentance, the door of hope flies open. Just as the valley of Achor was the door of hope to Israel, inasmuch as it was the first place they got possession of on entering Canaan, and inasmuch as, valley of trouble though it was, it became the source of much good to them; so the valley of trouble and humiliation is often the opening up of hope and comfort to the believer. Conviction of sin causes trouble. The awakened sinner is troubled by a sense of guilt and fear of deserved wrath; but such troubling opens the door to conversion and comfort. 4. The history of Israel repeats itself in the history of God's people still. (1) The trials of the wilderness were past, and Israel anticipated rest and happiness in the land of promise, but on the very threshold a sore trouble awaited them. So with ourselves; we may fancy trouble past, and flatter ourselves with future happiness, at the very time when other great and sore troubles are awaiting us. (2) As Israel got vineyards from the wilderness, so God prepares us for great mercies by sore troubles or severe afflictions. "The afflictions of the saints are not only harbingers of mercies, but doors of hope to let in mercies, means to advance their progress. God commands light to shine, not only after darkness, but out of darkness. Joseph's prison, David's persecution, Daniel's den, made way for the glorious mercies God had in store for them." Many a one can say, "The undoing of worldly prosperity has been the making of me in religion;" in times of trouble, therefore, it is our duty to be patient, and our privilege even to be joyful. (3) Instead of "door of hope," the Septuagint translates, "to open their understanding;" and, though an inaccurate rendering, it conveys the meaning of God's having opened the understanding of Israel to perceive the sinfulness of sin, God's hot displeasure against it, the

dreadfulness of his wrath, the holiness of his commandments, and the duty of putting away sin.

III. RENUNCIATION OF IDOLATRY IS IN CASE OF ISRAEL ANOTHER RESULT OF DIVINE MERCY. He draws them, and they run after him; he makes them willing in the day of his power. Relief from suffering is followed by renunciation of sin; this is a blessed consummation. 1. Other lords had dominion over her, but now she renounces all these, and devotes herself to Jehovah alone. So with sinners when they give up the sin that does most easily beset them. No longer is some beloved lust the subject of their thoughts or the object of their affections; no longer are they wedded to sensuality, or avarice, or ambition, or worldliness, or pride, or passion, or sin in any form; their Maker is now their Husband—even the Lord of hosts, which is his name. Nay, more; they acknowledge God as their Lord and Master, and so he is; they look up to him as their Patron and Protector, and so he is; they confess his right of ownership so as to dispose of them according to his sovereign will and pleasure—and they do well, for so he is. 2. But, above all this, they can come nearer to him and claim a closer connection; with holy boldness they can approach his throne with more confidence and less apprehension than Esther to her imperial husband, when she touched the golden sceptre which he held out to her. The Church can address Jehovah not merely as Baali—"my Lord," but with true wifely affection as Ishi—"my Husband." Or, if the distinction we have intimated be disallowed, the name of an idol shall never again be put in the place of the living God, according to the injunction in Exod. xxiii. 13, "Make no mention of the name of other gods, neither let it be heard out of thy month." So with whatever lust, or evil appetite, or sinful gratification, or vicious course we have had for an idol, let it not be once named among us. 3. But how is the change effected? It is God himself who by his grace brings it about. "I," says God, "will take away the names of Baalim out of her mouth." The very name is to be treated with abhorrence; it must never more be mentioned, but consigned to the oblivion of the past. God himself girds his people with strength for the sacrifice; "for it is God which worketh in you both to will and to work, for his good pleasure."

"The dearest idol I have known,
Whate'er that idol be,
Help me to pluck it from thy throne,
And worship only thee."

IV. RESTORATION TO PEACE LIKE THAT OF PARADISE. Once sin is renounced and man is at peace with God, he has peace with all around. 1. A scene of peace did once prevail on earth; it was in Paradise. In those Eden bowers our foreparents enjoyed sweet peace; they had peace with each other, peace and communion with God. Day was succeeded by night, and night melted into day; they slept, they waked, they walked; they kept that Paradisaical spot and dressed it. Above, around, within, the Divine favour brightly shone. No sound of discord was anywhere heard, nor did jarring note intrude. But soon as man broke the peace by turning rebel against God, the beasts, that till then had been subject to man and rendered him willing service, rose in fury and in fierceness against him. Man by sin turned a foe to himself, roused to rage the creatures before subject to him, and was at war with his fellow. 2. But when Israel returns to allegiance to God, the various sections of animate creation shall resume subjection to him. Wild beasts of the most savage nature, or bloodthirsty disposition, or venomous character, shall be at peace with him; the fowls of heaven, the winged emissaries of the evil one, that snatch the Divine Word out of the heart, shall lose the power of injury; enemies resembling the creeping things of the ground, however harmful before in enticing to low lusts, and leaving the slimy trail of sin behind, shall be restrained from hurting. Not only so; the curse of war shall cease. Jehovah pledges himself by covenant to bless Israel with peace; but the promise carries us on to that happy day when the Prince of peace shall restore peace to the individual heart, peace to the domestic hearth, and peace to the human family throughout all the world. 3. When the weapons of war shall have perished, men shall dwell, not only in safety, but security. They shall be fearless of every foe; fearless of all the powers of evil; fearless in life, for "perfect love casteth out fear;" fearless in death, and triumphant over the last enemy. May the good Lord hasten that time when

"No strife shall rage, nor hostile feuds
Disturb these peaceful years;
To ploughshares men shall beat their swords,
To pruning-hooks their spears.

"No longer hosts, encount'ring hosts,
Shall crowds of slain deplore:
They hang the trumpet in the hall,
And study war no more."

V. RENEWAL OF THE MARRIAGE CONTRACT OR COVENANT. If we take this Old Testament picture and put it in a New Testament frame, or if we take this Old Testament flower and transplant it to the New Testament parterre, we shall realize the words of the apostle to the Ephesians, when he says, "Christ also loved the Church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the Word, that he might present it to himself a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. . . . This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the Church." 1. The betrothal is in righteousness, in truthful sincerity, without the suspicion of dissimulation on the one side or the shadow of hypocrisy on the other; in judgment, with due deliberation, not rashly, not unadvisedly, not through some sudden or fitful impulse; in loving-kindness, in outward acts of kindness and innumerable love-tokens; in mercies, in bowels of mercy; this is the source whence all those countless acts of kindness proceed, the fountain from which such abundant streams of love flow forth; in faithfulness, in stability on the part of God, "with whom there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning," and steadfastness on the part of the saint. These are the precious stones in the wedding-ring which the bride, the Lamb's wife, receives—righteousness and judgment, loving-kindness and mercies, faithfulness—and thus the guarantee of a union that is to last for ever.

VI. REVIVAL OF PROSPERITY. In this part of the picture—and a beautiful picture is here presented to us—we see a specimen of the manifold wisdom of God, and of the many links in the chain of his providence. The boldness of the figure, and the beauty of the personification exhibiting the chain of second causes, and their connection with the great First Cause of all, have been much admired. When the people of God stand in need of, and prayerfully seek, outward comforts, "immediately the corn and the wine and the oil, as if they heard their complaints, shall say, O Lord, we would help Jezreel, and satisfy these thy servants. The corn shall cry to the earth, O earth, let me come into thy bowels; I will rot there that so I may bring forth fruit for this people. The vines and the olives shall desire the earth to receive them, to impart juice and nourishment to them, that they may refresh these reconciled ones of God. The earth shall say, Oh that I may receive the corn and wine and oil that I may be fruitful in my kind! but, ye heavens, I can do nothing except I have your influences, and the warm beams of the sun to make me fructify; come, therefore, and assist me, that I may bear fruit for Jezreel. And the heavens shall cry, Lord, we would fain help the earth, that the earth may help the corn and wine and oil, that they may supply Jezreel; but we can do nothing without thy hand; therefore hear us and suffer us to rain upon the earth, that it may become fruitful." Thus the creatures plead with each other for the saints of God; God hears the heavens, and the heavens the earth, and the earth the corn and wine and oil, and the corn and wine and oil supply abundance to the people of God. 1. If the creatures cry to one another for help to the people of God, shall we turn a deaf ear to the appeals of God's afflicted people when they cry for help to us? Or shall we refuse to hearken to the call of God when he summons us to help forward his cause and extend his kingdom? 2. If God hears his creatures when they cry to him for our support, what encouragement we have to believe that he will hear his own Son, when, as Advocate and Intercessor, he pleads on our behalf and in the presence of God for us!

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 2—7.—*Jehovah's condemnation of faithless Israel.* In ch. i. the prophet has painted a "vigorous fresco" (Ewald) illustrative of his domestic sorrows. And now he presents an explanation of the sad picture in its prophetic meaning. The supreme thought of the Book of Hosea is that of Jehovah's conjugal love for Israel, which she by her unfaithfulness had so foully dishonoured. Here, in ch. ii., accordingly, we have an allegory suggested by the prophet's symbolic marriage with Gomer; which depicts the deep sorrow of Jehovah on account of Israel's fall, and his long-suffering tenderness towards her. The first strophe (vers. 2—7) is occupied chiefly with words of solemn condemnation.

I. THE DIVINE REPROACH. Jehovah charges Israel with: 1. *Spiritual adultery.* (Vers. 2, 4, 5.) He was himself the rightful Husband of the nation, but she had slighted and rejected his love. With infatuated determination she kept saying, "I *will* go after my lovers." There was the calf-worship; and the calves were simply idols (ch. xiii. 2). There was the Baal-worship, with its shameful impurities. There was the infidelity which had shown itself in separation from the dynasty of David. These were spurious, carnal loves; and the people who cherished them were guilty of spiritual harlotry. 2. *Ascribing her material prosperity to her idols.* (Ver. 5.) Jeroboam I. had done so: "Behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt" (1 Kings xii. 28). Jeroboam II. was still doing so; during these gala-days of his reign Israel trusted in her own might, and boasted of her military glory. The calf-worship meant virtually the deification of nature. The Baal-worship was the idolatry of mere power, apart altogether from righteousness. Among Hosea's fellow-countrymen, as by so many in our own days, the worship of the living God was neglected amidst the deification of the popular will, reverence for physical law, and the idolatry of worldly success. These were the powers—Israel judged in her blindness—that made her land prosperous. 3. *The guilt of an outrage upon the Divine honour.* (Ver. 2.) In degrading herself, Israel had foully dishonoured her rightful Husband. For two centuries now her infidelity had been one long agony to Jehovah's heart. And how often, since the days of Hosea, has God been similarly grieved! He was so with Judah before her captivity (Jer. iii. 8—11), and with the Jewish Church in the time of our Lord. Of how many Christian communities also has the Lord been constrained to say, "She is not my wife"!—*e.g.* the Churches at Ephesus and Thyatira (Rev. ii. 4, 20); the Church of the dark ages before the Reformation; every Church that remains in Erastian bondage; every one that is grossly impure in doctrine or communion.

II. THE DIVINE THREATENING. The word "lest" was fitted to remind Israel that, guilty and fallen though she was, it was still possible for her, by timely repentance, to avert the impending judgments. Should she, however, stop her ears to the Lord's reproaches: 1. *He will take away her temporal prosperity.* (Ver. 3.) At the time of her birth as a nation, Israel was in a low condition indeed. In Egypt she had to struggle for life, like a castaway child. The very continuance of her existence seemed a miracle (Ezek. xvi. 3—6). But God now threatens to chastise her for her faithlessness by making her again a castaway. He will strip her of her material resources, bring to the ground her national pride, and cause her to become like a parched and desolate desert. The Almighty will touch with his finger her choicest possessions, and consign to destruction everything which has become tainted with the Baal-spirit. 2. *He will involve in this distress the individual children of the nation.* (Ver. 4.) The ten tribes had been unanimous in their apostasy. Each citizen had brought his own contribution to the universal guilt. There was meantime no godly remnant who could be thought of with comfort as still the Lord's people. So all must suffer in one common punishment. And what a dreadful doom to become "Lo-ruhamah"—to be shut out even from the very "mercy" of God!

III. THE DIVINE DISCIPLINE. The condemnation is not, after all, with a view to "a bill of divorcement;" rather it is the first step of a course of gracious discipline. The discipline consists of: 1. *Restraining words.* (Ver. 2.) Jehovah's heart is so full of relenting towards Ephraim that he summons individual citizens, who may have

become themselves penitent, to reason with the nation at large about its sin. The children are to share in the mother's punishment; and it is right that they should expostulate with her regarding her manifold idolatry. 2. *Restraining providences.* (Vers. 6, 7.) God will effect a forcible separation between Israel and her idols. The seventy years' captivity of Judah would be as it were a "hedge" of "thorns." The perpetual exile of Ephraim would be a solid wall interposed between the northern tribes and their "Baalim." Such methods of restraint God had often employed heretofore. The Book of Judges tells us of no fewer than six thorn-fences which God planted in succession, to break off the seductive alliances formed from time to time with the idolatrous Canaanites. The long drought during Ahab's reign was a wall thrown up between him and his Baal-worship. But none of these obstructions had been permanently effectual. Only the Assyrian and Babylonish captivities were so. By their long exile the Jews were at length for ever weaned from all gross idolatry. They could not forget that their false gods had given them no aid against the thundering advance of the Assyrian, or during the last agonies of Samaria and Jerusalem. 3. *Restraining grace.* (Ver. 7.) It is here predicted that the distresses of the protracted exile shall induce repentance, and awaken a longing desire to return to Jehovah. By the moral discipline of sorrow he will operate upon the hearts of his erring people, and sweetly draw them back to himself. As the "mighty famine" became the means of convincing the prodigal that he had wandered from his true well-being in leaving his father's house (Luke xv. 14—19); so Israel, in her days of sad adversity, shall resolve to return to the home of her Divine Husband, to whom she has for so long been unfaithful. This glorious consummation is still future. We think of it as belonging to "the last things." But it shall most surely be accomplished. There will be a national conversion of the Jews to the Christian faith. Israel shall "go and return to her first Husband;" "for the Lord delighteth in her, and her land shall be married" (Isa. lxii. 4).

LESSONS. 1. *The exceeding sinfulness of sin.* It is whoredom and adultery. How it debases and brutifies man's noble nature! It also blinds the mind to the true source of blessing (ver. 5). And what an agony it must be to the pure and loving heart of God! 2. *The unprofitableness of a sinful life.* Even from the sinner's point of view, such a life never pays. What expenditure of time and toil, of health and substance, a career of vice entails! How precarious, too, are all merely temporal blessings, and how utterly unsatisfying to those who choose them as their soul's portion! 3. *The goodness of God in the restraints which he imposes upon the sinner.* He has many "hedges" and "walls"—public opinion, conscience, temporal loss, personal sickness, family bereavement, etc. These become inestimable blessings to a man when they hinder him in a course of sin, and constrain him, not only to confess his folly (ver. 7), but to turn from it to the Lord.—C. J.

Vers. 8—13.—*Prosperity abused and blighted.* In this second strophe of the chapter Jehovah continues to expatiate upon Israel's ingratitude and infidelity, and warns her with solemn iteration of the punishment awaiting her. These verses speak of—

I. PROSPERITY PLENTIFULLY BESTOWED. (Vers. 8, 9.) The time of Jeroboam II., to which this part of the prophecy refers, was to Israel one of unexampled national wealth. The kingdom seemed as rich and powerful at that period as it had been even in the days of Solomon. The ten northern cantons, we must remember, included the fairest and most fertile districts of Palestine. They possessed "the glory of Lebanon, the excellency of Carmel and Sharon," the fruitful meadows of Bashan, and the green pasture-lands of Gilead. So Ephraim was rich in "corn and wine and oil," in "wool and flax," in "silver and gold." But has not God bestowed vastly greater gifts upon our own country? The climate of our island is damp, and its soil only moderately fertile; yet how much wealth there is amongst us! God has exalted Great Britain to heaven. The English nation is colonizing the world. And for what purpose does the Lord confer temporal prosperity? It is with the same design for which he lends us spiritual blessings—that we may learn to know him, and love him, and serve him.

II. PROSPERITY SHAMEFULLY ABUSED. Israel's prosperity was only in material things. Although imposing, it was external and hollow. It was not the wealth of well-being; for: 1. *The Giver was ignored.* (Ver. 8.) "She did not know," means that she was not willing to know. Her material prosperity begat pride, and pride

engendered forgetfulness of God. But Israel was without excuse. For she had been taught by Moses (Deut. viii.). She had been warned by Elijah (1 Kings xvii.). Every page of her marvellous history spoke of the Divine bounty. The offering of the first-fruits—the three great Hebrew festivals—and especially the Feast of Pentecost, were all just so many solemn thanksgivings to Jehovah for the blessings of his providence. It was true that the men of Ephraim still formally observed these institutions, but the living spirit of them had ebbed away; God was no longer remembered as the Giver of all good. And are there not multitudes still, even in Christian lands, who make no grateful acknowledgment of the Divine mercies? They ascribe their successes entirely to their good luck; or, at best, to their skill, or enterprise, or industry (Hab. i. 16), without recognizing the smile of a benignant Providence upon their efforts. 2. *The prosperity itself was deified.* (Vers. 8, 12, 13.) Ephraim prostituted it to the worship of the powers of physical nature. The people became "lotos-eaters;" they were enervated with sensuous pleasure. They regarded their harvests as the gifts of the Baalim—the "lovers' wages" which they received from their idols (ver. 12). They employed their silver and gold in the manufacture of images of Baal and Ashtaroth (ver. 8), as well as in the adornment of their persons for the celebration of the idolatrous festivals (ver. 13). But are not similar evils rampant just now amongst ourselves? The air is still full of the spirit of Baalism—the deification of force, the worship of success. We meet with this spirit: (1) In *politics.* "Witness the French saying: 'God is always on the side of the heavy battalions.' Witness Prince Bismarck's motto: 'Beati possidentes.' Witness the modern English phrase: 'British interests,' as used to express a rule of diplomacy which some regard as even more binding than the moral Law." (2) In *economics.* There can be only one true system of political economy; but in times of trade-disputes the capitalist and the labourer often adhere to diverse systems. The strike and the lock-out are an appeal to physical force—a virtual offering of the prayer, "O Baal, hear us!" (3) In *philosophy.* How many of our modern scientists deify nature under the name of "law"! They repudiate Providence, and recognize only force. They ignore the living God, and substitute in his room some blind impersonal power. They exalt proud reason to the place which should be occupied by a childlike faith. They ask us to accept a reading of the universe which leaves out the fact of sin, and the soul's hunger for immortality. (4) In *literature.* How many of our great authors—poets, historians, and even moralists—have dedicated their golden intellectual gifts to the service of materialism! (5) In *social life.* The immense increase of wealth in our time tends to foster ostentatious and luxurious habits. What multitudes "bow the knee" to the Baal of commercial success! With many life consists not in *being*, but only in having. But "the word of the Lord by Hosea" reminds us that the love of the world is moral harlotry, and that deference to its spirit is Baalism.

III. PROSPERITY MISERABLY BLIGHTED. Israel shall suffer: 1. *Deprivation.* (Ver. 9.) She has refused to remember God, therefore he will compel her to think of him. He is the real Proprietor of the corn and wine, of the wool and flax. Israel was only his steward, and yet she has claimed these precious gifts as if they were altogether within her own power. So the Lord will suddenly withdraw them. He will send the foreign foe, or the simoom, or the locusts. He will blast the ears of corn when they are just ready for the sickle. He will destroy the vine-clusters in the very hour of the vintage. He will take away his material gifts from those who worship only a God of corn and wine, forgetting that the true God is "righteous," and "loveth righteousness." It is a simple matter for Divine Providence to pauperize the man who is making his own prosperity an idol. He may do it by means of business losses, or family bereavement, or personal affliction, or by giving power to the monitions of conscience. 2. *Chastisement.* God can and will "curse our blessings" (Mal. ii. 2) if we persistently misuse them. So in store for poor Israel there shall be: (1) *Shame.* (Ver. 10.) The Lord will dishonour her before her idols themselves by withdrawing his gifts, and exposing Israel's folly in placing her trust in material things. (2) *Mourning.* (Ver. 11.) The people's sinfulness and their light-hearted mirth, which they had unnaturally wedded to each other, shall be divorced. What though Israel still professed to observe joyfully the Mosaic festivals? She could have no true gladness in Jehovah, so long as she refused to recognize his supremacy in providence. Her mirth was "the laughter of the fool," and God would turn it into mourning. (3) *Exile.* (Ver. 12.) The vineyards and the

fig orchards shall become "a forest" (Ps. cvii. 33, 34). The ravaging Assyrian shall come, like "the boar out of the wood," and root up the vine which was at first brought out of Egypt. Ephraim shall disappear for ever from among the nations.

CONCLUSION. We should cherish gratitude to the Hebrew prophets for the great lesson which they constantly teach, viz. that national sin is certain, in the course of providence, to be followed by national calamity.

> "In them is plainest taught and easiest learnt
> What makes a nation happy, and keeps it so;
> What ruins kingdoms, and lays cities flat."
> (Milton.)

A nation's strength does not consist in its wealth, nor in its armies, nor in its diplomacy. The true palladium of a commonwealth is its moral character. And the destiny of a people is determined by their willingness to lay to heart the lessons of national chastisement, and to use these as stepping-stones to a purer life.—C. J.

Vers. 14—20.—*Israel's restoration.* The word "therefore," with which this strophe opens, illustrates the blessed truth that God's thoughts are not our thoughts. The conclusion here is not what the premises would have led us to expect. This "therefore" is of Divine grace, not of hard cold intellect. Although Israel has foully dishonoured her heavenly Husband, and must be severely chastised, he will not give her a "bill of divorcement" to put her away. Rather, her miseries shall attract his mercies. Jehovah's love uses even her shameful unfaithfulness as an argument for the bestowal of his own matchless grace. These verses describe the future restoration, both of the literal and the spiritual Israel; and they are also a parable illustrative of God's thoughts and ways towards every returning prodigal.

I. THE METHODS OF ISRAEL'S RESTORATION. (Ver. 14.) We need not stay to speak of its Author, even although the first "I" (ver. 14) is emphatic. Only Jehovah himself has heart and power equal to this task. Only he who makes the summer of the year can produce that spiritual summer which is here described with such tender pathos. His methods are twofold. 1. *The outward discipline of the wilderness.* After Israel shall have endured the punishments denounced upon her, her national life is to begin anew. The generation that had come out of Egypt with Moses had needed the protracted discipline of the Arabian desert before God could "give them their vineyards;" and so would it be again. The nation must be taken apart, and be for a time alone with God. Similarly, the Lord removes the individual soul whom he designs to bless, into the wilderness of temporal loss, or sickness, or sorrow. When the aged Christian reviews his spiritual experience, he generally finds that the most marked spots in it have been connected with his times of sorrow. 2. *The inward realization of the constancy and tenderness of the Divine love.* The discipline must be spiritual also. Outward providences alone will not restore Israel. Neither will the truth of God presented only to her mind. In the wilderness the Divine Spirit must "speak to her heart." His purpose in carrying the nation into exile is that he may "allure" her, *i.e.* decoy her with tender words, persuade her by the persistent manifestation of his love. He will stoop to court her. He will outbid the Baals. His inextinguishable love will woo and win her soul. So, oftentimes, God "speaks to the heart" of the prodigal when he sits by the swine-troughs, in the time of the mighty famine. He "speaks to his heart," to soften it, comfort it, cleanse it, claim it, fill it. He has his ways of holy enticement for "alluring" sinners to receive and return his love.

II. THE BLESSED RESULTS OF THE RESTORATION. (Vers. 15—20.) These are described with exquisite beauty. The Divine promise is that in "the wilderness" Israel's national life shall begin afresh. God's nuptial covenant with her shall be renewed. She shall be enfeoffed again in the land of Canaan, the possession of which she had forfeited. The Lord "will give her her vineyards from thence." And the results shall be glorious. 1. *Fresh hope.* (Ver. 15.) The valley of Achor (*i.e.* trouble) was the door by which Israel had at first entered into possession of the highlands of Palestine. It had been the scene of a dreadful tragedy (Josh. vii.): the defeat before Ai, and Achan's sacrilege, conviction, and doom. But so soon as Israel purged herself of "the accursed thing," the valley of Achor had become to her "a door of hope." Now, however, she

must again pass through a still more doleful Achor. The destruction of Samaria and the desolation of Jerusalem would mark a defeat greatly more disastrous than the repulse at Ai. But through "the valley of trouble" she shall come again to peace and rest. Does not the expression before us furnish a valuable watchword for the Christian? It reminds him that he must pass through "the great tribulation" (Rev. vii. 14) before he can reach the heavenly Canaan. Every ungodly lust is an Achan in the camp of the soul, which must be convicted and stoned and burned. 2. *Youthful joy.* (Ver. 15.) Israel, when restored to the Divine favour, shall recover the sprightliness and joy of youth. "She shall sing there, as in the days of her youth;" and in those days she could indeed sing. Is not the song of Moses a masterpiece both of poetry and praise? In conception it is sublime. In execution it must have been thrilling. That old Red Sea ode is the first song of redemption. But, in the days of her restoration, Israel shall resume it, and with a fuller appreciation of its meaning. For the song of salvation which returning penitents now sing is "the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb" (Rev. xv. 3). 3. *Renewed conjugal love.* (Vers. 16, 17.) In the rapture of her recovered love, Israel shall call Jehovah "*Ishi*"—"my Husband." She shall no longer use the name "*Baali.*" In itself, of course, "Baal" is a good enough word. In Hebrew it is a common noun, meaning "master," "possessor," "owner;" and it had been used as a designation of Jehovah. But, alas! the word had at length been prostituted to base purposes, and defiled by wicked associations. Its purity was now hopelessly gone. So, in the good time coming, it shall be used no more. God will not be called Baal, lest the word should tempt Israel to think of her old idols. 4. *Paradisaical peace.* (Ver. 18.) The picture here suggests a return to the garden of Eden. The forces of nature, once so hostile (vers. 9, 12), shall be brought into harmony with Israel. Wars shall cease for ever. The face of the world shall be changed. How different this picture from the state of matters that is still thought necessary in order to the preservation of the peace of Europe! The favourite maxim just now is that the best security for peace is to be well prepared for war. The Baal-spirit professes to see the basis of peace in our arsenals and ironclads; but Jehovah's plan is to "break the bow and the sword and the battle out of the earth." 5. *An everlasting marriage union.* (Vers. 19, 20.) The Lord will forget all Israel's past infidelity, and treat her again as if she were innocent and pure. He will espouse her, as if she were a chaste virgin, to himself. He will bestow upon her, as bridal gifts, every Divine and spiritual blessing—"righteousness," "judgment," "loving-kindness," "mercies," "faithfulness." And the new marriage-covenant shall be "for eternity" (ver. 19). The former one, alas! had been sadly broken; but the renewal of the conjugal relationship shall be enduring as Jehovah's invincible, unchangeable love.

CONCLUSION. How important for the sinner to "know and believe the love that God hath to him"! The eternal love of God is a fact. Every pure human attachment is but a rill from the infinite fountain of the Divine tenderness. Love, no less than holiness and justice, lies at the root of the Divine wrath against sin. Jehovah our God is "a jealous God;" but he would not trouble himself to cherish holy jealousy about the affections of our poor hearts, if he did not love us with an ardent and a quenchless love. Oh for grace to love him in return as we ought!—C. J.

Vers. 21, 22.—*The golden chain of causation.* This promise is a parable in miniature, and has been much admired for its poetic beauty. It completes the prophetic picture of Israel's restoration in the Messianic era. Doubtless, also, it refers in its fulness of meaning, not merely to Israel after the flesh, but to the entire Christian Church during the time of the latter-day glory.

I. JEHOVAH IS THE FIRST CAUSE OF ALL THINGS. "I will hear, saith the Lord." According to Scripture, from its opening utterance (Gen. i. 1) onwards, the all-pervading power of God is the mainspring of the universe, and his all-controlling superintendence is its balance-wheel. Jehovah is the First Cause: 1. *In the world of nature.* He gives "the corn, and the wine, and the oil" (Ps. civ. 13—15). The order of the year is in his hand. No sunbeam glances, no raindrop falls, but at his bidding. Therefore he says with emphasis and iteration, "I will hear, I will hear the heavens." From this we should learn the sacredness of nature. The heavens are holy: they are "the work of God's fingers." The sea is holy: he "hath measured the waters in the hollow of his hand." The flowers are holy: each of them "shows some touch of his unrivalled

pencil." 2. *In the world of grace.* Jehovah is the ultimate Author of all spiritual blessing. He gives the "corn" of Bible truth, and the "wine" of gospel joy, and the "oil" of spiritual influence. When the foundation-stone of a place of worship is laid, sometimes corn and wine and oil are sprinkled upon it—a beautiful expression of the great truth, that "except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it." It is Jehovah alone who has "built up mercy for ever," and who sustains the fabric of redemption. The Lord, in the Trinity of his sacred Persons, is the First Cause of our salvation (Titus iii. 4—6).

II. ATTACHED TO HIS THRONE HANGS A CHAIN OF SECOND CAUSES. These are represented here by the "heavens," and the "earth," and the "corn and wine and oil," and by "Jezreel." The second causes have a real efficiency of their own: we live under "the reign of law." Yet they are at most only *second* causes—instrumentalities controlled by the will of the First Cause. There can be no such reign of law as makes Jehovah a subject or an alien in his own world. Law reigns, but God governs. He was, before any second causes began to operate. He used none when he created the universe, when he originated life upon the earth, when he instituted the laws of matter and of mind. And, when he pleases, he may still work without them, both in nature and grace. Usually, however, God does not dispense with second causes. In his ordinary providence everything requires everything.

> "All are needed by each one;
> Nothing is fair or good alone."
> (Emerson.)

Second causes combine: 1. *In the world of nature.* Indeed, there is scarcely any physical effect which we can ascribe to the operation of any one natural force alone. When God wills that it should rain, or that we should have sunshine, he wills that all the physical causes which produce these effects respectively should come into operation. And, moreover, there are many other powers engaged in the management of the world besides what we call physical laws. There are, *e.g.*, the power of animal instinct; the power of human thought and sentiment; the power of love and sympathy; the power of conscience; the power of free-will. There is the power of master-minds, wielded sometimes by direct communications, and oftener by subtle influence. Some men are "world-controllers," and leave their impress upon millions. 2. *In the world of grace.* In this region we call the subordinate causes "means of grace." Of these, some are inward, such as faith and repentance. Some are outward—the Word, the sacraments, and prayer. Among the means of grace, we must also reckon those influences in providence which operate in the formation of a godly character—education, early training, parental example, youthful companionships, disappointments, and afflictions. And these various kinds of means act in combination. They are a "sacred chain that binds the earth to heaven above." "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God" (Rom. x. 17). "All things work together for good to them that love God" (Rom. viii. 28).

III. PRAYER LINKS ITSELF ON TO THE ENTIRE CHAIN OF CAUSATION. It is represented here as the last link of the chain; and it is in the hands of Jezreel. But who is "Jezreel"? She is "the seed of God," whom he has "sown unto himself in the earth" (ver. 23); *i.e.* the spiritual Israel, the Christian Church in the latter days. Just as the valley of Esdraelon, in this beautiful parable, is conceived of as praying to "the corn, and the wine, and the oil," so the supplications of God's chosen seed have their place among the second causes of things. Believing prayer is, of course, addressed directly only to Jehovah, the First Cause. According to the teaching of Scripture and the testimony of experience, it is the condition which God himself has attached to the enjoyment of his mercies, and especially of all spiritual blessings (Ezek. xxxvi. 37; Matt. vii. 7, 8).

> "For so the whole round world is every way
> Bound by gold chains about the feet of God."
> (Tennyson.)

But true prayer takes hold also of the second causes. "They shall hear Jezreel." It

does so: 1. *In the world of nature.* How does man pray to "the corn, and the wine, and the oil"? He does so by tilling the ground, sowing the seed, planting the vines, and tending the olives. He uses the fixed laws of nature—directing their action so as to make them subservient to his will. The pious farmer's motto is, "Ora et labora." And so with all other pursuits of men. If I pray rightly that I may prosper in some plan or enterprise, I use also the other practical means of attention, arrangement, and diligence, else the larger number of second causes will make for the failure of my prayer. There must be a settled harmony between my plans of working and the petitions which I offer. 2. *In the world of grace.* Here prayer is not merely one of the means of grace, co-ordinate with the others; it is an indispensable condition to the successful use of any other. Prayer is not an intermediate link in the chain. It is at the one end; the throne and will of Jehovah being at the other end. But, while it is necessary that we pray for spiritual blessings, we must at the same time see that all the other second causes combine harmoniously with our petitions. *E.g.* our salvation is of grace alone, and yet the moral influences which go to shape character operate all the same. The revelation of Jesus Christ has not repealed the ethical precepts of the Book of Proverbs. Paul wrote his Epistle to the Galatians to teach that sinners are saved and that saints are sanctified by grace alone; and yet in that same Epistle he solemnly insists that "whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Gal. vi. 7). Prayer is one second cause; but there is a whole chain of them to which it must join itself. It is not enough to pray for one's own growth in grace, or for the conversion of one's children, or to observe family worship; we must take care that the other influences at our command shall harmonize with our petitions, and conspire to obtain the answer which we plead for.

IV. UNIVERSAL PRAYERFULNESS ON THE PART OF MAN SHALL BRING WITH IT THE RESTORATION OF NATURE. This text asserts the deep sympathy of nature with the cause of righteousness. We know that as soon as Adam in Paradise renounced his allegiance to God, the earth renounced its allegiance to him (Gen. iii. 17, 18). But, on the other hand, so soon as Jehovah shall be at peace with Israel, and the people of the world shall have become "the seed of God" in the day of the Redeemer's power, all things shall become theirs, and Paradise shall be restored (Ps. lxvii. 5—7). Already, it is true, man possesses a wide sovereignty in the kingdom of nature. As holy George Herbert says, in his poem on 'Man'—a poem which is Miltonic in the majesty of its conceptions—

"For us the winds do blow;
The earth doth rest, heaven move, and fountains flow.
Nothing we see, but means our good,
As our delight, or as our treasure:
The whole is either our cupboard of food,
Or cabinet of pleasure.

"More servants wait on man
Than he'll take notice of . . . .
O mighty love! Man is one world, and hath
Another to attend him."

But, in the golden age that is coming, man's sovereignty over nature shall be complete; and nature's sympathy with man shall be perfect (Isa. xi. 6—9).

LESSONS.—Let us: 1. Recognize our absolute dependence upon God, the great First Cause. 2. Earnestly seek his presence and aid, both in the discharge of daily duty and for the furtherance of our spiritual life. 3. Accompany our prayers with assiduous practical effort. 4. Rejoice in the hope of the ultimate restitution of all things.—C. J.

Ver. 23.—(See homily above, on *The curse reversed*, ch. i. 10, 11, and ii. 1.)—C. J.

Vers. 14, 15.—*The message from home.* There will be but little difficulty in the exposition of this passage if we remember that two distinct figures are blended by the prophet. On the one hand he recalls the early history of Israel. He remembers their

degradation in Egypt, and traces the moral effects upon them of the wilderness-life which transformed a horde of slaves into a nation; binding each man to his fellow, and all to God. To the prophet, as a moral teacher, the wilderness appears the place for the cure of idolatry, for the reception of the Law, for the appointment of Divine worship, and for the gathering of national and moral strength. Glancing from the wilderness across the Jordan, he sees, next, the disaster at Ai which ensued on sin, and notes the way in which, in the valley of Achor, the iniquity was purged, so that the people were ready for new victories and the possession of the land of promise. After recalling these incidents, Hosea says to the Israel of his own day, "These experiences shall be repeated in all their essential features. You shall be taken from the Egypt of idolatry, you shall be led into the wilderness of exile, you shall pass through the valley of trouble, and there, your sin being discovered and removed, you shall go on to a nobler future and have the fulfilment of the promises." But with this figure is blended another, which pervades the first three chapters, in which Israel is represented as a disloyal wife, whose husband loves her still, and seeks by the gentlest means to draw her again to himself. God's condescension and wisdom are shown in these attempts to set forth Divine responsibilities and privileges by analogies drawn from human relationships. The human is sanctified, and the Divine is made natural by such a method. Here God is represented as the Husband of the Church, bearing with her waywardness and sin, taking upon himself her sorrows and cares, purging her from all evil, that at last she may appear radiant in the sheen of her white robes, and crowned with light in his presence. (Text.)

I. CONSIDER THE ENTICEMENT OF SIN LEADING TO ESTRANGEMENT which is set before us in the earlier part of this chapter. The ideal condition of Israel, and therefore of every soul, is that of one betrothed to the Lord, yearning for his society, mourning his absence, cheered by his smile, and waiting for the marriage. Nothing satisfies the soul but God. In the imperfection of our friends, in the mistakes we make about each other, in the spurning of our love, in the loss of dear ones by removal or death, we are disquieted by the ordinance of God, so that, like Augustine, we may say, "Cor nostrum inquietum est, donec in te requiescat." As Israel said, "I will go after my lovers," so one says, "I will go after pleasure;" and another, "I will go after wealth," as if the highest good could be found there. And this sin is aggravated, because (as ver. 8 implies) all that is used or enjoyed in this vain pursuit is given to us by the God we forget; as the prodigal wasted in the far country what his father had given to him. In order to bring us to thought and penitence, wandering from God is made difficult to us, and often the words have been fulfilled, "I will hedge up thy way with thorns." He thwarts our plans and disappoints our hopes. The idolized friend proves false, the adored child is torn from our embrace, the hoarded wealth is swept away. The fruit has its bitter kernel, and the rose its thorn. Nor is it only in what is outward that we recognize a hedge planted by God to turn us back from evil. When one is about to sin, he is checked by the thought of dishonour to his father's name, or by the reproaches of conscience, or by the memories of old teaching, or by the tears of a mother. He can say, as Augustine did in the review of his sinful life, "I escaped not thy scourges, for what mortal can? For thou wert even with me mercifully rigorous, and besprinkling with most bitter alloy all my unlawful pleasures, that I might seek pleasures without alloy. But where to find such I could not discover save in thee, O Lord, who teachest by sorrow, and woundest us to heal, and killest us lest we die from thee."

II. LISTEN TO THE VOICE OF LOVE CALLING TO THE WILDERNESS. "Therefore I will allure her." It is the last inference we should expect. Sin and forgetfulness are not inducements to mercy. If trouble is the obvious result of extreme wickedness which is still unrepented, the father would say of the child, the husband of the wife, "It is right she should suffer, and till she returns she cannot expect blessing from me." So long as lawful authority is set at defiance, human law knows no mercy. God does not deal with us, however, as we deal with others. He did not cast Israel off at once, nor did he summon her to his feet by the thunders of Sinai or the terrors of hell, but says, "I will allure her;" speaking gently as Christ did by his Word and life, so that the sin-stained felt that, though no other mercy could be had, it might be found at the feet of the Friend of sinners. "I will draw her into the wilderness," the place of silence and of solitude. The Divine voice is seldom heard amidst a multitude. God severs the individual from his fellows when he would give him a message for himself or for others.

He spoke to Jacob, not in the family, but in the desert, where only the quiet stars were watching; to Moses, not in the crowded camp, but high above it, on Sinai; to Samuel, not amid the worshippers, but in the silent chamber where the child slept alone; to Elijah, not in the tumult of Carmel's victory, but in the silence of the cave at Horeb. So Israel had been taught, not in Egypt, but in the wilderness; and thus, said the prophet, it shall be again, and there "I will speak comfortably unto her"—literally, "I will speak upon her heart"—that henceforth my Law and my love may be graven on it. Such has been the experience of the Christian. Convinced of sin, the world seemed dreary as a desert to him, till hope was infused into his heart that pardon and reconciliation were not far from him. Believing that God was near, he lifted up his trembling heart in prayer, and in Christ, the crucified and risen Saviour, he saw God reconciled to him; and the glimpse of his infinite beauty, of his unspeakable love, won his heart for ever. Then the very place of grief became the place where the fruits of joy were growing, and in the wilderness of repentance the promise was fulfilled, "I will give thee vineyards from thence, and the valley of Achor for a door of hope."

III. LOOK FOR THE DOOR OF HOPE IN THE VALLEY OF TROUBLE. "The valley of Achor," or of troubling, on the north of Gilgal and Jericho, was the place in which Israel was gathered after the repulse at Ai; when the sin of Achan was discovered with such terrible exactitude, and removed by dreadful expiation (see Josh. vi.). But, though it seemed a valley of despair, it was really a place of hope, because the camp was purged from the curse and the people made ready for Canaan. So, in the coming exile of which Hosea spoke, some even in Israel would cast off their sin and turn to the Lord, and that valley of Achor would be a door of hope. The principle of using the most unlikely means for deliverance and blessing has often been exemplified, by him who brought water out of the rock, and made the cross the means of the world's salvation, and death the entrance to heaven. Most conspicuously is it seen in our redemption. 1. *The door of hope was opened for the world in the valley of trouble, through which Christ walked on our behalf.* We are raised to heaven because he came down to earth; we have the life eternal because he submitted to death. But for his obedience in humiliation, God's Law would not have been vindicated in its righteousness and beauty; but for his sorrows, we should have had no almighty Intercessor whose sympathy is perfect; but for his crucifixion, the handwriting against us would never have been nailed to the cross; and but for his death, and burial, and resurrection, and ascension, we should not have seen the kingdom of heaven opened to all believers. 2. *The door of hope was opened for the Jews, as a nation, in the valley of trouble.* Egyptian bondage prepared for liberty, wilderness wandering was the means of moral culture, defeat led to the putting away of sin, the captivity in Babylon tore up idolatry by its roots. After the coming of Christ, the destruction of Jerusalem amidst tears and blood was the opening of a new door of hope, for by it the noblest of the race began to look for the heavenly Jerusalem, to understand the spirituality of worship, and to find in Christ the one Centre round which the true Israel would gather. Thus every nation may look for a door of hope in its valley of trouble? When called to pass through commercial depression, military disasters, diplomatic defeats, there is hope of finding purification from immorality, extravagance, and self-indulgence, and a new and loftier sense of responsibility to others and to God. 3. *The door of hope is opened for sinners in the valley of trouble.* Trouble is not itself and of necessity a good. The wind, which wafts one vessel to the haven, may drive another on the rocks. The river, which to-day gives fertility to the fields, may to-morrow bring desolation to the works and to the homes of men. Trouble may injure us, yet it is meant to bless us; and this is specially true of the inward sorrow represented here. If one is convinced of sin, so that the old enjoyment of pleasures is gone, and paradise becomes a wilderness, his penitential grief is the true beginning of the joy the publican had, who went down to his house justified because he cried, "God be merciful to me a sinner." If we are in the sadder condition of one who has, like Israel, forsaken her first love, and are compelled to say, "Then was it better with me than now," our hope is found in going out, like Peter, weeping bitterly. And in the valley of the shadow of death, which seems to mortal eyes so dark and strange, so sad and fearsome, that it may well be called the *valley of Achor*, we shall find in it the door of hope—ay, the door of *heaven*—and, like others, we shall sing in it as in the days of our youth, "Thanks be unto God which giveth us the victory."—A. R.

Vers. 21, 22.—*God's rule in nature and in grace.* Hosea was projecting himself into the future. He felt as if standing already amid the desolation threatened against Israel. He saw around him a land barren through drought. Its inhabitants, dying of starvation, were craving the wonted produce of vineyards and corn-fields, but looked in vain for a sign of coming blessing. Under the name "Jezreel" they are represented as crying to the "corn" and wine to satisfy them; but these are in bondage to the earth, and appeal to it for vitalizing power. Then earth takes up the wail; every fissure in it becomes a mouth calling to the heavens for rain. Last in the series, the heavens, not able to send rain except by Divine ordinance, appeal to him who is over them all. (Quote text.) Context shows that spiritual as well as natural blessings are portrayed. Prophets saw the analogies of nature, the unity of the whole Divine economy, and devoutly believed that in the realms of nature and of grace the same God reigned. Draw out the analogy between the spring-time promised here, and the new creation in the soul of man. The text reminds us of—

I. THE PERSONALITY OF GOD'S RULE. "*I* will hear," etc. 1. *All things ultimately dependent on him.* This denied by many in Hosea's days and in ours. "Nature," with inanimate forces and partially investigated laws, so exalted that a personal God is declared to be needless. Hosea believed that the products of nature expressed God's thoughts and fulfilled his purpose, and that the cry of his people reached him and moved him through the series of forces represented by corn, earth, and heavens. Surrounding nations held that one god gave corn, another wine, etc. (illustrate from mythology); but Hosea ascribed all to one God, in whom all power centred, to whom all cries ultimately came. (Illustrate this re-echoed cry by the fires on the beacon hills telling from town to town that the Armada was in sight; or by the system of signalling in our army and navy, which makes known peril and want to him who commands in chief.) 2. *All things mutually dependent on each other.* Rain necessary to the earth, earth to seed, seed to bread, bread to man; so the withholding of rain, as in Elijah's time, brought home the sense of guilt to the sinful. Show intimacy of relation between man and earth, between moral and material prosperity, from history. Paul's "whole creation groaneth," etc. Complete reconciliation between man and man, between man and God, will bring about new heavens and new earth, in which righteousness will dwell. Still true "the eyes of all wait upon *thee*, and *thou* givest," etc.; "*Thou* openest thy hand, and satisfiest," etc.

II. THE MEDIATENESS OF GOD'S METHOD. Text reminds that all through the universe one force acts on another to effect the desired result, yet God is not the less working because his hand is unseen. As we do not pay the tool, but the workman whose skilful hand uses it, so we pay homage, not to "force" or to "law," but to God. The age wants what the prophets had—spiritual discernment. Ezekiel saw the "wheels," but also "the living one" within them. He noticed the "hand of the man," but above it "the wing of the cherubim." If possible to him, more so to disciples of Christ, who taught so distinctly the care of God even over birds and flowers. The Holy Spirit, moreover, was promised to bring all such truths to our remembrance. Show how God works through secondary means. 1. *Of our physical constitution this is true.* (1) *The individual man is not created afresh* from the dust. He has intimate relations with predecessors, is affected by their strength, weakness, prejudices, habits, etc. He is the result of complicated agencies working for centuries, yet it is "God that hath made us, not we ourselves." (2) *Man's support* comes not directly from God (as in the manna, or Christ's feeding the multitude), but by process described in text, yet *he* gives us each day our daily bread. (3) *Man's life on earth is terminated,* not by angel's touch, but by some chill, or infection, or developed germ of disease, which brings weakness, then death. 2. *Of our spiritual life this is true.* (1) *Pardon* came through our hearing the truth, which by the power of the Spirit brought us to penitence and prayer. (2) *Reconciliation* is possible to the world through the mediation of Christ. (3) *Others will be brought to God,* not by the voice that spoke to Abram in Ur of the Chaldees, and to Samuel in the tabernacle, but by pleading of parents, influence of teachers, etc. "He that rejecteth you rejecteth me;" "Ambassadors for Christ," etc.

CONCLUSION. 1. *How great the privilege of God's people!* "They shall hear Jezreel." Earth and heaven are to supply our wants. "Meek shall inherit the earth;" "All things are yours." 2. *How splendid the destiny of God's people!* "I will sow her unto

me;" "A handful of corn in the earth, . . . the fruit thereof shall shake like Lebanon." God's Church the germ of God's harvest. Perhaps like seed God's people must be scattered, sown, buried, forgotten; but the harvest is sure, and in it God will find his glory. Application: *By his mercies God has said to you,* "Thou art my people;" have you answered with loyal heart, "Thou art my God"?—A. R.

Ver. 5.—*The delusions of the ungodly.* Israel sinned, not only by forsaking God and by worshipping the idols of the heathen, but by defending this conduct—by justifying her apostasy, and attributing to the supposed deities her mercies and enjoyments. This is a common case with sinners; who first do wickedly in departing from God, and then give God's honour to another, praising those whom they have substituted for the great Giver for what they owe to him alone.

I. THE UNGODLY ATTRIBUTE THEIR ADVANTAGES AND ENJOYMENTS TO OTHERS THAN TO GOD. It is not only professed idolaters who act thus. Whoever they may be who turn aside from the Lord, they are one in this—they all assign to inferior beings or principles the credit and honour which are properly due to God alone. For example, men deify their own created and limited powers of body and of mind. "*They* give me my bread and my water," etc. Or they attribute all prosperity and happiness to society, to the political authority under which they live, to human kindred or patrons. God is not in all their thoughts. The agents they see, but him who is above all they see not and will not see.

II. THE UNGODLY CONSEQUENTLY ENCOURAGE THEMSELVES IN DEVOTION TO OTHERS THAN GOD. The unfaithful wife perseveres in the adulterous connections she has formed, because she persuades herself that her happiness and welfare are dependent upon others than her lawful spouse. "I will go after my lovers," etc. Thus men first forget God, and give themselves to the pleasures and the service of sin, and then, fancying themselves to be under obligation to the gods they have made, they addict themselves the more zealously to the debasing worship in which they have engaged.

III. THE UNGODLY MUST BE CONFRONTED WITH THE SHAMEFULNESS AND VILENESS OF THEIR COURSES. The language of the prophet is frank and unsparing; had it been otherwise it would have been unfaithful. The case is one that does not admit of nice language, or of gentle tones and bated breath. The spiritual harlotry of ungodliness must be exposed and rebuked; otherwise there is no prospect of repentance and of reformation.—T.

Ver. 6.—*The way hedged up.* A way may be hedged or walled up on either side for security and protection. But when the hedge is planted, or the wall built right across the path, such a barrier is of course intended to impede progress, and to render proceeding in that direction impossible.

I. DIVINE PROVIDENCE SOMETIMES HEDGES UP THE SINNER'S PATH. It does sometimes seem as if the ungodly were left to go their way unchecked; as if there were nothing to restrain their headlong race upon the downward path; as if sentence against an evil work were not executed speedily. But how often is it observed that Providence *does* interpose to restrain the mad career of iniquity and folly! To change the figure, it is as though the voice addressed the raging sea, "Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further; and here shall thy proud waves be stayed."

II. VERY VARIOUS ARE THE HEDGES AND WALLS ENCOUNTERED IN THE WAY OF SIN. Sometimes sickness and infirmity render the sinner incapable of pursuing his evil ways; sometimes temptation is signally removed from his path; sometimes disappointment and sorrow produce revulsion and even disgust; sometimes conscience is awakened, and sternly forbids indulgence in the pleasures of sin.

III. SUCH HEDGES AND WALLS AROUSE A HASTY AND VEHEMENT RESENTMENT. The bird strikes her wings against the iron bars of the cage in which she is confined; the ox kicks against the goad by which the driver urges him. And the first impulse of the sinner who encounters a hedge upon his sinful path, is to resent, to resist, to displace it. This is human nature; and only calm reflection and Divine grace can effect that it shall be otherwise.

IV. NEVERTHELESS, THE INTENTIONS OF DIVINE MERCY MAY IN TIME BE RECOGNIZED. The disappointed adulteress, finding that her unlawful lovers are indifferent to

her, and have forsaken her, comes to a better mind, and compares with their treatment of her the conduct of her just and rightful spouse. The sinner, learning by bitter experience that the way of transgressors is hard, comes to see that this is a provision of heavenly love and pity; acknowledges that it was not intended that the pursuits of worldliness and selfishness should satisfy man's immortal soul; and thus is led to seek forgiveness and reconciliation from a justly offended God.

V. THE HEDGING UP OF THE WAY THUS APPEARS TO THE PENITENT SINNER A BLESSING IN DISGUISE. He says within himself, "Had the road been open, and my course unimpeded, perhaps I should never have paused until I had rushed into ruin and destruction. How does it become me to adore and to bless the very mercy which I hated and despised, to which I owe it that my mad career was checked, and that my wandering feet have at last been led into the way of peace!"—T.

Ver. 8.—*Mercies abused.* Ingratitude and insensibility are odious vices; when displayed by God's intelligent creatures towards their Maker, they are hateful sins. The case is still worse when, as with Israel, the bestowments of a beneficent Deity are employed in the service of a rival and a foe. Jehovah gave to the people silver and gold; the people made of the precious metals shrines to Baal. Yet this is a just picture of the conduct of those who receive gifts from Heaven and use them in the service of sin.

I. GIFTS MAY BE RECEIVED AND THE GIVER UNRECOGNIZED. The produce of the soil—corn, wine, and oil; the mineral wealth of earth—silver and gold,—are all the provision of Divine bounty. But, whilst God opens his hands, multitudes, like Israel, take the gifts but give no thought to the Divine Benefactor. The powers of body and of mind which we possess are provided by Divine wisdom and goodness. Yet how often men use them as if they were absolutely their own, and involved no responsibility!

II. THE GIFTS OF GOD ARE SOMETIMES TRACED, NOT TO GOD, BUT TO HIS FOES. To take from Jehovah, and then to offer thanks and praise to Baal—such was the base and brutish proceeding of Israel. And now men praise themselves, or they praise fortune, or they praise the sinful arrangements of society, for the gifts they owe to Heaven. They "do not know," even as Israel "did not know." It is blamable, inexcusable ignorance, and only Divine forbearance could endure it.

III. THE GIFTS OF GOD MAY EVEN BE TURNED AGAINST HIM AS WEAPONS OF REBELLION. Israel took Jehovah's gold and made of it images of Baal. How often do men employ the wealth which God has enabled them to get, against the Giver, and in the promotion of the cause of error and of vice! How often do they prostitute the faculties and influence which they owe to God, to the service of Satan! The state, the Church, are from God; yet both have too often been made instruments of evil. Only infinite long-suffering could permit such an abuse of what was provided and intended for man's highest good.

APPLICATION. Ingratitude should be succeeded by repentance; and the abuse of God's gifts should be laid aside, and followed by lowly consecration.—T.

Ver. 13.—*Retribution.* It was part of the office of the prophet to exhibit the righteousness of the Most High. Justice and mercy, the attributes which appear so harmonious in the gospel, are equally apparent in the writings of the inspired seers of the old covenant.

I. THE SIGNS OF APOSTASY AND INFIDELITY. These are again set forth under the similitude of a loved and well cared for, yet unfaithful and adulterous wife. 1. Forgetfulness of the Lord, the Husband. If he had been remembered, honoured, and loved, others would not have been permitted to be his rivals and successors. To forget God is to fling one's self in the way of temptation. 2. The quest of other objects of affection and intimacy. When faithless Israel went after strange gods, "lovers," or paramours, she furnished an example of human infidelity to God. Men, forgetting God, worship the works of their hands, make idols of their talents, their wealth, their influence, their position in life, etc. 3. Devotion to the service of God's rivals. As the abandoned woman adorns herself, and sets forth her charms in order to attract the attention and admiration of men, so idolaters consume their substance and waste their energies in superstitious observances; and so all who forsake God encompass the vain objects of their devotion and affection with much lavish display of zeal.

II. THE AVENGING OF APOSTASY AND INFIDELITY. The language of Jehovah is simple, but vigorous: "I will visit upon her the days of Baalim." 1. God observes with indignation the unfaithfulness of those whom he created for his glory. He will not give his honour to another. He is not indifferent or unconcerned when his own depart from him. 2. God makes use of punitive means to assert his authority, and to arrest the downward progress of those who are unfaithful to him. In the previous verses are recounted the several "judgments" which the righteous Governor inflicts upon the disobedient. All affliction is designed to lead our thoughts to him who is the great Chastener. 3. Retribution is with a view to the repentance and reformation of the offender. The Lord does not cast off his people; he does not afflict them willingly; in the midst of wrath he remembers mercy.—T.

Ver. 14.—*Comfortable words.* In the later periods of Jewish history, references were frequently made to the early experiences by which Israel had been, in the providence of God, made a nation. In this verse the prophet, in assuring the people that the time of Divine reconciliation and favour was approaching, sets forth this prospect in language borrowed from the days of the Exodus. Then Jehovah had delivered his people from the bondage of Egypt, had led them into the wilderness, and there had entered into a covenant of espousals with the nation, and had spoken to them words of comfort and of encouragement. Hosea foretells that a similar experience is in reserve for the smitten but penitent and returning children of the covenant.

I. MAN'S NEED OF COMFORTABLE WORDS. This may be said to arise from the fact that severe words had been uttered to the people's sorrow. God is faithful, and he never flatters, and never withholds the correction which is deserved and required. When the voice of God has threatened, and the voice of conscience has condemned, welcome are words of consolation expressive of Divine interest and favour.

II. THE IMPORT OF COMFORTABLE WORDS DIVINE. 1. They are words of forgiveness. 2. They are words expressive of favour. 3. They are words assuring of gracious help. 4. They are words faithful and certain to be exactly and entirely made good. Unlike the well-meant comfortable words spoken by human lips, which often are nothing but words and are altogether vain, the gracious language of the Divine Deliverer is powerful to effect the purposes of the utterer, and to heal the sorrows and relieve the anxieties of those addressed.

III. THE EFFECT OF COMFORTABLE WORDS. 1. They reassure the timid and trembling. 2. They bring peace to the conscience-stricken and alarmed. 3. They soothe the anxious and distressed. 4. They banish the fears of the foreboding, and inspire with hope.

APPLICATION. The preachers of the gospel are commissioned to "speak comfortably to Jerusalem," to bind up the broken-hearted, to pour the balm of consolation into the spirit of the lowly and the contrite.—T.

Ver. 15.—"*A door of hope.*" Still continuing his reference to the early history of the chosen people, Hosea assures to the penitent and contrite the blessings of Divine favour, promising to returning Israel "the valley of Achor for a door of hope." As Achor was near Jericho—upon the threshold of the land of promise—the possession of this fertile valley was the earnest of the full and hoped-for inheritance. Entrance upon this was, as it were, passing through the door into the land flowing with milk and honey.

I. MERCIES FOR THE PRESENT. 1. The vineyards represent the possessions and privileges of God's people. They contrast with the dry and thirsty wilderness. They abound with proofs of God's care, with provision for man's wants. God gives his beloved all things richly to enjoy. 2. The songs are songs of deliverance, such as Israel sang upon the Red Sea shore; they are songs of rejoicing over enemies vanquished, safety experienced, fellowship in Divine favour.

II. PROSPECTS FOR THE FUTURE. It is well to enter at the open door; but the open door admits to the apartments of the house or palace. A guest does not enter by the door in order to remain standing in the hall; he is welcomed to the family hearth, and the society and enjoyments of the abode of his host. Thus, when God opens to his people a door, it is a door of hope. What they are is a promise of what they shall be,

and what they have is an earnest of what is provided for them in the future. Through the vale of Achor they enter into the land of promise; and its abundance is to them the assurance of an unfailing and perennial bounty. Hope extends to every stage of the earthly pilgrimage and warfare; there is progress and victory before the Lord's people. And hope stretches away to the infinite hereafter, which affords for its anticipations a boundless and immortal scope.

APPLICATION. The door of hope is by the gospel set open before every hearer of the gospel. What encouragement we have to enter in and to possess the land!—T.

Vers. 19, 20.—*Divine betrothal.* The unfaithfulness of the past is forgotten. The love of the Divine Husband is renewed. A joyous betrothal is the prelude to a hallowed, prolonged, and happy union.

I. THE BRIDEGROOM. Jehovah condescends to represent himself as sustaining this relationship. It implies on his part love and attachment, purposes of everlasting kindness, for the marriage cannot be broken, and a provision for all the wants of her whom he takes to himself.

II. THE BRIDE. Israel is here the type of the Church whom the Lord Jesus has purchased unto himself—the bride of the Lamb. She is indeed happy and honoured in the choice of her Divine spouse. She is called to purity, to fidelity, to holy service.

III. THE COVENANT AND CONTRACT. On the side of the Lord all is of grace; and the undertakings of the Bridegroom are "for ever." On the side of his spouse, the Church, there is implied the spiritual marriage vow, with all which that involves.

IV. THE SPIRIT IN WHICH THE UNION IS CONTRACTED. This is *faithfulness*, or the certainty of the fulfilment of the pledge voluntarily given. All God's promises are sure, for he is faithful.

V. THE CONDESCENDING PROMISE OF THE BRIDEGROOM TO THE BRIDE. "Thou shalt know the Lord." This knowledge shall be of all Jehovah's gracious attributes, and in itself it is eternal life.—T.

Vers. 21, 22.—*The great First Cause of blessing.* The language of the prophet here is language of true poetry. To his vivid imagination all nature is personified, endowed with hearing and with speech. The wants of the penitent Israel (figured as Jezreel) are known to the products of the earth by which human need is supplied; the earth when called upon yields her fruits, and the heaven, in response to earth's demands, pours down the fertilizing showers which ensure a plenteous harvest; for the Lord of all hears the entreaty of the skies, and bids them be bountiful and free.

I. HUMAN WANTS ARE SUPPLIED BY PHYSICAL AGENCIES. Man, though a spiritual being, has a physical nature with corresponding necessities. As a servant of the Creator, he depends upon nature for the maintenance of bodily strength and the opportunity of pious service. To despise the material is to question the wisdom of the God of nature.

II. CREATION IS A SYSTEM ARRANGED TO SECURE THE GOOD OF GOD'S INTELLIGENT SUBJECTS. The body of man depends upon the fruits of the earth; the fruits of the earth depend upon the atmospheric influences. There is mutual dependence among all parts of the great system of which, through our corporeal nature, we form a part. And all things work together, and by Divine appointment, for the good of those who love God.

III. GOD IS HIMSELF THE CONSCIOUS AND BENEVOLENT MAINSPRING OF THE VAST MACHINE. "I," saith the Lord, "will hear the heavens." From this we gather that the Divine mind arranges and controls universal nature, and that the delight of the great Ruler is in the welfare of his dependent and intelligent creatures, for which all things terrestrial and celestial are fashioned to co-operate, to which all things concur. That there is physical law no thoughtful man will question; and those who are alike thoughtful and devout will recognize the Lawgiver who is behind the law, and will delight in the conviction that whilst the Divine mind is infinite wisdom, the Divine heart is infinite love.—T.

Ver. 23.—*Purposes of pity and of possession.* The name *Jezreel* had been applied by the Divine command to one of Hosea's sons, and thence to Israel, by way of marking God's displeasure with the rebellious people, whose capital has been marked by deeds of disobedience and of bloodshed. But the name itself was good, meaning "God will

sow." And in this verse it is declared that God will indeed sow Israel unto himself, in mercy and for life and blessing. It is thus figuratively asserted that days of favour and of prosperity shall be accorded to repenting Israel.

I. MERCY COMES TO THOSE WHO BY REBELLION HAD PUT THEMSELVES BEYOND MERCY. In this respect the northern tribes are representative, not of the Hebrew people only, but of the human race. God has ever pitied those who have had no pity upon themselves. Had there been no sin, there would have been no room for mercy. This Divine attribute is manifested pre-eminently in the gospel of Jesus Christ, who is incarnate compassion.

II. GOD CLAIMS AS HIS OWN PEOPLE THOSE WHO HAD THROWN OFF HIS AUTHORITY AND THEIR ALLEGIANCE. Israel was bound to Jehovah, both by the common ties of human creatureship and by the special ties of the covenant he had made with the fathers of the nation. It was especially discreditable in those who owed so much to God, to forsake his worship, to despise his ordinances, to break his laws, to defy his authority. Yet, even for those who had so sinned, there was, when they repented, reconciliation and restoration. His of right and his by covenant, Israel now became his by actual possession. The language of mutual appropriation here employed is very beautiful. "Thou art my people," says Jehovah. And Israel responds, "Thou art my God." When such language is sincere, the convictions it expresses may be regarded as the foundation of all good. Such a relationship involves unfailing favour from God and unfailing faithfulness from man.

APPLICATION. 1. Consider the light this passage casts upon the Divine disposition towards mankind. 2. Consider the urgency of our condition, and the consequent desirableness of taking advantage of this Divine disposition.—T.

Ver. 6.—*Divine restraints.* "Therefore, behold, I will hedge up thy way with thorns, and make a wall, that she shall not find her paths." "There is a twofold hedge," says Burroughs, "that God makes about his people. There is the hedge of protection to keep evil from them, and there is the hedge of affliction to keep them from evil. The hedge of protection you have in Isa. v. 5, where God threatens that he will take away the hedge from his vineyard, that is, he will take away his protection; and it is said of Job, that God had hedged him about. But the hedge here meant is the hedge of affliction. I will hedge up thy way, that is, I will bring sore and heavy afflictions upon you, but yet in a way of mercy: these afflictions shall be but as a hedge to keep you from evil, they shall not do evil to you or bring evil upon you." God puts restraints on the sinner here.

I. THESE RESTRAINTS ARE MANIFOLD. "I will hedge up thy way with thorns, and make a wall." The first metaphor is taken from a husbandman who, to prevent the cattle from breaking away from the field, plants a prickly hedge. The other figure is taken from architecture—"a wall." If the thorns are insufficient, high and massive walls must be built. What are the restraints? 1. There is the restraint of *affliction*. When the wicked purpose some great crime, affliction comes, breaks their plans, and strikes them down. 2. There is the restraint of *public sentiment*. Public opinion, as it gets enlightened and strong, is a tremendous check to the wicked. The most daring cower before the public voice. 3. There is the restraint of *conscience*. Conscience is a Divine officer holding the sinner in.

II. THESE RESTRAINTS ARE NECESSARY. It is necessary that God should plant thorny hedges and build massive walls around the sinner. 1. It is necessary for the *sinner himself*. Were it not for these he would go galloping to perdition. "O unhappy men," says Luther, "when God leaves them to themselves and does not resist them in their lusts! You bless yourselves many times that in the way of sin you find no difficulty. Bless thyself! Thou hast cause to howl and wring thy hands; thou hast the curse of God on thee. A dreadful curse to make pleasant the way of sin!" 2. It is necessary for the *world*. What would become of the world if the wicked were not reined in? Were it not for restraints, the Cæsars, the Alexanders, and the Napoleons would soon turn it into a Pandemonium. 3. It is necessary for the *Church*. Had wicked men their full fling, how long would the Church last! The flames of martyrdom would soon blaze to heaven and consume Zion to ashes. Thank God for thorny hedges and massive walls—for all the restraints he puts on sinful men.—D. T.

Ver. 11.—*The conjunction of sin and mirth.* "I will also cause all her mirth to cease." Mirth is not happiness. It is but the mimicry of real joy. Happiness is a river deep and clear; mirth at best is but a sparkling bubble. There is but little happiness in the world, but there is much mirth, much noisy frolic and hilarious glee. The text speaks of mirth in connection with sinfulness. Israel, who had grown corrupt, had, notwithstanding, much mirth. In relation to the conjunction of sin and mirth we may remark—

I. THAT THE CONJUNCTION IS COMMON. The notes of jollity and fun are heard everywhere through society. At theatres, taverns, divans, and social festivities it flares and rattles. The drunkard has his mirth, the liar his mirth, the debauchee his mirth, the blasphemer his mirth, the sabbath-breaker his mirth. The union of sin and mirth is, alas! very common. We meet it everywhere, in the dance and in the song, in the joke and in the gibe.

II. THAT THE CONJUNCTION IS INCONGRUOUS. Gaiety and laughter in a sinner are most revolting when rightly regarded. The condition of a sinner is one of awful solemnity; a condition upon which God and his holy universe look with deepest seriousness. The sighs of moral anguish and tears of bitter remorse become the sinner. Fun and laughter are more unbeseeming to him than jests and jollities in a dying chamber. "Mirth," says Dr. Young, "at a funeral is scarce more indecent or unnatural than a perpetual flight of gaiety and burst of exultation in a world like this; a world which may seem a paradise to fools, but is a hospital with the wise."

> "The ground is hollow in the path of mirth;
> Oh! far too daring seems the joy of earth,
> So darkly pressed and girdled in by death."
> (Mrs. F. Hemans.)

III. THAT THE CONJUNCTION IS TEMPORARY. Amos, who was contemporary with Hosea, and like him was a prophet of the ten tribes, describes the conjunction well and indicates the necessity of the separation: "Ye that put far away the evil day, and cause the seat of violence to come near; that lie upon beds of ivory, and stretch themselves upon their couches, and eat the lambs out of the flock, and the calves out of the midst of the stall; that chant to the sound of the viol, and invent to themselves instruments of music, like David; that drink wine in bowls, and anoint themselves with the chief ointments: but they are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph. Therefore now shall they go captive with the first that go captive, and the banquet of them that stretched themselves shall be removed." 1. *The separation is certain.* There is no mirth for the sinner either in moral conviction, death, the judgment-day, or in the scenes of final retribution. "If you will not take away sin from your mirth," says an old writer, "God will take away your mirth from your sin." 2. *The separation will be solemn.* It is said that Pope Adrian exclaimed when he was dying, "O my soul, where art thou going? Thou shalt never be merry any more." "I will cause all her mirth to cease," says God.

CONCLUSION. Confound not mirth with happiness! The brightest gleams of mirth are but the rays of rushlights; only visible in the dark, and that must go out. Happiness is a quenchless sunbeam; it streams from the eternal Father of lights. Happiness will follow holiness for ever; mirth will only, like the *ignis fatuus*, flare about sin for a short time at most, then go out, and there is pitch darkness.—D. T.

Vers. 12, 13.—*The prosperity of the wicked.* "And I will destroy her vines and her fig trees, whereof she hath said, These are my rewards that my lovers have given me: and I will make them a forest, and the beasts of the field shall eat them. And I will visit upon her the days of Baalim, wherein she burned incense to them, and she decked herself with her ear-rings and her jewels, and she went after her lovers, and forgat me, saith the Lord." These verses lead us to look upon wicked man in three aspects.

I. AS PROSPERING IN THE WORLD. "I will destroy her [*i.e.* idolatrous Israel] vines and her fig trees." Vines and fig trees stand for prosperity. There is a synecdoche here: vines and fig trees mean all outward prosperity. Wicked men are allowed to prosper on this earth; they are often more successful in worldly enterprises than the

righteous. They live *for* the world and *to* the world, and they have their reward. Their ground becomes fruitful, their trade prosperous, their profession remunerative.

II. AS ASCRIBING THEIR PROSPERITY TO WRONG CAUSES. "These are my rewards that my lovers have given me." Israel ascribed its prosperity to its idols, here called its "lovers." The wicked ascribe their success sometimes to fortune, sometimes to chance, sometimes to their own industry, and sometimes to their rogueries. They don't trace it to the true Source, the great God.

III. AS DEVOTING THEIR PROSPERITY TO WRONG OBJECTS. "And I will visit upon her the days of Baalim, wherein she burned incense to them," etc. "Baalim" is the plural number, by which some suppose inferior gods are meant. Israel is here accused of burning incense to these *dei minores*. Wicked men devote their wealth, not to the improvement of their minds or to the true progress of mankind, but to their own selfish and superstitious ends. God is recognized in the use no more than in the pursuit of their wealth. "She went after her lovers, and forgat me, saith the Lord."

IV. AS DEPRIVED OF THEIR PROSPERITY BY THE GREAT GOD. "I will make them a forest, and the beasts of the field shall eat them. And I will visit upon her the days of Baalim." The threatening is, that God will not only destroy all their prosperity, "the vines and fig trees," but punish them for their idolatry. "I will visit upon her the days of Baalim."

CONCLUSION. "The tinsel glare upon a sinner is too apt to offend the weak eyes of a saint. Alas! why should he envy him a little light who is to be shrouded in everlasting darkness? Why should we throw bludgeons at boughs which are only laden with poisonous fruits?"—D. T.

Vers. 14, 15.—*Soul-restoration.* "Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her. And I will give her her vineyards from thence, and the valley of Achor for a door of hope: and she shall sing there, as in the days of her youth, and as in the day when she came up out of the land of Egypt." These words refer to the restoration of Israel to friendship and fellowship with God. "The desert," says Delitzsch, "into which the Lord will lead his people cannot be any other than the desert of Arabia, through which the road from Egypt to Canaan passes. Leading into this desert is not a punishment, but a redemption out of bondage. The people are not to remain in the desert, but to be enticed and led through it to Canaan, the land of vineyards. The description is typical throughout. What took place in the olden time is to be repeated, in all that is essential, in the time to come. Egypt, the Arabian desert, and Canaan are types. Egypt is a type of the land of the captivity in which Israel had been oppressed in its fathers by the heathen power of the world." The verses may be used to illustrate the subject of *soul-restoration*, and they suggest two facts.

I. THAT THE STAGES IN SOUL-RESTORATION ARE GRADUAL. The reference throughout here is to the emancipation of the Jews from the Egyptian bondage, their Divine guidance in the wilderness, and their entrance into the promised land. And all this is here employed to illustrate spiritual restoration. We may remark, therefore: 1. That the first step to soul-restoration is *from bondage to liberty*. "I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness." Into the wilderness from where? From Egyptian bondage. In Egypt the Israelites were slaves, in the wilderness they were free. All souls are in moral Egypt, and the first step to their restoration is their exodus into the moral Arabia. 2. The next step is from *despondency to hope*. The valley of Achor, which was situated to the north of Gilgal, is mentioned by the prophet with a manifest reference to Josh. vii. Through the sin of Achan Israel had incurred the displeasure of the Almighty, and its army against Ai was defeated. But through the prayers of Joshua and the elders, the Divine favour was again obtained, and Israel became triumphant, and the valley of Achor, where there was great trouble, radiated with "hope." The victory of Ai threw all Canaan into their hands (Josh. vii. 8), and Achor, once the scene of great trouble, became to them "a door of hope." It was, indeed, the first place of which they took possession in Canaan; it was the entrance into the promised land. In spiritual restoration the soul passes from trouble into hope; in the "deep valley of affliction it finds a door of hope." Joseph in his prison, David in his persecutions, Saul in his manifold trials,—all found "a door of hope." Through much tribulation we enter into kingdoms.

3. The next step is from *sterility to fruitfulness.* "I will give her her vineyards from thence." The wilderness was a barren desert, but Canaan was a land of vineyards; it abounded with fruit. In spiritual restoration the soul passes from the sterile into the fruitful; it leaves the desert for a paradise. 4. The next step is from *sadness to exultation.* "She shall sing there, as in the days of her youth." The reference here again is to the song which the Israelites sang after they had crossed the Red Sea (Exod. xv. 1). The song of the redeemed soul at last will be the song of Moses and the Lamb (Rev. xv. 3). Such are the stages through which the soul in its restoration passes—from thraldom to liberty, despondency to hope, barrenness to fruitfulness, sadness to exultation.

II. THAT THE AGENCY IN SOUL-RESTORATION IS DIVINE. Who is it that effects this restoration? God. "I will allure her," etc.; "I will give her her vineyards," etc. No one but God can restore souls. Mark how he does it. 1. *Morally.* "I will allure her." It is not by force or violence, not by menace or might, but by the enticements of the moral beauty of his character and the charms of his love. God restores souls by manifesting all his tenderness, his goodness, his perfections to them through Christ. The power of the gospel is the power of allurement. If souls are to come out of their Egypt into the wilderness, God must allure them. 2. *Lovingly.* "Speak comfortably unto her." He declares he has no pleasure in the death of a sinner. He assures of his readiness to pardon and to bless. He says, "Come now, and let us reason together," etc. 3. *Generously.* "I will give her her vineyards from thence." He who gave Canaan to the Jews gives heaven to restored souls.

CONCLUSION. Brother, knowest thou aught of this soul-restoration? Have the allurements of Divine love drawn thee out of Egypt? In the midst of thy deep troubles hast thou found a "door of hope"? Is the wilderness within thee beginning to blossom as the rose, and do the fruitful vines refresh thee with their clusters? Has the song of Moses and the Lamb inspired thy heart and tuned thy voice? If so, "sing praises unto our God, sing praises."—D. T.

Vers. 18, 19.—*The sublime privileges of the good.* "And in that day will I make a covenant for them with the beasts of the field, and with the fowls of heaven, and with the creeping things of the ground: and I will break the bow and the sword and the battle out of the earth, and will make them to lie down safely. And I will betroth thee unto me for ever; yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in loving-kindness, and in mercies." These words present to us a few of the many surpassing privileges which *all men* might enjoy.

I. INFERIOR CREATURES MIGHT BE DIVINELY RESTRAINED FROM INJURING THEM. "In that day will I make a covenant for them with the beasts of the field," etc. There are creatures that have both the power and the inclination to devour man. Prowling beasts of the field, and ravenous fowls of the air, and creeping scorpions of the earth, have at once the power and passion to put an end to the human race. Who restrains them? God's hand is on them. He holds them back. Sometimes he withdraws his hand and men are devoured. Will not a lion devour a saint as well as a sinner? It depends upon whether the saint has committed himself to the Divine protection, and has received into his own heart an assurance of Divine guardianship. Daniel was safe in the presence of the ravenous lions; and in modern times, instances have occurred where savage beasts have been restrained from inflicting injury on godly men. "Thou shalt tread upon the lion and the adder" (Ps. xci. 13). I have an impression that were man to possess and manifest the moral majesty of goodness, the wildest and most savage creatures would stand in awe of him.

II. HUMAN ENEMIES MIGHT BE MADE TO SUBMIT TO THEM. "I will break the bow and the sword and the battle out of the earth." Those who trust in the Lord need not be afraid of war. The potsherds of the earth might strive with each other, but they would not harm the good. The man who would never strike a blow is not likely ever to be struck. The spirit of the good man is to overcome evil with good. Imagine an army drawn up to attack a body of truly Christly men—men who prayed for their enemies, and did good to them that despitefully used them, and who held no weapons in their hands. They would look calmly on their assailants while they were brandishing their swords and shouldering their bayonets. What would be the result? Why, a moral force would go forth from the unarmed multitude, which would break

the "bow, the sword, and the battle." As a rule, bad as human nature is, it will not intentionally injure the unquestionably good and unoffending. It is the moral power of goodness that can alone break "the bow and the sword and the battle out of the earth."

III. THEY MIGHT ENJOY A PERFECT SECURITY. "Will make them to lie down safely." Every man might have God as his Refuge and Strength, as his Shield and Buckler. "The Name of the Lord is a strong tower: the righteous shall flee thereto and be safe." "Who shall harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?" "If God be for us, who can be against us?" What is the *true* safety? Not the mere safety of the body. The body is not the man; it is his—not him. The body may be in safety when the soul is in peril, and it might be in danger when the soul is secure. Soul-safety is the safety of the man; and soul-safety means protection from all that is unholy in thought, impure in feeling, unrighteous in volition. Blessed is the man that feels his spirit safe!

IV. THEY MIGHT ENJOY VITAL UNION WITH THE EVERLASTING FOUNTAIN OF GOODNESS. "I will betroth thee unto me for ever; yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in loving-kindness, and in mercies." Here is a union! The closest union, one represented by that of a husband and wife; a union formed by immutable ties. Righteousness, judgment, loving-kindness, faithfulness,—who can break these bonds? "The mountains shall depart, the hills be removed, but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed."

CONCLUSION. Learn the supreme importance of moral goodness to man. With godliness man has everything. All things are his, and he is Christ's, and Christ is God's.—D. T.

Vers. 21—23.—*God and his universe.* "And it shall come to pass in that day, I will hear, saith the Lord, I will hear the heavens, and they shall hear the earth; and the earth shall hear the corn, and the wine, and the oil; and they shall hear Jezreel. And I will sow her unto me in the earth; and I will have mercy upon her that had not obtained mercy; and I will say to them which were not my people, Thou art my people; and they shall say, Thou art my God." As the word "Jezreel" literally means "seed of God," I shall take it in its etymological sense, and regard it as denoting the *good* in every age and land. Our subject is *God and his universe*, and the text contains three facts.

I. That the operations of the universe are UNDER THE WISE DIRECTION OF THE GREAT GOD. The universe is represented as in action. The "heaven," the "earth," the "wine," the "corn," and "Jezreel" are all acting. There is nothing stationary. Creation is like a flowing river, there is not a particle at rest. It is our happiness, however, to know that all its activities are presided over by God. It is not a self-acting machine; the great machinist is ever in it and with it. The fact of his superintendence serves several useful purposes. 1. *To account for the unbroken order of nature.* Why does not the ocean overflow its boundaries, or the massive globes swerve from their orbits? God is over all. 2. *To impress us with the sanctity of nature.* God is in all—the lustre of the light, the beauty of the lovely, the majesty of the grand, the support of the feeble, the might of the strong. 3. *To inspire with reverence for God's greatness.* How great must he be, etc.!

II. That the operations of the universe are GENERALLY CONDUCTED UPON THE MEDIATORY PRINCIPLE. "I will hear the heavens," etc. One part of nature is here represented as *acting upon another*, in order to give a certain result. In the material as well as the spiritual world, God works out his plans by secondary instrumentalities. Look at this in relation to man. 1. In relation to him as a *material* being. Whence *came* these corporeal frames? how are they sustained? by what means are they *broken* up? All through secondary means. 2. In relation to him as a *spiritual* being. How is he instructed, converted, sanctified? Not directly, but mediatively.

III. That the operations of the universe are MERCIFULLY SUBORDINATED TO THE INTERESTS OF THE GOOD. "Jezreel," the seed of God, *i.e.* good men, are spoken of as receiving three things. 1. *The blessing sought.* Jezreel prayed, and all nature is represented as conveying its prayers to God. The universe labours for the good. 2. *The multiplication of their number.* "I will say to them," etc. The strongest desire of the truly good is to make others good. 3. *The heightening of the sympathy between*

them and their God. "I will say to them which were not my people," etc. What a privilege is this!—D. T.

Vers. 2—5.—*Spiritual adultery.* The individuals of the nation are exhorted to plead with their mother Israel, that she may turn from her adulterous courses, and so avert the doom which is otherwise certain to overtake her. Consider—

I. ISRAEL'S SHAMELESS PROFLIGACY. (Vers. 2, 5.) The sin charged against Israel is that of adultery, in her relations with Jehovah. Owing to the peculiarity of these relations, the sin was of a specially aggravated kind. 1. The people had withdrawn from Jehovah that undivided allegiance which, as the one living and true God, he demanded of them. 2. They had set up idol images (the calves), and had changed God in their thoughts to a mere nature-deity, like the heathen Baals. 3. They had gone after the heathen Baals as well. In form, the worship of Jehovah was kept up; in reality, idolatry had the sole dominion. This was their adultery. It was public and unblushing. Even in the eyes of the heathen, Israel was guilty of great wantonness, for the heathen were not wont thus lightly to change their gods (Jer. ii. 11). The crime for which Israel is indicted, however, is not peculiar to that nation. In a deeper regard, it is the fundamental sin of the race. The soul made by God for himself has left him, and gone after other lovers. It has turned to the creature. It lusts for illicit satisfactions. Its dispositions are "evil and adulterous" (Matt. xii. 39). Especially is this sin committed by those who, entering into a new covenant with God by grace, afterwards go back to the world.

II. HER CERTAIN PUNISHMENT. (Vers. 3, 4.) Israel's adultery dissolved *de facto* the marriage relation between the nation and Jehovah. Ver. 2 is the Divine deed of separation. Separation is followed by punishment. Under the Law, adultery was punished by death. This doom also, as respects corporate existence, was about to overtake Israel. But the figure in the text alludes rather to the withdrawal of God's good gifts—the gifts bestowed on Israel in her relation of spouse—with its result in the reduction of the nation to a condition of utter wretchedness and want. The "slaying with thirst" (ver. 3) is not absolute, since recovery is predicted (ver. 7), but denotes a state of extreme anguish, in which multitudes would actually perish (Deut. xxviii. 33, 34, 48, 65—68). There is here: 1. *A reminder of the source of natural blessings.* God could take away, because it was he who at first gave. It was he who gave Israel all she had. Hence the destitution to which the withdrawal of his gifts reduced her. "If God withdraws his gifts, the consequences are infinitely awful, because, altogether unlike the natural husband, he has *everything* in his possession; if he does not give anything to drink, he then slays by thirst" (Hengstenberg). 2. *A correspondence between sin and punishment.* What Israel possessed, she received in virtue of the marriage covenant. At first she had nothing. God had given her all. Answerably to this, she is punished by being reduced to her original destitute condition. Marriage unfaithfulness leads to the withdrawal of the marriage gifts. "The eternal and universal truth which, in the verse before us, is expressed with a special reference to Israel, is, that all the gifts of God are bestowed on individuals as well as upon whole nations, only in order to lead them to the communion of life with him, or because this communion already exists. If we fail to see that the gifts of God have this object, if they be not received and enjoyed as the gifts of God, if the spiritual marriage be refused, or if, having been already entered into, it be broken, sooner or later the gifts will be withdrawn" (Hengstenberg). 3. *A picture of the state of the soul from which God has withdrawn himself.* The outward is the image of the inward. The soul which has forsaken God—which God has forsaken—is solitary and desolate, burnt with hunger, parched with intolerable thirst, a desert. God's design in withdrawing the outward gifts is that the soul may be led to feel the deeper misery and disgrace within.

III. THE ONE WAY OF ESCAPE. (Ver. 2.) Repentance—turning from the evil courses. God is unwilling to proceed to extremities, though, if the sin be persisted in, he must. He gives here a final warning, a last opportunity. There is thus a limit to the Divine forbearance. The last appeal will come *some* day. Often, by the time it comes, we are so sunk in sin as to be past attending to it. While, however, mercy lasts, the most abandoned may return.

IV. THE DUTY OF THE INDIVIDUAL. "Plead with your mother, plead" (ver. 2). Individuals are implicated in the guilt of the community. They have a stake in the general well-being (ver. 4). They have, accordingly, a responsibility in connection with national backslidings. It is their duty (1) to separate themselves from the prevailing wickedness; (2) to testify against it; (3) to use every means to try to bring about repentance and reformation.—J. O.

Vers. 5—9.—*The philosophy of the Divine chastisements.* The punishment of Israel, while retributive, was designed also to be reformatory. It would display the Divine wisdom. Consider—

I. THE DELUSION UNDERLYING ISRAEL'S DEVOTION TO THE IDOLS. (Vers. 5, 8, 12.) 1. The *nature* of the delusion. The root of it was the notion that her prosperity was attributable to the assiduity of her service of the idols. It was they, she thought, who had given her her corn and wine and oil, her bread and water, her wool and flax. She ignored the real Giver. The delusion is not uncommon. Men put natural laws, second causes, their own skill and power, or the skill and power of others, in place of the living God. They forget *him.* 2. The *sources* of the delusion. (1) Ignorance of the true God. Israel had parted with the right knowledge of Jehovah (ch. iv. 6). She had it not, because she did not wish to have it (cf. Rom. i. 28). (2) Corrupt propensities. The state of the heart pointed out the way for the devotions. The heathen idols were more congenial objects of worship than the spiritual, holy God. 3. The *effects* of the delusion. The prosperity which the people enjoyed confirmed them in their adhesion to the Baals. It led them to redouble their assiduity in serving them (ver. 5). It led them increasingly to disregard the true Giver. Hence the necessity for breaking up the delusion by withdrawing the gifts.

II. THE DIVINE DEALING AS DIRECTED TO THE BREAKING UP OF THIS DELUSION. (Vers. 6, 7, 9.) God declares that he will: 1. *Block up Israel's way in pursuit of her idols.* "Therefore, behold, I will hedge up thy way with thorns," etc. (ver. 6). That is, he would put bars and difficulties in the way of the service of the idol-gods. He would interrupt and suspend their worship. He would break up the sense of fellowship with them. He would do this by means of afflictions. The effect would be to shatter the dreams of the worshippers. They would find to their discomfiture that the service of the idols was not all bliss. They would be led to consider *de novo* what they should do. Unexpected checks in the pursuit of favourite objects are among God's means of inciting us to reflection. 2. *Take away from her the blessings which are the chief support of her delusion.* (Ver. 9.) The removal of the corn and wine and oil, in fulfilment of the threatening, would show that these blessings were from Jehovah, and were not the gift of the idols. They must be his, else he could not thus take them away. Conversely, the inability of the idols to prevent this deprivation, or to restore the gifts, or to help their devotees in the time of need, would demonstrate the futility of putting trust in gods that were no gods. The removal of earthly blessings is intended in this way to work for our good. God seeks by it to break up false confidences. He would dispel our illusions. He would teach us dependence. He would lead us to recognize in him the only Giver of our good.

III. THE BEHAVIOUR OF ISRAEL UNDER THIS DIVINE DISCIPLINE. (Ver. 7.) 1. A first effect would be to make Israel more earnest than ever in pursuit of her idol-gods. "O Baal, hear us!" (2 Kings xviii. 26). Dawning conviction has often this result. The heart is slow to believe that it has been so utterly befooled. It tries hard to defeat God. 2. The second effect—when she had had full experience of the inability of the idol-gods to help her—would be to lead her to bethink herself of returning to Jehovah. "I will go and return to my first husband," etc. She sees now, like the prodigal (Luke xv. 17, 18), the folly of her past conduct; she realizes its wickedness; she feels that it was better with her formerly than now, and that "the way of transgressors is hard" (Prov. xiii. 15). So, cured of her delusions, she returns to her Lord. He, in turn, is ready to receive her. This was the end to which the whole discipline pointed. God is equally willing to receive every sinner who returns to him (Isa. lv. 6, 7). The experience of the bitterness of the fruits of sin is designed to lead to repentance. Well for the transgressor when chastisement produces in him the result here described! —J. O.

Vers. 10—13.—*Retribution.* Israel's punishment, while retributive, was reformatory. It is equally true that, while reformatory, it was retributive. It repaid Israel for her sins. It vindicated righteousness. All earthly punishments have this double character. The following principles come to light in the passage:—

I. SIN ENDS IN THE FULL REVELATION OF ITS HIDEOUSNESS. (Ver. 10.) At first its true nature is concealed. It comes with fair appearances; it decks itself in festal garments (ver. 13); it makes large promises. Only at a later period is the mask stripped off, and it appears in its full hideousness. Such a day of revelation will come for every sinner. He will find himself put to shame even in the eyes of those whom he sought to serve. How loathsome even the body can become when sin has wrought its work in it (the drunkard, the harlot)! How much more the soul! Every rag of deceptive appearance will yet be stripped off, and the foul, abhorrent spectacle of depravity exposed to the whole universe.

II. SIN ENDS IN THE DYING OUT OF JOY. "I will also cause all her mirth to cease" (ver. 11). This is literally true, even in the present life. After a time, sin ceases to yield the pleasures which at first were found in it. The very capacity for joy dies out. The debauchee, the fortune-hunter, the slaves of fashion, the victims of ambition, know this well.

III. SIN ENDS IN THE WITHDRAWAL OF ABUSED PRIVILEGES. (Ver. 11.) The feast days, new moons, sabbaths, and other festivals, which Israel had turned into days of unholy carnival, would be taken from her. They were given her for different ends, and she had abused them. We cannot hope to reject God and yet retain unimpaired our religious liberties, opportunities, and blessings; *e.g.* our sabbaths. These will vanish with our regard for the Giver of them.

IV. SIN ENDS IN THE REMOVAL OF NATURAL BLESSINGS. (Ver. 12.) Failing in the due acknowledgment of God in the reception of them, we may look for the withdrawal of these also.

V. SIN ENDS IN POIGNANT MEMORIES OF AN EVIL PAST. "The days of Baalim, wherein she burned incense to them, and she decked herself," etc. (ver. 13). The memory of past follies is no small part of the sinner's misery. "Son, remember" (Luke xvi. 25).—J. O.

Ver. 14.—*Israel's recovery.* It had already been told that God's dealings with Israel would not be permanently in vain. This truth is now expanded. Times and seasons are not specified; for (1) it was not given to the prophet to know them (cf. Acts i. 7); and (2) it lay with Israel itself, in some measure, to *make* the times and seasons. 1. The earliest phase of the predicted allurement is seen in the promises held out in connection with the return from the Babylonian captivity. These promises embraced Israel as well as Judah (Isa. xl.—lxvi.; Ezek. xxxvii.; Zech. viii., etc.). The result, however, showed that Israel was not yet in a fit condition to receive the fulfilment. 2. The second phase of the allurement was in the preaching of Christ's gospel. This, which was addressed to both Jews and Gentiles, tells of God's redeeming love, and prays, "Be ye reconciled to God" (2 Cor. v. 20). Many of the "house of Israel" listened—many still listen—to this allurement. 3. The final fulfilment will be reached in the day of Israel's national conversion. Then, as the result, perhaps, of great experience of trouble (ver. 15), God's words will come with new power to their hearts. Earnest penitence will ensue. "All Israel shall be saved" (Rom. xi. 26). The fulfilment of these promises is connected in prophecy with the coming of a Redeemer and the gift of the Spirit. This supposes new dispensational arrangements. There is implied the bringing in of a new economy, which yet, from its nature, would have a wider scope than the economy which then existed. Israel participates in the blessings of the new covenant only as part of a larger "people of God." This is the principle which legitimizes the extension of these promises—so far as they are not plainly national—to the whole Church of believers.—J. O.

Vers. 14—18.—*Allurement.* Wonderful are the steps of Divine love in the history of the recovery of a soul. View those which are here presented.

I. WILDERNESS PREPARATION. (Ver. 14.) Chastisement would prepare the way for mercy. Israel was to be taken out "into the wilderness." There, deprived of her idols,

and stripped of her earthly blessings, she would bethink herself of the God from whom she had departed. It takes much discipline, oftentimes, to bring us into the state of mind in which we are willing to listen to God. Pride needs to be humbled; self-will needs to be broken; the heart built up in self-righteousness needs to be convinced of sin. To this end God employs trials, hardships, crosses, bereavements, sorrows of various kinds. He trains us by the wilderness.

II. DIVINE ALLUREMENT. (Ver. 15.) We are led here to study the operations of Divine love under the character of *allurement*. "I will allure her." Allurement is the art of reaching the heart by soft influences. It is not compulsion. It is not conviction by argument. It is a persuasive, drawing influence exerted on the affections and will. It is gentle, not violent; it is mild, not passionate. It conquers by the might of love. Some persons have more of this power of attraction, of fascination, than others. It is a gift—an influence, emanating from the personality. It cannot be communicated. The Divine Spirit is the great Allurer. His dealings with a soul are a secret between that soul and himself. God allures: 1. By *solitude*. "I will bring her into the wilderness." He takes the soul apart by itself. He isolates it, as he did Israel when he spoke with her at first (Exod. xix. 3—5). We cannot hear God's voice amidst the busy hum of earth. Our own age stands much in need of more solitary communion. 2. By *word*. "I will speak comfortably unto her." The words of God are found in Scripture. How well fitted the Bible, with its gracious, tender, comforting, reassuring utterances, is for this purpose of allurement, we all know. It is shaped and adapted in every way to draw the soul to God. 3. By *gift*. "I will give her her vineyards from thence." The typical blessings shadow out the higher. God attests his love to us by gift as well as by word. He has given his Son (John iii. 16). He gives himself. He gives all spiritual blessings (Eph. i. 3). He gives eternity. Christ is "the unspeakable Gift" (2 Cor. ix. 15). "All things are yours" (1 Cor. iii. 21). 4. By *chastisement*. "And the valley of Achor for a door of hope." The valley of Achor lay at the entrance of Canaan. It was there that God "troubled" Israel for the sin of Achan (Josh. vii.). That sin barred the entrance to the land, and only when it was judged and removed could Israel proceed. The meaning is that, so often as sin bars the way to the possession of the inheritance, and brings down chastisement, so often will grace, working through judgment on the sin, bring good out of evil, and new hope out of the experience of sorrow (2 Cor. vii. 9—11). Israel, after the sin had been put away, received a pledge of the Divine presence with them for future victories. "In this relation the Lord here promises that the place of sanctified trial shall not only be a region of endurance, but a door of hope." Trouble becomes a means of spiritual profiting. 5. God's allurement begets *joy*. "She shall sing there, as in the days of her youth," etc. God puts a new song in the mouths of his people (Ps. xl. 1, 2). It is, as in the triumph at the Red Sea, a song (1) of deliverance; (2) of victory. "The song of Moses and the Lamb" (Rev. xv.). The joy is the greater after the sorrow (Rev. vii. 9—17).

III. HOLIER ESPOUSALS. (Vers. 16, 17.) Won by the Divine allurements, Israel ratifies a new marriage covenant with Jehovah. The new union is very different from the older one. It is a union marked: 1. By *earnest affection*. "Thou shalt call me Ishi"—"my Husband." 2. By *purified feeling*. "And shalt no more call me Baali"—"my Baal." Israel's feelings towards Jehovah would be purged of all idolatrous associations. 3. By *sincere abhorrence of the past*. "I will take away the names of Baalim out of her mouth." So does the sinner shudder at the very thought of the things which formerly pleased him. They are hateful to him. He would count it a shame even to speak of those things in secret (Eph. v. 12). 4. By *jealous care for the future*. "They shall no more be remembered by their name." Israel would guard, in her future relations with Jehovah, against the intrusion of even the thought of her former paramours.—J. O.

Vers. 18—23.—*The new betrothal*. Jehovah, on his part, signs, as it were, a new marriage contract with Israel. The relation will this time be an enduring one. He will grant to Israel security and peace. He will restore her blessings. He will dower her with fresh gifts. He will increase her fruitfulness. The promises may be legitimately extended to all the Israel of faith.

I. SECURITY AND PEACE IN THE NEW RELATION. (Ver. 18.) 1. The new covenant

will be, not merely a covenant of God with man, but *a covenant of God with nature on behalf of man.* "I will make a covenant for them with the beasts of the field, and with the fowls of heaven," etc. The idea here is that of security. The figure is common in the prophets (Lev. xxvi. 6; Isa. xi. 6—9; Ezek. xxxiv. 25). Underlying the promise is the deep truth that redemption will involve a palingenesis of nature —of the earth. So bound together are man and nature that the dissolution of the tie between him and his God leads also to the loss of his dominion over the creatures. This will be restored. The animal world will stand in awe of him, will serve him, will be tame before him. 2. The new covenant *will ensure peace.* "I will break the bow and the sword and the battle out of the earth," etc. A promise like this can only be fulfilled on the basis of a universal regeneration of society, and therefore points to the bringing in of a covenant not limited in its scope to the literal Israel. On the peace tendency of the gospel, see Foster's two sermons on 'The Cessation of War an Effect of the Prevalence of Christianity.'

II. THE ENDURINGNESS OF THE NEW RELATION. (Vers. 19, 20.) The first covenant failed because of (1) want of depth in Israel's knowledge of God; (2) want of entire surrender of heart to him; (3) want of spiritual powers, under the Law, adequate to renew the heart. The new covenant was not to be like that old one. Compare with this passage Jer. xxxi. 31—34, "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: not according to the covenant which I made with their fathers," etc. 1. The new covenant was to be formed after a discipline *in which Israel had learned to know God thoroughly.* "Thou shalt know the Lord" (ver. 20). Knowing God as she had come to do, Israel would be no longer under any temptation to wander from him. 2. The new covenant would be based *on fuller manifestations* of the character of God. "I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in loving-kindness, and in mercies" (ver. 19). The sin of Israel was the means of God's character becoming better known. His righteousness, judgment, loving-kindness, mercy, and faithfulness come to light in her history in many awful and affecting ways. It is with this fuller knowledge of the character of God that she now unites herself to him in love. The union is not one of impulse, of haste, of indiscretion. It is a true, sincere, heartfelt, and intelligent union, certain never to be repented of. Yet fuller knowledge of the character of God is derived from the manifestation of his attributes in the saving work of Christ. It is there, most of all, that we see displayed his hatred of sin, his determination to punish it, his exalted righteousness, his unspeakable goodness and love. 3. *God engages his own attributes to secure the perpetuation of this new covenant.* (Vers. 19, 20.) He had prepared the way for it; had laid the foundations of it deep; and he would now take the perpetuation of it into his own hands. He engages his righteousness, mercy, and faithfulness to accomplish this. "We are not under the Law, but under grace" (Rom. vi. 14). The new covenant has powers at its disposal which the old covenant had not. It is based on renewal, on regeneration. God sees to it that his people, once spiritually quickened, do not utterly fall away again. He preserves his Church by judgment and mercy.

III. THE REVERSAL OF THE CURSE IN THE NEW RELATION. (Vers. 21, 22.) For Israel's sake the land had been cursed, and made barren (Deut. xxix. 22—28). That curse was now to be recalled. So one effect of redemption will be the recall of the primal curse on the earth for man's sin (Gen. iii. 17, 18). 1. *Israel pleads for the removal of the curse.* The end of the chain of prayer is Jezreel. "They shall hear Jezreel" (ver. 22). Till Israel became penitent, removal of the curse was impossible. The success of the earth's prayer depended on hers. 2. *Nature pleads for the removal of the curse.* All her departments hang together. Each depends on the other. The suffering of one is the suffering of all. The corn, wine, and oil entreat the earth; the earth entreats the heavens; the heavens entreat God (cf. Rom. viii. 19—22). 3. *God hears.* He answers Nature's prayer. Nature becomes friendly. She showers her blessings on the restored people. The natural blessings are typical of the spiritual.

IV. FRUITFULNESS IN THE NEW RELATION. (Ver. 23.) Jezreel, in the sense of "I will scatter," is changed into Jezreel, in the sense of "I will sow." Lo-ruhamah becomes Ruhamah; and Lo-ammi becomes Ammi (ver. 1). God "sows" Israel in

the earth, so that she becomes greatly multiplied. The spiritual seed is here included with the natural. The widening of the covenant to embrace the Gentiles gives the words, "I will have mercy on her that had not obtained mercy," etc., a greatly extended application (Rom. ix. 25; 1 Pet. ii. 9).—J. O.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER III.

This short chapter contains two sections, of which the first, comprising vers. 1—3, is a symbolic representation; and the second, consisting of vers. 4 and 5, gives the explanation. The prophet bestows his affections on a worthless wife, who, notwithstanding his tender love to her, proves utterly unfaithful and lives in adultery. He does not cast her off, but, in order to reclaim her and bring her to repentance, he places her in a position of restraint, where she is obliged to renounce all intercourse with her paramours. Thus it was with Israel. They had had multiplied experience of God's loving-kindness and tender mercies, but in spite of all his benefits, great and manifold, they were alike ungrateful and unfaithful. The remainder of the chapter foretells the long and sorrowful abandonment of Israel, as though forgotten by God and forsaken by man; and closes with an outlook into the far-off future, when Israel's correction would issue in their conversion, so that they would return to the Lord their God and David their king in the latter days.

Ver. 1.—The general meaning of this verse is well given in the Chaldee Targum: "Go, utter a prophecy against the house of Israel, who are like a woman very dear to her husband, and who, though she is unfaithful to him, is nevertheless so greatly loved by him that he is unwilling to put her away. Such is the love of the Lord towards Israel; but they turn aside to the idols of the nations." The word עוֹד is in contrast with *t'chillath*, as the second part of Jehovah's continued discourse. It is erroneously and, contrary to the accents, constructed with "said" by Kimchi and others (Ewald considers it admissible, Umbreit preferable). Kimchi's comment on this verse is: "After the prophet finished his words of consolation, he returns to words of censure, turning to the men of his own time. And it is the custom of the prophets to intermingle reproofs with consolations in their discourses. But he says *yet* (again), because he had already commanded him to marry a wife of whoredoms, and now he speaks to him another parable." This time he does not employ the ordinary and usual word "take," but "love," plainly implying that he had already married her, so that her unfaithfulness took place in wedlock; or rather indicating the object of the union. **Beloved of her friend, yet an adulteress.** Her friend or companion is (1) her lawful husband, but contemporaneously and continuously with her husband's love to her are her adulteries with others, as is implied by the participles. (2) רֵעַ, being indefinite as not having article or suffix, is understood by some to be an acquaintance or lover, and preferred, as a milder term, to מְאַהֵב. The contrast was realized in Jehovah's love for Israel, notwithstanding their spiritual adultery in worshipping other gods. **According to the love of the Lord toward the children of Israel who look (*turn*) to other gods.** Two expressions in this clause recall, if they do not actually reflect, the words of two older Scriptures; thus in Deut. vii. 8 we read, "Because the Lord loved you;" and in Deut. xxxi. 18, "They are turned unto other gods." (3) The LXX. has γυναῖκα ἀγαπῶσαν πονηρά, having probably read אֹהֶבֶת רַע. **And love flagons of wine** (margin, *grapes*). The term *ashishe*, according to Rashi and Aben Ezra, means "bowls," that is, "bowls of wine" (literally, "of grapes"). They probably connected the word with the root *shesh*, six, a sextorius, and hence any other wine-vessel. The Septuagint, however, renders the word πέμματα μετὰ σταφίδος, "cakes with dried grapes." This meaning is to be preferred, whether we derive the word from אָשַׁשׁ, to press together, or from אֵשׁ, fire; according to the former and correct derivation, the sense being cakes of grapes pressed together; according to the latter, cakes baked with fire. Gesenius differentiates the word from אָשִׁישׁ, dried grapes, but not pressed together into a cake, and from דְּבֵלָה, figs pressed together into a cake. These raisin-cakes were regarded as luxuries and used as delicacies; hence a fondness for such indicated a proneness to sensual indulgence, and figuratively the sensuous service belonging to idol-worship.

Ver. 2.—**So I bought** (*acquired*) **her to me for fifteen pieces of silver, and for an homer of barley and an half-homer** (margin, *lethech*)

of barley. In narrating the prophet's compliance with the Divine command, the word אֶפְרָהּ is connected by Aben Ezra with יכר in the sense of making acquaintance with; but it is more correctly referred by Kimchi to כרה with daghesh euphonic in the *caph* as in אֶקְנֶךָּ, shall meet thee. "The daghesh of the *caph* is for euphony as in *miqdush*, and the root is כרה" (Kimchi). The meaning is then simply and naturally traced as follows: to dig, obtain by digging, acquire. The price paid for the acquisition in this case was either the purchase money paid to the parents of the bride, as to Laban in the case of Rachel and Leah by Jacob, or the marriage present paid (*mohar*) to the bride herself. Another view represents the prophet paying the price to the woman's husband to whom she had been unfaithful, and who in consequence resigned her for so small a sum. It remains for us to attend to the amount thus paid. Fifteen pieces of silver or shekels would be about one pound fifteen shillings, or one pound seventeen and sixpence; while the price of the barley would be somewhere about the same. There were fifty or sixty shekels in a *maneh*, Greek *mina*, and Latin *mina*; while the maneh was one-sixtieth of a talent (*kikteer*); and thus three thousand or three thousand six hundred shekels in a talent. The homer, the largest of the Hebrew dry measures, contained one cor or ten ephahs (= ten baths of liquids = ten Attic *μέδιμνοι*), and the half-homer or *lethec* (*hæmi-coros* in LXX.) was half a cor or five ephahs. These fifteen ephahs, at a shekel each—for under extraordinary circumstances (2 Kings vii. 1) we read of "two measures of barley for a shekel"—would be equivalent to one pound fifteen or seventeen shillings and sixpence. Both together—the silver and the barley—would amount to thirty shekels, or three pounds and ten or fifteen shillings. Why this exact amount? and why such particularity in the reckoning? By turning to Exod. xxi. 32 we learn that thirty shekels were the estimated value of a manservant or maidservant; for it is there stated that "if the ox shall push a manservant or a maidservant, he shall give unto their master thirty shekels of silver." The price paid by the prophet partly in money and partly in kind was exactly the price of an ordinary maidservant. The barley (שְׂעֹרִים, plural, equivalent to "grains of barley") may hint the woman's unchastity, as it was the offering for a woman suspected of adultery (Numb. v.) The low estate of the person purchased is a legitimate inference from all this. The wife, for whom such a paltry sum should be paid, and paid in such a way, or to whom such a petty gift would be offered, must be supposed to be in a condition of deep depression or in circumstances of great distress. Thus the sum paid by the prophet for his partner symbolizes the servile state of Israel when Jehovah chose them for his peculiar people.

Ver. 3.—**Thou shalt abide for me many days; thou shalt not play the harlot, and thou shalt not be for another man.** The prophet imposes certain restrictions of a very stringent character on his wife; he places her in a state of isolation; her past excesses and his purpose of effecting her reformation necessitate such measures, however strict and severe or even harsh they may appear. She is not to be admitted into full fellowship with her husband, nor is she to be allowed the possibility of intercourse with others. From friend, that is, husband and lovers, she is shut out; all sexual connection, whether illicit or legitimate, is peremptorily cut off. The clause, "thou shalt abide [or, 'sit still'] for me," denotes an attitude of waiting, not necessarily in sorrow, like the captive maiden who before marriage with her captor bewailed her parents for the period of a month, but in patient expectation of her husband's fortune and favour, though in seclusion from him, as also exclusion of all others. During this long period of "many days" she is not only debarred the society of her lawful partner, but forbidden either to play the harlot with several or to attach herself to a single paramour. Jerome directs attention to the fact that the word "another" has no place in the original text; otherwise it would imply that she was prohibited from intercourse with any other than her husband, while the real meaning makes the prohibition absolute and inclusive even of conjugal connection with her husband. **So will I also be for thee.** The Hebrew expositors, Aben Ezra and Kimchi, repeat the negative from the preceding clause and translate, "Nor shall I even come to you," that is, for marital society. This is not necessary to bring out the true sense, which is that, as she was to be restrained from intercourse with any and every other man, so he himself also would abstain from intercourse with her. "And also I will be for [unto] thee [*i.e.* thy husband] to preserve conjugal fidelity to thee, but hold aloof from thee during thy detention." Thus separated from both lovers and husband, Israel would for many a long day suspend her worship of idols, and be at the same time shut out from her covenant relation to Jehovah. Kimchi's comment amounts to pretty much the same, as does also that of Aben Ezra. The explanation of the former is, "I said to her, After thou hast committed adultery against me, thy punishment shall be that thou shalt

abide in widowhood of life many days; and the meaning of 'for me' is, thou shalt be called by my name and not by another man's; thou shalt say, I am the wife of such a one, and thou shalt not play the harlot with others, and also thou shalt not be the wife of any other man than myself." Aben Ezra makes mention of another interpretation of the verse, to the effect, "If ye shall return to me, I also will return to you." With this the Chaldee Targum is in accord, which represents God as commanding the prophet to say, "O congregation of Israel, your sins have been the cause of your exile for many days; ye shall devote yourselves to my service, and not go astray nor worship idols, and I also will have compassion upon you." Maurer considers the expression יוֹם אֶל־אֵשֶׁת equivalent to יוֹם, viz. *remhabere cum muliere;* but to this linguistic usage is opposed. Umbreit renders the phrase, "and I will *only* be for thee;" this, however, partakes more of the nature of a promise than of a punishment, and is not quite, therefore, in accord with the context. Ewald: "And yet I am kind to thee [*i.e.* love thee];" this is a rather trivial, as also ill-supported idea. Calvin's exposition is pretty much the same as we have given, and is the following: "I also shall be for thee; that is, I pledge my faith to thee, or I subscribe myself as thy husband: but another time must be looked for; I yet defer my favour, and suspend it until thou givest proof of true repentance. I also shall be for thee; that is, thou shalt not be a widow in vain; if thou complainest that wrong is done to thee, because I forbid thee to marry any one else, I also bind myself in turn to thee."

Ver. 4.—**For the children of Israel shall abide many days without a king, and without a prince, and without a sacrifice, and without an image, and without an ephod, and teraphim.** For a long series of years they were thus doomed to be without civil polity, or ecclesiastical privilege, or prophetic intimations. More particularly they were to remain without royal rule, or princely power, or priestly function, or prophetic instruction. As the prophet's wife was neither to be, strictly speaking, her husband's nor yet belong to another man; so Israel, as represented by her, was destined to be deprived of independent self-government and princely sovereignty; of Divine service, whether allowed as by sacrifice—the central part of Hebrew worship—or disallowed as by statue; of oracular responses, whether lawful as by the ephod or unlawful as by teraphim. There was thus an entire breaking up of Church and state as they had long existed; of all civil and ecclesiastical relations and privileges as they had been long enjoyed. Without a king of their own nationality to sit upon the throne, or a prince of their own race as heir apparent to the kingdom, or princes as the great officers of state; without offering by sacrifice to Jehovah, or statue by way of memorial to Baal; without means of ascertaining the will of Heaven in relation to the future by the Urim and Thummim of the high-priestly ephod, only the more than questionable means of soothsaying by the teraphim;—the children of Israel were to be left. And what attaches special importance to this remarkable passage is the undeniable fact that these predictions were uttered, not only before the dissolution of the monarchy and the cessation of sacrifices, but at a time when no human sagacity could foresee and no human power foretell the future abstention of the Hebrew race from idol-worship so long practised, and from heathenish divination resorted to from such an early period of their history. Rashi, in his comment, has the following: "I said to her, Many days shalt thou abide for me; thou shalt not go a-whoring after other gods; for if thou shalt play the harlot, thy sons shall remain many days without a king, and without a prince, and without a sacrifice in the sanctuary in Judah, and without a statue of Baal in Samaria of the kings of Israel, and without an ephod with Urim and Thummim which declared to them secrets, and without teraphim; they are images that are made with the observation of one hour composed for the purpose, and which speak of themselves and declare secrets; and so Jonathan has translated, 'Neither will there be an ephod nor one to give a response.'" Similarly Aben Ezra: "Without king, nor is there any objection from the Chasmoneans, for they were not of the children of Judah . . . without sacrifice to Jehovah nor statue to Baal, without ephod to Jehovah and without teraphim to the worshippers of idols, which Laban called his gods." It is a matter of much consequence that some of the ablest of the Jewish expositors realize these predictions as applicable to their own case and the existing circumstances of their nation. Thus Kimchi, in commenting on this verse, says, "These are the days of the exile in which we are this day, and we have neither king nor prince of Israel, for we are in the power of the Gentiles, and in the power of their kings and princes . . . no sacrifice to God and no statue for worshippers of idols . . . and no ephod which shall declare future things by Urim and Thummim, and no teraphim for idolaters which declare the future according to the notion of those who believe in them; and thus we are this day in this exile, all the children of Israel;" he then cites the Targum of

Jonathan in confirmation of his sentiments. For the ephod, comp. Exod. xxviii. 6—14, from which we learn that it was "a short cloak, covering shoulders and breast, wrought with colours and gold, formed of two halves connected by two shoulder-pieces, on each of which was an onyx engraven with six names of tribes, and held together round the waist by a girdle of the same material;" it was part of the high priest's attire. The teraphim—from the Arabic *tarifa*, to live comfortably, and *turfator*, a comfortable life, were the household gods and domestic oracles, like the Roman penates, and deriving the name from being thought the givers and guardians of a comfortable life, תְּרָפִים. They were images in human form and stature, either graven of wood or stone (*pesel*), or molten out of precious metal (*massekhah*). The first mention of them is in Gen. xxxi. 19, and the name occurs fifteen times in the Old Testament. They appear to have been of Syrian or Chaldean origin. Aben Ezra says of them, "What appears to me most probable is that they had a human form and were made for the purpose of receiving supernal power, nor can I explain it further." The two principal species of offerings were the זבח, or bloody sacrifice, and the מנחה, or unbloody oblation. The former comprehended those entirely burnt on the altar, עֹלָה, *rad.* עָלָה, to ascend, from going up entirely in the altar-smoke; and חֵלֶב, or those of which only the fat was burnt. According to the object of the offerer, they were *chattah*, sin offering, pointing to expiation or pardon for something done demanding punishment; or *asham*, trespass offering, implying satisfaction and acceptance, or something undone demanding amends; and *shelamim*, peace offerings.

Ver. 5.—**Afterward shall the children of Israel return, and seek the Lord their God, and David their king.** The note of time in the beginning of ver. 5 is explained by Rashi to signify "after the days of the Captivity;" and by Kimchi as follows: "This will take place at the end of the days, near the time of salvation, when the children of Israel shall return in repentance." Though not comprehended in the symbolic representation that precedes, this statement is necessary to complete it. The future of Israel is the burden of this promise; the blessedness of that future is its brightness. It comprises three items—the reversal of their previous career, their loving return to the Lord their God, and their cordial reception of David their king. Contemporaneous with their sorrow for the sins of the past was their serious seeking of the Lord their God and submission to David their king. Their revolt from the Davidic dynasty in the days of Rehoboam was immediately followed by the idolatry of the calves which Jeroboam set up at Dan and Bethel. The reversal of this course is symptomatic of their complete recovery. The patriarch David was long dead and buried, and his sepulchre was in Palestine at the time when the prophet wrote; one, therefore, in the Davidic line, a descendant from, and dynastic representative of, the patriarch must be meant. That this was Messiah there can be no reasonable doubt; parallel passages in the other prophets prove this; for example: "I will set up one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, even my servant David; he shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd. And I the Lord will be their God, and my servant David a prince among them" (Ezek. xxxiv. 23, 25; comp. also xxxvii. 24). Again in Jeremiah (xxx. 9) we read to the same purpose, "Thoy shall serve the Lord their God, and David their king, whom I will raise up unto them." We can by no means concur with those who refer this promise to Zerubbabel as a later occupant of the Davidic throne; and just as little with those who, like Wünsche, hold that the prophet has no particular period and no particular person in view, but presents the prospect of a happy and blissful future when Israel would return to the pure worship of Jehovah and enjoy his gracious protection, and when the national prosperity would equal or even far surpass that under the glorious reign of David himself. The best Jewish authorities are quoted in favour of the same; thus Rabbi Tanchum says, "He (the prophet) understands the son of David, occupying his place, from his lineage, walking in his way, by whom his name shall endure and his kingdom be preserved." The Chaldee Targum translates in the same sense: "They shall seek the worship of Jehovah their God, and obey Messiah, the Son of David, their king." So Aben Ezra says that "David their king is this Messiah, like 'My servant David shall be their prince for ever' (Ezek. xxxvii. 25)." The well-known idiom of one idea expressed by two verbs, so that the rendering of the clause would be "They shall again seek the Lord their God, and David their king," if applied here, as undoubtedly it might, would weaken the sense, and so be unsuitable to the context. **And shall fear** (literally, *come with trembling to*) **the Lord and his goodness in the latter days.** The comment of Kimchi on the first part of this clause is as follows: "They shall tremble and be afraid of him when they return to him, and shall with repentance wait for the goodness of redemption on which they have trusted." A somewhat different meaning is assigned to the words by Aben Ezra: "They shall

return in haste, when the end (*i.e.* the time of redemption) comes to their own land with hasty course suddenly." *His goodness* is taken by some in a concrete sense, as signifying the blessings which he bestows and the good gifts which he imparts; and by others in the abstract, as the Divine goodness or majesty, to which Israel resorts for the pardon of sin and the gracious acceptance of their petitions and answer of their prayers.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—3.—*God's mercifulness and Israel's sinfulness are brought into contrast.* Some are disposed to regard the woman mentioned in this chapter as identical with Gomer, whom the prophet had previously made his wife; and that she had in the mean time forsaken her husband the prophet, and had formed an adulterous connection with another man: while others regard the command of God to the prophet and his conduct in compliance therewith in the light of a new transaction with a different individual. In either case the whole is not an actual occurrence, but only a symbolical representation.

I. THE LESSONS OF THIS CHAPTER ARE MIDWAY BETWEEN THE PUNISHMENT THREATENED AND THE PROMISE VOUCHSAFED. Calvin has plainly pointed out the position of this chapter in the series of God's dealings with Israel. "It was God's purpose," he says, "to keep in firm hope the minds of the faithful during the exile, lest, being overwhelmed with despair, they should wholly faint. . . . This prediction occupies a middle place between the denunciation of the prophet previously pronounced, and the promise of pardon. It was a dreadful thing that God should divorce his people and cast away the Israelites as spurious children; yet a consolation was afterwards added. But lest the Israelites should think that God would immediately, as on the first day, be so propitious to them as to visit them with no chastisement, it was the prophet's design expressly to correct this mistake; as though he said, 'God will indeed receive you again, but in the mean time a chastisement is prepared for you, which by its intenseness would break down your spirits, were it not that this comfort will ease you, and that is that God, although he punishes you for your sins, yet continues to provide for your salvation, and to be as it were your Husband.'"

II. GOD'S LOVE TO ISRAEL UNMERITED AS WELL AS UNREQUITED. The prophet's treatment of the woman whom he was to take or had taken to be his wife evinced extreme forbearance and exceeding tenderness. He loved her before her fall,—this was natural enough; he loved her during and notwithstanding her fall,—this was not to be expected; he continued to love her after her fall,—this is contrary to all the ordinary feelings and instincts of humanity. This continued affection was designed, as it was calculated, to win her back from the error and evil of her ways. But where is the man who under ordinary circumstances would act so? Where is the husband that would treat a worthless wife with such mildness and compassion? But what man cannot find in his heart to do, what man cannot bring himself to do, God does in his treatment of Israel and in his dealings with sinners in general; "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." Notwithstanding all God's love to his people Israel, from the very commencement of their national existence they showed a special proneness to apostasy, readily and recklessly turning aside to idolatrous worship; yet God's love continued through it all, and outlived it all. It was love to the unlovable and unloving, to the undeserving and ungrateful; the current of his love runs on like the river broad and deep, which never ceases in its course till its waters form part of "the shining levels of the sea."

III. THE ACCOMPANIMENTS OF IDOLATRY HAVE A SEDUCTIVE TENDENCY. Idolatry was usually associated with voluptuousness and sensuality; and indulgences of this sort tended, no doubt, to attract many votaries, and served as inducements to idol-worship. Whether we "take flagons of wine" to be the right rendering of the original, as the Authorized Version does, or rather "raisin-cakes," the nature of the attraction will be much the same—fondness for self-indulgence. The Levitical priests were forbidden the use of wine when they ministered before the Lord; the Nazarites were total abstainers

all the time of their vow; but the worshippers of idols—priests and people alike—are represented as drinking bowls or flagons of wine. Raisin-cakes, sweet and luscious, formed parts of idolatrous repasts, and served as appetizing morsels in idol-feasts and for idol-worshippers. How like the seductive pleasures of sin in general! But they neither last long nor satisfy while they do last. The meat offerings of Mosaic ritual were of a severer sort, and less calculated to gratify the taste and please the palate.

IV. THE MERCIFUL PROVISION MADE FOR ISRAEL IN THE SEASON OF HER SEPARATION. If the prophet had already espoused the woman whom he is directed to love, the pieces of silver and measures of barley could neither be dowry, nor purchase, nor present in any proper sense. How, then, are we to understand the matter? Probably we may regard the expenditure here indicated as a suitable allowance for her support—a sufficient maintenance for her during the period of her separation from her husband. She may now be conceived as living apart from her husband—shut out *a mensa et a thoro*, as it is said, and so deprived of her proper means of subsistence. During this sad state of things, which her own guilt has brought about, she is still the prophet's wife, and neither forgotten nor forsaken by him. True, in one way she is unpitied and undeserving of pity, because of her vileness, yet in another she is not entirely bereft of her husband's affection; in spite of her grievous departure from the path of rectitude and virtue, his love follows her, still striving for her reformation and yearning for her restoration. Meantime he provides her with nearly fifty bushels of barley for food, and with nearly two pounds sterling in cash for raiment and other necessaries of life. The money and grain together would afford a sufficient, though not very sumptuous, support. Thus God's treatment of his Israel is symbolized. Though they were separated by sin from his immediate presence, and though they had forfeited his favours and proved themselves unworthy of his love, yet he has not entirely and finally cast them off. His eye still rests upon them; his mercy provides for them in their state of isolation; they are deprived indeed of the honour and dignity they once enjoyed and might still have retained, and they possess no longer the means of living in luxury and splendour as aforetime, yet they are allowed the necessary means of subsistence and an humble maintenance, with the prospect and for the purpose of their ultimate restoration to full favour, and unstinted possession of all the benefits and blessings still in store for them.

V. ISRAEL'S SOLITARY AND SEQUESTERED STATE. She is doomed to sit in solitary widowhood. Restrained from all licentious intercourse on the one hand, she is not restored to conjugal rights on the other. She was not to be a harlot, neither was she to be a husband's. That husband, however, still regards himself bound to her, and while she abides for him he promises her a like return: "So will I likewise be to thee-ward." He would still have regard to her and respect for her; feelings of kindness would animate him towards her; his guardian care and watchful providence would still be exercised on her behalf and for her benefit. The meaning and application of ver. 3 is well given in the following comment: "He, his affections, interest, thoughts, would be directed *towards* her. The word "towards" expresses regard, yet distance also. Just so would God, in those times, withhold all special tokens of his favour, covenant, providence; yet would he secretly uphold and maintain them as a people, and withhold them from falling wholly from him into the gulf of irreligion and infidelity." Sin is the cloud that darkens our sky and shuts out the bright light of our heavenly Father's countenance; yet behind the dark cloud of afflictive providences he hides a shining face.

VI. THE CONDITIONS OF THE COVENANT WHICH GOD MAKES WITH HIS PEOPLE. 1. We see here the Divine considerateness. God might have made out a bill of divorce, and dismissed them at once and for ever. He does not deal with us with the rigour of law or in the strictness of justice, but according to the multitude of his tender mercies and loving-kindnesses. 2. The condition he proposes to us is that we be to him a people, and he will be to us a God. When punished for sin it is wise and well to justify God's ways with us; we must wait with patience, and that perhaps for many days, until God again lift on us the light of his countenance. But besides all this, we must not turn again to folly, as Israel was strictly enjoined to eschew harlotry in the future; in other words, to shun every form of idolatry in all time to come. So, in dependence on Divine grace, we must resolve to follow the Lord fully, not wandering in the wilderness, not

worshipping the idols of our own pride, or passion, or sensuality, or sin of any sort, and never more to go a-whoring from our God. 3. Another condition of the covenant between the sovereign and his once rebel but now repentant subjects is implied in this passage, and well stated in the following words: "If they will be for God to serve him, he will be for them to save them. Let them renounce and abjure all rivals with God for the throne in the heart, and devote themselves entirely to him, and him only, and he will be to them a God all-sufficient. If we be faithful and constant to God in a way of duty, and will never leave nor forsake him, he will be so to us in a way of mercy, and will never leave nor forsake us."

Vers. 4, 5.—*The applicability of these verses.* There is an important question in connection with these verses which presses for solution, and that is—Are the children of Israel the descendants of the ten tribes exclusively? Or has the expression, as used by the prophet, that wider and larger signification in which we popularly employ it, namely, as including all the descendants of Jacob or Israel, in other words, all the Jewish or Hebrew race? These questions involve a prior consideration. The ten tribes were carried away into captivity and left in the lands of Assyria, B.C. 722 according to the common chronology; the two tribes of Judah and Benjamin were carried into captivity in Babylon about one hundred and thirty years subsequently. After a lapse of seventy years' captivity the latter were permitted to return to their own land, and large numbers availed themselves of that permission. But what became of the ten tribes of Israel? They are still spoken of by some as the lost tribes; some, again, identify them with the Afghans; others with the American Indians. Such theories are easily enough formed, but can scarcely be said to be founded on facts. It is admitted that the fifty thousand who returned belonged mainly to the two tribes of Judah and Benjamin, while many of those two tribes remained behind in Babylon, and comparatively few of the members of other tribes joined their brethren in the return to Palestine. Where, then, are we to look for the main body of the ten tribes? We will try to answer this interesting and important question as best we can, and with a view to its bearing on the subject before us. After the restoration of the temple and city of Jerusalem, we find that there was an immense increase of the inhabitants of Palestine in the time and under the rule of the Maccabees. May we not regard it as more than probable that lingerers out of all the tribes were attracted to their native land after the restoration of its capital, and the revival of the country's prosperity? But large bodies still remained behind in the lands of their dispersion; there would be a natural tendency on the part of the remnants of the two tribes and the ten to gravitate towards each other. Thus they may be supposed to have amalgamated. Hence James addresses his Epistle to "the twelve tribes which are of the dispersion," that is, "scattered abroad," according to the Authorized Version; and Paul says, "Unto which promise our twelve tribes instantly serving God day and night, hope to come." We may cite, as confirmatory, the opinion of the late Dr. M'Caul. He says, "I feel strongly inclined to the opinion that the ten tribes are now found mingled with the other two. I do not mean that the ten tribes returned from Babylon, for in Ezra and Nehemiah we are told particularly who did return, but that the main body of the Jews, who remained in Babylon, who were dispersed in Egypt and other countries, and who never returned, naturally mingled with their brethren of the other tribes, and that this intermixture increased after the destruction of the second temple." Their return to the house of David, intimated in ver. 5, presupposes some such reunion with their brethren as that of which we speak. We are, therefore, inclined to believe that the Judahites as well as the Israelites are comprehended in this plural patronymic of "the children of Israel."

I. THE CORRESPONDENCE OF THE CONDITION OF THE JEWS WITH THAT HERE SPECIFIED. The state of the Jewish people at the present day, as well as during centuries past, corresponds most exactly with that here described by Hosea. And where, it may be asked, is it possible to find any other nation whose condition—political and religious—is the same or even similar? Their condition is precisely what is here described with respect to Church and state, or public worship and civil government. No doubt in their dispersion they are subject to the king or rulers of the countries where they dwell; they have kings over them, but not of their own nation; they have laws by which

they are governed, but those laws are not their own, nor the laws which God had given them. They have no king nor rulers to defend them from aggression without, nor king and high officers of state as the legislative and executive powers within. Kings of countries where they have sojourned have been mean enough and wicked enough to rob and plunder and oppress them cruelly.

II. THE CONFUSION OF THEIR CIRCUMSTANCES. "Here," says an old commentator, "is much privation—six 'withouts:' (1) 'without a king;' (2) 'without a prince;' (3) 'without a sacrifice;' (4) 'without an image;' (5) 'without an ephod;' (6) 'without teraphim;' but the last verse makes up for all: 'They shall return, and seek the Lord their God, and David their king.' These 'withouts' show the wonderfully confused estate that Israel was to be in for many days, many years, both in regard of their civil and of their Church estate." They had corrupted their way, setting up idols in Dan the place of judgment, and in Bethel the house of God; and that corruption now ends in confusion of both their civil and Church estate. They had combined the ordinances of God with their own devices, that is, the sacrifice and ephod with the image and the teraphim; now they are deprived of both.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—5.—*Hosea detains Gomer in seclusion.* This chapter, like ch. i., is written in prose; all the other twelve being rhythmical. It deals, as ch. i. does, with the personal life of Hosea, giving one further glimpse of the bitter domestic sorrow by which God made him a prophet. The same wonderful providence which had led him to marry Gomer at the first now impelled him to rescue her from the wretchedness into which she had fallen. And his own quenchless love for his erring wife became a parable to him of Jehovah's infinite compassion towards Israel.

I. HOSEA'S NEW RELATION TO GOMER. (Vers. 1—3.) For we take the "woman" here to be Gomer, and "her friend" to be the prophet, her husband. After she had borne him three children (ch. i. 3—9), she fell into adultery and forsook him. It would seem, too, that she by-and-by became the slave of her paramour. But Hosea, as he sat in his blighted home, thought of poor Gomer with compassionate tenderness. She was still "beloved of her friend." He felt that he must seek her out, and say to her (as King Arthur said to Guinevere), "I loathe thee, yet I love thee." He resolved to buy her back. Her ransom cost him in money only one-half of the ordinary price of a female slave; the rest of the payment being made in barley—the usual coarse food of the class to which she now belonged. The inexpensiveness of the ransom shows to what a depth of degradation Gomer had fallen. This was so great, indeed, that the prophet could not at once restore her to her place at his table, or to the other rights of a dutiful wife. He will bring her home at first only as his ward. He will protect her from her sins. He will test her penitence by a lengthened probation, looking forward, however, to the time when the "receiving" of her again shall be as "life from the dead" to his long-widowed heart. It is pleasant to think of Gomer as not only rescued from her sinful courses, and by-and-by restored to her earthly husband, but as eventually also won back to the love of Jehovah. It is delightful to cherish the hope that the three children too became God's; their original names being purged of their vile associations, and becoming suggestive of spiritual blessing (Jezreel, Ruhamah, Ammi), so that

> "When soon or late they reached that coast,
> O'er life's rough ocean driven,
> They would rejoice—no wanderer lost—
> A family in heaven!"
>
> (Burns.)

II. THE SYMBOLIC MEANING OF THIS NEW RELATION. (Vers. 1, 4, 5.) Generally, it is a sign of Jehovah's love towards Israel, notwithstanding her idolatry and sensuality (ver. 1). It reflects the debasement to which sin leads, the discipline which God metes out to the penitent, and the irrevocable covenant of love which he makes with those who return to him. Hosea's family history stands out as a picture and a predic-

tion. In particular, his new relation to Gomer foreshadowed: 1. *Israel's long seclusion.* (Ver. 4.) Although the primary reference of the passage is to the ten tribes, the prophecy really embraces the whole Hebrew nation. God has not utterly rejected Israel; she is still "a people near unto him;" but he does not meantime dwell with her as of old. The specific features of her seclusion are noted in the six "withouts" of the verse, and these arrange themselves naturally into three pairs. The whole representation strikingly describes what has been the actual condition of the Jewish nation during the last eighteen hundred years. (1) *Without civil polity.* It had been a passion with Israel to have a king. But within three generations after the Lord gave Hosea this oracle, the ten northern tribes were "without a king, and without a prince." And when at last "Shiloh" came, "the sceptre" finally "departed from Judah" also. That was a memorable day on which the spiritual leaders of the nation professed so emphatically their willing subjection to the world-power: "We have no king but Cæsar" (John xix. 15); but during all the subsequent centuries Jerusalem has "sat solitary," and "is become as a widow." (2) *Without temple service.* The temple was the centre of the Hebrew religious system. When it was destroyed the Mosaic ritual collapsed. Such worship as the Jews now offer is conducted "with maimed rites." How sad that they should be "without a sacrifice"! Sacrifice was the very soul of the Hebrew worship. Every sinner needs a sacrifice of atonement before he can stand in God's gracious presence; but the poor Jew, who still clings to the old covenant, has none. It follows that he is also "without an ephod." The ephod was part of the dress of the high priest. In the breast of it were the Urim and Thummim, by which Jehovah gave responses. But now, alas! to the Jew "the oracles are dumb." He has no altar, no priest, no access! (3) *Without gross idolatry.* In Hosea's time the nation was attempting to combine the worship of Jehovah and of the Baalim; but the Lord tells him that for "many days" the people shall be without any god, true or false. They shall be "without an image," *i.e.* any public monument of idolatry such as the two golden calves were. And "without teraphim," *i. e.* those portable household gods which were sometimes kept as tutelary deities, and worshipped as the givers of earthly prosperity. It is a fact that ever since the Assyrian exile the Hebrew nation have not been able to endure any gross idolatry. They doubtless break the first commandment after the more refined fashion of civilized peoples; many Jews, *e.g.*, are money-lovers, and "covetousness is idolatry." But they have been at least free from the guilt of setting up "an image" or of worshipping "teraphim." Israel was to "abide many days" in this long seclusion; and it has already lasted for two millenniums. During all that period the Jewish nation has been the miracle of history. Its situation since Christ came is one of the most convincing of the external evidences of Christianity. And that situation shall continue until Messiah, the Prince of the house of David, shall assemble all the children of Jacob under his spiritual sceptre. 2. *Israel's final restoration.* (Ver. 5.) This is to take place "afterward"—"in the latter days," *i. e.* in gospel times, and as one of "the last things" of the Christian dispensation. Both Jewish and Christian commentators understand by "the latter days" the Messianic economy, which was to be ushered in by the advent of the Messiah himself. The restoration shall be characterized by: (1) *Religious earnestness.* They shall "seek Jehovah their God," and make the most assiduous efforts to find him. The Jews as a nation are not yet doing this. It is true, doubtless, that there are many devout families among them—many who cherish the deep piety which Sir Walter Scott has expressed so beautifully in his "Hymn of the Hebrew Maid," in 'Ivanhoe.' But among the cultured Jews much scepticism prevails. Many are pantheists, like the eminent Jew Spinoza. And among the mercantile Jews there is often an excessive devotion to wealth, together with indifference to all religion. "In the latter days," however, the Hebrew nation shall diligently "seek Jehovah their God." (2) *Loyalty to King Jesus.* They shall resume also the allegiance to the royal line of David which the ten tribes renounced when they apostatized from Jehovah under Jeroboam I. The Jewish rabbis themselves acknowledge that "David" in this verse means the Messiah. But Christendom is persuaded that he began to reign eighteen hundred years ago, and that he is reigning still. Jesus of Nazareth is "the Root and the Branch of David." His birth Gabriel announced beforehand to his mother (Luke i. 32, 33); and Israel, at the time of her restoration, shall accept that angelic oracle and rejoice in it. (3) *Holy reverence for her*

Divine Husband. Israel "shall fear Jehovah and his goodness." She shall have such a grateful remembrance of his loving-kindness in forgiving her adultery as shall constrain her to the most vigilant obedience. "In the latter days" her heart shall say "Amen" to the devout sentiment of the ancient psalm, "There is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared" (Ps. cxxx. 4). She shall find that to know the Lord (ch. ii. 20) and to partake of "his goodness" are blessings inseparable from each other.

CONCLUSION. The threatened isolation of Israel has been abundantly fulfilled; and shall not also the promised restoration? If ver. 4 has already become matter of history, and so very marvellously, may we not expect that ver. 5 shall also, in the Lord's time? We are sure that it shall. Jehovah's promise must be fulfilled. "Oh that the salvation of Israel were come out of Zion!"—C. J.

Ver. 1.—"*The love of the Lord toward the children of Israel.*" This exquisitely beautiful phrase comes in the midst of a passage of the most painful and distressing character. As a fond husband may tenderly love his wife, even though she abandon herself to a course of infidelity and profligacy, so the God of Israel is represented as cherishing towards his people, even in their defection and apostasy, the sincerest compassion, the most invincible affection.

I. HOW THE LOVE OF THE LORD TO ISRAEL WAS FIRST DISPLAYED. 1. In their selection from amongst the nations of the earth as the object of his special favour and calling. 2. In the communication to them of peculiar advantages and privileges. They were the depositaries of his truth, the conservators of his worship.

II. HOW THE LOVE OF THE LORD TO ISRAEL WAS TRIED AND TESTED. 1. By their forgetfulness of him. 2. By their neglect of his ordinances. 3. By their rejection of his messengers and prophets. 4. By their addictedness to idolatry. 5. By their violation of his commandments. 6. By their blasphemy of his Name.

III. HOW THE LOVE OF GOD ENDURED AND TRIUMPHED IN THE TEST TO WHICH IT WAS SUBJECTED. 1. Israel was spared, although deserving abandonment to destruction. 2. Promises of grace were addressed, when threats of desertion were to be expected. 3. Opportunity of repentance and reconciliation was afforded, and Israel was entreated not to abuse it.—T.

Ver. 4.—*The kingless state and priestless Church.* The singular symbolism of this book is intended vividly to depict the misery of Israel, by which she was to be driven in penitence and contrition to seek again the Divine favour she had forfeited. The woman whom the prophet purchased and married was to be deprived at once of her husband and of her lovers, and in this forlorn and anomalous state was to be an emblem of Israel, cut off at the same time from Jehovah, her true Husband, to whom she had been unfaithful, and from the spiritual paramours after whom she had gone, but in whom no help and no joy were now to be found.

I. THE PRIVATION OF KING AND PRINCE WAS PUNISHMENT FOR NATIONAL INFIDELITY. Jehovah was himself the King of the Israelites; their kingdom was a theocracy. He had sent Moses the lawgiver; he had raised up judges; he had heard their prayer and given them a king. In revolting from the house of David, the ten tribes had dishonoured God. Whether we are to look for the fulfilment of this threat in the collapse and captivity of the northern kingdom, or in the present dispersion of Israel, is immaterial. The lesson is plain. The nation which misuses national privileges and neglects national opportunities shall lose them both, and without a head, a corporate life, a settled abiding-place, shall learn the truth of the saying, "The Lord reigneth. He taketh down one, and setteth up another."

II. THE PRIVATION OF RELIGIOUS PRIVILEGES WAS PUNISHMENT FOR IRRELIGION AND SPIRITUAL REBELLION. The Hebrews were highly favoured in their possession, not only of the Law, but of a priesthood, a dispensation of sacrifices and festivals and various means of communion with Heaven. As preparatory to a more spiritual economy, these arrangements were invaluable. But the enjoyment of them was justly made dependent upon their proper estimation and employment. The northern tribes, by their secession, forfeited some of these advantages, and they largely corrupted to their own injury such as remained. The time came when, in Oriental captivity, they mourned the loss of advantages they had too often despised and misused. And now, as they are scattered

among the nations, they possess neither the sacrifices of the heathen nor the sacrifice of the Messiah, and are either condemned to a barren and unhappy seclusion or to a yet sadder alliance with the deists of the lands in which they dwell. A lesson to all who neglect the precious opportunities with which they are favoured by Providence. "Walk in the light whilst ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you."—T.

Ver. 5.—*Returning to God.* This is another instance of the remarkable conjunction of threat and promise. It seems as if the prophet no sooner uttered a word of denunciation, a prediction of wrath, than he followed it up with a prospect of reconciliation and an assurance of blessing.

I. THE OCCASION OF THIS RETURN. There is no note of exact time; but the reference is to "the latter days," to a period described as "afterward." Comparing this language with the context, we infer that this return to God should follow upon departure from God, and upon a bitter experience of the evil consequences of such forsaking. How often, as in the case of Israel, is it necessary that the sinner should learn that "the way of transgressors is hard"! Surely chastening, which is designed to produce a juster estimate of sin and a sincere desire for deliverance, is not to be resented, but rather received with humility, that it may lead to contrition, repentance, and amendment.

II. THE PURPOSE OF THIS RETURN. Observe: 1. *To whom* should Israel return. To "the Lord their God," whom they had forsaken in order to worship the vain gods of the heathen, but who, nevertheless, had a claim upon them that none other had, and who never ceased to be *their* God. In this Israel represents mankind; whoever returns to the Lord, returns to his own, proper, rightful God. To "David their king," from whose dynasty they had revolted in the pride, self-sufficiency, and rebelliousness of their heart. David was representative of the theocracy, for he was "the Lord's anointed," and he was an emblem of him who was David's Son and David's Lord. So that whoever returns to the Lord by the gospel of Jesus Christ, returns unto David, whose "sure mercies" are ratified in the Divine Saviour. 2. *In what spirit* Israel should return. They should "seek" the Lord, and should "fear" or approach with reverential devoutness the Lord and his goodness. The spirit thus described is a spirit of true earnestness, a spirit of lowly repentance, and a spirit of trembling confidence in that "goodness" upon which alone a contrite sinner can rely, and upon which he can never rely in vain.—T.

Vers. 1—5.—*Love to the adulteress.* It has been shown in ch. ii. that the punishment of Israel is designed to work for the nation's moral recovery. A new symbol is accordingly employed to set forth this aspect of the truth; as formerly the punitive aspects of God's dealing with the nation had been exhibited in the symbols of ch. i. The symbol is again drawn from the prophet's relations to his wife.

I. THE PROPHET'S CONTINUED LOVE FOR HIS UNFAITHFUL WIFE. (Ver. 1.) Gomer, adhering to her adulterous courses, had apparently left her husband, and had sunk to a condition of great wretchedness. The prophet, however, had not lost his love for her. She was still a woman "beloved of her friend," *i.e.* her husband. His love was the more remarkable that it is rarely a husband retains his love for an adulterous wife. Hosea, it may be inferred, felt that there was something uncommon in his relations with this woman. He did not, therefore, renounce her when she abandoned him. He still cherished towards her a husband's affection; retained his love for her, though unworthy; followed her in her devious ways with a pure, steadfast, unalterable, and wholly disinterested regard. In this his love became a fit image of Jehovah's love "toward the children of Israel." It was the image of it then, while the kingdom of Israel stood, and the people were zealous in their pursuit of "other gods;" and it would be still more the image of it when the threatenings of the previous chapter had taken effect, and the people were eating the bitter fruits of their sins. Is it not also the image of God's love to the sinful world as a whole? We had departed from him, and had bestowed our affections adulterously on the creature; but he did not on this account cease to love us. He saw us lost, sinful, and degraded; but he still looked on us with pity, and sought opportunity for our recovery. He so loved us that he gave his Son as the price of our salvation. This love of God to sinners finds no explanation in the nature of its objects. It is love to the unworthy, to the wicked, to the ungrateful;

a love, therefore, entirely pure, self-caused, unbought, and disinterested. How warmly should our love go back to him who has thus loved us!

II. THE PROPHET'S TREATMENT OF HIS WIFE. (Vers. 2—4.) Consider here: 1. *The condition in which he found her.* It was a very deplorable one. She had sunk so low that it became necessary to "buy" her. The price paid—fifteen pieces of silver and a homer and a half of barley—seems the equivalent of the price of a slave. If so, it is an additional token of her deeply humbled state. Either (1) she had sunk to the condition of a slave, and required to be redeemed out of it; or (2) "it was perhaps an allowance, whereby he brought her back from her evil freedom, not to live as his wife, but to be honestly maintained, until it should be fit completely to restore her" (Pusey). Barley was the coarsest food, so that, if maintenance was the object, her condition was still a hard and unenviable one. In this see a picture of the state to which sin reduces those who follow after it. It is a picture true to the life as respects the state to which sin reduced Israel. But it is surely not less true in the representation it gives of the results of a life of sin generally. The sinner, in beginning his career, promises himself liberty and happiness. He cheats himself with the belief that he is taking the true way to obtain these objects of universal desire. How soon he finds out his mistake! He obtains neither of the things he wishes. The pleasure he found in his vices soon dies out. His means are squandered. Friends desert him. His character, reputation, influence, are gone. He finds himself the victim of evil habits, perhaps of disease. He has lost his own self-respect. He feels that he has forfeited the respect of others. What remains for him but poverty and disgrace; or perhaps a life of crime? The whole history is depicted in the memorable parable of the prodigal—the beginning, waste of substance in riotous living; the end, snatching a morsel at the swine-trough (Luke xv. 11—32). "The way of transgressors is hard" (Prov. xiii. 15). The prophet's wife should be a warning to every female tempted to go astray. 2. *The restraint under which he placed her.* He did not admit her at once to full conjugal rights. He put her under trial. He bound her, in the mean time, to refrain from further immoral conduct. She was not to play the harlot. He, on his part, would abide in separation from her. This was to continue "many days." It would take a long time to wean her from her immoral ways, and thoroughly to test her disposition. The intention was that she might be trained to be again a faithful wife to him. Analogous to this would be God's method of dealing with Israel. "For the children of Israel shall abide many days without a king," etc. In the light of the subsequent history this prophecy is very striking. There is involved in it: (1) *Long exile.* The people were to abide "many days" without king or prince (civil government), without sacrifice or pillar (religious worship), without ephod or teraphim (means of inquiring into the future). This implies expulsion from their own land. The objects of Jehovah and idol worship are mixed up in this description to indicate the then mixed state of the nation's religion, and to show that in exile "the Lord would take away both the Jehovah-worship and also the worship of the idols, along with independent civil government" (Keil). (2) *Continued preservation.* The nation, it is further implied, though cast off, was not to be destroyed. It would still be the object of a Divine care. It would preserve its identity and distinctness through the "many days." "God would, in those times, withhold all special tokens of his favour, covenant, providence; yet would he secretly uphold and maintain them as a people, and withhold them from falling wholly from him into the gulf of irreligion and infidelity" (Pusey). (3) *Ultimate recovery.* God's end in his treatment of the nation was its salvation. Its banishment was not to be perpetual. A day of recovery was set for it (ver. 5). It will be admitted that the prophecy has had, in its first two parts, a singular fulfilment. The tribes—remnants both of the ten and of the two—are at this hour precisely in the condition of the prophet's wife. They are in a manner "waiting on God, as the wife waited for her husband, kept apart under his care, yet not acknowledged by him;" not following after idolatries, yet cut off through unbelief in Christ from full covenant privilege. They have been in this condition "many days," "praying to God, yet without sacrifice for sin; not owned by God, yet kept distinct and apart by his providence for a future yet to be revealed" (Pusey). The object of the present exile is (1) to wean Israel entirely from idols,—this end may be said to be effectually accomplished; (2) to train her to value lost privileges; (3) to educate her to constancy; (4) to create a

longing for reconciliation and restoration. These ends attained, restoration will follow. In a similar way God often deals with sinners for their good, cutting them off from the objects of their sinful desire, trying them by experiences of privation, leaving them without the comforts of his presence and the privileges of his worship, so teaching them the vanity of past pursuits, inciting them to seek him, and preparing them to receive his mercy when it is at length proposed to them.

III. THE RESULT OF GOD'S TREATMENT OF ISRAEL. (Ver. 5.) "Afterwards shall the children of Israel return, and seek the Lord their God, and David their king," etc.; that is, Israel, when recovered to God, would return to its allegiance to the Davidic house, and specially to him whom prophecy pointed to as the Messiah. It is to be noticed: 1. Return to God is the designed end of moral discipline. 2. Return to God is connected with submission to his Son. 3. The result of return to God is experience of his goodness." "They shall fear the Lord and *his goodness* in the latter days." 4. God is to be served by those who return to him in holy "fear." This fear is awakened by the experience of his "goodness," as well as by the remembrance of his chastisements. It is a holy, filial fear, born of reverence and love, and dreading to displease One so good. It has nothing in common with the slavish fear which combines love of sin with dread of the Punisher of it.—J. O.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER IV.

Ver. 1.—A new and distinct division of the book commences with this fourth chapter and continues till the close. What had previously been presented in figure and symbol is now plainly and literally stated. The children of Israel are summoned in the first verse of this chapter to hear the charge preferred against them and the sentence pronounced. Having convened, as it were, a public assembly and cited the persons concerned, the prophet proceeds to show cause why they are bound to give an attentive hearing. In God's controversy with the people of the land the prophet acts as his ambassador, accusing the people of great and grievous sins, and vindicating the justice of God's judgments in their punishment. The *ki* with which the last clause of the verse commences may be either causal or recitative, and may thus specify either the ground or subject of controversy. It is commonly understood here in the former sense. Israel is charged with want of truth, mercy, and the knowledge of God. Kimchi comments on this controversy as follows: "With the inhabitants of the land of Israel I have a controversy, for I gave them the land on the condition that they should exercise righteousness and judgment, and on this condition I pledged myself to them that my eyes would be upon them from the beginning of the year to the end of the year. But since they practise the opposite —cursing, lying, etc.—I also will act with them in a way contrary to what I assured them, and will hide my face from them." He adds, "There were some righteous among them, but they were few, and they hid themselves from the face of the multitude who were wicked." Truth and mercy are at once Divine attributes and human virtues; it is in the latter sense, of course, that they are here employed. Truth includes works as well as words, doing as well as saying; it implies uprightness in speech and behaviour—thorough integrity of character and conduct. Mercy goes beyond and supplements this. We sometimes say of such a one that he is an honest but a hard man. Mercy combined with truth, on the contrary, makes a man kind as well as honest, benevolent as well as upright. In a somewhat similar sense the apostle conjoins goodness and righteousness when he says, "Scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die." The knowledge of God is the real root of these two virtues of truth and mercy. If we know God as he is in himself and as he stands in his relations to us, we shall conform our conduct to his character and our actions to his will. If we know God to be a God of truth, who delighteth in truth in the inward parts, we shall cultivate truth in our hearts, express it with our lips, and practise it in our lives. If we know God as a God of mercy, who has shown such boundless mercy to us in pardoning our multiplied and aggravated offences, we shall imitate that mercy in our relations to our fellow-man; nor shall we enact the part of the merciless man in the parable, who owed his lord ten thousand talents, and who, having nothing to pay, was freely forgiven the debt; but finding his fellow-servant, who owed him only an hundred pence, laid hands on him and took him by the throat, saying, "Pay me that thou

owest," and, deaf to that fellow-servant's supplications, cast him into prison till he should pay the debt. The intimate connection of the knowledge of God with the virtues in question is confirmed by the Prophet Jeremiah, "Did not thy father eat and drink, and do judgment and justice, and then it was well with him? He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well with him: was not this to know me, saith the Lord?"

Ver. 2.—Having given a picture of Israel negatively, he next presents the positive side. The absence of the virtues specified implies the presence of the opposite vices. In the most vivid and impressive manner the prophet, instead of enumerating prosaically the vices so prevalent at the time, expresses them more emphatically by a species of exclamation, using (1) infinitives absolute instead of finite verbs; thus: "Swearing, and lying, and murdering, and stealing, and committing adultery." They may, however, be regarded as in the nominative as subjects to יָרַב. Instead of either supplying נִשְׁבַּר, to allot, or closely connecting "allot" with the verb "to lie," which immediately follows, it is better to understand the two verbs separately, as expressing two different species of sin; that is, swearing or cursing, and lying. So the Septuagint renders them by the nouns ἀρὰ καὶ ψεῦδος, equivalent to "cursing and lying;" as also the Chaldee, "they swear falsely and lie." The commandments which the children of Israel thus violated were the third, the ninth, the sixth, the eighth, and the seventh. (2) The construction, adopted in the LXX., Vulgate, and by Luther in his version, takes the infinitives (nounal expressions of habitual or continued actions) as nominatives to the verb *paratsu;* thus: "Cursing, and lying, and murder, and theft, and adultery abound (κέχυται or ἐκκέχυται) in the land;" "Maledictum, et mendacium, et homicidium, et furtum, et adulterium inundaverunt;" and Luther translates, "Gotteslästern, Lüger, Morder, Stehlen, and Ehebrechen hat überhand genommen." The common mode (3) of constructing the infinitives independently as above in (1) or gerundively as in the Authorized Version, and in either case understanding an indefinite subject to *paratsu*, is preferable on the whole; thus: "By swearing, etc., they break out." The allusion to the water overflowing its banks and spreading in all directions, implied in the Septuagint Version, is approved by Jerome in his Commentary: "He (the prophet) did not say *est*, but, to demonstrate the abundance of crimes, introduced *inundaverunt* (overflowed)." The common meaning of *parats* is to tear or break—break in upon, especially with violence, as robbers and murderers; so *paritsim* has the sense of murderers and robbers. It is better, therefore, to take the verb here as a present perfect connecting past and present, and to translate it "break through," or "into," that is, as burglars into houses. So Kimchi, though figuratively: "They break through the wall which is the fence of the Law, and multiply transgressions." Similarly, De Wette has "Gewaltthat über sie;" and Maurer likewise: "Jurare et mentiri et occidere et furari et adulterari! *Violenter agunt* et sanguines sanguines altingunt." The Massoretic accentuation favours (putting *athnach* at *naopt*) this construction; while the context, which speaks of bloodshed, is quite in keeping with acts of violence.

Vers. 3—5.—These verses relate, with much particularity, the sufferings consequent on sins, especially such as are specified in the preceding verses. The *mourning of the land* mentioned in ver. 3 may be understood either figuratively or literally. If in the former way, there are many Scripture parallels which represent nature in full accord with human feelings, sympathizing with man, now in joy, again in sorrow; for example: "The little hills rejoice on every side;" the valleys "shout for joy, they also sing;" on the other hand, "The earth mourneth and fadeth away, the world languisheth and fadeth away, the haughty people of the earth do languish." But if the expression be taken literally, it conveys a solemn fact, and one in perfect harmony with the entire tone and character of the old economy, according to which moral evil transmutes itself into physical evil, and impresses itself in dismal characters on the face of inanimate nature. The Hebrew commentators seem to understand the statement literally; thus Rashi: "The land shall be laid waste, and there shall be great mourning;" likewise Kimchi: "The land of Israel shall be laid waste and desolated." The latter has this further comment: "After the land of Israel shall have been laid waste, man and beast shall be cut off out of it. But under the beasts of the field the prophet does not mean the wild beasts, but the large domestic animals which dwell with the sons of men, likewise called חַיָּה. It is also possible that even the beasts that roam at large are included, for the wild beast does not come to inhabited places that are laid waste, unless they are partially inhabited." He also adds, in reference to the fowls of heaven, "When he speaks of the fowls of heaven, it is because most of the fowls do not dwell in the wilderness, but in inhabited places, where they find seeds and fruits and blossoms of trees. Or the fowls of heaven are mentioned by way of hyperbole to represent the matter in its totality; and, according

to this sense, it is used in the Prophet Jeremiah; and it explains itself in like manner in one of these two ways." With the mourning of the land the dwellers therein languish. Nor is this languishing condition confined to rational beings; it comprises the irrational as well, and that without exception. The dominion assigned man at the beginning over the whole creation of God is here reversed in the case of Israel; while the denunciation of wrath has that reversal for its dark background. The terms of the dominion to man by the Creator are, "Have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth;" but in this denunciation these terms are reversed and read backwards, being, "with the beasts of the field, and with the fowls of heaven; yea, the fishes of the sea also." Thus all nature, inanimate and animate, and all creation, rational and irrational, are involved in the consequences of Israel's sin. The particles "yea, even," preceding "the fishes of the sea" (such as the Sea of Galilee or other inland seas and rivers), show the entirely unexpected as well as unusual nature of the event. The Chaldee paraphrases the clause as follows: "And even the fishes of the sea shall be diminished in number, on account of their (Israel's) sins." Earth refuses sustenance to man and beast, no longer yielding grass for the cattle or herb for the service of man; the waters of the sea, being lessened by drought or becoming putrid by stagnation, no longer supply their accustomed quota of fishes for human food. An illustration of the literal sense has been quoted by Rosenmüller and Pusey from Jerome. It is the following: "Whoso believeth not that this befell the people of Israel, let him survey Illyricum, let him survey the Thraces, Macedonia, the Pannonias, and the whole land which stretches from the Propontis and Bosphorus to the Julian Alps, and he will experience that, together with man, all the creatures also fail, which afore were nourished by the Creator for the service of man." The *le* before מ is explained by Abarbanel in the sense of *through*, as though the inhabitants would be slain by wild beasts; by Hitzig as *extending to;* by Keil as *of* in enumeration. It is simply *with*. Ver. 4 looks like an interjected clause, coming in the middle of the enumeration of Divine judgments; and the purpose is not so much to justify the severity of those judgments as to intimate their inefficacy, owing to the incorrigible character of the people. There is (1) the rendering of the Authorized Version, Yet let no man strive, nor reprove another. This seems to show that mutual reproof was out of place, since one was as bad as another; or that every one was to look to his own sins, and not throw the blame on others; but this rendering is not tenable nor capable of being supported by such an expression as *ish beish*. The correct rendering (2) is rather, *only let no man strive (with them), and let no man reprove them.* This imports (*a*) that reasoning with them would be useless, and reproof thrown away, in consequence of the desperate obstinacy of these offenders; or (*b*) that they were so self-willed that they would not allow any one to reprove them for their conduct. The rendering (1) is favoured by Kimchi: "Let a man not strive, nor reprove his fellow for his wickedness, for it profits him not, because he also does evil like him." The fact often experienced in a season of public calamity, that every one comes forth as a corrector of morals, and transfers to his neighbour the cause of such calamity, Hitzig illustrates by the following words of Curtius: "Quod in adversis rebus fieri solet, alius in alium culpam transferebat." The explanation (2, *b*), which is pretty much that of Ewald, is supported by the comments of Rashi and Aben Ezra. The former explains: "Ye warn the true prophets against striving with you and against reproving you;" the latter: "There is no one that strives with another or reproves him: and yet it was the right of the priest to reprove Israel; but now they turn to reprove the priest, for he also is wicked in his works." But (3) Pusey's rendering, though only a slight modification of the preceding, conveys a different sense. It is "Only men let him not strive, and let not man reprove," which he explains as follows: "God had taken the controversy with his people into his own hands; the Lord, he said (ver. 1), had a controversy (*rib*) with the inhabitants of the land. Here he forbids man to intermeddle; man let him not strive (he again uses the same word). The people were obstinate and would not hear; . . . so God bids man to cease to speak in his Name. He himself alone will implead them, whose pleading none could evade or contradict." The rendering (2) is, in our opinion, decidedly entitled to the preference both on the ground of simplicity and agreement with the following clause. That clause, **for thy people are as they that strive with the priest**, is thought by Abarbanel to allude to the opposition of Korah and his company to Aaron the high priest, as recorded in Numb. xvi., and referred to in Ps. cvi. In the former passage, at the eleventh verse, it is asked, "And what is Aaron, that ye murmur against him?" while in the latter, at ver. 16, we read the statement: "They envied Moses also in the camp, and Aaron the saint of the Lord." This allusion, by which the Israelites of the prophet's day were compared to the Korah-

ites, will appear to most as far-fetched. (1) The usual acceptation is both simpler and more satisfactory. It takes the expression to denote such contumacy as is reproved in Deut. xvii. 12, "The man that will do presumptuously, and will not hearken unto the priest that standeth to minister there before the Lord thy God, or unto the judge, even that man shall die: and thou shalt put away the evil from Israel." The contumaciousness of Israel is thus compared to that of persons who were so obstinate and presumptuous as neither to obey nor reverence, but rather rebel against, the true priests of Jehovah, who, in his Divine Name and by Divine authority, instructed or reproved. Such persons neither feared God nor regarded man. It was the refractoriness of pupils acting in opposition to their teacher, or of a people rising in rebellion against their spiritual instructors. Thus the Chaldee understands it: "And thy people contend [quarrel] with their teachers." The last clause of ver. 4 is fairly well explained by Kimchi (except that he explains *kaph* of certainty and not similitude) as follows: "The prophet says, The priest should have taught, striven with, and reproved the people; but at this time the people strive with the priest; for it is not enough that they do not receive his reproof, but they strive with and reprove him, after the way they say, 'A generation that judges its judges.' Or the explanation is, 'The priest is as wicked as they, and if he reproves them so also they reprove him.'" (2) The LXX. has ὡς ἀντι λεγόμενος ἱερεὺς, as a priest spoken against. The text being thus somewhat doubtful, Michaelis made a very slight change in the pointing, putting a *patach* instead of *tsere* in the word for "contend;" thus: כְּמַרִיבֵי instead of כְּמָרִיבֵי, so that the translation would be, "And thy people are as my adversaries (those who contend with me), O priest." The people that should have learnt the Law from the lips of the priest would not even submit to reproof from the Most High himself. The expression, "priest-disputers" or "priest-gainsayers," is admittedly an unusual one, and given as a specimen of the peculiarities of this prophet's style, to which, however, there is a parallel in "boundary-movers" (cf. ch. v. 10). Still, we see no real advantage gained by the conjectural emendation of Michaelis, though some are disposed to accept it on the ground that the representation of the incorrigibleness of a people by gainsaying opposition to the priest appears incongruous with the immediately succeeding denunciation of the priesthood. The objection is obviated by understanding, as above, opposition to the true priests of the Lord. Another conjectural reading is that of Beck, viz. וְעַמִּי כְּמָרָיו, equivalent to "and my people are like their priests." Such conjectural emendation is needless as useless.

Ver. 5.—The parallelism of this verse is marked by the peculiarity of dividing between the two members what belongs to the sentence as one whole. Instead of saying that the people would fall (literally, *stumble*) in the day, and the prophet with them in the night, the meaning of the sentence, divested of its peculiar form of parallelism, is that people and prophet alike would fall together, at all times, both by day and by night, that is to say, there would be no time free from the coming calamities; and there would be no possibility of escape, either for the sinful people or their unfaithful priests; the darkness of the night would not hide them, the light of the day would not aid them; destruction was the doom of priests and people, inevitable and at all times. **And I will destroy thy mother.** Their mother was the whole nation as such—the kingdom of Israel. The expression is somewhat contemptuous, as though he said of the individual members that they were truly their mother's children—resembling her erewhile in sin and soon in sorrow. (1) Though the verb דמה is seldom used in Qal to denote "likeness," Abarbanel, as quoted by Rosenmüller, translates, "I have been like thy mother," and explains of the people addressing priest and prophet as a mother reproving her petulant children in order to improve them. Besides the far-fetched nature of such a rendering, there is the formidable grammatical objection that, in the sense of "similitude," this verb requires to be constructed with *l*ᵉ or *el*, so that it should be *l*ᵉ *immeka* or *el immeka*. "This word, when derived from *demuth*, likewise has *el* with *seghol* after it; but without *el*, it has the meaning of destroy," is the statement of Aben Ezra. The LXX., assigning to the verb the sense of "similarity," renders the phrase by νυκτὶ ὁμοίωσα τὴν μητέρα σου, "I have compared thy mother to night." (2) Jerome, connecting the verb with דום or דָּמַם, understands it in the sense of "silence:" "I have made thy mother silent in the night; that is, "Israel is delivered up in the dark night of captivity, sorrow, and overwhelming distress." The Syriac likewise has: "And thy mother has become silent" (if *shathketh* be read). The Chaldee, though more paraphrastic, brings out nearly the same sense: "I will overspread your assembly with stupefaction." To the same purport is the exposition of Rashi: "My people shall be stupefied as a man who sits and is overwhelmed with stupor, so that no answer is heard from his mouth." The meaning "destroy" is well supported by the cognate

Arabic, and gives a good sense; thus Gesenius renders: "I destroy thy mother, that is, lay waste thy country." Rather, the nation, collectively, is the mother; while the members individually are the children. Nor shall private persons escape in the public catastrophe—root and branch are to perish. Kimchi's comment on דמיתי is: "I will cut off the whole congregation, so that no congregation shall remain in Israel; for they shall be scattered in the exile, the one here, the other there."

Ver. 6.—**My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.** Here the verb is plural and its subject singular, because, being collective, it comprehends all the individual members of the nation. The word נִדְמוּ is rendered (1) by Jerome in the sense of "silence:" "conticuit populus meus," which he explains to mean "sinking into eternal silence." So also the Chaldee. (2) The LXX., understands it in the sense of "likeness:" "My people are like (ὡμοιώθη) as if they had no knowledge." Aben Ezra disproves this sense as follows: "This word, if it were from the root signifying 'likeness,' would have after it *el* with *seghol*, as, 'To [*el* with *seghol*] whom art thou like in thy greatness?' (Ezek. xxxi. 2); but without the word *el* it has the meaning of 'cutting off.'" So Kimchi: "Here also it has the sense of 'cutting off.'" The article before "knowledge" implies renewed mention and refers to the word in ver. 1; or it may emphasize the word as that knowledge by way of eminence, which surpasses all other knowledge, and without which no other knowledge can really prove a blessing in the end. The knowledge of God is the most excellent of all sciences. Paul counted all things but loss in comparison with its possession; and our blessed Lord himself says, "This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent;" while the Prophet Isaiah attributed the captivity to its absence: "My people are gone into captivity because they have no knowledge." **Because thou hast rejected knowledge . . . seeing thou hast forgotten the Law of thy God.** The cause of this ignorance is here charged on the unfaithfulness of the priesthood. They rejected knowledge and forgot the Law of their God. The two concluding clauses of this verse may be regarded as "split members" of a single sentence. As rejection implies the presence of the object rejected, while forgetfulness implies its absence from the mind or memory, some have understood rejection of knowledge as the sin of the priest, and forgetfulness that of the people. This separation is not necessary, for what men continue for a time to despise they will by-and-by forget. The forgetfulness is thus an advance upon rejection. The sin of these priests was very great, for, while the priests' lips were required to keep knowledge, they neither preserved that knowledge themselves nor promoted it among the people; hence the indignant and direct address. Thus Kimchi says: "He addresses the priestly order that existed at that time: Thou hast rejected the knowledge for thyself and to teach it to the people, consequently I will reject thee from being a priest unto me. Since thou dost not exercise the office of priest, which is to teach the Law, I will reject thee so that thou shalt not be a priest in my house." **I will also reject thee that thou shalt be no priest to me . . . I will also forget thy children, even I.** The punishment resembles the offence; the human delinquency is reflected in the Divine retaliation. To make this the more pointed, the "thou on thy part (*attah*)" at the head of the sentence has its counterpart, or rather is counterbalanced by the "even I" or "I too (*gam ani*)" at its close. The severity of the punishment is augmented by the threat that, not only the then existing priests, but their sons after them, would be excluded from the honour of the priesthood. This was touching painfully the tenderest part. It needs scarcely be observed that forgetfulness is only spoken of God in a figurative sense, and after the manner of men, that being forgotten which is no longer the object of attention or affection. "The meaning of אֹתִי," says Kimchi, "is by way of figure, like the man who forgets something and does not take it to heart." The unusual form אֶמְאָסְאָךְ has been variously accounted for. The Massorites mark the *aleph* before *caph* as redundant; it is omitted in several manuscripts of Kennicott and De Rossi, as also some of the early printed editions. Kimchi confesses his ignorance of its use. Olshausen treats it as a copyist's error; but Ewald "regards it as an Aramæan pausal form." Some take the reference to be to Israel as a kingdom of priests (Exod. xix. 6) rather than to the actual priesthood.

Vers. 7, 8.—**As they were increased;** rather, *multiplied*. Whether כְּרָבָּם be taken as infinitive with suffix and prefix, or as a noun, it will amount to the same. The reference is rather to the multitude of the population than to the greatness of their prosperity or the abundance of their wealth. In the latter sense it is understood by the Chaldee paraphrast, but in the former by the Syriac translator. So also Kimchi, where he says, "As for Aaron the priest their father, the Law of truth was in his mouth; but now that his sons have multiplied and spread abroad, they have sinned against me and forgotten my law; according as I did them

good they did evil." He also gives as the explanation of others, "As I increased them in wealth and riches, they sinned against me." **Their glory will I change into shame.** The "therefore" of the Authorized Version is inserted unnecessarily. Both the Chaldee and Syriac render, "And they changed their glory into shame;" as they took אָמִיר for the infinitive חָמִיר, and that in the sense of the preterite; or the infinitive in the gerundival sense: "changing their glory into shame." Kimchi explains the meaning correctly: "Therefore I made them heads over the people and expiators, yet if they do not observe my Law I will change their glory into shame; and the people will contemn and despise them." Their numbers multiplied with the multiplication of idols, and the apostasy of the people kept pace with both; and now as a fit punishment they are to be deprived of their priestly glory—their dignity and splendour. **They eat up the sin of my people.** The word חַטָּאת may be understood in either of two senses; and the meaning of the verse will correspond thereto. It may either mean that these faithless priests lived upon the sin of the people, deriving their livelihood and profit from the people's idolatrous practices; or that they were delighted with their sin, approving rather than reproving them for the same. The other explanation understands the word of sin offering, and is thus expressed by Kimchi: "They are only priests for eating up the sin and trespass offering which the people offer on account of sins, not for teaching the Law or right way." **To their iniquity they lift up (each one) his soul.** They set their heart upon and eagerly desire the continued practice of sin on the part of the people that they may profit by the sacrifices. Thus Kimchi explains this clause in accordance with his exposition of the former: "The priests lift up every one his soul to the sin of the people, saying, When will they sin, and bring sin offering and trespass offering that we may eat?"

Ver. 9.—**Like people, like priest.** As it had fared with the people who had sinned and had been punished, as is stated in the third and fifth verses; so shall it be with the priest or whole priestly order. He has involved himself in sin and punishment like the people, and that as the consequence of his extreme unfaithfulness; whereas by faithful dealing with the people and discharge of his duty he might have delivered his own soul, as stated by Ezek. xxxiii. 9, "Nevertheless, if thou warn the wicked of his way to turn from it; if he do not turn from his way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul." It is well explained by Kimchi as follows: "These two *caphs* of likeness are by way of abbreviation, and the explanation is—the people are like the priest and the priest is like the people. And the meaning is that, as the people and the priest are equal with respect to sin, so shall they be equal in relation to punishment." **And I will visit upon him his ways, and his doings I will bring back to him.** The retribution here threatened includes the whole priestly order, not people and priest as one man, according to Pusey, who, however, makes the following excellent comment on מעלליו: "The word rendered *doings* signifies *great doings* when used of God, *bold doings* on the part of man. These bold presumptuous doings against the Law and will of God, God will bring back to the sinner's bosom," or rather, down overwhelmingly upon his head. The singular individualizes; so both Aben Ezra and Kimchi: "Upon every one of them."

Ver. 10.—**For they shall eat, and not have enough: they shall commit whoredom, and shall not increase.** This part of the verse states the punishment to be inflicted and the reward to be received; it is thus an expansion of the closing clause of the preceding verse, with an obvious allusion to the sin specified in the eighth verse. To eat and not be satisfied may occur in time of famine, or be the effect of disease or the consequence of insatiable craving. "Since," says Kimchi, "they eat in an unlawful manner, their food shall not be to them a blessing." This was one of the punishments threatened for violation of the Law, as we read in Lev. xxvi. 26, "When I have broken the staff of your bread, ten women shall bake your bread in one oven, and they shall deliver you your bread again by weight: and ye shall eat, and not be satisfied." Further, the multiplication of wives or concubines would not increase their posterity; Solomon long previously had been a notable exemplification of this. "So in their cohabitation with their women, since it is in a whorish manner, they shall not increase, for they shall not have children by them; or, if they have, they shall die from the birth." The Hiph. *hiznu* has rather the intensive sense of Qal than that of causing or encouraging whoredom. **Because they have left off to take heed to the Lord.** The verbal *lishmor* either (1) has Jehovah for its object, as in the Authorized Version; or (2) *durko* or *darkair* may be supplied, as is done by Kimchi and Aben Ezra. The former has, "To observe his ways, for they have no delight in him and in his ways; to observe his ways they have left off;" the latter has, "They have forsaken Jehovah, to observe his way or his laws." But (3) Kimchi informs us that "Saadiah Gaon of blessed memory has connected the word with the verse that comes after it; they have for-

saken the Lord to observe whoredom and wine and new wine."

Ver. 11.—It makes no great difference whether we regard this verse as concluding the foregoing or commencing a new paragraph, though we prefer the latter mode of connecting it. It states the debasing influence which debauchery and drunkenness are known to exercise over both head and heart; they dull the faculties of the former and deaden the affections of the latter. The heart is not only the seat of the affections, as with us; it comprises also the intellect and will; while the word נשׂא is not so much to take away as to captivate the heart. Rashi gives the former sense: "The whoredom and drunkenness to which they are devoted take away their heart from me." Kimchi's explanation is judicious: "The whoredom to which they surrender themselves and the constant drunkenness which they practise take their heart, so that they have no understanding to perceive what is the way of goodness along which they should go." He further distinguishes the *tirosh* from the *yayin*, remarking that the former is the new wine which takes the heart and suddenly intoxicates. The prophet, having had occasion to mention the sin of whoredom in ver. 10, makes a general statement about the consequences of that sin combined with drunkenness in ver. 10, as not only debasing, but depriving men of the right use of their reason and the proper exercise of their natural affections. The following verses afford abundant evidence of all this in the insensate conduct of Israel at the time referred to.

Vers. 12—14.—The first of these verses exhibits the private life of the people as depraved by sin and folly; the second their public life as degraded by idolatry and lewdness; while the third points to the corresponding chastisement and its cause. **My people ask counsel at their stocks** (literally, *wood*), **and their staff declareth unto them.** Rashi explains "stocks," or literally, "wood," to mean "a graven image made out of wood;" while Aben Ezra prefaces his exposition of this by an observation which serves well as a link of connection between the eleventh and twelfth verses. It is as follows: "The sign that they are in reality without heart, is that my people turn to ask counsel of its stocks and wood." Kimchi not unaptly remarks, "They are like the blind man to whom his staff points out the way in which he should go." The stupidity of idolatry and the sin of divination are here combined. By the "wood" is meant an idol carved out of wood; while the staff may likewise have an image carved at the top for idolatrous purposes, or it may denote a mode of divination by a staff which by the way it fell determined their course. Theophylact explains this method of divination as follows: "They set up two rods, and muttered some verses and enchantments; and then the rods falling through the influence of demons, they considered how they fell, whether forward or backward, to the right or the left, and so gave answers to the foolish people, using the fall of the rods for signs." Cyril, who attributes the invention of rabdomancy to the Chaldeans, gives the same account of this method of divination. Herodotus mentions a mode of divination prevalent among the Scythians by means of willow rods; and Tacitus informs us that the Germans divined by a rod cut from a fruit-bearing tree. "They (the Germans) cut a twig from a fruit tree, and divide it into small pieces, which, distinguished by certain marks, are thrown promiscuously on a white garment. Then the priest of the canton, if the occasion be public—if private, the master of the family—after an invocation of the gods, with his eyes lifted up to heaven, thrice takes out each piece, and as they come up, interprets their signification according to the marks fixed upon them." The sin and folly of any people consulting an idol of wood about the success or otherwise of an undertaking, or deciding whether by a species of teraphim or staff divination, is sufficiently obvious. But the great aggravation of Israel's sin arose from the circumstance not obscurely hinted by the possessive "my" attached to "people." That a people like Israel, whom God had chosen from among the nations of the earth and distinguished by special tokens of Divine favour, and to whom he had given the ephod with the truly oracular Urim and Thummim, should forsake him and the means he had given them of knowing his will, and turn aside to gods of wood, evinced at once stupidity unaccountable and sin inexcusable. "The prophet," says Calvin, "calls here the Israelites the people of God, not to honour them, but rather to increase their sin; for the more heinous was the perfidy of the people, that, having been chosen, they had afterwards forsaken their heavenly Father. . . . Now this people, that ought to be mine, consult their own wood, and their staff answers them!" **For the spirit of whoredoms hath caused them to err, and they have gone a-whoring from under their God.** In this part of the verse the prophet attempts to account for the extreme folly and heinous sin of Israel, as described in the first clause. It was an evil spirit, some demoniac power, that had inspired them with an insuperable fondness for idolatry, which in prophetic language is spiritual adultery. The consequence was a sad departure from the true God and a sinful wandering away

from his worship, notwithstanding his amazing condescension and love by which he placed himself in the relation of a husband towards them.

Ver. 13.—**They sacrifice upon the tops of the mountains, and burn incense upon the hills, under oaks and poplars and elms, because the shadow thereof is good.** The prophet here enlarges on the sin of idolatry mentioned in the preceding verse, and explains fully how it showed itself in the public life of the people. Two places are specified as scenes of idolatrous worship: one was the tops of mountains and hills; the other under every green tree, here specified as oaks, poplars, and terebinths, whether growing alone or in groves, in vale or upland. The hills and mountain-tops were selected on account of their elevation, as though the worshippers were thus brought nearer to the objects of their adoration; the green trees as affording shade from the scorching heat of an Eastern sun, secrecy for their licentious rites, and a sort of solemn awe associated with such shadow. In such scenes they not only slew victims, but burnt odours in honour of their idols. The resemblance to, if not imitation of, the rites of heathenism in all this is obvious. Among the Greeks the oak was sacred to Jupiter at Dodona, and among the old Britons the Druidical priests practised their superstitions in the shadow of the oaks. The poplar again was sacred to Hercules, affording a most grateful shade; while in Ezek. vi. 13 we read that "under every thick terebinth" was one of the places where "they did offer sweet savour to their idols." The inveterate custom of these idolaters is implied in the Piel or iterative form of the verb; the singular of the nouns, *under oak and poplar and terebinth*, intimates that scene after scene of Israel's sin passes under the prophet's review, each exciting his deep indignation; the mention of the goodly shadow seems designed to heighten that feeling of just indignation, as though it came into competition or comparison with "the shadow of the Almighty," the abiding-place of him that "dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High." **Therefore your daughters shall commit whoredom, and your spouses** (properly, *daughters-in-law*) **shall commit adultery.** כַּלָּה primarily signifies "bride," but for the parents of the bridegroom, "daughter-in-law," its secondary sense. The bad example of the parents acts upon their children and reacts upon themselves; on their children in causing bad conduct, on themselves by way of chastisements. The parents had been guilty of spiritual whoredom by their idolatry; their daughters and daughters-in-law would commit whoredom in the literal and carnal sense. This would wound the parents' feelings to the quick and pain them in the tenderest part. Their personal honour would be compromised by such scandalous conduct on the part of their daughters; their family honour would be wounded and the fair fame of posterity tarnished by such gross misconduct on the part of the daughters-in-law. The following observations are made on the last member of this thirteenth verse by the Hebrew commentators: "Because the men of the house go out of the city to the high mountains and under every green tree there to serve idols, therefore their daughters and daughters-in-law have opportunity to commit whoredom and adultery" (Kimchi). To like purpose Aben Ezra writes: "The sense is—On the bare mountains and so on the hills they sacrifice; they say to the priests of Baal that they shall sacrifice; and therefore, because the men go out of the cities in order to burn incense, the daughters and daughters-in-law remain in the houses behind, therefore they commit whoredom." Somewhat different is the explanation of Rashi: "Because ye associate for idolatry after the manner of the heathen, and the heathen associate with you, and ye form affinities with them, your daughters also who are born to you by the daughters of the heathen conduct themselves after the manner of their mothers, and commit whoredom."

Ver. 14.—**I will not punish your daughters when they commit whoredom, nor your spouses when they commit adultery.** The spiritual adultery of parents and husbands would be punished by the carnal adultery of daughters and wives; sin would thus be punished by sin. Their own dishonour and disgrace, through the unfaithfulness of persons so near to them, would impress them with a sense of the dishonour done to God, the spiritual Husband of his people; their feeling of pain and shame in consequence would convey to them a clearer notion of the abhorrence which their offences had occasioned to God. But their punishment would become more severe, and their pain intensified by the Divine refusal to avenge them by punishing the lewdness that caused such dishonour. While punishment would prevent the sin and consequent reproach, impunity, or the postponement of punishment, would leave the offenders to go on in their course of sin and shame. Aben Ezra comments on this fourteenth verse as follows: "The sense is—It is not to be wondered at if the daughters commit whoredom; for they themselves, when they go up to the tops of the mountains to burn incense, eat and drink with harlots and commit whoredom—all of them. And, behold, the sense is, not that he shall not punish them at all, but he speaks in regard to, *i.e.*

in comparison with, the fathers; for they teach them to commit whoredom doing according to their works. Perhaps the daughters are still little, therefore I shall not punish." Rashi thinks that this threatening refers to the disuse of the bitter waters of jealousy, so that suspected guilt could not be detected. But there is nothing to intimate such a reference; nor would it be in keeping with the scope of the passage. Again, some, as in the margin of the Authorized Version, read the words, not indicatively, but interrogatively—"Shall I not punish," etc.? This would require such a meaning to be read into the passage as the following: "Assuredly I shall punish them; and not the daughters and daughters-in-law only, but the parents and husbands still more severely, because of their greater criminality." Equally unsatisfactory is the explanation of Theodoret, who, taking פָּקַד in a good sense, which it has with the accusative, understands it of God's refusing any protection or preservation of their daughters and spouses from outrage at the hands of a hostile soldiery, so that such sins as they themselves had been guilty in private, would be committed with the females of their family in public. **For they themselves are separated with whores, and they sacrifice with harlots.** The change of person appears to imply that God turns away with inexpressible disgust from such vileness, and, turning aside to a third party, explains the grounds of his procedure. The *Q'desheth* were females who devoted themselves to licentiousness in the service of Ashtaroth, the Sidonian Venus. Persons of this description were attached to idol temples and idolatrous worship in heathen lands in ancient times, as in India at the present time. The 'Speaker's Commentary' calls them "devotee-harlots," and cites an allusion to the custom from the Moabite Stone, as follows: "I did not kill the women and maidens, for I devoted them to Ashtar-kemosh." After stating the humiliating fact that fathers and husbands in Israel, instead of uniting with their wives in the worship of Jehovah, separated themselves, going aside with these female idolaters for the purpose of lewdness, and shared in their sacrificial feasts, the prophet, or rather God by the prophet, impatient of the recital of such shameless licentiousness, and indignant at such presumptuous sinning, closes abruptly with the declaration of the recklessness, and denunciation of the ruin of all such offenders, in the words—**the people that doth not understand shall fall**; margin, *be punished*; rather, *dashed to the ground*, or *plunge into ruin* (*nilbat*). Both Aben Ezra and Kimchi give from the Arabic, as an alternative sense of *nilbat*, to fall into error.

Vers. 15—17.—In this section the prophet, as if despairing of any improvement or amendment on the part of Israel, still resolutely bent on spiritual whoredom, addresses an earnest warning to Judah. From proximity to those idolatries and debaucheries so prevalent in this northern kingdom, and from the corruption at least of the court in the southern kingdom during the reigns of Joram, Ahaziah, and Ahaz, Judah was in danger; and hence the prophet turned aside, with words of earnest warning, to the sister kingdom not to involve herself in the same or similar guilt. Rashi's brief comment here is, "Let not the children of Judah learn their ways."

Ver. 15.—**And come not ye unto Gilgal, neither go ye up to Beth-aven, nor swear, The Lord liveth.** From a solemn warning in general terms, he proceeds to a specific prohibition. The prohibition forbids pilgrimages to places of idol-worship, such as Gilgal and Beth-aven; it also forbids a profession of Jehovah-worship to be made by persons inclined to idolatrous practices. Gilgal, now the village of *Jiljilia*, which had been a school of the prophets in the days of Elijah and Elisha, had, as we may rightly infer from passages in Hosea and Amos, become a seat of idolatrous worship. The Hebrew interpreters confound the Gilgal here referred to with the still more renowned Gilgal between Jericho and the Jordan, where Joshua circumcised the people a second time, and celebrated the Passover, and where, manna failing, the people ate of the old corn of the land. "And why," asks Kimchi, "to Gilgal? Because at Gilgal the sanctuary was at the first when they entered the land; therefore when they went to worship idols they built high places there for the idols. But with respect to the tribe of Judah, what need has it to go to Gilgal and to leave the house of the sanctuary which is in their own cities?" And Beth-el, now *Beitin*, had become Beth-aven—the house of God a house of idols, after Jeroboam had set up the calf there. Judah was to eschew those places so perilous to purity of worship; also a practice hypocritical in its nature and highly dangerous in its tendency, namely, confessing Jehovah with the lips, and by a solemn act of attestation indicative of adherence to his worship, but belying that confession by complicity in idolatrous practices, like the peoples who "worshipped Jehovah, but served their own gods." Kimchi observes as follows: "For ye engage in strange worship, and yet swear by the Name of Jehovah; this is the way of incensing and despising him."

Ver. 16.—**For Israel slideth back as a backsliding heifer: now the Lord will feed them as a lamb in a large place.** This verse con-

veys the reason of the warning contained in the preceding; and that reason is the punishment which is to overtake Israel as the consequence of their refractoriness. If this view of the connection be correct, it will help to the right understanding of a difficult passage. The "backsliding," according to the Authorized Version, is rather "stubbornness," "intractableness," or "unmanageableness." Keil renders it "refractory." This refractoriness was Israel's sin; the people would have their own way, and became refractory, like an unmanageable heifer, which rebels upon being trained. Aben Ezra explains סֹרֵרָה (which, by the way, has *tsere* before the tone syllable) as follows: "He is he who turns aside from the way that is appointed him, so that he does not walk in it. And, behold, he compares Israel to a stubborn cow, with which a man cannot plough." So also Kimchi: "Like a heifer which goes on a crooked way, and curves itself from under the yoke, that a man cannot plough with it; so Israel are crooked under their God, as they have taken upon them the yoke of the Law and of the commandments which he commanded them, and curve themselves under the yoke, and break from off them the yoke of the commandments." Israel rebelled against instruction, waxed stubborn and intractable. They would have their own way, and worshipped according to their own will, in indulging all the while with a high hand in vilest lusts. Now the season of punishment is arrived; and as they refused instruction and rebelled against Divine guidance, God, in just judgment and deserved punishment, leaves them to themselves. Carried into captivity, they may worship what they will, and live as they list. In these circumstances they will resemble a lamb taken away into a wilderness, and left there to range the wild and live at large, but without provision and without protection. Untended by the shepherd's watchful care, ungnarded from ravening wolves or other beasts of prey, that lamb is in a lost and perishing condition. So shall it be with Israel. Aben Ezra gives as an alternative sense: "Now (Jehovah will feed them like a lamb) alone in a wide place, and it wanders to and fro." Kimchi cites as the opinion of others: "Some say, Now will Jehovah let them feed alone in a wide place, like a lamb which bleats and goes to and fro, and neither rests nor feeds." Another meaning has been attached to the verse, to the effect that Israel, subdued by chastisement, will renounce their stubbornness, and, rendered tractable and tame, become like a lamb, which, brought to feel its helplessness amid a wilderness, requires and receives the shepherd's care. We much prefer the former.

Ver. 17.—Ephraim is joined to idols: let him alone. Ephraim being the dominant tribe, gave its name to the northern kingdom. The idols were Ephraim's folly, and to that they were wedded; and in consequence they are left to their folly, and at the same time surrendered to their fate. They may persist in their folly; they cannot be prevented. "Give him rest," as the words literally mean, from exhortations and expostulations, from remonstrances and reproofs; he will persist in his folly, prepare for his fate, and perish by his sin. This abandonment of Ephraim proves the desperate nature of his case. Left to his own recklessness, he is rushing towards ruin. Judah is warned to stand aloof from the contagion, lest by interference he might get implicated in the sin and involved in the punishment of Ephraim. The Hebrew commentators express the word rendered "joined to" in the Authorized Version (ver. 17) by words importing "yoked to," "allied with," and "cleaving to." Again, רֵעַ, imperative of רָעָה, is explained by them as follows:—Rashi: "Leave off, O prophet, and prophesy not to reprove him, for it is of no use." Aben Ezra: "Let him alone till God shall chastise him; perhaps his eyes shall then open." Kimchi: "Jehovah says to the prophet, Cease to reprove him, for it is of no use. . . . As a man who is angry with his fellow, because he will not hearken to him when he reproves him, and says, Since thou hearkenest not to me, I will cease for ever to reprove thee."

Vers. 18, 19.—The first of these two verses gives a picture of the degeneracy of the times; the second predicts the destruction that would ensue. Their drink is sour (margin, *is gone*): they have committed whoredom continually. If the first clause be taken literally, (1) it denotes a charge of drunkenness preferred against Ephraim. To this vice the people of the northern kingdom, as is well known, were addicted: the wine, from oft-repeated potations, became sour in the stomach and produced loathsome eructations. (2) Some, connecting closely the first and second clauses, and translating as in the margin, explain the meaning to be that "when their intoxication is gone they commit whoredom." But though drunkenness and debauchery frequently go together, it is rather during the former than afterwards that the latter is indulged in. (3) The first clause had better be understood figuratively, and the latter either literally or figuratively, or both. Thus the sense is the degeneracy of principle among the people in general, or rather among the principal men of that day. By the finest wine becoming vapid, the prophet represents the leading men of the nation, on whom so much depended and from whom so

much might be expected, as becoming unprincipled, and as being addicted to immorality or idolatry, or probably both (*hazneh hiznu*): "whoring they have committed whoredom." (1) **Her rulers** (margin, *shields*) with **shame do love, Give ye**; or rather, (2) *her shields love, love shame.* The first takes הָבוּ for הָבוּ, as imperative of יָהַב, to give, and should rather be, "Her shields love, 'Give ye'—shame," as there is no preposition before the word "shame;" even thus it is awkward. Most modern expositors take הָבוּ as a contraction of אֹהֲבוּ, and so a repetition of part of the full verb preceding; thus: אָהֲבוּ הָבוּ, equivalent to "loved, loved." Ewald, Delitzsch, and Pusey understand it so; the latter says this "is probably one of the earliest forms of the intensive verb, repeating a part of the verb itself with its inflection." And Keil calls it "a construction resembling the *pealal* form." Among the *sebirin*, or conjectural readings, we find both words united into one; thus: אֹהֲבָהֲבוּ, equivalent to "mightily love." The shields are the princes, or natural protectors of the state, as in Ps. xlvii. 9, "The princes of the people are gathered together . . . for the shields of the earth belong unto God." The shame they loved was the sin which is a shame to either princes or people, causes shame, and ends in shame. Isaiah expounds the thought (in i. 22), a comparison of which confirms the above exposition. (1) **The wind hath bound her up in her wings**; or, (2) *she hath bound up the wind with her in her skirts.* In the one case the wind is the strong storm-wind of Divine wrath that will seize on Ephraim, wrap her up with its wings, and carry her away. In the other, Ephraim wraps up the wind, that is, disappointment, the result of her sin, in the fold of her skirt. The (1) translation of the first clause of ver. 19 is supported by Rashi: "The storm takes her in its wings, as that bird which the wind does not let rest until it makes him go far away; so the enemies will come upon them and carry them into exile." Translation (2) is favoured by Aben Ezra and Kimchi; the former says, "As the man who binds the wind in the folds of his robe without finding anything therein." **And they shall be ashamed because of their sacrifices.** Frustrated in her hopes, and disappointed by the idols, from which she hoped so much and got so little, she is ashamed of the sacrifices she offered them; not of the altars (LXX.), for the preposition *min* is indispensable.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—5.—*Israel's sin and consequent suffering.* The prophet is Jehovah's mouth-piece, and as such he calls on his fellow-men to hear the word of the Lord; he thus speaks by commission and with authority. Having thus claimed an attentive hearing in his Master's Name, he denounces Israel's sins, and declares the judgments that await them. In this discharge of his duty the prophet has a twofold object in view. By his timely and truthful warning he hopes to reclaim some, at least, of his countrymen, and in any case he means to leave all without excuse. God by his ambassador displays in this way both his mercy and his justice. His mercy in that he speaks to them before he strikes them—he warns them of their danger while it is yet impending, and before they are actually involved in it; his justice—for he condescends to debate the matter with his people, and convince them of the reasonableness of his dealings, that they may see that he does not contend with them without cause, and that when he is forced to execute sentence for their sins, that sentence has been well deserved.

I. RELIGION IS THE SURE FOUNDATION OF MORALITY. True religion begins with a saving knowledge of God. This is the fountain-head; moral duties are the salutary streams that issue from it. Godliness is the source of uprightness; piety towards God produces propriety of conduct in demeaning ourselves and in dealing with others; where the right knowledge of God is absent, we need not expect truth or mercy among men. On the contrary, a profession of piety without the performance of duty to our fellows God will disown; without truth and mercy religion is only a pretence, a painful hypocrisy. Religion, then, is the rich soil in which virtue strikes root and its growth is maintained.

II. THE RELATION OF THE VIRTUES HERE SPECIFIED. With regard to mercy and truth, Kimchi has well remarked that "no truth" imports that there is "no one doing the truth, and no one speaking the truth;" while on the words "nor mercy," he adds, "How much [does it follow thence] that there is no mercy, for mercy is the

superabundance of goodness over and above what is meet; and as to him who does not maintain either truth or justice, how much less will he show mercy?" The combination of truth, mercy, and knowledge of God may be compared with the triple duties specified by Micah, as doing justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly with God; and with the apostolic triad of living soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world. In each of these our duty to ourselves, to our neighbour, and to our God is expressed; so, too, in the verse before us. While mercy mainly respects the duty we owe our fellow-man, and knowledge of God our relation to him, truth has to do with a man himself as well as with his neighbour. We are to be true to conscience, seeking to have it enlightened, striving to keep it clear, and having the courage of our convictions. We are to be true to ourselves, in our strangely composite personality; true to the soul by seeking its salvation, for "what shall it profit a man, should he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" true to the body by preserving its purity, maintaining its sobriety, and securing its health, that we may possess a sound mind in a sound body. Of course, truth has large scope in our intercourse with others. We are required to be truthful in our utterances, true to our promises, true in all our engagements, true and just in all our dealings. The duty of mercy, in a world where sin has wrought such ruin and caused such misery, is obvious. As sinful creatures, we need the mercy of our Creator; as suffering, sorrowful beings, we are strongly obligated to the exercise of mercy towards each other.

> "The quality of mercy is not strain'd;
> It droppeth, as the gentle rain from heaven
> Upon the place beneath: it is twice bless'd;
> It blesseth him that gives, and him that takes:
> 'Tis mightiest in the mightiest; . . ."

while

> "In the course of justice, none of us
> Should see salvation."

III. OMISSIONS SOON MAKE WAY FOR COMMISSIONS. When the duties of truth, mercy, and the knowledge of God were omitted, the grossest sins succeeded and took their place. But we must notice the expression, "in the land;" this appears to mean more than the general prevalence of such through all this country; it seems to hint at Israel's ingratitude. God had given them that good land, where God should have had grateful worshippers and a holy people. Kimchi makes the following judicious comment on this subject: "I have a controversy with them (the inhabitants of the land of Israel), for I gave them the land conditionally that they should exercise justice and judgment; and herein I made a covenant with them, that my eyes should be upon it from the beginning of the year even to the end of the year. But since they acted in a way contrary to this—perjuring, stealing, and committing adultery—I also will act towards them in a way contrary to what I promised, and hide my face from them; and the land shall mourn, and all the dwellers in it shall languish." The sins committed by Israel at this period evidence an almost disorganized state of society. The most important duties were omitted and the most enormous sins committed; nor was this strange, when there was no knowledge of God in the land; and yet this very circumstance was the great aggravation both of their omissions and commissions. It was the privilege of the highly favoured inhabitants of that land to know God; as we read, "In Judah is God known: his Name is great in Israel. In Salem also is his tabernacle, and his dwelling-place in Zion." But while both tables of the Law were transgressed, and fearfully transgressed, the violations of the sixth commandment were something shocking. This black feature in Israel's iniquity is made prominent by the prophet, and specially noticed by the Hebrew expositors. Rashi says, "They multiply the shedding of bloods until the blood of one slain man touches the blood of his neighbour;" and Kimchi's comment is, "The bloods of the slain touch one another from abundance." Though we may not be able to fix with certainty the period referred to, it may with considerable probability be conjectured that about this time the numerous and dreadful regicides occurred. Shallum slaying Zechariah; Menahem slaying Shal-

lum; Pekah slaying Pekahiah; and Hoshea slaying Pekah; so that "the land was polluted with blood."

IV. HUMAN SINFULNESS DRAPES NATURE IN WEEDS OF WOE. We have here at once an expansion and illustration of the sentiment of the psalm (cvii. 33, 34), "He turneth . . . a fruitful land into barrenness, for the wickedness of them that dwell therein." Man and beast, fish and fowl alike, are sufferers in consequence of human sin. The whole creation groaneth and suffereth together in consequence of the creature having been subjected to vanity. "When," says Jerome, on this verse, "the inhabitant is removed, the beasts also, and fowls of heaven, and fishes of the sea shall fail; and even the dumb elements shall feel the wrath of God." Many actual illustrations of this state of things, we doubt not, had taken place in the history of Israel, as in the days of Ahab and many a time besides. When rain was long delayed and drought ensued, the land mourned and its inhabitants languished.

V. PERVERSENESS IS A PREPARATIVE FOR DESTRUCTION. When people become so froward and perverse as to be beyond reproof, so that God says of them, as he does in effect of Israel in this passage, "Let them proceed and reproof cease," they are on the very verge of a fearful precipice. Israel had gone so far towards that perilous position that no private person was permitted to warn, if so disposed, or reason with his neighbour; not even the priest, God's appointed minister, in those days dared venture to do so, or if he did it was labour lost. They stumble and fall, teacher and taught, prophet and people together. As also both night and day alike; by day, when danger was least and the disgrace greatest; in the night season, when darkness made destruction inevitable. Worst of all, no helper to be hoped for; or, rather, the mother—she that might be expected to hold up or lift up her children—is herself doomed. That mother, whether Samaria, the mother city, or the commonwealth itself, the mother of them all, was devoted to the silence of destruction.

Vers. 6—10.—*Priestly neglect and its consequences.* This section deals with the sin and punishment of the priests, as the preceding one had described the sin and punishment of the people. The priests here referred to were probably Levitical priests still scattered through the northern kingdom, since God speaks of them as *his* priests; while those which Jeroboam appointed out of other tribes than that of Levi, and from all, even the lowest, ranks of society, were rather priests for the worship of the calves.

I. MINISTERIAL UNFAITHFULNESS. The ignorance of the people is here attributed to priestly negligence. They disliked and despised the knowledge of God for themselves, and consequently had no heart for dispensing it to others. The means available for knowing God they did not take advantage of, and accordingly their own ignorance unfitted them for instructing the people. Idleness combined with indifference in the case of these unfaithful ministers of religion, so that they were neither rightly instructed themselves nor capable of instructing others; while their carelessness increased their incapacity. It is incumbent on all public teachers to be diligent in their private studies; and a fearful responsibility is incurred by those who, appointed to instruct others in religious matters, refuse to take the pains necessary to qualify them for the efficient discharge of such important duty. It is a grievous sin for ministers of religion to serve God with what costs them nothing, and so to feed God's people with husks instead of the finest of the wheat. How different is the picture our Lord gives us of one who is faithful to such an important trust! "Therefore," he says, "every scribe which is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is a householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old."

II. THE PUNISHMENT CORRESPONDS TO THEIR SIN. They had rejected Divine knowledge; God rejects their priestly services. They had forgotten the Law from disuse, no doubt having previously forsaken it; God threatens to forget them, and, what was more galling, their children after them, so that the priesthood would be lost to them for ever. Wünsche and some others insist that it is the people and not the priesthood that is here addressed; that the whole nation is addressed as a single person, and that consequently the children are the individual members of the nation. Both priests and people were guilty in this matter. Both had shut their eyes upon the light, and the light was at length withdrawn. Both had said, "Depart from us: we desire not the knowledge of thy ways;" and God in turn had virtually said to them, "Depart from me: I

know you not." The priests, whose duty was to teach the people knowledge, had been unable or unwilling to do so, and the people remained in ignorance; the people, who should have received the Law from the priests' lips, are represented as striving with, and gainsaying, their spiritual instructors. The consequence was that they destroyed themselves, for the verb *nidmu* has here the proper reflexive sense of the Niphal; nor is it without knowledge, but because of the want of (*mibb'li*) the necessary knowledge. The punishment, if it be not a re-echo, yet reminds us of 1 Sam. xv. 26, where Samuel says to Saul, "For thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, and the Lord hath rejected thee from being king over Israel." The worst feature of the case was their gross and grievous ingratitude; for just in proportion as they increased in numbers and in wealth they multiplied transgression; just as of old "when Jeshurun waxed fat, he kicked." Kimchi, indeed, in mentioning the exposition of those who regarded the increase as financial rather than numerical, says, "Some interpret 'according to their increase' as equivalent to 'as I increased them in wealth and riches so they sinned against me;' after the manner of 'when Jeshurun waxed fat, he kicked.'" Their increase, either in number or riches—and both we think, are included—ministered to the sins of an unthankful people, and afforded occasions of trespassing yet more and more against God. Justly, then, did God turn to shame that which he had given Israel for the Divine glory, but which Israel used for vain-glory. "He," says Pusey, "not only gives them shame *instead* of their glory; he makes the glory itself the means and occasion of their shame. Beauty becomes the occasion of degradation; pride is proverbially near a fall; 'vaulting ambition overleaps itself and falls on th' other side;' riches and abundance of population tempt nations to wars which become their destruction, or they invite other and stronger nations to prey upon them." Jehoash's reproof of Amaziah and the result, as recorded in 2 Kings xiv. 9—14, furnishes a good illustration of this subject.

III. GAIN TAKES THE PLACE OF GODLINESS. Whichever interpretation be adopted, the general sense here remains the same. The priests pandered to the sins of the people, and, lest they should lose their influence with them, they connived at and countenanced their sins when they should have sharply censured them. Or they encouraged sin that they might share the sin offerings presented in expiation. What was this in either case but to live by and upon the sin of a people sinful and laden with iniquity? Calvin, who makes the priests and people share the sin in common, says, "There is a collusion between the priests and the people. How so? Because the priests were the associates of robbers, and gladly seized on what was brought; and so they carried on no war, as they ought to have done, with vices, but, on the contrary, urged only the necessity of sacrifices; and it was enough if men brought things plentifully to the temple. The people also themselves showed their contempt for God; for they imagined that, provided they made satisfaction by their ceremonial performances, they would be exempt from punishment. Thus, then, there was an ungodly compact between the priests and the people; the Lord was mocked in the midst of them."

IV. WHAT IS GOT BY SIN GIVES NO SATISFACTION. "Ill got, ill gone," is a common proverb and a very pithy one; so with these faithless priests in their ministrations for a sinful people. They said in effect, "The more sin the more sacrifices, and so the greater our share of profits;" but there was no satisfaction in such things and no success by them. 1. The pleasures of sin are mostly sensual; they last only for a season—a short one; and they afford no real satisfaction even when they do last. "What profit," asks the apostle, "had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of those things is death." 2. The priests, instead of reproving sin, did practically recommend it by their own godless conduct; and the people were well pleased to have it so. Alike in sin, however, they shall be alike in suffering; they helped each other in sin, they must have their share in punishment. The priests abused their position by neither practising piety themselves nor inculcating its practice on others; the people, freed from all restraint and having no fear of God before their eyes, sinned with a high hand. Both ran to an excess of riot, and both are to be punished with equal severity; neither can reasonably expect to be spared. 3. The root of the evil was their leaving off to take heed to the Lord. The word *shamar*, here rendered "to take heed to," is very expressive; it means to have a sharp eye upon, then to observe attentively. Applied to a person, it signifies to have the eye steadily set on his will, to meet his wishes, to

obey. Thus it is said of one waiting on his master, as in Prov. xxvii. 18, "He that waiteth on his master shall be honoured;" while in the hundred and twenty-third psalm we have a good practical illustration of the observance indicated: "Behold, as the eyes of servants look unto the hand of their masters, and as the eyes of a maiden unto the hand of her mistress; so our eyes wait upon the Lord our God, until that he have mercy upon us."

Vers. 11—14.—*Faults in the life breed errors in the brain, and errors in the brain produce in turn faults in the life.* Thus it was with Israel. Debauchery and drunkenness, and this to an extreme degree, had darkened the understanding, hardened the heart, paralyzed the will, and seared the conscience. In this enfeebled state of their intellectual and moral powers, they had recourse, in cases of doubt or difficulty, not to the high priest, or prophets of God, or Divine Word, for guidance and direction, but to their images of wood or idolatrous divining staff.

I. SIN LEADS TO SIN. If sorrows love a train, sins like a series. How often the culprit endeavours to conceal his guilt by lying, and thus adds one sin to another! Lewdness and intemperance, as here intimated, frequently go hand in hand. Since, then, sins are so linked to each other, our safety as well as our duty is to resist the very beginnings and buddings of evil in the soul. Every time sin is indulged the power of resistance is weakened, until men become the prey of the evil one, and, after a few weak wrestlings of the spirit against the flesh, the heart is easily taken captive. An effectual way of avoiding vice or any vicious course is to practise the opposite virtues. This is vastly more than forming a theory of virtue in one's thoughts; for, as Butler has shown, "from our very faculty of habits passive impressions, by being repeated, grow weaker," but "practical habits are formed and strengthened by repeated acts."

II. THE FOLLY OF SIN. The stupidity of which Israel gave evidence is traced to a spirit of whoredoms. The *ruach*, or spirit, in this passage somewhat resembles the personification of Atē by the Greeks, which in Homer denotes the infatuation or spirit of error that prompts to crime, then the crime committed, and also the punishment that overtakes crime. In the allegoric representation of Atē by Homer she has different and apparently contradictory attributes: as infatuation, taking possession of the mind; and blinding its faculties through passion. She has tender feet, does not tread on the ground, but moves gently and noiselessly over men's heads, surprising them in their unguarded moments, to their unspeakable injury. Again, in the commission of crime her gait is marked by strength of body and firmness of step and strong excitement, while in the punishment of crime the retribution is sudden, powerful, and certain. In these two capacities, that is to say, the perpetration of crime and its punishment, she is vigorous and firm of step. To the spirit of whoredom as an evil spirit of infatuation, like this Greek Atē, bewilderingly misleading men to the perpetration of evil and making them obnoxious to punishment, the prophet traces Israel's stupidity in consulting idols and similar means of divination on the one hand, and their sin in departing from God, the loving Husband and rightful Head of his people, on the other. Thus the spirit of whoredoms may be compared with similar Scripture expressions, such as a spirit of jealousy, a lying spirit, an unclean spirit; or it may denote the vehement spirit with which men, bent on idolatry and adultery—adultery both in the spiritual and carnal sense—were hurried along; while the faithlessness of the adulteress fitly represents the spiritual infidelity of Israel.

III. ZEAL CONTRARY TO KNOWLEDGE. The people of Israel fancied that they were worshipping God on the high hills and under the tall trees; but this was ignorant will-worship, or worse. God had appointed Jerusalem as the place of his worship, and had commanded sacrifices and incense to be offered there, and nowhere else. 1. The multiplication of altars and memorials elsewhere, however praiseworthy Israel might imagine it, was really a violation of the Divine command; and so God regarded it, for "behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams." Will-worship may have a show of wisdom in it, and may be well meaning, yet it is will-worship all the same. If we will worship God acceptably, then it must be in the place he has appointed and in the manner he has himself prescribed. Mountains have often been associated with sacred service and sacred scenes. Thus the sacrifice of Isaac was to be on a mountain; the giving of the Law was on a mountain; the temple was

erected on a mountain; the transfiguration, the crucifixion, and the ascension, were each on a mountain. But mountains became scenes of idolatry and sin, and therefore God, when he forbade such worship, forbade the scenes thereof. 2. Israel's zeal was worthy of a better cause. That zeal characterized their sacrifices, for it is the intensive form of the verb that is used—*yezabbechu* (Piel), not *yizbechu* (Qal); it distinguished their burning of incense, for again it is first *yeqatteru*, not *yaqteru*. "The words express," says Pusey, "that this which God forbade they did diligently; they sacrificed much and diligently; they burned incense much and diligently." Nor was this all. They performed with equal diligence both the important parts of the service—the sacrifice and the burning of incense. 3. The blood of the sacrifice signified atonement; the pleasant smell of the incense typified service acceptably offered. "Incense, being fragrant, represented that which is pleasing, and which has in it acceptability; and when offered along with prayer, praise, or any feeling of the soul, exhibited a type of the merits of the Surety enveloping his people's services."

IV. MEN'S OWN SINS ARE OFTEN MADE THEIR SCOURGES. Never did the great poet of human nature give expression to a truer sentiment than that—

> "The gods are just, and of our pleasant vices
> Make instruments to scourge us."

This was eminently the case with Israel. They had committed spiritual adultery, renouncing their subjection to him by violation of the marriage covenant, and thereby forfeiting that protection secured to them by the conditions of that covenant. "They," says an old writer, "who commit idolatry, and follow false religions, and so do renounce subjection to God, and put themselves from under his directions, do also put themselves from under his protection; for in both these respects it is true that Israel went a-whoring from under their God." They prostituted themselves to idols, and withdrew from under God's authority, casting off the obedience they owed him and the reverence which was his due. Nay, more, fathers of families and husbands at the head of households were not only guilty of spiritual whoredom or idolatry; they were guilty of carnal whoredom with those vile priestesses to abominable idols and prostitutes to the worshippers—devotee-harlots who had consecrated themselves to a life of sin, as though such shameful desecration of themselves were consecration to Divine service. Now they are in turn disgraced and distressed by the whoredom of their daughters and the adultery of their wives; nor are they allowed to comfort themselves by the hope of a speedy cessation of such corruption, for, unchecked by chastisement, the licentiousness continues, prosperity in sin tempting to perseverance. "So," says Pusey, "through their own disgrace and bitter griefs, in the persons of those whose honour they most cherished, they should learn how ill they themselves had done, in departing from him who is the Father and Husband of every soul. The sins of the fathers descend very often to the children, both in the way of nature, that the children inherit strong temptations to their parents' sin, and by way of example, that they greedily imitate, often exaggerate them."

Vers. 15—19.—*A passing word of warning is addressed to Judah.* The prophet pauses in his dark catalogue of Israel's sins and sorrows, and, turning aside, speaks a word of warning to Judah, that the people of the southern kingdom might be deterred from the crimes and awed by the calamities of their northern neighbours. In the large heart and catholic spirit of the prophet both Judahite and Israelite found a place; he had a message from God for both.

I. PLACES PERILOUS TO PIETY SHOULD BE SHUNNED. Judah had hitherto maintained their superiority to Israel both in religious worship and moral conduct; but their proximity to such neighbours was fraught with peril. Evil communications exercise a fearful potency in corrupting good manners; sensual indulgences, especially in the guise and under the name of religion, present strong inducements; scenes of sin have not unfrequently a fatal glamour about them. If Judah would steer clear of the rocks on which the faith of Israel had been wrecked, they must keep aloof from such places of peril and scenes of dissipation as Gilgal and Beth-aven. Wantonness and crime had proved disastrous to Israel, therefore let Judah beware and take warning in time. If men are in earnest in their prayers and in their efforts to avoid temptation, they must

keep away from those places and those persons that would tend to lead them into temptation. Hypocritical profession with irreligious practice was both detrimental and dangerous. After this friendly warning to Judah, Hosea resumes his complaint about Israel.

II. PUNISHMENT IS OFTEN A DARK REFLECTION OF MEN'S SINS. Israel had refused God's yoke, comparatively easy as it was, and started backward or turned sideward instead of drawing forward. They declined God's service, and determined to have full liberty and licence. They got their desire, but it was given them in judgment. The limits of the law and its straitness provoked their resistance; now they will be permitted to wander forth as captives through the wide wilderness of the East, or as exiles with all the world before them. They had been strong and stubborn as a headstrong, unmanageable heifer; now they are to become solitary as a lamb shut out from its flock or separated from its dam, and in a state as helpless as that same weak creature when exposed to savage beasts of prey, and left alone amid the wasteness of a wilderness. Ephraim, turning away her affections from her Maker as her Husband, got attached to idols, and clave fast to them; and so they are given up to their own hearts' lusts. They don't wish to part with their beloved idols, or to be parted from them; nor shall they. They are incorrigible, and God gives them up as beyond reproof and without hope—absolutely desperate. They wished to be left to themselves and their own ways, and so they are; not even Judah is to interfere with them. They are to be let go on without check from conscience, or reproof from prophet, or warning from the Divine Word, or any interference by Providence. "It is a sad and sore judgment for any man to be let alone in sin: for God to say concerning a sinner, 'He is joined to his idols, the world and the flesh; he is incurably proud, covetous, or profane, an incurable drunkard or adulterer,—let him alone; conscience, let him alone; minister, let him alone; providences, let him alone. Let nothing awaken him till the flames of hell do it.' The father corrects not the rebellious son any more when he determines to disinherit him. Those that are not disturbed in their sin will be destroyed for their sin."

III. PERSISTENCE IN EVIL PROVOCATIVE OF DIVINE DESERTION. 1. *Persistence in evil.* Idolaters are so attached to their idol-gods that they will not give them up, however hideous those idols or however vile those gods may be. (1) The people of Israel were bound to their idols; as another prophet says, "They hold fast deceit;" they are even as loth to change as to give up their idols. "Hath a nation changed their gods, which are yet no gods?" The word in the original is the same as that used in Gen. xiv. of the kings who came together as *confederates* unto the valley of Siddim; and never was there a more unholy alliance than that of Israel and Israel's idols, or that of sinners and their beloved lusts in general. The word is also used of *fascination*, by binding magical knots; and never was magical knot tighter or fascination stronger than that of an easily besetting sin over its victim. Men have been found to sacrifice their best and dearest interests for the sake of some low lust, some evil propensity, or some sinful habit. (2) A great disproportion. "But," says an old writer, "will idolaters thus adhere to their idols? will their hearts be united to them? are they willing to be one spirit with them? Oh, how much more should we be joined to the Lord our God, to Jesus Christ [the Saviour, and to the Holy Spirit the Sanctifier—the glorious triune Jehovah], to be as one spirit with him! That exhortation of Barnabas (Acts xi. 23), that with full 'purpose of heart they should cleave unto the Lord,' is seasonable at all times." 2. *Divine desertion.* This was implied in the injunction to whomsoever it was addressed. (1) If addressed to Judah, as it seems, it enjoins them to withdraw from Israel, though their countrymen and brethren—to have nothing more to do with them, to leave them to themselves, to let them alone. Few things are worse to bear than spiritual isolation. When the saints withdraw from a man because of the stubbornness of his rebellion against God, and his incorrigible wilfulness in the pursuit of sin, it is a heavy judgment from God; it is equal in bitterness to the curse pronounced on the man who loveth not the Lord Jesus Christ, and of whom it is said, "Let him be Anathema-Maranatha." As if it were said, "Let a curse rest on the devoted head of such a one; let him be left to himself, deserted by the saints and servants of God; in a word, let him alone till the coming of the Lord, and the Lord will deal with him." (2) If the injunction is addressed to the prophet, it means that he is to take no further

trouble with Ephraim, and cast no more pearls before swine; that he is to cease his ministry in that direction, and shake the very dust off his feet as a testimony against such wayward rebels. So when ministers have exhausted all their powers of persuasion, and all the varied resources of admonition, warning, entreaty, remonstrance with stout-hearted, refractory sinners, a time comes when they must just let them alone, leaving them to be dealt with by the Master at his coming. (3) But, worst of all, God himself lets them alone; and when he does so, it is a token of their rejection. A father has used all legitimate means to reclaim his profligate, prodigal, or rebellious son; and when all has proved in vain, he is forced to say, "I have done with him; I disown him; I will have nothing more to do with him; I will leave him to himself, and let him alone." So God lets men alone when he gives them over to themselves, leaving them to their own devices, to their lusts, to their evil ways, to their doings that are not good. "They would none of me," saith God, "so I gave them up to their own counsels." The Spirit of the living God has striven with that man to turn him away from his injustice, or profanity, or drunkenness, or impurity, or hypocrisy; but he has resisted the Spirit, stifled the voice of conscience, and gone on in his way of wickedness, till God, long-suffering though he be, and full of infinite loving-kindness, says at last, "My Spirit shall not always strive. Let him that is filthy be filthy still; let him that is unjust be unjust still." (4) Consider the dreadful import of this brief sentence —"Let him alone." It is as if God said, "Let him alone—he is rushing on ruin; let no barrier interpose to stop him; let him take his own way. Hitherto, and for long, he has been checked by the restraints of Providence; now let him alone." It is all very well when a man is at ease, in safety, or among his friends, to let him alone; but when he is rushing into the sweltering tide of ocean, or into the blazing fire of a widespread conflagration, or in among most deadly enemies, to let him alone is to consign him to destruction. It is not necessary that God should send his power to overwhelm us, in his justice to condemn us, or his wrath to consume us; he has only to let us alone, and our destruction is inevitable. When he let Adam alone, leaving him to himself, he undid himself and his posterity; when he let Hezekiah alone, what misery that good king brought upon himself and his subjects! (5) Let the fear of this terrible Lord God awe us! Beware of committing wilful sin, lest God should say, "Let him alone." Dread of being thus let alone is a sure sign that God has not let us alone, and safe way of keeping us from being let alone. May the good Lord preserve us from such a fearful fate!

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—5.—*The Lord's lawsuit.* The introduction to the Book of Hosea consists of a symbolical narrative, contained in ch. i.—iii. The body of the book is occupied with discourses, which are full of mingled reproaches, threatenings, and promises. Ch. iv. evidently reflects the condition of the nation during the interregnum which followed the death of Jeroboam II. The key-word of the first strophe (vers. 1—5) is the word "controversy" (ver. 1), used in the sense of a legal action—a suit at law. Jehovah represents himself as prosecuting Israel for breach of contract.

I. THE SUMMONS. (Ver. 1.) A solemn covenant had been concluded at Sinai between God and the chosen nation. It had the Decalogue for its basis, and it had been ratified by sacrifice (Exod. xx.—xxiv.). But the people of the ten tribes had infringed the covenant, and exposed themselves (taking the figure of the passage) to legal proceedings for breach of contract. The summons, however, was not served without extreme provocation. For the Lord is not litigious. He is "merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy" (Ps. ciii. 8). We shall see from the indictment that almost every obligation of the sacred compact had been violated.

II. THE INDICTMENT. (Vers. 1, 2.) It is a tremendous one. There are two weighty counts in it, and together they show that by this time the very bonds of society in Israel had been dissolved. 1. *Religion was dead.* (Ver. 1.) "No truth." "Truth" may here be taken to cover the entire masculine side of the religious character, and to include all such strong virtues as veracity, faithfulness, integrity, righteousness, immutability. To love truth is one of the first duties of religion. "Nor mercy." This word

represents the feminine side of piety, and includes such graces as pity, clemency, kindness, sympathy. These fatal defects were due to the lack of "knowledge of God in the land." Mercy and truth are glorious perfections of the Divine nature, and their existence as virtues of social ethics depends upon right conceptions regarding him. But Israel had lost the knowledge of Jehovah. The calf-shrines had been her ruin. The image-worship had destroyed the spiritual service of God. And the failure of the heart-knowledge led to the failure of head-knowledge also, and that in turn to the loss of all virtue. How sad that there should be "no knowledge of God in the land"! For was it not the land of Immanuel, and were not its citizens "a people near unto him"? How dreadful such an indictment against the nation of whom the psalmist exultingly sings, "In Judah is God known: his Name is great in Israel" (Ps. lxxvi. 1)! 2. *Immorality was rampant.* (Ver. 2.) The sin of Jeroboam I., in setting up the golden calves and encouraging the systematic violation of the second commandment, had become the fruitful source of disobedience to the whole moral Law. It had paved the way for the deeper apostasy of Baalism (1 Kings xvi. 31); and, the first two commandments being overturned, little respect was any longer paid to the others. Ver. 2 presents a picture of the eleven years which followed the death of Jeroboam II., when the forces of revolution and anarchy were struggling for the upper hand. Then the land was full of perjury and violence. All kinds of evil broke forth like a flood. The third commandment, the sixth, the seventh, the eighth, the ninth, were alike disregarded. One deed of blood trod upon the heels of another; assassination following assassination, and slaughter avenging slaughter. The character of the people, and of their prophets and priests, was hopelessly bad. Reproof would be in vain (ver. 4). The men of Israel were as contumacious as those who refused to obey the priest when he gave judgment in Jehovah's Name (Deut. xvii. 12). Indeed, the sin of the whole kingdom, which began with the renunciation of the Aaronical priesthood, may be symbolically described as that of "striving with the priest." And now, at last, even the very mercy of God had to be withdrawn from the nation.

III. THE JUDGMENT. (Vers. 3—5.) The Lord does not cite and plead in vain. He is "justified when he speaks, and clear when he judges." The punishment of Israel's sin is to be universal and very terrible. The judgment is to fall upon: 1. *The soil.* (Ver. 3.) The threatening here is that of a universal drought. The very ground is to be cursed because of the people's guilt. The famine is to be one of fearful severity. In a sense, the soil of Palestine may be said to be lying under that visitation yet. Canaan is naturally "a fruitful land;" but God has turned it "into barrenness, for the wickedness of them that dwelt therein." 2. *The lower creatures.* Animal life is to decline by reason of the drought. The brute creation shall be reduced to an extremity of hunger on account of the people's sin. 3. *The people themselves.* They are to be punished with: (1) Loss of *health.* "Every one that dwelleth therein shall languish"—the physical frame losing strength and tone, and "joy being withered away from the sons of men" (Joel i. 12). (2) Loss of *food,* due to the breaking of the two staffs of life—the failure of the harvests and the destruction of the animals. (3) Loss of *grace* (ver. 4). Expostulation with the people would be useless. They hated reproof. God's Spirit had ceased to strive with Ephraim; he was "joined to idols" (ver. 17). The men of Israel were so desperately wicked that it was "impossible to renew them again unto repentance." (4) Loss of *life* (ver. 5). "Evil shall slay the wicked." The people of the ten tribes, with their false prophets, are to perish in their sins. The slaughter is to be continuous, neither day nor night being free from it. It is also to be indiscriminate, and at last universal. And the loss of temporal life is only the shadow of deeper spiritual loss, beyond in eternity. 4. *The nation as such.* (Ver. 5.) "I will destroy thy mother." The Israelitish state was the "mother" of the people; and already, by reason of the family wickedness, she is driving fast along the highway to destruction. These closing words, indeed, are her funeral knell.

CONCLUSION. Two lessons of this passage are specially prominent, viz. (1) the essential connection between religion and morality; (2) the inevitable connection between national sin and national suffering. Wherever the right knowledge of God is wanting, there sin and Satan are sure to triumph. Ancient Greece gave to Europe the glorious beginnings both of political and intellectual life, and was herself resplendent

with the choicest triumphs of literature and art; yet some of her wisest philosophers countenanced the practice of unmentionable vices. The sun never shone upon a more brilliant company of scholars, poets, philosophers, orators, jurists, and *litterateurs*, than that which adorned the court of Augustus, the first emperor of Rome; yet during the Augustan age the Roman people were plunging into depths of moral degradation which ultimately led to the ruin of the empire. On the other hand, when the general overthrow of the continental monarchs took place in 1848, and the throne of Great Britain remained as stable as ever, M. Guizot said one day to Lord Shaftesbury, "I will tell you what saved your empire. It was not your constable; it was not your army; it was not your statesmen. It was the deep, solemn, religious atmosphere that still is breathed over the whole people of England." For nations, knowledge of God and acceptance of his salvation are necessary, in order to the prevalence of that righteousness which is the source of national stability. And for each citizen in like manner, "This is life eternal, to know the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent."—C. J.

Vers. 6—14.—*Israel's guilt and punishment.* Priests and people were guilty alike, and would be overtaken by one common doom.

I. THE SIN OF THE PRIESTS. 1. They rejected the knowledge of God (ver. 6). They did not engage in the study of the Divine Law, and their lives were a violation of its precepts. 2. They consequently failed to teach the Law to the people (ver. 6). 3. They connived at the national idolatry, on account of the material profit which they obtained from it (ver. 8). The calf-worship brought them many sacrificial fees; so the priests, instead of rebuking the iniquity, "set their heart" upon its continuance.

II. THE SIN OF THE PEOPLE. 1. They wilfully forgot the Law of God (ver. 6). 2. The more prosperous they became externally, the more grievously they sinned (ver. 7). 3. They addicted themselves to idolatrous divination, using sometimes teraphim, and sometimes divining rods (ver. 12). In worshipping wooden gods, they showed themselves to be at once wooden-headed and wooden-hearted (Ps. cxv. 8). 4. They practised the sensual rites of nature-worship with the temple prostitutes of Ashtaroth, and even were so shameless as sometimes to appear with them at the altar (vers. 13, 14). Impurity in one's religion is often joined with uncleanness of body.

III. THE DOOM THREATENED UPON BOTH. (Ver. 9.) 1. The priests and their sons would be deprived of their office, and the people would lose their high prerogative of being a priestly nation (ver. 6). 2. The glory of the kingdom would be turned into shame by reason of the loss of the numbers, wealth, and power in which they gloried (ver. 7). 3. Their sin would also become its own punishment (vers. 10, 11). The Lord would cause them to "eat of the fruit of their own way." The result would be surfeit, not satisfaction. Their sin would be their torment. 4. God would "give them up to vile affections;" he would cease to correct them for their idolatry and licentiousness, and thus visit them with reprobation (ver. 14).

CONCLUSION. Ver. 11 contains the solemn statement of a great moral truth respecting all sin, and which is specially applicable to sins of sensuality. Who can place confidence in the moral judgments of an adulterer or a fornicator? How sad when such men occupy positions of influence in Church or state!

> "Beware of lust; it doth pollute and foul
> Whom God in baptism washed with his own blood:
> It blots thy lesson written in thy soul;
> The holy lines cannot be understood.
> How dare those eyes upon a Bible look,
> Much less towards God, whose lust is all their book!"
>
> (George Herbert.)

C. J.

Ver. 9.—"*Like people, like priest.*" In this passage the Lord charges the priests of the ten tribes with having grievously abetted the idolatry and immorality which were rampant in Israel; and in the verse before us he declares that, as people and priest have been one in guilt, they shall be one also in punishment. When the

judgment falls, there shall be no "benefit of clergy." The four words of the text sound like a proverb (Isa. xxiv. 2). We may justly view them as an apothegm respecting the mutual relation of pastor and people. We read the word "priest" here "writ large" as "presbyter." We use it in its widest sense as denoting a minister of religion —one who officiates in the sacred service of the Church.

I. THERE IS A LIKENESS IN THE NATURE OF THINGS. In their relations to God and to their fellow-men, it is "like people, like priest." 1. *The principle applies to matters of personal life.* The priest is "taken from among men" (Heb. v. 1—3). He is by nature guilty, sinful, polluted, helpless, like every other member of the congregation. If he be a true believer, he has been washed in the blood of Christ, and justified by the grace of God, and made a partaker of the Spirit, like other believers. He is exposed to temptations, and prone to backslidings, as they are. He must "fight the good fight of faith," just like others. 2. *The principle applies to social relations.* A minister does not cease to be a man when he becomes a minister. He is to be "one that ruleth well his own house" (1 Tim. iii. 4). Like other citizens, he ought to interest himself in politics. The cause of liberty and righteousness, the redress of wrongs, and the elevation of the masses, should be specially dear to him. He must not allow himself to seem an emasculated man, who either has no opinions on public questions, or is afraid to avow them. 3. *The principle applies to business habits.* The priest is to eat his bread "in the sweat of his face," like other men. Observation of his habits ought not to produce the impression that he is without any engrossing occupation. No man in the congregation should be busier. No other work makes so constant a demand upon all the best energies of human nature as the work of the Christian pastor. 4. *The principle applies to the matter of his work itself.* According to the spirit of New Testament teaching, no hard-and-fast line is to be drawn between the Christian ministry and other useful occupations. The pastor ministers to a higher part of man's nature than the merchant does; that is all. "Whatsoever ye do, in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Col. iii. 17); that is the Christian law of work for all godly men alike. The life of the priesthood has no halo around it which does not belong to the life of the people. 5. *The principle applies to spiritual privileges.* The pastor enjoys the blessings of grace in common with the people—all of them, and no more. He has the same access to God which other Christian men and women have; no other access, and no nearer. He does not belong to a sacerdotal caste. He is in no respect a mediator. The special application of the term "priest," as denoting one who offers sacrifice, is not for the Christian pastor. In that sense the Lord Jesus Christ is the only Priest of the Church. The one respect in which the pastor is a "priest to God" is that in which, as Archbishop Leighton has put it, "all Christians are God's clergy." 6. *The principle applies to the final account.* It shall be "like people, like priest," at the day of judgment. His reward, like theirs, shall be in proportion to his diligence, efficiency, and success. And, contrariwise, the punishments inflicted for indolence shall be equally impartial. This is the very point of the text: "I will punish them for their ways, and reward them their doings." This general principle is so obvious, and so constantly enforced in the teaching of the New Testament, that it seems strange that it should ever have been contravened. Yet the subversion of it has been one of the most cherished errors of the Christian Church. Is not the denial of this principle the corner-stone of the Papacy? The Romish Church exalts one man, and one class of men, to absolute control over the consciences of their fellows. And does not the ritualism of our time at home involve the same error? Ritualism might be harmless if it meant only an ornate and beautiful service; but, meaning as it does a return to sacerdotalism, and the fettering of the spiritual liberty of the Christian people, it is full of deadly poison. Many communions, also, which are free from the temptations to clericalism in its grosser forms, are often in danger of separating those responsibilities, on the part of minister and people, which God has joined together. *E.g.* do not some minds harbour the notion that a higher standard of piety is appropriate for the pulpit than what is necessary for the pew? And are there not some popular amusements which it is thought quite lawful for other members of the Church to indulge in, but which a minister is expected to abstain from, under peril of being judged an unspiritual man? There is, however, no mention in the Bible of a broader and a narrower gauge of righteousness. There, it is "like people, like priest."

II. THERE IS A LIKENESS PRODUCED BY RECIPROCAL INFLUENCE. The relationship between pastor and people is a very sacred one. It is a union in which the one party does not absorb the other; rather, they tend to become filled with the same common life, and to be mutually assimilated in views, sentiments, and spiritual tone. We need not stay to speak of the influence which the priest has upon the people. For the one direct end of the ministry is to move men to live for God and Christ. It is designed, through the power of the Holy Spirit, to influence the hearts and habits of the people, not only upon the Lord's day, but during every hour of their lives. In what remains we shall rather consider the influence which the people exercise upon the priest, to mould his character as a man, and to affect his efficiency as a pastor. The text does not read, "Like priest, like people," although it is frequently misquoted so. It reads, "Like people, like priest;" and thus it invites us to view more especially the influence which the pew has upon the pulpit—an influence which is everywhere present, and which is very subtle and powerful. The priest springs from the people. He enters the ministry with his mind already largely moulded by the intellectual and religious influences which obtain amongst them. He may be expected to reflect in his own character the prevalent spirit in relation to Divine things amidst which he has been brought up. A long barren period of spiritual indifference will inevitably give to the Church a race of sapless anti-evangelical ministers; but when, on the other hand, there is a general revival of religion, many earnest young men from among the new converts will be found devoting their lives to the work of spreading the knowledge of salvation. Again, this influence is greatly promoted in connection with the more democratic systems of Church government. The writer of this homily, as a Presbyterian, may be allowed to point out that in every free Presbyterian communion the sap of the Church's influence rises from the people through sessions and presbyteries to the supreme court; and so, peculiarly under this system, it is, "like people, like priest." 1. *Sometimes this influence is for evil.* Take, *e.g.*, the sin of priestcraft itself. It is the corruption of the people, in the first instance, that makes this sin possible. Look at the case of the golden ox at Horeb (Exod. xxxii. 1). Or take that of the golden calves at Bethel and Dan. Jeroboam was trading with the spiritual degradation of the ten tribes when he instituted his false gods and his false priests. The malign influence continued down to the time of Hosea, and by-and-by involved the northern kingdom in destruction. Meanwhile, too, the evil leaven was spreading into the yet surviving monarchy of Judah (Jer. v. 31). And thus is it still. Whenever the blood of religion runs cold, and opposition to the doctrines of grace prevails, the Church will seek out teachers after her own degenerate heart (2 Tim. iv. 3). At such times the congregation desires to have a tacit understanding with the prophet that he is not to "use great plainness of speech" (Isa. xxx. 10). Every true minister has sometimes to contend against the temptation to suppress unpalatable truth. It is little more than a generation since thousands of pulpits in the United States submitted to be muzzled regarding the wickedness of negro slavery; and since hundreds of ministers in the Southern States were labouring to prove that slavery was the proper condition of the negro. In our own country, on the other hand, the warning voice of the pulpit in relation to the evil of the drinking customs is still a somewhat muffled one compared with what it has long been in New England. Finally, here, the priest's personal relations to his people are so intimate that their attitude towards him goes largely to affect even the moral tone and fibre of his character. If he submit to be continually petted, the danger is that all manliness will gradually ooze out of him, and that he will come to expect on all occasions different treatment from other men. But surely the Christian ministry ought to be the manliest of callings. The pastor should be one of the hardiest of the trees of grace, and not a mere greenhouse plant. He should desire no allowances to be made for him which are not made for men of other callings. The whole Church should take care that it is not her fault if he is not every inch a man. 2. *But often the influence of the people upon the priest is good and honourable.* A congregation whose conception of the ministry is formed as the result of the devout study of the New Testament, will look and pray for men in the pulpit who possess the tongue of fire, *i.e.* the power of the Holy Ghost; not the power to compose eloquent paragraphs and perorations, but power to arouse, convert, edify—power under which hearts will melt, and lives will begin anew. When conversions occur, the pastor preaches with an

enlarged heart and prays with redoubled fervour, and his path seems bathed in sunshine. After all, too, it is the people, quite as much as the priests, who guard the orthodoxy, purity, liberties, and spiritual life of the Church. For it is they who constitute the body of Christ; the pastors are only the servants of the Church for Jesus' sake.

CONCLUSION. 1. It is doubtless sometimes the fact that the priest and the people never become assimilated to each other at all. It was so, *e.g.*, in the case of Hosea; in that of Jeremiah; in that of the Lord Jesus himself, during his earthly ministry. But what the text expresses is simply an ordinary tendency in connection with this sacred relationship. 2. Let our closing thought be this, that the obligation involved in the pastoral tie is a mutual one. If his Church responsibilities should weigh heavily upon the minister's heart, they should also press upon the conscience of each member. Both are responsible for the results of the tie. It is, "like people, like priest."—C. J.

Vers. 15—19.—*Ephraim and Judah.* In this passage, as in ch. i. 7, the kingdom of Judah is presented in contrast with that of Israel. Here, for the first time in Hosea, we meet with the name "Ephraim." As the United Kingdom over which Queen Victoria reigns is often called simply "England," so the kingdom of the ten tribes sometimes receives the name of "Ephraim," that tribe being the most powerful of the ten, and having within its bounds the seat of government.

I. EPHRAIM'S SIN. It consisted in the subversion of the entire moral Law. 1. *General ungodliness.* He had broken: (1) The *first* commandment, by turning from Jehovah to serve the Baalim. (2) The *second* commandment, by leaving the one rightful altar, and bowing down to Jeroboam's graven images. Gilgal had once been a holy place to Jehovah, but it was now noted for the idolatries which were practised there; and Beth-el, "the house of God," where Jacob had seen the stairway and the vision of the Almighty, is now for the same reason nicknamed Beth-aven, "house of iniquity" (ver. 15). (3) The *third* commandment, in swearing by Jehovah while worshipping the calves (ver. 15). 2. *General licentiousness.* The worship of Baal and Ashtaroth became as impure and revolting as it is possible to imagine. The groves were the scenes of the foulest debaucheries. Every bond of truth and justice was broken. The judges loved to say, "Give ye;" *i.e.* they gaped for bribes, and sometimes sold their judicial decisions to the highest bidder. Morally, Ephraim was utterly degenerate; he had become just like "turned" or "sour" milk (ver. 18). He was *constant* in his sin: "They have committed whoredom continually" (ver. 18). He was *refractory:* in moral conduct he resembled a stubborn cow (ver. 16). And he was *obdurate:* a fearful and unholy union subsisted between Ephraim and the dead idols which he served (ver. 17).

II. EPHRAIM'S DOOM. It will fall upon him swiftly. It will come in the form of: 1. *Banishment.* Israel had felt the Lord's fold to be too tight, and the life within it too slow. So the ten tribes are to be driven into exile. They are to be exposed to danger like a timid "lamb" (ver. 16) in the wide wilderness of the world. A tempest of judgment shall suddenly seize them, lift them up, and carry them away like chaff (ver. 19). 2. *Shame.* (Ver. 19.) As long as the northern kingdom seemed strong and prosperous, its citizens gloried in "their sacrifices" to idols. But now, in these days of conspiracy and revolution, Ephraim will be disappointed in his expectation of help from the Baalim, and will be covered with shame on account of his infamous idolatries. We know that one chief result of the Assyrian and Babylonish captivities was to thoroughly wean the Hebrew nation from its polytheism. 3. *Abandonment.* (Ver. 17.) Judah is directed to "let Ephraim alone." God's people within the southern kingdom are to send no missionary to reprove him, or to attempt to convert him. They are to leave him to "eat of the fruit of his own way." This word spoken to Judah is often understood as if it referred to the desertion of incorrigible sinners by the Lord the Spirit. Such, however, is at best only a secondary and inferential meaning. It is evident that in this verse God himself pronounces no decree of final abandonment, for we find him saying afterwards (ch. xi. 8), "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim?" The abandonment here denotes the loss of the "kindness" and "excellent oil" which belong to the reproof of "the righteous."

III. AN ADMONITION TO JUDAH. (Vers. 15, 17.) The southern kingdom is cautioned to shun the contagion of Ephraim's wicked example. For: 1. *Judah's condition was*

meanwhile better. Up to the time to which ch. iv. refers, Judah was comparatively uncorrupted. There had always been a difference morally and spiritually between Ephraim and Judah. The southern kingdom possessed Jerusalem, and the temple, and the Aaronical priesthood, and the royal dynasty of David. Many of its monarchs had been godly men, who "did that which was right in the sight of the Lord." And God's restraining grace towards Judah had been so great, that if he had any saints just now in the world, these were in Judah. But: 2. *Judah was in danger of contamination.* The people of Judah were near neighbours to the ten thousands of Ephraim. They were brethren—two segments of the same nationality. They possessed the same great history, and inherited the same traditions. Israel, moreover, was the larger state, and the more prosperous. Jehovah, therefore, in his anxiety about Judah, warns him to keep away from such polluting places as Gilgal and Bethel (ver. 15). The Divine counsel to him is, "Let Ephraim alone;" *i.e.* have no intercourse with him, lest he pollute thee. Stand off from him, for "evil communications corrupt good manners." No effort on your part will avail to cure him of his idolatry; and perchance you may yourself become a partaker of it. 3. *The effect of this admonition.* Judah did remember it for a time; at least, a great theocratic revival and religious reformation took place during the reigns of Hezekiah and Josiah. Afterwards, however, a deep spiritual decline set in; and Judah, too, fell into the fatal grasp of Babylon only three or four generations after the fall of Ephraim.

LESSONS. 1. We must refuse to partake of other men's sins, if we would not share their punishment. One cannot touch pitch without being defiled. 2. We must beware of the "large place" outside of the Lord's fold. The broad way leadeth to destruction. Men of firm Christian principle are sometimes called "narrow;" but we must dare to be as narrow as the straight line of God's righteousness, and at no time depart from the leading of the good Shepherd. 3. We must cherish shame now for our own spiritual idolatries, and break with every idol, however dear, if we would have confidence before Christ at his coming.—C. J.

Ver. 17.—*Insensibility the result of impenitence.* The people of Israel are here designated by the name "Ephraim." This tribe rapidly rose to influence beneath the shadow of Joshua's greatness. Under that hero, one of its greatest sons, Ephraim was located in the most fertile part of Palestine, and being less exposed than other tribes to external attack, grew in numbers and affluence. When another Ephraimite, Jeroboam, led the revolt against the house of David, and became the first king of Israel, this tribe, already strong, stood foremost, and its name became henceforth a synonym for Israel. In this chapter Hosea exhibits the sins of the people in a series of graphic pictures. He tacitly asks whether they had anything to urge in stay of judgment. He would prove to their own consciences the righteousness of the Divine decision, so that they would be left without excuse. There ever comes from the throne of God, as once there came from Mount Sinai, a voice which appeals to human conscience to confirm the Divine sentence: "Let all the people say, Amen!" Our text exhibits a nation abandoned by God—to whom all expostulation had proved useless. It suggests a moral condition similar to the physical condition of some patient on whom the surgeon has operated again and again; who has often pleaded to be left alone, and from whom at last, with heavy heart, the skilful kindly friend turns away, saying, "It is best that he should be left alone now, for his disease is fatal." That Divine abandonment is possible may be shown from Jer. vi. 30, compared with Matt. v. 13. At times God seems to reply to man's wish by an echo (compare Job xxi. 14 with Matt. xxv. 41). The solemnity of the fact that *insensibility follows impenitence.*

I. THE WICKEDNESS OF IDOLATRY. "*Joined to idols*" implies vital association with them. Ephraim would not part with idols, and could not be parted from them without death. *Three forms of idolatry prevailed.* Each appealed to a distinct section of the people, and all alike drew their hearts from God. The *calves* introduced by Jeroboam from Egypt were deification of "nature," and became at Gilgal and Bethel centres for political and national gatherings. *Baal*, the sun-god, was a deification of "power," and was worshipped in mountains and high places. *Ashtaroth*, the Astarte of the Greeks, the Venus of the Romans, was worshipped in the groves, under the shadow of which hideously licentious rites completed the degradation of the people. Each had

its own cultus and its own worshippers. We all recognize that an idol may exist in our thought as well as in our sight. The essence of idolatry is the preference of anything to God, so as to allow it to take the place he should fill in our thoughts and affections. The same object does not tempt us all, nor will the same allure us in all the stages of our life. In youth you may worship Astarte; in manhood, Baal; and in old age, the golden calves. Speak of forms of idolatry prevalent in England. 1. *The idolatry of wealth.* We do not allude to the gaining of money, which is possible to a man who wins it by his shrewdness and skill, by his industry and probity in business. The Lord has given him power to get wealth, which he uses as a steward for God. Describe one who makes money-getting the object of life. He chooses a business, without any care about its evil associations. He steels his heart to misery and to the claims of his own kin. He ignores the standard of integrity which an enlightened conscience sets up. If advantage is to be gained by bribe or trick, he is not the man to lose it from scrupulousness. He has no time for home duties, for Church work, etc., which claim his efforts. In brief, he dismisses, and feels that he must dismiss, God from his plans; and as the habit grows he becomes "joined to idols," and in his avaricious hardness God lets him alone. 2. *The idolatry of pleasure* is not extinct. Picture a young girl introduced to society, in whose gaieties she henceforth finds herself entangled. Simple of heart as she is fair of face, she is insidiously injured by the unwholesome excitement, the late hours, the inane and profitless chit-chat of such an existence. Too tired to pray, too flattered to conquer self, she forgets those solemn realities to which the present life is only a vestibule, until in the scales of Eternal Justice she is "weighed in the balances and found wanting." Slowly but surely her early sensibility decreases; and she whose heart was once easily touched, whose conscience was keenly sensitive, becomes the hardened, scheming woman of the world. She is joined to idols: let her alone. 3. *The idolatry of sensuousness.* The halls of entertainment in which the lusts of the flesh and of the eye are pandered to are thronged nightly by lads whose incipient manliness becomes deteriorated. There, and elsewhere, drink exercises a fatal influence. Short of intoxication, the will is weakened, the memory obscured, the imagination so excited as to find pleasure where otherwise there would be none; and so the first step to ruin is often taken half consciously. Little by little the power of drink asserts itself, till self-control is gone, and its victim cannot live without it; and so joined to idols is he that God says, "Let him alone." In these as in similar temptations many resent holy influence till they cannot feel it; they are "twice dead," "given over to a reprobate mind."

II. THE WOEFULNESS OF INSENSIBILITY. 1. *Its nature.* "Let him alone," is God's command to all who have been speaking in his name, the prophet being their representative. *A minister* preaches, and many under the influence of the truth are moved to thought and penitence. One hears as others do, but, unlike them, is hard and callous. Often has he said to himself, "I wish I could go to a place of worship without feeling uneasy;" and at last God says, "You shall. Ministers, let him alone!" *Friends* spoke faithfully to another, urging him to prayer, pleading with him, even with tears, to turn from sin. Sometimes he laughed at their anxiety, sometimes he was angry at their interference, heartily wishing that they would interfere with him no more. Now they do not. One friend has removed to a distance, the voice of another is stilled by death, and another has given up further effort in utter despair of success. God has said, "Let him alone." *Solemn events* once stirred to thought, but now their influence is gone. The voice within which warned and entreated is sensibly weaker and less frequently heard. To conscience God has said, "Let him alone," and now it is sleeping. 2. *The dreadfulness* of this condition is seen in the fact that *the noblest part of man is gone.* Suppose your hand was injured so that you were in pain night and day. Driven to desperation, you take a red-hot iron and sear the flesh, destroying nerves and tissue ruthlessly. The sore heals, the pain is gone. Ay, but the hand is useless, and nothing can restore it. So may you deal with conscience. Refusing to go to the good Physician when conscious of your peril, you sin deliberately against God, and thus conscience may be "seared as with a hot iron." Note, also, *the ominousness* of being left alone. We see all the trees in an orchard pruned with an unsparing yet skilful hand, and are told that they will be the more vigorous and fruitful in the autumn. One tree, however, has been left untouched by the knife. Why? Is it

because it is a favourite? You see the answer in the red cross on its trunk, which shows that it is marked for cutting down as a cumberer of the ground. Take another illustration. Two prisoners are convicted of offences against the law. The one, on the ground of his youth and possible reformation, is sent home for his father to chastise, and he goes weeping. The other, a hardened criminal, is to receive no stripes, but may have anything his appetite craves. Yet all look on him with horror. The fact that he is to receive no chastisement is ominous; for he is under condemnation of death. That you are so little troubled by serious thought is no sign of safety; it may be the indication that soon, "being past feeling," you will be "given over to a reprobate mind." "To-day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts."

CONCLUSION. 1. *Address those who fear they are left alone.* If the faint desire to return to God yet lingers, if the fear of being forsaken of God makes you tremble, the curse has not yet fallen. The Lord, who is very pitiful and of tender mercy, still says, "Come now, and let us reason together," etc. 2. *Address those in danger of being abandoned.* Illustrate their position by the story of two brothers crossing a pass, overtaken by a snow-storm. One longs to sleep. He is dragged on for a time by physical force, is pleaded with earnestly, but at last is of necessity left. He sinks to rest; the snow-flakes fall silently and swiftly, and in the depths he finds his grave, and sleeps the sleep of death. You may say to all good influences, "Let me alone," until God puts his seal on your choice, and says to all that might save you, "Let him alone."—A. R.

Ver. 1.—"*Hear the word of the Lord!*" The Hebrew prophets were distinguished from other politicians and moralists in this respect, that they did not address the people upon their own authority, or convey to them the counsels of their own wisdom. It was their practice to keep themselves in the background, and to summon their countrymen, in the language of the text, to "hear the word of the Lord." This language implies—

I. THAT GOD HAS SPOKEN TO MAN. 1. This is opposed to the atheistic doctrine, that there is no God to speak; and to the Epicurean doctrine, that the gods care not to concern themselves in the affairs of mortals. It is also opposed to the modern and pseudo-scientific doctrine, that the universe is so bound in the chains of physical law that there is no opportunity for the mind, if such there be, that shapes and controls all things to communicate with the spiritual nature of man. 2. Yet this belief harmonizes with the highest conception we can form of the Eternal. We refuse to believe that he, who is present throughout his material creation, is cut off from the very nature which is most akin to his own. 3. As a matter of fact, revelation is a word of God to man. The prophets, evangelists, and apostles were taken possession of by a supernatural power, that spake to them, in them, and by them, to their fellow-men. 4. Christ himself, the Word of God, sums up in his person, ministry, and sacrifice all that God has of especial interest and value to impart to the minds of men.

II. THAT MAN IS UNDER AN OBLIGATION TO LISTEN TO THE WORD OF GOD. 1. The finite and fallible nature of man stands in need of Divine instruction, guidance, encouragement, and admonition. 2. There is in man a conscience which attests the divinity of the word to which he listens when God speaks. 3. Humility and reverence are becoming to such as thus come into contact with the utterances of Eternal Wisdom. 4. To hear aright involves a prompt and cheerful obedience. For the Word of God conveys not only speculative truth, but the most valuable practical counsels as to conduct. He received aright the word of God who exclaimed, "Speak, Lord; for thy servant heareth!"—T.

Ver. 1.—*A controversy.* Language such as this shows how readily the inspired writers made use of human relationships in order to impress upon the minds of the people great moral facts and lessons. There is, of course, great difference between the disputes and controversies which arise among men, and any matter of estrangement between God and men; yet how vigorously and effectively does this language set forth human sin and Divine righteousness!

I. THE PARTIES TO THIS CONTROVERSY. On the one side is a rightful Ruler; on the other, rebellious subjects. The Ruler is possessed of infinite power; the rebels are

feeble, and their resistance is vain. The Ruler has established, by his grace and forbearance, the strongest claims upon his subjects' gratitude and loyal affection; the rebels have shown amazing insensibility and obduracy. This is indeed a just picture of the righteous and merciful God, and of the disobedient and rebellious children of men. The inhabitants of the land, *i.e.* of Israel, are in this matter representative in their attitude and conduct of an ungodly race.

II. THE GROUND OF THE CONTROVERSY. The prophet, speaking in the name of Jehovah, charges Israel with evil-doing of two kinds. 1. *Immorality.* The two great classes of human duty are simply described by the two terms, truth and mercy. If men are just and benevolent in their dealing with one another, they fulfil moral obligations; for these virtues comprehend all excellences which may be displayed in human life and intercourse. But where faith is broken and pity is withheld, the bonds of society are loosened, and its dissolution has begun. 2. *Impiety.* "The knowledge of God in the land" is essential to the well-being of a nation. Where God is unknown, where men live "without God in the world," where his knowledge is suffered to lapse, and the rising generation are trained with no fear of God before their eyes—there vice and crime will be rampant and unchecked, and there will be no guarantee for social order and peace.

III. THE ISSUE OF THIS CONTROVERSY. 1. It cannot be in the victory of the rebellious. 2. It must be in the maintenance of Divine authority and honour. 3. It should be in the repentance and submission of the disloyal, and in a reconciliation between the penitent offenders and the righteously offended God. 4. The gospel is especially intended to bring this controversy to a close, in a way honouring to God and advantageous to sinful man. "We beseech you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God."—T.

Ver. 6.—*Ignorance and destruction.* All classes in Israel were guilty of forsaking Jehovah, and all classes were reproached with the same sin. It is usually the case that rebellion against a righteous Lord, and neglect of sincere worship and devotion, are chargeable, if not equally so, upon high and low, learned and ignorant. And when none are free from guilt, none are exempt from condemnation.

1. TRUE RELIGION IS BASED UPON KNOWLEDGE. Idolatry and superstition are compatible with ignorance, and are favoured by ignorance. But the religion which is alone proper to man and acceptable to God is spiritual, and therefore intelligent. If this was the case with the Mosaic economy, how much more so with the Christian! In the Old Testament, the "fear of the Lord" and "wisdom" were the same; in the New Testament we are taught that life eternal consists in the knowledge of the true God through his Son. A religion of formal assent or observance, a religion of mere feeling and excitement, is vain. Knowledge alone is insufficient, but knowledge is nevertheless indispensable to true Christianity.

II. THOSE SPECIALLY QUALIFIED AND APPOINTED AS MINISTERS OF RELIGION ARE BOUND TO DIFFUSE KNOWLEDGE. In Israel the priests and the prophets seem to have been both, if not equally, to blame for the irreligion and defection of the people. The priests taught religious knowledge by symbol, the prophets by word of mouth. Both orders were chargeable with negligence of these sacred and honourable duties. In the new and spiritual kingdom of Christ, there are no officers exactly corresponding to either the priests or the prophets of the Hebrews. But those whose ministry it is especially to teach, and all who by reason of their own gifts and position have the opportunity of imparting spiritual knowledge, are bound to communicate the Word of life.

III. THE REJECTION OF KNOWLEDGE ON THE PART OF ANY INVOLVES THEIR OWN REJECTION BY GOD. Lack of knowledge is itself destruction. It is the starving of the soul through defect of spiritual nourishment. "They die without wisdom," is the mournful lamentation of the spectator of moral delinquency and consequent destruction. Israel was rejected and punished, was sent into a long captivity, because of religious defection and hardened impenitence. And it is a law of the Divine government that wilful ignorance should entail moral deterioration. The plant cannot be taken into the darkness without suffering; its vitality is at once enfeebled, and gradually diminishes until it dies. It is so with the soul; it is so with the nation. This is a solemn warning

to those who love moral darkness rather than light. It is an admonition to those who have the light that they walk therein.

IV. THE HEAVIEST PENALTY FALLS UPON THOSE THROUGH WHOSE NEGLECT THE PEOPLE ARE LEFT IN SIN. Although a prophet himself, Hosea upbraided those called to the prophetic office who left the people in ignorance, and those priests who encouraged and led the people in sacrifices to the gods of the heathen. Such were threatened with the Divine displeasure, and assured that they should no more sustain sacred offices, but should be deprived of all that made them honourable. It is ever the case that abuse of trust is worse than neglect of privileges, and that those who not only wander themselves, but lead others astray, as their guilt is greater, shall experience a sorer condemnation.—T.

Ver. 9.—"*Like people, like priest.*" This and similar passages show the justice and impartiality with which the inspired prophets fulfilled the office to which they were called. Neither the fear of the priest nor the favour of the people was allowed to act as a motive to deter them from plain speech and faithful dealing with men's souls.

I. THERE IS ACTION AND REACTION BETWEEN THE PEOPLE AND THEIR RELIGIOUS LEADERS. A spiritual and vigorous ministry tells favourably upon the moral and religious habits of the community, and a formal and selfish ministry is a check to moral improvement and a hindrance to national purification. The importance is manifest of securing for every community clergy and teachers who shall raise the moral tone of society. Yet it is only here and there that a minister of religion will be found truly alive to God in the midst of a corrupt and worldly society. For good and for evil, teachers and taught, leaders and led, rise and fall together. "Like people, like priest."

II. THE PEOPLE AND THEIR RELIGIOUS LEADERS ARE ALIKE AMENABLE TO THE RIGHTEOUS RULE OF GOD. If the watchman be faithful amidst general corruption and defection, if he give the people warning, he shall deliver his soul. But if he neglect to do this, and the people perish, shall the slothful or unfaithful watchman escape, in the day of inquisition and of judgment? No! when the people are punished for their ways and rewarded for their doings, the pastors who have encouraged the sheep in their wanderings, and left them to perish in the wilderness, shall be overtaken by the penalties attaching to sinful neglect and abuse of trust. Their official position, even the formal fulfilment of their official duties, shall not exempt them from the fate of the faithless. "Like people, like priest."

APPLICATION. 1. Let people value a faithful ministry, and give heed to wise and righteous warnings, ere it be too late. 2. Let ministers of religion beware lest they fall into negligent habits, and perform their services in a perfunctory and unspiritual manner, and thus encourage the people in impiety.—T.

Ver. 11.—*Sensuality is ruin.* Whilst the language of this prophet regarding debauchery is sometimes to be taken figuratively, we have no option but to read this statement in its obvious and literal sense. Evidently the worship of foreign deities in northern Palestine was accompanied by licentious rites and debasing moral habits. In this verse is set forth the general law that the indulgence of the animal nature involves mental and moral deterioration and destruction.

I. SENSUALITY AFFECTS THE MIND THROUGH THE BODY. Whoredom and intoxication have ever been, and are to-day, the two great "sins of the flesh." Man's bodily nature is so constituted that these practices derange the nervous system, and render the sinner mentally incapable of many of the serious duties of life. The lunatic asylums are peopled with those who have lost their mental powers through addictedness to wine and to women. And where the evil has not gone to lengths so great, it is nevertheless sufficient to affect the powers of application, the memory, and the judgment.

II. SENSUALITY INJURES THE MIND BY CONSTANTLY DIRECTING IT TO MEANS OF CARNAL GRATIFICATION. The man who is besotted with the love of pleasure, and is constantly planning new means of animal gratification and excitement, has little energy to spare for loftier flights. Even his intellectual efforts are tainted with the poison. If he be a man of genius, the trail of the serpent is over his works.

III. SENSUALITY CURSES THE MIND WITH SELFISHNESS. Whatever makes a man selfish takes away his heart. The sensual become machines bent upon the vain task

of satisfying the bodily appetites. Those addicted to vice have no room in their souls for generous impulses, and have no disposition to engage in works of philanthropy and public good.

IV. SENSUALITY INDISPOSES THE MIND TO RECEIVE THE ENLIGHTENING AND QUICKENING INFLUENCES OF RELIGION. Christianity is a rebuke to the lover of pleasure; for it summons man to a spiritual life, imposes spiritual service, and proffers spiritual joys. He that liveth in pleasure is dead while he liveth. Christ calls us to mortify the deeds of the body. His religion is, indeed, not ascetic; at the marriage-feast at Cana he sanctioned wedded love and the proper use of wine. But he cannot tolerate a sensual life, and has declared plainly that the debauched and the drunken can have no place in his kingdom. For such have permitted Satan to take away their heart, and they have none left to give to Christ.

APPLICATION. Let the young be warned against the insidious and seductive snares which the world lays for their downfall, and into which their weak and sinful nature is too apt to lead them. There is safety only by the cross, and by the Spirit of the Holy Saviour.—T.

Ver. 17.—*Abandonment.* Ephraim is in this book taken as the representative of the northern tribes, because it was the most numerous and powerful, and seems to have been the leader in the apostasy of Israel. The principle of this verse is one which we can recognize as just, but one upon which it would be dangerous, without authority, for erring man to act.

I. THE CASE DESCRIBED IS ONE OF RESOLUTE APOSTASY AND IDOLATRY. Ephraim is represented, as not only idolatrous, but confirmed in idolatry. Having forsaken the Lord, Israel has gone after strange gods, and is joined unto them as in an adulterous connection. There are those who not only fall into sin, but wallow in sin; who are not only tempted, but delight in yielding to temptation.

II. THE HUMAN ABANDONMENT HERE COUNSELLED. "Let him alone." This presumes that many efforts to reform the sinful have been made. It would not, indeed, be lawful for man to give such a direction as this; but God gives it. Why? Doubtless that the sinner may be left to his own devices, to reap the consequence of his sinful ways. Expostulations, entreaties, threats, have all failed; and man can do no more. It is time for God to work; and he teaches by allowing the disobedient to eat the fruit of their conduct. "The way of transgressors is hard;" and they must walk therein in order to learn that this is so.

III. THOSE ABANDONED BY MEN ARE NOT ABANDONED BY GOD. Mercy dictates the treatment here counselled. Ephraim is "let alone," in order that, learning by bitter experience the evil of sin, Ephraim may turn unto the Lord, and so seek and find pardon and acceptance. The eye of God is upon the abandoned sinner, and the hand of God is ready, at the right moment, to be stretched forth to deliver and to save. For such the mercy of the Sovereign, the grace of the Saviour, may yet avail.—T.

Vers. 1, 2.—*A corrupt people and an expostulating God.* "Hear the word of the Lord, ye children of Israel: for the Lord hath a controversy with the inhabitants of the land, because *there is* no truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God in the land. By swearing, and lying, and killing, and stealing, and committing adultery, they break out, and blood toucheth blood." In the previous chapters the prophet's language had been highly and somewhat perplexingly symbolical. It is so much so in the short chapter preceding this, that we pass it by. Here he begins to speak more plainly, and in sententious utterances. From the first to the nineteenth verses of this chapter, he reproves both the people and the priest for their sins during the eleven years' interregnum that followed Jeroboam's death. He makes no mention, therefore, either of the king or his family. The subject of these two verses is—*A corrupt people and an expostulating God.*

I. A CORRUPT PEOPLE. The people are "the children of Israel," or the ten tribes who were living during the terrible period of anarchy which followed on the death of Jeroboam II. Their depravity is here represented both in a negative and a positive form. 1. *Negatively.* "Because there is no truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God in the land." These are the great fontal virtues in the universe; and where they are

not, there is a moral abjectness of the most terrible description. "No truth!" A people without reality, not only living in fictions, but their very life a lie. "Nor mercy!" No acts of beneficence performed, and the very spirit of kindliness extinct. All tenderness and genial feeling burnt out. "Nor knowledge of God!" The greatest, the holiest, and the most beneficent Being in the universe utterly ignored. 2. *Positively.* The absence of these great virtues gives rise to tremendous crimes. (1) There is *profanity.* "By swearing." Where God is ignored, all reverence is gone; the sentiments of sacredness can never exist in a heart "without God." (2) There is *falsehood.* "And lying." God is the foundation of all realities; and estrangement from him is a universe of lies. (3) There is *cruelty.* "Killing." What is life to a man who has no truth, or mercy, or knowledge of God? It is a cheap and worthless thing; and the work of the assassin and the warrior becomes natural to him. (4) There is *dishonesty.* "And stealing." Rapine and plunder become rife: he who respects not the claims of God will have but little respect for the claims of man. (5) There is *incontinence.* "Committing adultery." Domestic sanctities invaded and the Divine institution of marriage outraged. (6) There is *murder.* "Blood toucheth blood." An expression that means a profusion of slaughter, as in the case of massacres, insurrections, and national wars. "Blood toucheth blood;" the streams of crimson gore run from the slain and mingle together. "It was about this time that there was so much blood shed in grasping at the crown: Shallum slew Zechariah, and Menahem slew Shallum; Pekah slew Pekahiah, and Hoshea slew Pekah; and the like bloody work it is likely there was among other contenders, so that the land was polluted with blood (Ps. cvi. 38); it was filled with blood from one end to the other (2 Kings xv. 16)." Such are the corrupt people here portrayed. Alas, that there should be so much in modern England like unto this ghastly and revolting picture!

II. AN EXPOSTULATING GOD. "Hear the word of the Lord, ye children of Israel: for the Lord hath a controversy with the inhabitants of the land." Of all controversies this is the most awful. A controversy between men and men, between individuals, Churches, nations, is sometimes very awful, but nothing approaching to this. 1. It is a *just* controversy. Many of men's controversies are most unrighteous, but this is just. Has not the great Ruler of the universe a right to contend against profanity, falsehood, cruelty, etc.? They are repugnant to his nature; they are detrimental to the interests of his creation. 2. It is a *continuous* controversy. It began with the first sin, has continued through all preceding ages, and is on now as strong as ever. 3. It is an *unequal* controversy. What are all human intellects to his? Sparks to the sun. The sinner has no argument to put before him. He cannot deny his sins; they are too palpable and patent. He cannot plead accidents, for sin has been the law of his life. He cannot plead compulsion, for he is free. He cannot plead some merit as a set-off, for he has none. No, in this controversy he must be crushed. "Julian strove a great while against the Lord, but at length he was forced to acknowledge, with his blood cast up in the air, '*Vicisti Galilæe, vicisti!*' 'Thou hast conquered, O Galilean, thou hast conquered!'"

CONCLUSION. Is this controversy going on with you? It is held in the court of conscience, and you must know of its existence and character.—D. T.

Vers. 3—5.—*A terrible deprivation.* "Therefore shall the land mourn, and every one that dwelleth therein shall languish, with the beasts of the field, and with the fowls of heaven; yea, the fishes of the sea also shall be taken away. Yet let no man strive, nor reprove another: for thy people are as they that strive with the priest. Therefore shalt thou fall in the day, and the prophet also shall fall with thee in the night, and I will destroy thy mother." These words lead us to consider a lamentable deprivation—a deprivation that comes upon the people in consequence of their heinous iniquities. Two remarks are suggested concerning this deprivation.

I. It is a deprivation both of MATERIAL AND SPIRITUAL GOOD. 1. Of *material* good. (1) A deprivation of *health.* "Every one that dwelleth therein shall languish." The physical frame loses its wonted elasticity and vigour, and succumbs to decay and depression. "Languish" like a dying man on his couch. Sin is inimical to the bodily health and vigour of men and nations; it insidiously saps the constitution. (2) A deprivation of the *means of subsistence.* "The beasts of the field, and with the fowls

of heaven; yea, the fishes of the sea also shall be taken away." Literally, this refers to one of those droughts that occasionally occur in the East, and is ever one of the greatest calamities. What a dependent creature man is! The beasts of the field, the fowls of heaven, and the fish of the sea can do better without him, but he cannot do without them. How soon the Eternal can destroy these means of his subsistence! One hot blast of pestilential air could do the whole. 2. Of *spiritual* good. "Let no man strive, nor reprove another: for thy people are as they that strive with the priest." The meaning seems to be that their presumptuous guilt was as great as that of one who refused to obey the priest when giving judgment in the Name of Jehovah, and who, according to law, for that cause was to be put to death (Deut. xvii. 12). One of the greatest spiritual blessings of mankind is the strife and reproof of godly men. The expostulations and admonitions of Christly friends, parents, teachers. What on earth is more valuable; is so essential as these? Yet these are to be taken away. "Let no man strive, nor reprove another." The time comes with the sinner when God says, "My Spirit shall no more strive with thee; Ephraim is joined to idols: let him alone." Men have become so dog-like in nature that holy things are not to be presented to them; so swinish that you are to cast before them no more pearls (Matt. vii. 6).

II. It is a deprivation LEADING TO A TERRIBLE DOOM. 1. The destruction of *priests and people.* "Therefore shalt thou fall in the day, and the prophet also shall fall with thee in the night." The meaning is, that no time, night or day, shall be free from the slaughter, both of the people and the priests. This was literally true of the ten tribes at this time. And it is true in a more general and universal sense. God's law is, that "evil shall slay the wicked;" and it is always slaying them, whether they be priests or people—the laity or the clergy. If they are not true to God, day and night, they are being slain. 2. The destruction of the *social state.* "And I will destroy thy mother." Who was the mother? The Israelitish state. And it was destroyed. England is our mother, and our mother will be destroyed unless we banish sin from our midst."—D. T.

Ver. 6.—*Religious ignorance.* "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the Law of thy God, I will also forget thy children." These words suggest three things in relation to religious ignorance.

I. IT IS DESTRUCTIVE. "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge." Ignorance is not the mother of devotion, it is the mother of destruction. 1. *What* does it destroy? The growth of the soul in power, beauty, and fruitfulness. 2. *How* does it destroy? How can the lack of a thing destroy? How can nothing do mischief? The lack of heat and moisture will kill the vegetable kingdom; the lack of air will cause the extinction of all animal life. The soul without knowledge of God is like a plant without heat and moisture; an animal without the salubrious breeze.

II. IT IS WILFUL. "Because thou hast rejected knowledge." There is no culpability in a man being ignorant of some things. He may not have the means, the time, or the faculty for the particular attainment. Not so with the knowledge of God; it comes to him whether he will or not. It comes to him in the objects of nature; it comes to him in the necessary deductions of his reason; it comes to him in the intuitions of his moral nature. Besides, in some cases, as with the Israelites, it comes to man by special revelation. He rejects it. Ignorance of God is ever more a criminal ignorance. "For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse."

III. IT IS GOD-OFFENDING. "I will also reject thee." It is not unnatural or unphilosophic to suppose that the condition of the man ignoring his existence must be to the last degree offensive to him. Hence he deals out retribution. 1. To *themselves.* "I will also reject thee," etc. 2. To their *children.* "I will also forget thy children." It is a Divine law springing from the constitution of society, that the iniquities of the fathers shall be visited on their children. Parents cannot do wrong without injuring their offspring.—D. T.

Ver. 7.—*Secular prosperity.* "As they were increased, so they sinned against me:

therefore will I change their glory into shame." The "increase" referred to in the text is in all probability an increase in the number of the population. Israel had become a numerous people. But it might also refer to their increase in wealth; this is the application that we shall make of it, and notice three points.

I. SECULAR PROSPERITY ATTAINED BY THE WICKED. They were an idolatrous and rebellious people, yet they had grown rich. Their lands brought forth plentifully, and their merchandise was prosperous. 1. This is a *common* fact. Wicked men, in all ages from the beginning, have not only been successful in the accumulation of wealth, but as a rule have been more prosperous than their contemporaries. Two things may account for this fact. (1) Their *secular earnestness*. Material good is the one thing that fills and fires an unregenerate soul, and for this he labours with might and main. The more earnest a man is in any pursuit (his aptitudes being equal), the more successful. The mere worldly man is "fervent" in business. (2) Their *moral unscrupulousness*. They have no high sense of honour, no inviolable rules of right, no swaying sense of moral responsibilities. Hence they will not reject the fraudulent and the false if they will serve them in their course. Fraud and falsehood are perhaps the chief factors in fortune-making. No wonder, then, that the wicked become rich. 2. This is a *trying* fact. Men of incorruptible truth, honesty, and high devotion have in all ages been baffled and distressed by this fact. "Wherefore do the wicked prosper?" This has been their puzzle.

II. SECULAR PROSPERITY ABUSED BY THE WICKED. "As they were increased, so they sinned against me." Wealth has a wonderful power either for good or ill. With it the truly generous and holy can widen the empire of spiritual intelligence and advance the cause of human happiness; and by it the wicked can increase the corruption and swell the tide of human depravity. In the hands of the wicked wealth can: 1. Promote *injustice*. Wealth gives a man power to baffle the cause of justice, trample on human rights, and oppress the poor and the innocent. Wealth fattens the despotic in human nature. 2. Promote *sensuality*. It provides means to inflame the low passions of human nature, and to pamper the brutal appetites. It tends to bury the soul in the warm and sparkling stream of animal passions. 3. Promote *practical atheism*. The man who has an abundance of the things of this life, and who has not the fear of God in his heart, is sure to sink into an utter forgetfulness of the Author of all good. Thus, then, "as they were increased, so they sinned against me." A terrible fact this.

III. SECULAR PROSPERITY RUINOUS TO THE WICKED. "Therefore will I change their glory into shame." I will strip them of all they now glory in, all their worldly prosperity, and give them shame instead. I will quench all the lights which they have kindled, and which glare around them, and there shall be darkness. I will bring them into wretchedness and contempt. "Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee." "I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay tree. Yet he passed away, and, lo, he was not: yea, I sought him, but he could not be found."

> "To-day he puts forth
> The tender leaves of hopes, to-morrow blossoms,
> And bears his blushing honours thick upon him:
> The third day comes a frost, a killing frost:
> And,—when he thinks, good easy man, full surely
> His greatness is a-ripening,—nips his root,
> And then he falls, as I do."
>
> (Shakespeare.)

D. T.

Ver. 8.—*Feeding on sin.* "They eat up the sin of my people, and they set their heart on their iniquity." Dr. Henderson renders these words, "They devour the sin offering of my people." "The priests greedily devoured what the people brought for the expiation of their sins; and instead of endeavouring to put a stop to abounding iniquity, only wished it to increase, in order that they might profit by the multitude of the victims presented for sacrifice." The priests lived upon the sacrificial meat (see Lev. vi. 26), and the more they had of this the more they were pleased. But this

increased with the increase of the sins of the people: the more the people sinned, the more sin offerings; and the more sin offerings, the more priestly banquets. So they "set their heart on their iniquity." That is, they longed for its increase; they had an interest in the growth of sin in the country, so that in truth, without figure, they *feed upon the sin of the people*. "The more sins," says an old expositor, "the more sacrifice, and therefore they cared not how much sin people were guilty of. Instead of warning the people against sin from the consideration of the sacrifices, which showed them what an offence sin was to God, since it added such an expiation, they emboldened and encouraged the people to sin, since an atonement might be made at so small an expense. Thus they glutted themselves upon the sins of the people, and helped to keep up that which they should have beaten down." Are there no men now that feed and feast on the sins of the people? We think such men can be found.

I. THERE ARE SUCH MEN IN THE ECCLESIASTICAL WORLD. There is a class of ecclesiastics who live in palaces, fare sumptuously every day, and roll in chariots of opulence, who profess to be the chief ministers of him who made himself of no reputation, took upon himself the form of a servant, and who, when on earth, had nowhere to lay his head. What is it that sustains these men, keeps up the huge imposture? Simply the "sin of the people." Their *credulity*, their *ignorance*, their *servility*, their *superstition*. Let these sins die out, and these gorgeous and plethoric hierarchs will have to doff their splendour, live on humble fare, and work as honest men or starve. A story is related of a prelate in Charles V.'s time, who invited his friends to his house, and prepared a hospitable banquet of which they would not partake. "What!" said he, "will you not eat of dainties that are bought at so dear a rate? The meat that I have prepared for you is like to cost me the pains of hell." The prelate felt that he was a priestly impostor, misrepresenting the Man of sorrows, and shamefully neglecting his duty.

II. THERE ARE SUCH MEN IN THE COMMERCIAL WORLD. There are men who have vested interest in the sin of *intemperance*—brewers, distillers, and traffickers in alcoholic drinks. They live on the sin of intemperance, and raise themselves in hot antagonism against any effort to weaken its power or to limit its influence. There are men who have vested interest in the sin of *war*. The sin of war! The phrase is infinitely too weak. War comprises all sins. It is the totality of all abominations. Yet the manufacturers of armouries and war-ships, and traders in the implements and equipages of fighting men, live on this sin. They hail every intimation of war. The first groan of the infernal lion falls as music on their greedy ears.

III. THERE ARE SUCH MEN IN THE PROFESSIONAL WORLD. What would the *lawyer* do without chicaneries, breaches of contract, thefts, violences, seductions, and all kinds of social immoralities and crimes? What would *popular journalists* do were there no scandals, no tragedies, no crime, no fraudulent advertisements? What would become of the *sensational novelist* if there was no sinful love in the people for the horrible and the prurient?

CONCLUSION. Alas! that men are sinners, but alas! a thousand times more, that men should feed on sin! Herein is the great obstruction to moral reformations. Destroy a popular sin, and you destroy the livelihood of hundreds, and the pomp and splendour of many. How shall sin be put away from the world? Who shall destroy this work of the devil? Thank God, we have the answer!—D. T.

Ver. 9.—*The reciprocal influence of priesthood and people.* "There shall be, like people, like priest." Though perhaps the translation of Keil and Delitzsch—"Therefore it will happen as to the people, so to the priest"—may give the literal idea, I take the words as they stand, which have become a proverb, "Like people, like priest." Instead of taking up the primary idea of the words, viz. that the rank and wealth of the priests would not exempt them from sharing the same fate as the rest of the nation, I would put into prominence for a moment the idea of the reciprocal influence of priesthood and people. And I make two general remarks on this idea.

I. THERE IS SOMETIMES A DISGRACEFUL RECIPROCAL INFLUENCE. 1. It is a disgrace to a true priest to become like the people. A true priest—that is, a God-made priest—is a man above the average in brain, heart, being, culture, intelligence, and virtue. He who is not above the average is no priest; he is out of his place. A priest is a man to

mould, not to be moulded; to control, not to cringe; to lead, not to be led. His thoughts should sway the thoughts of the people, and his character should command their reverence. Sometimes, nay, too frequently, you see priests become like the people—mean, sordid, grovelling. There are men who call themselves priests that are the mere creatures of the people. The true priest is the prince of the people; his ministry is a "royal priesthood." 2. It is a disgrace to a people to become like a bad priest. There are priests whose natures are lean, whose capacities are feeble, whose religion is sensuous, whose sympathies are exclusive, whose opinions are stereotyped, whose spirit is intolerant. Shame on the people that allow themselves to become like such a priest! And yet the transformation is pretty general. How often one meets in a social circle with those who represent the miserable spirit of their little priest!

II. THERE IS SOMETIMES AN HONOURABLE RECIPROCAL INFLUENCE. 1. It is honourable when people become like a true priest. When they catch his broad spirit, cherish his soul-quickening thought, and grasp his lofty aims, when they feel one with him in spiritual interests and Christly pursuits. 2. It is honourable to the true priest when he has succeeded in making the people like him. He may well feel a devout exultation as he moves amongst them that their moral hearts beat in unison with his, that their lives are set to the same key-note, that they are of one mind and one heart in relation to the grand purpose of life.

> "I venerate the man whose heart is warm,
> Whose hands are pure, whose doctrine and whose life
> Coincident, exhibit lucid proof
> That he is honest in the sacred cause.
> To such I render more than mere respect,
> Whose actions say that they respect themselves."
>
> (Cowper.)

D. T.

Ver. 17.—*An unholy alliance and a righteous abandonment.* "Ephraim is joined to idols: let him alone." "Ephraim," the most powerful of the ten tribes, is frequently used by the prophets for Israel. Notice briefly two things.

I. AN UNHOLY ALLIANCE. "Ephraim is joined to idols," is welded to them; his heart is rooted in them. What is an idol? Carved wood, stone, or moulded metal, living creatures, flowing streams, or heavenly orbs? No. These are mere representations of idols. The idol of a man is the object *supremely* loved, whatever that object may be. Gold, fame, beauty, power, pleasure,—whatever the heart is set on, that is the idol. Here in our England we condemn polytheism, but we abound with polytheists. Men have as many idols here as they have objects of supreme love, and they are many. Thousands of Englishmen are joined to their idols; they are chained to them by the ties of their strongest loves and habits.

II. A RIGHTEOUS ABANDONMENT. "Let him alone." It is a hopeless case. Waste no more time in argument and moral appliances. The times comes with every sinner when he is abandoned, his character is stereotyped, and his doom is settled. God says to providence, "Let him alone"—do not disturb him; to conscience, "Let him alone;" to the Spirit, "Let him alone." When God abandons the soul, all is over; when the fountain refuses to pour forth its waters, the stream dries up; when the sun refuses to travel up the horizon, all nature will die.—D. T.

Ver. 19.—*Retributive justice.* "The wind hath bound her up in her wings, and they shall be ashamed because of their sacrifices." The simple meaning of this is, Israel shall be borne away from her land, suddenly and violently, as by the winds of heaven. There is retributive justice in the universe. Men are slow to discern it, and it often moves so silently and secretly as to elude the dim vision of the wicked. Still it is in existence, and it works like the thunderstorm; it may sleep silently in the heavens for some time, but break into tempest and fury it must, sooner or later. The verse leads us to notice two things in relation to this retributive justice.

I. ITS EMBLEM. It is here compared to the "wind." Why is it like "wind"?

1. In its *agitation.* Wind is a disturbance or an agitation of the atmosphere. The average condition of the air is silence and serenity. The normal condition of Divine government is quiet. It has no tempest where there is not wickedness. The growing heat of sin so disturbs it that it often breaks into an all-devastating fury. It is like "wind." 2. In its *violence.* There is often a mighty power in the wind. It sometimes "rends the mountains and breaks in pieces the rocks." It has overturned the "mountains by the roots;" it has "broken the cedars, even the cedars of Lebanon, and shaken the wilderness." Cambyses being once in the wilderness with the soldiers, a strong and violent wind broke and buried thousands of them in the sand. Who can stand before retributive justice when it comes forth in its power? "The wind hath bound her up in her wings." Avenging justice binds its victim up, and carries it away—whether it be an individual, a nation, or a world—as tempests carry off the chaff.

II. ITS EFFECT. "And they shall be ashamed because of their sacrifices." Shame —moral shame, the primary element in the soul's hell—ever comes to the victim of retributive justice. 1. There is the shame of *disappointment.* All plans broken, all purposes thwarted, all hopes destroyed. "Let me not be ashamed of my hope," said David. 2. There is the shame of *exposure.* The wicked always live in masquerade; they always appear to be what they are not; they are necessarily hypocrites. Retributive justice takes off the mask and lays bare their hearts in all their revolting foulness. 3. There is the shame of *remorse.* This is the most burning shame of all. It sends its fires down into the very centre of man's being, and sets all the moral nerves aflame.

CONCLUSION. Take warning, ye wicked sons of men; let not the present stillness of your atmosphere deceive you; your sins are generating a heat that must sooner or later so disturb the elements about you, as to bring on you ruin and fill you with "shame and confusion of face."

"A year has ended. Let the good man pause,
And think, for he can think, of all its crime
And toil and suffering. Nature has her laws
That will not brook infringement; in all time,
All circumstances, all states, in every clime,
She holds aloft the same avenging sword;
And, sitting on her boundless throne sublime,
The vials of her wrath, with justice stored,
Shall, in her own good hour, on all that's ill be poured."

(James Gates Percival.)

D. T.

Vers. 1—5.—*The Lord's controversy.* God had a controversy with the inhabitants of the land. The essential part of the indictment was that they had forsaken *him.* "There is no knowledge of God in the land." Hence—

I. A FEARFUL OVERFLOWING OF IMMORALITY. 1. With the knowledge of God there had departed also "truth and mercy" (ver. 1). "Truth" and "mercy," or "kindness," are root-principles of morals. The subversion of them is the subversion of morality in its foundations. These foundation-virtues, however, had been subverted in Israel. Morality has never proved able to sustain itself in divorce from religion. The bond which binds man to God is also the bond which binds him to the practice of the moral virtues. To cut this bond is to set him adrift. He who ignores the primal obligation—that to his Maker—is not likely to have much regard for any other. 2. The result was a fearful overspreading of corruption. "By swearing, and lying, and killing," etc. (ver. 2). Ungodliness ran its course unchecked. It brought forth its natural fruits of rapine, dishonesty, licentiousness, profanity, riotousness, and murder. Society seemed dissolving. Irreligion is the foe, not only of private morality, but of social order. It tends to division, to anarchy, to general disregard of law and rights.

II. SEVERE JUDGMENTS ON THE LAND. "Therefore shall the land mourn," etc. (ver. 3). Man's sin, in its effects, is not confined to himself or to his kind. It overflows on the animate and the inanimate creation. 1. The ground was cursed at first for man's sake (Gen. iii. 17). 2. It is degraded in being compelled to sustain the

sinner, and to serve as the instrument of his vices. 3. It is visited on his account with plagues, droughts, and famines (Amos iv. 6—12). 4. It is despoiled and down-trodden, and suffers from his neglect, his misuse, and his ruthless devastations. 5. The animal creation shares in these calamities, besides suffering much directly from man's cruel treatment. Thus in many ways the creature is made subject to vanity (Rom. viii. 19—22). The consideration should heighten our sense of sin's enormity.

III. APPROACHING RUIN TO THE NATION. (Vers. 4, 5.) A nation in the moral state above described cannot long escape punishment. It "is nigh unto cursing" (Heb. vi. 8). Its doom hastens on apace. "Wheresoever the carcase is, there will the eagles be gathered together" (Matt. xxiv. 28). The judgment which would fall on Israel would be: 1. *Sure.* "Yet let no man strive, nor reprove another," etc. (ver. 4). The thing for the people to do was, not to strive with one another, but to cease to strive with God. But this was a remedy not likely to be adopted. A headstrong, presumptuous, contumacious spirit had got possession of them; they were "as they that strive with the priest"—a proverbial expression for the highest contumacy (cf. Deut. xvii. 12). It is useless for the wicked to reprove, rebuke, or reproach one another for the miseries which are overtaking them while repentance toward God stands postponed. That is the first and great necessity. 2. *Sudden.* "Therefore shalt thou fall in the day," etc. (ver. 5). People and prophet would fall continuously, night and day, till all were destroyed. But there seems allusion also to the swiftness with which the calamity would descend. The "day" of their prosperity (ch. ii. 11) would suddenly terminate; a "night" of terrible blackness would succeed. This night would be a specially dark one for the "prophet"—he who had claimed to be a "seer." His predictions discredited, his repute gone, his charlatanry exposed, his visions extinguished in blood, he and his dupes would perish miserably together. "The blind lead the blind," and both at last "fall into the ditch" (Matt. xv. 14). 3. *Complete.* The whole nation would be destroyed. "Thy mother" (ver. 5).—J. O.

Vers. 6—11.—*Priests and people.* The prophet addresses himself in this section to both priests and people, but chiefly to the priests, whom he regards as mainly responsible for the people's defection.

I. PRIESTS AND PEOPLE ALIKE IN THE REJECTION OF THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD. (Ver. 6.) 1. *The lack of the knowledge of God.* Israel possessed this knowledge of God once. It did not possess it now. There was little right knowledge of God's character, of God's Law, and of God's past gracious dealings. Jehovah was regarded practically as one of the Baals. Destitute of right ideas of his spirituality, holiness, and moral demands, the people in their sinning did not feel how far they were going astray. Right ideas on these subjects could hardly penetrate into minds besotted with wine, whoredom, and the unholy rites of Baal and Astarte worship. In our own land of Bibles and churches, what dense ignorance of God and of Divine things might be found to prevail, if the matter were inquired into! 2. *Causes of this lack of knowledge.* The knowledge of God was lost, not through any fault on God's part in not giving the means of knowledge, or in not sufficiently inculcating on the people the importance of using the means. God had given the people a Law (ch. viii. 12); he had laid upon the Levites the duty of teaching and of promoting the knowledge of its requirements (Deut. xxxiii. 10; Mal. iii. 5—7); he had laid the same duty on parents (Deut. vi. 6—9); he had warned all of the dangers of inattention and forgetfulness. How, then, came the knowledge to be lost? (1) The priests failed in teaching (cf. Mal. ii. 8). A grave responsibility rests on the teachers of a nation. If they are faithful in duty, the knowledge of God can never be absolutely lost. If they do not teach, it is certain that a large number will always remain uninstructed. Their example has an influence on others. (2) The people failed in remembering. The priests had rejected (or despised) knowledge; the people had forgotten the Law of their God. The unfaithfulness of the professed teachers did not wholly exonerate those who were neglected. They had other means of knowledge. Had they been diligent in preserving the knowledge they had, and in handing it down by careful parental instruction (Ps. lxxviii. 4), this, aided by the study of the Law itself, would have kept alive true knowledge, and have saved the nation. We are responsible for the use we make even of scant opportunites. (3) The cause of failure in both cases was a moral one. Neither priests nor people cared to retain God in their

knowledge. This was how they allowed the knowledge of him to be lost (cf. Rom. i. 21, 28). The departure of the heart from God comes first. There is then the indisposition to hear about him or learn about him. Thus the knowledge of him is lost. Such ignorance is culpable. 3. *The fatal effects of this lack of knowledge.* (1) The people were destroyed. "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge." They had destroyed themselves. How many are thus destroyed who, had they been rightly taught in youth, might now have been foremost in God's service! Parents, teachers, ministers, cannot too seriously reflect on the measure of their responsibility (cf. Ezek. iii. 17—21; xxxiii.). We must teach men the way of salvation, if we expect them to find it or to walk in it (Acts x. 6, 33; xvi. 17, 31). (2) God rejected those who had rejected him. "I will reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to be." Place, office, honour, opportunities of usefulness, will be taken from us if we misuse them (Rev. ii. 5, 16). (3) The children were lost through the unfaithfulness of the parents. "I will forget thy children."

II. PRIESTS AND PEOPLE ALIKE IN SIN. (Vers. 7, 8.) The sins alluded to are pride and covetousness. 1. *Pride* was the sin of the people. "As they were increased, so they sinned against me." This is the danger of prosperity. "Jeshurun waxed fat, and kicked" (Deut. xxxii. 15). The heart grows haughty, and rebels at the restraints of the Divine Law. Moses foretold the danger, and warned against it (Deut. viii. 10—20). Retribution would correspond in character to the sin. "I will turn their glory into shame." 2. *Covetousness* was peculiarly the sin of the priests. "They eat up the sin of my people," etc. The reference is to the flesh of the sin offerings, or, more generally, to revenues derived from transgressions (atonement money, etc.). The priests prostituted their sacred office for gain. They were glad at the iniquity of the people, if it brought them more income (cf. the Romish sale of pardons, etc.). It is shameful, under any circumstances, to seek gain by conniving at sin.

III. PRIESTS AND PEOPLE ALIKE IN THE PUNISHMENT OF SIN. (Vers. 9—11.) "Like people, like priest." It is difficult to say which has the greater influence on the other, priest or people. The people are readily corrupted by their leaders. The leaders, on the other hand, are too apt to take their tone from the community. They act and react, and tend to a moral level. Alike in sin, priests and people are made alike in punishment. "I will punish them," etc. The punishment would be: 1. *Congruous with the nature of the sin.* "They shall eat, and not have enough," etc. For plenty there would be substituted scarcity; greed would find its recompense in not having enough to satisfy; the nation that boasted of its increase would be made few in number. This is the general character of God's punishments. 2. *In part wrought out by the sins themselves.* Sin strikes round to be its own avenger. Luxury and waste lead to poverty. The greed of the priest overreaches itself, and leads to the altar being deserted, and the office held in contempt (Judg. xvii. 9, 10; 1 Sam. ii. 36). Pampered appetite becomes a tyrant and tormentor. Licentiousness diminishes population. 3. *Prepared for by infatuation.* "Whoredom and wine and new wine take away the heart." "Whom the gods wish to destroy, they first madden." Infatuation precedes doom.—J. O.

Vers. 12—14.—*Sin's fatuity.* The people had parted with the knowledge of the true God, and had become possessed of a spirit of whoredoms. See the effects.

I. THEY WENT AFTER SENSELESS FOLLIES. "My people ask counsel at their stocks, and their staff declareth unto them" (ver. 12). The spirit of sin is a spirit of "error." It robs men of their better judgment. No limit can be put to the wanderings of the mind under its influence. The worship of a "stock" is absurd enough, even when the devotee knows no better. But that Israel, who had "been once enlightened," and had known the true God, should go back to "stocks" and "staffs," was a singular instance of fatuity. When the soul has abandoned God, there is no anticipating what crazes it will adopt, what "will-o'-the-wisps" it will follow after (the follies of society, the credulity of scepticism, etc.).

II. THEY FELL VICTIMS TO SUPERSTITION. "They sacrifice upon the tops of the mountains," etc. (ver. 13). They attached a superstitious importance to mountains, hills, trees, groves, etc., in connection with their worship. The mountains lifted them nearer to heaven (Numb. xxii. 41; xxiii. 14, 28); the shade of the trees filled them with awe. True religion delivers from superstition. Irreligion leaves men a prey to

it. Feelings of a superstitious nature become with many a substitute for religion. They seek, in the materialistic accompaniments of worship, a satisfaction which the worship itself would not afford them (altars, ritual, architectural gloom, vestments, etc.).

III. THEY WERE BEGUILED INTO GROSS IMMORALITY. "Therefore your daughters shall commit whoredom, and your spouses [daughters-in-law] shall commit adultery" (ver. 13). The seductions of the place, the character of the worship, and the exciting behaviour indulged in at the altar, paved the way for lewd practices. These were incorporated as a part of most heathen worship. The heart which has cast off the fear of God is only too eagerly prepared for licentious conduct. Lust is one of the commonest forms of sin.

IV. THEY SET AN EVIL EXAMPLE TO THEIR JUNIORS. "I will not punish your daughters," etc. (ver. 14). The unblushing conduct of the parents in going to the public altars with immoral women made it impossible to blame too severely the younger generation, who simply followed the example set them by their elders. Thus corruption was propagated, and the most shameless deeds were flaunted in the light of open day.

V. THEY BROUGHT DOWN ON THEMSELVES THE VENGEANCE OF GOD. "Therefore the people that doth not understand shall fall" (ver. 14). The origin of all was the not understanding. They are destroyed for lack of knowledge (ver. 6).—J. O.

Vers. 15—19.—*Warning to Judah.* Judah had not yet sunk so low as Israel. She was, however, far from guiltless. Her princes were like them that remove the bound (ch. v. 10). She is included with Israel in the threatenings that follow (ch. v. 5, 10, 14; vi. 4, 11). "The people did yet corruptly," is the testimony of the history (2 Chron. xxvii. 2). Still her case was not so hopeless but that judgment might be averted by timely repentance. There was still "some good thing" in Judah to work upon; something to appeal to. The prophet bids her take warning from the sister kingdom, "Come not ye unto Gilgal, neither go ye up to Beth-aven [Bethel]," etc. (ver. 15). Judah should be warned—

I. BY ISRAEL'S INTRACTABLENESS. (Ver. 16.) "Israel is intractable as an intractable heifer." The nation, that is, had proved unruly, obstinate, refractory, backsliding, unteachable. Nothing that God could do would induce it to walk quietly in his ways. This is a picture of the natural, unrenewed temper. "It is not subject to the Law of God, neither indeed can be" (Rom. viii. 7). In Judah, also, this temper was beginning to show itself. Let it be warned. Israel would soon have liberty enough, and more than it cared for. "Now the Lord will feed them as a lamb in a large place." Intractableness springs from a false desire of freedom. It counts the yoke of God a bondage. The punishment would correspond. God would relieve the people of his yoke, but would relieve them at the same time of the care and protection they had enjoyed as his nation. Left, in a condition of dispersion, to realize their helplessness, they would learn to long for the yoke they had once despised.

II. BY ISRAEL'S OBDURACY. (Ver. 17.) Obduracy is defined as that state which implies "a total disregard of Divine calls and warnings, and an insensibility to their importance" (Müller). This is the state to which intractableness tends. In Israel it had been already reached. "Ephraim is joined to his idols: let him alone." 1. The soul has its idols—its earthly objects, which it puts in the place of God. 2. There comes in time to be such a welding of the soul to the objects of its sinful pursuit, that further remonstrance is useless. 3. When this stage is reached, God "lets it alone." He ceases remonstrating. He abandons it to its sinful courses. Conscience is silent. The Spirit ceases to strive. These awful words, "Let it alone," are the soul's deathknell. After this there is no recovery. How solemn the warning to Judah—and to *us!*

III. BY ISRAEL'S MORAL DEGENERACY. (Ver. 18.) Everything in the kingdom had become spoiled, degenerate, corrupt—like wine turned sour. The Hebrew word means literally, "to turn aside." Life, when turned aside from its right ends, speedily degenerates. So do gifts and blessings. The land is badly tilled; its fruits are wasted in gluttony and debauchery; health degenerates through the waste of the powers of life in profligacy; feasting sinks to mere animalism, etc. This was the state into which Israel had come. "Her rulers [shields] have loved, have loved, shame." They loved

shame, and the print of shame was on them. The spectacle should deter Judah from following in their steps.

IV. By Israel's experience of the futility of trust in idols. (Ver. 19.) Destruction was about to descend on the nation. The tempest would carry them away on its wings. A fate (1) swift; (2) violent; (3) resistless; (4) dispersive. Then it would be manifest how helpless their idols were to aid them. They would be ashamed of the sacrifices they had offered to them. The wicked will one day be driven out of their false confidences.—J. O.

Ver. 15.—*Offending.* 1. We offend when we frequent places notorious for wickedness. This was the character of Gilgal and Bethel. 2. We offend when we lend countenance to impieties practised in the name of religion. One of Jeroboam's calves was at Bethel. Its presence changed Beth-el, the "house of God," into "Beth-aven," "house of vanity." 3. We offend when we are partners to any profanation of the Name of God. "Nor swear, The Lord liveth." An oath is so solemn a thing that it ought not to be taken except on the most solemn occasions. The light use of God's Name in any connection—especially in connection with circumstances otherwise dishonouring to him—is a heinous transgression.—J. O.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER V.

Ver. 1.—**Hear ye this, O priests; and hearken, ye house of Israel; and give ye ear, O house of the king.** The persons here addressed comprise all the estates of the realm—priests, people, and princes. The house of Israel is the northern kingdom; and the house of the king is the members of the king's family, of his court and of his government. Thus the rulers and the ruled, the spiritual teachers and the taught, are comprehended in this address. Neither priestly office, nor popular power, nor princely dignity was to be exempted. But, though all are summoned to give audience, the heads of the people, the men of light and leading, are first arraigned. **For judgment is toward you,** as the clause is correctly rendered; not, "it devolves on you to maintain judgment," as some understand it. It had, indeed, been the province of the priest to teach, and of the king to execute the judgments of God in Israel; but now they are themselves the subjects of judgment. Judgment was now to begin at the house of the king and of the priest; God was about to execute judgment upon them—the judgment from that judgment-seat where justice never miscarries, and where no mistake is ever made. The cause of this is assigned. **Because ye have been a snare on Mizpah, and a net spread upon Tabor.** Instead of being safeguards of the people, they had been a snare to them; instead of being true leaders, as God had intended them, they had misled them; instead of contributing to their security, they had seduced them to sin and so helped to prepare them for destruction; they had been a snare to entrap and a net to entangle. East as well as west of the Jordan their evil influence had wrought ruin. Mizpah, now *es-Salt*, was on the east of the river among the hills of Gilead, where Jacob and Laban entered into covenant; Tabor, like a solitary cone or sugar-loaf, rises up from the plain of Jezreel, or Esdraelon, on the west of the river. On the wooded slopes of Tabor and the beacon-hill of Mizpah game, no doubt, abounded and found covert, and hence the origin of the figure here used; but they had probably become scenes of idolatry or wickedness.

Ver. 2.—**And the revolters are profound to make slaughter** (or, *profuse in murders or in sacrifices, or in dealing corruptly*), **though I** have been **a rebuker of them all** (rather, *but I am [bent upon] chastisement for them all*). The literal rendering of the first clause is, *slaughtering they have made deep*, which is an idiom analogous to "they have deeply revolted;" literally, "they have made revolting deep" (Isa. xxxi. 6). The slaughtering, though understood by Wünsche of sacrifices, is rather meant of the destruction and carnage which the revolters caused to the people. Rashi explains it literally in this way: "I said, Every one that goes not up to the stated feasts transgresses a positive precept; but they decree that every one who goes up to the stated feasts shall be slain." This seems to imply that liers-in-wait were set probably on Mizpah and Tabor, the places mentioned in the preceding verse, to slay the Israelites that were found going up to the feasts at Jerusalem. Aben Ezra, taking this second verse as continuing the sentiment of the first, interprets as follows: "Ye have been a snare on Mizpah that ye might not allow them to go up

to the feasts to the house of the Lord; and to slay (victims) in the usual way." The revolters or apostates he takes to be the worshippers of Baal. "They made deep," he adds in his exposition, "the snares, those that are mentioned, that passers-by might not see them; but I will chastise all of them for this evil which they have done, since it is not hidden from me why they have hid (made) it so deep." The slaughtering is thus understood by Aben Ezra of slaying the sacrificial victims. Similarly Kimchi interprets thus: "He says that the revolters who are the worshippers of idols, who depart from the ways of God—blessed be he!—and from his service, like a woman who is a revolter from under her husband, have made deep their revolt, slaying and sacrificing to idols." He would understand the slaughtering neither of victims with Kimchi and Aben Ezra; nor of literally slaying Israelites to prevent persons going up to Jerusalem, the proper seat of Jehovah's worship; but of the destructive consequences which the conduct of these apostates brought on the people. The work of chastisement God now takes in hand in good earnest. Droppings of the coming shower there had been; but now the full flood is to descend, for God presents himself to misleaders and misled alike under the sole aspect of rebuke. "I," he says, "am chastisement" (give myself to it). A like form of expression occurs in Ps. cix. 4, "I am prayer;" that is, am a man of prayer, or give myself to prayer. Thus Kimchi explains the idiom: "The prophet says, Say not that no man shall correct and reprove them, therefore they sin; for I am the person who reproves them all, and day by day I reprove them, but they will not hearken to me. But *raani moser* wants the word *ish*, man, as (in Ps. cix. 4) *raani tephîlah*, which we have explained *raani ish tephîlah*."

Ver. 3.—**I know Ephraim, and Israel is not hid from me.** All attempts at concealment are vain, though sinners try ever so much to hide their sins from the Divine Majesty. However deep they dig downward, God will bring their evil doings up and out to the light of day and punish them. **For now, O Ephraim, thou committest whoredom, and Israel is defiled.** Israel is the northern kingdom, and Ephraim, being the most powerful tribe, is often identified with Israel; here, however, they are distinguished—Israel is the kingdom as a whole, and Ephraim is its leading tribe. This powerful tribe, ever envious of Judah, was the ringleader in the calf-worship of Jeroboam and other idolatries; and through Ephraim's evil influence the other tribes, and so all Israel, were defiled.

Ver. 4.—In this verse their evil doings are traced to an evil spirit of whoredoms, that is, of idolatries, which impels them blindly and resistlessly to evil, while at the same time it expels the knowledge of God. The first clause is differently rendered. The textual rendering of the Authorized Version, viz. **they will not frame** (literally, *give, direct*) **their doings to turn unto their God**, denotes their total and absolute refusal to repent or to bring forth fruits meet for repentance. The actions are an index of the state of the heart, but neither the thoughts of Israel at this time, nor their deeds which indicated those thoughts, were in the direction of repentance. In heart and life they were impenitent. This rendering is supported by most of the Hebrew commentators. Rashi says, "They forsake not their evil way;" Aben Ezra, "They perform not works so as to turn." Kimchi also gives an alternative sense: "Or the sense of the words is thus: They cling so closely to their evil works, that even should they for once conceive in their heart the idea of turning, they immediately repent them of it." The marginal rendering also yields a good sense; it is, *Their doings will not suffer* (allow) [*them*] *to turn unto their God.* The pronominal suffix for "them" is wanting, yet it may be dispensed with, as the appending of it to "doings" and "God" makes the sense sufficiently explicit. It is favoured by Ewald, Keil, the Targum, and Kimchi, who explains: "Their evil works do not allow them to return to their God, as if he said, To such extent have they multiplied transgression that there is no way left them to return, until they receive their punishment." Such and so great was the power of their evil habits that they could not break them off or break away from them by repentance; or so intimately connected is a change of heart with a change of life that, in the absence of the latter, the former is impossible. According to either rendering, the reason assigned is contained in the next clause: **For the spirit of whoredoms is in the midst of them, and they have not known the Lord.** So overmastered were they, as though by some fiendish spirit that held them in check and exercised despotic power over them, that they rushed headlong down the steep incline, like the Gadarene herd of swine, which, when the unclean spirits entered into them, ran violently down a steep place into the sea. Neither was there any counteracting force to turn them back or reverse their course. Such a force might have been found in the knowledge of God, of his covenant mercy, of his power, love, grace, and goodness. But this was wanting, and the absence of this knowledge at once increased their impenitence and aggravated their guilt. It was Israel's privilege and Israel's duty to know the Lord; for he had

revealed himself to them as to no other nation; he had given them his Law, he had made them depositaries of his truth and the conservators of his living oracles; their ignorance, therefore, was altogether inexcusable, while it evinced greatest ingratitude to Jehovah, who had taken them into covenant with himself, and declared himself to be their God.

Ver. 5.—**And the pride of Israel doth testify to his face.** This may be understood (1) of Jehovah, who was Israel's glory, as we read in Amos vii. 7 of "the excellency of Israel." This explanation suits at once the sense and the context. They knew not God, notwithstanding the special advantages they enjoyed for that knowledge; they had no liking to the knowledge of God, they did not concern themselves about it; and now Jehovah, who should have been their excellency and glory, but who had been thus slighted by them, will testify against them and bear witness to their face by judgments. But (2) another interpretation recommends itself as equally or more suitable. This interpretation understands "pride" more simply to mean the prosperous state and flourishing condition of which Israel was proud, or rather, perhaps, the haughtiness of Israel, owing to those very circumstances of worldly wealth and greatness. This vain pride and self-exaltation was the great obstacle in the way of their turning to the Lord. If this sense of the word be accepted, the verb had better be rendered "humbled," a meaning which it often has; thus, "humbled shall be the pride of Israel to his face" (that is, in his own sight). Such is the translation of the LXX.: *Ταπεινωθήσεται, ἡ ὕβρις τοῦ Ἰσραὴλ εἰς πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ*, "The pride of Israel shall be brought low before his face;" while the Chaldee translates similarly, "The glory of Israel shall be humbled while they see it;" the Syriac has, "The pride of Israel shall be humbled in his presence," or before his eyes. Aben Ezra also takes the idea of the verb to be humiliation or depression; while Kimchi takes *gaon* not so much in the sense of the inward feeling, as of those outward circumstances that promoted it—their greatness and grandeur and glory; and, alluding to the words of the Chaldee rendering, "in their sight," he says, "While they are still in their land before their captivity, they shall perceive their humiliation and degradation, instead of the glory which they had at the beginning." Kimchi, however, as well as most other commentators, seems to have understood the verb in the sense of "testify;" thus, "Israel's pride will testify to his face, when he shall take upon him its punishment." **Therefore shall Israel and Ephraim fall in their iniquity; Judah also shall fall with them.** Pride usually goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall. The consequence of Israel's pride was the fall here mentioned. The ten tribes composing the northern kingdom fell into gross and grievous sin, and therefore also into long suffering and sore sorrow. Even Ephraim, that tribe pre-eminent for power as for pride, and the perpetual rival of Judah, shall fall as well as and with the rest. Judah also, that is, Judah proper, and Benjamin, participating in the same evil course, fell like Israel into sin, and, though more than a century later, into ruin.

In vers. 6—10 the prophet details the unavailing and ineffectual efforts of Israel to avert, or at least escape from, the threatened judgments.

Ver. 6.—**They shall go with their flocks and with their herds to seek the Lord.** In this way they attempt to break, if not prevent, their fall. With numerous and costly sacrifices they endeavour to propitiate Jehovah. With sheep and goats out of their flocks, and with bullocks and heifers out of their herd, they try to make reparation for the past or to secure present and future favour. But in vain. Israel might go to Bethel and Judah to Jerusalem; but to no purpose. **They shall not find him; he hath withdrawn himself.** Their repentance came too late; or when it did come it wanted sincerity; or it was a wrong motive which prompted it—fear of approaching calamity and not love to their Creator; or their sins ran parallel with their sacrifice. Forgetting that obedience is better than sacrifice, they cherished a disobedient spirit or continued in their course of disobedience notwithstanding their outward sacrificial service. For one cause or other they fail in their efforts to find him; for, instead of being a present help in time of trouble, he has withdrawn beyond their reach; he has removed the Shechinah-glory of his presence from among them; or he has loosed himself from all those ties that once bound him in mercy to them, just as a husband frees himself from all responsibilities and disarms all liabilities on behalf of a faithless partner whom he has been forced to divorce. And such is the specific reason assigned in the next verse.

Ver. 7.—**They have dealt treacherously against the Lord: for they have begotten strange children.** This may refer to intermarriages with idolaters, when the offspring of such forbidden unions departed still further from the worship of Jehovah; or the children of godless Jewish parents reflected yet more the wicked works and ways of such parents. In consequence of the infidelity of the wife, the children were not the offspring of lawful wedlock or conjugal union; in other words, they were children

of whoredom—an adulterous generation. Israel's infidelity to the holy covenant had as its result a graceless, godless race—children strange and supposititious in the spiritual sense. **Now shall a month devour them with their portions.** If (1) "month" be the right rendering, it is a note of time like "the day of the Lord;" and the sense is that a short time shall see the end of them—not only of their persons, but their properties, that is, their hereditary portions in Palestine. But (2) if "new moon" be the correct translation, the new moon, or sacrificial feasts celebrated at that season, will only ruin, not relieve, them. Their sinful sacrifices and vain oblations, on which they now placed their reliance, will procure, not their salvation, but perdition.

Vers. 8, 9.—**Blow ye the cornet in Gibeah, and the trumpet in Ramah.** Intimation had been given in the preceding verse that the period of their fast-approaching destruction was at hand; that, as Kimchi expresses it, the new moon would soon come at which their enemies would destroy them. Now he pictures them as already on the march, and just advancing to execute the work of destruction; while the terror and alarm consequent thereon are here presented with great vividness, but at the same time with much brevity. A similar scene is depicted at full length by Isaiah in x. 28—32, where the line of the Assyrians' march seems to be indicated, if, indeed, it be not a poetic representation of it, which the prophet gives. Thus from Aiath (*el-Tell*) to the pass of Michmash, now *Mukmas*, where he lays up his baggage; forward to Geba, where they quarter for the night; then on to Nob, where he halts in sight of the holy city, and scarce an hour's march distant. The alarm was to be sounded with the *shophar*, or far-sounding cornet, made of curved horn, and the *châtsôts-rah*, or straight trumpet, made of brass or silver, used in war or at festivals. This signal of hostile invasion was to be sounded in Gibeah, now *Tuleil-el-Ful*, some four miles north of Jerusalem, and in Ramah, now *er-Ram*, two miles further distant. Both these towns, situated on eminences, as the names denote, belong to the northern boundary of Benjamin. The overthrow of the northern kingdom is thus presented as an already accomplished fact; while the invading host has already reached the frontier of the southern kingdom. **Cry aloud at Beth-aven, after thee, O Benjamin.** This cry is the sound of the war-signals already mentioned, and the repetition intensifies the nature of the alarm and the urgency of the case. Beth-aven was either Bethel, now *Beitin*, on the border of Benjamin, or a town nearer Michmash, belonging to Benjamin. The meaning of the somewhat obscure words in the concluding clause can give little trouble, when read in the light of the context. The sounding of the alarm of war indicates with tolerable plainness what was coming behind Benjamin; nor is there need to supply the words, "the enemy rises behind thee," with some, or "the sword rages behind thee," with others. The signals announce the foe as arrived at the frontier of Judah. The enemy is close behind thee, Benjamin, in close pursuit after thee, upon thy very heels. **Ephraim shall be desolate in the day of rebuke.** The day of rebuke is the season when God rebukes sin by punishment; the punishment in this case is no slight rebuke or temporary chastisement. On the contrary, it is extreme in severity and final in duration. Famine, or pestilence, or war might lay a country desolate for a time, and yet relief might soon ensue and recuperative power be vigorously developed. Not so here. Ephraim is made more than desolate partially and for a short period; it becomes a desolation—"an entire desolation," as the words literally mean. In this desolation the other tribes would be involved. Nor was the menace lightly to be regarded or treated as meaningless; it was firm—well grounded as the word of the Eternal, and irreversible as his decree.

Ver. 10.—**The princes of Judah were like them that remove the bound.** The individual who had the temerity to remove his neighbour's landmark was not only guilty of a great sin, but obnoxious to a grievous curse. Thus Deut. xix. 14, "Thou shalt not remove thy neighbour's landmark, which they of old time have set in thine inheritance;" and again xxvii. 17, "Cursed be he that removeth his neighbour's landmark. And all the people shall say, Amen." The removal of the landmark characterizes the conduct of men entirely regardless of the rights of others—utterly reckless. The Jewish nobles, the king's ministers and high officers of state, are compared to those who remove the landmark, disregarding alike what was due to their fellow-men and to their God. The Jewish commentators differ in their exposition between fact and figure—some of them taking the removal of the boundary as a matter of fact, the *caph* being for confirmation; thus D. Kimchi; while L Kimchi explains it of the rejection of the appeal for justice against removers of landmarks; others understanding it figuratively, and the whole as expressing general lawlessness, thus Rashi: "Like a man who removes his neighbour's landmark, just so they hasten to hold fast the ways of Israel their neighbours . . . according to the literal sense, They grasped at the fields; but this, in my opinion, is harsh, for then the

prophet must have written merely מַסִּיגֵי, and not נַסְּכֵי." Similarly Aben Ezra: "They exercise violence towards those who are in their power, whilst they are like those who secretly remove the landmark." The people of Judah had also sinned, and, like Israel in sin, they resemble them in suffering. Therefore **I will pour out my wrath upon them like water.** The word "wrath" here is from a root which signifies "to overflow;" it is thus the overflowing of Divine indignation; while the outpouring thereof denotes the full flood of wrath that will overwhelm those lawless leaders of a misguided and misgoverned people. The execution of the threatening was reserved for the Assyrians, who, under Tiglath-pileser and Sennacherib, invaded and laid waste the land. And yet those judgments, though so severe and plentiful, were not to end in total and lasting devastation as in the case of Israel. The following vers. 11—15 teach the inevitable nature of the judgments that were coming upon both Israel and Judah, and from which no earthly power could deliver them. The only relief possible depended on their seeking God in the day of their distress.

Ver. 11.—**Ephraim is oppressed and broken in judgment.** The expression *rtsuts mishpat* is (1) by some explained, "crushed by the judgment," that is, of God, according to which *mishpat* would be the genitive of the agent as *mukkeh Elohim*. But "crushed of judgment" or in judgment is justly preferred by others, the genitive taking the place of the accusative. Again, though the combination of *'ashuq* with *rutsuts* is frequent, occurring as early as Deut. xxviii. 33, the latter is the stronger term. The oppression is (2) not that which their own kings and princes practised upon their subjects, according to Aben Ezra, "Their kings oppressed and cheated them;" nor the injustice practised by the people of Ephraim among themselves, as implied by the LXX., "Ephraim altogether prevailed against his adversary, he trod judgment underfoot." The reference (3) is rather to Ephraim being oppressed and crushed in judgment by the heathen nations around; thus Rashi explains, "Oppressed is Ephraim ever by the hand of the heathen—chastised with chastisements;" so also Kimchi, "By the hand of the heathen who oppressed and crushed them through hard judgments." The construction is asyndetous, like Cant. ii. 11, "The rain is over, is gone." **Because he willingly walked after the commandment.** This clause assigns the reason of Ephraim's oppression. They evinced ready willinghood in following (1) the commandments of men instead of the commandments of God. *Tsav* is thus understood by Aben Ezra, and in like manner Ewald explains it to mean an arbitrary or self-imposed precept. The LXX. (2) seem to have read שָׁוְא, equivalent to אָוֶן, vanity, translating, "for he began to go after vanities (*τῶν ματαίων*);" which the Chaldee and Syriac follow. But (3) it is rather the commandment of Jeroboam about the worship of the calves which lay at the root of the nation's sin. It is well explained by Kimchi: "Although the word 'Jeroboam' is wanting, so that he makes no mention of it after *tsav*, such is the scriptural usage in certain places, *i.e.* to omit a word where the sense is plain. For it was a well-known fact that in that generation they walked not after the commandment, but after that of Jeroboam; therefore he has abbreviated the word to indicate the worthlessness, and used *tsav* instead of *mitsvah*." Perhaps it may have the concrete sense of the object of idolatrous worship.

Ver. 12.—**Therefore will I be unto Ephraim as a moth, and to the house of Judah as rottenness.** This verse is well explained by Calvin as follows: "The meaning of the prophet is by no means obscure, and that is, that the Lord would by a slow corrosion consume both the people; and that, though he would not by one onset destroy them, yet they would pine away until they became wholly rotten." The two agents of destruction here named—the moth which eats away clothes, and the woodworm which gnaws away wood—figuratively represent slow but sure destruction. They are found together in Job xiii. 28. Kimchi explains the sense in like manner: "Like the moth which eats away garments, and like the woodworm which consumes bones and wood, so shall I consume you." The pronoun at the beginning of the verse is emphatic: "*I* your God, who would have been your protector and preserver, whom you have sinfully forsaken, and whose commandments you have arbitrarily set aside—even I am to you as the source of rottenness, and of slow but sure ruin."

Ver. 13.—**Then went Ephraim to the Assyrian, and sent to King Jareb.** Both kingdoms became conscious of their disease and decline; Ephraim felt its sickness or internal consumption, Judah its wound or external corruption (*mazor*, a festering wound, from *zur*, to squeeze out); they were both conscious of rottenness in their condition. That diseased condition was rather spiritual apostasy than political adversity, though these were connected as cause and effect. But, instead of applying to Jehovah, Ephraim had recourse to Assyria and its king for health and help, but in vain; for no earthly power could avert the Divine judgments. The punishment threatened in the twelfth verse prompts the efforts to obtain succour mentioned in this. The general sense of the

verse is given by Kimchi as follows: "When Ephraim and Judah saw that the enemies were constantly invading and plundering them, they seek help from the King of Assyria; but turn not back to me, nor seek help from me, but from flesh and blood, which, however, cannot help them when it is not my pleasure." (1) Some, as the Jewish interpreters, refer the first clause as a matter of course to Ephraim, but the second to Judah; thus, Jerome in like manner understands Ephraim's visit of that to Pul, recorded in 2 Kings xv., and the message of Judah to Tiglath-pileser (2 Kings xvi.); but an interval of thirty years lay between the two events thus described as synchronous. Rashi explains the former clause of Hoshea's visit to Shalmaneser the King of Assyria, and the second of Ahaz's to Tiglath-pileser; Kimchi, again, refers the former to Menahem visiting Pul, and the second of Ahaz to Tiglath-pileser (comp. 2 Chron. xxviii. 21). But (2) Ephraim is the subject in both clauses, so that there is no need of a supposed reference to Judah in the second. Calvin correctly restricts them both to Ephraim, and accounts for the restriction as follows: "Why, then, does he name only Ephraim? Even because the beginning of this evil commenced in the kingdom of Israel; for they were the first who went to the King of Assur, that they might, by his help, resist their neighbours, the Syrians; the Jews afterwards followed their example. Since, then, the Israelites afforded a precedent to the Jews to send for aids of this kind, the prophet expressly confines his discourse to them." He admits, however, that the accusation had respect to both in common; or Ephraim may have applied on behalf of Judah as well as for herself. There is much diversity of opinion with regard to the word "Jareb." Some take it (1) for a proper name, either of an Assyrian king or of some place or city in the country of Assyria, as the LXX., Aben Ezra, and Kimchi; but the absence of the article is opposed to this, neither is Jer. xxxvii. 1, "and Zechariah reigned as king" (*vayyimloch melech*), a proper parallel. Others (2) more correctly explain as a qualifying epithet to "king," that is, "pleader," "striver," or "warrior," in other words, a warlike or champion king, like the epithet of σωτήρ among the Greeks. The indefiniteness in this case gives the idea of majesty or might, as in Arabic; thus, "a champion king, and such a king!" Yet could he not (*yet shall he not be able to*) heal you (plural, and so Ephraim and Judah), nor cure you of your wound. Whatever the distress was, whether arising from hostile invasion or domestic troubles, those degenerate kings had recourse to foreigners for aid. With the profitlessness as well as the sinfulness of such attempts they are here sharply rebuked. Thus Calvin: "Here God declares that whatever the Israelites might seek would be in vain. 'Ye think,' he says, 'that you can escape my hand by these remedies; but your folly will at length betray itself, for he will avail you nothing; that is, King Jareb will not heal you.'"

Vers. 14, 15.—These verses assign a reason for the powerlessness even of the mighty Assyrian monarch to help; and that reason is the Divine interposition. The irresistible Jehovah himself (the addition of the pronoun intensifies, yet more its repetition) now interferes for the destruction of the apostate and rebellious people. **For I am unto Ephraim as a lion, and as a young lion to the house of Judah.** As we are taught in these words, Jehovah's mode of procedure is now changed. Before it had been slow and silent, though sure destruction, as signified by the moth and woodworm; but now it will be public and patent to the eyes of all, as well as decisive and powerful, as intimated by the comparison of a lion and young lion. Nor is that all: lion-like, he will rend before removing the prey—a tearing in pieces and then a carrying away. This well-known habit of the lion finds its counterpart in the subsequent facts of Hebrew history. The northern kingdom was first rent or broken up by Shalmaneser; subsequently the population were carried away into captivity; in like manner the southern kingdom suffered at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar. **I will go and return to my place.** The figurative comparison with a lion is continued in the first clause of ver. 15 also. The lion tears his victim and carries it away, then he retires into his cave or den; so Jehovah, after bringing calamity upon Israel, withdraws from the scene and retires to his own place in heaven, though the heaven of heavens cannot contain him. There, in that unapproachable ether, he is inaccessible to and beyond the reach of the guilty nation that knew not nor valued the former times of merciful visitation. One remedy, and only one, is left, and that is found in penitence and prayer. Once they find out their guiltiness and humble themselves in repentance, they may hopefully seek his face and favour. Turning away from human help, and supplicating the gracious help of the Divine presence, they are encouraged by the prospect of relief and revival; while the means to that end are, no doubt, painful, yet profitable. In the school of affliction they learnt penitence and were brought to their knees in prayer.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—5.—*God here arraigns the sins of princes, priests, and people.* Their degeneracy had been very great and their sins very grievous. Though there is no formal catalogue given of those sins, yet they are incidentally exhibited in the reproofs and rebukes which follow.

I. ALL CLASSES ARE ADDRESSED BY THE DIVINE WORD. It is directed to the high and to the low alike; to the rich and to the poor; it speaks to every grade in society and every rank in life; there is none so high as to be above its teaching, and none so lowly as to be beneath its notice. To sovereigns as to the meanest subjects of their realm; to magistrates and men in authority, as well as to those under their jurisdiction, the warnings and admonitions of Scripture reach. To all, of every class and condition, of every caste and clime, the Divine Word is offered as a light to their feet and a lamp to their path.

II. ALL CLASSES ARE AMENABLE TO THE DIVINE JUDGMENTS. The judgments of God are denounced against all workers of iniquity—from the poorest and meanest of the people to the priests who should be their instructors and examples, and to the princes and principal men, who should not only rule and guide, but protect and preserve them to the utmost of their power. And yet there is a distinction; for those who, through their exalted position or extensive influence, seduce others to sin, expose themselves to sorer condemnation. But, while those who entrap others into sin are doubly guilty, the persons entrapped are not on that account guiltless. Subjects sometimes suffer through the mistakes of their sovereigns; but when subjects and sovereigns are both involved in guilt, they must expect to have their respective share in punishment. When God has a controversy with a people, and his judgments are approaching, it is a time for serious consideration and solemn reflection. Hence we have a triple call to attention in this first verse: "Hear ye this, hearken ye, give ye ear." It was an earnest time and an emphatic call; for God "will at last force audience and attention from the most stubborn."

III. ALL CLASSES HAD PERVERTED THEIR WAY. The revolters seem to have belonged to all ranks and to have comprehended all classes. If the "slaughter" which they made refers to the slaying of sacrifices, it is spoken of with contempt, because those sacrifices, whether from defects in their own nature, or imperfection in the manner in which they were offered, or the wrongness of the motive with which they were presented, were unacceptable to God. Accordingly he speaks of them disparagingly; for "though the prophet spake of sacrifices, he no doubt called sacrificing in contempt killing; as though we should call the temple the shambles, and the killing of victims slaughtering." If, on the other hand, the slaughter referred to be understood literally of actual murder, the criminality is still greater, and they bear the brand of red-handed assassins. In either case, the idiom employed is a very energetic mode of expression "The slaughter they have made deep," or, "they have gone deep in slaughtering," conveys the idea of the great length to which they had gone, either in sacrifices to idols and contrary to legal appointment, or in murderously shedding blood, or even in the more modified sense of causing destruction. They had gone to an extreme in the direction indicated, whichever sense is assigned to slaughtering. It is not so much that they hid their doings deep, as that they went deeply into their works, or sunk deeply in their sin. Further, the aggravation of their sin consisted in its being without excuse. They could not plead ignorance, for they had had line upon line, and precept upon precept. They could not say that they had been left to themselves without lot or hindrance, for had they not enjoyed the instructions and admonitions of those prophets of God whose sphere of labour lay in the northern kingdom? Warnings they had had from Ahijah, Elijah, Elisha, and others; corrections moderate in measure and salutary in design they had, no doubt, been favoured with. Yet all had been to no purpose; they sunk deeper and deeper in the slough of sin, so that their sin had become exceeding sinful.

IV. ALL DISGUISES OF SINNERS ARE TRANSPARENT TO THE EYE OF OMNISCIENCE. Many are the pretences men make to cover their sins, and artful the pretexts by which they seek to hide them. But however men may strive to conceal their sins from their fellow-men, however they may gloss them over so as to deceive their own souls, and

however they may cloak them, as though it were possible to cheat the Almighty; yet all such artifices, by which they try to deceive their neighbours, or blind themselves, or even escape the eye of Omniscience, will prove miserable evasions, leaving them at last —even the inmost thoughts and intents of their hearts—open and naked before the eyes of him with whom they have to do. "The Lord seeth not as man seeth: for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart." The sin of Ephraim, the premier tribe of Israel, was known to God, and he pronounced it whoredom, spiritual whoredom, that is, idolatry. The effect of that sin, which, originating with Ephraim, infected all the other tribes of Israel, was not hid, and could not be hid, from the omniscient One, and he denounced it as defilement—pollution loathsome as sinful. Many a specious excuse had been offered, we cannot doubt, for the worship of the calves. Did it not originate with Jeroboam, that patriot king who came to the rescue of the people, and delivered them from unjust and grinding taxation? Was not Jerusalem too far distant from the centre of the country to be the gathering-place of the tribes? Was not Bethel a consecrated place—a holy spot from that early time when Jacob had his wondrous vision of the ladder connecting earth with heaven? Was not Dan conveniently situated for the northern and remoter tribes? These, and such arguments as these, might serve to palliate the will-worship of Ephraim and the idolatry of Israel. But no; the eye of God saw through it all; for *now*, whatever excuse might be alleged; *now*, whatever plausibilities might be employed; *now*, whatever veil might be thrown over their procedure;—it stood out in its true colours, and in the sight of Heaven, idolatry, defilement—sin in inception and sin in execution, sin in act and sin in effect. Thus Omniscience is proof against all the plausible pretexts with which men surround their sins by way of excuse, apology, or palliation.

V. SINS, LIKE SORROWS, LOVE A TRAIN. How often one sin leads to another, and that, again, to many more! Sins not unfrequently are linked together. Israel by this time was bound by the chain of their own sins; and the links of that chain were many. Beginning our enumeration with idolatry, we find in its wake impenitence, ignorance, insolence, and iniquity in general. 1. It is bad enough when men fall into sin, but worse when they persist in it; nor is there any real repentance unless there are *fruits meet* for repentance. But when men will not have recourse to any of those outward means that might tend toward repentance, the obduracy of their heart is extreme and their condition desperate. Thus was it with Israel when they would not "frame their doings to turn unto their God." 2. The alternative rendering of these words shows us the slavery of sin. Never was there a more cruel bondage than that of iniquity. "Their doings will not suffer them to turn;" they have put the yoke on their neck, and having worn it long they are loth to part with it; and if they would they could not. "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil." So in Peter we read of persons "having eyes full of adultery, and that cannot cease from sin." 3. When men continue long in a course of sin, hardening themselves against remonstrance and reproof, and holding out against all inducements and invitations to repent, God may, and sometimes does, give them up to judicial blindness of one kind or other. An evil spirit of idolatry or impunity, or both, had taken possession of the people's heart at this period. "A strong man armed keepeth his palace—his goods are in peace;" so the infatuation of a particular course of sin, like a Satanic spirit and with Satanic power, completely overmastered and dominated them. 4. Profession without practice is both hypocritical and vain. The Israelites at this time had a profession of religion, for God is called "their God," which could only be by their profession, or owing to the original covenant engagement, the conditions of which they had fallen away from, or by reason of his long-suffering mercy waiting for their return. It is, rather, the first of these that justified the use of the possessive in this case. And that being so, they claimed to possess knowledge of God; but "as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind," or, as the margin has it, "to a mind void of judgment." Continuance in sin proves men's ignorance of the true character of God, of the beauty of holiness, of the hatefulness of sin, and of the dreadful consequences of backsliding. The custom of sinning deprives men of whatever knowledge of such things they had or seemed to have, so that "he that hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he hath." 5. This ignorance was evidence of their ingratitude. "The prophet," says Calvin, "extenuates not the

sin of the people, but, on the contrary, amplifies their ingratitude, because they had forgotten their God who had so indulgently treated them. As they had been redeemed by God's hand, as the teaching of the Law had continued among them, as they had been preserved to that day through God's constant kindness, it was truly an evidence of monstrous ignorance that they could in an instant adopt ungodly forms of worship, and embrace those corruptions which they knew were condemned in the Law."

VI. PROOFS AND CAUSES OF ISRAEL'S PRIDE. Ephraim's pride and envy of Judah produced the disruption and perpetuated it. Two privileges of the birthright forfeited by Jacob's firstborn had been shared by these tribes. Joseph got the double portion in connection with Ephraim and Manasseh; and Judah gained the pre-eminence. Though Judah was superior both numerically and by largeness of territory in the land of promise, Ephraim enjoyed countervailing advantages. All along from the blessing of Jacob Ephraim was inspired with the hope of great things for himself and tribe. The Ephraimites had the choicest of the land, and a central position contributing to their influence over the other tribes. Joshua, the chosen chief who had led the people into the land of promise and settled them in it, sprang from Ephraim; Samuel, the last of the judges, was a native of Mount Ephraim; for three centuries and a half the national sanctuary remained at Shiloh, within the confines of the tribe of Ephraim; the men of that tribe had highly distinguished themselves in the war with Midian, securing the fords of Jordan and beheading the two Midianite princes, Oreb and Zeeb, who had escaped at the head of fifteen thousand men. Nor were they slow to assert their claims; such was their pride, that they could not brook a subordinate position, but insisted on pre-eminence. Their self-assertion and even unreasonable petulance were severely chastised by Jephthah. For a time the superiority inclined or actually belonged to Ephraim; but the preponderance given to Judah by the elevation of David, and Solomon his son, completely turned the scale. Moreover, the transference to Jerusalem, both of the seat of ecclesiastical authority from Shiloh and of the civil capital from Shechem, deeply wounded the pride of Ephraim, and greatly increased the rivalry with Judah. To the slight thus put upon Ephraim there is a distinct reference in several verses of the seventy-eighth psalm; thus, "God was wroth, and greatly abhorred Israel: so that he forsook the tabernacle of Shiloh, the tent which he placed among men;" and again, "He refused the tabernacle of Joseph, and chose not the tribe of Ephraim: but chose the tribe of Judah, the Mount Zion which he loved." For seven years they held out against David; they were the strength of the Absalomic rebellion; they abetted the usurpation of Jeroboam, and accepted the idolatrous worship which, for political purposes, he commended to them; and all from their pride and overweening estimate of themselves, and envy towards their brethren of Judah.

VII. THE HUMILIATION OF PRIDE, OR ITS TESTIMONY. 1. This overbearing spirit of Israel as a nation, and of Ephraim its kingly tribe, was sorely crushed, and the pride of both sadly *humbled*, when, as had been foretold, they first went into captivity. 2. The other rendering of *testify* is well explained by the following observations of Pusey: "They could not give up this sin of Jeroboam without endangering their separate existence as Israel, and owning the superiority of Judah. From this complete self-surrender to God their pride shrank and held them back. The pride which Israel thus showed in refusing to turn to God, and in preferring their sin to their God, itself, he says, witnessed against them, and condemned them." 3. It must have been an addition to Israel's calamity that they had been a snare to Judah, and helped to drag them down into the same slough of sin, and eventually into the same catastrophe with themselves. 4. But how are we to account for the seeming contradiction between the safety previously promised Judah and the calamity now denounced? Calvin's reply to a similar inquiry is pertinent and plain. "The prophet," he says, "speaks here not of those Jews who continued in true and pure religion, but of those who had with the Israelites alienated themselves from the only true God and joined in their superstitions. He thus refers here to the degenerate, and not to the faithful Jews; for to all who worshipped God aright salvation had been already promised."

Vers. 6—10.—*No place found for repentance.* They would seek the Lord with sacrifices from the flock and from the herd, but they would not find him; they multiplied sacrifices, but the Lord had withdrawn himself. Thus in the New Testament

we read that Esau "found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears;" or, according to the Revised Version, "even when he afterward desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected (for he found no place of repentance), though he sought it diligently with tears." In one of our Lord's parables—the parable of the ten virgins—we read that after those who were ready had gone in with him to the marriage, "the door was shut." This brief sentence is in one aspect of it among the most impressive and solemn in the whole Word of God. The sentiment conveyed by it is somewhat, indeed much, akin to that of the statement of the prophet in reference to Israel.

I. IT IS IMPORTANT TO REALIZE THE NATURE OF SUCH WITHDRAWAL. The loss of earthly friends or their estrangement from us is much to be deplored; how much sadder it is when we forfeit the favour of Heaven, and God withdraws himself! On earth friends may, from misconduct on our part, or misconception on their part, or misrepresentation on the part of some intermeddler, or misapprehension of one kind or other, shut the door against us, or we may shut the door against ourselves. But however such an event is to be regretted, still a proper understanding may reopen the once friendly door, or time may unbar it, or the kindly interposition of mutual friends may again open it; or, failing all this, another door may be opened in its stead, and other friends replace those whose friendship has been lost, or even better friends may be raised up in their room. But when the Lord shuts to the door and withdraws himself, no interposition shall unbar it, no time reopen it, no explanation ever fling or force it back; nothing shall ever be able to remove the bar that closes it. Once shut, it is shut for ever; once closed, it never opens; once locked, no key can enter its wards; once bolted, that bolt remains an everlasting fixture.

II. IT IS WELL TO REFLECT ON THE TIME WHEN GOD WITHDRAWS HIMSELF AND IS NO LONGER TO BE FOUND. There may be some difficulty in ascertaining the precise times when God withdraws himself and is no longer found. 1. One thing, however, is abundantly certain, that in the case of sinners who live and die in sin, impenitent and unpardoned, this withdrawal takes place at death; for there is neither knowledge nor device in the grave. Then the day of grace is concluded, then the time of probation ends, then the means of salvation terminate, then the space for repentance is past, and God has for ever withdrawn himself. Death seals the sinner's doom irreversibly; the last opportunity is gone, and for ever; prayer is then powerless and penitence hopeless. There remains only the dooming, damning sentence, "I know you not whence ye are." Hollow-hearted hypocrites ye must have been, workers of iniquity, and nothing more and nothing better, false professors, fruitless fig trees, cumbering and cursing the rich vineyard soil. Children of God ye never were; I never owned you as such; I cannot do so now. And thus he withdraws, leaving them to their fate. 2. But even before death this withdrawal may take place, at least in a certain sense. We are warned in Scripture that the Spirit will not always strive. To the Israelites of old he swore that they would never enter into his rest, and so a whole generation of them was excluded from the land of promise; in reference to which the inspired penman utters the solemn warning, "Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief" ("disobedience," Revised Version and margin). In this very book God's abandonment of Ephraim and consequent withdrawal are affirmed. "Ephraim is joined to his idols: let him alone." Let us, then, beware of provoking God to withhold or withdraw the gracious influences of his Spirit, and thus leave us to judicial blindness. Let us beware of sinning away our day of grace, and in this respect outliving it. 3. We would not venture to limit the mercy of God, or set bounds to his sovereign grace.

> "While the lamp holds out to burn
> The vilest sinner may return."

But God at any moment may withdraw the breath of his Spirit, or withhold the oil of his grace, and the lamp go out in everlasting darkness! Pusey makes a very interesting distinction, as follows: "The general rule of his dealings is this: that when the time of each judgment is actually come, then as to *that* judgment it is too late to pray. It is not too late for other mercy, or for final forgiveness, so long as man's state of probation lasts; but it is too late as to this one."

III. IT IS OF MOMENT TO ASSIGN SOME REASONS WHY GOD WITHDRAWS HIMSELF. This frequently takes place, we doubt not, in consequence of men silencing conscience and stifling convictions. Conscience may become callous or seared, and convictions may wear gradually weak, nay, at length cease altogether. The same result may be brought about by allowing any sin to have the mastery, and in consequence of not seeking grace to resist it, or not summoning up resolution to break its yoke. 1. The people particularly referred to by the prophet had not sought the Lord in time. It was only when ruin stared them in the face that they bethought themselves of seeking God; it was fear drove them to his service. 2. They were only half-hearted in his service, and it was a divided allegiance they rendered; but God claims the whole heart of his worshippers, otherwise he will not be found of them. 3. Their repentance was not genuine; it appears to have been outward sacrifice, not inward service. They brought their herds, not their hearts; their flocks, not the feelings of their souls. 4. Their faithlessness had a prospective as well as present evil influence. Their children, instead of being trained in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, inured to idolatry and irreligion both by the precept and example of their parents, would, as a matter of course, prove as faithless and godless, or more so than they. 5. No wonder God set a time to ease him of his adversaries and avenge him of his enemies. That time, a month, was certain, short, and sudden.

IV. GOD SPEAKS BEFORE HE STRIKES. God suffereth long with the provocations of sinners. He warns them of the evil of their ways; he apprises them of the ruinous consequences of their sinful courses. 1. He threatens before he inflicts the blow; he gives notice of his judgments before they arrive. Dark clouds precede the coming storm. Milder judgments are sent as precursors of more severe visitations. It is of God's mercy that men are not only informed of their duty, but apprised of their danger. Ministers of the gospel are to sound the alarm, that men may flee from the wrath to come. 2. When God's judgments are near at hand, their approach has a startling effect. Those who made light of them, or thought them far off, are confounded and amazed; while this confusion may be reflected in the very abruptness of the expression, "After thee, O Benjamin;" at thy back comes the enemy—disaster, destruction, desolation. 3. The judgments of God, thus announced as near, at the very door, are represented as sure. They are no mere menaces or make-believes; they are not meant merely to alarm; they are dread realities, which impenitent sinners can by no means escape or evade. "Among the tribes of Israel have I made known that which shall surely be." To all notice had been given, so that no one could urge the plea of ignorance on his own part, nor charge precipitancy on the part of God. In his mercy he had made it known to all without exception, in his truth he will make it sure. They had been warned, called to repentance, chastened paternally; but they had despised all this. And the day of mercy is now past; the time of judgment is come; the final doom, fixed and irreversible, is denounced. When princes, making their will law, trample on the privileges of their people, or infringe the Law of God, or in any way set aside sacred and solemn obligations, they incur a fearful responsibility. When, not only by their edicts but by their example, they set aside the enactments of Heaven, and encourage their subjects to do likewise, they open upon themselves the flood-gates of Divine wrath which God pours out upon them, like the waters of the deluge on the guilty antediluvians. Pusey supposes that the reference to the princes of Judah being "like them that remove the bound," contains some such allusion as the following: "Since the prophet had just pronounced the desolation of Israel, perhaps that sin was that, instead of taking warning from the threatened destruction and turning to God, they thought only how the removal of Ephraim would benefit them by the enlargement of their borders. They might hope also to increase their private estates out of the desolate lands of Ephraim their brother."

Vers. 11—15.—*God's judgments differ both in degree and kind.* Ephraim had obeyed man rather than God, and God gives them over to man for punishment. The men who oppressed Ephraim acted unjustly, but God, in permitting that unjust oppression, was exercising his prerogative of justice. Neither could Ephraim palliate their sin by alleging compulsion on the part of their rulers, nor throw the blame entirely on the ungodly commandment of an ungodly king, or those who might enforce it by pains and

penalties. They obeyed it, not by constraint, but willingly; not through compulsion, but of a ready mind.

I. THE DESIGN AND NATURE OF MINOR AND MILDER JUDGMENTS. The moth and woodworm may symbolize lesser judgments. Such visitations frequently have for their object the repentance and reformation of the people or persons so visited. God's design in sending them is gracious; his purpose is merciful. The process, notwithstanding, is painful and the affliction grievous. It goes on silently, so that little alarm is made; noiselessly, so that little apprehension is felt; hence it is that grace is needed for men to know the time of such visitation. It proceeds slowly, so that time is allowed men to mend their ways, and space given them for repentance. The judgments here spoken of proceed gradually, and are designed to prevent greater. Thus mercy is mingled with judgment; for judgment is God's strange work, while mercy is his darling attribute.

II. THE IMPOTENCY OF MERE HUMAN HELPERS. They felt their sickness, they suffered from their painful wound, and became conscious of rottenness in their state. They did not discern with equal clear-sightedness the cause of that sickness, nor perceive the source whence that rottenness proceeded. They were equally blind to the right way of relief. Had they seen their sin in their suffering, God's hand in their stroke, and his justice in its infliction, they would have been nearer the right way to the remedy. They sought help from the creature, not from the Creator; from the monarch of Assyria, not from the King of kings, and yet he only distressed them and helped them not. So with men too often in time of their distress. They put confidence in human means, but find at last that they are leaning on broken reeds; they hew out for themselves cisterns, but find too late that they are broken cisterns, that can hold no water. Not only so, by such sinful expedients they are in no way bettered, but rather get worse, and increase thereby at once their sin and their sorrow.

III. WHY THE SORER AND SEVERER JUDGMENTS ARE RESORTED TO. The lion and the young lion are emblematical of the severer judgments. God threatens to deal with the people of Israel and Judah more rigorously than heretofore. "I will not be any longer like a moth and a worm; I shall come like a lion to you, with an open mouth to devour you. . . . I will rage against you as a fierce wild beast: your grievance shall not now be from moths and worms; but you shall have an open and dreadful contest with the lion and the young lion. . . . Men, when they attempt to oppose vain helps to the wrath of God, gain only this, that they more and more provoke and inflame his wrath against themselves. After God has first gnawed, he will at length devour; after he has pricked, he will deeply wound; after he has struck, he will wholly destroy." But why are these severer visitations had recourse to? The answer is very well given by Cyril as follows: "As in human bodies such affections as are violent and do not yield to gentle remedies are frequently overcome by fire and sword, in like way and manner affections occurring in human souls, if they do not give way to mild words, and are overcome by prudent reasoning, are expelled by labour and chastisement and severe calamities."

IV. A RESPITE RESULTING IN REPENTANCE. The infliction of punishment is represented as executed in lion-like fashion: he is not forced to retreat, nor is there any possibility of rescue, nor does he retire stealthily and with fox-like secrecy and cunning, but openly, powerfully, and victoriously. When God visits with judgments, he comes forth out of his place and men are forced to feel his presence; when his corrections are completed, he returns to his place, and there, though he seems to take no notice of, and to be far removed from, his people, he has taken his place on the mercy-seat and is waiting to be gracious. God here speaks after the manner of men; "for he neither so hides himself in heaven that he neglects human affairs, nor withdraws his hand but that he sustains the world by the continued exercise of his power, nor even takes his Spirit from men, especially when he would lead them to repentance; for men never of their own accord turn themselves to God, but by his hidden influence." Thus, when God had punished both Israel and Judah by exile, he seemed to hide his face from them, as though unmindful of them, and having neither care nor regard for them. This hiding of his face allowed time for repentance. His purpose was to induce them to repent and return to him. This was the true and only remedy.

V. MEN RETURN TO GOD BY REPENTANCE AND FAITH. The first step men take as they return to God is confession of sin—"they acknowledge their offence;" the first part in the process of healing is the correct diagnosis of the disease and discovery of its

cause. The second thing required for reconciliation with God is to "seek his face." Thus repentance and faith go hand in hand; not that either of them is the meritorious cause of pardon. The one is a condition—a suitable condition or proper qualification for pardon; the other is the cordial acceptance of pardon, or rather of that righteousness which is the true ground of pardon. The mercy of God is transparent throughout the entire process, while a practical realization of persons acknowledging their offence and seeking the face of God is found in the case of Daniel, as may be seen by a perusal of the ninth chapter of the book of that prophet.

VI. AFFLICTION SERVES AS A SPIRITUAL RESTORATIVE. During the long and dreary period of the seventy years' captivity in Babylon the captives had a convenient season to repent of their sins and return to the Lord; nor did they ever after backslide into idolatry. During the present prolonged dispersion of that wonderful people, many of them will repent of their national rejection of Messiah and return to God, looking unto him whom their forefathers pierced with tearful eyes; and at the close of the period in question, though "blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in, all Israel shall be saved."

APPLICATION. "When," says a godly Puritan expositor, "we are under the convictions of sin and the corrections of the rod, our business is to seek God's face. . . . And it may reasonably be expected that affliction will bring those to God that had long gone astray from him, and kept at a distance. Therefore God for a time turns away from us, that he may turn us to himself and then return to us."

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—10.—*National sin and punishment.* The general strain of this chapter is similar to that of the preceding. "*The* judgment" (ver. 1) which has already been pronounced there is still continued. In ch. iv., however, Judah was addressed as occupying a different position, morally and religiously, from Israel; whereas here the southern kingdom is represented as sharing in Israel's guilt and condemnation. It would appear, therefore, that when the warning of ch. iv. 15 was uttered, Judah's defection was already beginning.

I. THE NATURE OF SIN. It is a "dealing treacherously against Jehovah" (ver. 7), the rightful Spouse of the soul, who expects from his people that faithfulness which a wife owes to her husband. It is also "whoredom" (ver. 3); for infidelity to the marriage covenant leads to the cherishing of many objects of sinful desire. It is also "pride" (ver. 5)—that deeply rooted self-will which is the secret spring of idolatry. Sin in all these forms dishonours God and grossly defiles the soul.

II. THE ROOT OF SIN. Sin is not merely an outward work. It is not confined to acts of the will. The root of it is "the spirit of whoredoms" (ver. 4). This spirit has its seat at the very centre of man's being. The Apostle Paul calls it "the law of sin" (Rom. vii. 23, 25). It is the controlling principle of the unregenerate life, and it often leads the believer captive even in spite of his renewed nature. "The spirit of whoredoms" dominates the soul like a demon, and the sinner serves it as its slave. Satan lays hold upon this spirit as his helper in his constant assaults upon the minds of men. And only the Holy Spirit can impart adequate strength to prevail against it.

III. THE CONTAGIOUSNESS OF SIN. The condition of Israel at the time to which the prophet here refers graphically illustrates this. Hosea saw that the national life was leavened with iniquity. The pyramid of the commonwealth, from apex to base, was honeycombed with idolatry and impurity. The national sin was shared by: 1. *The priests.* Instead of being the spiritual guardians of the people, they were as snares and nets to entrap them. Ministers of religion become such: (1) By neglecting teaching, as the priests of the ten tribes had done (ch. iv. 1). (2) By preaching unsound doctrine. So, in 'The Pilgrim's Progress,' the Flatterer, "a black man clothed in white," led Christian and Hopeful into his net. (3) By living inconsistent lives. So the wickedness of Eli's sons made many unbelievers. 2. *The courts.* The princes, too, were men-trappers—"sportsmen rather than watchmen" (Jerome). Jeroboam I. had been such. He "drave Israel from following the Lord, and made them sin a great sin" (2 Kings xvii. 21). Ahab had been such, in introducing the worship of Baal and

Ashtaroth (1 Kings xvi. 30—33). Menahem was such, for his reign was steeped in cruelty, and he laid his help upon King Pul of Assyria rather than upon the God of Israel (2 Kings xv. 19). Even the princes of Judah were becoming such; they were removing the landmarks between the worship of Jehovah and idolatry (ver. 10). Our rulers in like manner entrap the British nation into sin, when they promote immoral legislation upon pleas of expediency or state policy (*e.g.* the attempted state regulation of vice in the army, and the patronage of the opium trade between India and China). 3. *The entire Hebrew nation.* The people of both kingdoms foolishly fell into the snares and nets which were spread for them. They were full of "pride" (ver. 5) and vain confidence. They despised prophetic instruction, and became contumacious and refractory in their sin.

IV. THE HEREDITY OF SIN. Had Israel continued faithful to the national covenant with Jehovah, he would have begotten children to God, instead of "strange children" (ver. 7), who did not belong to the home, and did not spring from the marriage union. But a godless nation is composed of godless parents, who bring up godless children. Infants who have done no evil yet inherit evil, and may bring with them into life terrific predispositions towards it. The iniquity of the fathers is visited upon the children. It is comforting, however, to remember that good traits descend by inheritance as well as bad ones. God's way of regenerating the world is to maintain his Church in it, and to cultivate thereby the heredity of holiness. There is a sense in which grace does run in the blood (Exod. xx. 6; Ps. cxii. 2; 2 Tim. i. 5). The children of Christian parents are not "children of wrath" (1 Cor. vii. 14; Acts xvi. 31).

V. THE PUNISHMENT OF SIN. Ephraim's "whoredom" was detected (ver. 3). It lay exposed every moment to the eye of God. He penetrated all the fair excuses which the people made to themselves for it. "The pride of Israel doth testify to his face" (ver. 5), *i.e.* he shall be openly convicted of it, and condemned for it. The punishment is to be: 1. *Immediate.* (Ver. 7.) "A month shall devour them." Destruction shall overtake them as swiftly, so to speak, as the moon shall wane. Already the sword of vengeance is hanging over their heads by a single hair. 2. *Sudden.* (Ver. 8.) The invasion of the Assyrian power as the rod of the Divine anger is announced with an injunction to sound horn and trumpet. For the prophet already sees the drawn sword of Jehovah in the conqueror's hand. 3. *Certain.* (Ver. 9.) The punishment "shall surely be." God is as true to his threatenings as to his promises. 4. *Terrible.* "Israel and Ephraim shall *fall* (ver. 5). "A month shall *devour* them" (ver. 7). "Ephraim shall be *desolate*" (ver. 9). "I will *pour out my wrath* upon them like water" (ver. 10). The whole nation became wasted with misery, and was plunged headlong into destruction. The story of the decline and fall of the Hebrew monarchies illustrates very vividly the doom of sin.

VI. HOW THE PUNISHMENT OF SIN MAY BE AVERTED. Even this dark passage is not altogether without some hopeful suggestion. 1. *A false expedient.* (Ver. 6.) The festivals and worship of the Mosaic Law were still observed at the idol-shrines of Bethel and Dan. So Ephraim, when his doom began to overtake him, endeavoured to pacify the Divine anger by bringing costly sacrifices of flocks and herds. But, although the people sought the Lord thus, they did "not find him;" for they came in a spirit of slavish fear, and did not bring the sacrifice of a contrite heart and an obedient will. 2. *The right way.* (Ver. 4.) God is waiting to be gracious; but he requires of sinners a willingness to "frame their doings to turn unto their God." We must gladly allow the Holy Spirit to regenerate and purify our souls. The only use of the external sacrifices of the Law was to typify the Lord Jesus Christ, the true Sacrifice for sin; and to symbolize the "living sacrifices" which men offer to God when they yield themselves wholly to his service.—C. J.

Ver. 10.—*Landmark-removers.* The Jews were not a mercantile nor a manufacturing people, but a nation of agriculturists. Each citizen had his own piece of ground allotted to him as the family inheritance; and great pains were taken that his descendants should be secured in it for ever. A man might pledge his portion until the year of jubilee, but it was not lawful absolutely to sell it (Numb. xxxvi. 7). Hence the sacredness of landmarks, as a means of preserving accurately the boundaries of family possessions. One of the curses spoken from Ebal was directed against the man

who should remove them (Deut. xxvii. 17). Elijah pronounced doom upon Ahab, not for the murder of Naboth alone, but also for "removing the bound" of his vineyard (1 Kings xxi. 19). Our text, however, invites us to consider rather the spiritual truth which this offence suggests. "The princes of Judah" were guilty of still deeper sin than the removal of boundary-stones. They had broken down moral and religious barriers. And this form of evil is a crying one in the world still.

I. SOME "REMOVE THE BOUND" OF THE INSPIRED WORD. The Bible closes with a curse upon such (Rev. xxii. 18, 19). Yet the Jews committed this sin in relation to the Old Testament Scriptures by venerating the traditional law, as written in the Talmud, more than "the commandment of God" itself (Matt. xv. 6). The Church of Rome errs in the same way, by giving the Apocrypha a place alongside of the canonical Books, and by insisting upon apostolical and ecclesiastical tradition as the complement of Scripture—equally inspired with it, and equally authoritative as a rule of faith. And those Protestants also "remove the bound" who deny the plenary inspiration of the Bible, and adopt the theory of partial inspiration in any of its forms.

II. SOME "REMOVE THE BOUND" BETWEEN CHURCH AND STATE. Both of these are Divine institutions—the one spiritual in its nature, and the other secular. The spheres of the two are distinct; and each within its own sphere is independent of the other. But how hard have men found it to let the landmarks between Church and state remain where God set them! In one country the Church invades the domain of the state, directing and controlling it—a usurpation which, in its fully developed form, is Vaticanism. In another country the state encroaches upon the domain of the Church, and exercises rule in sacred things—which is Erastianism. "Render therefore unto Cæsar," etc. (Matt. xxii. 21).

III. SOME "REMOVE THE BOUND" AS REGARDS PURITY OF WORSHIP. "The princes of Judah" had shifted the landmarks between the worship of Jehovah and idolatry. And this offence is committed still by all who introduce modes of worship which are not in accordance with the Word of God. An elaborate sensuous ceremonial, and any form of service which assumes that ministers belong to a distinct sacerdotal order, are a removing of the bound. The secularization of the sabbath belongs to the same class of sins. Those who teach that now every day is alike sacred to the Christian are doing their best, although without intending it, to undermine one of the foundations of morality. For the sabbath law is imbedded in the Decalogue. Not only so, but "Christ hath took in this piece of ground" (George Herbert). So it is at our peril if we remove the boundary-stones which separate the Lord's day from the other days of the week.

IV. SOME "REMOVE THE BOUND" BETWEEN SCIENCE AND RELIGION. The conflict between the two is concerned very much about the landmarks of their respective provinces. In old times it was the theologian who was generally the chief offender. It was the Church that forced Galileo to abjure the sublime truths of his scientific creed, and that condemned the three laws of Kepler as heretical. At present, however, the chief "remover of the bound" is the scientist. The student of physical nature, unless he be decidedly a Christian, is prone to lack ability to appreciate moral evidence. Thus some of our most eminent scientific investigators in these times would have us give up our faith in moral freedom, in personal immortality, and in the existence of God himself. But the domain of physical science is one province of truth, while that of religion is another. Scientific questions are to be settled on scientific grounds, and by men who have had a scientific training. The theologian, on the other hand, must keep within his own frontier, and resolutely defend those moral facts and religious truths with which it belongs to him to deal. It is his function to assert the reality of moral freedom, the supremacy of conscience, the intuition of immortality, and those deep experiences of guilt and soul-hunger to which only the gospel of Christ can respond. A curse shall fall upon those who remove these landmarks.

V. SOME "REMOVE THE BOUND" OF EVANGELICAL DOCTRINE. Orthodoxy has its landmarks which separate the apostolic doctrine from "another gospel." What are the great historical creeds and confessions, but so many bounds which the Church has erected in order to discriminate truth from error? And is not every article in one of these creeds, as it were, a boundary-stone? Experience has shown Christendom that the most effectual way of exposing heresies is to translate the doctrinal teaching of

Scripture into the philosophical language of a confession. Yet there have always been "removers of the bound" of "sound doctrine." The Broad Churchman and the rationalist object to the evangelical boundaries; and they have never done so more loudly than at the present day. Even in some orthodox Churches, doctrines contained in the standards are from some of the pulpits unblushingly contravened. We must "hold fast the form of sound words." It is at our peril if we "remove the bound."

VI. SOME "REMOVE THE BOUND" AS REGARDS NONCONFORMITY TO THE WORLD. The evil one labours to obliterate as much as possible all distinct boundary-lines between the Church and the world. He tempts ministers always to preach "smooth things." He tempts the rulers of the Church to neglect the administration of discipline. He tempts the members of our congregations to imbibe the spirit of the world, and to try to serve both God and mammon. The ten commandments are so many boundary-stones which mark the track of the narrow way; but we often regard the path as too strait, and would fain remove the stones back a little. We ask concerning certain worldly pleasures,—"What harm is there in them?" instead of inquiring what good there is. The tendency of the Church in these times is by no means towards asceticism or Puritanism. Few Christian people are too strait-laced; the danger is rather that we become spiritually lax, and that we "remove the bound."—C. J.

Vers. 11—15.—*The Divine judgments.* In this strophe the Lord denounces as useless and foolish the policy which Israel had adopted of seeking to strengthen himself by alliances with Assyria. In doing this the nation was only adding to its guilt, and precipitating its doom.

I. THE NATURE OF THE JUDGMENTS. We gather from the passage that these are of three orders, each being more severe than the preceding. 1. *Slow consumption.* (Ver. 12.) The "moth" and the "worm" ("rottenness" should be, as in the margin, "a worm") suggest silent, stealthy, secret destruction. So the kingdom of the ten tribes is as a garment eaten by a moth, while the kingdom of Judah is as a tree slowly destroyed by a worm. The worm makes way much more slowly than the moth does; and we find, accordingly, that the "moth" ate up Israel in two generations from the time of this prediction, while the "worm" did not accomplish its work in Judah until after the lapse of a century and a half. Now, God's judgments still, both upon nations and individuals, are often like the moth and the worm. Many an ungodly commonwealth has the heart eaten out of it by a process of imperceptible moral deterioration. And frequently a young man of reputable character, who has never gone astray into gross vice, yet degenerates in spiritual tone, and loses the finer fibres of his nature, just because he has not cultivated elevating tastes, and has been content to cherish low ideals. 2. *Sudden ruin.* (Ver. 14.) If God sometimes punishes slowly, he does so at other times swiftly. The two Hebrew kingdoms resisted his judgments, when, in his long-suffering, he came at first somewhat lightly as the "moth" and the "worm." So he is compelled to adopt measures more dramatic and terrible. Jehovah will be to Ephraim as a strong full-grown "lion"—full-grown because the northern kingdom is very soon to fall; and he will be to Judah "as a young lion," which must become mature before it will do its work of destruction. Both kingdoms, however—each in its turn—are to be overwhelmed with a sudden rush of ruin. "'I, even I,' the Lion of the tribe of Judah, will tear the nation and take it hence. I will no longer be its guardian; I will make it my prey." How many powerful Gentile states also have been suddenly destroyed! And how many ungodly men, who "spread themselves like a green bay tree," have been "cut down like the grass"! 3. *Settled desertion.* (Ver. 15.) The Divine judgment upon the sinner, in its superlative form, consists in the withdrawal of the Divine favour and protection. When the two captivities took place respectively, the Hebrew nation became, as it were, God-forsaken. The Lord smote Ephraim and Judah, and tore them, and "returned to his place," leaving them bruised, bleeding, and to all appearance dying. To be thus God-deserted is, to a moral and spiritual being, the acme of punishment. When a soul becomes consciously God-forsaken, it begins to taste the pains of hell.

II. THE CAUSE OF THE JUDGMENTS. They fell upon the Hebrew people on account of their idolatry, aggravated by the unbelief which they showed in resorting for aid to

the Assyrian power. 1. *The worship of false gods.* (Ver. 11.) "The commandment" refers to Jeroboam's idolatrous innovation in erecting the two golden calves. This measure was the result of considerations of state policy on the part of a prince who did not himself rely upon the Divine protection. But the people accepted it "willingly," showing thereby that their hearts also were not right in the sight of God. The calf-worship was the root of the entire apostasy of Israel; it prepared the way for the grosser idolatry of Baalism, with its attendant train of moral disorder, vice, and crime. It was Jeroboam's sin that sowed the seeds of the ruin of the whole Hebrew nation. 2. *The calling in of incompetent physicians.* (Ver. 13.) Israel was suffering from the "sickness" of anarchy, and bleeding from the "wound" of revolution; yet he would not recognize in these distresses a token of the Divine displeasure. He refused to listen to the messages of warning which God sent him by Hosea, and kept looking to second causes alone, both for the disease and the remedy. Ephraim "sent to King Jareb." The word "*Jareb*" means "warrior," "adversary," "avenger;" and it is to be understood probably not as a proper name, but as a poetical epithet applied by the prophet himself to the King of Assyria. Again and again the two Hebrew kingdoms sought to make peace with the Assyrian power, buying him off by tribute, and occupying a position of abject vassalage (2 Kings xv.—xviii.). All, however, was in vain. This untheocratic policy did not even heal the hurt slightly; it made matters worse (2 Chron. xxviii. 20). But the nations still have their King Jarebs to whom they apply when seeking a cure for their moral maladies. How numerous are the favourite social nostrums! With some, the hope of Great Britain is the further expansion of trade; with others, the spread of education; with others, "local option;" with others, parliamentary reform; with others, religious equality. But such expedients, however desirable in their own place, are at best only plasters and patches. Where the heart is the seat of the disease, the cure must be inward and radical. We must send, not to King Jareb, but to King Jesus. So, also, there are Jarebs to which guilt-stricken and sin-sick souls still apply. One seeks an anodyne in the pursuit of wealth; another fills high the bowl of sensuous pleasure; a third pays court to culture and the fine arts; a fourth labours hard in his own strength to live a clean moral life. But none of these pursuits can salve the wounds of sin. Only the application of the blood of Christ can bring spiritual life and health and blessing.

III. THE DESIGN OF THE JUDGMENTS. (Ver. 15.) The Book of Hosea is full of clouds and darkness; but behind them somewhere the sun is ever shining. And as we gaze upon the storm we see the rainbow of grace springing up in its very bosom. This closing verse of the chapter reminds us that the judgments are inflicted: 1. *To produce penitence.* For, after all, the Lord has only withdrawn a little way from his apostate people. If they will but have it so, he has only "returned to his place" for a short time (Isa. liv. 7—10). He has not cast them off finally, but only until they shall become convinced that they can have no comfort or salvation apart from himself. The first step in repentance is conviction and acknowledgment of sin. And multitudes of souls have been brought to take this step during a time of "affliction." 2. *To bring back to God.* To "seek God's face" is to seek his favour, his Son, his Spirit, the ordinances of his grace. To "seek him early" is to do so urgently, after the manner of one who will rise before the morning in very eagerness. If we view this verse as a prediction regarding the future of the Hebrew nation, we may find partial fulfilments of it towards the close of the Babylonish exile (Dan. ix.), and on the day of Pentecost (Acts ii.); and we know that it will be fully realized in that national conversion of the Jews which is to precede the second advent of Christ (Zech. xii.; Rom. xi.). But the promise before us has a perennial lesson also to "sinners of the Gentiles." It assures us of the glad welcome which our God will give us—despite whatever guilt may have stained our lives, and the deep corruption which assuredly still dwells within our hearts—if only we turn to him in penitence, and make him our Righteousness and Strength and Hope.—C. J.

Vers. 10—13.—*The misuse of Divine judgments.* It is well for our rest and strength when, like the prophet, we can exercise steadfast faith in the unseen Ruler of all human affairs. Many events appear to contradict the theory of a wise and loving government. Causes which are seen seem adequate to produce the effects which arise

from them, and we fail to discern God behind the ambitions and the follies of men. Happy is he who, like Hosea, hears God's voice amidst the tumult, believes in a plan underlying confusion, and recognizes a hand which moulds and shapes all events to a wise end. He can "rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him." It is more difficult to see God in passing events than in past history. The mists of antiquity envelop the actors and they become less real; whereas in modern events the actors project themselves in all the greatness of their individuality upon our thought, to the exclusion of him who is greater than they. Coming from Chamounix towards Geneva, the tourist sees the near hills, but does not catch a glimpse of the snowy peaks of Mont Blanc till he is far away; but in the greater distance the lower hills fade into indistinctness, and the everlasting heaven-lighted mountain once more asserts itself. In the study of these far-off scenes we see something of him who rules over all things, God blessed for ever. "Our lives through various scenes are drawn," etc. Learn from the passage—

I. THAT THE SHARING OF SIN INVOLVES MEN IN THE SHARING OF SIN'S PUNISHMENT. 1. *The sin of Israel is mentioned in ver.* 11. "He was oppressed because he willingly walked after the commandment." The Hebrew (*tsav*) signifies a human ordinance as opposed to a Divine law, and refers here to the commandment of Jeroboam which inculcated calf-worship, on which the kingdom of Israel, established by his revolt, was founded (see 1 Kings xii. 26—33). This idolatry was willingly, wilfully chosen by Ephraim, and it destroyed him. How often the thing chosen by the sinner is the means of his destruction! The Jews cried, "We have no king but Cæsar," and Cæsar destroyed them. A nation chooses prosperity, not righteousness, and the prosperity of fools destroys them. Instances from history. 2. *The princes of Judah shared this sin of idolatry.* (Ver. 10.) They "were like them that remove the bound." In a literal sense no doubt this was true. Deut. xxvii. 17 was disobeyed. The infringement of another's rights, whether in business or policy, ever brings a curse. Probably Judah would speculate as to the profit that might be made out of Israel's loss—how its own bounds might be extended when the kingdom of the ten tribes was removed; but the reference in the text is not to that. Hosea alludes to the sin of Judah in breaking down that barrier which idolatry had raised between the two kingdoms, which separated between God's people and Baal's people. The act was fatal. It was like the opening of a dyke, which no longer could keep out the floods around; and the tide of invasion swept over Benjamin and Judah. The cornet and trumpet on the beacon-hills of Gibeah and Ramah (ver. 8) proclaimed this woe too late to avert it. "I will pour out my wrath upon them like water." Show how the breaking down of the barriers between the Church and the world, between Christianity and paganism, between the Christian and the godless, in business, society, etc., brings desolation to spiritual life and to the kingdom of Christ.

II. THAT THE WARNING OF GOD IS TO BE SEEN SOMETIMES IN SIGNS OF GRADUAL DECAY. The gradualness of the earlier judgments is pointed out in ver. 12 as distinguished from the overwhelming destruction suggested by ver. 14. The "moth" and the "rottenness" do their work stealthily and slowly. You take out the cloth laid by: it is consumed. You rest your weight on the furniture: it breaks down with a crash. Perhaps a distinction is suggested here. "The moth" destroys the softer cloth more rapidly than "rottenness" the harder wood. An indication that Judah would be more slowly consumed. The main idea, however, is that destruction would not come at first suddenly and without warning. This is true of the method of him to whom judgment is a strange work. Examples: 1. *A nation* suffers, from its want of integrity, justice, etc., in depressed trade, severance and suspicion between various classes of society, wars costly in treasure and blood. All this comes far short of national destruction; yet each is a call to sobriety, self-rule, integrity, humiliation before God, lest worse things befall it. 2. *An invalid* finds his health slowly impaired. Weakness gradually increases. Senses become less keen. All such symptoms are reminders that he should be seeking after a forgotten God. 3. *There is a consuming of character* which may be illustrated from this verse. A distaste for what is good creeps over the heart; doubts which at first seem trivial bring insecurity to the religious profession; indulged sins honeycomb the spiritual life, etc. As the moth is hidden and makes no sound, yet does its fatal work, so may men lose innocency and

truth, till nothing is left of the old fabric of faith and hope. Therefore pray, "Cleanse thou me from secret faults."

III. THAT THE TEMPTATION TO THE DISTRESSED IS TO FIND HELP IN MAN RATHER THAN IN GOD. (Ver. 13.) The "sickness," or inward disease, refers to moral corruption; the "wound," caused by a blow from without, to national weakness resulting from wars and political disasters. The first recognition of these evils produced this effect—"Then went Ephraim to the Assyrian, and sent to King Jareb." Not two persons, but one referred to here. Jareb (equivalent to "the warrior") is Hosea's epithet for Assyria's king. An account of this incident is given in 2 Chron. xxviii. 19, 20, where it is expressly stated that Assyria "helped him not." The sin and curse involved are pointed out in Jer. xvii. 5, 6. How ready we are to follow Ephraim in this! We involve ourselves in difficulties by our folly and self-seeking, and then try to disentangle ourselves by force or fraud. Examples: A nation bound by cords of its own weaving cuts its way to deliverance by the sword. A man in business becomes embarrassed by overtrading, and tries to right himself by further speculation, which ruins himself and others. A Church fails of the outward prosperity it seeks, and resorts to unholy methods to win transient success. This was the temptation our Lord endured and conquered (Matt. iv. 8—10): "All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me."

APPLICATION. *To those in sorrow about sin.* Beware of getting rid of your anxiety by plunging into gaiety or companionship, but pray to the Father who seeth in secret. Resist the temptation to trust to outward observances, to self-improvement, etc., instead of falling at the feet of him who says, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." For none are the words (ch. vi. 1) more intended than for you, "Come, and let us return unto the Lord: for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up."—A. R.

Ver. 15.—*The affliction of God's withdrawal.* Jehovah here threatens to withdraw his presence from his people, until, conscious of their weakness and loneliness, they return to him. In the affliction of the seventy years' captivity many did seek him. After that night of darkness the dawn of a new day brought a few gleams of hope, and some bestirred themselves "early" to find mercy with God (see Dan. ix. 3—6).

I. THE CAUSE OF THIS AFFLICTION is to be found in unrepented sin. 1. *The unwillingness of God to send trouble to his creatures* is constantly insisted on in Scripture. "He is very pitiful, and of tender mercy;" "Judgment is his strange work," his object being to show the need we have of the mercy he proffers. Evidences of the loving-kindness of God to his creatures reveal themselves more distinctly as we study their condition and circumstances. Illustrations from insects, birds, and beasts, in their relations to food and habitation. Example in provision for every child of man. The babe is cast in its helplessness upon us. We are to shield it, to foster its life, to foresee and provide for its wants. This is as much for our good as for the child's good. We learn thereby to conquer ourselves, to exercise frugality and diligence, and the rough nature is softened by the touch of tiny tender fingers. In the ways of Christ "a little child shall lead them." Then, as life develops, pleasure is found in the sights and sounds of nature, in the exercise of each faculty, etc. "Lord, when I count thy mercies o'er," etc. 2. *There are seeming contradictions, however, to the loving-kindness* of God's rule. The helpless racked with pain, the innocent born to a heritage of shame, the noblest and most useful snatched away by death, etc. Hence heathen philosophy believed in two antagonistic deities. Trace the belief in ancient philosophy and in modern idolatry. Holy Scripture declares there is but *one* God, concerning whom we read, "I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the Lord do all these things" (Isa. xlv. 7). The boldness of that conception stamps it as Divine. We know not the effect on other worlds and beings of the conflict waged here between good and evil. We cannot judge God from what is seen in this tiny fragment of his universe. A sea-anemone in its pool feels the rush of the tide over it and all around it, and its subsequent and certain withdrawal. If it could think, it would argue that the ebb and flow of the tide was God's law for all life. It knows nothing of fair fertile fields and busy cities, where the moaning of the sea is never heard. Our knowledge of God's method and character from what is around us is as

slight. 3. *The revelation of God in Christ shows that the sorrow is rightly mingled with the sin*—just as storms are good for a vitiated atmosphere. We cannot breathe without creating poison. If the air were motionless it would be fatal to us and others. By Divine ordinance the air, because it is vitiated and heated, must move; and then comes the draught which chills the invalid and kills him, and the storm which sweeps over the sea and causes wreck. Yet the law which causes these disasters is for the world's salvation. So evils which would corrupt the earth, as in olden time, are not left unheeded. Sorrow comes till men "acknowledge their offence and seek God's face."

II. THE NATURE OF THIS AFFLICTION. "I will return to my place." God is everywhere; but relatively to us he is sometimes near, sometimes far away. He is to us according to the conditions and desires of our hearts. He is said to withdraw when the sense of his care and favour is gone. This would be no great trouble to some. They have yet to learn that to be apart from God is to be away from light and love and hope for ever. It is to be in "the outer darkness." None of us know to the full the sweetness of the Divine presence, and therefore do not completely know the bitterness of its withdrawal. Who of us has prayed till the heavens were opened, and we saw visions of God? Who of us has gazed on Christ till he was transfigured before us, and we cried, "It is good for us to be here"? Who of us knows the deepest meaning of the promise, "If any man open the door, I will come in to him, and sup with him, and he with me"? It is in proportion as we have realized these blessings that we can realize this curse. Imagine yourself stricken down by fatal illness, growing sensibly weaker, no hope of recovery and no God near; going down into the darkness of death, feeling in vain for a hand that does not meet yours—a God-forsaken man! Or read the utterances of men who knew more of God than we. See the agony of the psalmist as he prays, "Be not silent unto me: lest, if thou be silent to me, I become like them that go down into the pit" (Ps. xxviii. 1; also Job xiii. 24; Ps. xliv. 23, 24, etc.). If the message comes to the nation, to the Church, or to you, "I will go and return to my place," no organization we can frame, no force we can muster, will avail us. It will be time for us (as it was for Israel when Jehovah refused to go up amongst them, and promised only indirect guidance) to put off our ornaments, to bewail our sin, to acknowledge our offence, and seek him early. "Oh, satisfy us early with thy mercy, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days."

III. THE RESULTS OF THIS AFFLICTION. "In their affliction they will seek me early." 1. *Acknowledgment of sin* is the first sign of the change. The reference is not to the unconsidered declaration that we are "miserable sinners," but to the intelligent and prayerful confession which follows on that self-examination which affliction does so much to stimulate. When severe weather keeps us within doors, we discover the faults of our house. When the vessel is under the stress of storm, her weak places reveal themselves. So with character, when thoughts are driven in upon ourselves. In society a man asks himself, "What *have* I?" in solitude he asks himself, "What *am* I?" A true answer to that question leads to confession. Acknowledgment of sin is not synonymous with the cry of pain or despair. See how David distinguishes between these in his own experience in Ps. xxxii. He speaks of himself as "roaring" with his pain, yet that brought no relief; but he adds, "I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord: and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin." The same distinction is drawn by Hosea himself (vii. 14), "And they have not cried unto me with their heart, when they howled upon their beds." If a man were on the rack the executioner would not stay his hand because of his shrieks, but the first whispered words of a confession would give instant relief. 2. *The seeking after God* is a further sign of this change. We may condemn ourselves, we may resolve to be holier, we may confess our faults to our fellow-man, without having the true repentance described here. Judas was conscious of sin, and it drove him to despair; but Peter, when contrite, went to the Lord's feet, and was able still to say, "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee." "In their affliction they shall seek me early." To bring this about we are sometimes so encircled by troubles that we cannot look over them or see beyond them, but can merely look up to the hills whence true help comes. Apply this to the Christian who has been forgetting God, and to the sinner who has never known him.

APPEAL. *Wait not till the sorrows of life make you feel your need of God.* We

may be thankful that we may go even at the last, but how ignoble to leave it till then! Point out the shame of leaving the gladness of youth unconsecrated to him who gave it; of waiting till the cares of life so press upon the spirit that, weary and heartsick, we return to the Father; of delaying till the evening of life is deepening, and enfeebled by age we say, "Now let us turn to God." Show how destitute of magnanimity, how fraught with peril, such a course must be. Whether in affliction or in joy, "seek him early."—A. R.

Ver. 3.—*Divine omniscience.* Uninspired teachers often act upon imperfect information. Ministers of religion take some people to be better and others to be worse than they really are. From this unavoidable infirmity of men the omniscient God is free. In dealing with a sinful soul or a sinful community he speaks and acts from a perfect knowledge.

I. THE FACT OF DIVINE OMNISCIENCE. It is incredible that there should be any bounds to Divine knowledge; yet it is scarcely to be realized by us that there should be none. See how this thought inspired the psalmist (Ps. cxxxix.). This natural attribute of the Creator is one mode, so to speak, of his infinite perfection.

II. THE BEARING OF THE DIVINE OMNISCIENCE UPON THE STATE OF THE SINNER. 1. No aggravation of the sinner's guilt is hid. If Ephraim sinned against light, this was known to Jehovah; if Israel rejected the counsels of the prophets divinely sent, this was not hid from him. 2. No extenuation of the sinner's guilt is hid. The temptation to which he yields, the weakness which succumbs, the regret and remorse which follow sin,—all are known to Heaven. 3. The judgment which God passes is righteous and unquestionable. There is no escape from the Divine tribunal to our own; for the voice within accords with that from above.

III. THE PRACTICAL LESSONS OF THE DIVINE OMNISCIENCE. 1. It should lead to a full and immediate *confession.* God knows all, and if we do not acknowledge our sin it will not be hid from him. Whilst "if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive." 2. It should lead us to *watchfulness and prayer.* If his eye is ever upon us, let our eyes ever be up unto him; if his ear is ever open, let our cry ever ascend unto him. 3. It should lead the accepted soul to *constant fellowship with God.* To the Christian the thought of the Divine omniscience is fraught with holy, filial, rejoicing confidence. It is not only our sins that are not hidden from him; he knows our prayers, our love, our hopes, our all.—T.

Ver. 6.—*Divine withdrawal.* When the Lord invited Israel's approach, Israel remained afar off in unbelief and impenitence. And when, in distress and anxiety, Israel drew near the Lord, it was to find that he would no longer reveal his face or bestow his favour.

I. THE OCCASION OF THE DIVINE WITHDRAWAL. The Scriptures often represent the Lord as hiding his face, as turning away his ear, as repenting him of the favour he had shown, as hiding himself. Why such action? Surely this withdrawal is always and only because of human sin. Whilst his subjects are loyal, they always find him gracious and accessible; but from the rebellious and obstinate he withdraws himself in displeasure.

II. THE SIGNS OF THE DIVINE WITHDRAWAL. In the case of Israel prayers were unheard, sacrifices were disregarded, enemies were suffered to triumph, and national disasters followed one another thick and fast. God has ways of withdrawing himself from a soul as well as from a nation. He removes the joyful light of his countenance, and suffers afflictions to befall those from whom he hides his face for a moment.

III. THE PURPOSES OF THE DIVINE WITHDRAWAL. It is a purpose of mercy, not of malevolence or vindictiveness. If men will not obey God, he leaves them to taste the fruits of disobedience. When they are wearied of his absence, and turn unto him, it is with great mercies that he gathers them.—T.

Ver. 7.—*Human treachery.* Israel's idolatry was unfaithfulness and treason to Jehovah. And every one who does wickedly in departing from God is similarly guilty, and is similarly marked by Divine omniscience and regarded with Divine displeasure.

I. THE PROOFS OF TREACHERY. The main principle of infidelity and traitorousness

is the preference of another for God. Whether our own carnal gratification, or the applause of men, or the wealth of this world, be desired rather than the service and favour of God, in every such case treason, spiritual treason, has been committed. This is shown by idolatry, by sensuality, by worldliness, by pride; all of which are evidences of a treasonable intent.

II. THE SIN OF TREACHERY. This appears when we consider: 1. God's claim upon our fidelity. In calling us his and treating us as his, in providing for all our wants, our Divine Lord has established and exhibited his right to our loyal subjection and service. 2. God's grace and indulgence. He has shown his affection by his considerate care for our happiness. To be disloyal to him is base insensibility and ingratitude.

III. THE CONSEQUENCES OF TREACHERY. God is as a king, who cannot be indifferent to the treason, the rebellion, of his subjects; he is as a husband, who cannot pass over the infidelity of his wife. He will exercise his sovereign power, vindicate his righteous claims, and punish the disloyal and the traitorous. To avoid a doom so awful, "kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way."—T.

Ver. 13.—*Human physicians helpless.* The reference here is to both Israel and Judah; for both kingdoms were alike suffering, alike guilty of reliance on human help and deliverance, and alike in their experience of its utter vanity.

I. NATIONAL DISEASE AND SUFFERING. The language is, of course, figurative, but it is very expressive. Whoever reads the chronicles of the chosen people must become familiar with the civil troubles, afflictions, and disasters they were called upon to endure. Had they been faithful to God and to one another they would have been spared very much which they brought upon themselves of sorrow and of disaster.

II. THE APPEAL TO POLITICAL PHYSICIANS. It was to Assyria that the Israelites were often so foolish as to appeal. Beset by Babylon on the east and Egypt on the south, the Hebrews were often at a loss how to steer their course. Their danger was lest they should rely for healing and for safety upon "an arm of flesh." It was not unnatural that they should do so; but it was wrong and foolish policy, as the event always proved.

III. THE POWERLESSNESS OF THE NATIONS TO HEAL THE MALADIES AND WOUNDS OF ISRAEL. The children of the covenant gained nothing by going after other gods or by courting the alliance of heathen kings. These physicians, when called in, could effect no cure and could afford no relief. In this we discern a symbol of the powerlessness of all human friends and helpers to bring deliverance to the captive soul, health to the spiritually sick and suffering, relief to the burdened.

> "I have tried, and tried in vain,
> Other ways to ease my pain."

IV. THE LESSON OF THIS EXPERIENCE. It is an easy one to understand, but a difficult one to practise. We are summoned to cast aside all confidence in human helpers, and to rely simply and only upon the Divine Physician. In him is salvation. "There is balm in Gilead; there is a physician there." Christ is the Healer alike of body and of soul, of individuals and of nations; and his healing is both for time and for eternity.—T.

Ver. 15.—*Fruits of affliction.* Prosperity is not so unmixed a blessing as men are prone to imagine. It often withdraws the attention from the unseen world and the eternal future. And, on the other hand, much as men may dread adversity, multitudes have had reason to be grateful for affliction. "Before I was afflicted I went astray," etc.

I. AFFLICTION IS DIVINELY APPOINTED. The order of things, as a result of which troubles and privations befall men, is constituted by Divine wisdom. In the Hebrew manner of thought this fact is conveyed by the language put into the lips of Jehovah, "I will go and return to my place."

> "Let us be patient; these severe afflictions
> Not from the ground arise."

II. AFFLICTION IS INTENDED TO DIRECT THE THOUGHTS TO THE SUFFERER'S SINS. It is often idle curiosity to speculate upon the connection between disobedience and particular troubles. But, as a general principle, sin is the root of which suffering is the fruit. And times of affliction call upon the "tried" and harassed to scrutinize their own conduct and their own heart, "till they acknowledge their offence," or "hold themselves guilty." Men go on sinning, from one crime or folly to another, and confirm themselves in their evil courses, until a check comes, until calamity overtakes them, until they are constrained to ask themselves—Have we forgotten that the world is ruled by a righteous God, who is angry with the wicked every day? Thus they are led, by God's grace, to confession and to penitence.

III. AFFLICTION IS INTENDED TO DIRECT THE THOUGHTS TO GOD. It is not enough for the offender to look inwards to himself; he must look upwards to his God. "Till they seek my face;" "They will seek me early." In days of calm, of pleasure, of health, of plenty, God has been forgotten. But "sweet are the uses of adversity;" and there is no use sweeter, more profitable, than this—its tendency to raise the mind to heaven. To seek forgiveness for careless, forgetful days, to seek the favour which has been justly forfeited, to seek the help which has been despised,—such is the attitude of the humbled and the contrite. And such suppliants shall not seek the face of God in vain.—T.

Vers. 1—3.—*National depravity.* "Hear ye this, O priests; and hearken, ye house of Israel; and give ye ear, O house of the king; for judgment is toward you, because ye have been a snare on Mizpah, and a net spread upon Tabor. And the revolters are profound to make slaughter, though I have been a rebuker of them all. I know Ephraim, and Israel is not hid from me: for now, O Ephraim, thou committest whoredom, and Israel is defiled." "With the words, 'Hear ye this,' the reproof of the sins of Israel makes a new start, and is specially addressed to the priests and the king's house, *i.e.* the king and his court, to announce to the leaders of the nation the punishment that will follow their apostasy from God and their idolatry, by which they have plunged the people and kingdom headlong into destruction" (Keil and Delitzsch). These words lead us to consider the depravity of a nation.

I. PRIESTS AND PEOPLE ARE INVOLVED IN IT. "Hear ye this." All orders and degrees of men are here cited to appear before the Almighty on account of the sin of the country. Both priests and rulers, clergy and kings, ought, not only to be unimplicated in the moral corruption of a country, but to be evermore the most zealous and efficient agents in purifying the spirit and elevating the moral character of a nation. In their elevated positions they should not allow a breath of general depravity to touch them, but pour down evermore upon all grades of people sentiments and influences that shall purify and bless. Alas! it has been otherwise; both have, for ages, proved the greatest contaminators and curses of their race. Priests have oftentimes been fiends in sacerdotal robes, and kings beastly voluptuaries in royal garb and stately gait. No man is a real priest of God, and no man a true king, who is not the most distinguished exemplar and promoter of those heavenly virtues which alone can confer peace, stability, and honour upon a country.

II. UNFAITHFULNESS TO GOD IS A PROOF OF IT. "For judgment is toward you, because ye have been a snare on Mizpah, and a net spread upon Tabor." "As hunters spread their net and snares upon the hills Mizpah and Tabor, so ye have snared the people into idolatry, and made them your prey by injustice." As *Mizpah* and *Tabor* mean a "watch-tower" and a "lofty place," a fit scene for hunters; playing on the words, the prophet implies, "In the lofty place in which I have set you, whereas ye ought to have been the *watchers* of the people, guarding them from evil, ye have been as hunters entrapping them into it." The meaning is "These kings and priests use their elevated positions in turning men away from the true God." "And the revolters are profound to make slaughter, though I *have been* a rebuker of them all." "Revolters" means apostates, and these apostates were "profound," deeply rooted, sunk into the lowest depths of idolatry. "To make slaughter." Their offerings were not sacrifices, they were mere slaughters, butcheries; there was nothing sacred about them. Here, then, is a proof of the general depravity of a nation. A nation that is unfaithful to its true God is a tree-rotten in its roots, a river poisoned in its springs.

Philosophically there can be no morality where there is no fidelity to him whose existence is the foundation and whose will is the rule of all virtue.

III. THE JUDGE OF THE WORLD IS COGNIZANT OF IT. "I know Ephraim, and Israel is not hid from me." No covering can conceal it, no argument will disprove it. It lays bare to the eye of Omniscience. "I know Ephraim." Though they were ignorant of him, he knew them and read them through and through. Nations often cover over their depravity by the promotion of benevolent institutions, by encouraging the ordinances of public worship, and by a public profession of religion. But there is an eye that penetrates through the thick covering—he sees the devil in the angel; "He searcheth the heart, and trieth the reins of the children of men."

CONCLUSION. Suppose not that national depravity is something distinct from the depravity of the individual. It is but the aggregation of individual depravities. Nor suppose that, because priests and kings may be the mightiest agents in promoting national immorality and irreligion, each individual in the nation is less accountable for his sins on that account. No priest or king can compel us to sin. Sin is an act of freedom, and for it each man is held responsible to the Most High. Daniel Webster was once asked, "What is the most important thought you ever entertained?" He replied, after a moment's reflection, "The most important thought I ever had was my individual responsibility to God."—D. T.

Ver. 4.—*Necessary preliminaries to a godly life.* "They will not frame their doings to turn unto their God," etc. Preachers do not always deal wisely with their hearers. They call upon men to repent; they often describe repentance with metaphysical accuracy, and enforce it with resistless logic and pressing rhetoric. So with faith; they explain its nature and enforce its duty. They say, "Repent or be damned," "Believe or be damned." They seldom go further. But few have any notion that there is a certain way to repent and believe, fewer still indicate the nature of that way. Long have I had the impression, which deepens with years, that there is as truly a way to "repent and believe," as there is a way to cultivate the farm, build the house, or master any art or science. The text implies this, "They will not frame their doings to turn unto their God." What is the way? How are men to frame their doings as to turn unto their God?

I. BY THINKING ON CERTAIN SUBJECTS. We ever act from motives when we act as men. But what are motives? The creation of our own thoughts. The man who centres his thoughts on the advantages of wealth, or fame, or knowledge, turns to their pursuit. His thoughts excite his feelings, and his feelings urge him to a resolution. But what are the subjects which thought must dwell on in order that we may move religiously? If I am to repent I must think of my sins in relation to the character of the holy God and the self-sacrificing Christ. It is only as I muse that the fires of penitence will burn. If I am to believe, I must think upon the object who alone has the attributes to command my highest confidence and unbounded trust. If I am to love supremely, I must meditate on the perfections of him who is supremely good. In fact, if a man is to turn to any new course of conduct, he must have new motives; and if he is to have new motives, he must have new thoughts. "I thought of my ways, I turned my feet unto thy statutes." Thought is the rudder of the soul; as it is turned, the vessel takes the direction.

II. By thinking on certain subjects IN A CERTAIN WAY. There is a way to think. You may think on the most serious subjects in such a way as to produce profanity and mirth. How must you think, then, on these subjects? 1. With *concentration.* The whole thinking force of the soul must be centred on them. The most solemn of them, taken up lightly and despatched with a reflection or two, will not produce the result. If you would bring the beams of the sun into a scorching flame, you must draw them to a focus. And if you would make the great truths of religion kindle repentance within you, you must focalize them by a process of intense thinking. 2. With *persistency.* It is not enough to bend even the whole force of the mind upon them now and then at distant intervals; it must be done consecutively. They must be kept constantly before the mind as objects in its horizon so grand and solemn that all else shall seem trifling and contemptible. 3. With *devotion.* God must be brought to them. His presence and aid must be invoked.

III. By thinking on certain subjects WITH A PRACTICAL INTENT. To think upon religious subjects in order to increase our theological knowledge or to make our feelings glow for a time with a religious sentiment would be of little service; but to think in order to translate the thought into action, to embody the idea in the life—this is the way. They must be thought upon in order to answer the question, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?"

CONCLUSION. "This is the way; walk ye in it." Think. Thoughtlessness is the curse of humanity. Think on right subjects; wrong subjects will do you harm. Think on right subjects in a right way; thinking on right subjects in a wrong way must prove disastrous. Think on right subjects with a practical intent, not for speculation nor sentimentalizing, but for action—real, living, godly action. Thus frame your doings, and "turn unto the Lord." Think, brethren, think; there is nothing like noble thoughts. "It is a grand thing when, in the stillness of the soul, thought bursts into flame, and the intuitive vision comes like inspiration; when breathing thoughts clothe themselves in burning words, winged as it were with lightning; or when a great law of the universe reveals itself to the mind of genius, and, where all was darkness, his single word bids light be, and all is order where chaos and confusion were. Or when the truths of human nature shape themselves forth in the creative fancies of one life, the million-minded poet, and you recognize the rare power of *heart* which sympathizes with and can reproduce all that is found in man" (F. W. Robertson).—D. T.

Ver. 6.—*Too late.* "They shall go with their flocks and with their herds to seek the Lord; but they shall not find him; he hath withdrawn himself from them." This verse directs us to two subjects of thought.

I. THE MOST IMPORTANT OF ALL WORKS. "They shall go with their flocks and with their herds to seek the Lord." "Seek the Lord:" this implies a distance between man and his Maker. The Bible abounds with allusions to this distance. What is it? It is not the distance of *being*, for both are in close vital contact. "In *him* we live and move and have our being." It is the distance of character. Between the sympathies, principles, and aim of the two there is a distance vast as infinitude. "His thoughts are not our thoughts," etc. Hence the great work of man is to seek the Lord *morally*—to seek his character, and thus become a "partaker of the Divine nature." 1. This is a *work in which all men should engage.* The grand duty of all souls is to be "holy, even as he is holy." Holiness is the condition of fellowship with him in "whose presence there is joy, and at whose right hand there are pleasures for evermore." 2. This is a work which all men *must attend to sooner or later.* The time hastens on when the most wicked and worthless man on earth will wake up to the importance of holiness, and strenuously try for his friendship. Of all works, then, this is the most important. Every other avocation of life is puerile compared with this. Man's great want is the Lord—the Lord's character, the Lord's fellowship. Without this, whatever else he has, he is lost—lost to happiness, to usefulness, and to the grand ends of his being.

II. The most important of all works UNDERTAKEN TOO LATE. "They shall not find *him*; he hath withdrawn himself from them." Though they take with them their flocks and their herds, and are prepared to make the greatest sacrifices, their efforts are fruitless—"He hath withdrawn himself from them." This is the language of accommodation. He puts forth no effort to conceal himself, he alters not his position, but he seems to withdraw from them. As the white cliffs of Albion seem to withdraw from the emigrant as his vessel bears him away to distant shores, so God seems to withdraw from the man who seeks him "too late."

CONCLUSION. "Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me: for that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord: they would none of my counsel; they despised all my reproof. Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices."—D. T.

Ver. 8.—*An earnest ministry.* "Blow ye the cornet in Gibeah, and the trumpet in Ramah: cry aloud at Beth-aven, after thee, O Benjamin." The prophet in vision sees

Divine judgment coming on the rebellious nation, and commands an alarm to be given of the approach of the enemy. Gibeah (Josh. xviii. 28) and Ramah (xviii. 25) were two elevated places in the tribe of Benjamin, and were well adapted for signals on account of their lofty elevation. The introduction of these particular towns, which did not belong to the tribe of Israel, but to Judah, is intended to indicate that the enemy had already conquered the ten tribes, and had advanced to that on the border of Judah. The idea of the passage is—Give an earnest warning of the judgment about to break on the people, sound the alarm, and startle the population. The subject suggested is that of an *earnest ministry*. Notice—

I. THE NATURE OF AN EARNEST MINISTRY. "Cry aloud." Let the whole soul go forth in the work. Let us not mistake the nature of earnestness. It is not *noise*. Ignorant people imagine that the minister who makes the greatest noise, roars and raves the most in the pulpit, or parades his doings most in journals and reports, is the earnest man. "A celebrated preacher, distinguished for the eloquence of his pulpit preparations, exclaimed on his death-bed, 'Speak not to me of my sermons. Alas! I was fiddling whilst Rome was burning.'" It is not *frightening* people. Often he who is the most successful by graphic and impassioned descriptions of the judgment day and hell fires, in terrifying men, is considered the most earnest. This is a mistake—a popular and fatal mistake. It is not *bustle*. He who is always on the "*go*," whose limbs are always on the stretch, into this house and that house, into this meeting and that, who is never at rest, men are always disposed to regard as an earnest man. Genuine earnestness is foreign to all these things. It has nothing in it of the noise and rattle of the fussy brook; it is like the deep stream rolling its current silently, resistlessly, and without pause. An earnest ministry is *living*. It is not mere preaching or service, occasional or even systematic; it is the influence of the whole man. It is the "Word" made flesh; so permeating the whole man that every word, act, and expression are as the blasts of a Divine trumpet, rousing sinners to a sense of their moral danger. Such a ministry is a *matter of necessity*. The Divine thing in the man becomes irrepressible, it breaks out as sunbeams through the clouds: "Woe is unto me if I preach not the gospel." Such a ministry is *constant*. It is not a professional service; it is as regular as the functions of life; it is a thing that is "in season and out of season"—in shops and in sanctuaries, on hearths as well as in pulpits. Such a ministry is *mighty*. Men can stand before the most thunderous words and violent attitudinizations, but they cannot stand before such a ministry as this; they are before it as snow before the sun.

"Oh! let all the soul within you
For the truth's sake go abroad!
Strike! let every nerve and sinew
Tell on ages—tell for God."

II. THE NEED OF AN EARNEST MINISTRY. Why was the "cornet" to be now blown in Gibeah, and the "trumpet" in Ramah? Because there was danger. The moral danger to which souls around us are exposed is *great*. There is the danger of losing, not existence, but all that makes existence worth having—love, hope, power, friendship, etc. "To be carnally minded is death." It is *near*. It is not the danger of an invading army heard in the distance. The enemy has entered the soul, and the work of devastating has commenced. It is *increasing*. The condition of the unregenerate soul gets worse and worse every hour. Brothers, let us be earnest in our work, always "abounding in the work of the Lord"!

"Time is earnest, passing by;
Death is earnest, drawing nigh;
Life is earnest; when 'tis o'er
Thou returnest nevermore."

D. T.

Ver. 12.—"*The moth;*" *or, God's quiet method of destroying.* "Therefore will I be unto Ephraim as a moth, and to the house of Judah as rottenness." "And I am like the moth to Ephraim, and like the worm to the house of Judah" (Keil and Delitzsch). "The moth and worm are figures employed to represent destructive powers—the moth

destroying clothes (Isa. l. 9 ; Ps. xxxix. 12), the worm injuring both wood and flesh." The words indicate *God's quiet method of destroying.* In two or three verses in this chapter he is spoken of as proceeding in his work of destruction as a lion : "I will be unto Ephraim as a lion." Here as a "moth"—working out ruin silently, slowly, and gradually.

I. HE WORKS DECAY THUS SOMETIMES IN THE BODIES OF MEN. Oftentimes men die violently and suddenly, but more frequently by some insidious hidden disease which, like a "moth," works away quietly at the vitals, gradually poisoning the blood and undermining the constitution. In truth, the seed of death, like a moth, gnaws away day after day and year after year in every human frame. The moth is often so small and secret in its workings that medical science can seldom find it out, and, when it finds it out, though it may check it for a time, it cannot destroy it: the moth defies all medicine. Truly we are crushed by a moth. At the heart of some of the strongest trees in the forest there are hosts of invisible insects noiselessly at work ; the forester knows it not, the tree seems healthy ; until one fine morning, before a strong gust of wind, it falls a victim to these silent workers. So with the strongest man amongst us.

II. HE WORKS DECAY THUS SOMETIMES IN THE ENTERPRISES OF MEN. Often men find it impossible to succeed in their worldly avocations. Mercantile establishments that have been prosperous for generations have the "moth" in them. For years the fabric has been so firm that it has made but little way, the tree has grown and flourished though the worm was at its root ; but the time comes when the effects are seen, and the existing proprietors begin to wonder they do not go on as usual, why the fruit is not so juicy and abundant as in their father's time. One of their projects brings poor results, and another fails, at last the establishment collapses ; the outsiders wonder, and a panic is created in the market. What is the matter ? There has been a "moth" there for years. It has not been conducted by godly men, and that in a right spirit ; so God sent a "moth," and the moth has been working away for years silently, secretly, and gradually, until all the vitality has been eaten up.

III. HE WORKS DECAY THUS SOMETIMES IN THE KINGDOMS OF MEN. For a time a country flourishes ; there is a vigour, an elasticity, an enterprise, a love of justice and honour in the spirit of the people, and all things seem to prosper. Its commerce flourishes, its laws are respected, its influence great amongst the nations, but there is a "moth" in its heart. Effeminacy, luxury, ambition, greed, self-indulgence, servility, irreverence,—these are moths, and decay sets in, and it falls, not by the sword of the invader, but by its own "rottenness." We fear there is a "moth" secretly but regularly working out the ruin of England. "I will be unto Ephraim as a moth." It was thus with the nations of antiquity. Where are they ? The moth has eaten them.

"When nations go astray from age to age,
The effects remain a fatal heritage ;
Bear witness, Egypt, thy huge monuments
Of priestly fraud and tyranny austere !
Bear witness, thou, whose only name presents
All holy feelings to religion dear—
In earth's dark circlet once the precious gem
Of living light, O fallen Jerusalem !"

(Robert Southey.)

IV. HE WORKS DECAY THUS SOMETIMES IN THE CHURCHES OF MEN. What destroyed the Churches of Asia Minor ? The "moth" of worldliness and religious errors. Some of our modern Churches are obviously slowly rotting away. A realizing faith in the invisible, brotherly love, practical self-sacrifice, Christliness of spirit,—these, which constitute the moral heart of the true Church, are being eaten up by the moth of secularity, sectarianism, superstition, and religious pretence. Thus, too, individual souls lose their spiritual life and strength. Many a soul, once earnestly alive to the higher things of being, has lost its vigour and fallen into spiritual decay. God deliver us from those errors of heart that like a moth eat away the life ! "We read," says Archbishop Trench, "in books about the West Indies of a huge bat, which goes under the ugly name of the vampire bat. It has obtained this name, sucking as it does the blood of sleepers, even as the vampire is fabled to do. So far, indeed, there can be no doubt ; but it is further reported, whether truly or not I will not undertake to say, to

fan them with its mighty wings, that so they may not wake from their slumbers, but may be hushed into deeper sleep, while it is thus draining away the blood from their veins. Sin has often presented itself to me as such a vampire bat, possessing as it does the same fearful power to lull its victims into an even deeper slumber, to deceive those whom it is also destroying."—D. T.

Ver. 13.—*Wrong methods of relief.* "When Ephraim saw his sickness, and Judah saw his wound, then went Ephraim to the Assyrian, and sent to King Jareb: yet could he not heal you, nor cure you of your wound." The "moth" had so far eaten into the political heart of Ephraim and Judah that they began to feel the wound and to grow conscious of their weakness. They felt, it may be, that from the sole of the foot to the crown of the head there was no soundness in them, but wounds and bruises and putrefied sores. Under a grievous sense of their disease and weakness, instead of applying to Jehovah for help, they went "to the Assyrian, and sent to King Jareb." The Assyrian king was ever ready for his own aggrandizement to mix himself up with the affairs of neighbouring states, and profess to undertake Israel and Judah's cause. As the real disease of the two kingdoms was apostasy to the Lord, which ever gives rise to all the evils that destroy political states as well as individual souls, we are justified in giving the text a spiritual application; and we raise from it the following remarks:—

I. Men are OFTEN MADE CONSCIOUS of their spiritual malady. Depravity is a disease of the heart; it is often represented as such in the Bible, and it is so. As a disease it impairs the energies, mars the enjoyment of the soul, and incapacitates it for the right discharge of the duties of life. Often men remain insensible to this disease, but the time comes when they become deeply conscious of it. As "Ephraim saw his sickness, and Judah saw his wound," they see their moral wretchedness, and cry out, "Who shall deliver us from the bondage of this sin and death?" A great point is gained when the sinner becomes conscious of his sins.

II. Men under a consciousness of their spiritual malady FREQUENTLY RESORT TO WRONG MEANS OF RELIEF. Ephraim now "went to the Assyrian, and sent to King Jareb." The Assyrians had neither the power nor the disposition to effect their restoration to political health. How often men whose consciences are touched by the events of providence and the truths of the gospel appeal for help to some moral Assyrian! Sometimes they go to *scenes of carnal amusement*; sometimes to *sceptical philosophizings*; sometimes to *false religions*. These are all "miserable comforters," "broken cisterns."

III. That resorting to wrong methods of relief WILL PROVE UTTERLY INEFFECTIVE. "Yet could he not heal you, nor cure you of your wound." What can worldly amusements, sceptical reasonings, and false religions do towards healing a sin-sick soul? Nothing. Like anodyne, they may deaden the pain for a minute only, that the anguish may return with intenser acuteness. There is but one Physician, and that is Christ. Public amusers, sceptical philosophers, entertaining novelists, ceremonial priests,—these have been tried a thousand times, and have failed—signally failed. Christ only can bind up the broken-hearted. "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."—D. T.

Vers. 1—7.—*God and man.* All classes are addressed by the prophet—priests, king, nobles, the whole house of Israel. The prophecy makes an advance. In the previous chapter judgment is threatened; in this it is announced as imminent. Judah also is menaced with punishment (vers. 5, 10, 12).

I. GOD WILL ENSNARE THE ENSNARERS. (Ver. 1.) The dignitaries—priests, kings, and nobles—had led the people astray. They had put stumbling-blocks in their way. They had become a snare to them. Mizpah and Tabor may be referred to as conspicuous centres of wickedness. The figure is taken from the ensnaring of birds. We may ensnare: 1. *Through evil example.* The example of a court, of the aristocracy, of ministers of religion, of the wealthy, has a powerful influence on the tone of morals and religion. If evil, it gives an immense impetus to corruption. The multitudes think nothing wrong which they see in their betters (cf. Massillon's sermon on 'Des Exemples des Grands'). 2. *Through traps set for virtue.* The idolatrous festivals patronized by

the great were direct temptations put in the way of the people. What shall we say of the countenance given by many in high positions in our own land to the turf, to demoralizing sports, to gambling institutions, to Sunday festivals, etc.? The toleration and licensing of vice by public authorities is the spreading of a "snare." Every effort should rather be made to remove stumbling-blocks from the midst of a community. 3. *By direct solicitation to evil.* The vicious take a wicked delight in seducing others. They gloat in seeing the innocent brought down to their own level. They are active and unremitting in compassing men's destruction. They cannot bear that any should remain to be a rebuke to them. Hence the ensnaring influence of evil companionships. God, however, declares that the ensnarers in Israel shall not escape his judgment. "Judgment is toward you." He will dig a pit for those who are digging pits for their fellows. He will take them in their own net, and destroy them suddenly (Ps. vii. 11—16; ix. 15, 16).

II. GOD IS MORE PROFOUND THAN THE PLOTTERS. (Vers. 2, 3.) The revolters in Israel were "profound to make slaughter." They laid their plots deep. They concocted conspiracies (ch. vii. 3—7) and planned deeds of blood (ch. vi. 8, 9). They thought that no one knew of their doings. But God was more profound than they were. "I know Ephraim, and Israel is not hid from me." They would find him "a rebuker" of them all. All their sins were "naked and open" to him—their plottings, their "whoredom," and everything else. 1. *The wicked pride themselves on their deep cunning.* They imagine that their deeds are wrapped in impenetrable darkness. They are strong in a fancied security. They think no one can find them out. 2. *They forget about God.* All the while God is watching their doings; he is privy to their most secret counsels; he knows how to counterwork and defeat their plots; he will at last "bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil" (Eccles. xii. 14).

III. GOD IS NOT REGARDLESS OF THOSE WHO REFUSE TO KNOW HIM. (Vers. 4, 5.) 1. *The sinner puts God out of his thoughts.* Israel had turned its back on Jehovah. It would not know him. "They will not frame their doings," etc. The cause of this was the evil heart of unbelief in the people, leading them to depart from the living God. "The spirit of whoredoms is in the midst of them." The alternative rendering of the clause first suggests that, once the sinner has embarked on evil courses, he finds it difficult again to leave them: "Their doings will not suffer them to turn unto their God." The "spirit of whoredoms" binds the transgressor in love to ways that are not right. These fix themselves as habits, customs. The latent sense of wrong-doing in the mind will not allow of further debate with conscience. The sinner, in this condition, is apt to think that, because he has succeeded in forgetting God, God has forgotten him as well. 2. *God, however, is not forgetful of the sinner.* With the latter it may be "out of sight, out of mind;" but there is neither "out of sight" nor "out of mind" with God. The "pride of Israel" here (ver. 5) and in ch. vii. 10 is best interpreted —after the analogy of the similar expression, "excellency [pride] of Jacob," in Amos viii. 7—of God himself, Israel's glory. Israel had forgotten God, but God remembered Israel, and testified against it "to its face." He testified now (1) by reproofs; and would testify afterwards (2) by judgments. "Therefore shall Israel and Ephraim fall in their iniquity." What applied to Israel applied also to Judah—"Judah also shall fall with them;" and applies to every sinner. God testifies to the sinner of his sins, of his ingratitude, of his folly, and of his certain punishment. This, through conscience, in the Word, by the Spirit, by the reproofs of his servants.

IV. GOD CAN WITHDRAW HIMSELF WHEN MEN SEEK. (Vers. 6, 7.) 1. The time would come when, convinced of its folly, Israel would begin to seek eagerly after God. "They shall go with their flocks and with their herds," etc. 2. But it would then be too late. "He hath withdrawn himself from them." The reason why God would thus withdraw himself would be that there was no sincerity in their approach. They would come with flocks and herds, but not with the essential sacrifice—the contrite spirit. The character of Israel was not such as held out any hope of genuine repentance. "They have dealt treacherously against the Lord," etc. (ver. 7). The right time to seek the Lord is while he "waits to be gracious." After that it is too late (Prov. i. 24—34). 3. They would be cut off in a short time, and in the very midst of their sacrifices. "A month shall devour them with their portions" (cf. Zech. xi. 8).—J. O.

Vers. 8—12.—*Ephraim and Judah.* The judgment is represented in these verses as already fallen. Shrill cornet and trumpet blasts announce the presence of the invaders. They fill the land. They are at the borders of Judah. They menace Benjamin.

I. IN THE GRASP OF THE DESTROYER. (Vers. 8, 9.) 1. *Ephraim's destruction came upon him suddenly.* It was on him before he was aware. Ere almost he could realize the fact, the land was in possession of invaders. It is thus that God's judgments commonly overtake transgressors. While they are saying to themselves, "Peace and safety," "sudden destruction cometh upon them" (1 Thess. v. 3). They mocked at the warning and professed to disbelieve it. Now, to their amazement, they find God's word come true. They are caught in the wave of judgment. "The sorrows of death compass them, the pains of hell get hold upon them." It was so at the Flood (Matt. xxiv. 38, 39); at Sodom (Luke xvii. 28, 29); at the destruction of Jerusalem (Luke xvii. 30, 31); and shall be so at the Lord's second advent (Matt. xxiv. 48—51). 2. *When Ephraim's hour came he was powerless to save himself.* He might blow his trumpets; he might raise cries of frantic distress; he might warn Benjamin; but he could not deliver his own soul. So, in the day of judgment, the haughtiest of those who now exalt themselves against God will find themselves to be impotent. They will find their foe to be one against whom there is no contending. They may cry for mercy; may shout to the mountains and rocks to fall on them (Rev. vi. 16); may plead, like Dives, for their "five brethren" (Luke xvii. 27, 28); but they will know that for themselves there is no hope in resistance. 3. *Ephraim's desolation would be complete.* "Ephraim shall be desolate in the day of rebuke," etc. (1) The judgment would fall in successive strokes. The land was frequently overrun by the Assyrians, prior to the final overthrow. There is an *evolution* in God's judgments. They run on till they are fulfilled. "That which shall *surely* be." (2) It would be entire. The land would be reduced to utter desolation. (3) It would be lasting—"great plagues, and of long continuance" (Deut. xxviii. 59). So the last clause may be rendered, "I have declared what is lasting."

II. THE DANGER TO JUDAH. (Vers. 8, 10.) 1. *The ruin of one sinner is a warning to others.* Judah was partaker in Israel's sins. The destruction of Ephraim was therefore of very special significance to the sister state. It portended judgment to it also. When the northern kingdom was in the hands of the foe, the cry might well be raised, "After thee, O Benjamin." (1) The sinner overtaken by judgment gives warning. He is now conscious, if he was not previously, that "it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Heb. x. 31). Transgressors have often died warning those related to them against drinking, sabbath-breaking, bad company, and whatever else brought them to their shameful end. (2) Conscience gives warning. When judgment is seen descending on another, conscience is quick to interpret the meaning for one's self. "After thee, O Benjamin." 2. *The ruin of one sinner foretells judgment on others.* It not merely warns of it; it predicts it. It says, "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish" (Luke xiii. 3). Judah's punishment was as certain as Ephraim's. (1) Judah's sins called for punishment. "The princes of Judah were like them that remove the bound." They changed God's commandments. They refused to be bound by the Law God had given them. They altered the limits of conduct to suit themselves. They called that good which God called evil. They were thus like boundary-removers. All sin is a boundary-removing. It is the refusal to abide within prescribed limits. It is "transgression," a stepping across. It is "lawlessness" (1 John iii. 4). (2) God had threatened Judah with punishment. That threatening he now ratifies and repeats. Ephraim's overthrow was a pledge of its fulfilment. "I will pour out my wrath upon them like water." The judgment predicted is not of so fatal a kind as that on Ephraim, but it would be still very terrible. It is well to remember that there is wrath in God; that it is roused against sin; and that, in its effects, when poured forth, it is dreadful and overwhelming. Here it is figured as a flood which carries all before it.

III. MORAL CAUSATION. (Vers. 11, 12.) The moral state of Ephraim and Judah, and the judgments which overtook them, stand in the relation of cause and effect. There is nothing arbitrary in the Divine government. God but gives to the sinner what his own doings have earned (ch. iv. 9). 1. *Judah's sin and Ephraim's sin were practically the same sin.* (1) Judah's princes removed the bound; but this also was the sin of Ephraim. What was the institution of the calves but a removing of bounds

set by God's commandments? It was the substituting of a human statute for a Divine —the setting aside of a prohibition of the Decalogue. (2) The people of Ephraim "walked willingly after the commandment," *i.e.* after the man-made statute; but so also did the people of Judah. They followed the example of their princes. Both kingdoms were antinomian. 2. *Judah's punishment and Ephraim's punishment would accordingly be alike.* "Therefore will I be unto Ephraim as a moth, and to the house of Judah as rottenness." The agency at work in their destruction, while supernatural in origin, would work through natural causes and in accordance with natural laws. Destruction is prepared for by a process of internal decay. This decay is gradual, secret, sure, ruinous. It affects all parts of the social fabric. It so eats away its substance that it needs but a touch to make it fall in pieces. This is precisely what happens in a state when moral laws are tampered with.—J. O.

Vers. 13—15.—*The false physician and the true.* The aid of the King of Assyria was, when times became troublous, freely sought by both Ephraim and Judah. Ephraim, however, was the chief offender. The relations between Israel and Assyria were at this time very close.

I. THE FATAL SICKNESS. (Ver. 13.) "When Ephraim saw his sickness, and Judah saw his wound," etc. The sickness was a deadly one. Its diagnosis is not difficult. "The real disease," one has said, "was apostasy from the Lord, or idolatry, with its train of moral corruption, injustice, crimes, and vices of every kind, which destroyed the vital energy and vital marrow of the two kingdoms, and generated civil war and anarchy in the kingdom of Israel." It was the disease of *sin*, which in more or less aggravated forms afflicts us all. "The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint" (Isa. i. 5).

II. THE PHYSICIAN THAT COULD NOT HELP. (Vers. 13, 14.) "Then went Ephraim to the Assyrian, and sent to King Jareb [the warlike king]," etc. 1. *The sinner will apply to any helper rather than to God.* Israel had God to come to, but he would not avail himself of this aid. He preferred to send to the Assyrian. The reason was that he did not believe much in God's help. He knew, too, that, did he come to God, he would require to "acknowledge his offence" (ver. 15) and give up his evil ways. For this he was not prepared. In like manner, the sinner's first resort is usually to earthly helpers. He neglects the great Physician. He looks to man for his comfort, counsel, strength, assistance, and happiness. He tries the "broken cisterns" (Jer. ii. 13). He seeks remedies, not in the gospel, but in science, philosophy, politics, literature, and art. It is in vain. The physician is not to be found there. 2. *No helper other than God can heal the sickness.* "Yet could he not heal you, nor cure you of your wound." "King Jareb" could not heal Israel, and neither can these earthly physicians we speak of heal the trouble of the sinner. It passes their skill. The Assyrian could not heal Israel; for: (1) The cause of the trouble lay, not in anything outward, but in the moral state. Social, moral, and political evils need a deeper remedy than any earthly helper knows how to apply. Unless a cure can be discovered for sin, other remedies will fail. The seat of the mischief is in the heart. It is that which needs healing. (2) God's hand was against Israel. "For I will be unto Ephraim as a lion, and as a young lion to the house of Judah," etc. So long as God had this "controversy" with the people it was vain to look for healing. God being against them, no human being could make things go well. They might heal, but he would rend again. They might rescue, but he would take away. They might gather, but he would scatter. There is no help so long as God is angry with us. (3) After all, the Assyrian was not honest in his help. He did not really mean to help Israel. He sought only his own ends. Once he got the nation in his power, he would turn and rend it. Instead of helping, Assyria became the chief instrument in God's hand in inflicting the threatened punishment. Equally vain is the help we seek from earthly physicians. They cannot render it, even supposing they were willing, and they often are not willing. Our own age finds no real balm for its wounds in its theories and systems. It needs Christ. He is the only true Physician.

III. THE PHYSICIAN THAT COULD HELP. (Ver. 15.) This was Jehovah. But him, as yet, Israel would not seek. 1. Only on one condition could his help be bestowed. This was that they should "acknowledge their offence, and seek his face." It was the

indisposition to do this which kept Israel back. 2. Till Israel was brought to this point of acknowledgment God would hide himself in chastisements. "I will go and return to my place," etc. It is the sinner that must change. God cannot. 3. There remained the hope that affliction might ultimately lead them to seek him. "In their affliction they will seek me early."—J. O.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER VI.

Vers. 1—3.—These three verses have, by the division into chapters, been violently and improperly torn from the preceding chapter, to which they naturally belong. Their connection with the foregoing sentiments is indicated by the ancient versions —Chaldee and Septuagint, the LXX., for example, inserting λέγοντες, as if the reading had been לֵאמֹר. This (1) represents the Israelites exhorting one another in that good time which the prophet encourages them to expect. But (2) it may be regarded as the prophet's own exhortation to the exiles; their affliction urging them to seek the Lord, and their encouragement consisting in the knowledge of his ability and willingness to heal the wounds which his own hand had inflicted.

Ver. 1.—**He hath torn, and he will heal us.** The presence of the pronoun imparts emphasis to the statement, so that it is rather, *he it is that hath torn;* and the preterite of this verse, compared with the future in ver. 14 of the foregoing chapter, implies that the destruction there predicted has become an accomplished fact. **He hath smitten, and he will bind us up.** The language is figurative, and borrowed from medical science. Jehovah, not Jareb nor any sovereign of Assyria, is the physician. Long before he had assured his people Israel of this, saying, "I am the Lord that healeth thee" (Exod. xv. 26); and again, "I kill, and I make alive; I wound, and I heal" (Deut. xxxii. 39). Aben Ezra, commenting on *yachbeshena*, alludes to the ancient mode of surgical practice, probably as indicated in Isa. i. 6: "A wound needs to be pressed out and bound up, and afterwards softened with oil."

Ver. 2.—**After two days will he revive us: in the third day he will raise us up, and we shall live in his sight.** The expression of time here employed denotes a comparatively short period, and implies that Israel's revival would be speedily as well as certainly accomplished. Paucity is signified by the binary number in Old Testament language, just as we speak of two, or a couple, in the sense of fewness. In 1 Kings xvii. 12 we find "two" used in this way: "Behold, I am gathering two sticks;" so in Isa. vii. 21, "A man shall nourish a young cow and two sheep;" in Isa. xvii. 6 a small number is spoken of as "two or three;" while a short period is similarly described in Luke xiii. 32, "Behold, I cast out devils, and I do cures to-day and to-morrow, and the third day I shall be perfected." The important idea of this verse connects itself with the terms corresponding to revival, resurrection, and restoration to the Divine favour and protection. The drooping, declining, dying state of Israel would be revived; their deathlike condition would undergo a resurrection process; their disfavour would give way to Divine complacency; and all this, though not immediately, yet in a comparatively short time. This appears to us the import of the prophecy. Similar figurative language, and with like significancy, is employed by Ezekiel (xxxvii.) in his vision of the valley and the resurrection of its dry bones; as also by Isaiah (xxvi.), where the same or a similar thought is presented in briefer, but still more beautiful, language: "Thy dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise. Awake and sing, ye that dwell in the dust: for thy dew is as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead." Calvin understands this verse as containing a source of consolation to Israel. "When," he says, "the Israelites, through their long obstinacy, had become nearly incurable, it was needful to lead them to repentance by slow punishments. They, therefore, said, *After two days God will revive us;* and thus they confirmed themselves in the hope of salvation, though it did not immediately appear; though they long remained in darkness, and the exile was long which they had to endure, they yet did not cease to hope. 'Well, let the two days pass, and the Lord will revive us.'" To man in sorrow the time appears long; it is short in the sight of him with whom a thousand years are as one day. Kimchi's explanation is also, to a certain extent, satisfactory: "The prophet says, 'If our sickness lasts for two days, yet he will heal us of our sickness, till on the third day he will raise us up, and we shall live long before him,' as if he said, 'though our afflictions continue a long time.' The two days are a figure, for 'in a short time he will bring us his salvation,' and 'on the third day' is figurative." He afterwards refers the

"two days" to the two captivities of his people —that in Egypt and that in Babylon; while "the third day" denotes the third or present Roman captivity, "out of which he will raise us up and we shall live before him, so that we shall never again go into captivity, but shall live continually before him, while we sin no more." Rashi refers the words to the three temples—that of Solomon, that of Zerubbabel, and the temple that is to be built by Messiah. Some of the Fathers understand the three periods in the history of humanity—the first, under Adam, as the time of Law and captivity to sin; the second, under Christ, as the time of the gospel and of grace; and the third, with Christ, as the time of the general resurrection. Theodoret and most of the Fathers understood this verse to refer to the resurrection of Christ on the third day after three days' rest in the grave. Calvin, after giving what appeared to him "the simple and genuine sense" of the passage as applying primarily to the Jews, as we have already seen, adds, "I do not deny but that God has exhibited a remarkable and memorable instance of what is here said in his only begotten Son. As often, then, as delay begets weariness in us, let us flee to Christ; for, as it has been said, his resurrection is a mirror of our life; for we see in that how God is wont to deal with his own people: the Father did not restore life to Christ as soon as he was taken down from the cross; he was deposited in the sepulchre, and he lay there till the third day. When God, then, intends that we should languish for a time, let us know that we are thus represented in Christ our Head, and hence let us gather materials of confidence. We have, then, in Christ an illustrious proof of this prophecy." The political resurrection of Israel may dimly shadow forth, by way of type, the resurrection of Messiah and the general resurrection of which he is the Firstfruits.

Ver. 3.—**Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord.** This is more accurately rendered by, *let us therefore know, hunt after the knowledge of Jehovah*, the verbs being both cohortative and no conditional particle ("if") in the second clause. The second clause is a more emphatic and energetic reaffirmation of the first, urging to active and zealous effort and steady perseverance in obtaining the knowledge of God —a knowledge theoretic, but especially practical. Aben Ezra understands the exhortation of intellectual knowledge: "To know Jehovah is the secret of all wisdom, and for this alone was man created. But he cannot know God till he has learnt many doctrines of wisdom, which are, as it were, a ladder in order to mount up to this highest step of knowledge." Kimchi, on the other hand, though quoting Aben Ezra's comment with approval, inclines to the practical side of knowledge: "Let us follow on to know Jehovah, exercising justice and righteousness." **His going forth is prepared as the morning; and he shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth.** Here, again, the translation of the Authorized Version is susceptible of improvement: *his going forth is fixed as the morning dawn; and he shall come to us as the plentiful rain, as the latter rain which watereth* (or, *watering*) *the earth.* Here we have two beautiful figures—the morning dawn and the fertilizing rain. The going forth of Jehovah is represented as the sun rising upon the earth, or rather as the dawn which heralds the day. The advent of salvation to his people is identified with, or symbolized by, his appearance. But the dawn of day only brings the commencement of salvation; its complement is found in the fruits and blessings of salvation. The root of *motsav* is *zatsa*, which is applied to the sunrise in Gen. xix. 23, as also in Ps. xix. 7. Parallel passages are found in Isa. lviii. 8, "Then shall thy light break forth as the morning (dawn), and thy health shall spring forth speedily;" and lx. 2, "The Lord shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee." Further, the word *nakon*, meaning "prepared," "fixed firm," is applied to the clear bright light of morning, as in Prov. iv. 18, "The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect (*nekon*) day." The plentiful rain is that which falls after the sowing of the seed in October (the beginning of the Hebrew year) and in the following months; while the *malqosh* is the late or spring rain, which, falling in March and till the middle of April, precedes and promotes the harvest. The LXX. translates the (1) concluding clause by ὑετὸς πρώιμος and ὄψιμος erroneously, for *zoreh* is not a noun with *be* being understood before "earth;" neither is it (2) the future Hiph., which would necessitate the ellipse being supplied by *asher;* it is the Qal participle in the sense of "watering." *Geshem* is "a violent or plentiful rain," stronger than the usual word for "rain," *matar;* while *malqosh* is "the late rain" which ceases a short time before harvest. The explanation of the "dawn" by Aben Ezra is erroneous: "The intelligent man at the beginning knows God—blessed be he!—by his works, like the dawn of day in its going forth; but moment after moment the light increases, until the full truth becomes visible." Kimchi more correctly explains the figure as follows: "If we shall do this, viz. follow on to know the Lord, then he will be to us as the morning dawn, of which the going forth is fixed [purposed by God and certain] as though he

said, He will cause his light and his goodness to shine over us." His comment on the second similitude is equally appropriate: "He will come to us as the plentiful rain, as the plentiful rain which revives the dead plants; so man sunk in sorrow is like one dead; but when deliverance comes to him it is with him as if he revived out of his dead state." Thus he shall be to his people as "morning to the weary watcher," and as "plentiful rain to the parched ground."

Ver. 4.—**For your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away.** A new section here commences. God, having tried various expedients and many ways to restore Israel to faithfulness, finds all those methods unavailing; and now he asks what further means of reclamation he can resort to; what further punishment he is to inflict. Thus in Isa. i. 5, "Why should ye be stricken any more? ye will revolt more and more!" or what additional privileges can be vouchsafed? Thus in Isa. v. 4, "What could have been done more to my vineyard, than I have not done in it?" The reason is then assigned for such questioning; it was the brief duration of Israel's piety. It was evanescent as the early cloud which floats across a summer's sky and which the sun soon scatters for ever, or which promises a refreshing shower, but which is exhaled by the sun's heat; it was transient as the dew which lies in pearly drops of beauty upon the grass, but which the foot of the passing traveller brushes away in a moment. The prophet had, in the opening verses, referred to real repentance; but now, turning to Israel, he reminds them of *their* repentance by way of contrast, showing them that it was neither of the consistency nor permanent character required. Proofs of their deficiency lay on the pages of their national history. Hezekiah had done "that which was right in the sight of the Lord;" but his son and successor, Manasseh, "wrought much wickedness in the sight of the Lord, to provoke him to anger." Josiah, again, was eminent for piety, so that "like unto him was there no king before him, that turned to the Lord with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might;" but his successors degenerated, for it is added, "neither after him arose there any like him." The connection and meaning are well given by Kimchi: "How shall I heal you, and how shall I bind you up, as your repentance is by no means perfect? For if the kings of Israel did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, so have they soon turned to do evil, like Jehu. And likewise the kings of Judah, who in the days of Josiah did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord, turned again to do evil in the days of his son and son's son." Thus he reproves them for the superficial and fleeting character of their goodness. The participles *mashkim* and *holek* are either co-ordinated asyndetously, thus: "coming in the morning, going away;" or the lattor is subordinated to the former: "in the morning passing away." Kimchi takes the former word as a noun after the form of *makbir*, equivalent to "abundance" (Job xxxvi. 31); the right rendering is, "as the dew early going away." A somewhat different rendering is proposed by Wünsche, viz. "Your goodness goeth away like a morning cloud, and like the dew in the morning;" "goodness" being the subject, "goeth away" the predicate, "like morning cloud and dew" nearer definitions.

Vers. 5, 6.—The consequence of Israel's unsteadiness and inconstancy is here stated. Because of the fluctuating and formal nature of their religiousness, God cut them down (instead of rearing them up) through his prophets by fierce denunciations, and slew them (instead of reviving them) by the Divine word. The judgment of Jehovah went forth as the lightning-flash, or was as clear and conspicuous for justice as the light of day. Neither could outward services expiate their sins, when the proper feelings and meet fruits were absent. **I have hewed them by the prophets; I have slain them by the words of my mouth.** The language is figurative—the first clause seems borrowed from hewing hard wood and shaping it so as to assume the required form; so God dealt with Israel to bring them into shape morally symmetrical, and make them correspond to the character of a holy people. The slaying is metaphorical, and consisted in the denunciation of death and destruction to the impenitent; in this way he killed, but did not make alive. A different rendering of the clause is given by the LXX. and also by Aben Ezra; the former has, "Therefore have I mown down your prophets; I have slain them with the word of my mouth;" the latter has, "The sense is that he slew some of the prophets who misled the people so that they did not turn (repent)." But *b*e does not imply his hewing in among the prophets; it is instrumental. **And thy judgments are as the light that goeth forth.** The judgments here spoken of are the Divine judgments denounced against, or inflicted on, the people. Another reading has the pronominal suffix of the first person: "My judgment goeth forth as the light;" to which the Septuagint corresponds: κρίμα μου, equivalent to "my judgment." *I desired mercy* (or, *mercy I delight in*) . . . *and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.* The former is the right state of the life, the latter the correct condition of the heart; the former

manifests itself in practice, the latter embraces the proper feelings and affections; the former is seen in works of charity and benevolence, the latter consists in right motives and the right relation of the soul to God. The Hebrew form of speech here used denotes inferior importance, not the negation of importance. A similar sentiment occurs in 1 Sam. xv. 22, "Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams." Parallel statements are found in Isa. i. 11—17; Ps. xl. 7—9 and l. 8; also in Micah vi. 8. Our Lord cites the first clause of ver. 6 twice—once against Pharisaic ceremonialism (Matt. ix. 13), and again against rigorous sabbatarianism (Matt. xii. 7); while there is an allusion to it in Mark xii. 33, where love to God and to one's neighbour is declared to be better, or "more than, whole burnt offerings and sacrifices." Sacrifices in themselves, and when offered at the proper time and place, and as the expressions of penitent hearts and pure hands, were acceptable, and could not be otherwise, for God himself had appointed them. But soulless sacrifices offered by men steeped in sin were an abomination to the Lord; it was of such he said, "I cannot away with" them. It is to such that the prophet refers here, as is plain from the following verse.

Ver. 7.—**But they like men** (margin, *like Adam*) **have transgressed the covenant: there have they dealt treacherously against me.** This verse is variously rendered. (1) *They like men* (that is, men in general, or the rest of mankind, to whom they are in no way superior) *have transgressed the covenant.* (2) *They are like men who transgress a covenant;* according to this rendering the word אדם is otiose, or adds nothing, nor is indeed required. (3) *They like Adam have transgressed the covenant;* this rendering, supported by the Vulgate, Cyril, Luther, Rosenmüller, and Wünsche, is decidedly preferable, and yields a suitable sense. God in his great goodness had planted Adam in Paradise; but Adam violated the commandment which prohibited his eating of the tree of knowledge, and thereby transgressed the covenant of his God. Loss of fellowship with God and expulsion from Eden were the penal consequences that immediately followed. Israel, like Adam, had been settled by God in Palestine, the glory of all lands; but, ungrateful for God's great bounty and gracious gift, they broke the covenant of their God, the condition of which, as in the case of the Adamic covenant, was obedience. Thus the comparison projects the shadow of a coming event when Israel would lose the land of promise. There is still the word "there" to be accounted for. It cannot well be rendered "therein," nor taken as a particle of time equivalent to "the," with Cyril and others. It is local, and points to the place where their breach of covenant and faithlessness had occurred. Yet this local sense is not necessarily so limited as to be referred, with some, to Bethel, as the scene of their apostasy and idolatry. "*There*, to Israel," says Pusey, "was not only Bethel, or Dan, or Gilgal, or Mizpah, or Gilead, or any or all of the places which God had hallowed by his mercies and they had defiled. It was every high hill, each idol-chapel, each field-altar, which they had multiplied to their idols. To the sinners of Israel it was every spot of the Lord's land which they had defiled by their sin." The word thus acquires a very suggestive significance, reminding Israel of God's goodness on the one hand, and of their own sinfulness and ingratitude on the other.

Vers. 8, 9.—In these two verses the prophet adduces proof of that faithlessness with which he had just charged Israel. **Gilead is a city of them that work iniquity, and is polluted with blood.** The latter clause is more literally rendered, *foot-printed* or *foot-tracked from blood.* Two things require consideration here—the place and its pollution. Gilead is sometimes a mountain range, and sometimes the mountainous region east of the Jordan; it has Bashan on the north, the Arabian plateau on the east, and Moab on the south. It stretches from the south end of the Sea of Galilee to the north end of the Dead Sea—some sixty miles in length by twenty in breadth. The part of Gilead between the Hieromax and the Jabbok is now called *Jebel Ajlun;* while the section south of the Jabbok forms the province of *Belka.* In the New Testament it is spoken of under the name of Peræa, or beyond Jordan. Sometimes the whole trans-Jordanic territory belonging to Israel is called Gilead. In the passage before us it is the name of a city, though some take it to mean the whole land of Gilead. The men of Gilead and the Gileadites in general seem to have been fierce, wild mountaineers; and yet they are represented as still worse in this Scripture. They are not only barbarous and wicked, but murderous and infamous for homicidal atrocities. As evidence in some sort of the justness of this dark picture, the murder of Pekahiah by Pekah with "fifty men of the Gileadites," as recorded in 2 Kings xv. 25, may be specified. The word עָקֻבָּה is taken (1) by some as the femiuine of the adjective עָקֹב, crafty, cunning, wily; thus Rashi explains it: "Gilead

is full of people who lie in wait for murder;" and Kimchi likewise has, "Gilead is a city of evil-doers, who are crafty to murder men." But (2) it is rather the Qal Pual participle feminine from עָקַב, to seize the heel of any one, hold, tread in the footsteps, follow, go after; which is the right meaning, viz. "tracked," as given above. We retain the Authorized Version of the first clause of ver. 9, slightly modified, viz. (1) **As troops of robbers wait for a man, so is the company of priests**; חֹבֵי equivalent to חֹבָה, wait, being an anomalous form of the infinitive Piel for חֲבוֹת; thus Kimchi says, "The *yod* stands in the place of *he*, and the form is the infinitive." Both Aben Ezra and Kimchi translate the first clause as above; the former has, "The sense is, As robber-troops wait for a man who is to pass along the way, that they may plunder him, so is (or so does) the company of the priests;" the latter explains, "As troops of robbers wait for a man passing along the way to plunder him, so is the company of priests. He means to say, as the priests of the high places who combine to plunder those who pass along the way." There is (2) another translation, which, connecting *ish* taken collectively with *g'dhudhim*, and making it the subjective genitive of the infinitive כ, is, "Like the lurking of the men of the gangs is the company of the priests." This first clause is (3) quite misread and misrendered by the LXX.: Καὶ ἡ ἰσχύς σου ἀνδρὸς πειρατοῦ· ἔκρυψαν ἱερεῖς ὁδόν, "And thy strength is that of a robber: the priests have hid the way." Instead of כַּחֹבֵי they read בְּחֹחַ, and for חבר they read חבו or חבאו. In the second clause we prefer decidedly the translation which is intimated in the margin of the Authorized Version; thus: *Along the way they murder even to Shechem.* The word *derekh* is an adverbial accusative of place; and Sichem, the present Nablus, was situated on Mount Ephraim between Ebal and Gerizim. It was a Levitical city and a city of refuge; it thus lay on the west as Gilead on the east of Jordan, and both cities, thus perhaps nearly parallel in place on opposite sides of the river, were equal in crime and infamy. The prophet does not tell us who the wayfarers were, or whither they were bound; he only intimates that they fell victims to certain miscreant priests located in these quarters. As this city lay on the main route from the north to Jerusalem, pilgrims to the annual feasts passed along this way. The priests of the calf-worship, being in general persons taken from the dregs of the people, waylaid those pilgrims, whether for plunder, or through hostility to the purer worship still maintained in the holy city, or from sheer cruelty. Or it is even possible that the wayfarers referred to may have been persons going from Samaria, the northern capital, to the idolatrous worship at Bethel. In either case, on the way to their destination or on the return journey they were set upon and robbed, or, in the event of resistance, they were murdered. **For they commit lewdness**; rather, *yea, they have committed enormity.* The *zimmah*, or infamy, here mentioned is referred (1) by some to unnatural wickedness (comp. Lev. xviii. 17; xix. 29); it is rather (2) a designation of wickedness and abominations in general; thus Kimchi explains it of "evil and abominable work of every kind." He further remarks: "The prophet says, Not this alone have they done; but all their works are *zimmah*. And perhaps *zimmah* may be explained of thought, as if he said, As they have thought in their heart so they have acted." On this verse generally it may be briefly remarked (1) that "by consent" of the Authorized Version would require אחד to be joined with "shoulder;" (2) the connection of the first and second clauses in the Authorized Version is much the same with that of Ewald: "And as troops lie in wait the company of priests murder along the way to Sichem." (3) His explanation is that the priests murdered those that fled by the way before they reached the refuge, perhaps at the command of some leading persons ill disposed towards them.

Ver. 10.—**I have seen an horrible thing in the house of Israel: there is the whoredom of Ephraim, Israel is defiled.** The house of Israel comprises (1) the ten tribes of the northern kingdom, according to some; it seems more correct (2) to understand it of the whole nation, including both the northern and southern kingdoms, in which case the remainder of the verse relates to the northern kingdom of the ten tribes, and the succeeding verse to the southern kingdom of the two tribes. Further, Israel is not synonymous with the parallel Ephraim, as Keil thinks; the latter is the principal tribe which led the way in Israel's apostasy. The "horrible thing" comprehends every sort of crime and abomination; while the "whoredom," literal or spiritual, is specified as an example thereof. (For the explanation of "there," see on ver. 7.)

Ver. 11.—**Also, O Judah, he hath set an harvest for thee.** The subject of *shath* is the indeterminate third person, like the French *on*, and our "they" or "one." The third person singular masculine, the third person plural, the second person singular masculine, and the passive voice are all used in this way. So here it is: "One hath appointed (set) a harvest for thee," or "a harvest is appointed for thee." The harvest is either

recompense or retribution, and thus it is either good or evil, for as a man sows he reaps. The context shows that the reaping here is punishment. Judah had sinned like Israel; and, in the case of both, a seed-time of sin produced a harvest of suffering and sorrow. **When I returned** (better, *return*, or, *restore*) **the captivity of my people.** The restoration here mentioned is thought (1) by some to be the bringing back of the captives; but (2) Keil and others, with good reason, understand it to be turning of the captivity, and that figuratively, that is to say, the restoration of his people's well-being. The *shebhuth* is the misery of the Hebrew people; the *shubh shebhuth*, recovery and restoration of them to their true destiny. But this necessitates a previous purification by punishment; with this Judah, as well as Israel, shall be visited. It is as though God said, "Let not Judah claim superiority over Israel, nor expect to escape Divine judgment more than Israel. Each reaps what he sows. When Israel has received the deserved chastisement, Judah's turn shall then come also." The "turning of captivity" is a formula denoting the restoration of the lost fortune or well-being of a people or person; thus Job xlii. 10, "And the Lord turned the captivity of Job."

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—3.—*Exhortation and encouragement to repentance.* Whether the opening words of this chapter be those which the penitents address mutually to each other, or whether they be the exhortation of the prophet encouraging the people to return to God, the sentiment they contain is equally important, and the duty enjoined is equally imperative.

I. THE URGENCY OF THIS APPEAL IS STRIKING. From whichever of the sources indicated this appeal proceeds, its urgency is unmistakable, as implied in the cohortative form of the verb "return," as also in the hortatory "come" at the commencement. In God's dealings with mankind we find now reproofs for sin and threatenings of wrath, again invitations to repentance and promises of mercy. We are warned to flee from the wrath to come on the one hand, and urged to return unto the Lord on the other. It is our duty to exhort one another with earnestness, and even affectionate importunity, to return to him from whom we have wandered, to seek him whom we have slighted, and, like the prodigal in the parable, to arise and go to our Father with confession of our many wanderings of heart and life from the living God.

II. THE SOURCE WHENCE HEALING COMES. They had tried Assyria, but to no purpose; they had sent to King Jareb, but in vain. A greater power than that of Assyria, great though that was, was needed; a mightier monarch than Jareb, champion sovereign though he was, was required to heal the disease and bind up the wounds of Israel at this time, or indeed at any time. None but the hand that tore could heal; none other than he who smote could bind up. Nay, he wounds in order that he may heal; he sends afflictive providences that we may apply to him for the restoration of prosperity; he produces conviction of sin before that, and in order that, he may impart to us everlasting consolations. His method is to convince us in order that he may comfort us, to show us our sin that he may lead us to the Saviour, to show us our ruin and then apply the remedy. He shows us our danger and then urges us to the discharge of our duty; he shows us our fall and how we are to rise again; in short, he urges us to repentance, showing us what to do and what to say, and encouraging us withal by God's readiness to receive penitents.

III. LIFE FROM THE DEAD IN GOD'S GOOD TIME. The guilt of sin may for a time overwhelm us, terrors of conscience alarm us, afflictions of various kinds crush us to the earth; there may be fightings without and fears within. In our distressed and downcast state we may look upon ourselves, and be looked upon by others, as dying—almost dead. 1. In this deathlike condition the sorrows of death may compass us and the pains of hell get hold on us, we may find trouble and sorrow; we may be like those that go down into the pit. All this may continue for a time, and the time may appear long; yet we may not despair nor despond. Rather let us imitate the example of the psalmist, who in his distress called upon the Lord and cried unto his God. Nor did he cry in vain. God heard his voice out of his temple, and his cry came before him, even into his ears. In like circumstances of disaster on another occasion he called upon the name of the Lord and said, "O Lord, I beseech thee, deliver my soul;" and as

usual a reply and relief came. "I was brought low, and he helped me;" "He delivered my soul from death, mine eyes from tears, and my feet from falling." Thus God deals with his people still. "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning." For two days—a relatively brief period—the sleep or sorrow of death may be upon us, but he will then restore us to life, revive and quicken us; and on the third day, when we have been thus restored to animation and vigour, he will raise us up. 2. The words of ver. 2 are, no doubt, applicable to the death and resurrection of our Lord, and they have been so understood by many Christians both in earlier and later times. "The resurrection of Christ," says Pusey, "and our resurrection in him and in his resurrection, could not be more plainly foretold. . . . It was not the prophet's object here, nor was it so direct a comfort to Israel, to speak of Christ's resurrection in itself. He took a nearer way to their hearts. He told them, 'All we who turn to the Lord, putting our whole trust in him, and committing ourselves wholly to him, to be healed of our wounds and to have our griefs bound up, shall receive life from him, shall be raised up by him.' They could not understand *then* how he would do this. The 'after two days' and 'on the third day' remained a mystery to be explained by the event. But the promise itself was not the less distinct, nor the less full of hope, nor did it less fulfil all cravings for life eternal and the sight of God, because they did not understand—*how shall these things be?*" 3. The sequel of revival and resurrection is life in God's sight, or, "before his face," according to the literal rendering. The face of man is the index of the mind and heart; of the operations and various workings of the former, and of the feelings and emotions of the latter. We turn away the face in sorrow or in mirth; we look the object of our love or satisfaction full in the face. God had withdrawn himself and turned away his face until they acknowledged their offence and sought his face. But life is not only restored; it is life in God's sight, that is, before his face. This is real life—life in God's favour, with the light of his countenance lifted up upon us; with his eye on us to guide and to direct us as well as to guard and protect us. We live in his sight when, whatever we do, we do it as unto the Lord. Every duty is discharged as in his immediate presence and under his all-seeing eye. Our thoughts, our purposes, our plans, our feelings, the inmost actings of our spirit, are all ordered with the abiding impression that they are in God's sight, open and naked before the eyes of him with whom we have to do.

IV. THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD AND GROWTH THEREIN. What is the great end of man's being? What is the thing that chiefly concerns him? To such questions various answers will be returned according to the tastes, or habits, or capacity of the individual. Some will answer and say that life itself, its preservation and well-being, is the great concern of man; or that health—health of mind with health of body, a sound mind in a sound body—is chiefly to be attended to. Others, again, will reply that the advancement of one's family or the increase of one's fortune is the main thing to be sought and attained. Whatever truth may be in any of these, it is not the right answer. There is something higher and holier, nobler and better, than any of the things specified. The glory of the Creator and the good of the creature must be placed above everything else. But to glorify the Creator, and thereby and therewith to attain to the good of the creature, we must know God. 1. Wherein does the knowledge of God consist? What do we mean by the knowledge of God? It is to know God as he has made himself known, in the two great volumes which he has spread out before us. The one is the volume of his *works*, open to the eyes of all men; but that volume only takes us a short way. We get the knowledge of his Godhead, or existence as God, and of his power; we learn that there is an eternal Power that called created things into being, and that that Power is neither blind physical force nor the pantheistic spirit of the universe, but a Divine Person; for "the invisible things of him since the creation are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse." The other volume is his *Word*, in which he has fully revealed his will. From this volume we know his various attributes and infinite perfections—his holiness in hating sin, his justice in punishing it, his wisdom in devising the plan of salvation, his love in sending his Son to work it out, his mercy in shedding down his Spirit to apply it. But, over and above all this, the knowledge of God must be personal, experimental, and practical. We need to know God as our God through Jesus Christ our Lord; we need to know by happy experience his love to our souls; we need to

know the duty which we are bound to render to him in gratitude for his amazing loving-kindness, and in love to him who first loved us. 2. How is this knowledge attained? There must be diligent, prayerful study of the Divine Word under the teaching of the Divine Spirit. The physician never dreams of gaining a knowledge of his profession, and of qualifying himself for the performance of its responsible duties, without years of preparatory study in order to grasp its principles and master its details; nor can he afford to abandon that study even after he has entered on the practice of his professional labours—earnest thought and unwearying diligence are still required. The merchant who would succeed in mercantile life must devote much attention to the principles of commerce and the various departments of trade; days of toil and nights of close application to business are indispensable. The agriculturist, if he would attain to eminence or even respectability in his calling, cannot expect to do so without suitable training and diligent attention in order to acquaint himself with the proper methods of tillage. Shall men willingly devote their noblest energies and highest powers and best days to the occupations of time, and yet afford only some brief intervals of leisure, or some spare hours, and very slight attention to attain the knowledge of that God who is above them, and to prepare for that eternity that is before them? 3. By what means do we gain increase of this knowledge? What promotes our growth at once in grace and the knowledge of God? The answer is before us. We are to follow on, hunt after, strive zealously to know the Lord. There must be continued diligence, constant perseverance; there must be devout and daily reading of God's Word—some time every day less or more should be given to the study of Holy Scripture; there must be fervent prayer for the teaching of the Holy Spirit: for "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; they are foolishness unto him, because they are spiritually discerned." Have we already acquired some knowledge of God, not merely out of the volume of creation, or by the light of our own intellect, or from the teachings of others, but from this Word of God, which is brimful of the knowledge of God; and do we know God to be a just God and yet a Saviour—our God and Father through Jesus Christ our Lord? Then we must beware of becoming cold, or languid, or lifeless. We must avoid everything and anything that would turn us aside, or tempt us to prefer our secular business to salvation, or to set the trifles of time in the place of the realities of eternity. But should coldness creep over us, or should a spirit of slumber overtake us as the virgins in the parable, or should our little progress in the Divine life and Divine things discourage us, let us repair at once to the mercy-seat for Divine help and grace; and the Spirit of truth will guide us into all truth. Let us ever bear in mind that we must persevere to the end in order to be saved, that we must be faithful unto death if we would obtain the crown of life, and that if, after having put our hand to the plough, we turn back, the Lord will have no pleasure in us. Follow on, then, as the runner in the race to win the prize, as the warrior in the conflict to gain the victory, as the mariner steers his homeward-veering bark to reach his native shore.

V. THE BLESSEDNESS PROMISED TO THOSE WHO PERSEVERE IN THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD. The promised blessing is here presented under two beautiful figures—the returning light of morning, and the refreshing rain. 1. There is freshness in the morning air, there is beauty in the morning light, there is loveliness in natural scenery when the light of morning shines on it. One of the oldest Greek poets often speaks of morning, and usually with some epithet of praise or admiration, such as "saffron-robed Aurora," or "Aurora, daughter of the dawn." "The morning." We associate morning with the idea of *refreshment and relief*. If you have been laid on a bed of sickness, or tossing on a bed of pain, or watching by the bedside of one dear to you as your own life, how welcome is the light of morning! After tossings to and fro till the dawning of the day, the morning brings some measure of relief or relaxation. Many a one in the circumstances supposed is crying out, "Would God it were morning!" or sighing out, "Oh for the light of morning, to shorten the weariness of the night, or bring some alleviation!" There, again, is the mariner toiling through the dreary hours of a stormy winter night, while neither moon nor stars appear; how he wishes and longs for the light of morning! Or a traveller has been overtaken by the darkness of the night, and has lost his way in some pathless wilderness, or among the glades of a mountain forest; how he waits and watches for the first gleam of morning light to extricate him from his perplexity and peril! In all these cases the morning is looked forward to for relief; nor is it ever

looked for in vain, for morning is *sure* to come. It may seem slow in coming, and long before it comes; or the weary watcher may be many a time on the point of giving up in despair. But the return of morning, after a night however long, or dark, or painful, or perilous, is certain to take place; its return is prepared; it is a fixed ordinance of nature. So, to every persevering seeker after the knowledge of God, the Lord's going forth is fixed and cannot fail; it is sure as the morning sunrise. To every afflicted, anguished spirit, to every weary waiting soul, the morning dawn shall come surely as the day succeeds the night and the light alternates with darkness, for God has established this order of things. The Dayspring from on high, with the light of saving knowledge and spiritual healthfulness, shall visit all who patiently wait and perseveringly pursue the knowledge of God. There is a *joyousness of spirit*, a buoyancy of feeling, peculiar to the morning, and not experienced to the same extent, or perhaps at all, during the remainder of the day. Delightful as is the figure, the fact represented by it is even more so. What joyfulness comes with morning to the bewildered wayfarer, or tempest-tossed sailor, or sorely afflicted sufferer! Then hope takes the place of despair, and joy succeeds to sorrow. To the soul that waits upon the Lord, his coming is as sure as the return of the morning light; and brings with it peace and joy in believing, favour and forgiveness. To him who has waited long, and watched with patience till hope deferred had begun to make the heart sick, the Lord's going forth is certain as the morning dawn; and simultaneously therewith the light of his countenance is lifted on the soul, and cheerfulness is imparted to the spirit. It is a blessed assurance that none ever waited upon the Lord in vain; no one ever trusted him and was disappointed. Wait, then, for his going forth. It may tarry, but wait for it; for at last it will come and will not tarry; for the time is fixed, and the Sun of righteousness shall arise on every patient soul with healing under his wings. Fortified by this assurance, the psalmist says, in language we would do well to adopt and act on, "I wait for the Lord, my soul doth wait, and in his Word do I hope. My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning: I say, more than they that watch for the morning." 2. That the Authorized Version is inaccurate, is obvious from its making the latter rain precede the former. The reverse is the natural order and the order here observed, *geshem* standing for the one or rather for "plentiful rain" in general, *malgosh* for the other or "latter rain," and *moreh* not a noun at all. This beautiful figure is specially suitable to the Orient, and finds its most striking application in Eastern lands; it is also more or less appropriate in all lands. Not only so, it forms a fitting counterpart to the figure which precedes, and with which it is so intimately connected—the one exhibiting the fact, the other the fruit, of salvation; the one the beginning of salvation, the other its benefits; the one its commencement, the other its consummation. In the land of Israel, as well as other countries of the East, soon after seed-time, when the seed has been sown in the furrows, comes the early rain to make the seed germinate and the tender blade spring up; but there is also the latter rain in the weeks preceding harvest, to fill the ear and mature the growing grain. With a rich Eastern soil below and a warm Eastern sun above, the beneficial effects of the former and latter rain are obvious. In connection with the combined action of sun and soil and shower, there are first the blade, then the ear, and eventually the ripe corn in the ear. Thus in spiritual husbandry, the seed of Divine and saving knowledge has been no sooner cast into the furrows than the rain-shower of Divine grace waters it, so that it germinates and grows—blade and ear and ripened grain as in the natural world; nor are showers of grace withheld before and up till the reaping-time, so that even in old age there is abundant fruitfulness. "They shall still bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be fat and flourishing [margin, 'green'];" and when the time of the end comes and the harvest day arrives, they resemble a shock of corn in its season, rich with golden grain, ripe and ready to be gathered into the heavenly garner. Thus shall it fare with the soul that follows on to know and love the Lord. Sure as the dawn brings on the day; sure as the sun goeth forth out of his chamber, and rejoiceth as a strong man to run his race; sure as the alternation of day and night; sure as the succession of the seasons; sure as the rain comes down from heaven, and returns not thither again till it has moistened and fructified the earth;—God shall bless that soul with light and life and love. Therefore let us know, let us follow on to know the Lord; for "it is good that a man quietly wait and patiently wait for the salvation of God."

Vers. 4—9.—*Israel's inconstancy.* The Lord had just comforted the truly godly portion of the people; he now turns aside and expostulates with the ungodly. Judah as well as Ephraim—the two tribes and the ten—fell far short, unspeakably short, of the picture of penitence, with the annexed promises, which he had just placed before them. Their state had become so desperate that destruction had become their desert, not because of his severity, but their own sin, themselves being judges.

I. THE COMPLAINT OF THEIR INCONSTANCY. 1. God here speaks as if all remedies had proved futile, and as if he were at a loss to know how to deal towards them or what to do with them. Various means had been tried, diverse methods resorted to: he had sent them precious promises of mercy and alarming threatenings of wrath; means and expedients had been exhausted; but they had gone from bad to worse. And now, as though resourceless, the Almighty puts the question as if to their own conscience, "O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee? O Judah, what shall I do unto thee?". 2. Or perhaps we may rather understand such questions as a lamentation over their case, so deplorable had it become. Thus our Lord wept over Jerusalem and the desperate state of its doomed inhabitants. Nor was it a few tears he dropped (ἐδάκρυσε), as at the grave of Lazarus; his eyes brimmed over with tears (ἔκλαυσε), while his lips uttered the touchingly pathetic words, "If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes." 3. The picture of their inconstancy is sadly appropriate. The morning cloud is an attractive object as it floats sublimely overhead on a summer's morning; but it is as evanescent as conspicuous, suddenly fading away into the "azure deep of air." Still more lovely is the dew which lies copiously on the herbage in the early morning, glistening on every blade of grass and flower petal, and beautifying with its pearly drops the lawns and pasture-grounds. Soon, however, the footstep of man or beast brushes it aside, and it disappears; or it is exhaled, and vanishes by the heat of the advancing day. Thus it was with the goodness of the Hebrew people, both north and south, at the time referred to. Several cases of reformation had taken place in Judah; revivals of religion had occurred, as in the days of Hezekiah, and subsequently in the time of Josiah; and even in Israel we read of the humiliation of Ahab and the zeal of Jehu; but these were to a large extent transient and temporary. So, too, it often happens in times of awakening, sorrow for sin may becloud the brow of the penitent and tears of contrition bedew his eyes; but ere long the excitement dies away, and that sorrow and those tears have passed away, and all serious impressions and gracious influences have vanished with them.

II. CONSEQUENCES OF THE INCONSTANCY COMPLAINED OF. These consequences are enumerated with some detail in vers. 5—7, though the fifth verse is differently understood by some, as though it contained two different kinds of messages sent by God to Israel—messages of coming wrath to arouse and awaken them, thus hewing them by the prophets and slaying them by the words of his mouth; and messages of mercy, bright as the light and beautiful as the sunbeams, to encourage them, thus causing his judgments to go forth as the light. But this latter sense does not suit the context. 1. First of the consequences is *denunciation* of wrath, when God denounced their destruction with severity by his messengers the prophets, and the words of his mouth which constituted the message which they delivered; while the justice of the judgments thus visited on them was positively demonstrated and plainly proved, so that it was seen to be and must have appeared even to the guilty sufferers clear as the light. 2. The second consequence is *degeneracy* in religion. It had degenerated into mere formalism. In place of mercy came sacrifices, and for the knowledge of God burnt offerings were substituted. Outward observances took the place of inward devotion. Instead of piety towards God and charity to man, a tedious round of services was performed. Ritualism was substituted for religion; ceremonialism for clean hands and a pure heart. Obedience to the commandments of God, whether prescriptive or prohibitory, was neglected; morality was dissociated from religion; mere rites supplanted moral or religious duties. 3. But a third consequence was *declension* of spiritual life in general; this was additional evidence of the religious degeneracy just referred to. Covenant-breaking and treacherous dealing are specified. Like the most reckless of men, they were truce-breakers, bound by no compact, and regardless of the truth of promises. Besides being thus practically dishonest, they were altogether

unreliable and faithless. Their sin in this respect, though declared to be against God, involved *à fortiori* similar conduct in relation to their fellow-men.

III. CONFIRMATIONS OF ISRAEL'S GUILT. Two places are specified as instances, and their inhabitants singled out as specimens of the wickedness of the times—Gilead on the east and Shechem on the west of Jordan. If Gilead be a city—Ramoth-gilead, perhaps—a city of refuge and a Levitical city, the sin of its inhabitants was something shocking. When men, who by profession should be an example and pattern to others, descend to practices directly opposed to that profession, and degrade themselves by criminal actions of the worst and basest kind, religion is evil spoken of, a stumbling-block is cast in the way of the weak, the Master himself is stabbed in the house of his professed friends. The people of this highly favoured place had set themselves to work iniquity, and that of no ordinary kind; the blood of murdered innocence clave to their hands. Shechem was even worse in this respect. In this other city of refuge the privilege of asylum was profaned. Either guilty persons were admitted and protected for a bribe, when they should have been delivered up to death; or, in addition to thus screening the guilty, those who had committed homicide unwittingly, but who were too poor to offer bribes, were ruthlessly given up to the blood-avenger; or, worst of all and vilest of all, the priests who had got settled in the place formed themselves into robber-gangs or common banditti to rob, and in case of resistance murder, the travellers who were so luckless as to journey that way, or from a bloodthirsty spirit of revenge they waylaid and assassinated the objects of their displeasure. In one way or other blood was defiling the land and crying to Heaven for vengeance. Long before a bloody deed had been done in this very place, when Simeon and Levi in cruel wrathfulness put the defenceless Shechemites to the sword; history in a still worse form now repeated itself.

IV. COMMUNITY IN CRIME. The proverbial expression of "Like priest, like people," was fully verified in the case before us. When priests perpetrated such atrocities, what could be expected from the populace? When religious teachers distinguished themselves as ringleaders in wickedness, what could be hoped for among the less privileged of the population? There was, in fact, a community in crime. In the house of Israel, or main body of the people in the northern kingdom, there was wickedness so horrible as to make one shudder or the hair stand on end. However men might attempt concealment, God's eye detected and discovered their horrid iniquity, while his justice denounced vengeance against it. Ephraim is again foremost and first in the present iniquity, as previously in the idolatrous calf-worship and original revolt. Their whoredom, whether literal or figurative, exercised a contaminating effect on the rest of the ten tribes. How baneful the effects of evil influence! How great the responsibility connected with the exercise of influence! Judah also, from whom better was to be expected, with the ancient sanctuary among them and a purer ritual, had been seduced to sin; the example and influence of their brethren in the north had, no doubt, helped their depravation, evil communications corrupting good manners. Be this as it may, they had sown the wind and must in consequence reap the whirlwind. As they had sown and what they had sown, they must by-and-by reap. The general judgment is likened to harvest; so also are special judgments. (For the time specified, see Exposition.) The Judahites who had been made captives by Israel had been set at liberty through the interposition of the prophet Oded (2 Chron. xxviii. 8—15). God had spared them then, but set them a harvest at another time; as it has been remarked, "Preservations from present judgments, if a good use be not made of them, are but reservations for greater judgments."

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—3.—*Repentance and saving knowledge.* We view these verses as closely connected with the last verse of the preceding chapter. There the Lord has said that Ephraim and Judah, when they shall have been well punished for their apostasy, will at length return to him. Here, accordingly, he anticipates what they shall say to one another when they do so. "In their affliction they will seek me early, saying, Come, and let us return unto the Lord." This prediction, doubtless, has already once and

again been partially fulfilled; but its complete accomplishment belongs to "the last things."

I. AN ENCOURAGEMENT TO GODLY REPENTANCE. (Vers. 1, 2.) The opening clause of ver. 1 consists of an earnest self-exhortation, and this is succeeded in the remainder of the two verses by arguments in support of it. The nerve-thought of these is, that restoration to the Divine favour will succeed repentance. The expatriated Hebrews, in their miserable exile and God-forsakenness, shall have a profound conviction of their guilt wrought within their hearts; and they shall return to their long-slighted Lord in the confident hope of a favourable reception. Their restoration, they are persuaded, will be: 1. *Certain.* The words of vers. 1, 2 evince strong faith. There is in them the pulse-beat of a firm confidence. He who tore will also heal. He who inflicted the agony will bestow the joy. True penitence is always accompanied with some measure of faith. It cherishes the hope of mercy. It lays hold of the truth contained in that magnificent proverb, "God never strikes with both hands." It accepts the testimony of the Eternal, that he "dwells with him that is of a contrite and humble spirit." 2. *Speedy.* The definite limits of time here mentioned (ver. 2) are intended to assure us that the restoration of Israel shall come not only certainly, but quickly. Jehovah is slow to chide, but he is swift to bless. It may seem to us a long time since Israel's rejection; it is now nearly two thousand years since the Romans destroyed Jerusalem. But "one day is with the Lord," etc. (2 Pet. iii. 8). Many commentators have judged that Christ's resurrection "in the third day" is indicated here. And no doubt an analogy is traceable between the events of Israel's history and events in the life of the Messiah (cf. ch. xi. 1 and Matt. ii. 15). But it is one thing to apply the prophet's words to the great fact of Christ's resurrection, and another thing to conclude that that event is even so much as indirectly foretold by this language. 3. *Complete.* "We shall live before his face" (ver. 2). The face is an index of character. It reveals the mind and heart. A man naturally turns his face towards the person whom he loves, and turns it away from one whom he dislikes. God had "withdrawn himself from" Israel (ch. v. 6, 15); but now again, in the day of their revival, he shall "cause his face to shine upon them." The contrite ones live in the open smile of the Divine favour, and enjoy the perpetual sunshine of the Divine presence.

II. AN ENCOURAGEMENT TO SAVING KNOWLEDGE. (Ver. 3.) The first part of this verse should be translated, "Then let us know, follow on to know, Jehovah." This is a further self-exhortation, parallel to that in ver. 1. Jehovah had become unknown in Israel (ch. iv. 1). But the resolve to "return" to him involves the resolution to "know" him, and to grow in that knowledge continually. Such knowledge has a very practical aim. It is a life, not a mere science; an experience, not a speculation. It leads a man to own God and to serve him. It will fill the mind with brightness, and the life with fruitfulness. We sometimes call theology "the queen of the sciences;" but this heart-knowledge of God is more—it is "life eternal" (John xvii. 3). Two very attractive emblems are presented in the latter part of the verse for our encouragement in the pursuit of saving knowledge. With the ancient Jewish rabbins, we are to see in these an anticipation of the Redeemer of men. Jehovah comes in the Person of his Son, Jesus Christ, as "the morning;" and he comes in the Spirit of his Son, as "the rain." 1. "*The morning.*" The Lord Jesus is the Aurora, or Dayspring from on high;—the Sun of righteousness, who has arisen with healing in his wings. He will be welcomed yet as such by the entire Hebrew nation. His coming has flooded the world with the light of life. "His going forth," like the morning, brings *brightness* and *joy* to the believer. "O happy day, that fixed my choice," etc. It brings also *freshness*; for the knowledge of Jesus is to the Christian always new, and full of infinite variety. The morning is *irresistible* in its coming; and the "going forth" of Christ "is prepared as the morning," *i.e.* decreed in the purposes of Jehovah's love. The morning comes *increasingly*; and thus also the believer who follows on to know the Lord shall "go from strength to strength," from the dawning light "unto the perfect day" (Prov. iv. 18). 2. "*The rain.*" In Palestine, the two rainy seasons here referred to were most necessary and precious. The "former rain," which fell in October, preceded the seed-time, and prepared the earth for cultivation. The "latter rain," which fell in April, filled the ears before harvest, and perfected the fruit. Now, God shall come to Israel in the last days—as he comes to his people in every age—by his Holy Spirit, "as the

min." The rain is *refreshing*; and so the knowledge which the Spirit imparts comforts the hearts of young converts, and matures the character of experienced Christians. The rainfall is *variable*; and the coming of the Spirit varies in like manner, according to God's will and our faith. The rain is *trouble-giving*—it comes amid shadow and gloom, sometimes with thunder and tempest; and so the Spirit often visits the soul by means of deep and painful heart-searchings on account of sin. The rain is *fertilizing*—its absence would cause dearth and barrenness; so the knowledge of God will make those hearts fruitful which beforetime yielded only thorns and briers (Heb. vi. 7, 8).

CONCLUSION. Although we in this age do not live in the last days of Israel's restoration, the sweet voice of this mutual appeal is for us. We need to stir up our own hearts to exercise the grace of repentance, and to pursue the study of saving knowledge. Some of us perhaps have gone astray into very miry paths, and have been sorely chastised for our sin. Oh for grace to respond to this twofold appeal, that we may know the Lord our Saviour as the bright Morning and the genial Rain, and that we may "live in his sight"!—C. J.

Vers. 4, 5.—*Fugitive piety.* A thoughtful reader cannot fail to observe the contrast here suggested between the constancy of Jehovah's grace (ver. 3) and the inconstancy of Israel's piety (ver. 4). If Israel would only "return," and "follow on to know the Lord" now, all would yet be well. But, alas! the twelve tribes are as fickle as he is faithful.

I. GOD'S COMPLAINT REGARDING THE JEWISH PEOPLE. (Ver. 4.) In Eastern lands the sky is often heavily hung with clouds at early dawn; but, so soon as the sun rises, he begins to suck them up—their many-coloured glory quickly fades, and in an hour's time they are gone. In the morning, also, the dewdrops adorn the herbage like myriads of sparkling diamonds; but the first acts of radiation after sunrise dissipate all the jewellery, and soon leaf and blade languish in the heat. Those two figures the Lord uses in this touching expostulation. Israel's piety, when the people did show any, was similarly fascinating, promising, and evanescent. It could no more be reckoned upon than "a morning cloud." It was short-lived as "the early dew." There are many examples in Scripture of such fugitive piety. (1) *In the national history of Israel.* At Sinai the people promised obedience, and then made the golden calf. The age of the Judges was a time of alternate sinning and repenting, and repenting and sinning. Each of the reformations under Jehu, Elijah, and Hezekiah turned out to be "as a morning cloud." (2) *In the lives of individuals.* It is enough to mention such cases as King Saul, the young ruler who came to Jesus, Felix, Demas, the Galatian professors (Gal. v. 7). We meet with morning-cloud religion constantly still. It is frequently found: 1. *In the time of childhood.* "The dew of youth" is always beautiful; and sometimes the grace of the Holy Spirit is in it, and it fertilizes. The morning cloud of childhood's faith is often a "vision splendid," for

> "Trailing clouds of glory do we come
> From God, who is our Home:
> Heaven lies about us in our infancy!"
> (Wordsworth.)

But the piety of childhood does not always bear the test. It sometimes turns out to be merely emotional, and nothing more. In the hour of temptation "it goeth away." 2. *In the season of affliction.* Many a man, in the day upon which some storm of sickness or bereavement has strewn his life with wreckage, resolves that when the clouds are removed he will cultivate the friendship of God, and trust in his providence, and keep his Law. But, after prosperity has returned, he does not "pay that which he has vowed." 3. *As the result of common grace.* Common grace is that influence of the Holy Spirit which is more or less granted to all men. In connection with his operations men who are unregenerate have their seasons of deep conviction, and of anxious thought regarding spiritual things. Sometimes they "receive the Word with joy" (Matt. xiii. 20), and are "made partakers of the Holy Ghost" (Heb. vi. 4), and begin to lead an externally religious life. But, if experiences of this kind are not accompanied by a real change of heart, they pass away like "a morning cloud." Such fugitive piety is fatally defective. It is: (1) *Unreal.* For, a characteristic mark of

true religion is steadfastness. "The path of the just" is not "as a morning cloud," but "as the morning" itself, "that shineth more and more unto the perfect day" (Prov. iv. 18). (2) *Unhappy.* Those who do not "follow on to know the Lord," but allow themselves to be hindered by the discouragements and sufferings which belong to the Christian life, come to identify religion only with these. "Pliable" associates piety with the "Slough of Despond," "Formalist and Hypocrisy" with "the Hill Difficulty," "Timorous and Mistrust" with "the lions." It is only pilgrims like "Christian," who endure to the end, that shall taste the joys of "the House Beautiful," and "the Delectable Mountains," and "the land of Beulah." (3) *Unhopeful.* Those who "receive the Word into stony places," or "among the thorns," become a very hopeless class. The habit of taking sudden fits of goodness, each of which is followed by a relapse into sin, is very hardening to the heart.

II. GOD'S METHOD WITH THE PEOPLE. (Ver. 5.) The Lord speaks as if he has been at his wit's end to know what measures to adopt in order to win the nation back to godliness. His words are, "What shall I do unto thee?" "What could have been done more to my vineyard that I have not done in it?" (Isa. v. 4). His wisdom can devise no new expedient. His policy hitherto has been one of mingled goodness and severity, and all that he can do is to continue that policy still. So: 1. *He sends his prophets to "hew."* The figure here is taken from the art of the statuary. Human souls are like blocks of marble, and God is the great Sculptor. He sent the Hebrew prophets to cut and carve Israel into the Divine image; for, while the nation's piety was thin as vapour, its heart was hard as adamant. This metaphor has a lesson in it regarding the Christian ministry. A large part of the preacher's work is to prick slumbering consciences, and to hammer stony hearts. It is true, of course, that the New Testament message is emphatically "the gospel;" yet the background of the "good news" is necessarily the bad news of guilt and sin and wrath. Christian sermons addressed to the natural man cannot avoid being denunciatory. Our pulpit teaching, both in matter and manner, should reflect as clearly as possible the teaching of the New Testament. In delivering the message of condemnation especially, the speaker should take care to be not only faithful but tender. 2. *He uses his Law to "slay."* "The words of God's mouth" are fitted to produce the recognition of sin in its true nature and consequences. The ministry of the Law convicts and condemns. God's word "slays" when it convinces of guilt and pollution, and produces thereby self-condemnation and remorse. A man must be thus slain in relation to sin before his heart can be prepared for the reception of the gospel. "Is not my Word like as a fire? saith the Lord" (Jer. xxiii. 29). "The Word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword," etc. (Heb. iv. 12). 3. *He comes in a morning of judgment.* "Thy judgments" we take to mean the judgments inflicted on thee, *i.e.* on the Jewish people. God will prepare for them such a morning as they do not desire to see at all. He will come "as the light" to manifest their sins, and to punish them. The judgments shall be palpable to every eye, and shall be manifestly just. Jehovah shall be "clear when he judges."

CONCLUSION. These two verses remind us (1) that God's compassions fail not, but (2) that persistent sinfulness on man's part will shut him out from the enjoyment of the Divine mercy.—C. J.

Vers. 6—11.—*Religion and irreligion.* In the verse immediately preceding, God has spoken of sending his prophets to "hew," and his words to "slay," and of visiting the nation with a sunrise of judgment. And now, in the remainder of the chapter, he proceeds to justify these threatenings by setting forth the reason why he felt compelled to deal with the Hebrews in this fashion.

I. THE NATURE OF TRUE RELIGION. (Vers. 6, 7.) It is described here in a twofold manner. 1. *Faithfulness to the covenant of grace.* (Ver. 7.) The covenant of grace has been made by God with his elect people, the Lord Jesus Christ being Mediator in their behalf. It rests upon the covenant of redemption which was formed from eternity between the Father and the Son. The promise of the covenant of grace is spiritual and eternal life; and faith in Christ is the condition of it. This covenant has been the same under all dispensations; but, as made with the Hebrews in the time of Moses, it is presented in three aspects: (1) national and political; (2) legal, as seen in the

moral and ceremonial laws; (3) evangelical, for all the Mosaic institutions pointed to Christ. Under every economy, also, religion has consisted in acceptance of this covenant and fidelity to its obligations. In every age faith in God has been the bond of living fellowship with him. 2. *The offering of the worship of a holy life.* (Ver. 6.) Religion must have a form in order to its manifestation. Piety has an outward side as well as an inward. Where there is wine, there must also be bottles in which to hold it (Matt. ix. 17). Among the Jews this outward expression of piety was to take the form of "sacrifice" and "burnt offerings." But religion itself is a spirit. It consists in "mercy" towards man, and in the experimental "knowledge of God." Jehovah says here that holiness in the life is the test of sincerity in the observance of ritual. He does not reject sacrifices in themselves; indeed, he had himself instituted them. But he will not accept heartless oblations. He thinks of sacrifice without mercy as being like a body from which the spirit has fled. All the prophets of the Old Testament asserted the superiority of ethical over ceremonial laws. And the Lord Jesus Christ on two different occasions quoted the words before us, "Mercy, and not sacrifice" (Matt. ix. 13; xii. 7), in support of the position that the righteousness of forms is not the righteousness of faith, and that it is the discharge of moral duties rather than the observance of positive institutions that makes the true life of religion. Such also is the doctrine of the apostles; *e.g.* James says in his Epistle that the ritual of Christianity consists in a life of personal purity and active benevolence (Jas. i. 27).

II. THE IRRELIGION OF ISRAEL. (Vers. 7—11.) The entire Hebrew nation, and both of the kingdoms into which it was divided, had failed to maintain any appreciable measure of religious life. (1) *They had been faithless to the covenant.* (Ver. 7.) In this respect they were "like Adam" (margin), *i.e.* they had "sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression." They had violated the covenant alike under all its aspects —national, legal, and evangelical. (2) *Their worship was an insincere formalism.* (Ver. 6.) "There" (ver. 7), even at Bethel, whither they went "with their flocks and with their herds to seek Jehovah" (ch. v. 6), they in so doing "dealt treacherously against him." For they brought "sacrifice," but showed not "mercy;" they presented "burnt offerings," but had lost "the knowledge of God." Hosea, in the remainder of the chapter, adduces one or two illustrations of the deep and universal apostasy. 1. *Sacred places had become polluted.* (Ver. 8.) "Gilead" perhaps means Ramoth-gilead, a famous city in Gad, and the centre of the mountainous region called Gilead. Moses appointed it for one of the cities of refuge. The place seems to have had now a bad eminence in crime. Many homicides were there, not of the class alone for which the cities of refuge were intended, but also many culpable homicides and murderers. Gilead was "tracked with blood." 2. *A sacred office had become infamous.* (Ver. 9.) The priests of the northern kingdom belonged to "the lowest of the people," and they were now giving themselves over to perpetrate the grossest wickedness. They "did evil with both hands earnestly." One "enormity" which the sacerdotal guild committed was actually that of lying in wait for the pilgrims from the north who were "in the way to Shechem" (margin), perhaps *en route* for Bethel—to demand, like robbers, their money or their life! 3. *The sacred nation itself had become abominable.* (Vers. 10, 11.) (1) Israel's apostasy was "a horrible thing;" a godly mind could only contemplate it with a shudder. The sin of the ten tribes was "whoredom," both spiritual and literal. But is not that of our own Christian land the same? There is doubtless a large portion of the British people who love and follow purity, and thus far as a nation we are morally better than Ephraim; but those who study our national life upon its seamy side "sigh and cry for all the abominations that are done in the midst thereof." (2) Judah also has sown the bad seed of sin, and therefore cannot escape reaping "a harvest" of wrath. Already, in fact, the southern kingdom is almost ripe for destruction. It is to be carried into "captivity." Only as the result of such a process of judgment shall Jehovah purge out the wickedness of his people, and restore them again to his favour. In the closing words of the chapter the dark clouds break a little, and there appears just for a moment a glimpse of blue sky. The Jewish nation, says Jehovah, is still "my people," and one day "I will return their captivity." This anticipation shall be fully realized only when at last Israel shall be converted as a nation to the faith of Jesus Christ.

LESSONS. 1. The right relation of the form and the spirit in religion (ver. 6). 2. The

appalling wickedness and shamefulness of sin (vers. 7, 10, 11). (3) When man prostitutes the best institutions from their proper uses, they often become the worst things (vers. 8, 9).—C. J.

Ver. 1.—*On returning to the Lord.* The graciousness of God is seen in nothing more conspicuously than in his willingness to receive those who come to him under the influence of sorrow. In all ages he has condescended to use afflictions to bring men and nations to an acknowledgment of their need of him. This was always a feature of his dealings with Israel. The growing tyranny of the taskmasters in Egypt aroused the cry of the Israelites for Divine interposition, without which they never could have become a separated and theocratic nation. In the wilderness, the scarcity of water, the defeat at Ai, etc., brought those who had forgotten God to a confession of sin. So was it in the subsequent history of that people, who constituted an abiding exemplification of God's method of dealing with other nations. From the lives of individuals also, illustrations of the same principle may be drawn. Hagar found that God was more to her when she and her child were dying in the wilderness than he had ever been in Abraham's tent. Jacob was smitten with sorrow, homesick, fearful, destitute, when he saw the ladder the top of which reached to heaven. In the New Testament we find crowds around the Saviour, and of whom did they consist? Chiefly of those whose sadness made them yearn for him. Blind men groped their way, lepers ventured near, the palsied besought their friends to lay them at his feet, the bereaved sent to tell him of their grief, and the broken-hearted sinner washed his feet with her tears. During his ministry it was as if our text had sounded over the world, "Come, and let us return unto the Lord: for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up." Three considerations should lead to obedience to this exhortation.

I. THE WICKEDNESS OF SOUL-WANDERING. The exhortation to "return" implies previous estrangement. 1. *To whom were these words spoken?* Not to the heathen, but to those who considered themselves the people of God. They knew and could recite the requirements of the Law; they took part in religious observances; they boasted of a pious ancestry. Now, therefore, the words may fairly be applied to those who belong to a Christian nation, who are familiar with Divine truth, but who know that they have not personally returned unto the Lord. 2. *How does this wandering reveal itself?* There is an estrangement from God which is easily recognized. One wanders from *holiness* into corrupt imaginations, evil associations, gross habits, till all manly virtue or womanly grace is gone, and parents' tears or kindly words avail nothing. Another wanders from *truth and righteousness*, turning his back on these, because they seem opposed to present interests, and so he gets entangled in crooked policy and tortuous expedients. Another wanders from *love*, till there is discord in the home, suspicion and enmity in the heart. All would admit that as God is holy and true and loving, those who turn from these virtues show that they are turning from him, and in the woes that follow such sins a voice is heard, saying, "Come, and let us return," etc. 3. *Is there no soul-wandering which does not outwardly reveal itself?* We are more concerned about some who are guilty of sin, but not of crime; who are irreligious, but not immoral. Their condition is more perilous, because less likely to cause them alarm; yet what more lamentable in God's sight than a prayerless, godless man? Illustrate it by the relation between father and child in a human home. Imagine your son being to you what the godless man is to God. You watched over his infancy, sacrificed yourself for his comfort, etc. You expect to reap the fruit of all this in his love, to be glad in his success, to live over again in him. But he becomes a man, and has no thought or care for you. Cheerful in the society of others, he never gives his father a look or a smile. Is there no wrong in that, even though he may fulfil his duties to his neighbours and his country? But by-and-by he breaks down in his schemes; his brilliant course is run, his friends forsake him; then, poor and broken, he comes back to you, and in your pardon and kindness he feels and knows what you are, and how true all along your love has been. On his past negligence all the world would cry "Shame!" Yet what has he done that the moral, respected, yet godless man is not doing every day of his life? To such the message is sent, "Come, and let us return unto the Lord."

II. THE PURPOSE OF SOUL-CHASTENING. God is spoken of here as the Wounder of

men. This would be a strange declaration if all life was limited to this world by the abyss of the grave. Then it would seem as if we were created for suffering, and that the assurance, "God is love," was a mockery. But we are destined to dwell near God eternally, to do in his presence a service for which we are here being prepared; and anything which reminds us of that and fits us for it is to be received thankfully. A schoolboy does not see the good of his lessons. Some will be of no practical value, but they serve the purpose of mental discipline; and he is wise who learns them all, for he is not fit to discriminate for himself. "We know not what we shall be," but we do know that "all things work together for good." If we see an artist beginning his work on the canvas, we can make nothing of the first streaks of colour; but a glance at the fair scene before him helps us to know what he is aiming at. So are we to look off from our troubles to our Lord, who "learned obedience by the things that he suffered," and there find God's ideal for us. The cross of Calvary is the interpretation of the mystery of suffering. If we were told that griefs and joys were distributed promiscuously, that we must merely brace ourselves to bear "the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune," we should gain no moral good from obedience. If we believed that sorrow was to avenge sin, that it was the beginning of punishment from a vindictive God, we should have no hope. But we are assured that the griefs and losses of life come to us from him who "so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son" to redeem it from sin; and so we believe that their design is in harmony with that great purpose. This which is true of the Christian life in its course is true of Christian life in its commencement. The misery of shame, the agony of penitence, constitute the broken heart and contrite spirit which is the pledge of God's love, the creation of God's Spirit. "*He* hath torn, and he will heal us; *he* hath smitten, and he will bind us up."

III. THE PROMISE OF SOUL-HEALING. (Text.) When Telephus was defending his country against the Greeks, he was wounded by the spear of Achilles. The Delphic oracle declared that the hurt could only be cured by a touch of the weapon which caused it. The oracle was obeyed. Telephus humbled himself to his foe, and by the spear's touch he was healed. To those stricken-hearted by the thought of sin, this text comes with a message more worthy of trust than any from Delphi; declaring that the wound was made, not in wrath, but in love; urging return, not to a foe, but to a Friend—even to "Jehovah Rophi," the Lord that healeth. Let us turn to no one else, lest we perish. If a surgeon were obliged to operate, his patient might flinch, and bid him hold his hand; but true wisdom teaches him to trust, for he says to himself, "He has wounded, and he alone can heal." The troubled Christian comes to God in prayer, and has the deep, sweet assurance that his Father is doing all things well, and straightway the bitterness goes out of his grief. The sorrowing sinner goes to Jesus' feet, and there is made glad by the declaration, "Thy sins are forgiven thee." Adduce other examples.

CONCLUSION. In conclusion, let us lay stress on the exhortation, "Return unto the Lord." This must be a personal and deliberate resolve on the part of each. Trouble has no magical effect. It only gives opportunity and inclination for thought and prayer. It does not of necessity turn us to God. The sun melts the wax, but it hardens the clay. The rain blesses some things, but destroys others. A child may be chastised, and yet be made stubborn, not penitent, by the discipline. So with God-sent griefs, inward or outward. You may forget them in gaiety, in work, in companionship, and never turn to God at all. You may be influenced for a time, but, like Ephraim, your goodness may vanish like the morning dew or the passing cloud. Think, therefore, of your present and pressing responsibility, lest your sorrow lead to the despair of Judas, and not to the penitence of Peter. Your outward sorrows, your inward griefs, are from him who loves you. "Come," then, "and let us return unto the Lord: for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up."—A. R.

Vers. 2, 3 (first clause).—*The promised Dayspring.* It is a happy thing that God's love always comes forth to meet man's longings. In the preceding verse Hosea had been urging the people to return to the Lord, but the exhortation would have been useless had he not been able to add the promise in the text. If the soul of man had to struggle unaided to the throne of God and to win a revelation for itself, the task would have been hopeless. But it is not so. We are not like the idolaters who, on Mount Carmel, cut themselves with knives and lancets, and cried again and again, "O Baal, hear us!"

while from the brazen sky there came "no voice, nor any that answered;" but we speak to the Father who sees in secret, till the sweet sense of his pardoning love sinks deep into our hearts. The penitent is not like the heathen on pilgrimage to the sacred shrine, who sometimes measures the whole length of his journey by prostrations of his own body on the hot, dusty road, and only arrives at last before an idol too deaf to hear, too dumb to speak; but he resembles, as Christ tells us, the prodigal who starts on his way home, weary, ragged, and heart-sick, whose father sees him when a great way off, and has compassion on him, and runs to meet him, and falls on his neck and kisses him. Such is the thought stirred in our minds by the promise of the text following on the exhortation in the verse preceding it. Here we have a threefold assurance.

I. THE PROMISE OF NEW LIFE. (Ver. 2.) (For the different interpretations given to these words, see Exposition.) The obscurity is caused by the seeming definiteness of the words. Too much stress, however, must not be laid on the actual numbers, any more than in the following passages: Job v. 19; Prov. vi. 16; Amos i. 3. The main idea is that in a very *short* time, and that already *determined* in the counsel of God, there should come certain revival; and that this should be when to onlookers all seemed most hopeless, as to Mary and Martha when Lazarus had been in the grave "four days" already (John xi. 6, 17, 39). No doubt all spiritual quickening finds its centre in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and so far the text has reference to that; but mainly to the revival of the spiritually dead, that they may live in God's sight, and walk all day in the light of his countenance. Point out the analogy, so often alluded to in the New Testament, between rising from the corruption of death, and the uplifting of the soul by God's Spirit above the degradation of sin, the darkness of despair, the hopelessness of doubt, etc. Indicate the first signs of such revival, that they may be gratefully welcomed. Insist on such verses as "If ye then be risen with Christ," etc. (Col. iii. 1; ii. 12, 13; Eph. iii. 1). Show the fulfilment of the text in Christ's assurance: "I am the Resurrection, and the Life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live" (John xi. 25, 26).

II. THE HOPE OF THE HIGHEST KNOWLEDGE. "Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord." Much and varied knowledge is eagerly sought for in our day. It is a new national ambition to be an "educated" people. With all its advantages, this is not without its perils. The strain of competitive examinations may divert from the culture of character. Knowledge of God's works may supersede knowledge of God. The skilful use of material and mechanical resources may lead to forgetfulness of spiritual forces—righteousness, truth, prayer, etc. It is the highest knowledge of which we are capable promised here. 1. *This does not come instantaneously*, as in the flash of light to Saul of Tarsus; but gradually, as in the three years of his waiting in Arabia. The knowledge that God is in Christ may be given suddenly; but after that revelation we are to "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." 2. *In following on to know the Lord, the whole man* must be absorbed in the pursuit. We learn a problem of Euclid by mere intellectual effort. We know the sweetness of human love by loving a child or friend. We have the enjoyment of appetite by ministering to it; and so forth. But as God is the Sum of all good, all our capacities, the perception of truth, the love of his Law, the submission of our will, the obedience of our life, must be absorbed in knowing him. The light which shows us Christ leads us to love him, and loving brings us more light. Knowing God's will prompts us to do it, so as to embody knowledge in action; and this, again, helps to deeper knowledge. "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine." In obedience, as well as in prayer and thought, we "follow on to know the Lord;" and though as yet we only know in part, that which is perfect shall come, and "then shall we know."

III. THE CERTAINTY OF DIVINE INTERPOSITION. "His going forth is prepared as the morning" (literally, "is fixed as the morning dawn"). To those seeking and needing the Lord, he will reveal himself as certainly as the sun rises. Nothing that men can do is able to impede the breaking of the day. Imagine wicked men engaged in some conspiracy or burglary, hoping the darkness may last till their enterprise is complete. A streak of light comes over the eastern hills, the darkness fades, men will soon be stirring; yet how powerless the wrong-doers are to hinder the change. So resistlessly did the Lord appear for Israel in Egypt, for the Jews in exile, and for the soul oppressed by the powers of darkness. Show the application of this to *the coming*

of God in Christ Jesus. The world was in gross darkness. Corruptions prevailed which are described by profane historians, and alluded to by Paul in his Epistle to Rome. When things were at their worst, the angels' song, which told of peace and good will, was heard by the shepherds, and soon the anthem rang over all the world. The great light which illumined the fields at Bethlehem was but the type of that light which now "lighteneth every man that cometh into the world." Christ's going forth from the Father was "prepared as the morning." *Show from the present condition of the world the need for some Divine interposition.* Allude, for example, to the wars that prevail; to the standing armies, which are crushing Christendom by taxation, and weakening it by the withdrawal from productive labour of its manly strength; to the conflicts between capital and labour; to the unrest in the minds of those who are asking, "Is life worth living?" etc. Show how all these call for the fulfilment of the text. Because it will be fulfilled we may be hopeful of the future, and believe that the power of God will be yet so manifest that it shall be as the dawn of a new day to a dark and saddened world. Already to the Church the summons is sent: "Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee."—A. R.

Ver. 3 (last clause).—*Heavenly blessings for weary souls.* This clause, read in the light of the context, evidently refers to the outpouring of Divine influence—in other words, to the gift of the Holy Spirit. As the earth waits for the rain, so the Church waits for the Spirit. The appropriateness of the figure will be seen in a fair consideration of the coming and the effects of the descending rains.

I. CONSIDER THE BLESSING IN ITS COMING. 1. *Rain is given in the sovereign bounty of God.* Few things are less subject to the control of man, who at most can foretell its fall. Human merit, human skill, and human power have nothing to do in ruling it. If God pleased he could, by a comparatively slight change in physical laws, so alter the condition of the world that the clouds would no longer float in the sky, and the verdure no longer beautify the earth. Our home might be transformed into a world like the moon, with its awful crevasses and stupendous mountains ungladdened either by rain or dew. But in the tender mercy of God rain still falls, and under its influence ferns uncurl in the woods, and the cups of forgotten flowers run over with blessing. It is God who "so clothes the grass of the field." He only can transform the *moral* wilderness into a paradise, and he does "give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him." 2. *Rain falls generously.* Suppose you were at variance with your neighbour, and shut yourself off from him by a lofty wall, so that you could not see his garden nor he yours. When a shower fell from heaven it would disregard that distinction, and bless alike the seeds you both had sown; nor would it matter whether his was the splendid park, or only the tiny garden where a few flowers made the soil look beautiful. So generously does the Spirit come down on all assemblies of Christian worshippers; whether they meet in the home or in the church; amidst the uncouth expressions of prayer and song, or the splendours of an ornate ritual. In them all God sees tender flowers of joy and peace whose fragrance is sweet to him, and he comes down on them as the rain. 3. *Rain falls seasonably.* "As the latter and former rain upon the earth." In Palestine, where the steep hillsides were cultivated in terraces, the soil would suffer readily from drought. "The former," or autumn rain, fell in September, blessing the seed-time, and making the earth soft with showers. "The latter rain," falling in March and April, filled out the ears of corn before the harvest. So that to a Jew there was special significance in the promise, "I will cause the rain to come down in his *season*." If either of the rains were withheld the harvest would fail. The spiritual life of man is ever needing the nourishment of Divine influence. Christ is "the Author and the Finisher" of our faith. He is the Alpha and the Omega of Christian life. The old Christian cannot rest in past experience, nor the working Christian in service; but each must ever be looking out of and above himself. Nor can we trust to organizations and ritual for revival. It is wise to dig canals, and build tanks, and provide means for directing the rills to the gardens which need them; but of what avail are these, if the rain does not come? We may use our watering-pot during a drought; but how small the patch affected, how poor and unsatisfactory our work, compared with that day when God visits the earth and waters it!

"Diffuse, O God, those copious showers,
That earth its fruit may yield;
And change this barren wilderness
To Carmel's flowery field."

II. CONSIDER THE BLESSING IN ITS EFFECTS. 1. *The revival of drooping life.* Describe a corn-field in spring-time after a time of drought. Contrast its condition after a week's rain. Apply these pictures to the moral condition of the Christian Church. Take as a typical instance the condition of the disciples before and after the day of Pentecost. It was the descent of the Holy Spirit which gave them new tongues, and emboldened them to face and to rebuke a hostile world, till those who had crucified the Lord were pricked in their hearts, and cried, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" 2. *The attractiveness of fragrant life.* Nothing is more beautiful in appearance, more pleasant in fragrance, than the garden just blessed by a shower. The rain has brought nourishment to all the life that is in it; but each plant has transformed the nourishment into its own kind of beauty, so that it is white in the lily, green in the grass, fragrance in the violet, strength in the oak. A Pentecostal blessing would not make all Christians alike, but would increase the beauty and the strength of each. Indicate the different expressions of revived life—in the increase of integrity, self-sacrifice, gentleness, devoutness, joy, etc. The Church should be attractive to the world, and so full of life as to possess healing power. She should be like the Lord, around whom the sin-sick and sad gathered, and virtue went out of him even to the skirts of his garments, and "as many as touched were made perfectly whole." 3. *The blessedness of a useful life.* The Church, represented by the growing grass, exists as grass does for the world's sake. The grass is not merely the pleasant background on which Nature may weave her gorgeous colours; but it is also the fundamental life by means of which other things and beings live. Directly by his use of corn, indirectly through eating the flesh of animals fed on grass, man is absolutely dependent upon grass as it is on the rain. So through the Church, by the power of the Holy Spirit, the world lives; and in this is found her highest honour, because in it she is like unto her Lord, who "came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many."

APPLICATION. 1. *To those outside the Church.* "Break up your fallow ground: for it is time to seek the Lord, till he come and rain righteousness upon you" (ch. x. 12). 2. *To those within the Church.* Be like Elijah after his conflict on Carmel. Let the yearning cry arise to heaven, and let your hopes go up often to catch the first sign of the coming blessing; and we shall "hear the sound of abundance of rain," whereby God will refresh his inheritance when it is weary.—A. R.

Ver. 4.—*God's grief over evanescent goodness.* There are times in a man's life when he begins to fear that he is too impotent or too sinful for the notice of God. In the activity of the day he may be free from such a thought; but in the solemn night, when he looks up to the vast canopy above him and thinks how those same stars have been brooding over the earth amidst all its changes, there comes to him the thought of David, "When I consider thy heavens," etc. Still more is he oppressed by the sense of the moral distance between himself and God which has been created by sin. If only infinite knowledge can reach him in his insignificance, only infinite mercy can reach him in his degradation! Of both these attributes we have an explicit assurance in the text.

"Thou art as much his care, as if beside
Nor man nor angel were in all the world."

God would save the world even at the cost of his Son; nor will he give up the sinner till the last hope of saving him is gone, destroyed by the sinner's own hand. Our text is the sob of a Father's heart after all means of reclaiming the prodigal had failed.

I. THAT GOD LONGS FOR THE SALVATION OF MEN, AND SEEKS IN EVERY WAY TO EFFECT IT. 1. *This has been revealed to the world.* Even under the old dispensation it was expressly declared. If Moses would know the name or character of God, the Lord passed by before him, declaring himself to be "merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth" (Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7). Daniel (ix. 9) was bold in his

prayer, because he could say, "To the Lord our God belong mercies and forgivenesses, though we have rebelled against him" (see also Micah vii. 18; Ezek. xviii. 32, etc.). In the fulness of time God sent his Son, that men might know his love, that it might be "commended" to them; yet even the Son of God was cast out and crucified. Illustrate by the parable of the wicked husbandmen. The question in our text was answered in the cross. Beyond that, as the means of pardon and the centre of attraction, God can do no more. If there be any question unsolved respecting the absolute, infinite, and perfect God, we find its only answer for us in Christ—the Embodiment of love, the Fount of mercy, to all who come to him. Give examples of those who came during Christ's ministry. "No man knoweth the Father, but the Son; and he to whom the Son shall reveal him." Compare the text with the words of Christ on Olivet (Matt. xxiii. 37). 2. *This has been proved in human experience.* It is one thing to feel compassion, another thing to show it. Much sentimentalism is in the world (stirred by fiction) which finds no outlet in benevolence. But the thought and act of God are one. He is recalling here what he had *done* for Israel, as well as what he had *felt* towards Israel, when he asked, "What shall I *do* unto thee?" Deliverance from Egypt, help in the wilderness, settlement in Canaan, might have been cords to bind them to Jehovah; but "they soon forgat his works." Wealth, success, victory, were ascribed to political skill or warlike prowess, and not to him who "gave power to get wealth." Examples can be given *in modern history of nations* losing sobriety, self-restraint, modesty, thrift, equity, etc., by the very blessings which were designed to keep them near God. Thus is it with *individuals.* Their lives are unwearied by pain and their minds untainted by disease; they have had no heritage of evil habit, or of gross shame from their parents; in their homes they are encircled by love and baptized by prayer. Whence and why all this? Is it that strength may be wasted in pleasure, that thought may feed itself on the husks of Positivism, that success may generate self-confidence, that men may be enchained more lastingly to earth? "Knowest thou not," says St. Paul, "that the goodness of God leadeth to repentance?" "We beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice." (Text.) Besides all this, *sorrow and disappointment* have spoken unmistakably. The scheme has broken down and left you penniless; illness has swept you from daily work, leaving you like driftwood on the shore; death has crossed the threshold, and said, "Eternity is near!" What more can God do to arouse to repentance? *Words of man*, inspired as messages from God, have borne witness. Few in this Christian land can say, "I was never warned against sin, and never knew that 'God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself.'" Remembering all the pleading and warning sent through the Church and the Word and the home to conscience, may not the text be uttered by Jehovah over many?

II. THAT THE MEANS EMPLOYED TO BRING MEN TO REPENTANCE SOMETIMES FAIL TO DO MORE THAN AROUSE TRANSIENT FEELING. "Your goodness is as the morning cloud," etc. Nothing is more mysterious than the struggle of God's Spirit with man's soul. God created free men and accepted all the responsibilities of doing so, foreseeing the possibilities of their development. Laying aside his power to rule by decree, and watch the work of automatons, he endued man with liberty, so that it could be said to the impenitent, "Ye do always *resist* the Holy Ghost." If we perish, it is in defiance of him. It was by fighting against God that the good feeling aroused in Israel was dissipated like the morning cloud. 1. *Examples of this transient goodness abound.* Hosea saw hearers moved to tears, knew their resolves to have done with the idols and return to Jehovah; yet all this came to nothing. In our day, some visited in illness vow that they will live a different life; yet with returning health comes returning indifference. Others, in the hour of temptation, are delivered by the uprising of tender memories; but these are not abiding. In brief, no one has been condemned who could not recall good resolves. The past is strewn with their fragments. 2. *The illustration of transient goodness* in the text is suggestive. Few things are more beautiful than the cloud tinged with the rosy light of dawn. In an Eastern land it would be full of promise too. It might prove like that over which Elijah rejoiced, only as a man's hand in itself, but the precursor of hosts of rain-laden clouds which would deluge the world with blessing. But imperceptibly it vanishes; and once gone, no power on earth can recall it. The "*early dew*" is exquisite in beauty, scattered

like flashing jewels over things unsightly and base, as well as tipping each blade of grass and filling the cups of the flowers. But when the sun has risen the dew is gone, and soon the herbage is parched. How fitting are these illustrations of tears, feelings, resolves, which cause hope to the onlooker, though they leave the life unchanged! In the irreligious home, amid the evil companionship, under the influence of the sceptical writer, through the business of life, etc., these, like the morning cloud and early dew, pass away. 3. *The peril of such transient goodness* may be shown by: (1) *Its gradual and unnoticed departure.* It is difficult to fix the moment when the dew disappeared, and equally hard to judge of the time when religious impressions really fade. Probably Judas had no expectation of earning the execration of men and the curse of God. His heart must often have been touched by the words and love of Christ, yet, resisting these, at last he imbrued his hands in the Saviour's blood. (2) *The woefulness of having such feeling gone for ever.* No road is worse than that which has been often thawed and often frozen; no curse worse than to have conscience seared, and capacity for feeling gone. Still to the undecided does our merciful Father say, "O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee?"—A. R.

Ver. 1.—*The Divine Healer.* In this book of prophecy we find, side by side, the sternest reproaches and denunciations of the idolatrous and apostate, and the most tender and gracious assurances of compassion for the penitent.

I. CHASTISEMENT HAS BEEN INFLICTED FOR SIN. The language used is very vigorous, almost rough. God is represented as having torn his people as a lion tears his prey, as having smitten his people as a master smites his slave. At the same time there is no resistance, no resentment; but submission and an implicit acknowledgment of the justice of the infliction.

II. THE AFFLICTED RESOLVE TO SEEK THE DIVINE FAVOUR. 1. There is a mutual admonition: "Come." What is not easy to do alone, men will sometimes do with the countenance of their fellows. 2. The act is one appropriate in itself. If it is wrong to turn away from the Lord, it is right to return unto him—to seek him while he may be found. 3. To return to God evinces the sinner's faith; it proves that the admonitions have not been received in vain, but are bringing forth their fruit.

III. THE PENITENTS CHERISH EXPECTATIONS OF DIVINE FAVOUR. "He will heal;" "He will bind us up." 1. This God alone can do; the wounds which he has inflicted none but he can cure. 2. This God is willing to do. His chastisement is not wanton; it affords him no pleasure; the end of it is answered when the chastised are brought in lowly penitence to supplicate a restoration of favour, a renewal of blessing.—T.

Ver. 2.—*Spiritual revival.* The bold and daring figure of this passage is suited to the circumstances which call forth the exclamation and the assurance of repenting Israel, as it is in harmony with the vigorous style of the prophet.

I. SPIRITUAL INSENSIBILITY AND APOSTASY ARE SPIRITUAL DEATH. There is a moral death, and it is into this that ungodly individuals and nations plunge, as into a black sea of unfathomable depth. It is trifling with sinners to tell them that they are not quite all that they might be. The Hebrew prophets spoke plainly and faithfully, and addressed them as "the dead."

II. FROM THIS DEATH THE LORD OF LIFE ALONE CAN QUICKEN AND DELIVER. The prophet does not profess to raise the dead, nor does he send them to any human helper or physician. He alone, who first breathed the breath of life into the soul, can rekindle the expiring flame. By his death and resurrection the Divine Saviour interposed upon the behalf of a dead humanity. In him was life; and he himself has foretold that all who are in their graves shall hear the voice of the Son of man, and come forth, *i.e.* to a new, a spiritual, an eternal life.

III. THIS WORK OF QUICKENING SHALL NOT ONLY BE COMMENCED; IT SHALL BE PERFECTED. Revival shall be followed by raising up, and that by life unto God. Christ came that we might have life, and that we might have it more abundantly. In his miracles of raising the dead, we notice the successive stages by which the reality of the work was evidenced. And corresponding with these stages are the advances in spiritual vitality and all its proofs and signs made by those in whom there dwells that Spirit who is "the Lord and Giver of life."

IV. DIFFIDENCE EXPECTS DELAY IN THIS PROCESS OF QUICKENING, WHICH THE LIVING LORD DISPENSES WITH. How natural is the shamefaced, modest hope! "Not perhaps yet, but soon, it may be after a delay of two days; then on the third day the Lord will revive us." But the word goes forth, "Breathe upon these slain, that they may live!" and lo! the breath comes from the four winds without delay, and the dead bones live, and the Lord of life is glorified.—T.

Ver. 3.—*The quest of Divine knowledge.* In the Old Testament prominence is given to the intellectual as well as to the practical side of religion. To the Hebrew, religion was no mere matter of routine and ceremony; it consisted in an acquaintance with the character and will of the Supreme, and in a practical obedience. In this the authority of Old Testament Scripture is very apparent. True religion as distinguished from human superstition is based upon an appeal to the intelligence.

I. THE AIM. This is, "to know the Lord." Such knowledge was opposed to the idolatry into which Israel had been tempted; it involved recovery to the worship and service of Jehovah. Revelation has made an extended knowledge of God possible to man. And in his Son Jesus Christ, our heavenly Father has made himself more fully known than even by the Law and the prophets. We may know God by the way of discovery, by the way of experimental acquaintance, and still more fully by the way of voluntary conformity.

II. THE MEANS. This is by "following on," an expression which implies that it is not by a single effort, but by sustained endeavour, that we are to come to the knowledge of our God and Saviour. This quest of Divine knowledge must be undertaken and carried on urgently and strenuously, in the right direction, under Divine guidance, perseveringly and persistently, and without discouragement.

III. THE PROMISE. "Then shall we know." Or, if this be not an exact translation, it may be said to represent the spirit and tenor of the passage. "Let us know," *i.e.* we may if we will, and if we will aright. In the quest of other kinds of knowledge we may be disappointed. It may be too high for us; our powers may be too feeble. In the pursuit of some knowledge success may be a curse. But this is a sure, a precious, a gracious promise. For "this is life eternal, to *know* the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom he has sent."—T.

Ver. 3.—*Morning and showers.* A beautiful description of the privileges and joys appointed for such as follow on to know the Lord. His gracious visitation is compared to the brightness of the daybreak, to the falling of the refreshing and fertilizing showers. The language is doubly applicable to those who receive the gospel of Jesus Christ.

I. A SUGGESTION OF HUMAN NEED. It is implied that our state in sin and ignorance is a state of darkness and of drought. 1. Absence of Divine knowledge and favour are as darkness covering the soul with gloom, and society with moral night. 2. The same privation is as drought to the thirsty land. Where no water is, there is barrenness and death. An emblem of those who are without God.

II. A REPRESENTATION OF DIVINE PROVISION. 1. Christ is the Light of the world, the Morning at whose presence darkness flees away. He brings daylight and healing on his wings. Where he comes, he scatters the night of error, ignorance, and sin; he sheds the light of truth and purity. 2. The Holy Spirit is as the rain which falls upon and fertilizes the soil—as "the latter and former rain." The Spirit of God was given in Pentecostal showers, and his influences are diffused throughout the Church. These influences are like the rain—heavenly in origin, silent in operation, free and full in measure, yet individual in appropriation.

III. AN ANTICIPATION OF SPIRITUAL RESULTS. As the sunlight and the showers co-operate to evoke and sustain and perfect life, and to produce fruitfulness and abundance, so is it with the provision made under the gospel. Where Christ is preached, and where his Spirit works, there life abounds and spiritual fertility is apparent.

APPLICATION. 1. Acknowledge the Source of true blessing. 2. Come under the range of spiritual influence. 3. Seek the diffusion throughout humanity of these priceless blessings.—T.

Ver. 3.—*The rain.* The climate of Palestine differs from our own. There are "early" rains at sowing-time. Rain continues from autumn until spring. That which swells the corn and prepares for harvest is the "latter" rain. Deficiency of rain is fatal to the hopes of the husbandman; regular and abundant rains ensure his crops. Accordingly these rains serve as figures of the spiritual influences of God in producing and perfecting spiritual life and fruitfulness. The appropriateness is evident of the application of this figurative language to the spiritual economy beneath which we are privileged to live. The Holy Spirit's influences resemble the latter and the former rain, inasmuch as they are—

I. HEAVENLY IN ORIGIN.
II. SEASONABLE IN BESTOWMENT.
III. COPIOUS IN MEASURE.
IV. UNFAILING IN SUPPLY.
V. REFRESHING IN EFFECTS.
VI. QUICKENING TO THE LIFELESS.
VII. FERTILIZING IN ULTIMATE RESULTS.

APPLICATION. 1. Recognize an historical fact in the Divine outpouring. 2. Believe a faithful promise of mercy and blessing. 3. Act upon an encouragement to earnest prayer.—T.

Ver. 4.—*Transitory goodness.* The climate of Palestine is dry, and accordingly dew is especially precious. Hence it is a natural figure of welcome blessings. "I will be dew unto Israel;" "As the dew on Hermon." Rain, too, is now and again infrequent, and is therefore longed for and prized. "He shall come down like rain upon the mown grass." Both dew and rain are necessary for vegetation and life, and are appropriate emblems of highest good. And as a *light* dew is too soon scorched up, and as a *passing* rain-cloud disappoints the expectations of the husbandman, these serve to set forth such good signs and omens as are not fulfilled and realized. So they were used by Hosea with reference to Israel; and such a purpose they may subserve in fixing attention upon superficial and transitory goodness wherever it is found.

I. A CERTAIN KIND OF GOODNESS IS ADMITTED. The case is that of an irreligious man who by some means is led to give attention to spiritual teaching, and to take interest and even pleasure in it. One hitherto impenitent now sheds tears of sorrow because of his sin. One formerly unrighteous now makes efforts after justice and holiness, and the reformation of his conduct is obvious and undeniable. Among the young we often meet with cases corresponding with the figurative language of the text. Deep impressions seem to be made, if we may judge by the outward and unmistakable appearances.

II. VARIOUS CAUSES ACCOUNT FOR THIS KIND OF GOODNESS. Events which have happened in the order of God's providence, some striking calamity or bereavement, some faithful admonition of parent or teacher, some impressive sermon, or some startling word from Holy Writ, the example of decided piety presented by some one near and dear,—any of these may well account for the kind of goodness described in the figurative language of the text.

III. THIS KIND OF GOODNESS IS OFTEN TRANSITORY. As the dew of the morning dries up in the blazing heat of the sun; as the gathering cloud disperses and vanishes away; as the blossom of spring is blasted and issues in no fruit; as the splendid sunrise is followed by an unsettled, dreary, or stormy day;—so the promise put forth by the young, the ardent, the impressible, is often doomed to issue in disappointment. This may be owing to natural levity and fickleness, to the influence of worldly society, to violent temptations, or to the mere lapse of time. But one thing is indisputable, and that is the contrast between the promise and the fulfilment.

IV. THIS KIND OF GOODNESS IS VERY MISCHIEVOUS. And this in many ways. Spiritual dryness and barrenness return, and are worse than before. A reproach accrues to the religion of Christ, and a discouragement falls upon the ministers of Christ. Such cases act as a dissuasive from a religious profession, and they are destructive of the spiritual prospects of the unhappy persons who experience the transitory change.

V. THE FEELINGS WITH WHICH GOD CONTEMPLATES THIS KIND OF GOODNESS. He is here represented as asking, "What shall I, what can I, do?" Such an inquiry is a

revelation of deep interest, of willingness to use every method to create a more permanent impression, of grief that all which has hitherto been done has, alas! been done in vain. What a revelation of the Divine heart!

VI. THE FEELINGS WITH WHICH THOSE TO WHOM THIS DESCRIPTION APPLIES SHOULD REGARD THEMSELVES. Such should ask, "How is our superficial character, our inconsistent conduct, regarded by God?" Taking a profoundly serious view of their conduct and state, they should repent, and humbly seek the influences of the Holy Spirit, that their hearts may be as good soil, bearing much fruit.—T.

Ver. 6.—*Mercy better than sacrifice.* This is one of those sublime declarations of Scripture which taken together are a proof of its inspiration; one of those

> "Jewels five words long,
> That on the stretch'd forefinger of all time
> Sparkle for ever."

I. THIS PRINCIPLE IS CONTRARY TO THE CUSTOMARY BELIEFS REGARDING RELIGION. There is a tendency in human nature to degrade religion into a matter of ceremony. Religions which in their beginnings enunciate great spiritual truths often sink into schemes of ritual, transactions between devotee and priest, a routine of sacrifices and formal observances. Even the best religions—those which originate in the Divine wisdom—are not superior to the debasing influence of this tendency.

II. THIS PRINCIPLE IS SANCTIONED BY THE WHOLE TEACHING AND TENOR OF SCRIPTURE. It was grandly expressed by Samuel the seer, whose spiritual intuitions were never more strikingly evident than in its enunciation in the memorable words, "To obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams." It was repeated by the great Teacher himself, "Go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice." And when the scribe summed up morality and religion in the memorable saying, "To love God . . . and his neighbour . . . is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices," this judgment was stamped at once with the approval and commendation of the Lord.

III. THIS PRINCIPLE IS IN HARMONY WITH AN ELEVATED AND JUST VIEW OF THE CHARACTER OF GOD. The deities imagined by the heathen were in many cases of such a character that they may have been well supposed to take pleasure rather in offerings than in virtue, in justice, and benevolence. But the God who is himself all holy, and who is the Searcher of hearts, must needs detest the hypocrisy that is scrupulous in all outward observances, but neglects the weightier matters of the Law.

IV. THE PRINCIPLE IS ONE THE PRACTICAL ADOPTION OF WHICH MUST PROMOTE THE TRUE WELFARE OF MAN. It is well known that the ceremonial system of religion which is consistent with a low standard of morality, debases society; whilst, on the other hand, they who cultivate an intelligent religion, based on "the knowledge of God," and a practical religion displayed in the exercise of mercy, are the very salt of society. The practice of thoughtful inquiry and of virtuous living gives a depth to piety, and renders a profession of religion, which otherwise would become a laughing-stock, honourable and estimable in the view of men.—T.

Ver. 6.—*Knowledge and mercy.* This verse may be regarded as embodying true religion. This consists in—

I. KNOWLEDGE OF GOD. There is a presumption here: 1. That man has a nature capable of knowing God. 2. That God has so revealed himself as that he may be known. 3. That God desires that men should know him.

II. MERCY TO MAN. This is the human side of religion. The laws of civil society enjoin justice, without which communities could not hold together. 1. The exercise of mercy towards man springs from a sense of mercy received from God. 2. It is prompted by the example of Christ's merciful life. 3. It is performed with willing cheerfulness.—T.

Ver. 1.—*Man's highest social action.* "Come, and let us return unto the Lord: for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up." These words are to be regarded as an address by the prophet, in the Name of the Lord, to

those who had been smitten or sent into exile. They mean: let us go no more to the Assyrians nor to any other incapable deliverer, but "let us return unto the Lord;" put away all confidence in an arm of flesh, renounce all idolatries. Take the words as indicating *man's highest social action.* Man, as a member of society, has much to do with his fellow-men; he should contribute to the advancement of general knowledge, to the progress of political purity and freedom, and to the augmentation of the general health and comfort of the kingdom. But there is a higher work than this for him in society; it is that of *stimulating* the community to which he belongs to "return unto the Lord," to bring them into fellowship with the infinite Father. "Come, and let us return unto the Lord." Taking the words in this application, what do they imply?

I. THAT SOCIETY IS AWAY FROM GOD. Not *locally*, of course—for the great Spirit is with all and in all—but morally. Society is away from him in its *thoughts:* it practically ignores his existence and his claims. Away from him in its *sympathies:* its heart is on those things that are repugnant to his holy nature. Away from him in its *pursuits:* its pursuits are those of selfish and carnal gratifications and aggrandizements. Far gone, in truth, is society from its true Centre—God. It is like the prodigal, in a "far country."

II. THAT ESTRANGEMENT FROM GOD IS THE SOURCE OF ALL ITS TRIALS. Because the prodigal left his father's home he got reduced to the utmost infamy and wretchedness. Moral separation from God is ruin. Cut the branch from the root and it withers; the river from its source, and its dries up; the planet from the sun, and it rushes into ruin. Society has left God—its Root, Source, Centre—hence the terrible evil with which he by his government "hath torn" it. Nothing will remove the evils under which society is groaning but a return unto God. Legislation, commerce, science, literature, art, none of these will help it much so long as it continues away from him.

III. THAT RETURN TO HIM IS A POSSIBLE WORK. Were it not so there would be no meaning in the language, "Come, and let us return unto the Lord." With some estranged spirits in the universe a return may be impossible for ever; not so with human spirits on this earth. There is a way, a true and living way, by which all may return—return by repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. "God is in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself."

CONCLUSION. Who are the greatest social benefactors? Those who are the most successful in exciting and stimulating their fellow-men to come back to God, to return home to the great Father of love who awaits their return. He says, "Come now, and let us reason together," etc. To bring society back to God is pre-eminently the work of the gospel minister; to this he consecrates his power, his time, his all.—D. T.

Ver. 3.—*Man God-ward, and God man-ward.* "Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord: his going forth is prepared as the morning; and he shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth." "Let us therefore know—hunt after the knowledge of Jehovah; his rising is fixed like the morning dawn, that he may come to us like rain, and moisten the earth like the latter rain" (Keil and Delitzsch). There are two pursuits in this passage—man pursuing God, "following on to know him," and God as a consequence pursuing men. "He shall come unto us as the rain." Observe—

I. MAN IN A GOD-WARD DIRECTION. "Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord." The particle *if* is not in the original, although it is certain that a knowledge of Jehovah depends on searching after it. Two things are here implied. 1. That a knowledge of God is *the essence of spiritual goodness.* This is clear from reason, and is everywhere taught in the Bible. By a knowledge of him, however, we do not mean a *scientific* acquaintance with his attributes, relations, and works; but a *sympathetic* experience—an experience of those sentiments of justice, truthfulness, love, and mercy, which are the inspiration, the moral life of God himself. Philosophically, we can only know a man as we sympathize with the leading principles of the man's heart; and it is only thus we can know God. 2. That a knowledge of God *can only be attained by earnest searching.* We shall know if we "follow on," if we "hunt after." Intellectually, whatever may be the amount of earnest searching, we shall never know him. "Who by searching can find out God?" But with the heart we may know him whom to know is "life eternal." Every day by study we may get new ideas of him, every day

we may translate those ideas into emotions, and every day we may cherish those emotions into dominant forces of the soul. All this requires the most resolute and persistent effort.

II. GOD IN A MAN-WARD DIRECTION. The man who goes forth in search of a heart-acquaintance with Jehovah will meet with him in the way. "His [that is, Jehovah's] going forth is prepared as the morning." God comes forth to all men, but he comes forth in a special way to all those who are pressing after an acquaintance with himself. 1. He comes to them full of *promise*. "As the morning." What a delightful season is the morning: it rings the knell of the dark night, and heralds the beauties and brightness of the coming day! How the sufferer in his midnight agonies, the mariner in his nocturnal tempest, hail the first grey beams of the morning! The night of guilt and dark foreboding is broken by the morning of God's manifestations of love. We could not bear God to come to us as the high noon—his effulgence would burn us up; hence he comes as the morning. 2. He comes to them full of *refreshing influence*. "He shall come unto us as the rain." What a glorious change seasonable showers produce on the parched earth! They touch every part into life and beauty. Such is the influence of God upon the heart of the devout inquirer.

CONCLUSION. How sublime the destiny of the truly good man! He goes forth in search of a knowledge, not of the creation, but of the Creator himself; and the Creator appears to him full of the promise of the morning and of the influence of refreshing showers. What is the world to him? Whilst worldly men

> "Things terrestrial worship as Divine,
> His hopes immortal blow them by, as dust
> That dims his sight, and shortens his survey,
> Which longs, in infinite, to lose all bounds."
>
> (Dr. Young.)

D. T.

Ver. 4.—*A threefold theme.* "O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee? O Judah, what shall I do unto thee? for your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away."

> "What shall I do to thee, O Ephraim!
> What shall I do to thee, O Judah!
> For your goodness is like the morning cloud,
> And like the dew which early departeth."
>
> (Henderson.)

Here we have a threefold theme of thought.

I. DIVINE SOLICITUDE. Here the Infinite condescends to speak after the manner of men, that men may appreciate him. The language seems to imply: 1. *I have done much for thee.* It has the sound of another utterance, "What more could I have done to my vineyard that has not been done in it?" (Isa. v. 4). God has done much for Ephraim and Judah. He had given them emancipators, lawgivers, priests, prophets; granted to them for ages many signal and merciful manifestations of himself. 2. *I am ready to do more.* My heart overflows with compassion. Your rebellions and your iniquities have not exhausted my love. I am still ready to show you mercy. 3. *I am fettered in my actions.* I know not what to do; I am nonplussed. The Infinite has limits of action; Almightiness has restrictions. All things are not possible with God. It is not possible for him to tell a lie, it is not possible for him to be immoral, it is not possible for him to make moral intelligences virtuous and happy contrary to their will. Christ said to the men of Jerusalem, "I would, but ye would not." "What shall I do?" What wonderful language this for the Infinite to employ! His incapacity at this point is his glory. It is his glory that he will not outrage moral minds.

II. HUMAN PERVERSITY. The right answer to this appeal, "What shall I do unto thee?" would have been, "Whatever thou willest, Lord;" "Not our will, but thine, be done." We cordially submit to thine authority, we loyally acquiesce in thy arrangements, we lovingly yield to thy operations. This is the language of heaven, hence God knows no restrictions in his operations there; all go with him, and he pours forth his

love freely and without restraint. On earth it is not so. Men set their wills in hostility to his. Their language is, "We will not have thee to reign over us." They are rebels, and will not lay down their arms of hostility and become loyal subjects, hence they must be crushed; they are diseased, and will not accept the means he has prescribed for their restoration; they are captives, and will not leave their cells though he has thrown their doors wide open; they are paupers dying of starvation, but will not take from him the Bread of life which he offers to them without money and without price. Hence he says, "What shall I do unto thee?" I can reverse the laws of nature, I can break up old universes and create new ones; but I cannot make beings whom I have endowed with the power of freedom virtuous and happy contrary to their own will. "Why will ye die?"

III. EVANESCENT GOODNESS. "Your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away." Whether the goodness here refers exclusively to human kindness or includes some amount of pious sentiment, it matters not; it was so evanescent that it was of no worth. It was like the cloud, empty, fickle, disappointing. When it appeared first, men thought it had in it the refreshing element, and they expected a shower to come down on the parched earth; but a gust of wind came and swept it out of sight. Like the "early dew," it sparkles as diamonds on the greensward for a short hour, but is soon exhaled by the summer beams. Evanescent goodness is worthless. Most men have some amount of goodness in them, which continues for a time and then passes away. Goodness is of no worth to any being until it becomes *supreme* and *permanent*.

CONCLUSION. Thank God for endowing thee with freedom; it is a fearful power. It gives to men a widely different destiny even here.

"From the same cradle's side,
From the same mother's knee,
One to long darkness and the frozen tide,
One to the peaceful sea!"

But a destiny in eternity infinitely more dissimilar. It leads some to God's heights of blessedness, others to the deepest depths of perdition.—D. T.

Ver. 6.—*Righteousness and ritualism.* "For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings." We shall take "mercy" and "knowledge of God" here as including spiritual excellence, and "sacrifice" and "burnt offerings" as representing religious ritualism; and the idea is that Jehovah desires from man one rather than the other. The same idea is given in the following passages: "Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams" (1 Sam. xv. 22; Matt. xii. 7); "What doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" (Micah vi. 8); "Go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Matt. ix. 13); "To do justice and judgment is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice" (Prov. xxi. 3); "To love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love his neighbour as himself, is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices" (Mark xii. 33). Why is moral righteousness preferable to religious ritualism?

I. BECAUSE RITUALISM AT ITS BEST, APART FROM RIGHTEOUSNESS, IS WORTHLESS. We are not of those who thunder unqualified denunciations at all rites and ceremonies in connection with religion. Principles to show themselves must always have forms, and we would have the forms ever the most graceful and appropriate. Science is the ritual of the philosophic, art is the ritual of the æsthetic, tuneful verse is the ritual of poetry. Nature is the ritual of God; through its countless forms of life and beauty his invisible things reveal themselves. But ritualism, in connection with the religion of man, must be the *effect*, the *expression*, and the *medium* of inner righteousness. Without "mercy" and the "knowledge of God" in the soul all ritual observances are as worthless and as revolting as the motions of a galvanized corpse. "Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of

assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them. And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear" (Isa. i. 13—15).

II. BECAUSE RIGHTEOUSNESS, APART FROM THE BEST RITUALISM, IS ABSOLUTELY VALUABLE. Spiritual excellence, whether it shows itself or not, is essentially good; it is God-like. Like electricity in the material system, it is the subtle element which binds the moral universe into unity and tunes it into music. Ritualism, at its best, has only a *circumstantial*, *local*, and *temporary* worth; but the value of spiritual excellence is *absolute*, *universal*, and *eternal*.

CONCLUSION. Beware of mere formality in religious worship.

"A man may cry 'Church! Church!' at every word,
With no more piety than other people.
A daw's not reckoned a religious bird
Because it keeps a-cawing from a steeple.
The temple is a good, a holy place,
But quacking only gives it an ill savour;
While saintly mountebanks the porch disgrace,
And bring religion itself into disfavour."
(Thomas Hood.)

D. T.

Ver. 8.—*Divine institutions corrupted.* "Gilead is a city of them that work iniquity, and is polluted with blood." It is supposed that Gilead here means Ramoth-gilead, the metropolis of the mountainous region beyond Jordan and south of the river Jabbok, known by the name of Gilead (Josh. xxi. 28; 1 Kings vi. 18). It was here that Jacob and Laban entered into a sacred covenant with each other. It was once a very sacred place; it was one of the celebrated cities of refuge (Deut. xx. 23; Josh. xxiii. 28). The place, which was once a city of refuge, an institution of the God of heaven, had now been desecrated by wicked men, and become the scene of "iniquity" and "blood." Observe two things—

I. That Divine institutions, specially designed for man's good, ARE OFTEN CORRUPTED BY HIM. Gilead, as a city of refuge, was of Divine ordinance, designed for special good. It was set apart for protecting men from the injustice of being put to death as murderers where the motive to murder did not exist, and thus preventing the shedding of innocent blood. But this very place for justice had now become the scene to "work iniquity," the place of mercy the scene that was now "polluted with blood." Thus men may—nay, they have done and still do—corrupt God's special ordinances for good. We say special ordinances, for all God's ordinances are for good. Whilst all places on earth are for the good of man, Gilead had a specific appointment. 1. The *Bible* is a special ordinance of God for good. Men have corrupted that. They do so sometimes by denying its truth altogether, but oftener by perverting its doctrines. 2. The *gospel ministry* is a special ordinance of God for good. From the beginning almost God set apart men for the special work of indoctrinating their fellow-men with the principles of everlasting rectitude and the doctrines of redemptive mercy—prophets, apostles, evangelists, pastors, etc. But men have sadly corrupted this Divine institution; few things on earth have been more corrupted by man than the ministry.

II. That Divine institutions specially designed for man's good, when corrupted, BECOME THE WORST OF ALL EVILS. Holy Gilead, once the scene of Divine mercy, was now filled with "iniquity" and "blood." 1. A corrupted *Bible* is the worst of all books. It does more mischief than any infidel productions. Political tyrannies, slaveries, wars, persecutions, have all been sanctioned and encouraged by a corrupted Bible. Alas! the millions of Christendom hate the Bible—not the Bible that God gave, but man's corrupted version of that Bible. 2. A corrupted *pulpit* is the worst of all ministries. Popes, archbishops, bishops, and the clergy in every grade in all Churches, have been found amongst the most intolerant despots and the most bloody persecutors of all times. They consecrate the banners of the warriors, they advocate the cause of slavery, they have ever been the prime obstructors to the promotion of liberty and the advancement of the universal rights of man. An old expositor has said,

"The clergy, when wicked, are the worst of all men; none so cruel and bloody." It is time for the people to be taught that a pulpit is not necessarily a Christian or a useful thing. It may be—alas! it sometimes is—the corruptest and the most pernicious thing in the neighbourhood in which it has a place. A man is not a saint because he calls himself a Christian; a building is not the "house of God" because it is called a church, a chapel, or a tabernacle; a forum is not sacred to the utterance of gospel truth because it is called a pulpit. Things called "sermons" may sometimes have more wickedness in them than infidel tracts; places called the "houses of God" may sometimes serve more effectually the cause of the devil than the theatres of pleasure-seekers or lecture-halls of sceptics. Mere names must not rule our judgment. It is the policy of the devil in these days to baptize his instruments with Christian titles. He is never more powerful than when he occupies the sacred desk, writes religious books, and quotes the Word of God. There are wolves in sheep's clothing, and false prophets now as ever.—D. T.

Ver. 11.—*Naturalness of retribution.* "Also, O Judah, he hath set an harvest for thee." Dr. Henderson ends the chapter with this clause and begins the next chapter with the latter clause of this verse. Some regard the harvest here as used in a good sense, as pointing to the ingathering of the people of God. But such a view is scarcely admissible. It evidently refers to punishment, and some suppose to that terrible punishment that fell on Judah as recorded in 2 Chron. xxvi. 6—9. Divine punishment for sin is elsewhere spoken of as a harvest: "Put ye in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe: come, get you down; for the press is full, the fats overflow; for their wickedness is great." "Another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to him that sat on the cloud, Thrust in thy sickle, and reap: for the time is come for thee to reap; for the harvest of the earth is ripe." The imagery suggests—

I. That retribution is natural in its SEASON. There are the "appointed weeks of harvest." These weeks come round with an undeviating regularity, and they come because the immutable One has decreed their advent. "Seed-time and harvest shall not fail." Punishment comes to the sinner naturally, so far as the proper time is concerned. *In this life* the sinner has many harvests. Every transgression is a seed, and the seed sometimes grows rapidly and ripens fast. In truth, to some extent man reaps to-day morally what he sowed yesterday; not the *whole* crop, it is true, for every sin is awfully prolific, but some portion. The law of memory, habit, causation, render this constant reaping inevitable. No man can do a wrong thing anywhere or anywhen, without its bringing to him sooner or later a harvest, even in this life. But in the after-world there is a *full* and complete harvest. All the sins committed are there ripened into crops of corresponding miseries. Yonder is the harvest; there is the reaping—reaping—reaping, and little else than reaping for ever. The wicked there reap "the fruit of their own doings."

II. That retribution is natural in its RESULTS. In harvest, the man reaps the *kind* of seed he has sown, whatever it may be, barley or wheat. Also as a rule the *amount*. If he has sown sparingly, he reaps sparingly; if with abundance, he will reap abundantly. He gets what he wrought for. It is just so in the retributive ministry of God. "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." The cheat shall be cheated, the oppressor shall be oppressed, the malicious shall be hated. "With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again." The sinner in every pang of suffering will recognize the fruit of some sinful act of his. He will feel evermore that his misery has grown out of such a sin, and this out of that, and so on. Hence he will never be able to blame either God or his creation for his wretched destiny; he reaps "the fruit of his own doings."

III. That retribution is natural in its APPROACH. As soon as the seed is sown and germination begins, it proceeds slowly and silently from day to day, week to week, and month to month, towards maturition, its harvest state. It is just so with sin; it proceeds naturally to work out its results. "Lust, when it is conceived, bringeth forth sin; sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death." Punishment for sin does not require the positive and direct interposition of eternal justice; it comes—comes as the harvest comes—comes by the established laws of the moral universe. In truth, sin is more certain to ripen than the seed of the husbandman. Ungenial soil, foul weather, nipping frosts, scorching rays, destructive insects, may destroy the seed in the ground,

so that it may never spring even to blade. But sin, unless uprooted by God's redemptive hand, cannot be destroyed, must grow, and ripen into a harvest of misery. "Be sure your sins will find you out."

> "Though the mills of God grind slowly, yet they grind exceeding small;
> Though with patience he stands waiting, with exactness grinds he all."
>
> (Longfellow.)

D. T.

Vers. 1—3.—*Returning to God.* Affliction is represented as having at length accomplished its work. In the far country the prodigal bethinks himself of his father's house. He comes to himself. He says, "I will arise," etc. (Luke xv. 18). Thus shall Israel at last take with them words, and turn to the Lord (ch. xiv. 2). The words stand as a form for Israel to take up whenever their hearts shall turn to the Lord (2 Cor. iii. 16).

I. RETURN TO GOD RESOLVED UPON. (Ver. 1.) The people incite one another to return to God, as formerly they had encouraged one another in wickedness. They strengthen each other's good resolves. This is as it should be. Their language is that of true wisdom. It shows: 1. *That they rightly understand the Source of their affliction.* "Let us return unto the Lord: for *he* hath torn," etc. They see God's hand in what has befallen them. They recognize him as their Chastener. They own the justice of what he has done. They acknowledge their sufferings to be a just punishment for their sins. The penitent justifies God and condemns himself (Ps. li. 4). 2. *That they recognize God's beneficent hand in their affliction.* "He hath torn, and he will heal us," etc. They no longer upbraid God because he has dealt thus hardly with them. They feel that they deserved it all and more. They perceive, too, what his end has been in the tribulation through which he has caused them to pass, viz. to subdue their rebelliousness, and bring them to repentance, that he might heal them. God's rod has always kindness hidden behind it. The true penitent owns this. 3. *That they have confidence in God's power and willingness to restore them.* They argue from his power to smite what his power must be to heal. His power to destroy is the measure of his power to save. Nor do they doubt—perceiving as they do his hand in afflicting them—that if they return they will be graciously received (ch. xiv. 2, 4). The sinner may always have this confidence towards God. He has no pleasure in afflicting. He desires only to lead to repentance. When the sinner returns, he may rely on a warm welcome. The wounds made by his Law or his judgments God will heal; his smiting will prove to have been in love.

II. ISRAEL'S HOPE IN RETURN TO GOD. (Ver. 2.) Returning to God, the people are confident that God will "revive" them, will "raise them up." The terms include both national restoration and spiritual quickening. 1. *Revival implies a previous state of death.* So Israel, in her banishment, was as it were dead to God. The nation is still sunk in the moral death of unbelief. Its recovery will be as "life from the dead" (Rom. xi. 15). The soul, in its natural condition, is "dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph. ii. 1). 2. *Revival is an act of Divine power.* An act even of omnipotence (Eph. i. 19). Only Omnipotence can "open the graves" of scattered and rejected Israel (Ezek. xxxvii. 11—14). Omnipotence is required for all resurrection (Matt. xxii. 29)—the resurrection of Christ (Eph. i. 20), the resurrection of the dead soul (John v. 25), the resurrection of the body (John v. 28, 29; 1 Cor. xv. 35—58). Only almighty power can revive the Church when life is gone, or is going, out of it. 3. *Revival follows speedily on penitent return.* "After two days will he revive us: in the third day he will raise us up." The words indicate a short period. Israel would not be kept waiting at the door of mercy. God *hastens* to meet the returning sinner with his mercies. David was forgiven the instant he confessed (Ps. xxxii. 5). The prodigal was without delay reinstated in his place as son (Luke xv. 22—24). 4. *Revival is through Christ.* His resurrection is the pattern and ground of every other (Eph. i. 19, 20). Israel's history in a manner recapitulated itself in him. His rejection and death was for her sins, and the sins of the whole world. In his cross the judgment of God on sin culminated. His resurrection, in like manner, conditions all revival. It is therefore

to say the least, significant that words should be used here so exactly descriptive of the period during which Christ remained under the power of death. There is probably a glance Christ-wards in the passage. 5. *The end of revival is that we may live unto God.* "And we shall live in his sight." See this thought developed in Rom. vi. 10, 11; 2 Cor. v. 15. The new life, having God as its Source, has God also as its End.

III. THE ASPECTS OF GOD'S GRACE TO ISRAEL. (Ver. 3.) What God wills to be to his people, he cannot discover to them all at once. There is greater fulness in him than they can at once apprehend. His coming is like the *dawn*—progressive, brightening by degrees till it culminates at noon; and like the *rain*, falling in repeated and seasonable showers. Would Israel, therefore, know all that God is, she must "follow on"—must persevere in her new way. God would open himself up to her in new manifestations of grace, suited to each step in her advance. "Dawn" and "rain" are influences. (1) Heavenly; (2) gentle; (3) beneficent; yet (4) distinct in their effects. 1. The dawn is primarily enlightening; the rain fructifying. 2. The dawn gladdens; the rain refreshes. 3. The peculiar effects of the dawn are those of contrast; the rain gives heightened beauty to effects already existing.—J. O.

Ver. 4.—*The day-dawn and the rain.* The Jewish doctors found in these words a prophecy of Christ. We Christians cannot do less. It is Christ whom our faith must grasp under these two figures—the *day-dawn* and the *rain*. There is a twofold coming of the Son of God—the first in his own Person to establish and confirm the gospel; the second in his Holy Spirit to apply it to the heart. The one of these may be very fitly compared to the morning, the other to the rain.

I. THERE ARE POINTS IN WHICH THE DAY-DAWN AND THE RAIN RESEMBLE EACH OTHER. 1. They have *the same manifest origin.* They come from heaven. They are not of man's making and ordering, but of God's. It is not less so with the gospel and Spirit of Christ. Man neither invented nor discovered them. They carry their evidence with them, like Heaven's sun and Heaven's rain. 2. They have *the same mode of operation on the part of God.* The mode of operation is soft and silent. What so gentle as the day-dawn? What more soft than the spring's falling rain? And like to these in their operations are the gospel and the Spirit of Christ. When the Saviour came into the world it was silently and alone. His kingdom came not with observation. The Spirit's great work is not in the earthquake, or the mighty rushing wind, but in the still small voice. 3. They have *the same mode of approach to us*—in perfect fulness and freeness. They are, like God's great gifts, without money and without price, and they come with an overflowing plenty. In this they are fit and blessed emblems of the way in which Christ approaches us, both with his gospel and his Spirit. 4. They have *the same object and end.* It is the transformation of death into life, and the raising of that which lives into higher and fairer form. The gospel and Spirit of Christ have the same aim—life and revival. Christ is no less earnest for our eternal life in the one than in the other.

II. THERE ARE POINTS OF DISTINCTION BETWEEN THE DAY-DAWN AND THE RAIN. 1. Christ's approach to men has *a general and yet a special aspect.* The sun comes every morning with a broad, unbroken look, shining for all and singling out none. But the rain, as it descends, breaks into drops, and hangs with its globules on every blade. There is a wonderful individualizing power in the rain. There is a similar twofold aspect in the coming of Christ. The gospel enters the world with the broad universal look of daylight. It singles out none, that it may exclude none. But Christ comes after another manner in the Spirit. Here no man can tell how God is dealing with another. He approaches the door of the single heart and speaks to itself. 2. Christ's coming is *constant, yet variable.* He visits men in his gospel, steady and unchanging as the sun. But with the Holy Spirit it is otherwise. For the rain man knows no fixed rule. It may come soon or late, in scanty showers or plentiful floods. The gift of God's Spirit is no doubt regulated also by laws, but these laws are hidden from us in their final ground. The emblems show us in God's working the two great features of law and freedom. 3. Christ's coming may be *with gladness*, and *yet also with trouble.* What more joyful than the returning sun? But God comes also in the cloud, and there is a shade over the face of nature—sometimes in the thunder-cloud, dark and threatening. There is gladness in the gospel, there is trouble in the conviction by the Spirit. But Christ comes in both. 4. Christ's coming in his gospel and his coming in the Spirit

tend to a final and perfect union. They are indispensable to each other. The gospel without the Spirit would be the sun shining on a rainless waste. The Spirit without the gospel would be the rain falling in a starless night. Christians need both. Some have a very distinct perception of the gospel in its freeness and fulness, but they lack the life of the Spirit. They need the rain. Some experience the workings of the Spirit in conviction, etc., but they have only a small portion of the sunlight and the joy. Our souls can only live and grow when the sun and the showers intermingle. (Adapted from Dr. John Ker.)—J. O.

Vers. 4—6.—*Evanishing goodness.* So froward, heedless, fickle, and incorrigible had Ephraim proved, that God did not know what more he could do with him. The same was true of Judah. The tender mode of speech, "O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee? O Judah, what shall I do unto thee?" shows how loth God is to pass from mercy to judgment. His heart yearns for the conversion of the objects of his solicitude.

I. PIETY VALUELESS, IF EVANESCENT. (Ver. 4.) Ephraim and Judah had *fits* of piety—of goodness; but they did not last. They are compared here to the "morning cloud"—the vapour which the heat of the sun sucks up as the day advances; and to the "early dew," thick and fresh at dawn, but soon carried off by evaporation. Such an instance of momentary goodness we have in Ephraim in the reign of Pekah, when, rebuked by Oded the prophet, "certain of the heads of the children of Ephraim" compelled the return of the captives from Judah (2 Chron. xxviii. 12, 13); and there would probably be instances of the same kind under the preaching of Hosea himself. Note: 1 *The defect of this kind of piety.* It lacked root. It had no depth of earth. It promised well, but brought forth no practical fruit of righteousness. The nature was superficially moved, but there was neither genuine conviction of sin nor true turning of the heart to God. 2. *The manifestation of this defect.* The impressions did not endure. They hardly "dured" even "for a while," but as soon as "the sun" was "risen with a burning heat" (Jas. i. 2), they "were scorched" and "withered away" (Matt. xiii. 6). The test of real piety is its enduringness. No piety is worth having which will not endure the heat of the daytime—the test applied to it by the everyday work, trials, engrossments, and temptations of life. Yet many have known no other piety than that which consists in passing convictions, in weak desires, in good resolutions that come to nothing, in vague and easily frustrated efforts after amendment.

II. JUDGMENT INEVITABLE, IF REPENTANCE IS NOT SINCERE. (Ver. 5.) "Therefore," God says; that is, (1) because of the failure of milder measures to bring Ephraim to repentance; (2) because of this evanishing goodness, which showed the necessity for something that would reach the *depths* of the nature; (3) because of the sin that waited for punishment, and now must be punished, seeing that the people so utterly refused to turn from it;—"therefore" he is compelled by his prophets to denounce judgments against them. The words of the prophets are said to do that which the judgments themselves will accomplish—"hew," "slay"—to indicate the *certainty* of the result. The thing is as good as done when God says it. Certainty of fulfilment is a characteristic of God's Word. His judgments would be "as the light that goeth forth," *i.e.*: 1. Majestic. 2. Obeying a law (sunrise). 3. Sudden: the lightning (Matt. xxiv. 27). 4. Revealing: God's judgments reveal the sin against which they are directed (ch. vii. 1). If the reading in the Authorized Version, "thy judgments," be retained, it is still God's judgments that are referred to. They belonged to Ephraim as falling upon him.

III. SACRIFICE USELESS, IF WITHOUT LOVE. (Ver. 6.) "Mercy," or love to man, is the obverse of "knowledge of God," and the proof of its existence. The Law is summed up in love. It is love God looks for as the reality of religion. 1. *Love to man shows itself in kind deeds.* It is not a thing of "word" or of "tongue," but of "deed" and of "truth" (1 John iii. 18). It proves its reality by the acts in which it embodies itself (1 John iii. 17). This love is the substance of piety. It is the true ritual. "Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless," etc. (Jas. i. 27). It is this class of deeds Christ looks to (Matt. x. 42; xxv. 35, 36). No one ever laid such great stress on kind deeds, or so entirely embodied the law of love in his own life, as Christ did. 2. *The absence of love shows itself in wicked deeds*—in injustice, robbery, violence, etc. These are the crimes here charged against Ephraim

(vers. 8—10). 3. *Without love no outward service is of any use.* No sacrifices, almsgiving, prayers, new moons, or fasts (Isa. i. 13—15; lviii. 3—8; Matt. ix. 13). In vain do we keep sabbaths, practise austerities, uphold orthodoxy, wait on religious ordinances, and engage in outward works of piety, if this, the one thing needful, is wanting (1 Cor. xiii.).—J. O.

Vers. 7—11.—*The broken covenant.* Israel had broken covenant with God. In the rupture of this bond was ruptured also the bond which bound society together. Fearful wickedness was the result.

I. THE BOND BROKEN WITH GOD. (Ver. 7.) 1. *The primal sin.* "They, like Adam, have transgressed the covenant." Our first parents were placed under arrangements involving in them the essentials of a covenant. Through breach of this covenant came "death into our world, and all our woe." 2. *Israel's sin.* God made a covenant with Israel at Sinai. It was a covenant of Law, yet it had mercy in the heart of it. It required obedience, but it embraced provision for the removal of guilt. It asked from Israel only the pure will and the steadfast heart. It conveyed to them the highest privileges, and conferred on them the greatest blessings. Yet they shamefully broke it. They trampled their compact underfoot. They traversed in every direction the Law which God had given them. 3. *Our own sin.* God has a covenant made with us in the very constitution of our nature. There is that within us which binds us to God and to the practice of goodness. We find ourselves within the bond of this covenant. Its obligations be upon us. Yet we have broken it. We have gone astray. Sin is the breach of this covenant. In committing sin, we know that we, violating law, are guilty of unfaithfulness to God, and are doing violence to our own nature.

II. THE BOND BROKEN WITH MAN. (Vers. 8, 9.) The result of breach of covenant with God is seen in the open throwing off of all regard from ordinary moral obligations. The principle of love being dethroned—and love soon dies out in the soul that has cast out love to God—self-will, egoism, greed, evil principles of various kinds, usurp its place, and rule the conduct. These verses, accordingly, hold up a picture of utter lawlessness and disorder. Violence filled the cities; the very priests took part in highway robberies and murders. Society without God is like an arch from which the keystone is removed. It falls in ruins. It is like a system of planets without a central sun—unable to maintain its independence. It becomes a scene of confusion, a chaos.

III. INIQUITY MOST SHAMEFUL AMONG THOSE WHO HAVE KNOWN GOD. (Ver. 10.) This was the aggravation of Israel's sin. They had known God, yet were now in this deplorable and desperate condition. Their knowledge of God made their sin "an horrible thing"—"an abomination." Specially hateful to God were the *impurities* of their worship. He would punish them with special severity on account of their special relation to him (cf. Amos iii. 2). Judgment shall begin at the house of God (1 Pet. iv. 17).

IV. A SIDE-WORD TO JUDAH. (Ver. 11.) In the judgments that were about to fall—having, however, for their object, not Israel's destruction, but her salvation; the turning of her captivity—Judah might be sure that *she* would not escape. God had set a harvest for her also. What applies to one sinner applies *mutatis mutandis* to another. —J. O.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER VII.

This chapter may be divided into three sections. In the first section, including vers. 1—7, the prophet reproves with much but deserved severity the depraved morals of king and princes. In the second section, consisting of vers. 8—11, he rebukes their sinfulness, silliness, pride, and stupid obstinacy, notwithstanding the many manifest tokens of decay. Otherwise the first section deals with the internal corruption of the northern kingdom, and the second exposes their sinful and harmful foreign policy. The third section, continuing from the twelfth verse to the end of the chapter, that is, vers. 12—16, threatens the infliction of punishment incurred by their gross wickedness and base ingratitude to God.

Vers. 1—3.—When I would have healed

Israel. We may, with some, understand this healing of those (1) prophetic admonitions and rebukes by which God designed to cure the transgressions and heal the backslidings of his people. (2) It is more probable, however, that the reference is to the partial restoration of the national prosperity in the days of Jeroboam II., who "restored the coast of Israel from the entering of Hamath unto the sea of the plain." (3) Jerome's exposition is not so natural when he says, "The sense is: When I wished to blot out the old sins of my people, on account of ancient idolatry, Ephraim and Samaria discovered new idols;" the old sins and ancient idolatry he refers to the making and worshipping of the golden calf in the wilderness, while the new idols were the calf-worship which Jeroboam of the tribe of Ephraim instituted, and the people of the capital, Samaria, adopted. When God would heal, or as often as he proceeded to heal, Israel, the evils broke out afresh, or came more fully to light, just like a wound the dangerous nature of which is discovered by the surgeon's probe in the effort to heal it. **Then the iniquity of Ephraim was discovered, and the wickedness of Samaria.** The sin of the northern kingdom manifested itself in high quarters—in the premier tribe of Israel, and in the capital city of Samaria. "Because," says Aben Ezra, in his comment, "they said, He hath torn, and he will heal us, he says, When I was disposed to heal them, the wickedness concealed in their heart stood before my face, which they have not left off until the present time, for they practise falsehood; by night they steal, and by day troops (of bandits) spread themselves outside the cities." Similarly, Rashi explains: "When I was willing to help and to heal them, their iniquities manifested themselves before me, for they practised lying constantly; while thieves of their number entered in continually, and stole the wealth of their companions, and even their gangs spread themselves for robberies to rob men." **For they commit falsehood; and the thief cometh in, and the troop of robbers spoileth** (margin, *strippeth*) **without.** Here follows an enumeration of the crimes of which they were guilty. There was falsehood, or fraud, or deception generally, and that, not only in words, but in works; next comes dishonesty, both in public and in private. The thief privately entered the houses, and committed burglary; gangs of highwaymen publicly infested the roads, spoiling the passers-by, or rather roamed or spread themselves abroad for plunder, since it is the causative conjugation of *pashat* that has the signification of stripping or spoiling others. **The thief within, the robber robs without.**

Ver. 2.—**And they consider not in their hearts** (margin, *say not to their heart*) **that I remember all their wickedness.** Between the common reading *libravkeh* and *bilraykeh* found in several manuscripts by Kennicott and De Rossi, there is a not unimportant difference. The latter, equivalent to saying "*in* their heart," which is the usual expression, denotes one's inward thoughts or reasonings with himself; the former, equivalent to saying "*to* their heart," is an address to, or remonstrance with, the heart with the view of restraining its evil purposes. God's remembrance of wickedness imports its punishment. **Now their own doings have beset them about.** Their doings (1) have become evident or conspicuous as a robe or garment with which a man is surrounded, or a troop of body-guards placed about him. Or (2) the terrors and penal consequences of their sins have surrounded them like a garment, as we elsewhere read, "He clothed himself with cursing like as with his garment." In this latter sense the figure is rather taken from enemies besieging a town or city, and beleaguering it closely all around, or from lictors, *i.e.* officers of the law surrounding them, or even witnesses confronting them on every side. Kimchi explains the sense as follows: "Now their evil deeds surround them, which were before my face and were not hidden from me; and, while they receive the punishment, they will remember that I know all the whole, and that it is I who return their reward upon their head." **They are before my face,** in the last clause, has a striking and awe-inspiring parallel in the ninetieth psalm: "Thou hast set our iniquities before thee, our secret sins in the light of thy countenance." Aben Ezra's exposition is somewhat obscure; it is as follows: "They think that I do not see them, and they do not observe that their actions encircle them, as they are before my face."

Ver. 3.—**They make the king glad with their wickedness, and the princes with their lies.** The moral corruption and depravity of Israel were extreme and universal. They reached from the rabble to royalty, from the common people to the princes of the court. The king and princes were in full accord with fellows of the basest sort, taking pleasure in their wickedness and applauding their lies. (1) Rosenmüller quotes the explanation of Abarbanel to the following purport: "He (the prophet) means to say that the violent men of that age were accustomed to narrate their atrocities to their kings, that the latter might thence derive entertainment." It is much the same whether the king and princes of that time took pleasure in the villanies which were perpetrated, or in the narratives of those villanies to which they listened. (2) A

somewhat different rendering, and consequently different exposition, have much to recommend them: "In their wickedness they make the king merry, and in their feigning the princes;" their wickedness was their diabolical design to assassinate king and princes; with this object in view they make the king merry with wine so that he might fall an easy and unsuspecting victim; their feigning was their fell purpose of assassination under the profession of friendship. Such was the desperate treachery of those miscreant conspirators. This view tallies well with the context.

Vers. 4—7.—Vers. 4, 6, and 7 are linked together by the figure of an "oven," common to them; while 4 and 6 have also in common the figure of a "baker." Further, we are helped to the literal meaning of the metaphorical language of vers. 4 and 6 by vers. 5 and 7 respectively. **They are all adulterers, as an oven heated by the baker.** Whether the sin indicated was idolatry, which is often represented as spiritual adultery, or adultery in the literal sense, which was its frequent accompaniment; or in a larger sense faithlessness to solemn obligations such as treason, treachery, or perfidy in general; it was their habitual practice, as intimated by Piel participle in its iterative or intensive sense. The persons charged with this sin were *kullam*, all of them—sovereign and subjects, princes and people alike. The traitors of the time referred to, or rather their heart heated with lawless lust and pernicious passion, is pictured by the prophet as an oven; and the oven is heated by the baker, or more literally, *burning from the baker*. Who or what is represented by the baker? This may be a personification of the spirit of treason like the spirit of whoredoms (ch. v. 4), or evil agency that impelled these men to their nefarious deeds; or we may understand by the "baker" those persons who were the prime movers in such matters, and who instigated others to become their tools and execute their plans. In either case the burning, once commenced, continued of itself; the primary instigators had no difficulty in securing agents ready and willing as themselves for such bad and bloody work, and who, once set agoing, needed no further impulse, but of their own motion delighted to carry it through. **Who ceaseth from raising after he hath kneaded the dough, until it be leavened.** An interval of time elapses between the inception and execution of the work. The baker ceaseth from raising, more literally, from stirring or stoking; after kindling the fire in the oven he lets it burn on and leaves off stirring it until the kneaded dough is fully fermented. This respite is allowed that the leaven of wickedness may do its work, and completely pervade the minds into which it has been introduced, and until matters are thoroughly matured for action. Meantime the fire burns steadily and sufficiently, until the oven requires to be more highly heated for the well-prepared and perfectly leavened dough. The use of the participle מַעִיר is well explained by the principle stated by Ewald as follows: "Just as the idea of the verb 'to be' is placed in immediate construction with the word which more exactly forms the predicate, so also may those verbs which describe a somewhat more specific kind of being, *e.g.* verbs which signify 'commencing' to be, *i.e.* becoming . . . verbs of *hastening*, i.e. quickly becoming . . . and those of *ceasing* to be, Hos. vii. 4. . . . The following verb, if such a word be required for the more specific predicate, most readily chooses the participial form . . . verbs denoting *continuance* would be constructed in the same way." The particle עַד, equivalent to *usque ad*, implies the completeness of the leavening.

Ver. 5.—**In the day of our king.** This may mean the anniversary of his birth—his birthday celebration, or the anniversary of his accession or coronation; or it may have been used in an ambiguous sense, and to include the day of his destruction, like the tragic irony or contrast between the knowledge of the spectator and the supposed ignorance of the actor. The expression "our" is either a real acknowledgment of the kings of Israel, or rather the lip-loyalty of the traitorous princes who were compassing his ruin. **The princes have made him sick with bottles of wine.** The literal rendering is, *have made sick the heat of wine*; i.e. made him sick with heat from wine. The construction resembles Micah vi. 13, "I will make sick thy smiting;" *i.e.* I will make thee sick through smiting thee. The heat from wine repeats in some sort the preceding figure of a heated oven. The object of these wretches was twofold—to inflame their passion, and nerve their hands for the bloody work on which they were set; and to leave the king powerless, a helpless victim in their hands. **He stretched out his hand with scorners.** Whatever the real origin of this phrase may be, the meaning is plain—he joined in fellowship with those wicked princes, and took part on terms of equality with them in their brutish debauch and profane carousal. He stretched out his hand and hailed them as boon-companions.

Ver. 6.—**For they have made ready their heart like an oven, whiles they lie in wait: their baker sleepeth all the night; in the morning it burneth as a flaming fire.** Their heart is the oven, as the comparison here

teaches us; the fire by which it is inflamed is the fire of sinful passion, and the fuel that feeds the flame is the murderous machination on which they are at present so intent; the baker is either the original contrivers and prompters of their wickedness, or their own wicked spirit, or the evil one himself at the head of all. But, though there is a temporary suspension, there is no real cessation of their evil purpose; they are only biding their time, lying in wait; the baker sleeps, but it is only whilst the dough is leavening. Soon as the suitable time has come, soon as the occasion has arrived, and all circumstances in readiness, *in the morning* the baker rouses from his nocturnal slumber, stirs up the fire, and sets the oven ablaze. Now that the dough is sufficiently leavened, and the oven thoroughly heated, the bread is put in—the meditated assassination is accomplished—*it burneth as a flaming fire.* This is the second and last stage of the proceeding, the last scene of the last act of the tragic drama.

Ver. 7.—**They are all hot as an oven, and have devoured their judges; all their kings are fallen.** Here we have the application, and so the explanation of the figurative language of the preceding verse, which, as we have seen, is the second stage of the action. The heat of the oven denotes the intense violence of their passion, as also their fierce and fiery power of destruction. Inferior rulers and magistrates fell victims to it; while regicides in incredible number were the result of it. Three regicides were perpetrated in thirteen years; and four in less than forty, the victims being Zechariah, Shallum, Pekahiah, and Pekah. Also Nadab, Elah, Zimri, Zibni, and Jehoram perished by their successors. **There is none among them that calleth unto me.** Amid such horrid scenes of blood and violence, of disorder and anarchy, there was none of them to realize the calamities of the times or recognize the cause. Consequently there was no one to discover the remedy, and apply to the true and only source of relief.

SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES.

Ver. 4.—The difficulty of the section including vers. 4—7 has occasioned considerable difference of exposition; it may not, therefore, be amiss to supplement the foregoing observations. 1. Aben Ezra accounts for בערה being accented as *mîlel* (1) on the ground that, though a feminine formation, it is really masculine (to agree with תנור), like מחלה and לילה, both of which, though feminine in form, are notwithstanding of the masculine gender. Abarbanel, who is followed by Wünsche, (2) takes בֹּעֲרָה as a participle feminine for בֹּעֵרָה or בֹּעֶרֶת, which is justified by the circumstance that the names of fire and of what is connected therewith are feminine in the Semitic, so that תנור is feminine. 2. The word מֵעִיר, which Ewald and others take, properly we think, (1) as participle of Hiph., is treated (2) by Gesenius and Maurer as infinitive Qal with *min* prefixed, which would occasion the awkward and unusual combination of two infinitives each prefixed with *min* in immediate sequence; while (3) Kimchi takes it as infinitive Hiph. contracted for מַהְעִיר. 3. More important still is the interpretation of the verse. There is (1) that already given, and which is in some measure supported by the following rabbinic comments: "Their evil passion," says Rashi, "which stirs them up, rests from kneading the dough until it is leavened, *i.e.* from the time that any one has thought on evil in his heart how he shall execute it, he rests and sleeps till the morning, when he shall be able to execute it, as the baker rests from kneading the dough until it is leavened, when he can bake it." Similar and yet somewhat peculiar is the concluding portion of Kimchi's comment: "As soon as he lays the pieces of wood into the oven, in order to heat it, he commands the women to knead, and he ceases to stir them (the women) up until the dough is leavened, as he estimates it in his heart, and then he rouses them to come with the dough to bake it. And this is the time when the oven is heated." (2) The LXX. takes עיר as a noun prefixed with the preposition *min* (ἀπὸ τῆς φλογός), and translates the whole as follows: "They are all adulterers, as an oven glowing from flame for hot-baking, from the kneading of the dough until it is leavened." The interpretation (3) of Wünsche differs considerably from both the preceding; it is, "They are all adulterers, like an oven, burning from a baker, who *rests while stoking* from the kneading of the dough till its fermentation;" and he cites in favour of this view Aben Ezra as follows: "This verse is inverted, and accordingly the sense is: As the oven of a baker burneth from the kneading of the dough till its fermentation, so that the baker can scarcely cease to stir it up, but must stir it up and heat it violently."

Ver. 5.—A like diversity of exposition is found in connection with ver. 5, at least its first clause. 1. There is (1) the rendering already given; but (2) Wünsche, taking החלו from חלל, to begin, as is done by the LXX., Syriac, Chaldee, and Jerome, translates: "The princes begin [*i.e.* open] the day of our king in the heat of wine." Consequently, *yom* is (*a*) the object of this verb; while, (*b*) according to the usual rendering, it is the accusative of time, equivalent to

בְּיוֹם; others again (*c*) take the word as a nominative absolute, or translate the clause as an independent one; thus Simson: "It is the day of our king." 2. Again, חֲמַת st. construct of חֵמָה, from the root חמם or יחם (for the construct state is used, not only for the genitive-relation, but also before prepositions, the relative pronoun, relative clauses, even *vav* copulative, etc.), is (1) the accusative of the clause, equivalent to "in the heat (proceeding) from wine;" or (2) *be* may be understood; or (3) the preposition *min* may be regarded as transposed.—Rashi explains it: "From the heat of the wine that burneth in them;" or (4) מִבַּעֲלֵי may be supplied, as Wünsche suggests, equivalent to "possessors (bearers) of heat from wine." 3. לֵץ is a scoffer and worse than כְּסִיל, a fool, or פֶּתִי, a simpleton; the last acts through inexperience, the second from unwisdom, the first, though possessing in some measure both wisdom and experience, acts in disregard of both. The meaning is given by Kimchi in the following comment: "The sense of מ' ח' is that the one came with his bottle full of wine, and the other with his bottle; and they made the king sick;" and to this there is an exact parallel in Hab. ii. 15, "Woe unto him that giveth his neighbour drink, that puttest thy bottle to him, and makest him drunken also." In the second clause the expression, "drawing out the hand," is borrowed from drunken carousals, in which the hand is stretched out in asking, receiving, and handing the goblets; or, more simply, according to Pusey, who says, "Men in drink reach out their hands to any whom they meet, in token of their sottish would-be friendliness."

Ver. 6.—This verse, Wünsche thinks, is probably the most difficult in the whole book. 1. The translation of the first clause in the Authorized Version is susceptible of a more literal and improved rendering. (1) "For they bring near as an oven their heart, whilst they lie in wait;" that is, they approach the king with loyalty on their lips, but hatred in their heart. Their heart (which is the fact) is heated with evil passion, as an oven (which is the figure) is heated for baking purposes; while they are secretly set for wickedness. (2) Wünsche, after enumerating a great variety of renderings and expositions, with none of which he is satisfied, gives the following: "For they press close together; like an oven is their heart in their artifice (cunning)." The meaning, according to the same author, is that all, scoffers and king alike, press near each other, being of one heart and disposition; cunning makes them one single society. (3) Keil translates more simply as follows: "For they have brought their heart into their ambush, as into the oven." In this rendering he combines the explanation of Ewald and Hitzig. 2. In the second clause which Keil translates in the same sense as (1) the Authorized Version, Wünsche (2) changes the common reading into אַפָּם, equivalent to אַפָּם, their anger, and translates accordingly, "All night their anger sleeps, in the morning it burns like flaming fire." That the reading here is somewhat doubtful may be inferred from the fact that the LXX. has Ἔφραιμ: while the Chaldee and Syriac *rugzehon*, their fury; still, as it is only a conjectural emendation, we prefer abiding by the ordinary reading and rendering, at least in this instance. The following explanation of the whole verse by Aben Ezra gives a consistent sense: "By בְּאֹרְבָם are meant their evil purposes, which they devise all night long. And their heart is like an oven, only with the difference that there the baker sleeps the whole night, and only in the morning kindles the oven; but their heart does not sleep at all, but devises evil the whole night." It is curious how Rashi and Kimchi, while giving in the main the same explanation with Aben Ezra, differ from him about the meaning of the sleeping. The former has the following brief comment: "Their baker lights the oven. After they have prepared their heart and thought out the consummation of their wickedness, how they could carry the same into effect, then their baker sleeps, that is, they sleep till morning; at the break of day, however, they burn like fire, until they have brought their wickedness fully to an end." Kimchi goes into the matter a little more fully, as is usual with him; he comments as follows: "The heart is the instrument of the thought, and the power that works therein is the baker by way of figure. And as the baker lights the oven at night, and in the morning finds that the pieces of wood have burnt out, and he baketh therein the bread, which is the chief end of the work of heating; and lo, the baker sleeps in the night after he has put the pieces of wood into the oven, because he has nothing more to do till the morning. Just so the baker in this figurative sense, which is the power of thought—he sleeps in the night; as if he said he lies there and rests, because the project comes not forth into execution until the morning; and the prophet calls him who thinks sleeping, because that there is no effort of the body in thought. In the morning he burneth, as if he said that they are in flame in the morning to execute the evil which they have devised at night."

Ver. 7.—1. "To call unto me (God)" is to cry to God for help and succour, to seek safety and deliverance with him. It is not the same with that other expression, viz.

"to call on the Name of Jehovah," which is rather to reverence and worship Jehovah. 2. The word דִּין is more poetic than שָׁפַט, though the meaning of both is "judging," the latter probably derived from שִׁפְט, to set, then to set right, defend. 3. Their not calling unto God is well explained by Kimchi as follows: "Also they (the people) had fallen by the hand of their enemies, the kings of the Gentiles; but, notwithstanding this, no one among them calls to me. They should have thought in their heart, There is no power in the hand of our king to help us out of our distress; we will turn to Jehovah, for he will be our Helper." This verse is not so difficult as the three preceding; we proceed, therefore, in regular order to the next.

Ver. 8.—**Ephraim, he hath mixed himself among the people; Ephraim is a cake not turned.** The people of the northern kingdom had fallen away from Jehovah, and mixed themselves with the heathen nationalities. They resembled a cake which, through neglect of turning, was burnt on the one side and raw on the other. The best commentary on the first clause of this verse is found in Ps. cvi. 35, 36, and 39; they "were mingled among the heathen, and learned their works. And they served their idols: which were a snare unto them. . . . Thus were they defiled with their own works, and went a-whoring with their own inventions." The second clause is well explained by Bishop Horsley as follows: "One thing on one side, another on the other; burnt to a coal at bottom, raw dough at the top. An apt image of a character that is all inconsistencies. Such were the ten tribes of the prophet's day; worshippers of Jehovah in profession, but adopting all the idolatries of the neighbouring nations, in addition to their own semi-idolatry of the calves." Similarly, the Geneva Bible has, "Baked on one side and raw on the other, he is neither through hot nor through cold, but partly a Jew and partly a Gentile." Jehovah had chosen Israel out of the nations of the earth, and given them a special constitution. The object of this segregation was that Israel should be a peculiar people and a holy nation. Thus distinguished, they were to dwell alone; but, ungrateful for this high distinction, and unmindful of their high destiny, they mingled with the nations, learned their heathenish ways, and worshipped their hatefnl idols. Thus they forfeited their theocratic pre-eminence. While it was their privilege as well as duty to follow the precepts of Jehovah, and serve him with undivided affection, they fell away from his service and adopted the idolatries and habits of the heathen; it was only a just retribution, therefore, when God gave them over into the hand of those heathen peoples to waste their resources and leave them shorn of their strength. The second clause is the counterpart of this; exactly like the peoples subsequently brought from Assyria, and planted in the lands of the dispossessed Israelites, they worshipped the Lord, but served their own gods—they were neither true worshippers of Jehovah nor out-and-out followers of Baal. In religion they were mongrels—inconsistent and worthless hybrids; they were, in fact, what Calvin in rather homely phrase says of them, "neither flesh nor fish." The comment of Kimchi is concise as it is clear: "The prophet means to say, He (Israel) mixes himself among the peoples; though God—blessed be he!—separated them from them, yet they mix themselves among them and do according to their works." His explanation of the second clause is not so satisfactory when he says, "As a cake which is baked upon the coals; if they do not turn it, it is burnt below and not baked above, so is the counsel that is not right when they do not turn it from side to side (sense to sense) until they bring it upon their wheels (into action). So (thoughtless and hasty) is Ephraim in his determination to serve the calves and other gods without proving and choosing what is good." (2) Other explanations need only be referred to in order to be rejected, as (1) that of Rashi, who is followed by Grotius. He takes the verb in the future sense: "Ephraim in exile shall be mixed among the peoples." But it is obviously the present, not the future time, that is intended—the present sin, not its future punishment. There is (2) the explanation of Aben Ezra, followed by Eichhorn and Maurer, referring to the alliances or treaties which the northern kingdom formed with their neighbours to repel their enemies, and by which the resources of the land were consumed; while the second clause, (*a*) according to Aben Ezra, refers to the over-hastiness and thoughtlessness with which Israel proceeded in their resolutions; and, (*b*) according to Maurer, Jerome, and Theodoret, it signifies what is spoiled, ill-advised, and worthless.

Ver. 9.—**Strangers have devoured his strength, and he knoweth it not.** Israel's intercourse with other nationalities could not but issue in disaster; a specimen of that disaster is here given. As the Greeks called all who did not speak the Greek language, whether they were savage or civilized, barbarians, so Israel called all foreigners, whether near or far off, strangers. The foreign nations here meant were those with which Israel had entered into treaties or formed alliances, in contravention of the constitution which God had given them.

These nations, moreover, devoured their national resources by the imposition of taxes and hostile incursions; thus the King of Syria left "of the people to Jehoahaz only fifty horsemen, and ten chariots, and ten thousand footmen; for the King of Syria had destroyed them, and had made them like the dust by threshing;" again, when "Pul, the King of Assyria, came against the land," we read that Menahem gave Pul a thousand talents of silver, that his hand might be with him to confirm the kingdom in his hand. And Menahem exacted the money of Israel, even of all the mighty men of wealth, of each man fifty shekels of silver, to give to the King of Assyria;" then, "in the days of Pekah King of Israel came Tiglath-pileser King of Assyria, and took Ijon, and Abel-beth-maachah, and Janoah, and Kedesh, and Hazor, and Gilead, and Galilee, all the land of Naphtali, and carried them captive to Assyria." The *strength* here mentioned includes all those things which constitute the wealth and well-being of a country, the produce of the soil and the riches of its inhabitants. Thus Aben Ezra rightly explains this clause, referring it to "the tribute which the Israelites gave to Assyria and Egypt, as is written in the Book of Kings." **Yea, grey hairs are here and there** (margin, *sprinkled*) **upon him.** What from foreign foes and internal feuds, the body politic was manifesting unmistakable symptoms of decay and decrepitude and approaching dissolution, just as grey hairs on the human body give indication of the advance of old age, with its decay of strength and nearness to the tomb. "The course of nature," says Aben Ezra, "has sprinkled grey hairs upon him, just as grey hair comes on men in consequence of the course of nature;" this corresponds to the sentiment of the preceding clause, for, according to the commentator just named, "the grey hair denotes that their power is weakened and their possession perished." **Yet he knoweth not** is parallel to "And he knoweth (it) not," and repeats the same sentiment, of course with emphasis. Of what was Israel thus ignorant? Not, surely, of the declining state of the national strength and the decay of the national importance. After so many drains upon their resources and the unsatisfactory position of their foreign relations, they could not shut their eyes upon the steadily and even rapidly approaching decadence. But though they could not pretend ignorance of the fact, they remained in ignorance of the cause, its consequence, and the cure. Notwithstanding the already exhausted condition of their country, and the process of exhaustion still going on, they overlooked the lamentable cause of all, which was their sin, national and individual, in departing from the Lord; and at the same time the dangerous consequences that were neither remote nor capable of being staved off; as also the only possible cure to be found in direct and immediate return and application to that God from whom they had so revolted. The "it" supplied in the Authorized Version (1) had better be omitted; (2) the construction adopted by Rashi and others, who make the first part of each clause the object of the second, is erroneous, as we have shown in the preceding observations. "They took it not to heart that the kings of Syria consumed them in the days of Jehoahaz" is the exposition of Rashi just referred to; but that of Kimchi favours the first and correct construction, as may be inferred from the words, "And he (Israel) knows not that on account of his iniquity all this has come upon him, and yet he turns not from his wickedness."

Ver. 10.—**And the pride of Israel testifieth to his face: and they do not return to the Lord their God, nor seek him for all this** (*amid all this*). If with Keil and others (1) we understand "the pride of Israel" to mean Jehovah the glory of Israel, and take the verb in the sense of "testify," the meaning will be that Jehovah bore witness to the face of Israel by the weakening and wasting of their kingdom, as portrayed in the preceding verse. We prefer (2) to understand "the pride of Israel" in the sense of "the haughtiness" of Israel, and the verb in the sense of "being humbled," as at ch. v. 5. The real meaning, then, is expressed in the following rendering: *And the haughtiness of Israel shall be humbled to his face.* This humiliation is the effect of the wasting mentioned in the preceding verse; while the evidence of their humiliation is specified in the succeeding verse by their resorting to Egypt and repairing to Assyria from a consciousness of their helplessness. This rendering is countenanced by the LXX., both here and at ch. v. 5; while Rashi says, "The verb ענה has the meaning of 'humiliation.'" *For all this.* This emphasizes the obstinate blindness and perverseness of Ephraim, when, amid all the calamities and miseries of the kingdom both within and without, they turned not to Jehovah to solicit help and deliverance, but concluded treaties or made alliances with foreign nations in hope of being lifted up out of their national impotence. On this Aben Ezra makes the judicious remark: "They turned not to Jehovah as paupers who have nothing more to give foreign nations that they may help them."

Ver. 11.—**Ephraim also is like a silly dove without heart.** The silliness of the dove, with which the stupidity of Ephraim is compared, is not manifested by its missing

its nest and resting-place, and then helplessly fluttering about, according to Ewald; nor by its falling into the net of the bird-catcher in its effort to escape from the hawk, according to Hitzig; nor by its neither grieving nor searching for its young when it is robbed of them, according to Jerome; nor by its becoming dejected or devoid of consideration when it has lost its young, according to the Targum; but by its flying right into the net of the bird-catcher, without suspecting or observing it, in its search for food, according to Rosenmüller. Thus Kimchi explains it: "The prophet compares Ephraim to a dove which gets caught in a net owing to its simplicity, because it has no sense to perceive that, when it goes to gather grains of corn, a net is spread there to catch it. So Ephraim, when they went and asked help from Assyria or from Egypt, (did not perceive) that they went to their hurt, when they sought help from the foreign nations and not from God—blessed be he!—in whose hand all is. And he mentions the dove, though it is the manner of other birds, because the dove has no bitterness, as if it went in simplicity and without apprehension of the evil that would come upon it." **They call to Egypt, they go to Assyria.** The position of Palestine exposed its inhabitants to attacks from the two great rival powers of Egypt and Assyria, or Babylon. "It stood midway," says Stanley, "between the two great seats of ancient empire, Babylon and Egypt. It was on the high-road from one to the other of these mighty powers, the prize for which they contended, the battle-field on which they fought, the lofty bridge over which they ascended and descended respectively into the deep basins of the Nile and Euphrates." Accordingly the rulers of the people sought help, now from Egypt to strengthen them against the oppression of Assyria; at another time they sought to secure the support of Assyria. The most powerful enemy of the northern kingdom was Assyria, which distressed that kingdom more and more, until at last they made an end of it. "But," says Kimchi, "while they think to obtain help by them (Egypt and Assyria), they fall into the net of the Almighty—blessed be he!—and this is what he says (in the following verse), As they go I spread my net over them."

Ver. 12.—**When they shall go, I will spread my net over them.** Threats of punishment are contained in this and the following verses. He begins by the application of the comparison of Ephraim to a dove. Exactly as a dove in its silliness falls into the net set by the fowler, so Israel runs into the net of destruction in seeking help from Egypt and Assyria. The literal rendering is, *according as they go*, or, *whatsoever way they shall go*. God threatens to spread a net over them, from which there can be no escape. The chief aim of Hebrew sovereigns and rulers was to defend themselves from Egypt by the help of Assyria, or from Assyria by the aid of Egypt; in either case God threatens to spread over them the net of destruction as the bird-catcher. The application to one or other of these powers God forbade, but when they go to either for relief, the result is sure to prove fatal. The image of a net is frequent in Ezekiel; so in Job, he "hath compassed me with his net." **I will bring them down as the fowls of the heaven.** The comparison with birds and bird-catching continues. Though their sunward soaring flight be high as the eagle's, or rapid as the soft swift wing of the dove, they cannot outspeed or escape the hand of God, but shall be brought down to earth. Or the idea may be that, swiftly as a bird of prey swoops down out of the free air of heaven upon its quarry on the low-lying earth, Jehovah will bring Israel down out of the air of freedom into the net of captivity. Thus in Obad. 4 we read, "Though thou exalt thyself as the eagle, and though thou set thy nest among the stars, thence will I bring thee down, saith the Lord;" likewise in Amos ix. 2, "Though they dig into hell, thence shall mine hand take them; though they climb up to heaven, thence will I bring them down." **I will chastise them as their congregation hath heard.** The word אִיסָרֵם is an anomalous Hiph. instead of אֲיַסְּרֵם, that is, *yod* mobile instead of *yod* quiescent or diphthongal *zere*. The literal rendering makes the meaning more obvious; it is: "I will chastise them according to the tidings [or, 'announcement'] to their congregation." In the Law and by the prophets it was repeatedly declared that judgments would fall upon the disobedient and rebellious. As specimens of such announcements, we may refer to Lev. xxvi. 14—39; Deut. xxviii. 15—68; and Deut. xxxii. 15—35. The prophet now assures Ephraim that the judgments so frequently and forcibly announced to the congregation of the children of Israel in the wilderness, and repeated in subsequent times by the prophets, would be executed on the rebellious rigorously, and in exact accordance with those many previous denunciations. Kimchi has the following comment: "I will assemble them through the chastisement of the peoples, as I announced to their assembly in the wilderness words of chastisement, which are written in the Law, if they will not hearken to the words of the Law." The LXX. may have read צרתם, as their rendering is ἐν τῇ ἀκοῇ τῆς θλίψεως αὐτῶν, equivalent to "I will chasten them *with the rumour of* their (coming) *affliction*."

Ver. 13.—**Woe unto them! for they have fled from me: destruction** (margin, *spoil*) **unto them! because they have transgressed against me.** Of these exclamations, the first is general and indefinite, the second is specific and precise. The thought of coming chastisement calls forth the exclamation of woe; while the second exclamation fixes the character and explains the nature of that woe denounced. In neither case does יְהִי or יָבֹא need to be supplied; the opposite expression is שָׁלוֹם לָהֶם or בְּלֵכָה לָהֶם. In assigning the reason, there is a retrospective reference to the figures of the two immediately preceding verses. The word נָדַד with *min* is employed in relation to birds which, when scared from their nest, fly away. Kimchi thinks it applies to the abstention or withdrawal of the Israelites from Divine service in the national sanctuary in Jerusalem. His comment is: "They fly from me, from the service of the house of my sanctuary, to the service of the calves; and this is a breach of faith and defection from me." The LXX. translate the beginning of the second clause freely by δειλαῖοι εἰσιν, equivalent to "they are cowards;" and Jerome by "miseri (maticulose) erunt, et semper timentis ac formidantes." The cause assigned is their breaking covenant with God, which is expressed by פָּשַׁע, literally, "to break away from," "tear one's self loose from." **Though I have redeemed them.** This first part of the last clause is rendered (1) as a past by some, as Jerome, who refers it to the redemption from Egypt; thus also the Chaldee: "And I was their Deliverer." Rosenmüller approves of this, but, instead of restricting it to the deliverance from Egypt, includes their recent deliverance from the Syrians by Jeroboam II. It is (2) better rendered in a voluntative or optative sense: "I would (should like) to redeem them, but they speak lies against (or, concerning) me." The verb *'ephdem* cannot with any propriety be taken for a preterite. **Yet they have spoken lies against me;** rather, *but they on their part have spoken lies concerning me.* The prophet had already charged them with lying at ver. 3, and previously at ch. iv. 2; but their lies were not confined to their intercourse or dealings with their fellow-men; they spoke lies *against* or, as the preposition sometimes signifies, *concerning* God. The lies in question included, no doubt, a denial of his essential Deity or sole Divinity; of his power or willingness either to protect or punish. Or they might consist in their falsehood in drawing near to God with their lips without either true faith or real affection in their hearts; some were directly opposed to the claims of Jehovah, some insincere in his service, and others turned aside to the idolatry of the calves,—all, with probably some honourable exceptions, had proved false to his covenant with Israel. The last clause has been taken (3) independently by Ewald, without any considerable alteration of the sense: "*I*, for my part, would redeem them, but they, on their side, speak lies against me." Other acceptations, (*a*) interrogative and (*b*) conditional, evidently mistake the sense. The whole clause is correctly explained by Kimchi thus: "It was in my heart to redeem them out of their distress; but they speak lies against me, while they say that I know nothing nor exercise any providential care over their actions, whether their actions are good or bad. Therefore I have withdrawn my providential oversight, and have hidden my face from them, and they shall be consumed."

Ver. 14.—**And they have not cried unto me with their heart, when they howled upon their beds.** This clause may be more correctly rendered, *They did not cry to me in their heart, but howl upon their beds.* Their falsehood manifested itself in works as well as words; a practical example is here given. They did not, in reality, seek help from God; if they sought at all, it was insincerely. They cried to God, but that cry did not proceed from their heart. They gave vent to their feelings of distress by howlings upon their beds; but those howlings were the expression of unbelief and despair, not by any means evidences of faith. "They do not cry to me," says Aben Ezra, "as the sick man cries to the physician." The comment of Kimchi is still fuller and more explicit: "They have not cried to me in their heart, because of their notion that I do not see their cry nor know what is good or bad for them; but they howl upon their beds, *i.e.* when they are upon their bed and when they think of that misfortune which is coming upon them. They howl and weep because of their evil case, and do not think that the evil falls on them from me, because they have broken faith with me." The form of יְיֵלִילוּ is correctly explained by Gesenius as future Hiph. with preformative put before the third person, the *yod* of the simple form being superficially taken to belong to the stem. His derivation from אָל, God, as if a cry to him for help, is incorrect; it is really an onomatopoetic word. **They assemble themselves for corn and wine,** and **they rebel against me.** What this (1) assembling of themselves was does not clearly appear; whether it was in the market-place or elsewhere to purchase corn in time of famine, as some think; or in idol-temples to propitiate their deities, like the Roman *supplicatio* or *lectiosternium*, as others suppose; or for the performance of some extra rite of

worship to Jehovah; or for the purpose of plunder in a season of scarcity; or generally their assembling in knots and crowds to discuss anxiously and lament despairingly the distressed state of the country;—their chief design and highest aim being a good supply of corn and wine, that is, the supply of mere bodily wants. (2) The LXX. seem to have read יִתְגֹּדָדוּ, as their rendering is κατετεμνόντο, equivalent to "they cut themselves," or "pined for corn and wine;" corresponding to which rendering is Cyril's exposition: "As enthusiasts and fanatics making incisions with steel in their breasts and both hands, and absurdly all but shedding in sacrifice their own blood, perhaps to graven images." (3) Jerome, taking the verb from גָּרַר, to ruminate, translates accordingly: "super triticum et vinum ruminabant." (4) The Syriac, tracing it to גּוֹר, to be afraid, translates: "They feared (or, were fearfully anxious) about corn and wine." The common reading and rendering are clearly preferable; Kimchi's exposition is in harmony therewith: "When corn or new wine comes into the city for sale, they all assemble at (or, round) it on account of the famine which is in the city; and yet they fall away from me." The construction of the last clause is pregnant, that is (1) "they turn aside (and turn) against me." Here, again (2) the LXX. seem to have read יִסָּרוּ, to which their translation, ἐπαιδεύθησαν ἐν ἐμοί, equivalent to "they were instructed by me," corresponds.

Ver. 15.—**Though I have bound** (margin, *chastened*) **and strengthened their arms, yet do they imagine mischief against me.** The first clause of this verse is more accurately translated as follows: *And yet I have instructed, have strengthened their arms.* Here we have another instance of God's goodness and Israel's ingratitude. He had done much for them, and would fain have done more; and yet the return they made was devising mischief against him. The arms are the seat and symbol of strength, as the hands and fingers symbolize skill; thus, in reference to the latter the psalmist says, "Blessed be the Lord my Strength, which teacheth my hands to war, and my fingers to fight;" and with regard to the former he says, "He teacheth my hands to war, so that a bow of steel is broken by mine arms." Two benefits are here included in the prophet's enumeration. He instructed the arms, by which is meant that he showed them how and where to get strength. But this was not all; he not only directed to the source, and taught the secret of acquiring strength, he actually supplied strength, thereby giving them power to contend against and conquer their enemies. At a time when "there was not any shut up, nor any left [that is, 'neither bond nor free'] nor helper for Israel . . . the Lord . . . saved them by the hand of Jeroboam the son of Joash." Notwithstanding all this, they (1) acted the part of apostates and rebels against him; they devised mischief against him by their idolatry which denied him the Godhead glory which was his due, and by their rebellion which aimed at depriving him of his kingly power and dignity. The reference of the last clause, (2) according to Ewald, is to the treaties which Israel entered into with Assyria and Egypt for safety and defence; and (3) according to Kimchi, to Israel's false representations of the government and providence of Jehovah: "For they say the good or evil does not come to them from me, but is purely accidental." With respect to אֹסֶר, it must be borne in mind that, like יסר, it has two meanings, viz. the chastisement of punishment (κόλασις) and the chastisement of love (παιδεία).

Ver. 16.—**They return, but not to the Most High.** This verse is closely connected in sense with the preceding. Their God-defying attitude, as described in ver. 15, is represented in ver. 16 allegorically as a deceitful bow, which fails to send the arrow to the mark; also their unsuccess is represented as exposing them to the derision of Egypt; while the princes who spake so exceeding proudly, and who instigated their ungodliness and consequent wretchedness, would be slain with the sword. This is the drift of the whole verse; its details, however, demand more particular consideration. 1. The word עַל is by some identified in meaning with (1) the adjective עֶלְיוֹן, equivalent to "the Most High;" by others (2) it is taken adverbially, and translated "upwards." (3) The Septuagint does not express it, translating ἀπεστράφησαν εἰς οὐθέν, "They turned aside to that which is not [literally, 'nothing']." (4) Jerome translates it as if עֹל, were equivalent to "yoke:" "They returned that they might be without a yoke." Their return, according to Jerome, would be to their pristine condition before the call of Abram, like the other nations, without yoke or knowledge of law. 2. The return spoken of implies that there were junctures at which they seemed disposed to return to religiousness, but ere long they again relapsed into idolatry. They disappointed the high hopes raised, and missed their own high destiny, and thus they resembled a bow, of which the string, losing its elasticity, could not propel the arrow to the object aimed at. Appearing to return to the worship of Jehovah, they turned aside to an idol. Thus in Ps. lxxviii. 57, they "turned back and dealt unfaithfully like their fathers: they were turned aside like a deceitful bow."

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—7.—*Crimes charged on Israel; people and princes.* It was a time of great corruption and of atrocious crimes. Nor were those crimes committed only by persons "of the baser sort;" people and princes alike, rulers and ruled, had their share in them; the country and the capital, Ephraim and Samaria; the chief tribe and the chief city, with the common people as well as *élite*, in the former, and members of the court in the latter. All classes contributed their portion to the national sins, and sins of almost all classes were freely indulged in.

I. THE CHARACTER OF SIN AS A DISEASE. Sin is represented in Scripture as a disease—an all-pervading disease; it is as universal as the race, for all have sinned; it is an all-embracing disease, for it extends to the faculties and feelings of the soul, and employs as its instruments all the members of the body. It infects whole peoples as well as individual persons. The description which Isaiah gives of its widespread ravages applies to the body politic as well as to the body human: "The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrefying sores." It is thus a loathsome disease, a dangerous disease, a deadly disease; and, unless arrested in time, it is a fearfully fatal disease. The Apostle James gives us the genesis and development of this disease: "When lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death;" and the symbol of this spiritual malady is leprosy—one of the most frightful scourges of humanity.

II. THE MEANS OF HEALING EMPLOYED. The disease is so desperate that God alone can cure it. 1. If there is balm in Gilead and a physician there, God himself is that Physician, and a Physician who not only supplies the balm but applies it; he has provided the remedy and prescribed the way in which it is made available. Thus the Prophet Jeremiah prays, "Heal me, O Lord, and I shall be healed; save me, and I shall be saved: for thou art my Praise." To a people as well as a person laden with sin, God promises relief when it is earnestly sought and properly applied for; thus we read in 2 Chron. vii. 13, 14, "If I shut up heaven that there be no rain, or if I command the locusts to devour the land, or if I send pestilence among my people; if my people, which are called by my Name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land." If, then, sin-sick souls are not healed, it is not that God is either unwilling or unable to heal them. When Christ would have gathered the people of Palestine, or the inhabitants of its principal city, with all the tenderness and all the carefulness that the parent bird exercises in gathering its brood under its outspread wings, they would not. So is it still; sinners' condemnation is self-procured as well as justly deserved, while the salvation of the righteous is only of the Lord. 2. The means which God employs for healing, though various, are yet pretty much the same at all times. One of these means, and that most commonly employed, is the Word of his grace read, preached, or meditated on. In all ages the chief instrumentality for reclaiming men has been his message of mercy. Thus he dealt with his ancient people: "The Lord God of their fathers sent to them by his messengers, rising up betimes, and sending; because he had compassion on his people, and on his dwelling-place: but they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against his people, till there was no remedy" (margin, "healing"). Other means used for the same end are afflictions and adverse circumstances of whatever kind; cases of this sort, such as dearth, or famine, or pestilence, or impoverishment, or sore sickness and of long continuance, were frequent experiences of God's people in the past. But the purpose was benevolent and salutary: "By this therefore shall the iniquity of Jacob be purged; and this is all the fruit to take away his sin." It is so still; for while "no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby." Again, God sends intervals of prosperity with like design. This he did with Israel in the reign of Jeroboam II., in the days of Joash, and at other periods in their history, in order to wean them from sin and win them to himself. Another means of healing which God resorted to in the case of his ancient people was

the removal of ringleaders in iniquity and notable apostates, as when he made an end of the dynasty of Ahab. Not a few similar instances in subsequent and modern times might be pointed out.

III. THE EXTENT OF THE HURT DISCOVERED BY THE ATTEMPT AT HEALING. While God was manifesting his intentions of mercy towards Israel, the virulence of their disease became evident. God here, in condescension to our weakness, accommodates himself to the manner of men and adopts their mode of speech. As though he had not known the desperate state of matters before, he speaks of it being now discovered. It is by probing a wound that a surgeon discovers its depth, and whether it reaches some vital part; it is only by careful examination a physician detects the character of his patient's disease, and whether it is curable or likely to prove fatal. So with the good physician on closely examining the state of Israel; he found it even worse than had been supposed—much worse than it appeared to the superficial observer. Much, no doubt, must have appeared on the surface, and much lay hid in secret; it had been, in fact, "half revealed, half concealed." When the iniquity of Ephraim was fully discovered and the wickedness of Samaria clearly seen, it proved incurable, so enormous was their guilt, so hardened were they in their transgressions, above all, so impenitent were they and so unwilling to be helped and healed. Their obduracy barred the door against the entrance of mercy, their refusal to part with their enormities checked the outgoings of the Divine goodness towards them. Nay more; as when a rock rises up in a river-bed, or the stream is narrowed by the encroaching banks, the water rushes with greater violence and is lashed into foam, so the very attempt to repress the sin of Israel rendered it more violent and outrageous. The rulers and those who occupied high places, as the inhabitants of the metropolis Samaria, and the people of the pre-eminent tribe of Ephraim, proved the most incorrigible of all. Among the vices of the time were falsehood and fraud, and the fraud was both private and public.

IV. THE SINS CHARGED AGAINST ISRAEL ARE COMMON TO THEM, WITH THE UNGODLY, AT ALL TIMES. This assertion is proved by the further enumeration of these sins by Hosea. There was also sinful security and senseless stupidity. 1. They did not confer with their own hearts in reference to their state in the sight of God, nor impress on themselves their responsibility to him. They were strangers to any right searching of heart, or any serious reflection on the issues of their conduct and conversation. It is thus with hundreds of our fellow-men; want of consideration has ruined thousands both for time and eternity; hence the earnest wish of the great lawgiver, "Oh that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end!" Hence, too, the solemn command of "the Lord of hosts; Consider your ways." 2. The want of consideration or of communing with their own heart had special reference to the relationship in which they stood to God. They did not reflect that God remembered all their wickedness, consequently they did not recollect their liability to punishment for their wickedness at the hand of God, and therefore they did not feel any remorse on account of their wickedness when committed. Being spared after their wickedness, and not visited with immediate vengeance because of their wickedness, they thought themselves certain of impunity; enjoying a season of prosperity notwithstanding the greatness of their wickedness, they were emboldened in their wicked ways. 3. Atheism, theoretical or practical, or both, was at the root of the matter with them. The first article of belief embraces the existence of God, and the existence of God implies a Being of Divine attributes and infinite perfections; the second article includes a belief in God that he is a Recompenser of men's actions—a Rewarder of them that diligently seek him, and a Punisher of all workers of wickedness. They rejected, at least practically, these rudiments of the faith, these primary articles of belief; "as if God could not see their wickedness, though he is all eye; and did not heed it, though his name is Jealous; or had forgotten it, though he is an eternal mind that can never be unmindful; or would not reckon for it, though he is the Judge of heaven and earth. This is the sinner's atheism; as good say there is no God, as say he is either ignorant or forgetful; none that judgeth in the earth, as say he remembers not the things he is to give judgment upon; it is a high affront they put upon God, it is a damning cheat they put upon themselves, when they say, The Lord shall not see" nor remember. 4. The eyes of such shall be opened one day. They shall wake up out of their day-dream, and their delusion shall vanish when their doings shall beset them about, and

the sad effects thereof shall entangle them as in a net. They shall see their sins in the punishments they bring upon them; they shall feel them in the sorrows and sufferings that attend them; and they shall recognize that God had them before his face all the time, having knowledge of them when committed, taking notice of their demerit, and remembering them for the exercise of his retributive justice. Even men's secret sins God sets in the light (literally "luminary," *maor*) of his countenance; the fire-flashing eye of the Omniscient penetrates the deep recesses of the human heart, and brings forth its secret workings into the sight of the sun and the broad light of day.

V. OBSEQUIOUSNESS TO RULERS IN THEIR SINFUL COMMANDS OR COURSES IS EXTREMELY PERNICIOUS. It may please ungodly sovereigns or civil rulers to find subjects so pliable as at once to fall in with their wicked works and ways; or to be flattered by them; or to hear the upright who oppose their vileness slandered; or to listen to the lies by which the unscrupulous seek to ingratiate themselves; but such pandering must prove pitiful and profitless work for both the persons who indulge in it and the princes who encourage it. The former have often realized, though not perhaps to the same extent, the bitter experience of the great cardinal when he said—

> "Oh, how wretched
> Is that poor man that hangs on princes' favours!
> There is, betwixt that smile we would aspire to,
> That sweet aspect of princes, and their ruin,
> More pangs and fears than wars or women have;
> And when he falls, he falls like Lucifer,
> Never to hope again. . . .
> Had I but served my God with half the zeal
> I served my king, he would not in mine age
> Have left me naked to mine enemies."

There is an alternative interpretation of ver. 3 which presents the other side, and another aspect of the case, namely, when deceitful men wickedly and mendaciously impose on the credulity of princes by false professions of friendship at the very time they are plotting their downfall and planning their destruction. The ordinary acceptation, however, suits the sense of the passage very well. When people are so wicked as to conform to the idolatrous worship prescribed by godless rulers, or to imitate their impious and immoral practices, or to applaud their worthless favourites, or to calumniate those known to be obnoxious to them, those rulers are more than gratified and gladdened by such lying and baseness, they are encouraged and stimulated in their wrong-doing, while a terrible responsibility rests upon the head of both. Thus Herod, after harassing the Church and slaying James the brother of John, "because he saw it pleased the Jews, proceeded further to take Peter." People, again, when they see that their acts of wickedness please their rulers, or their accounts thereof amuse them, are emboldened to proceed yet further. Thus sovereigns and subjects encouraging each other in sin ultimately work each other's destruction. There is probably a reference to the people's facile complaisance with the idolatry of the calves legalized by Jeroboam, or of Baal by Ahab—a conscienceless acquiescence which in the end was fraught with the most baneful results to princes and people.

VI. THE COURSE OF SIN IS A DOWNWARD SLOPE. After reprehending the profligate pleasure which both princes and people took in sin, the prophet reproves the servile submission of the latter to idolatry, and the debaucheries of the former. The adultery which he proceeds to stigmatize may be understood literally as well as spiritually, the former being so frequent an accompaniment of the latter. In this case the heart is aptly compared to an oven, its lusts the fire with which it is heated; while Satan supplies by his temptations the fuel to the fire, and at the same time puts the leaven in the dough. Whether the baker, after kindling the fire, ceases from stirring it till morning, by which time the dough is leavened and ready for the oven, which he then raises to a greater heat; or whether he rests comparatively while still stoking during the interval that elapses from kneading the dough till it is leavened and ready for use; in either case there is a respite, not from the fire of lust abating or the fuel of temptation ceasing, but from want of opportunity or courage or ability. Soon, however, as the occasion presents itself, or opportunity is afforded, or means of gratification are available, or hope of

impunity is cherished, the fire of lust that seemed smouldering flames up with increased intensity; the wicked plot is executed; the covert passion breaks out into the overt act; the half-stifled concupiscence finds vent; the lustful, covetous, or ambitious project is accomplished.

VII. DRUNKENNESS IS A PREPARATION FOR OTHER WICKEDNESS. The reference to it in ver. 5 is interjected between the mention of adultery and other enormities, as if it were an incentive thereto. 1. The occasion on which the intemperance took place was a celebration day, whether the king's birthday, or the day of his accession to the throne, or his coronation day. As it was, it is; days of celebration, while not improper in themselves, may be turned into days of sinful carousal. Days of high festival that ought to be days of thanksgiving to God, of grateful praise and holy joy, are too often taken advantage of for purposes of intemperance, gluttony, or dissipation. Days that should be consecrated to religious exercises or real national rejoicing are too frequently desecrated by irreligious sensuality and anti-religious debauch. 2. According to the common rendering, the health of the king suffered; according to another rendering, which some prefer, the day was *begun* so that his honour was tarnished. According to either, his high dignity was levelled in the dust. It is bad enough and sad enough to see any man indulge in the sin of intemperance—a sin which deranges and disorders the body, damages the soul and its eternal interests, dishonours God, and degrades man below the beast that perisheth. But for a king who is appointed to govern others to lose the government of himself through such scandalous excess, is the extreme of vileness; hence the faithful admonition, "It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine." 3. While the duty of a king was neglected, the dignity of a king was sacrificed. Kimchi has the following judicious remark in reference to this matter: "The prophet says, What was the business of the princes with the king? There was no conversation about the might and conquest of the enemies and about the establishment of justice, as it becomes the king of a free nation, but their business consisted in eating and drinking until they made the king sick from the excessive drinking of wine." Even worse, if possible, was the fact of his debasing himself by companionship with profane scoffers. Rashi aptly observes, "The king withdraws his hand from the good and worthy in order to join in fellowship with scorners. The men that put the bottle to his mouth with professed friendliness were, as the event proved, plotting his ruin and preparing for his assassination."

VIII. THE SEEMING RESPITE FROM, AND REACTIONARY NATURE OF, SIN. The respite was not a real rest from sin; it was only the interval while the mischief was being premeditated, and the opportunity for putting it in practice waited for. 1. In the morning, at the first and earliest opportunity, soon as the plot was matured and the favourable moment for its execution arrived, the fire of passion or lust that had been burning slowly all the time broke out afresh and with greatly increased vigour. They made ready, applied, or, as Pusey says, "literally brought near their heart. Their heart was ever brought near to sin, even while the occasion was removed at a distance from it." While the leaven is commingling with the dough and the fuel combining with the fire, the baker may sleep, or seem to do so; so, while temptation, like fuel, is acting on the fire of lust within, and the evil suggestion of Satan is pervading the powers of the soul in which it has found lodgment, the tempter may appear to slumber. The work is going on internally, and once the occasion offers it shall be carried out externally in full force and certain effect. 2. A man throws a stone in the air and it comes back on his own head; men sin themselves or tempt others to sin, and the consequences recoil on themselves. The Israelitish kings, from the period of the disruption in the days of Jeroboam, corrupted the worship of God or acquiesced in that corruption, and induced the people to conform to that corruption and other sinful courses that followed in its wake; and all for their own political advantage and private selfish ends—to prevent, if possible, the return of power to the Davidic line, and the reunion of the ten tribes with the two. But the time of reaction arrived, and the retributive Nemesis began to work; the people who had been corrupted by their rulers now turned against their corrupters; disloyalty to God brought in its train disloyalty to man; kings and subordinate rulers perished in quick succession. And notwithstanding the times of anarchy, insecurity for life and property, and general upheaval of social order—amid all those scenes of terrible confusion, there was none among them to realize the fact that "for the transgression of a

land many are the princes thereof." Consequently there was none among them to call upon God in supplication for relief and preservation.

Vers. 8—11.—*The silly sinful pride and obduracy of Israel, in spite of many manifest tokens of decay, or their disastrous foreign policy.* The prophet had described the corruption; he now turns to the state of the country. From the iniquity of the princes he descends to the sin of the people. The figure of baking is still present to the prophet, as is evident from the metaphor of a cake.

I. THE INCONSISTENCY AND WORTHLESSNESS OF DIVIDED ALLEGIANCE. God had intended to separate Israel from the rest of the nations, and by prohibiting intermarriages to keep them distinct. 1. The great purpose of this separation was to prevent their associating with their heathen neighbours, and conforming to their idolatries and immoralities. Thus they were to conserve the doctrines of the Divine unity, the knowledge of the true God, and the purity of his worship. But by intercourse with their neighbours, and forming alliances now with one then with another, in order to secure their help—the help of one against another—they got mixed up with them, and became like a cake in which two ingredients at least, Judaism and Gentilism, were kneaded together. The consequence of such admixture, as the word (בלל) implies, was confusion. 2. But, in addition to baking the cake of such heterogeneous elements, there was the defective ovening, or rather imperfect hardening of the cake by fire, so that one side was burnt and blackened, the other doughy and damp—neither roast nor raw, and consequently useless. Thus Israel was often, as in the days of Ahab, halting between God and Baal; now zealous for the latter and indifferent to the former, or the converse; more commonly cold towards Jehovah and warm for Baal; frequently neither cold nor hot, but lukewarm. They blended Gentile idolatry with the worship of the true God; they joined in the calf-worship at Dan and Bethel, while they swore by the Name of Jehovah. It is thus also with many professing Christians: they have a name to live, but are dead; they have a form of godliness, but want the power; they are hypocritical professors, but are devoid of real godliness. Whatever outward services they perform, it is for parade or to be seen of men, while they are strangers to the practice of piety and exercise of charity. The Targum explains this of punishment rather than of position. "The house of Ephraim is like to a cake baked on coals, which before it is turned is eaten;" that is, they are suddenly destroyed by their enemies, who are like hungry men that, without waiting for the turning and proper baking of a cake, snatch it up, though only half baked, and speedily devour it.

II. TOKENS OF DIVINE DISPLEASURE. When God is displeased with a person or a people, one way in which he manifests such displeasure is by desertion. He leaves them in the hands of their enemies. On the contrary, when a man's ways please the Lord, he makes his enemies to be at peace with him. When Israel, in consequence of sin, was thus deserted, strangers devoured his strength, that is to say, his substance; they robbed him of his wealth, they wasted the fruits of his field, they dismantled his fortresses, they destroyed the flower of the population, and they imposed oppressive tribute. The strangers referred to included several nationalities. The Syrians had so weakened and distressed Israel in the reign of Jehoahaz that they had made them "like the dust by threshing." Then came the Assyrians under Pul in the days of Menahem King of Israel, and exacted a tribute of a thousand talents of silver, thus draining their resources and devouring their strength. Subsequently, Tiglath-pileser, monarch of Assyria, captured many of the Israelitish fortresses, and carried the inhabitants into captivity. By such exactions and devastations strangers exhausted the strength of Israel.

III. MARKS OF NATIONAL AND SPIRITUAL DECAY. Grey hairs, if plentiful, are a sign that old age has already arrived; grey hairs, when sprinkled here and there, are symptoms of its approach, and of life's decline. 1. Grey hairs had at this time appeared here and there in Israel, and thus proved the kingdom to be in a weak and declining state; they were not only symptomatic of the present, but prognostic of the future. They afforded proof plain and palpable of national declension at present existing through the depredations and exactions of the enemy; they also foreboded the melancholy fact that utter decay was near at hand. 2. But there is also spiritual decay, and the life of the soul is subject to it. How many professing Christians—members of the visible

Church—are in this sad condition of spiritual declension, and hardly conscious of it! Grey hairs are here and there upon them, and they know it not. The dwelling-place of God is not so lovely, nor the tabernacles of his grace so amiable, as they once were; there is not the same relish for the Word of God as there once was; prayer is not so fervent or so frequent as formerly; praises are not so hearty nor so heavenly as when the Christian life began;—all such circumstances give evidence that grey hairs are here and there upon persons in the condition indicated, whether they perceive them or not. But we cannot stay to dwell on the nature of spiritual decay and the marks thereof; we may, however, briefly sum them up. They are such as the following: diminished appreciation of the Divine Word, without self-application of it or growth in the knowledge of it; restraining prayer before God, without supplication for one's self on special occasions and under particular circumstances, and without earnest intercession for others; less love to Christ and less leaning on him; less hatred of sin and less esteem for the righteous. 3. It is of prime importance to ascertain the causes of decay. What caused the national decay of Israel? There was the prevalence of lust: "They are all adulterers, as an oven heated by the baker;" this was one of the causes of Israel's decline. Another cause was their intercourse with the ungodly: "Ephraim, he hath mixed himself among the people." These may be taken as specimens of the causes which brought about the national decline of Israel. When lust prevailed, or when they associated freely among the nations instead of dwelling alone, grey hairs appeared here and there upon them. So is it with spiritual decay in the case of Christians. When sensual lust, or lust for gold, or for pleasure, or for praise, overmasters a follower of Christ, decay has set in, grey hairs show themselves here and there upon him. Again, when worldly society is eagerly sought and keenly relished by Christians, forgetful that, like Israel of old, they are a peculiar people, as our Lord has said, "Ye are not of the world, as I am not of the world," then spiritual affections are decaying, grey hairs are here and there upon them. 4. The most surprising circumstance of all is the ignorance of those who are sufferers by this process of decay. Israel did not know because he did not wish to know, as if by ignoring it he could conceal it from himself or others. "He knoweth not," says Pusey, "the tokens of decay in himself, but hides them from himself; he knoweth not God, who is the Author of them; he knoweth not the cause of them, his sins; he knoweth not the end and object of them, his conversion; he knoweth not what, since he knoweth not any of these things, will be the issue of them, his destruction." Somehow thus it is with spiritual decay. Most persons dislike the idea of growing old, or even of being thought old. They care not to notice themselves, and they conceal from others as much as possible, the marks of age and the progress of decay. All the while grey hairs multiply, and old age creeps on apace, almost imperceptibly and without being observed, so that in a certain sense many persons become old without fully realizing the fact. Likewise in the decay of life in a Christian's soul, it goes on secretly, and little, if at all, noticed, like the silent advance of age with its gradually increasing decrepitude and decay; grey hairs are here and there upon him, and he knows it not. Let us beware of the insidious approach of spiritual decay, and be on our guard against it.

IV. PRIDE RAISES A GREAT BARRIER BETWEEN THE SOUL AND GOD. Notwithstanding Israel's decline, pride attended them still; it remained unsubdued; it prevented their return to God; it stood in the way of their seeking him. Or, if the other translation be preferred, and if it be granted that Israel's pride was humbled by the calamities that had come upon them, those calamities had not been sanctified, and so they returned not to nor sought the Lord. *For all this*, and in spite of all God's merciful dealings with them, they persisted in their impenitence and stood out against the Most High. God had shown them his loving-kindness, and again he had visited them with severe corrections; he had almost exhausted the resources of his grace; and yet they were in no way bettered, but rather grew worse. So is it with many. God's gracious dealings fail to draw them to God; his afflictive dispensations too often drive them away from God. And yet, when he sends affliction, it is a loud call on men, not only to seek relief from God, but also to seek God himself, his face and favour—free as well as that help which he alone can give; whereas obstinate impenitence frustrates the dispensations of Providence, and afflictions unsanctified in no way better men or improve their state.

V. FOLLY THE CAUSE OF MEN NEGLECTING THE RIGHT, AND RESORTING TO WRONG SOURCES OF SUCCOUR AND RELIEF. 1. Simplicity with godly sincerity, in accepting the Word of God and in obeying the will of God, is estimable and highly commendable; simplicity without a heart to love God, following his guidance, and delighting in his governance, is both wrong-headed and reprehensible. With regard to the former there is the promise, "The Lord preserveth the simple;" in relation to the latter the solemn question is asked, "How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity?" The union of simplicity or ingenuousness of purpose with understanding of heart is commended by the exhortation of our Lord, "Be ye wise as serpents, harmless [or, 'simple'] as doves." 2. The silliness of Israel was simplicity in its bad sense, as we learn from the *specimen* of their conduct which the prophet subjoins. The calamities which befell them were so many calls to them to return to God and seek his merciful interposition; but, instead of applying to God, they exhibited unspeakable folly in having recourse to one or other of the two great rival powers, Egypt and Assyria, of which the former was as unreliable as a broken reed, piercing the hand that leans on it, and the latter crushing and cruel as the king of foreign beasts in devouring his prey. "Egypt," it has been well said, "was a delusive promiser, not failing only, but piercing those who leant on it; Assyria was a powerful oppressor." 3. The miseries which Israel brought upon himself, and in which men frequently involve themselves by taking a similarly silly and simple course, were (1) unescapable, and such as they could by no possibility extricate themselves from, for the net of God would ensnare and envelop them. (2) They are unquestionably certain; for however high hopes men may entertain of their carnal confidences, to whatever height of temporary prosperity they may be elevated, God is sure to bring them down, and their fall will be disgraceful in proportion to the elevation they fancied themselves to have attained. (3) They will consist of sore chastisements, and all the sorer from being so well deserved. 4. The folly of such conduct in the face of warnings so great and manifold is as inexcusable as undeserving of pity. Israel sent southward to Egypt or travelled northward to Assyria in search of human helps, all the time turning their back on God; while to all the exhortations and remonstrances addressed to the congregation of Israel they refused to lend an ear. Line upon line they had been favoured with in the book of the Law—in the blessings on obedience and the curses on disobedience which Ebal and Gerizim respectively re-echoed—in the teachings of other prophets, in the appeals of Hosea himself; their heedlessness to all these disentitled them to sympathy from man or succour from God.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—7.—*Sins of court and country.* The reproofs contained in this chapter lay special emphasis upon the sins of the upper classes. But the prophet brands the whole nation also for its irreligion and immorality, and (in the second part of the chapter) for its political corruption.

I. THE EXPOSURE OF ISRAEL'S SIN. The wickedness of the people is portrayed, both as regards principles and individual acts. It may be described as: 1. *Cold-blooded in its principles.* (Vers. 1—3.) These showed themselves in habits of: (1) "*Falsehood.*" (Ver. 1.) There was "no truth in the land" (ch. iv. 1). The life of the nation had become a lie. Towards God there was chronic hypocrisy, and towards man habits of theft and robbery (ch. vi. 6—10). (2) *Sympathy with sin and crime.* (Ver. 3.) The ruling classes had become morally so corrupt that not only was their example always evil, but it also gave them positive satisfaction to take note of the immoralities of their subjects. Such satisfaction is itself the climax of human wickedness (Rom. i. 32). (3) *Spiritual inconsiderateness.* (Vers. 2, 7.) The root of all the evil was Israel's forgetfulness of God. They failed to remember his holiness, his justice, his omniscience. And, in ignoring these truths, they neglected also their own highest interests; for, from the lack of timely repentance, their sins "beset them about." This inconsiderateness is the cardinal error of all ungodly men. Multitudes, like Ephraim, have had their attention loudly called to spiritual things by the voice of temporal blessings, of gospel promises, and of providential chastisements; but they will not hear! But, again, Israel's sin was: 2. *Hot-blooded in its acts.* (Vers. 4—7.) Here the people are com-

pared three several times to a baker's "oven," the meaning being that in doing their deeds of guilt they were enthusiastic and passionate. They sinned hotly in the direction of: (1) *Idolatry.* (Ver. 4.) "They are all adulterers;" *i.e.* king, princes, and people alike were guilty of apostasy from Jehovah, and shared in the dissoluteness which was associated with the worship of the Phœnician deities. "They had violated their faith pledged to God, they gave themselves up to filthy superstitions, and they had wholly corrupted themselves; for faith and sincerity of heart constitute spiritual chastity before God" (Calvin). Their souls were inflamed with their idolatrous lusts like a burning oven. (2) *Debauchery.* (Ver. 5.) Both the king and the nobles followed habits of intemperance. At the banquet held on the royal birthday he and they "erred through strong drink," and scoffed together at the majesty of Jehovah. In our own country, too, how many there are who spend Christmas as if they were celebrating the birth of the devil rather than that of the Redeemer! (3) *Anarchy.* (Vers. 6, 7.) The fiery passions of the people caused the land to be long torn by disorder and revolution. Their rulers became fuel for the fire of their anger. "All their kings are fallen;"—Zechariah was murdered by Shallum, Shallum by Menahem, Pekahiah by Pekah, etc. Indeed, very few of the monarchs of the northern kingdom died in peace. During its entire course, the heat of political violence devoured like a furnace; and in the deepest national calamities none sought the aid of the Divine King.

II. WHAT LED TO THIS EXPOSURE. 1. *The encircling presence of their sins.* (Ver. 2.) The people sinned so deeply and so boldly that their enormities grew up around them like a rampart. Wherever they went their wickedness attended them, and became a swift witness against them. A man's iniquity wraps him round like a poisoned tunic. He is "holden with the cords of his sins" (Prov. v. 22); and it is his own hands, alas! that have forged and riveted his chains. Evil doings "beset" a man through the accusations of conscience, through the power of habit, through the action of natural law, and through the providence of God, which makes sure that his "sin will find him out." 2. *God's remembrance of their sins.* (Ver. 2.) The Lord must take notice of sin, for he must punish it. Although the sinful nation has forgotten this, the fact remains. "They are before my face;" *i.e.* ever present to me; I cannot avoid seeing them. "These words ['before me'] in the first commandment teach us that God, who seeth all things, taketh notice of, and is much displeased with, the sin of having any other god" (Westminster Assembly's Shorter Catechism). 3. *God's efforts to cure them of their sins.* (Ver. 1.) As the depth and seriousness of a wound are often not known until the surgeon probes it, and as the nature of a disease may not be fully understood for some time after the physician has begun to grapple with the case, so the depravity of Israel was adequately exposed only when God adopted strong measures in connection with it, by the chastisements of his providence, and the warning voices of his prophets. For the people refused to obey each summons to repentance; and, instead of placing confidence in Jehovah, "they called to Egypt, and went to Assyria" (ver. 11). So the very means of grace which God used in order to save Israel, became the occasion of showing how far the nation had already wandered from him, and even of inducing them to wander still further. And thus is it still, when God deals with men by his Word and Spirit. "By the Law is the knowledge of sin" (Rom. iii. 20). The primary work of the Holy Ghost is to "convince the world of sin" (John xvi. 8). By his common grace he gives, even to the unconverted, a partial view of their own unworthiness. And, in the case of all who enter upon the Christian life, he uses the disclosure of sin to lead the penitent to renounce all self-righteousness, and to fall at the feet of the Lord Jesus Christ for mercy.—C. J.

Ver. 8.—"*A cake not turned.*" There are many striking sayings in Hosea. This one, in particular, has a quiet touch of humour in it, as well as a severe reproof. There is nothing conventional in the style of the Bible writers. When they have anything practical to say, they do not wrap it up in verbiage. The Book of Hosea contains strains of poetry of surpassing splendour; yet here is an illustration from the cottager's kitchen. Let us look at this cake. It is burnt to a cinder on one side, and remains damp and doughy on the other. It is partly underdone, partly overdone; and thus, being neither dough nor bread, it is quite spoiled, and fit only to be thrown away. The metaphor reminds us of the English legend of good King Alfred, when a wanderer in

the forest of Selwood: the royal fugitive kept mending his bow and arrows, and forgot to turn the cakes which the neat-herd's wife had committed to his care. The first part of the verse helps us to understand the metaphor in its application to the kingdom of the ten tribes. Ephraim had "mixed himself among the people," *i.e.* entered into political alliances with the heathen round about, and conformed to their idolatrous usages. Yet he did not wish to break with Jehovah altogether; the Israelites continued to observe the sabbaths and the feast-days (ch. ii. 11). But the simile before us may be used with a still wider application. It describes—

I. THE NATURAL STATE OF MANKIND. Human nature since the Fall has been spoiled and worthless. There clings to it a radical defect Godward. Man is like a cake which has its warm side to the earth, and its cold side towards heaven. Some unrenewed men are very kindly in feeling and unselfish in action towards their fellow-men, but all the while their hearts remain cold and ungrateful towards God. We remember the young man who came to Christ, of whom it is said that "Jesus, beholding him, loved him" (Mark x. 21); he was amiable and truthful, yet what a fatal "lack" there was in his character! Such, however, is the natural condition of man everywhere—"a cake not turned."

> "Low, but majestic, though most strangely formed
> Of contradictions and antitheses,
> With head of gold and feet of miry clay,
> One half of dust, one half of deity;
> Touching the angel here, and there the brute.
> Here, 'thoughts that wander through eternity;'
> There, passions sounding all the sties of time;
> His rooted selfishness and lofty love,
> His little life, his princely intellect,
> His pure desires, his hateful selfishness,
> His deeds of darkness, and his thoughts of light."
>
> (Gilfillan.)

II. THE CHARACTER OF MANY WHO MAKE A PROFESSION OF RELIGION. 1. In this connection various ideas are suggested. 1. *Hypocrisy.* Ephraim boasted that he was a nation sacred to Jehovah all the while that he addicted himself to the idolatry of Baal and Ashtaroth. So, still, the man who sings at meeting and swears at market is a hypocrite. It is in vain to call out "Lord, Lord," if we do not the things which Christ says. Obedience in the letter is valueless, when divorced from obedience in the spirit. The bottles of profession are of no use if we do not pour into them the wine of principle. 2. *Inconsistency.* The people of the northern kingdom betrayed this in "mixing themselves" spiritually with the uncircumcised and unclean Gentiles. And, in our own day, how many there are whose fixed resolve seems to be to wear the Christian name, and at the same time take care not to part from the world! Their business habits assume the form of an ingeniously adjusted compromise between the service of God and that of mammon. And in social and domestic life they try to retain some relish for the pleasures of religion, even amidst the pursuit of amusements that are distinctively worldly. But it is a wretched thing to be "neither fish nor flesh" as regards character. It is impossible to "run both with the hare and the hounds." Spiritually, each of us is really either one thing or the other, and we should seem to be what we are. The Lord's command is, "Be not conformed to this world" (Rom. xii. 2); "Come out from among them, and be ye separate" (2 Cor. vi. 17). 3. *Half-heartedness.* There are many who name Christ's Name by partaking of the Lord's Supper, whose religion, as reflected in their daily lives, seems little more than nominal. You cannot say that they are wicked sinners, but neither dare you call them saints. They are too good to ban, and too bad to bless; too good for hell, but not nearly good enough for heaven. Their character is one of insipid negative respectability. Then there are those also who make only a half-and-half profession—who confess Christ's Name so far as to attend public worship, but stop short at the threshold of the guest-chamber, where the Lord's Supper is spread. Perhaps they think that only conscientious scruples keep them back; but God, who knows the heart, may judge that it is rather half-heartedness. For, if Christianity be true, it is a tremendous verity. And if it be right to

hear Christ's gospel preached, it is dutiful also to obey his other precepts; as, *e.g.*, to "do this in remembrance of him," and, "whatsoever we do, to do all in the Name of the Lord Jesus."

III. THE SPIRITUAL CONDITION OF MANY TRUE CHRISTIANS. Indeed, we might almost say, *of all*. For where is the believer whose spiritual condition satisfies his own enlightened convictions as to what he ought to be? Our personal deficiencies abound; and these are due either to our moral ignorance or to our moral supineness. 1. *Our Christian character lacks thoroughness.* The process of sanctification is designed to renew us "in the whole man," and yet we know that in fact a holy character is never perfected in this life. Every believer has within him a mixture of good and evil, and the purer he becomes he is the more ready to acknowledge the imperfection of his nature. Many true Christians, however, do not co-operate with God's Spirit so earnestly as they might, in striving to rid themselves of indwelling sin. They carry with them that Laodicean lukewarmness which the Lord abhors (Rev. iii. 16); their Christian character, in wanting thoroughness, is like "a cake not turned." 2. *It also lacks all-sidedness.* A man may be a true believer for a lifetime, and yet neglect entirely to bring some important departments of conduct into contact with the fire of Divine grace. He may try to regulate his domestic affairs by the law of Christ, and forget all the while to subject his business concerns to the same law. Some good men trust God absolutely about their souls, but only partially about their temporal affairs. Some are zealous workers in the cause of Christ, but would rather avoid putting money into his treasury; while others seldom refuse to give a subscription, but give it on the understanding that they are not to be expected to take any personal trouble. Now, if we distinguish in this way between one duty and another, both of which are equally binding, what are we but "a cake not turned"? To avoid such defects, we must enlighten conscience and strengthen its authority; and expose our whole nature, in spirit and soul and body, to the fire of gospel truth and grace.—C. J.

Ver. 9.—"*Grey hairs.*" In Scripture these are sometimes associated with sentiments of honour and reverence, for they suggest the thought of ripe wisdom and venerable piety (Lev. xix. 32; Prov. xvi. 31). Here, however, they are viewed simply as premonitions of old age, and of an old age, besides, that was premature. There is a lesson in our text, taking it even in its most literal sense. The believer's first grey hairs should remind him that the grace of God will enable him to "grow old gracefully." But the "grey hairs" spoken of in this verse are, of course, figurative. We may consider the text in connection with—

I. THE DECLINE OF NATIONS. Its primary reference is to "Ephraim," and to the symptoms which Ephraim showed of approaching national ruin. But the whole Bible, and especially the Old Testament, is full of teaching about the decadence of nations. The Hebrew prophets point to "the giant forms of empires on their way to ruin." Hence the priceless value of their writings to the Christian patriot, and to the devout student of history. What are some of the "grey hairs" which forebode national decay? 1. *Idolatry.* The northern kingdom had departed from God, first in worshipping Jeroboam's calves, and afterwards in serving the idol-deities of Phœnicia. And now, in his time of political need, Ephraim was looking for help to Egypt and Assyria (vers. 8—11), instead of returning to Jehovah as his Portion. This "grey hair" led quickly to the degradation and ruin of the kingdom. So, still, those nations that will not serve the Lord our God shall perish, and be utterly wasted. 2. *Immorality.* A people may increase greatly in civilization and intellectual culture, and yet be sprinkled all over with this "grey hair." Ancient Greece, when it was the land of art and poetry and philosophy, was morally all the while a mass of corruption. Rome, during the first century of the Christian era, was even worse. Juvenal calls it "a filthy sewer," and Seneca "a cesspool of iniquity." When immorality is rampant, it marks the commonwealth as moribund, and forebodes its "decline and fall." 3. *Vicious luxury.* It was a sign of decay when Ephraim began to "live deliciously," like ancient Tyre and Babylon (Amos vi. 3, *et seq.*). In the palmy days of the Roman commonwealth the Romans were brave, hardy, and victorious; but under the Empire the inner life of the people was gradually eaten away by the canker of luxury. Our own nation, and all the great Anglo-Saxon communities at the present time, need to guard against

this "grey hair." 4. *Oppression of the poor.* If a nation is to continue safe against dissolution, it must be governed by justice and humanity. The French revolution of 1789 was the result of the sinful waste of the Bourbon kings, and the misery of the French peasantry. But every nation is in danger which takes no care to "judge the poor of the people." This text reminds us, accordingly, of *our duty as citizens.* We must take order that our political representatives shall act in all public matters with justice and honour. Every Christian elector should use his ballot-paper under a sense of his responsibility to the Lord Jesus Christ, the King of nations; and he ought to do what he can otherwise to strengthen public opinion in the direction of wise political principles, and of a healthy condition of the national conscience.

II. THE DECLINE OF CHURCHES. For, alas! the marks of decay are often found there also. It was so with the seven Churches of proconsular Asia in the first century. In most of the epistles which the Lord addressed to them (Rev. ii., iii.) he points out the "grey hairs." How gradually, too, premonitions of spiritual decline appeared in the Church of Rome! The student of Church history sees at first only one or two "grey hairs" upon its head. We may indicate some of the signs of spiritual decay in Churches. 1. *Prevalence of unsound doctrine.* A Church, to be spiritually healthy, must be thoroughly evangelical. Its ministers must not regard themselves merely as the educators of some native goodness in man; and they must not preach as if the cross were only a myth, or the Holy Ghost a metaphor. The Church's best times are those in which it teaches most clearly and emphatically the three evangelical "R's," viz. ruin by the fall, redemption by the Lord Jesus, and regeneration by the Holy Spirit. 2. *Lack of missionary zeal.* This defect frequently accompanies unwholesome doctrine. The continued vigour of a Church depends upon its aggressiveness as a crusading institute in opposition to the sin and misery of the world. It is not enough that it provide carefully for its own edification, and know that its members are benefited by its services. It will decline in spiritual life if it forgets those around who perish "for lack of knowledge." 3. *Decadence of family religion.* In the Bible the true ecclesiastical unit is not the individual, but the family. Holy Scripture magnifies "the Church in the house." And experience shows that a congregation, to be strong and healthy, must be composed of well-trained, intelligent, and devout families. What both the Church and the nation greatly need to-day is godly households. The lack of family religion is a precursor of spiritual ruin. 4. *The spirit of worldliness.* The Lord Jesus detected this "grey hair" in the Church of Ephesus (Rev. ii. 4) and in the Church of Laodicea (Rev. iii. 15). And those of our own day are not untainted with the same spirit. It is a mark of decay when a denomination or congregation plumes itself upon its social importance; or when it makes an idol of decorum and good taste; or when it becomes formal in spirit, and discourages religious enthusiasm; or when it relaxes in faithfulness of discipline.

III. THE DECLINE OF SPIRITUAL LIFE IN THE SOUL. The figure appropriately describes the backslidings of true and professed believers. We shall mention one or two symptoms which even those who themselves manifest them are prone to fail to recognize. 1. *Habits of sin.* It may be that seeds of evil which we sowed long ago in our hearts are growing up now, and occasioning us spiritual failure and confusion. Little sins are like these "grey hairs;" *e.g.* the spirit of over-carefulness, the spirit of cavilling, the spirit of ostentation in religious duties, the unforgiving spirit, undue love of human praise, uncharitable judging, etc. 2. *Neglect of ordinances.* Christ has given us his Word, and has invited us to come to the throne of grace, and has spread for us the communion-table. But how gradually may we lose our relish for these means of grace, and how easily may the habit of neglecting them steal in upon our souls! 3. *Covetousness.* Some one has described the love of money as "the Church member's sin." Thomas Binney has said of it that it is "about the only great damning vice which can be indulged and clung to in connection with a recognized modern religious profession." There is no sin more insidious; it may occupy the heart and one "not know" it. 4. *Conformity to the world.* The daily circumstances of our lot constantly appeal to sense and self, and continually tempt us to give up trying to lead a spiritual, pure, and consecrated life. Even a true believer, before he knows it, may be "following afar off," and slowly abating his testimony as a nonconformist to the ungodly customs of the world.

CONCLUSION. We require frequently to "examine ourselves, whether we be in the faith." We ought constantly to hold up before our eyes the clear mirror of Holy Scripture, that we may detect the "grey hairs." We must also see reflected in it the glorious form of the Lord Jesus, the one Image of perfect manhood. There are no "grey hairs" upon him; "his locks are bushy, and black as a raven" (Cant. v. 11). We must seek grace to give ourselves constantly to the imitation of Christ.—C. J.

Vers. 11—16.—*Ephraim's folly and falseness.* In this passage the Lord threatens the northern kingdom for its unnatural and untheocratic policy of seeking support from the neighbouring heathen powers. These verses, therefore, deal primarily with the sins of the court and the government. The nation is to be punished for—

I. POLITICAL INFATUATION. (Vers. 11, 12.) The true resting-place of the commonwealth was in God; but Ephraim had wandered from him, and was fluttering about inconsiderately "like a silly senseless dove," now seeking help from Egypt and now from Assyria (2 Kings xvii. 3, 4). How prone are governments to lay stress upon statecraft and diplomacy, when they should be simply trusting in God and following righteousness! Dr. Pusey aptly refers in this connection to "the balance of power" which for so long a period controlled the policy of European statesmen. But this theory has of late years largely lost its influence, and given place to a policy of non-intervention, accompanied with an enormous increase of military armaments. The true balance of power will be established only when the nations everywhere acknowledge the kingship of Christ, and deal with one another on the principles of justice and amity which his Law enjoins. As Ephraim was caught in the "net" of his own foreign entanglements—these becoming his ruin—so will all those nations be that forget God, and make flesh their arm. In the case of Israel, "their congregation had heard" the threat of such chastisement from Moses and the prophets; while modern states "hear" it from the Word of God, and witness its execution in the retributions of history.

II. MORAL INGRATITUDE. (Vers. 13—15.) During the whole career of the Hebrew people God had lavished upon them his tender love and compassion; but they had requited him with the basest ingratitude. They had been unthankful and evil, although he was: 1. *Their Redeemer.* (Ver. 13.) Jehovah had delivered them from Egypt; he had protected them in the desert; he had raised up the judges to repel their foreign oppressors; he had "saved" the northern kingdom "by the hand of Jeroboam II., the son of Joash" (2 Kings xiv. 27). The Lord had constantly redeemed them; and he was prepared to do so again, if they would but turn to him in penitence and faith. But, alas! Ephraim persisted in his apostasy, and by his idol-worship and insincerity "made God a liar," and his own national life also a lie. 2. *The Giver of their harvests.* (Ver. 14.) In the time of prosperity Israel ignored Jehovah as the Author of fruitful seasons (ch. ii. 8). In the time of famine, however, the people in their distress wildly "howled" for bread; but if they cried to Jehovah at all, they did not do so "with their heart." 3. *Their Physician.* (Ver. 15.) Jehovah had acted towards Israel like a wise and skilful surgeon. He had seen their power enfeebled, like a relaxed or dislocated arm; and he had bound the arm, to make it once more strong and sinewy. Yet the first use to which Israel put the healed arm was to raise it to strike the Healer. What a warning have we here against the sin of unthankfulness! The Lord's reproach reminds us that apart from the grateful heart there can be no true piety. Gratitude is inseparable from faith in God. And the reflex influence of gratitude upon the soul is to inspire and ennoble it. "Oh that men would praise the Lord for his goodness!"

III. SPIRITUAL INSTABILITY. (Ver. 16.) The princes of Israel were constantly changing their policy; but they never, amidst all their changes, really turned towards God. The nation often professed to seek him, but their evil heart constantly drew them aside to idols. "They are like a deceitful bow," which has either been faultily constructed at the first, or the string of which has lost its elasticity, and which, therefore, disappoints the archer by sending forth the arrow wide of the mark. So Ephraim had given a wrong direction to his whole spiritual life. The nation had failed to accomplish the end for which God had chosen it. Its profession and its practice were at variance. Its arrows were not directed towards the Divine glory, and therefore it must presently "fall by the sword," and suffer the "derision" of Egypt, in whom it

had foolishly trusted. But does not this graphic metaphor, "a deceitful bow," describe the character of every unbeliever; and of every Christian, in so far as he trusts in his own strength? "In like way doth every sinner act, using against God, in the service of Satan, God's gifts of nature or of outward means, talents, or wealth, or strength, or beauty, or power of speech. God gave all for his own glory; and man turns all aside to do honour and service to Satan" (Pusey). We must be daily strengthened with the grace that is in Christ Jesus, if our bow is to "turn not back," but to "abide in strength."—C. J.

Ver. 2.—*An unconsidered truth.* Two facts are suggested here.

I. THAT GOD REMEMBERS THE WICKEDNESS OF MAN. "Wickedness" may exist in thought or intention (Ps. cxxxix. 23, 24), in word (Matt. xii. 36), in act (Ps. li. 4). 1. *This fact is proclaimed in God's Word.* (1) *Statements.* Jer. xiv. 10 proves God's watchfulness, Jer. xvii. 1 his recollection, Isa. xliv. 22 his record, etc. (2) *Examples* seen in the sin of Adam, the antediluvians, Joseph's brethren, Abraham in Egypt, David, etc. 2. *This fact is necessitated by the Divine nature.* God's omnipresence, omniscience, and immutability imply it. His absolute perfection makes impossible either defect of knowledge or decay of faculty. 3. *This fact is exemplified in the life of the Lord Jesus.* "He knew what was in man;" "He knew their thoughts," etc. Show how completely he detected the plots of his foes, knew the doubts of his disciples (John xx. 27), overheard the discussions of distant followers (Mark ix. 34), perceived the unexpressed longings of the unpardoned (Matt. ix. 2—7), and read the secrets of a sinful life (Luke vii. 37—50). 4. *This fact is a requisite to a just judgment.* See references to the coming judgment (Eccles. xii. 14; Jer. xxxii. 18, etc.). No fair decision could be given except by One who knew all our sins and struggles, and had forgotten none of their circumstances.

II. THAT MAN FORGETS THE SUPERVISION OF GOD. "They consider not," etc. It is not said man has no knowledge of the fact, but that he does not reflect upon it. To "consider in the heart" is to think over the truth seriously, closely, with sincere application to ourselves. If the charge were not true, we should no longer continue in sin; we should not attempt to extenuate it; we should mourn over it as an offence against God rather than as a cause of dishonour or loss to ourselves. Show the sinfulness of this. 1. *It is disobedience to the exhortation of God.* "Now therefore consider your ways;" "Oh that they were wise, that they would consider," etc.! 2. *It is rebellion against the rule of conscience.* Show what conscience is to the child at his first offence, and what it becomes through continued heedlessness. 3. *It is encouragement to secret sin.* "They say, Doth God know?" etc. Many sins are disguised from the world, unsuspected by our friends, from which, therefore, no regard for reputation will save us. The secret sin undermines the character. Open sin follows. Even if it does not, the judgment of God is against those that do such things. 4. *It is a hindrance to true repentance.* Men do not come to Christ until they feel their need of him, who "saves his people from their sins."—A. R.

Ver. 8.—*The sin of half-heartedness.* When the discipline which God sends to arouse men to thought fails of its purpose, it cannot but harm the nation or the individual receiving it. There is a light from heaven which ushers in the new day, and wakes the world to life and joy; but there is also a light from heaven, seen in the lightning-flash, which serves only to make the darkness visible; and this, not that, was the emblem of the light shed upon Israel by exhortation and discipline in Hosea's times. They were scorched, not blessed, because they refused to turn to the Lord. Subject—*The sin of half-heartedness* is set before us in the graphic imagery of our text.

I. THE CAUSE OF THIS SIN. Doubtless it varies according to the circumstances and the character of each one who is guilty of it. Sometimes the sin results from weakness of character and vacillation of purpose, and sometimes from want of earnest consideration. But the cause mentioned in our text is by no means infrequent. "Ephraim hath mixed himself among the people," *i.e.* the heathen. Israel was ordained to be a separated people (Exod. xxxiv. 12, 13; Lev. xx. 24). Balaam was shrewd enough to see that their strength lay in their separateness (Numb. xxiii. 9). He knew that the curse Balak sought against them would fall, if only they could be blended with the idolatrous

people around. Partakers in guilt, they would be partakers in punishment. To us the restrictions placed on their marriage and their commerce appear illiberal; but he who imposed them understood the weakness of this people, and estimated rightly the universality and intensity of idolatry. Results justified God's ordinance. Jeroboam's residence in Egypt brought calf-worship into Israel; Ahab's marriage with Jezebel introduced the rites of Baal and Ashtaroth. In Hosea's time the people were leavened by idolatry, and the allusion here is to this fact, and not to the political alliances formed with heathen empires, or to the conquest of parts of Israel's territory by idolatrous kings. To him loss of character was more ominous than loss of territory. Israel was no longer worth preserving. The object of their existence, to witness to the one living and true God, could no longer be attained. The salt had lost its savour, and was henceforth good for nothing. With their remembrance of Mosaic Law and their practice of idolatrous rites, they were like "a cake not turned"—irremediably spoilt. Show from this the importance of right companionship, especially to those whose characters are in the formative stage. Jealously as parents watch against the intrusion of one who is suffering from infectious disease, how much less watchful and firm are they against the introduction to their homes of those whose presence cannot fail to be a source of moral infection! When the result of such association is not seen in outward depravity, it is often seen in a wasted and frivolous life. The effect is gradually produced. The Rhine and the Arno flow side by side in the same channel without mingling their waters; but though the swifter stream keeps clear for a while, at last it is defiled; and it is the turbid stream that conquers. "Gather not my soul with sinners;" "He that walketh with wise men shall be wise, but a companion of fools shall be destroyed."

II. THE NATURE OF THIS SIN. The cake (*uggah*) was a thin circular pancake, exposed to the scorching heat of red-hot stones, and of necessity must be quickly turned, or it would be burnt on one side and moist dough on the other: spoilt, because not penetrated. A good figure to represent this people, who knew God's Law, remembered his worship, but were in practice idolaters. They refused to turn to God the other half, the practical part of their being. Give examples of those who have served God by halves; belonging neither to the world nor to the Church. In Elijah's days the people were impressed by the power of Jehovah, yet loved the pleasures of idolatry; hence the question of the prophet, "How long halt ye between two opinions?" Christ Jesus had around him those who admired his teaching; but they would not risk being put out of the synagogue, nor associate with illiterate peasants, nor follow One who would lead them to the cross; so to them he said, "Ye cannot serve God and mammon." See also the condition of Laodicea (Rev. iii. 14—18). Such a character is discoverable still, in those who join in worship, though in heart they neither pray nor praise; in those conscious of sin, yet not justified by faith; in those using the words of prayer, without any speaking to the Father who seeth in secret, etc. God seeks not for such. We are to be fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; whole-hearted in all we offer to him—not as Ephraim, the cake not turned.

III. THE EFFECTS OF THIS SIN. We are responsible for our unconscious influence over others. Our Lord condemned the scribes and Pharisees; "for," said he, "ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men; for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in." Better far would it have been had they been openly irreligious. Picture a man standing near the door of the ark—a wise and prominent man in antediluvian society, hesitating whether to believe Noah or the sceptics; while others wait to see his decision. How deep and loud their curses afterwards if he decided not to enter, or if he hesitated so long that it was too late for him and them! Apply this to modern life. A father has children whose characters are rapidly forming; and he is not in the kingdom, though not far from it. They naturally say, "We are waiting for father; he is a hearer of the truth; he knows more than we; he is an upright man; if it be right to be wholly on Christ's side he will be, so let us wait for his decision." For the sake of others let procrastination come to an end, and be it yours to say with Joshua, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

IV. THE PERILS OF THIS SIN. 1. *You strengthen temptations against yourself.* You say in effect to influences for evil, "Don't give me up yet, for I am not decided." A candidate, who in canvassing finds one voter who has not made up his mind, will call again with others who have more influence than himself, and the waverer is won over.

In the counsels of the wicked concerning one who is half-hearted it is said, "We will ask him again; his answer was not decided; he is not an avowedly Christian man; by a little pressure we can bring him over." How can such a man pray, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil"? 2. *You weaken powers for good, and lessen hope of the future.* There is a blossoming time for every tree, a flowering time for every corn-field, and then the future is decided, for fruit or for barrenness. Our Lord comes down to listen at every heart for prayer, to see the effect of all he has done for each. He looks and feels for fruit amidst the leaves of the fig tree, and finding none he finally utters the word, "Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever."—A. R.

Ver. 9.—*The unperceived signs of moral decay.* This chapter is occupied with a denunciation of the sins of the princes and chief men in Israel, who are designated (in ver. 1) by "Ephraim," the principal tribe, and "Samaria," the principal city. Such men are ever most condemned in Scripture, because they have (1) more opportunity of knowing God's will, and (2) more influence over others (see Matt. xi. 20—24). A godless lad who has been brought up under Christian influence, and has seen the Christian life represented in his home, is more deserving of condemnation than the waif thrown up by the sea of irreligious life, who has been unblessed by teaching and prayer. The man successful in business or scholarship, the attractive and popular visitor, the gifted writer, the eldest in a family, the leader in policy, etc., have heavier responsibilities than others because they have nobler powers. The sins condemned here were (1) drunkenness, which specially prevailed on the king's birthday (ver. 5) and at similar festivities; (2) passion for idolatry and its licentious rites, the heart of the people being like the oven heated hot, and needing only the stirring of opportunity to burst into flame (vers. 4, 6, 7); (3) refusal to believe in God's presence and watchfulness (ver. 2). These and other sins were the signs of moral decay, which were reflected in national disasters. Yet none of these were perceived by the infatuated people. (See Keil and Delitzsch in justification of the rendering "He knoweth it not" in both clauses.) Subject—*Unnoticed signs of moral decay.*

I. THAT MORAL DECAY HAS ASCERTAINABLE CAUSES. Exemplify from the sources of Israel's decadence. 1. *Want of consideration.* (Ver. 2; Isa. i. 3; Hag. i. 5.) Every faculty fails after disuse; *e.g.* the eyeless fishes of lakes in dark caverns. Muscular and mental development or decay, by exercise or inertness. He who *will* not think of God, at last *cannot* think of him. 2. *Association with evil.* (Ver. 8.) Show the effects of unconscious influence in the formation of character. They must be jealously watchful over themselves who are necessarily associated with the godless. The companionship of books equally important. Sensuous or sceptical literature may emasculate character. 3. *Forgetfulness of God.* All are prone to this. Material life becomes increasingly aggressive in thought. The hurry of business, the whirl of society, lessen the frequency and intensity of prayer. 4. *Self-indulgence.* Israel gave way to drunkenness and the licence of idolatry. It was the opportunity for gratifying the worst passions that made the worship of the groves so popular. Many begin by staining the imagination who end by defiling the life. Depict the ruin of the drunkard, who once perhaps was a leader in Christian and benevolent enterprise.

II. THAT MORAL DECAY HAS OBSERVABLE SYMPTOMS. "Strangers have devoured his strength." Egypt and Assyria had despoiled Israel, sometimes by exacting tribute, sometimes by violent attack (2 Kings xiii. 7; xvi. 9). Compare the condition of the Roman empire just before its ruin by the Goths. With Israel the losses were the direct result of leagues made, contrary to God's will, with idolatrous nations around; for they became thereby involved in their disputes and disasters. Still this was not perceived. These and other signs of wasting and decay were visible to the prophet, and seemed to him like grey hairs sprinkled here and there—the effects of declining age, the tokens of decay. Point out symptoms of spiritual decline in the soul. 1. *Want of appetite for what is good.* The house of God neglected, the old service forsaken, the infrequency and unreality of prayer, etc. 2. *Want of sensibility to what is evil.* Contentment with a lower standard for Christian life, flippancy in dealing with infidelity, indifference to acts and words which at one time would have raised a flush of shame, etc.

III. THAT MORAL DECAY HAS IRREVERSIBLE ISSUES. These grey hairs were the

precursors of death. Israel would never be restored. The life was lived, was nearly over, and without hope of resurrection. Christ Jesus speaks of a time of probation given now which will not be given hereafter. He will do all that can be done even for a fruitless fig tree, but at last must say, "Cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?"

IV. THAT MORAL DECAY MAKES IMPERCEPTIBLE ADVANCE. At first grey hairs are sprinkled here and there. How fast they multiply, though no one notices the change in each hair! When first noticed, an endeavour may be made by nostrums to disguise the fact; but the decay goes on. The march of old age, as he sprinkles his snows, is not really checked. If a man could persuade himself as well as others that he was still young, that would not prolong his life. But it is far easier to disguise from ourselves the signs of moral decay, and this has been done with fatal frequency. The old world, though often warned, "knew not till the flood came and swept them all away." Samson betrayed the source of his strength and lost it; but when he rose against his foes as aforetime, "he wist not that the Lord was departed from him." King Saul was robbed of his means of defence and refreshment, but he still slept on (1 Sam. xxvi.). So Israel shut its eyes to the loss of strength and hope. Beware lest character be like the cliff, secretly honeycombed by the sea, until in an unexpected moment it falls in irreparable ruin.

CONCLUSION. *Address the aged.* There is a natural decay, which may be the precursor of destruction or the promise of resurrection (1 Cor. xv.). 1. "*The hoary head is a crown of glory, if it be found in the way of righteousness.*" Eleazer said, "I will not do that which seems to be evil, lest I should spot my white head." 2. *The hoary head is a call to repentance, if it be found in the way of wickedness.* "I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God: wherefore turn yourselves, and live ye."—A. R.

Ver. 14.—*Useless prayers.* Two instances in Scripture of true repentance at the point of death. Manasseh in the Old Testament, the dying thief in the New Testament. These save from despair, yet are too few to allow any to presume on them. Four characteristics of the useless prayer mentioned in the text.

I. IT IS A DEFERRED PRAYER. "On their beds." In health and strength the idols had been worshipped. Now death seemed near, the Name of Jehovah was on the trembling lip. Mercifully, delay is not of *itself* sufficient to make a cry to God useless. David lingered in sin till Nathan rebuked him. The prodigal dwelt in the far country till all was gone, etc. Still it is perilous to defer any known duty, most of all that of coming to God.

II. IT IS AN INSINCERE PRAYER. "They have not cried unto me with their heart." This fact would make any prayer useless. "God is a Spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." Compare the prayers of the Pharisees in the temple or the street with those of publicans and sinners (Matt. vi. 7; xv. 8, etc.).

III. IT IS A DESPERATE PRAYER. "They howled upon their beds." The agony of pain, or the dread of meeting God, not the consciousness of sin, caused this. Repentance is not the dread of sin's punishment, but the turning from sin because of its sinfulness. Contrast the cry of the condemned criminal with the prayer of the dying Christian. Depict, for example, the death of Stephen, and the utterance of Paul about his departure (2 Tim. vi. 6).

IV. IT IS UNAVAILING. The unreality of the prayer was seen in the subsequent conduct of those who offered it. This is described in the next clause. No sooner were they restored to health than "they assembled for corn and wine," *i.e.* went back to the old revelries and forgetfulness. How many have dealt thus with God! Brought back from the gates of death, the spared life is no more sober, devout, and holy than the past. Let us beware lest we harden ourselves through the *deceitfulness* of sin. If, of those restored, so small a proportion prove that the prayers and vows in illness were genuine and availing, how can we indulge much hope of those whose future is not in time but in eternity?

In view of this solemn subject: 1. *Urge Christians to speak faithfully to sinners in the day of health.* 2. *Urge sinners to come humbly to the Saviour in the day of hope.*—A. R.

Ver. 2.—*God's memory of man's wickedness.* There is something to all unreconciled and unpardoned sinners very terrible in this assertion, "I remember all their wickedness."

I. GOD REMEMBERS MAN'S WICKEDNESS IN THE EXERCISE OF HIS OMNISCIENCE. "All" here comprehends every kind of wickedness, in thought, word, and deed; every instance of wickedness, whether noted or not by fellow-men; the aggravations of wickedness which has been more serious because of the light and privileges notwithstanding which the sinner has transgressed.

II. GOD REMEMBERS MAN'S WICKEDNESS IN HIS CHARACTER OF A PERFECTLY HOLY BEING. It is not simply a matter of knowledge; the evil he knows God hates. Every such recollection is accompanied with displeasure. "He is angry with the wicked every day;" and whilst men, through familiarity with human sins, often become either indifferent or cynical, the Most Holy retains his disapproval and his loathing undiminished.

III. GOD REMEMBERS MAN'S WICKEDNESS IN HIS CHARACTER OF A RIGHTEOUS JUDGE. The upright and pure man may view the prevalence of wickedness with revulsion and distress; but "vengeance belongeth unto God." As the sovereign Ruler of the universe, bound by his own nature to maintain his authority, and to do righteously as the Judge, the Lord exercises his judicial attributes and functions. And what he remembers he will one day bring forward, for the confusion of the impenitent.

IV. GOD HAS PROMISED THAT, IF THE SINNER WILL REPENT, HE WILL REMEMBER HIS SINS NO MORE. We need not trouble ourselves with the attempt to reconcile what may seem to us conflicting statements, which, however, are both necessary to set forth all the truth. Let the impenitent bear in mind the fact that the righteous God remembers all their iniquities; and let the penitent and believing hearers of the gospel rest assured that a merciful God will cast their sins behind his back, and sink them in the depths of the unfathomable sea of oblivion.—T.

Ver. 7.—*None calleth unto God.* The calamities and miseries which befell Israel were in themselves awful, but perhaps the most terrible circumstance connected with them was this: they failed to lead the people to a better mind, to true repentance, to sincere supplication unto God.

I. THE HAND THAT AFFLICTS ALONE CAN HEAL. Chastisement is necessary in the economy of Divine government; yet our heavenly Father chastens, not for his pleasure, but for our profit. He is more ready to cherish and to comfort than to smite. And when he has afflicted, it is vain to look elsewhere than to him for solace.

II. THE CALLOUSNESS OF SINNERS MAY PREVENT THEM FROM SEEKING DIVINE MERCY AND CONSOLATION. Surely the first thing for those to do who are smarting beneath the rod is to humble themselves beneath the mighty hand of God, to repent of sin, to entreat clemency, favour, forgiveness. But so hardening is the effect of sin, that there are many cases in which this is the last thing that occurs to the mind. It is an addition to the heinousness of sin, when the sinner refrains from bringing his transgression with penitence before the throne of him whom he has offended.

III. YET THERE IS NO RELIEF EXCEPT UPON THE CONDITION OF APPLICATION TO THE ALL-MERCIFUL. To call upon man is vain. To sink into apathy is to despair. Hope is in one direction only. Let the sinner call upon God, and God will hear, answer, and save.—T.

Ver. 10.—*They return not unto the Lord.* The life of man is a journey, and the sinner has taken the wrong road—the road which leads to destruction.

I. THE IMPORTANCE AND NECESSITY OF RETURNING UNTO THE LORD. The further the sinner proceeds the nearer he approaches final ruin, and the harder it is for him to reverse his steps.

II. THE METHOD OF RETURNING UNTO THE LORD. The sinner must change his view of God and his view of himself. He must repent of sin and believe the gospel.

III. THE ENCOURAGEMENT TO RETURN UNTO THE LORD. There are the express directions, and the faithful promises of Heaven.

IV. THE RESULTS OF RETURNING UNTO THE LORD. To return to God is to return to

holiness and happiness, to peace and hope. Truly to return to him is to remain for ever in his favour and his fellowship.—T.

Vers. 11, 12.—*The silly dove.* The folly of sin is a frequent topic with the inspired writers, and is urged upon the attention of some who may be more fearful of lacking wisdom than of grieving God. In this passage the prophet makes use of a homely and striking similitude with a view to impress upon the rebellious the vanity and simple credulity of their sinful conduct.

I. THE DOVE'S PERPLEXITY. Alarmed by a bird of prey hovering over her and ready to seize her, the simple dove is ready to rush into any danger. An emblem of Israel of old, placed between Assyria and Egypt, and, when alarmed by the threats of one power, ready to court the alliance of the other. And an emblem of foolish sinners, of all nations and of all times, whose only safety and whose only guidance is in God, but who are ever prone to look hither and thither, to human counsellors and to human helpers.

II. THE DOVE'S FLIGHT. As the simple dove, in her danger and perplexity, makes straight for the fowler's net, so Israel, seeking security by her fancied policy, which in reality was short-sighted and vain, again and again brought herself into national disaster and misery. "They said, We will ride upon horses." "Therefore," was the responsive prediction, "shall ye flee." Where is the foolish rebel against God who has not by his own unwise precipitation brought himself into ruin and calamity?

III. THE DOVE'S CAPTURE IN THE NET. The dove fails to escape, falls into the snare of the fowler, and perishes. Israel, however she might forget and forsake God, could not evade the penalties of disobedience; for she could not get beyond the range of the Divine government and judicial sway. "I," said Jehovah, "will chastise them, according to the announcement to their congregation." "Though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not go unpunished." Let none imagine that there is a possibility of eluding Divine justice.

APPLICATION. The way of wisdom is the way of safety; and "the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom." It is better to flee to the Lord as to a Tower of refuge, than to fall into the net of retribution.—T.

Ver. 14.—*Failure to cry unto the Lord.* As a child in trouble calls aloud upon his father for help, as a soldier in danger calls upon a comrade for succour, so sinful, feeble, helpless man calls upon his God for deliverance and consolation, and does not call in vain. The guilt and folly of Israel was great in sinning, but far greater in neglecting to call upon the Lord with the heart. It appears when it is considered that this duty was neglected—

I. ALTHOUGH CIRCUMSTANCES MIGHT HAVE IMPELLED TO SUCH AN INVOCATION. Many a time had Israel been afflicted, and her afflictions were intended in mercy to drive her to the God she had forsaken. No one of us has been without occasion, urgent and distressing occasion, to seek God. Providence has not left us without the inducement, furnished by great straits and sore needs, to seek the God of salvation.

II. ALTHOUGH NO OTHER REFUGE OR HELPER COULD BE FOUND. Israel was ever seeking safety by heathen alliances, by the policy of diplomacy, or by the might of arms. Yet events constantly taught the unwisdom of such recourse to human aid. It is well when the soul is led to exclaim, "Beside thee there is none else;" "To whom shall I go, but unto thee?"

III. ALTHOUGH ENCOURAGED BY THE CHARACTER AND THE PROMISES OF THE DIVINE HELPER. As in the history of Israel, so through all time, the great Ruler has revealed himself as the great Deliverer. To us as Christians this revelation is especially plain and effective; for in Jesus we see "the salvation of the Eternal." If it be hard to cry upon a God who is known to us only as a just and almighty Judge, surely it is not hard to call upon a God who has come to us in the person of his Son, full of "grace and truth."

IV. ALTHOUGH THE VANITY IS APPARENT OF CALLING UPON THE LORD ONLY WITH THE LIPS. We have only to consider our own spiritual nature, and to remember that God is a Spirit, in order to feel the absurdity and uselessness of offering to Heaven the homage of the lips, and withholding the reverence, the faith, the aspirations of the heart. Ye shall find the Lord, if *with all your heart* ye truly seek him.—T.

Vers. 2, 3.—*God's remembrance of sin.* "And they consider not in their hearts that I remember all their wickedness: now their own doings have beset them about; they are before my face. They make the king glad with their wickedness, and the princes with their lies." These words contain three facts.

I. That God REMEMBERS men's sins. "I remember all their wickedness." This is a *wonderful* fact. When we think of the infinite greatness of him to whom the universe is as nothing, we are struck at first with amazement that God remembers the sins of a creature so frail, so insignificant as man. Still, as we reflect, we soon get the conviction that there is nothing absurd, nothing unreasonable, in the fact. To the Infinite there is nothing great or small; to the Omniscient there is nothing unobserved; to the Holy there is nothing so distressing, so oppressive, as sin. Sin is no trifle in the eye of him whose glory is his holiness. This is not only a wonderful, but a *solemn* fact. God not only observes and knows my sins, but he remembers them—does not lose sight of one. They are in his memory. What a book is the memory of God! The whole history of the universe is there! Every sin that has ever been committed by any moral intelligence in the creation, however insignificant, has record there. "Thou art acquainted with all my ways; for there is not a word in my tongue, but thou, Lord, art acquainted with it altogether." "Doth not he see all my ways, and count all my steps?" "All things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do." "Hell is naked before him, and destruction hath no covering." "How much more then the hearts of the children of men!" How useless the attempt to dissemble our sins from him! How awful the revelations of the last day!

II. MEN DISREGARD God's remembrance of their sins. "They consider not in their hearts that I remember all their wickedness." "They say, The Lord shall not see, neither shall the God of Jacob regard it." Sinners, the world over, are indifferent to this fact. So far from considering that all their sins are in the memory of the holy and just One, they practically ignore his very existence. In their plans, engagements, and avocations they take no account of him. Why do they not consider? Is it because the thought strikes them as so manifestly improbable as not worthy of their attention? Assuredly not. They have only to reflect on this subject to see that it must be so. Why, then? 1. Because *other thoughts engross their minds*—thoughts of worldly wealth and power, thoughts of selfish gains and sensual pleasures. They are too full of vain and worldly thoughts to admit an idea so grand and solemn as this. 2. Because this thought, if it occurs to them for a moment, *is too painful to be entertained.* The corrupt nature revolts from it, expels it the moment it gains admission, and bolts every door against it, environs itself with associations that keep it far away in the distance. "It desires not a knowledge of it."

III. That men's disregard of God's remembrance of their sins LEADS THEM TO REVEL IN INIQUITY. "Now their own doings have beset them about; they are before my face." Here we have their sins: 1. In *general.* They are abundant and daring. Their sins encompass them on all sides, and they perpetrate them without shame under the very face of God himself; they give full play to all their passions, an unbridled licence to all their sinful impulses and lusts. 2. In *particular.* Some of their sins are specified here. "They make the king glad with their wickedness, and the princes with their lies." "It pleases them," says an old writer, "to see the people conform to their wicked laws and examples in their worship of their idols, and other instances of impiety and immorality, and to hear them flatter and applaud them in their wicked ways. When Herod saw that his wickedness pleased the people he proceeded further in it. Much more will the people do so when they see that it pleases the prince" (Acts xiii. 3). Particularly, they made them glad with *their lies*, with the lying praises with which they crowned the favourites of the prince, and the lying calumnies and censures with which they blackened those whom they knew the princes had a dislike to. Those who show themselves pleased with slanders and ill-natured stories shall never want those about them who fill their ears with stories. Prov. xxix. 12, "If a ruler hearken to lies, all his servants are wicked," and will make him glad with their lies.—D. T.

Vers. 8, 9.—*Sad aspects of character.* "Ephraim, he hath mixed himself among the people; Ephraim is a cake not turned. Strangers have devoured his strength, and he knoweth it not: yea, grey hairs are here and there upon him, yet he knoweth not."

The primary application of these words to Ephraim is obvious from the context, and from the history of Israel at the time. We shall use them as indicating certain bad aspects of human character.

I. WRONG COMPANIONSHIP. "Ephraim, he hath mixed himself among the people." The reference is here not to the punishment or dispersion of the Israelites among the nations, but to the state in which Israel was at the time. Heaven's plan was that the Hebrew people should separate from the nations, and be holy to him (Lev. xx. 24—26); to be as Balaam predicted, "a people dwelling alone" (Numb. xxiii. 9). But in opposition to this the ten tribes had mingled with the heathen, learned their works and served their idols. Now, what is a wrong mixing with the people? Not *intermixture in marriages.* It appears to us that the mingling of the different tribes of mankind in matrimonial alliances is, according to the plan of the Creator, highly promotive of the good of the entire race. Not *intercourse in business.* Such is the state of human society that good men are bound in worldly affairs to have dealings with the irreligious and depraved. Not *associating with them for spiritual usefulness.* Those who think that the saints of God should shut themselves up from the world, dwell in monasteries, and live as hermits, make a great mistake. The more Divine love and truth a man has in him, the more bound is he to be out in the world, and to let the light of his doctrines and his character flash widely and strongly upon the heart of his compeers. The man who has "mixed himself with others" does as did the ten tribes now; for worldly advantage and unholy gratifications make bad people companions. It is said that Pythagoras, before he admitted any one into his school, inquired who were his intimates, justly concluding that they who could choose immoral companions would not be much profited by his instructions.

II. MORAL WORTHLESSNESS. "Ephraim is a cake not turned." The Easterns bake their bread on the ground, covering it with embers, and turn it every ten minutes to bake it thoroughly without burning it (1 Kings xix. 6). Without the turning it would be charcoal on one side and dough on the other, and the bread would be worthless. Worthlessness is the idea. Ephraim or Israel—for the words seem to be used convertibly—had become *utterly useless* in a spiritual sense. It no longer fulfilled its Divine mission maintaining and promoting the worship of the one true and living God. As the unturned cake would be thrown away as utterly unfit for human food, Israel was to be thrown away by God as utterly unfit to fulfil its mission. What a sad thing to be utterly worthless in a moral sense!—salt that has lost its savour, only fit to be trodden underfoot; trees that have lost their fruit, only fit for the fire! Usefulness is the grand purpose of our being. The man who does not make the world better than he found it, must be accursed.

III. SOCIAL DESPOILMENT. "Strangers have devoured his strength, and he knoweth it not." The reference probably here is to the fact that Shalmaneser King of Assyria finally carried away Israel captive because of the defection of Hoshea King of Israel to So King of Egypt (see 2 Kings xiii. 7; xv. 19, 20; xvii. 3, 6). In consequence of their unholy mingling with idolatrous people and their dependence upon foreign nations, they got rifled of their property, their power, and their influence. Thus strangers devoured their strength. How many souls in all ages lose their "strength" under the influence in which they mingle! Their intellectual power, social sympathies, moral sensibilities, get used up, and they become the mere creatures of others and of circumstances. The man of society "has his strength devoured;" he loses freedom and force and manhood.

IV. UNCONSCIOUS DECAY. "Yea, grey hairs are here and there upon him, yet he knoweth not." Moral strength goes so slowly from men that they are often not conscious of its loss until they are reduced to the utmost prostration. Thus with Samson, "He wist not that the Spirit of the Lord had departed from him." Nations have their grey hairs, and they don't know it; Churches have their grey hairs, and are unconscious of them. So also with individuals; decay is so gradual that the subject is unconscious that death is working its ruin.

CONCLUSION. Let us look at these aspects of character and learn practical wisdom. Form no friendship with sinners; come out from amongst them—"the companion of fools shall be destroyed." Avoid a worthless life. Be not like the unturned cake; render some service to the universe. Allow not the social influences of your sphere to

steal away your strength, to eat up your manhood; conclude not that decay is not working within you because you are unconscious of it. Wake up to the great realities of your spiritual being, and be strong in the Lord.—D. T.

Ver. 11.—*The silliness of sin.* "Ephraim also is like a silly dove without heart." "There is much force and beauty in this comparison of Ephraim to a 'silly dove without heart,' or rather without understanding, which when pursued by a bird of prey trusts to the rapidity of its flight; that is, relies upon its own powers for the means of escape, instead of at once throwing itself into the nearest recess, where the interference of man or the narrowness of the place might render it secure from molestation. Israel, instead of taking shelter under the wing of the Almighty, who is a God *near at hand*, and not afar off, rested his hope of defence upon the celerity of his movements—stretching his wing towards Assyria or Egypt; but in the length of the flight is overtaken, secured, and dies in the cruel talons of his unrelenting pursuer" ('Pictorial Bible'). The passage may be used to illustrate the *silliness of sin.* Men under the influences of sin are as silly as the dove. What do naturalists say about the dove?

I. IT IS TOO SILLY TO DEFEND ITS OWN. Most creatures will stand by their young and fight for them to the last, but the dove, it seems, cares but little for them, and allows them to be captured without resistance. Ephraim had sunk into this state; his most distinguished blessings were going from him, and he struggled not to retain them. The sinner will not battle with the devil to defend his own—his force of thought, his sensibility of conscience, his freedom of will, his purity of love; he allows these precious things to be taken from him without a struggle.

II. IT IS TOO SILLY TO FEEL ITS LOSS. It is said that the dove will lose its nest and not feel it. The tree seems as attractive to it without its nest as with it. Men under the influence of sin do not feel their loss. Though sin has broken up their nest, they still strive to make the world a resting-place. Whatever is taken from them, they still cling to earthly things.

III. IT IS TOO SILLY TO ESCAPE DANGER. More dull than other fowls, it discovers not its perils; it "hasteneth to the snare, and knoweth not it is for her life" (Prov. vii. 23). Thus it was with the ten tribes politically, and thus it is with all souls morally in their fallen state. They will not flee to the right place of safety—too silly to be calm under trial. It is said of the dove that it has not courage to stay in the dove-house when frightened, where it is safe under the careful protection of its owner, but flutters and hovers, seeking rest first in one place and then in another, and thus exposes itself to new and greater dangers. Thus with Ephraim: instead of settling down under the protection of God, he hurried forth in quest of foreign help, and was the more exposed to calamities and ruin. Thus, too, with souls under the influence of sin.

CONCLUSION. Sin is folly. The fool and the sinner are, in God's vocabulary, convertible terms. Oh, how sad it is to see human souls hovering and fluttering about like silly doves, with no sense of their loss, no resting-place, no security, no peace!

> "A soul immortal spending all her fires,
> Wasting her strength in strenuous idleness,
> Thrown into tumult, raptured, or alarmed,
> At aught this scene can threaten or indulge,
> Resembles ocean into tempest wrought,
> To waft a feather or to drown a fly."
>
> (Young.)

D. T.

Ver. 12.—*The fowler of retribution.* "When they shall go, I will spread my net upon them; I will bring them down as the fowls of the heaven." This should be translated, 'As they go I spread my net over them; I bring them down as fowls of the heavens' (Keil and Delitzsch). "As they go." Whither? "The preceding verse answers the question: to Egypt and Asshur seeking help in their difficulties rather than to Jehovah. Israel, here spoken of as Ephraim, being sorely pressed by Asshur, at one time seeks help from Egypt against Asshur; whilst at another they try to secure the friendship of the latter. For what threatened Israel was the burden of 'the king of princes.' And that they tried to avert, partly by their coquettish arts (ch. viii. 9),

and partly by appealing to the help of Egypt; and while so doing, they did not observe that they had fallen into the net of destruction by the power of Assyria. In this net will the Lord entangle them as a punishment. As they go thither God will spread his net over them like a bird-catcher, and bring them down to the earth like flying birds; *i.e.* bring them from the open air, that is to say, from freedom—unto the net of captivity or exile." Here the work of retribution is spoken of as the work of the fowler, and it includes two things—entrapment and abasement.

I. ENTRAPMENT. The spreading of the net refers to the taking of the birds that lay on the ground. The literal reference here is to 2 Kings xvii. 4. Here the retributive providence of God employed the Assyrians as a net, but so ensnared the Israelites that they could not escape. Eliphaz observed this ensnaring work of Providence: "He taketh the wise in their own craftiness." So did David, who says, "He made a pit and digged it, and is fallen into the ditch which he made. His mischief shall return upon his own head, and his violent dealing shall come down upon his own pate." How often in the history of the world is this retributive entrapment witnessed! The cases of Joseph's brethren and the crucifixion of Christ are striking examples in sacred history. Popery confined Luther in the Wartburg Castle, but there he translated that Bible which shattered the whole system. Anglican bigots confined Bunyan in Bedford Jail; there he produced a book that has given him immortal fame. The net that entangled sinners is not manufactured in heaven; it is made on earth, made by themselves. Righteous Providence allows them to be so ensnared by it as to render that enthralment painful and lasting. Take care of the net.

II. ABASEMENT. "I will bring them down as the fowls of the heaven." However high up they may tower in their ambitious work, retribution has missiles to bring them down. "Thine eyes are upon the haughty, that thou mayest bring them down." There are men on earth who in their worldly prosperity, pride, and ambition soar like the eagles high up in heaven above all the rest. It is said that an ancient philosopher, when once asked what Jupiter did in the highest heaven, replied, "He pulls down the haughty, and exalts the humble." Hear these words: "The pride of thine heart hath deceived thee, thou that dwellest in the clefts of the rock, whose habitation is high, that saith in his heart, Who shall bring me to the ground? Though thou exalt thyself as the eagle, and though thou set thy nest among the stars, thence will I bring thee down, saith the Lord."

CONCLUSION. Ponder well thy condition, sinner. Not only is the eye of retributive justice upon thee wherever thou art and whatever thou dost, but it has all the machinery for thy ruin. Art thou down grovelling in the earth, working out thy sordid soul? it has nets that will ensnare thee there! Or art thou high up in the heavens of worldly prosperity and haughty ambition, proudly exulting in thy superiority? it has shots that will reach thee and bring thee down to the dust. Thy only safety is the cross.—D. T.

Ver. 15.—*Divine dispensations abused.* "Though I have bound and strengthened their arms, yet do they imagine mischief against me." This text has received different translations. "And I have instructed them and strengthened their arms, and yet they think evil against me" (Delitzsch). "Whether I chastised or strengthened their arms, yet they thought evil against me" (Elzas). I accept the latter translation; then the idea is, that God's treatment of man, whatever its character, afflictive or otherwise, is abused. Observe—

I. THAT GOD'S DISPENSATIONS WITH MEN ARE CHARACTERIZED BY VARIETY. "I have bound and strengthened," or, "I have chastised and strengthened." The events of human life are of a mixed and conflicting character. There is affliction and health, prosperity and adversity, friendship and bereavement, sorrow and joy, wounding and healing. All these conflicting events are under the direction of the great Father, whose aim in all is to make his children "meet for the inheritance of the saints in light." As the soil to be fruitful requires the frosts of winter as well as the sunbeams of spring and summer, man requires trials as well as joys to make his spirit fruitful in good works. As the loving father has the good of his child at heart whether he chastens him with a rod or presses him to his bosom, so has the Almighty Father in all his dispensations with men, whether the painful or the pleasant. "All these things

worketh God oftentimes in man, that he may bring him back from the pit and enlighten him with the light of the living."

II. THAT WHATEVER THE CHARACTER OF THE DIVINE DISPENSATIONS, THEY ARE OFTEN PERVERTED. "They imagine mischief against me." It matters not what the treatment, they continue to rebel. They are like the sterile ground to which all seasons, all weathers, are alike. Observe: 1. *The force of the human will.* It can oppose the influences of God, and turn what he designs for good to ill. Man is no passive being. He is not to be acted upon as a machine, not to be coerced either by anathemas or benedictions. He is a voluntary agent. This links him to moral government, makes him responsible for his actions, and invests his existence with a momentous solemnity. 2. *The depravity of the human heart.* This force of will explains, not man's rebellion, for regenerate souls and holy angels have it, and they run in the way of the Divine commandments. The reason of the rebellion is the depravity of the human heart, which is desperately wicked.

CONCLUSION. Open your hearts to the various dispensations of Heaven. Be thankful for their variety. One is designed to touch a chord within thee that another cannot reach. The one may strike conviction of sin, another may tune thy heart to gratitude and hope.

"God, full as kind as he is wise,
So tempereth all the favours he will do us,
That we his bounties may the better prize,
And make his chastisement less bitter to us.
One while a scorching indignation burns
The flowers and blossoms of our hope away,
Which into scarcity our plenty turns,
And changeth new-mown grass to parchèd hay;
Anon his fruitful showers and pleasing dews,
Commixed with cheerful rays, he sendeth down,
And then the barren earth her crops renews,
Which with rich harvests hills and valleys crown.
For, as to relish joys he sorrow sends,
So comfort or temptation still attends.

(George Wither.)

D. T.

Vers. 1, 2.—*Sin's malignancy.* Jehovah was Israel's Healer (Exod. xv. 26). His constantly cherished desire was to do them good. He had laboured for this end by his prophets, by chastisements, and by exhibitions of kindness. All had been in vain. The people would not permit the Lord to be their Healer. If sin was checked for a little, it was only to break out again in worse forms than before. The more he sought to heal them, only the more clearly was their iniquity discovered. We note here concerning Ephraim's wickedness—

I. ITS INVETERATE MALIGNANCY. "When I would have healed Israel, then the iniquity of Ephraim was discovered, and the wickedness of Samaria" (ver. 1). The evil of sin is revealed in the very attempt to cure it. 1. The cure of sin makes necessary *the laying bare* of its evil. The wound must be probed before remedial measures can be adopted. It is when he begins to probe it that the physician discovers its dangerous character. So, when God would heal us, he begins by discovering to us the truth about our spiritual state. He calls sin by its right name. He tells us of our depravity, our corruption, and brings into light the transgressions we had covered up. This was the work of the prophets of Israel. It is the work of the Law, and of God's Word generally. Till we are thoroughly convinced of sin, recovery is hopeless. "By the Law is the knowledge of sin" (Rom. iii. 20). 2. The evil of sin is discovered in *its resistance to cure.* An ordinary disease yields to remedies. Where these are employed and no improvement is manifest, we pronounce the case a serious one. Its resistance to treatment evinces its malignity. It is thus that Ephraim's sin was discovered by God's attempts to heal him. Every means of remedy had been tried, but without success (ch. vi. 4). Wickedness seemed at a greater height than ever. Sin is no skin-deep disorder. The difficulty of its cure is sufficient proof of the inveteracy of its hold. So depraved is the heart, that nothing will remedy it but

complete renewal. We have evidence every day of the determined resistance which sin is capable of offering to God. We see it in others, and we know it in experience. 3. The attempt to cure sin often results in *aggravated manifestations* of it. The sinful heart is roused to antagonism. Its latent enmity to God comes more fully out. It rages in its opposition to his servants. When the commandment comes, sin revives (Rom. vii. 9). Temporary amendment is followed by greater outbursts of wickedness (ch. vi. 8—10; Luke xi. 24—26).

II. ITS BALEFUL MANIFESTATIONS. "For they commit falsehood; and the thief cometh in, and the troop of robbers spoileth without" (ver. 1). We have here: 1. *Falsehood.* Israel was guilty of falsehood (1) towards God, in breaking his covenant, in proving faithless to their vows of amendment, and in "speaking lies" concerning him (ver. 13); (2) towards their allies, in disregarding treaty engagements; and (3) towards one another. Deceit had become part of their nature. When falsehood becomes a habit, moral recovery is scarcely possible. The ingrained liar is an almost hopeless subject for conversion. 2. *Robbery.* Justice is itself a species of truth, and with the loss of the sense of truth there is undergone a corresponding loss of the sense of justice. Each regards his neighbour as his lawful prey. He robs him if he can. Thefts, heartless frauds, organized robberies, are of frequent occurrence. 3. *Violence.* From robbery to violence the transition is not great. When men cease to live by honest labour, they do not stick at trifles. If a slack state of the law permits, crimes will abound. Where, as was the case in Israel, the throne is built on murder, it need not surprise us that lawlessness spreads in the community.

III. ITS PITIFUL DELUSION. (Ver. 2.) "They consider not in their hearts," etc. The point here is *the obliviousness of the wicked to God's knowledge of their doings.* They extrude God from their thoughts. "They say, How doth God know? and is there knowledge in the Most High?" (Ps. lxxiii. 11). On this notice: 1. *The wicked have, in secret, more knowledge of God than they pretend.* Israel, with a prophet like Hosea in its midst, could not be entirely ignorant of God. It showed that it had *some* knowledge of him, by its cries to him in trouble, and by brief periods of amendment. This extrusion of him from the thoughts was, therefore, voluntary. It was Israel's *will* not to know God. Thus there lurks in the sinner's consciousness a spark of knowledge which renders him inexcusable for his habitual forgetfulness. He may banish God from his thoughts, and try to persuade himself that God does not remember his wickedness. But if he does so, it is because he *prefers* to live in a delusion which at bottom he knows to be such. 2. *The wicked, as a rule, do succeed in expelling God from their thoughts.* They get their own way. They soon perfect themselves in the art of forgetting their Creator. Like the ostrich, which is fabled to hide its head in the sand as a protection from the hunters, they think that when they have succeeded in putting God out of their remembrance they have somehow got rid of him. 3. *The delusion in which the wicked encourage themselves does not in the least alter the real state of the case.* Sinners may shut out the thought of God's knowledge of their doings, but none the less is God cognizant of everything they are about. "Their own doings have beset them about; they are before my face." This is the folly of sin; it cannot by its forgetfulness and denials alter the actual state of the facts. The sinner's deeds are his own. He remains answerable for every one of them. With all his doings about him, he stands daily, hourly, constantly, in full view of the eye of God (Ps. cxxxix.). He will be called to an account.—J. O.

Vers. 3—7.—*The oven and the baker.* High and low united in the wickedness which has been described, and is to be described. The example of the king and court gave the key-note to the subjects, and they in turn pleased the king and his princes by a hearty imitation of their vices. "They made the king glad with their wickedness"—themselves living lives of debauchery and ungodliness; "and the princes with their lies"—offering them flattery, and siding with them in ridicule of the prophet's teachings A new image is here employed to set forth the enormity of the wickedness which prevailed—that, viz., of the heated oven and the baker. The elements of the figure may be thus analyzed. The oven is the heart; the fire, unholy lust, appetite, or passion; the dough, the evil intent or plan. This is prepared beforehand, while the fire smoulders beneath; when it is matured for execution, the fire—lust or passion—is

stirred up to a flame, and the act of wickedness is consummated. The general thought is the systematic character of the sin, its deliberateness in being previously conceived, planned, prepared for—the soul, thereafter, being held as it were in readiness for its execution. Three illustrations, though the figure applies strictly only to the first and last.

I. THE HEAT OF LUST. (Ver. 4.) "They are all adulterers, as an oven heated by the baker," etc. Their debaucheries, *i.e.*, were not the fruit of mere impulse. They were gone into as the result of forethought and preparation. Libidinous thoughts were encouraged. New gratifications were planned; the matter was reflected on and matured; the act of indulgence was anticipated in imagination. Time was thus given for the lustful desire to permeate the whole nature, when, like dough fully leavened, the evil intent was ready to be converted into deed. Lust, to use the figure of James, conceives, and brings forth sin (Jas. i. 15). Learn: 1. *The importance of guarding against the inception of lust.* It is in its beginnings that lust is most dangerous. The wrong thought, the lustful look, the dallying with desire,—it is there the evil lurks. From this there is but a step to evil intent. The fire burns, the dough is prepared; it will be a wonder if actual sin is not some day the outcome. 2. *The importance of regulating thought as a means to the control of the passions.* Thought can be so directed as to feed and inflame passion; it can also be so ruled as to check and control it. The wicked use this power of thought for a bad purpose; nor less earnestly should we attempt to use it for a holy one. It is only through care of the thoughts, and through strict control exercised over them, that inward and outward purity can be preserved.

II. THE HEAT OF WINE. (Ver. 5.) "In the day of our king the princes have made him sick [or, 'are sick'] with heat of wine," etc. Royal feast days were days of recognized and premeditated debauch. Wine maddens and inflames the nature. 1. *Drunkenness stands in close relation to lust,* with which it is here brought into connection. It is lust's most powerful auxiliary. "Whoredom and wine" (ch. iv. 11). Sensuality, in turn, predisposes to excess in drinking. It loosens restraint. It destroys self-control. It inclines to animal indulgence generally. 2. *Drunkenness is degrading in its own effects.* (1) Degrading to the body—"made sick." It sickens and bestializes. It injures health. It bloats and disfigures the countenance. A more degrading spectacle can hardly be conceived than a helplessly intoxicated man. (2) Degrading to the soul. It takes from it its self-respect. It begets a heartless, scoffing, irreverent disposition, and leads to association with those who are of this character. The King of Israel is here represented as striking up fellowship with "scorners"—mockers at Divine things. 3. *Drunkenness prepares the way for strife and plotting.* The drunkenness is the nexus between the adulteries and the conspiracies. Pot-companions are rarely stable friends. They do not really trust each other. Carousals lead to quarrelling. The strong and unscrupulous see with contempt the weaknesses of the rulers, and plot against them.

III. THE HEAT OF ANGER. (Vers. 6, 7.) "They have made ready their heart like an oven, while they lie in wait," etc. We have here the result of the carousals and the scorning in plots and conspiracies. These are: 1. *Secretly prepared;* like the oven got ready beforehand, the dough also being kneaded and leavened. 2. *Silently waited upon.* It takes time for a plot to mature, as it takes time for the leaven to permeate the dough. A good example is furnished in the case of Absalom, who first, by fair speeches and complaisances, stole the hearts of the people of Israel; then, after the leaven had had time to work, got leave of absence, and, with two hundred men accompanying, had himself proclaimed king (2 Sam. xv. 1—14). 3. *Hotly executed.* There is no mercy in the fierceness which at length breaks out in bloody deeds. The pent-up heat burns like an oven. The anger of the wicked is ruthless, cruel, unsparing. It had proved to be so in Israel's history. Dynasty after dynasty had been swept away by assassination. Pekah, probably the then reigning king, was himself afterwards murdered by Hoshea. Yet Israel refused to take the lesson. "There is none of them that calleth upon me" (ver. 7).—J. O.

Vers. 8—10.—*Mixing with the ungodly.* "Ephraim, he hath mixed himself among the people"—had adopted heathenish ways, had set at nought the command of God

requiring separation from the ungodly, had intimately associated himself with the idolatrous nations around. The mixing, as Keil well points out, was an inward one before it became an outward one. There is first a mixing in the heart with the *spirit* of the world, then comes outward worldly conformity. It is this which Christians have constantly to guard against (Rom. xii. 2). Their calling is to be separate (2 Cor. vi. 14—18). They need to remember that "the friendship of the world is enmity with God" (Jas. iv. 4) and that "if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (1 John ii. 15). Mixing with the world—the sin of the Church to-day, as it was the sin of Israel of old—has its effects.

I. SPIRITUAL INCONSISTENCY. "Ephraim is a cake not turned"—overdone on the one side, underdone on the other; not of a piece throughout; one side "scorched and black, the other steamed, damp, and lukewarm; the whole worthless, spoiled irremediably, but only to be cast away" (Pusey). The unturned cake is an emblem: 1. *Of partial conversion.* We have this where the Divine life has not penetrated the nature, but affects only parts and sides of it. The conscience is sensitive on some points, but not on others. Favourite duties are attended to, while others not less important are neglected. The conduct in some things shows the power of religion, in others it appears untouched by its influence. There is a want of *pervasion*, of through-and-throughness in the character. An illustration is afforded in what Stanley says of Saul: "He became 'another man,' yet not entirely. He was, as is so often the case, half converted, half roused. His mind moved unequally and disproportionately in its new sphere. Backwards and forwards in the names of his children we see alternately the signs of the old heathenish superstition, and of the new purified religion of Jehovah. . . . His religion was never blended with his moral nature. It broke out in wild ungovernable acts of zeal and superstition, and then left him more a prey than ever to his own savage disposition." 2. *Of zeal for the forms of religion combined with denial of its power.* Pharisaism was an instance of this. We have other examples in Judah and Israel. The people of the two kingdoms seem never to have failed in their zeal for the outward services of religion. They kept up sacrifices and offerings (ch. vi. 6); observed the feast days (ch. ii. 11; Isa. i. 11—14; Amos v. 21, 22); were unusually attentive to these forms when trouble seemed impending. With all this they were iniquitous in heart and life. They neglected the weightier matters of the Law—judgment, mercy, and faith (Matt. xxiii. 23). With excess of zeal for the forms, there was no zeal at all for the reality. For this, God likens them to an unturned cake. 3. Generally, *of religious profession, with inconsistency of conduct.* Religion is intended to pervade the life. It should be as manifest on week-days as on Sundays; in the ordinary business of life as in the devotions of the sanctuary. Yet how many fail in thus carrying out the life of the gospel! What grievous inconsistencies are seen in their conduct! They maintain their profession, yet "mix with the people," and fall in freely with the world's ungodly ways. Surely this is to be "a cake not turned."

II. SPIRITUAL DECAY. "Strangers have devoured his strength, and he knoweth it not: yea, grey hairs," etc. Ephraim had already suffered much from the people among whom he had chosen to mix himself. But even he was not aware of the amount of harm they had done him. He did not perceive how this intercourse with the heathen had sapped the moral strength of the nation; had deteriorated its politics; had beguiled it into a false dependence on foreign helpers; had given a mighty impetus to every disintegrating force already at work in the kingdom. The grey hairs —significant of decay—were thickly strewn upon him, but he perceived it not. Deterioration inevitably results from the mixing of Christians with the world. 1. *Worldly conformity leads to a decay of inward religious earnestness.* The diversion of thought and affection from spiritual things to the objects about which alone the world cares necessarily brings about this result. The temperature of the spiritual life falls in conformity with its environment. Interest in religion gives place to interest in the things which are the constant subjects of thought, talk, and concern in the circles in which we move. It is, besides, soon found that participation in the world's pleasures and follies is incompatible with serious attention to the things of the soul, and the latter, accordingly, is soon abandoned. 2. *Inward spiritual decay reveals itself by various outward tokens.* As grey hairs upon the head reveal the gradual approach of age. Among the indications of decay of piety we may notice neglect of prayer, and

of the reading of God's Word; aversion to religious conversation; the preference of the society of the worldly to the society of God's people; neglect of the sanctuary; a light, depreciating way in speaking of religious earnestness, etc. 3. *The progress of spiritual decay is often not noticed by the sinner himself.* It comes on gradually. There is an unwillingness to look closely into the spiritual state. The power of spiritual perception gets lost.

III. SPIRITUAL BLINDNESS. Ephraim did not know, and would not be warned. Darkness had blinded his eyes. "The pride of Israel" testified to his face, but Ephraim understood neither (1) the plain speaking of the prophets; (2) the signs of internal decay; (3) the voice of external judgments. "For all this" he would not return to God. Sin is blindness, fatuity, folly. The worldly conformist speedily becomes blinded. The god of this world blinds him, and he is willing to be blinded (2 Cor. iv. 4). He "cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins" (2 Pet. i. 9). "He knoweth nothing," says Pusey. (1) "He knoweth not the tokens of decay in himself, but hides them from himself; (2) he knoweth not God, who is the Author of them; (3) he knoweth not the cause of them, his sins; (4) he knoweth not the end and object of them, his conversion; (5) he knoweth not what, since he knoweth not any of these things, will be the issue of them, his destruction."—J. O.

Vers. 11—16.—*Ephraim's flight from God.* Every sinner may read a warning in the words here addressed to Ephraim.

I. FLEEING FROM GOD. (Vers. 11, 12.) The wicked "say unto God, Depart from us; for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways" (Job xxi. 14). They themselves try, though vainly, to escape from God. They would fain put a great distance between him and them (Jonah; the prodigal). 1. *Fleeing from God is sin.* It is an attempt on the part of the creature to establish an independence which the Creator does not allow. Even the attempt at such flight God must check and punish. 2. *Fleeing from God is folly.* It is foolish (1) because it is an attempt at the impossible; and (2) because, if the wicked could succeed in the attempt, it would still be to their own hurt. Abandoning God, the soul is doomed to the pursuit of vanity. It cannot rest in itself, for it is not self-centred; but neither can it rest in the creature, for the creature is constantly proving itself a false support. Besides, life without God has no longer a proper aim. The soul is thus smitten with restlessness; its movements become vague, methodless, erratic. "They call to Egypt; they go to Assyria." It flits from one object to another, and finds repose in none. Existence is a succession of new trials, and a series of new disappointments. 3. *Fleeing from God is destruction.* God declares that when the sinner flees, he will pursue (ver. 12). No matter how lofty their soarings, he will spread his net for them, and bring them down. He has forewarned them of this, and they will find it true. Jonah found, when *he* tried to escape, that God's net was spread for him. Every sinner will find the same. The net which God spreads for the haughty, would-be independent ones is that of his punitive justice. Their pride will end, as all evil ends, in destruction.

II. FALSE DEALING WITH GOD. (Vers. 13—16.) A main part of the charge against Ephraim is falsehood (vers. 1, 3). The falsehood is primarily falsehood towards God. We have here three phases of it. 1. *Insincerity in repentance.* "They have not cried with their heart, when they howled upon their beds," etc. (ver. 14). The insincerity of their repentance was evinced: (1) By the very noise they made about it—"they howled," etc. (2) By their unabridged indulgence in sin: "They assemble themselves for corn and wine, and they rebel against me." They insulted God by lying protestations of a desire to return to him, while openly dishonouring him by their wickedness. It is not loud outcries, but changed actions, which show the reality of repentance (Matt. iii. 8). 2. *Speaking lies against God.* (1) God had attested his willingness to redeem, but they alleged that he would not do so. "I would redeem them, but they speak lies against me" (ver. 13). It was easier to profess doubt of God's Word than to fulfil the moral conditions necessary for the securing of the blessing. (2) God had shown himself their true Helper—"I instructed and strengthened their arms"—yet they plotted alliances with heathen powers, disowning his past goodness. "They imagine mischief against me" (ver. 15). Thus, doubly, they made

God a liar. But their whole life and worship was a denial of his Word. They gainsaid the Word sent them by the prophets, denied his anger at their sins, changed his truth into a lie in the worship of the calves, etc. 3. *Faithlessness in promises.* Even when, for a brief moment, they seemed wishful of amendment, their goodness did not last (ch. vi. 4). Their promises were broken. They did not keep faith with God. They were as "a deceitful bow" (ver. 16). The deceitful bow: (1) Holds out a promise. The person who shoots thinks he can depend upon it. It seems a bow that will serve his ends. (2) Suggests an aim. The use of a bow is to drive the arrow to the point aimed at. God had an aim in the calling of Israel. It was his desire to reach that aim through the obedience of the nation. He has an aim in our own creation, calling, and moral discipline. (3) Proves treacherous on trial. It either does not shoot at all, or sends the arrow but a little way, or turns it off in a different direction from that which the shooter intended. In any case, it proves not to be depended on. Confidence cannot be placed in it. It deceives and disappoints. Israel had thus repeatedly disappointed the expectations raised by repentances and vows.

III. A LAUGHING-STOCK TO MEN. (Ver. 16.) "This shall be their derision in the land of Egypt." Their princes had used boastful language—"the rage of their tongue." Once their pretensions were exposed, they would become a mockery to those for the sake of whose friendship and help they had deserted God.—J. O.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER VIII.

This chapter deals with the punishment of apostasy. Once more the sins of the northern kingdom are enumerated and its approaching fall predicted. There is a close connection between the verses in the first section of the chapter. That connection is as follows: The first verse begins with an exclamation containing Jehovah's command to the prophet to act as his herald, putting the trumpet to his mouth and sounding the alarm about coming calamity. In the second clause of the same verse the nature of the calamity is announced. In the third and last clause of it the cause of the calamity is declared. The second verse represents Israel in their extremity crying to God for deliverance; the cry is very earnest, and proceeds from every member of the community, backed also with the assertion of their acquaintance with Jehovah. In the third verse Jehovah rejects their cry and refuses to interpose between them and the enemy, because their knowledge of him was merely historical and neither spiritual nor practical, as their dislike of what was good continued unabated. The fourth verse specifies facts in proof of Israel's renunciation of Jehovah. The fifth verse shows a just retribution, for, inasmuch as Israel disliked what was good, the object of their idolatry has disgusted Jehovah or cast them off. The sixth verse contains the doom of this silly, sinful, and disgusting idol. In the seventh verse the threat of such destruction is accounted for on a broad principle taken from agricultural life, that the harvest will correspond to the seed sown; and so Israel shall reap the fruit of their ungodliness.

Ver. 1.—The exclamation in this verse, **A trumpet to thy mouth**, supersedes the necessity of supplying a verb. The alarm of war or of hostile invasion is to be sounded by the prophet at the command of Jehovah. The (1) trumpet is at once to be employed for the purpose. The rendering of both the Targum and Syriac (2) expresses the same idea, though under a different form; the former has, "Cry with thy throat, as if it were a trumpet;" and the latter, "Let thy mouth be as a trumpet." According to this view, the Prophet Hosea expresses here very briefly what Isaiah has done more fully in the words, "Cry aloud [Hebrew, 'with the throat'], spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and show my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins." (3) The LXX. here deviates considerably from the Massoretic Hebrew text, translating εἰς κόλπον (חִיקֶךָ) αὐτῶν, ὡς γῆ, of the meaning of which Jerome acknowledges his ignorance, though he attempts to explain it. Cyril connects the words with the concluding part of the preceding chapter, thus: "This their setting at nought (of me) in the land of Egypt shall come into their own bosom. As the land, as the eagle against the house of the Lord;"

while his explanation is as follows: "Since, though I preserved them and instructed them, and gave them victory over their enemies (for I strengthened them), they have impiously set me at nought, worshipping demons for gods, and have trusted to the land of the Egyptians, and have fancied that their help shall be sufficient for their prosperity, therefore their attempt shall return unto their own bosom, and they shall find no good reward of their temerity; but they shall receive, as it were, into their bosom the deserved punishment. For he shall come, he shall come who shall lay them waste—the King of Assyria, with an innumerable multitude of warriors, and he shall come to them as the whole land and region and country, that one might think that the whole region of the Persians and Medes had wholly migrated and had come into Samaria. This is the meaning of the whole land (ὡς γῆ). He shall likewise come as an eagle into the house of the Lord." (He shall come) **as an eagle against the house of the Lord.** These words cannot mean, (1) as Hitzig thinks, the rapidity with which the prophet is directed to convey his tidings of alarm, as if it were, "Fly [ראה imperfect being supplied], thou prophet, as an eagle;" nor yet, with others, the loudness of the alarm he was to sound. The meaning abruptly though vividly expressed refers (2) to the approaching invasion of the enemy, though there is no need to supply יראה or יבא. It is the substance of the prophet's alarm. As an eagle the enemy (as is evident from ver. 3) shall come against the house of the Lord. The enemy was, in all probability, the Assyrian, in whose symbolism the eagle bulks largely; while the griffin vulture, scenting from afar, and coming down with rapid and terrific swoop upon its prey, is an appropriate image of the sudden and impetuous character of his invasion. The house of the Lord is neither the temple at Jerusalem, for the prophecy relates to the northern kingdom; nor the temple at Samaria, which could not be called *Beth Y'hovah*, but *Bethbamoth*; nor the land of Israel, which could not with any propriety be called a house; but the people of Israel, which, owing to God's covenant relation to that people, is called his house, as in Numb. xii. 7, "My servant Moses is not so, who is faithful in all mine house." The figure seems an echo of Deut. xxviii. 49, "The Lord shall bring a nation against thee from far, from the end of the earth, as swift as the eagle flieth;" while it has a parallel in Matt. xxiv. 28, "For wheresoever the carcase is, there will the eagles be gathered together." **Because they have transgressed my covenant, and trespassed against my Law.** These words exhibit the cause of Israel's being exposed to the sudden hostile attack which the prophet was commissioned to proclaim. The provocations of Israel consisted in violating the covenant which God had been pleased to make with them, and in proving unfaithful to that Law, obedience to which was the condition of the covenant. The explanation of the whole verse thus given is confirmed by the Hebrew commentators; thus Rashi says, "The Shechinah (or Divine Majesty) says to the prophet, 'Let the voice of thy palate be heard and sound the trumpet and say, The enemies fly hither as the eagle flieth and come unto the house of the Lord.'" Aben Ezra more concisely conveys the same sense: "It is the words of Jehovah to the prophet, 'Set the cornet to thy palate, for the enemy flieth as the eagle against the house of the Lord.'" Kimchi differs in two respects from his brethren, understanding the address to be, not that of Jehovah to the prophet, but of the prophet to the people; and the house of the Lord to include the whole land of Israel and temple at Jerusalem: "The cornet to thy palate, as he said above, 'Sound the trumpet in Gibeah.' Many a time the prophet speaks to the people in the singular and many a time in the plural. He says, 'Put the trumpet to thy mouth, for behold! the enemy flies hither like the eagle over the house of Jehovah;' he means to say, 'Over the whole land and also over the house of Jehovah, in order to destroy it.' And he joins the trumpet to the palate (and yet man sets the trumpet to the mouth) because the voice passes over the way of the palate after it comes out of the throat."

Ver. 2.—**Israel shall cry unto me, My God, we know thee.** The more literal as well as more exact rendering is, *to me will they cry, My God, we know thee, we Israel!* Notwithstanding their provocation, their unfaithfulness to the covenant of God, and their disobedience to the Law, they appeal unitedly and severally to God in the day of their distress, and urge two pleas—their knowledge of God, or acknowledgment of him as the true God; and their high position as his people. Thus the Chaldee paraphrase has: "As often as calamity comes upon them they pray and say before me, Now we acknowledge that we have no God beside thee; deliver us, because we are thy people Israel." As to the construction, either "Israel" is in apposition to *anachnu*, the subject of the verb, or there is a transposition. Thus Rashi: "We must transpose the words, and explain, 'To me, cries Israel, My God, we know thee;'" so also Kimchi and Aben Ezra. The former says, "'Israel' which comes after, should be before, after לי, and many inversions of this kind occur

in Scripture, as Ezek. xxxix. 11 and Ps. xxli. 10." The word "Israel" is omitted by the LXX. and Syriac, and in many manuscripts of Kennicott and De Rossi.

Ver. 3.—**Israel hath cast off the thing that is good: the enemy shall pursue him.** This is the reply of Jehovah. The good which Israel rejected is not exactly God the One Good, nor Jehovah the greatest Good, nor the Law, which was good; but all the goodness which he bestows on such as keep his covenant. This Israel rejected, and in turn is rejected of God and delivered up into the hands of his pursuers.

Ver. 4.—**They have set up kings, but not by me: they have made princes, and I knew it not.** Here was the first instance and evidence of Israel's rejection of Jehovah. Their conduct was not guided by Divine direction, nor in obedience to the Divine will, nor with the Divine sanction. This state of things began with Israel's revolt from the house of David, and rebellion against the son of Solomon their legitimate sovereign, and was repeated in subsequent usurpations. Perhaps we may go further back, even to the appointment of the first king of the yet undivided kingdom, when "the Lord said unto Samuel, Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them." Usurpations such as those of Zimri, Omri, and Shallum at least are comprehended in the appointments referred to—appointments on making which the people did not inquire of the Lord, nor act under his guidance, nor seek his sanction. Some go so far as to include all the kings of Israel that succeeded Jeroboam. Thus Cyril says, "He denies the kingdom of Israel and his successors on the throne of Israel." Aben Ezra also extends the statement to the kings of the northern kingdom from the days of Jeroboam: "They inquired not of God with respect to the making of Jeroboam king, although it is written, 'Thou shalt in any wise set him king over thee whom the Lord thy God shall choose.'" A seeming contradiction here exists between the statement of the prophet here and that in 1 Kings xi. 37, where God promises by the Prophet Ahijah, "I will take thee, and thou shalt reign according to all that thy soul desireth, and shalt be king over Israel," and the fact of Jehu's anointing being ordered by the Prophet Elisha, who sent one of the children of the prophets for that purpose with the words, "Thus saith the Lord, I have anointed thee king over Israel." The plotting of Jeroboam, and the conspiracy of Jehu against Joram, and the conspiracies of other usurpers, were things which God could not approve; and so we must distinguish between the permission and approval of Jehovah; in his government he permits many things which from his nature we know he does not and cannot approve. השירו is usually and properly rendered, "they have made princes;" but Aben Ezra and Rashi translate it as הסירו, equivalent to "they have removed;" while the Massora reckon השירו in the number of those words which are written with *shin* but are read and explained with *samech*. Some manuscripts also of Kennicott and De Rossi have הסירו. **Of their silver and their gold have they made them idols, that they** (literally, *it*) **may be cut off.** This is a second proof of Israel's renunciation of Jehovah. They used their gold in making the idolatrous calves, and their silver in supporting their idolatrous worship; or they made the idol-calves, some of silver, and others of gold. The consequence rather than the purpose is the destruction of it, namely, the gold and silver; or the ruin of the kingdom or of each member of it; or the cutting off of their name, according to Kimchi. The word לְמַעַן, like ἵνα in Greek, is generally *telic*, denoting "purpose;" nor is it *ecbatic* here, denoting "result," though, according to the Hebrew mode of thought, design and consequence often coincide. Its meaning here is well explained by Keil, "ל describes the consequence of this conduct, which, though not designed, was nevertheless inevitable, as if it had been distinctly intended."

Ver. 5.—**Thy calf, O Samaria, hath cast thee off; mine anger is kindled against them.** This portion of the verse has occasioned much diversity of translation and exposition, and yet the general meaning is much the same. (1) In the translation (*a*) of the Authorized Version the word "thee" is supplied; others (*b*) supply "me," meaning Jehovah, thus, "Thy calf, O Samaria, hath cast me off;" while (*c*) Rosenmüller prefers supplying "them," viz. the Israelites: "Thy calf, O Samaria, hath cast them off," *i.e.* has been the cause of their rejection, which is favoured by כִּם in the following clause. The meaning of (*b*) is plain, the import being that the idol-worship had led to the rejection and so the withdrawal of Jehovah; while the sense of (*a*) conveys the idea that the golden calf which the country represented by its capital and the government had established at Bethel as the symbol of their worship, so far from protecting its worshippers, would fall itself into the hands of the Assyrian invader. (2) The Septuagint translates by ἀπότρεψαι τὸν μόσχον σου Σαμάρεια, equivalent to "Cast off [as if זְנַח] thy calf, O Samaria;" which is

an exhortation to Samaria, and not only Samaria, but the entire country, with the inhabitants of the capital at its head, to cast aside the calf-worship by which they had incurred the wrath of the Almighty. Jerome, reading זֻנַּח (Pual), renders, "Cast off is thy calf." (3) Some modern scholars translate, "He has cast off thy calf," and refer it to the enemy, and rather in the sense of carrying off the golden image as a spoil; or to Jehovah; thus De Wette has, "[Jehova] verwirft dein Calb, Samarien,' which is not in keeping with the first person in the next clause. (4) Others take the verb intransitively, and give it the meaning of "smelling bodily," "emitting intolerable stench," "being loathsome or disgusting;" thus Keil has, "Thy calf disgusts, O Samaria." So Wünsche: "Anekolt dein Calb." Israel loathed or felt disgust at pure worship and what was really good; now Jehovah in turn is disgusted with their golden calf and hateful idolatry. No wonder it is added, *Mine anger is waxed hot* (has burnt or blazed out) *against them;* i.e. not the calf and Samaria, nor the calves, but their stupid, sinful worshippers. **How long** will it be **ere they attain to innocency?** Or it may be translated, *How long will it be ere they shall be able to endure* (bear) *innocency* (guiltlessness)? The verb יכל has frequently to be supplemented by another verb, as in Ps. ci. 5, לֹא אוּכַל, "A proud heart will not I suffer;" so also Isa. i. 13. The speaker here turns, as it were, from unwilling auditors to others more ready to lend an ear, and asks, "How long are they incapable of purity of life instead of the abominations of idolatry? How great the madness that, while I allow space and place for repentance, they are unwilling to return to soundness of mind!" The Authorized Version rendering is supported by Aben Ezra and Kimchi. The former explains: "It is as if נ were written double, 'Thee as thy calf cast off—thee Samaria, as if it has rejected thee, for the city shall be laid and its inhabitants shall go into captivity;'" and Kimchi says, "נ is transitive, and has the meaning of 'remove,' as in Lam. ii. 7. He says, 'O Samaria, thy calf has removed thee,' that is, on account of it thou art removed out of thy land." The last clause is also well explained by Kimchi, though in a different sense from that given above, thus: "How long are they unable to purify themselves from this guilt (*i.e.* idolatry)?"

Ver. 6.—**For from Israel was it also: the workman made it; therefore it is not God.** The prophet here vindicates the justness of Jehovah's complaint and the folly of Israel's conduct. **The first clause** points out the origin of this idolatry—this god of gold was out of Israel, it proceeded from them and was invented by their kings. The second clause shows that it was of human manufacture; while the natural inference follows in the third clause to the effect that, having its origin with man and being made by man, it could not be God. Or if the rendering, "Thy calf disgusts," be adopted, the *ki* introduces the explanation of the disgust which that abomination caused. This idol was of home manufacture, not imported from abroad, as Baal and Ashtaroth from the Sidonians, Chemosh from the Moabites, and Moloch from the Ammonites. The Israelites themselves and their king Jeroboam made for the northern kingdom what had been learnt in Egypt. Thus Israel's god was a creature of Israel's own devising. How stupid and how absurd! Israel's god man-made, how enormous and abominable the iniquity! **But the calf of Samaria shall be broken in pieces.** It shall become splinters; the *hapax legomenon* שְׁבָבִי is derived from an Arabic root, *shaba*, to cut; and thus, as the calf at Sinai was burnt and pulverized, the calf of Samaria shall be broken into splinters and destroyed. The whole verse is well explained by Kimchi: "Now ye will see if the calf is able to deliver its worshippers; it cannot even deliver itself, for it shall become splinters, as if he said that the enemies shall break it up and carry it away for the worth of the gold, not for any utility that is in it while it is still in the form of a calf. שבבי is equivalent to שברים (broken pieces, shivers), fragments." (2) The Septuagintal rendering, πλανῶν, is probably due to the reading שׁוֹגֵב, Micah ii. 4, "turning away."

Ver. 7.—**For they have sown the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind.** The harvest corresponds to the seed-time; their foolish and vain idolatries shall have corresponding results. This proverbial expression imports more than merely labour in vain; it denotes labour that has an injurious and destructive result. It has more than a negative significancy of lost labour; it conveys the idea of positive detriment. "The prophet," says Kimchi, "means to say that they will weary themselves in vain in this service (of idols), just as if a man who sows the wind, in which there is nothing substantial, shall only reap the wind, or even still less; as if he had said, 'Ye shall not obtain the least enjoyment, but only injury.'" If, then, the wind denote the vanity and nothingness of human effort, the whirlwind is the image of destruction and annihilation, viz. a storm or hurricane remorselessly tearing all away with it. *Suphah* itself intensifies the notion included in *ruach*, while the paragogic ה intensifies

still more, so as to denote a storm of greatest violence. The double feminine ending is regarded by most as strengthening the sense in this word *suphathah*, סוּפָתָה, etc. **It hath no stalk** (margin, *standing corn*): **the bud shall yield no meal**; better, *shoot brings no fruit*. This is a further development of the figure. When wind is the seed sown, destruction represented by tempest is the harvest reaped. The seed sown produces no stalk, or at least no stalk with grain in it—no standing corn. If the seed shoot up at all, the shoot has no fruit. Here the play on words, of which the Hebrews were so fond, is obvious—the *tsemach* has no *yemach;* the halm has no malm; the *Sprosse* no *Schoss;* the corn no kern. **If so be it yield, the strangers shall swallow it up.** When, or if, any fruit is attained, the invasion of rapacious foreigners swallows it up. First, then, when the wind of vain human efforts is the sowing, destruction is the harvest. If the seed spring up at all, the ear does not fill; or if the ear should fill, there is no substance in it; or if it fill and have substance, the rapacity of hostile invaders consumes it. Thus a blight falls on all they do. Kimchi explains the verse fully as follows: "Because the prophet compares their works to one who sows the wind, he adds further to the same image, and says, 'It has no stalk, it reaches not the time when it shall be stalk' (or 'standing corn'). Now קמה is the name of the corn when it stands ready for the harvest, from which the husbandmen (literally, 'sowers') soon expect enjoyment, *i.e.* after harvest, when they shall make it into meal. Yea, even at the time they expect profit from their works, they shall have none. And he says further, 'The shoot shall not produce fruit or meal,' as if he said, 'Even should the seed spring up after the sowing.' He thus represents in a figure that should they prosper a little in their works after they have begun to do evil, yet that prosperity will not last, and it will not come to perfect enjoyment (beauty) like corn which comes to harvest and to grinding. And if it should yield, strangers devour it. Perhaps for a time it may produce so as to come to meal, as if he said that, should they prosper in their possessions so that a little enjoyment should be accorded to them at the first, then strangers shall come and devour it, and their enjoyment will not be complete."

Ver. 8.—**Israel is swallowed up.** Not only shall the productions of their land be swallowed up, but the persons of the Israelites shall be consumed; nor is the event far off in the distant future, though the Hebrew commentators translate the past as prophetic future; already has the process begun. Such is the extension of the punishment. **Now shall they be** (rather, *are then become*) **among the Gentiles as a vessel wherein is no pleasure.** The prosperity, population, property, and even nationality, are swallowed up—engulfed as in some abyss, so as to be undiscoverable to the present time; while their reputation has suffered so sorely that they are despised as a worthless household vessel—a vessel unto dishonour, never of much worth, but now cast away as entirely unfit for use.

Ver. 9.—**For they are gone up to Assyria, a wild ass alone by himself: Ephraim hath hired lovers.** All their misery and misfortune they have brought upon themselves. They have prepared this fate for themselves, and made themselves meet for their fate. The second clause is correctly rendered, *a wild ass goes alone by itself;* and this clause is an independent statement—not connected by כ of comparison either with the clause preceding nor with the succeeding one. Instead of saying that Ephraim, that is, Israel, went up to Assyria like a stubborn wild ass alone by itself, or that like a wild ass going alone Ephraim hired (sued for) lovers, the statement stands independent and in a measure detached, the meaning being that even a wild ass, stupid and stubborn as that animal is, keeps by itself to secure its independence. The conduct of Israel, however, appears to disadvantage in contrast with that of a stupid wild ass; it is more stupid and senseless; their folly is seen by the comparison: it maintained its independence by going alone, Ephraim lost independence by soliciting help from heathen allies. What, then, was the object to the attainment of which this foolish conduct was directed? In other words, why did Israel go on this stupid mission to Assyria? What did they seek to gain by it? The third clause contains the answer: they sought help and succour from the Assyrians. Thus the first clause, giving a reason for their calamity, shows it was self-procured by Ephraim going up to Assyria; the second clause exposes the folly of such conduct in seeking prohibited and pernicious foreign alliances; the third clause specifies the precise object of Ephraim's sinful and foolish mission, namely, the procuring of succour from Assyria. The above explanation, (1) which is in substance Keil's, and which is a contrast between the independence of the wild ass and Ephraim's servile suing for foreign help, is, we think, simpler and more correct than (2) the common one, which is a comparison of the wilfulness, waywardness, and wantonness of the wild ass roaming solitarily by itself with Ephraim's wilful waywardness in going up to Assyria for succour, and wantonness in suing for

idolatrous alliances. The expression, "going up," alludes to going to the interior of the country, or to the capital of the monarch Assyria now owned as sovereign, or to a place of refuge. The hiring of lovers, or lover, by Ephraim stigmatizes their shameful conduct as that of a shameless harlot, who, instead of receiving, bestows presents on lovers, or as the reward of endearments.

Ver. 10.—**Yea, though they have hired among the nations, now will I gather them.** Instead of "have hired," "sue" would make the sense more obvious. But who are they of whom it is here said, "I will gather them"? (1) The nations, among whom Ephraim has been suing for endearments from paramours, shall be gathered together to effect the hurt or ruin of Ephraim; while for this explanation Ezek. xvi. 37, is cited as parallel: "Behold, therefore, I will gather all thy lovers, with whom thou hast taken pleasure, and all them that thou hast loved, with all them that thou hast hated; I will even gather them round about against thee, and will discover thy nakedness unto them, that they may see all thy nakedness." But (2) others maintain that the persons gathered are the Ephraimites whom the Lord will gather, that is to say, (*a*) will bring them all together among the nations, leading them thither; and to this exposition ch. ix. 6 is thought to furnish a parallel, at least as far as the meaning of the verb "to gather" is concerned: "Egypt shall gather them up, Memphis shall bury them." (*b*) Or the Ephraimites shall be gathered together to be led away in chains and dispersed among the nations; (*c*) or shall be gathered for death and to perish by sword and famine; or (*d*) to be gathered together unto Samaria and other fortified cities, in order to be taken together and carried by their enemies away into captivity. (3) Rashi understands the gathering together of Israel, but in the sense of a promise: "'Though they have sued for endearments among the nations, I will gather them out of the nations among which they have been dispersed, as the same verb, קבץ, is used in Isa. liv. and Jer. xxxi. 10, viz. 'I will not delay their deliverance.'" This exposition is not in harmony with the context, from which we expect a threat of punishment rather than a promise of reward. Both Kimchi and Aben Ezra favour exposition (1): "What benefit is it to them, asks the prophet, that they sue among the nations? For soon I will gather the nations against them to carry them into captivity." Thus Kimchi and somewhat similarly Aben Ezra. Whether we take the verb as pointed with daghosh in the *tav*, and so from מָנַן, to give, that is, gifts to lovers, or without daghesh, and from חנה equivalent to אָחַנָּן, to hire or bargain, makes little difference in the general sense of the clause. **And they shall sorrow a little for the burden of the king of princes.** This fixes with more definiteness the meaning of the foregoing member of the verse. According to (1) this rendering of יָחֵלּוּ (Qeri) Hiph. from חוּל, "a little" would require to be taken ironically; it is better, therefore, to render it "in a little time." The burden is not that of taxation or even deportation, but of oppression in exile. The oppressor is the monarch of Assyria, who asks boastingly, "Are not my princes altogether kings?" Another (2) translation is, "They will begin to diminish on account of the burden of the king of princes." According to this the verb יָחֵלּוּ is future of Hiph. הֵחֵל from חלל, to begin, and מְעָט is either an infinitive for מֵעָט, or rather a verbal adjective; and the sense is that they begin to be or become fewer in consequence of the Assyrian's oppression. But (3) taking the verb from the same root חלל cognate with Greek χαλάω, loose, set free, Gesenius translates, "And they (the hostile nations) shall presently force them from the burden (*i.e.* the unpleasant dominion) of the king." The Septuagint (4) read מִמַּשָּׂא instead of מְעָט, and a copula between, *i.e.* "and princes;" and render, Καὶ κοπάσουσι μικρὸν τοῦ χρίειν βασιλέα καὶ ἄρχοντας, equivalent to "And they shall cease a little to anoint a king and princes." Our choice must lie between (1) and (2) in interpreting this difficult clause; there is a modification of (1) worth mentioning; it is: "They shall in a little while sorrow for the burden which they pay (*i.e.* the tribute which they pay) kings and princes," viz. all of them, the two concluding words being thus in apposition to the subject of the verb. On the whole, we prefer the rendering of the clause in the Authorized Version, as both grammatical and supplying a sense consistent with the context. The prophet foretells that Israel would ere long feel painfully the sorrowful consequences of their going to Assyria and suing there for help. Oppressed by a yearly tribute to the Assyrian king, they would smart under the yoke, and long to be free.

Vers. 11, 12.—These two verses are closely connected with the preceding verse and with each other. Ver. 11 not only accounts for, but justifies, the threat of punishment announced in ver. 10 by reference to Ephraim's sin; and ver. 12 shows the inexcusableness of Ephraim in thus sinning. **Because Ephraim hath made many altars to sin, altars shall be unto him to sin.** Instead of the one sanctuary with its altar in the place which the Lord their God would choose out

of all their tribes to put his Name there and to accept the offerings of his people, they multiplied altars contrary to the express command of God; while those altars which they erected in any places that pleased them were not for the service of the true God, but for the worship of idols, the calves, Baal, and other vanities of the heathen. Thus they multiplied their sin by every altar they reared and every idol they worshipped. Their altars, instead of proving their piety, plunged them in greater sin and deeper guilt. **I have written to him the great things of my Law, but they were counted as a strange thing.** For the Athenians, whose city Paul found full of idols, and which in addition to its many other altars had one to an unknown god, there was some excuse, for they were not privileged with a revelation of the Divine will in a written Law; but for Israel no such apology was possible. This verse proves plainly that, in their sinning by multiplying idols and altars, they were entirely without excuse. The kethic or textual reading has *ribbo* for *ribboth* by the omission of *tav* and equivalent to רִבָּבָה, that is, ten thousand, or myriads; the Qeri or Massoretic correction, רַבֵּי, plural of רב, multitudes. The idea conveyed is the numerous directions, preceptive and prohibitive, of the Pentateuch; the commandments, so full and explicit, comprehending alike the great things and the little; the details, so minute as well as manifold, that there was no possibility of mistake, provided there was any mind to be informed. Still more, these commandments, directions, and details were not only communicated verbally and orally to Israel; they were committed to writing, and thus placed permanently on record. And yet, notwithstanding all this, the great things of God's Law were regarded by many or most of those to whom they were addressed as instructions foreign to their interest, with which they had no concern, and which consequently had no claim on their attention and deserved no place in their recollection. The variety of names for the Divine commands is very noteworthy. There are *commandments*, equivalent to all precepts of which the motives are assigned, as of circumstance to distinguish Israel from other people; *statutes*, for which no motives are assigned, as in the case of the red heifer, prohibition against wearing garments of mixed material, and ceremonial prescripts in general; *testimonies*, precepts intended to keep up the memory of any event or fact, as the Passover to remind of the departure from Egypt; *precepts*, rational injunctions, left, so to say, to our intelligence, as the unity of the Deity and the fact of his being the Creator; and *judgments*, judicial directions relating to buying and selling, inheritances, and such like.

Vers. 13, 14.—**For the sacrifice of mine offerings, they sacrifice flesh and eat it; but the Lord accepteth them not.** The mention of altars naturally suggests that of sacrifices, and, as a matter of fact, with the multiplication of those altars they multiplied their sacrifices, so that the latter kept pace with the former, and a due proportionateness maintained between them. And yet, numerous as those sacrifices were, they were not real sacrifices; they were no more and no better than slaying so many animals and feasting on their flesh; the spirit of devotion was absent, therefore God did not accept them. **Now will he remember their iniquity, and visit their sins: they shall return to Egypt.** The turning-point was now reached, their iniquity was full, and the time of punishment had arrived. God had delivered their fathers out of the bondage of Egypt; now he will send their posterity into a bondage similar to or even worse than that of Egypt. **For Israel hath forgotten his Maker, and buildeth temples** (or, *palaces*). Here Israel's sin, with the consequent suffering, is traced to its source. The origin of all was their forgetfulness of God and false confidence in man—themselves and others or both. **And Judah hath multiplied fenced cities.** Israel forgot his Maker, and built shrines on high places, "consecrating," as Jerome says, "whole hills and mountains and shady trees to Baal and Ashtaroth and other idols." Judah also, though aware that Israel had renounced the love of Jehovah and had been punished for their sins, did not return to God, but trusted in fenced cities. **But I will send a fire upon his cities, and it shall devour the palaces thereof.** To the word for "city" the masculine suffix is attached; while with "palaces" the feminine suffix is employed. With the proper names of peoples either gender is used: (*a*) the masculine with reference to the people or population, and the feminine in relation to the country; or the reference may be to Israel and Judah, the masculine referring to their respective peoples, and feminine to their lands; though (*b*) Aben Ezra refers the feminine suffix of "palaces" to עִיר, city, which is feminine. (*c*) The Septuagint has *τὰ θεμέλια*, **foundations**, instead of palaces.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—3.—***Ministerial faithfulness.*** The prophet is represented as a messenger with alarming tidings, or sentinel at his post to give warning of the enemy's approach, or rather as a herald commissioned to declare war. Earthly kings have heralds or special messengers for this purpose, and here the King of kings charges the prophet as his herald to proclaim war. "Go, then, and let the Israelites know, not now by thy mouth, but even by thy throat, by the sound of the trumpet, that I am an enemy to them, and that I am present with a strong army to destroy them." The presence of a herald on such occasions presupposed the preparation of the enemy—that they were ready to take the field, or were actually on the march. As the prophets of old, so ministers still require to act boldly, bravely, with earnestness and faithfulness in rebuking sin, warning men of approaching peril and punishment, and calling on them loudly and fearlessly to repent and return to God.

I. PUNISHMENT IN PURSUIT OF THE GUILTY. Even a heathen poet has sung, "Seldom does punishment, though lame of foot, quit the criminal who goes before." Sometimes the propbet is summoned to declare the people's sin, showing them its guilt and dangerous consequences; sometimes to denounce its punishment. We have a notable example of the former in a passage a good deal like the opening verse of this chapter; thus Isaiah is commanded by God in the words, "Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and show my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins." But the Prophet Hosea is here enjoined to proclaim the punishment which the sin of Israel was surely and swiftly bringing upon them: "He shall come as an eagle against the house of the Lord." The abruptness imparts vigour to the expression, while it indicates the sad and sudden reality. When the cup of a people's iniquity is brimful, calamity is just at hand; when they are ripe for judgment, the enemy is ready to execute it; when the day of vengeance has arrived, no distance can secure them from it. From the far-distant land of Assyria, the Assyrian eagle, Shalmaneser, like the great Babylonian eagle, Nebuchadnezzar, of a later date, "with great wings, long-winged, full of feathers," came from afar, swift in his advance, sudden in his approach, sure of his prey, and savage in rending it. No boasted privileges can delay that day of disaster, nor deliver when it comes; even *the house of the Lord* shall not be exempt. Israel, though God's people, his house and family, shall fall by the assault of the Assyrian. God usually speaks before he strikes, and warns before he pours down his wrath; nor does he either threaten or strike until he has been provoked by sin.

II. THE PROCURING CAUSE OF ISRAEL'S PUNISHMENT. "Because they have transgressed my covenant, and trespassed against my Law;" such is the cause which God assigns for the threatened punishment. God thus indicates his proceedings, exhibits his justice, asserts his patience and long-suffering, declares his hatred of sin, and gives to all a solemn warning against its commission. Here again the mercy of God is made manifest. Notwithstanding God's supreme right over men and absolute authority to dispose of them as he pleases, yet he graciously condescends to enter into a covenant with his creatures, stipulating promise of reward to obedience, and penalty in case of disobedience. Nor could Israel plead ignorance of the conditions of this covenant; for the *Law*, with its commandments, exhibited those conditions, explicitly declaring all the duties of the covenant. They, however, broke the commandment, and so prepared the way for breaking the covenant; they trespassed against the Law, and so transgressed the covenant. They violated the commandments of the Law that taught them their duty to their neighbour; they broke the covenant that bound them to their God. Usually men proceed from omissions to commissions, and frequent violations of the Law make way for the final and entire renunciation of the covenant.

III. PROFESSION WITHOUT PRACTICE IS MERE PRETENCE. Israel had, no doubt, more knowledge of the true God than any of the neighbouring nations. God's Name was known among them; to Israel belonged "the adoption, the glory, and the covenants." They depended much on this, and in their adversity they urged with much vehemence the plea, "My God, we know thee." So at last many will cry, "Lord, Lord, open to us;" or, "Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy Name, and in thy Name cast out devils, and in thy Name done many wonderful works?" But this plea shall only meet,

as it merits, the indignant response, "Depart from me, ye workers of iniquity." Here is the secret of their rejection: their profession was not supplemented by practice. They pretend to know God in the day of their distress; but as long as they basked in the sunshine of prosperity, they neither desired the knowledge of God's ways, nor delighted in the duties required of them; nay, they despised practical piety. They had a name to live, but were dead; they had a form of godliness, but denied its power in their heart and life. Alas! how many professors of religion are in this same state. "What stead will it stand a man in to be able to say, 'My God, I know thee,' when he cannot say, 'My God, I love thee,' and 'My God, I serve thee, and cleave to thee only'?" Israel had cast off the thing that is good; they had cast off God, the supreme Good. There is nothing truly great but God, and nothing really good but God; and in rejecting God they rejected all that is good. God is the Author of all goodness, and nearness to him is the sure way of getting good. "Whatsoever any man hath or enjoys of good, is from his relation to him, his nearness to him, his congruity with him." Israel cast off the Law of God, though that Law was holy and just and good; they cast off his worship, though that conduced both to their temporal and eternal good; they abandoned his service, though it was good for all the relations of life; they had cast over everything good and upright, just and true; and now in turn they are cast off. The contrast is observable; they had driven away from all that was good, and now the enemy drives in hot pursuit after them.

Vers. 4—8.—*The causes of the Divine judgments are more particularly specified.* The first sin which brought down the Divine displeasure was their civil apostasy, as it has been called, or change of civil government.

I. NATURE OF THE FIRST SIN BY WHICH ISRAEL INCURRED DIVINE WRATH. By this we are not to understand, with some, the election of Saul, because this political offence, if we may rightly so term it, included the twelve tribes in common, whereas it is the ten tribes of the northern kingdom with which the prophet here deals; neither are we, according to others, to confine the sin with which Israel is here charged to certain usurpers who, by treachery, or conspiracy, or assassination, forced their way to the throne, for this was long after the disruption, and was the sin of a few individuals rather than of the whole people, though undoubtedly the whole people suffered by the transgression of these particular persons. It is to the separation of Israel from the Davidic dynasty and the southern kingdom in the days of Jeroboam that the prophet refers.

II. THE SAME THING DONE AND NOT DONE BY GOD. An objection is sometimes urged against the severity with which Israel is reproved for the disruption of the kingdom of David, seeing that God had predestined and promised it. 1. It is true, indeed, that God had predicted the rending of the kingdom of Solomon; it is true he had promised ten tribes to Jeroboam by Ahijah the Shilonite; it is true also that he had even predetermined the whole. How, then, can it be said to have taken place without God's consent? Or why should Israel be so sharply rebuked for the sin? God had determined to punish Solomon by rending ten tribes from the kingdom of his son and successor, though he himself was allowed to retain the government of the whole till the end of his days, and by handing them over to Jeroboam. The part enacted by the people was not with the Divine knowledge, that is, the Divine consent, approval. They did not consult God about the matter, or the manner of it, or the time of it; they did not wait for his command to do it; they did not seek his approbation in doing it; they were no way concerned about executing the Divine purpose—nothing was further from their thoughts. They revolted from the house of David not in order to obey God; of this, as far as the history shows, they never thought. What they did was done from a spirit of sedition; what they aimed at was a relief from oppressive taxation. They had no regard to the Divine mind in the whole movement. They were bent on carrying out their own cherished project, and yet unwittingly, unintentionally, they were carrying out the purpose and promise of God, though without any reference to the mind and will of God. 2. The following illustration of this difficult subject is given by Calvin. "God," he says, "designed to prove the patience of his servant Job. The robbers who took away his property, were they excusable? By no means. For what was their object, but to enrich themselves by injustice and plunder? Since, then, they purchased

their advantage at the expense of another, and unjustly robbed a man who had never injured them, they were destitute of every excuse. The Lord, however, did in the mean time execute by them what he had appointed, and what he had already permitted Satan to do. He intended that his servant should be plundered; and Satan, who influenced the robbers, could not himself move a finger except by the permission of God—nay, except it was commanded him. At the same time, the Lord had nothing in common or in connection with the wicked, because his purpose was far apart from their depraved lust. So also it must be said of what is said here by the prophet."

III. THE SECOND CAUSE OF DIVINE JUDGMENT. The second sin and cause of judgment was their religious apostasy in the worship of the calves. 1. The first sin, as so often happens, led to the second. The idolatry of the calves was intended by Jeroboam to help and uphold his usurped sovereignty. Not only had the national religion fallen into decay, but it had degenerated into superstitious will-worship. Next to the subversion of the Davidic kingdom came the perversion of the legitimate priesthood. 2. The sin of their apostasy was aggravated by their abuse of the wealth which God had given them. All they had they owed to God, and were in duty bound to employ it for his honour; instead of doing so, they dishonoured him by making idols of their silver and gold. Men are sometimes found to be more lavish of their gold and silver in support of a false religion than in maintaining the pure worship of the true God. Israel might pretend that their calves of gold were only representations of Jehovah; but Jehovah refuses to be so represented, forbidding men to make any graven image of metal, or stone, or wood, standing out prominently and in high relief, or any likeness of anything on a flat surface as a picture, for the purpose of doing it homage by worship or serving it by sacrifice. If, then, men neglect the Divine prohibitions or precepts, they must remember that God will not be mocked by their professions or pretences, but will estimate them by their practice in the light of his Law. 3. Israel was destroying himself by this sinful idolatry. "That he may be cut off;" such is the literal sense, as though it meant the whole nation as one man—one and all. Such was the tendency of their conduct, though it was not their intention; such was the inevitable end of their course, though they were not aware of it. "So a man chooses destruction or hell, if he chooses those things which, according to God's known Law and Word, end in it. Man hides from his own eyes the distant future, and fixes them on the nearer objects which he has at heart." Some take the clause to mean that the gold and silver so sadly misused and sinfully perverted would be cut off; it appears rather to refer to the persons who were the possessors thereof; in any case their money would perish, either passing out of their possession or along with the possessors.

IV. THEIR SIN AND CONSEQUENT SUFFERING ARE INSISTED ON. The striking amplification of the same subject seems designed to impress on the people's mind that they themselves, and no other, had wrought their ruin, and that they need not try to transfer the fault to others, or charge God foolishly. Nor is it necessary to suppose that a calf had been set up at Samaria, or that one of those at Dan and Bethel had been removed thither. Samaria was the metropolis of the northern kingdom, and as such took a leading part in the calf-worship and contributed largely and liberally to its support. Of the different renderings of the first clause of ver. 5, all tending pretty much in the same direction, we may safely adhere to that of the Authorized Version as affording a good sense. Israel, we read in ver. 3, "had cast off" God and goodness; now the calf which they had set up as their god had cast them off, left them in the lurch, or caused their removal to another and a foreign land; thus their sin and its punishment are linked together by the same word, "cast off" (זנח). The thing is represented in the past because sure of accomplishment; they had renounced God, and now the thing which they substituted for God had abandoned them. 1. So shall it ever be; whatever object men make an idol of, and set it up in their heart instead of God, giving it that place in their affections which belongs to God alone, will one day assuredly cast them off, desert them in their sorest need, and leave them in distress. Is wealth our idol? Do we make gold our god, and fine gold our confidence? That calf of gold will cast us off; for riches make themselves wings and fly away, as has been the sorrowful experience of thousands. Is fame the god we follow? Is popular applause the idol we worship? Are worldly greatness and its accompanying glory the idols, the objects, of our idolatry, and dear to us as the calves at Dan and Bethel were to Israel? This calf of vain-glory

will surely cast us off; for fame is a bubble that bursts before it goes far along the stream of time; popularity is often false, always fickle as the breeze. The words of Wolsey prove with wondrous power how the calf of worldly glory casts off its worshippers.

"Farewell, a long farewell, to all my greatness!
This is the state of man: To-day he puts forth
The tender leaves of hope, to-morrow blossoms,
And bears his blushing honours thick upon him:
The third day comes a frost, a killing frost;
And,—when he thinks, good easy man, full surely
His greatness is a-ripening,—nips his root,
And then he falls, as I do. I have ventured,
Like little wanton boys that swim on bladders,
This many summers in a sea of glory;
But far beyond my depth: my high-blown pride
At length broke under me; and now has left me,
Weary, and old with service, to the mercy
Of a rude stream, that must for ever hide me.
Vain pomp and glory of this world, I hate ye!"

Do the pleasures of sin engross our affections, and are they the idol on which our heart dotes? Our idol will cast us off. The pleasures of sin are short-lived; they last but for a season, and that season is at most and best a short one; nor do they satisfy while they last. Is beauty the object of our idolatry? This calf, so greatly admired and much beloved, in a little while casts off and disappoints its many worshippers. For beauty is a fair but fleeting flower; it fades and fails. "All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away." The heir to or actual owner of a large estate, with its broad acres and princely mansion, sets his heart on his splendid possessions; his magnificent property becomes his idol, but his calf casts him off. If only heir, he may never enter on the actual possession, and so he is disappointed of it; if already owner, he may in many ways be disappointed in it, or he may be deprived of it by force, or fraud, or casualty, or death; in either case the calf casts off the idolatrous worshipper. The hereditary estate, secure it as men will by deeds and settlements, shall change proprietorship and be taken away; there is no real fixity of tenure here on earth. The baronial residence shall in time become a ruin grey, round which the ivy twines. 2. But why does the calf of Samaria, or, generally speaking, men's idol, prove so unsatisfactory, blighting men's hopes and blasting their expectations, so that they are left a prey to disappointment, disgust, distress, or even despair? Just because God's anger is kindled against it. God is a jealous God, and will not give his glory to another, or his praise to graven images. Whatever course of sin men pursue becomes like a conductor of electricity, and brings down the scathing lightning of the Divine wrath upon their guilty heads. 3. But the anger of God is not only kindled against them; it is aggravated and intensified by their obduracy of heart and persistent course of evil. "How long," asks God, "will it be ere they attain to innocency?' that is to say, how long will they persevere in their present evil ways, neither purging themselves from the sin of idolatry and putting away their idols, nor striving to attain to purity of life and uprightness of character? The omniscient One himself in asking this question seems surprised—with reverence be it spoken—at their suicidal obstinacy, as if bent on their own destruction and rushing on their own ruin. He waits to be merciful, but they repel the overtures of his grace; he stretches out his hand to receive and welcome them, but they refuse to return. No wonder our blessed Lord, during the days of his flesh, is reported in a certain place to have "marvelled because of men's unbelief." 4. We are further shown in the following verse the justness of God's indignation against those stupid calf-worshippers. This worship was no institution of God; it was Israel's invention. They could not lay the blame of it on others. Sinners sometimes feel a miserable satisfaction or even palliation in endeavouring to make others the scapegoat of their own iniquities. This is an old story. Adam laid the fault of his eating the forbidden fruit on Eve; Eve in turn transferred it to the serpent. No doubt a load is lightened when it is laid on the shoulders of several persons instead of a single individual. Not so with Israel in this

case. No prophetic intimation induced Israel to adopt the calf-idolatry, neither could they find fault with their neighbours for seducing them into it. It was their own device, and had its origin with their king and themselves. How sad that Israel should make themselves so vile!—that Israel, forgetful of their high lineage; that Israel, unmindful of their great progenitor, whose title of nobility was "prince with God;" that Israel, whom God had taken into covenant to be his peculiar people, and who at the foot of Sinai avouched the Lord to be their God, should prove so unspeakably sottish as to worship a man-made God, having "changed their glory into the similitude of an ox that eateth grass"! But those calves of Dan and Bethel, or this calf of Samaria, in its collective sense comprehending all and considered by them as a "sort of tutelary deity of the ten tribes," was as contemptible in its end as at its beginning. Made by man's hand, it was to be unmade by the same; fashioned by man, it was doomed to be broken into fragments by man, and, like Aaron's calf at Sinai, broken into pieces and ground to powder.

V. A MORAL SEED-TIME AND ITS HARVEST. The account of Israel's punishment is continued in two striking similitudes, one of which presents the positive side and the other the negative. The positive side is that of a man sowing the wind and reaping the whirlwind, as if a person took immense pains, toiling and labouring like a husbandman when he sows his seed; but the seed sown is wind, a thing of nought and unsubstantial—mere empty sound, and nothing more or better; then when harvest comes, as might in such circumstances be expected, there is grievous disappointment, and not only disappointment, but destruction, utter destruction, represented by a fearful whirlwind (the double termination intensifying the meaning). "If it may be supposed," says Pococke, "that a man should sow the wind and cover it with earth, or keep it there for a while penned up, what could he expect but that it should be enforced by its being shut up, and the accession of what might increase its strength to break forth again in greater quantities with greater violence?" Israel expended gold and silver on their idols, and were assiduously laborious in their worship; but instead of reaping any benefit from them, or increasing their prosperity by them so as to equal the idolatrous nations around, they laboured in vain and wearied themselves for very vanity. Nor was that all; they reaped ruin, being swept away by the whirlwind of Divine wrath. The negative side exhibits three degrees of development, or three stages of progress. They sow, and, as the husbandman expects a crop, so they look for a harvest of peace, plenty, and prosperity. But lo! the seed they sow never comes up, it has neither blade nor stalk; or if it should spring up, produce a stalk or standing corn and develop an ear, it never reaches maturity—the ear does not fill, there is no ripe corn in the ear, and so the bud yields no meal; or suppose it to advance yet further, and to ripen and yield meal, it becomes a spoil to the enemy, for strangers swallow it up. How many every year, every month, every week, ay, every day, are sowing in this way foolishly and even fatally, being doomed to reap, not only disappointment, but destruction! The apostle tells us that they who sow to the flesh shall reap corruption. It is observable that in the passage referred to (Gal. vi. 8) there is a distinction: the seed (ὁ γὰρ ἐὰν σπείρῃ) and the soil, or the field (εἰς τὴν σάρκα), and that which is sown in it. The field is the flesh, or sensuality in general: in that field some sow the seed of licentiousness, and they reap rottenness; some sow intemperance, and they reap corruption.

VI. THE SAD SEQUEL OF ISRAEL'S SIN. The figure now resolves itself into a fact—a threefold fact—namely, Israel's consumption, captivity, and contempt. 1. They are swallowed up as a victim is swallowed by a beast of prey, and consumed from being a nation. And yet this consumption is not annihilation, nor extinction, as we learn from the remainder of the verse. It is rather impoverishment—their substance devoured by strangers, and the produce of their land eaten up. The expression may be paralleled by the Homeric—

> "Priam and all his house and all his host
> Alive devour; then, haply, thou wilt rest."

More appropriate still is the Scripture parallel, "Have all the workers of iniquity no knowledge? who eat up my people as they eat bread." 2. Their dispersion and captivity in Gentile lands were soon and certainly to come to pass. Driven from their own country, and deprived of those ordinances which, when they might have enjoyed and profited by

them, were abused and despised, they shall ere long find themselves strangers in a foreign land and among heathen people; for "now shall they be among the Gentiles." 3. In addition to captivity, they are doomed to contempt, like vessels put to the vilest use, and into which the filthiest things are poured. They have been vessels of dishonour, despised broken vessels, in which there is no pleasure. And has it not been so with Israel for nearly, or perhaps we might say for more than, two thousand years? Notwithstanding the eminence to which individuals of that race have risen in the different professions and in various walks of life, they have as a people, in the lands of their dispersion, been subject to outrage, treated with contumely, scorned and spoiled and peeled. 4. Though these calamities were peculiar to Israel in a special manner, yet less or more they have been common to sinners at all times and in all lands. Those that corrupt religion or contemn its privileges are not unfrequently deprived of them; gospel-despisers are deprived of the gospel; those that dishonour God are dishonoured by their fellow-men, for "them that honour me," says God, "I will honour; and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed."

Vers. 9—13.—*The justice of the judgments threatened with further additions.* Their errand to Assyria added to their sin; they sought heathen helpers to uphold them in their apostasy and idolatry, increasing their sin.

I. ONE SINFUL ACT IS PROLIFIC OF MANY MORE. One sinful course draws on another, just as one lie necessitates one or more to make it plausible, or prop it up or cloak it. The revolt from the Davidic dynasty was a wrong step and a sinful one; the idolatry of the calves was still more wicked. The progression was from bad to worse; but to have recourse to foreign allies to secure them in their twofold national iniquity was yet another step down the steep incline of sin.

II. SIN IS AT ONCE A FOOLISH AND EXPENSIVE THING. 1. Ephraim's conduct was as perverse in this regard as the headstrong wild ass that refuses all restraint, and stubbornly pursues its own headlong course through the desert; or, if it be a contrast and not a comparison, the folly of Ephraim is reproved by the wild ass, which is sufficiently wise to roam at large in its own solitary way, keeping aloof from all interference with its liberty and retaining its independence. 2. But Ephraim's folly cost them dear. Like a shameless wanton, wooing and not waiting to be wooed, they resorted to sinful helps which were as much adultery as idolatry itself; they hired help by such adulterous alliances. The help they thus procured in reality helped them not; they submitted to the suzerainty of Assyria, and became subject to imposts and tribute. To escape one master, men sometimes put themselves in the power of a worse, repeating the experience of the poet's fable—

> "A lordly stag, arm'd with superior force,
> Drove from their common field a vanquish'd horse,
> Who for revenge to man his strength enslaved,
> Took up his rider and the bit received;
> But, though he conquer'd in the martial strife,
> He felt his rider's weight, and champ'd the bit for life."

III. GOD ALONE IS THE SURE REFUGE OF HIS PEOPLE IN THEIR STRAITS. In time of trouble men often sin against God, and sin against their own soul by going elsewhere in search of help. If in their straits they seek help of God, all will be well with them in the end. When trouble comes, when affliction comes, when we are in distress, instead of simple shifts we are to seek help from God; instead of putting confidence in creaturely succours, we must apply to the Creator. To neglect him and sue for relief elsewhere, is forsaking our own mercies and turning our back on God; to depart from God and depend on sinful means of help, is hurtful in the effort and in the effect, as well in the emergency as in the issue and end. Nor need we ever distrust his care or doubt his kindness, if only in earnest we apply to him; his help is real, his help is effectual; he bestows it without stint and without fee or reward, without money and without price. As the psalmist sings so beautifully—

> "God is our Refuge and our Strength,
> In straits a present Aid;
> Therefore, although the earth remove,
> We shall not be afraid."

IV. WRONG MEANS OF HELP PROVE RUINOUS. The help which Israel hired among the heathen, so far from availing them, put them in a worse position than before. 1. God would frustrate their purpose, gathering their hired allies against them, or themselves as exiles among aliens and enemies. If "a little" be not referred to time nor understood ironically, it may mean that heavy as was the tribute imposed by the Assyrian monarch, and grievous to be borne so that it caused revolt, it was the source of little grief compared with what followed, when first a portion and then the whole of the nation were carried into Captivity. 2. Partly similar and partly dissimilar is the following exposition of Kimchi: "They at first murmured and complained on account of the burthen of the king and the princes, as is written in the Book of Kings that the kings of the nations imposed tribute on them; and this the prophet calls a trifle in comparison with the Captivity." The taxes and burdens with which they were oppressed were, indeed, mere trifles, and easily borne in respect of the Captivity and the calamities that succeeded. 3. "A people," says an old expositor, "who have suffered under lesser trouble, and yet have made no right use of it to prevent more, or have used sinful means to be rid of it, may expect no other issue but that the Lord will send a greater trouble to make them forget the former; for this had been their carriage under their tribute and burdens, and they are therefore told *they shall* sorrow a little for the burden of the king of princes." Further, the means that men use will be of little avail so long as they refuse to acknowledge God, while the most prudent plans of their own devising, if unsanctioned and unblessed by him, end in disappointment and disaster; what they hire for their preservation becomes their undoing, and issues in destruction. Israel had applied to Assyria, and as the result of that application "began to be minished through the burden of the king of princes" (according to one rendering of the clause). First came the exactions of Pul, then the captivity of Gilead by Tiglath-pileser, and in the end the deportation of all Israel by Shalmaneser.

V. A SHOW OF RELIGION WITHOUT THE SUBSTANCE SERVES ONLY TO INCREASE SIN. God had, from the time of Moses, appointed one altar at Jerusalem; and when, in the days of Joshua, the trans-Jordanic tribes were thought by their brethren to have built an altar in violation of the Divine appointment, it called forth a most vigorous remonstrance: "What trespass is this that ye have committed against the God of Israel, to turn away this day from following the Lord, in that ye have builded you an altar, that ye might rebel this day against the Lord?" It was only on receiving an explanation that it was not a sacrificial but monumental altar that the western brethren were reconciled. 1. Now, however, they had so far degenerated that beside the once central altar at Jerusalem they had one at Dan, another at Bethel, and others on every high hill and any other place that pleased them. This multiplication of altars had the appearance of religion, but only the appearance; these many altars were in all likelihood made for the ostensible purpose of offering expiatory sacrifices for sin, but were actually an augmentation of the people's sin, each altar becoming an additional element in the national transgression. 2. They had turned aside from God for human help; next they turned aside from the divinely appointed mode of worship to human methods, substituting for the pure service of the Most High the miserable semblance of self-devised religiousness. They had made many altars, which, however intended, resulted in the commission of sin; and now these many altars, instead of expiating their sins or making amends for their transgressing God's express command, are counted to them for sin and bring them in guilty before God, not to speak of the fact that the multiplication of altars to the true God would occasion the further sin of dedicating altars to other and strange gods. If men corrupt religion, however plausible their pretext, they do it at unspeakable peril to their own soul and the souls of others.

VI. THERE IS NO REASONABLE EXCUSE FOR SIN. This was specially the case with Israel, and still more particularly with ourselves. If Israel had been left in heathen darkness, if they had been ignorant of the Divine statutes and judgments, if they had not enjoyed the high privilege of being made the custodians of God's living oracles, there might have been some excuse for them, though indeed natural reason is sufficient to leave even the heathen without any reasonable excuse for idolatry. 1. But how different it was with Israel! God had made known to them, and that in permanent written record, the many lessons of his Law; but much as God had done for the people of Jewry, still more has he done for the peoples of Christendom, for while the Law

came by Moses, grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. We have in our hands, and for daily perusal, the wondrous things of the Law and the gracious things of the gospel; the twin lips of God's great oracle speak to us. 2. Many and great are the lessons of the written Word. Many as they are in number, they are yet greater in importance—great in their origin, for they come from God and are given by inspiration of his Spirit; great in their utility to man, for they make him acquainted with the things that pertain to life and godliness; great in their issues, for the interests of eternity are intertwined with them and depend on them; great as revealing the one living and true God, the way of his worship, his well-beloved Son our only Saviour, and the plan of salvation by him. 3. Proportionately great is the sin of neglecting them. Israel, though God had been at pains to write to them the great things of his Law, turned their back upon them as something strange in which they had no concern, and with which they were disinclined to intermeddle, and which, even if attended to, could prove of little moment. These things, in greater measure and with greater fulness, have been handed on to us; for, though written long ago, they were written for our learning. What a terrible responsibility rests on us if we neglect these things from indifference, or slight them from contempt, or refuse to be directed, guided, and governed by them, or reject them altogether as unworthy of our observance and obedience, or as unsuitable to a progressive age and present circumstances!

VII. SELFISH SERVICES ARE VOID OF SIGNIFICANCE. "Most part of worshippers follow the external duties of religion no further than their own ends lead them; and men's own advantage is the upholder of all false religion, for *they sacrifice and eat it*." 1. They feasted on their sacrifices. This was allowable in the case of peace offerings and thank offerings; but in the case of the burnt offerings they were wholly consecrated to God, and ascended (according to the import of the name) in the altar-smoke to heaven. Israel was not, it is probable, careful to mark the distinction or restrict their appetite in the case. It is right and proper that we should carry our religion into our business, but decidedly wrong to carry our business, with all its selfishness or greed of gain, into our religion. 2. Their worship was a lifeless, soul-less, unspiritual service. Besides being offered in the wrong place and by the wrong persons—that is, in places forbidden and by unauthorized persons, such as Jeroboam's priests—they were offered without the right aim or right end, or any true devotion of spirit. It was mere external worship, without spiritual affections, or spiritual dispositions, or spiritual life; and therefore such sacrifices wanted the proper qualities and necessary characteristics of sacrifice; they were, in fact, only flesh, and the victims only carcases, and consequently the Lord could not away with them; he accepted them not. 3. A proper spirit, a pure heart, and clean hands are among the conditions of acceptable service. God, by the Prophet Isaiah, after affirming his respect to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembling at the Divine Word, adds in relation to the opposite character, "He that killeth an ox is as if he slew a man; he that sacrificeth a lamb, as if he cut off a dog's neck; he that offereth an oblation, as if he offered swine's blood; he that burneth incense, as if he blessed an idol." So in the New Testament we are required to present "reasonable service," or service in which the soul and spirit are engaged, as opposed to what is merely outward and corporeal. 4. Unhallowed services only remind God of the offences of the worshippers, whose sins in consequence he remembers, not to pardon them, but to punish them. The God that redeemed them and brought them out of Egypt will send them back into bondage, in Assyria or elsewhere, equal to or worse than that of Egypt. Some literally and actually went to Egypt, and found a grave there.

Ver. 14.—*Israel and Judah both in the transgression.* In this closing verse of the chapter God takes Judah to task as well as Israel for forgetfulness of God; while that forgetfulness of his Maker on the part of Israel manifested itself in idolatry, and so in building idol-temples, but on the part of Judah by carnal confidences, and so in multiplying fenced cities. The one set up idols in the place of God, the other confided in outward means of defence and safety instead of trusting in God; thus the heart of both was far from God and the remembrance of his Name. The sin here recorded occurred in the reign of Ahaz, who sought to secure Judah by fortified cities, dreading the incursions of Assyria (Isa. xxii. 8—11). The punishment was inflicted by Sennacherib (Isa. xxxvi. 1).

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—4.—*A trumpet-blast of judgment.* In this passage the announcement of Israel's doom is still more direct than it has hitherto been. Up to this point the prophet's message has been principally one of complaint, with threatening of punishment in the future; now, however, he speaks of the judgment as immediately about to fall upon the sinful nation.

I. THE PROCLAMATION OF JUDGMENT. (Ver. 1.) Hosea is here abruptly addressed by the Spirit as a sentinel or watchman. Being the herald of Jehovah, he is to proclaim with the trumpet of prophecy the near approach of the day of vengeance. His immediate message is that Shalmaneser, the Assyrian king, is soon to descend upon Israel as with the fell swoop of an eagle, and to carry the ten tribes captive. Beyond that, however, and little more than a hundred years later, Nebuchadnezzar, "a great eagle with great wings" (Ezek. xvii. 3), is to fall similarly upon Judah. And yet again, in the year 70 A.D., when Jerusalem shall have become a "carcase," the Roman eagles under Titus shall assemble around it, perch victoriously upon the crest of Moriah, and take away from the Jews "both their place and nation." By means of such judgments as these was the wonderful prediction of Moses to be fulfilled, in which the Lord threatened to "bring a nation against Israel from far, as swift as the eagle flieth" (Deut. xxviii. 49). Even yet, however, in these times of the gospel, must the Lord's prophet "set the trumpet to his mouth" to warn wicked nations of the doom which national sin entails, and to remind the sinner of "the wrath to come" which shall overwhelm the impenitent. The "silver trumpet" of the gospel jubilee is to announce, not only the salvation which the Lord Jesus Christ brought at his first coming, but also the judgments which are to overtake unbelievers at the second advent, and which shall then be heralded by the dread "trumpet" of the resurrection.

II. THE CAUSE OF THE JUDGMENT. It was apostasy. This is stated generally in ver. 1, and more specifically in ver. 4. Israel had "transgressed the covenant" (ver. 1) that Jehovah had made with them at Sinai; they had done so by "trespassing against his Law," as written in "the book of the covenant" (Exod. xxiv. 7). They had forsaken God in two ways: by rebelling against the royal house of David, and by rejecting the priestly order of Aaron (ver. 4). 1. *Israel maintained a schismatic kingdom.* In revolting under Jeroboam, they consulted only their own evil self-will, and not the will of Jehovah. During the two hundred and fifty years that the northern kingdom lasted, the throne was occupied by six or more wretched dynasties, and by nineteen unhappy monarchs, all of whom were apostates from God and tyrants over the people. Not one of the kings of the ten tribes did Jehovah recognize as his vicegerent. Dethronements and assassinations and usurpations followed one another, and he "knew it not." 2. *Israel embraced a false religion.* "They made them idols," and went astray into calf-worship and Baal-worship. Not only did the political apostasy lead to the adoption of these heathen practices; the tribes, apart from that, had at this period of their history strong leanings towards idolatry. The people found it pleasant to employ as objects of worship what they could see and touch. They desired to be like the nations around them that served graven images. So they gave freely of their wealth (ver. 4) for the maintenance of their idol temples. In our age, too, the Lord's prophet must point to apostasy from him as the cause of spiritual ruin. The gospel trumpet is to emphasize the counsel of the apostle, "Little children, keep yourselves from idols" (1 John v. 21). The pulpit ought to warn men that the one sure result of persistently setting any creature—whether money, or power, or fame, or any earthly love—in the place of the Creator, will be the irreparable loss and everlasting shame of the soul.

III. THE FALSE PLEA WHICH ISRAEL WOULD USE TO DEPRECATE THE JUDGMENT. (Vers. 2, 3.) Their affliction would drive the people to pray, and to plead that "we, Israel, have known thee." But such a declaration on their part were pretentious and hypocritical. It was irrelevant, and it would be unavailing. For, after all, it rested only upon their natural descent as the chosen race, and upon the historical information about God which they possessed. The plea is that the Lord must protect his own people; but he does not recognize as such those who can say nothing more than that "they have Abraham for their father." He regards mere head-knowledge of himself

as dead knowledge. Israel "professed that they knew God, but in works they denied him" (Titus i. 16). "Israel hath cast off good" (ver. 3)—thrown it from him with loathing and contempt. He had rejected God's salvation, by "transgressing his covenant"—in token whereof he had separated himself from the dynasty of David and from the priestly house of Aaron. And he had rejected Jehovah himself as the chief Good, by seeking a portion for himself in idolatry. Inevitably, therefore, "the enemy shall pursue him;" the Assyrian must crush the northern kingdom under his iron heel, and utterly destroy it. But these verses sound still in our ears the warning, to beware lest we trust in spiritual privilege, as if that were personal piety; or in the faith of our godly ancestors, as if that could be imputed to us; or in our knowledge of theology merely, as if that were synonymous with heart-religion. There is a strong tendency in human nature towards such vain confidence; and Satan plies us with subtle temptations in this direction. The Lord Jesus has warned us that when the last "trumpet" shall sound, and the great assize shall be held, this same false plea shall be presented by multitudes (Matt. vii. 22; Luke xiii. 25—27). To many who shall then cry, "My God, we know thee," the reply of the Judge will be, "I never knew you; depart from me, ye that work iniquity." We must during the present life calmly accept Christ, and live by the faith of him; we must have his Spirit reigning in our hearts, and devote ourselves to the pursuit of righteousness, if we would "not be ashamed before him at his coming."—C. J.

Vers. 5—14.—*Sin its own punishment.* These verses exhibit (1) the *root* of sin, viz. forgetfulness of God (ver. 14); (2) its *folly* (ver. 6); (3) its *fruitlessness* (ver. 7); and (4) the *ruin* which it entails (vers. 8, 10, 13, 14). But perhaps the most prominent thought in the passage is that of the self-punishing nature of sin, as illustrated in the early history and the later fortunes of Ephraim. We see this fact reflected—

I. IN THE NATIONAL CALF-WORSHIP. (Vers. 5—7.) Samaria had "cast off good" (ver. 3) by departing from the pure ritual which Jehovah had prescribed; and therefore the "calf" which she had set up, and in which she gloried, had "cast her off." There was no help in the golden god during the crisis of the country's peril. How could there be?—for "the workman made it." Instead, therefore, of interposing to save their worshippers from exile, the two calves were themselves taken to Nineveh as a spoil. Tiglath-pileser carried away the calf of Dan, and Shalmaneser that of Bethel. The worship of Jeroboam's images proved the ruin of the nation. It was a sowing of the wind. For the breach of the second commandment paved the way for the violation of the first, and for contempt of the whole Decalogue; and then Israel "reaped the whirlwind."

II. IN THE MULTIPLICATION OF ALTARS AND SACRIFICES. (Vers. 11—14.) The Divine will had appointed but one central sanctuary and place of sacrifice (Deut. xii. 5—14). But Israel evinced the corruption of her worship by multiplying temples all over the land, not only to Jehovah, but to the gods of heathendom. The people protested, indeed, that they did not deny the Lord God of their fathers, even when they called upon Baal (ch. ii. 11). But Jehovah could not accept a divided homage; he regarded their altars as set up only "to sin," and he rejected the sacrifices which they laid upon them. The temples which the men of Ephraim built, thus became a millstone round their neck to drag them to destruction (ver. 11). What a pathetic word-picture of a dead ritualism is sketched with one slight touch in ver. 14, "Israel hath forgotten his Maker, *and buildeth temples*"! Yet these shrines were not true temples after all, for there was no Divine presence in them. Without the presence of God the most splendid cathedral is not a sanctuary, but a sepulchre.

III. IN THE POLITICAL FLIRTATIONS WITH ASSYRIA. (Vers. 8—10.) Again and again the kingdom of Israel endeavoured to bolster itself up by abject vassalage to the King of Assyria, and by paying heavy tribute to buy off his invading armies. To this adulterous policy Hosea refers in the words, "Ephraim hath hired lovers." But such expedients, so far from contributing to the safety of the nation, served rather to precipitate and aggravate its ruin. First of all, the tribute imposed upon the people caused them to "sorrow" (ver. 10); and at length Israel was entirely "swallowed up" by the invader. The nation became, in its headstrong obstinacy of disobedience,

like the solitary "wild ass" of the desert; and it fell an easy prey to the Assyrian lion.

IV. IN THE CONFIDENCE OF THE PEOPLE IN MATERIAL DEFENCES. (Ver. 14.) Hosea ascribes this particular sin to Judah rather than to Israel. The Jews "trusted in their fenced cities" (Jer. v. 17). A fortified city is certainly a place of refuge from the invading host. But the motto of such should be, "*Nisi Dominus frustra;*" for, "except the Lord keep the city," it will be quite defenceless, in spite of its fortifications. Judah's battlements were not the Lord's; so they attracted the thunderbolts of the Divine vengeance, and were at last burned with fire by Sennacherib (2 Kings xviii. 13), and by Nebuchadnezzar (2 Kings xxv. 9, 10). His cities and towers had been erected, Babel-like, in proud self-confidence; and thus they ultimately became his destruction.

CONCLUSION. 1. What was true of Ephraim will be true also of England, so soon as the national life of our land shall resemble his. If we claim that the spiritual promises made to Ephraim apply to England, we ought also to acknowledge that the denunciations directed against Ephraim may possibly be deserved by England too. 2. If Ephraim's sin turned out to be its own punishment, it is the same also with that of each individual sinner. Retribution falls upon the wrong-doer in the course of natural law. For Providence is just, and "of our pleasant vices makes instruments to plague us."—C. J.

Ver. 7.—*Reaping the whirlwind.* The figure here is extremely striking; it is one of the most forcible and vivid of Hosea's images. It suggests the folly and unprofitableness of a life of sin; those who live such a life "sow the wind." And it emphasizes the fact that while the harvest must be the same in kind as the seed sown, the increase will be tremendous, both in strength and volume. The whirlwind of the desert tears along with a roar like a cataract, and carries in its wings violent and sweeping destruction; it is, therefore, a fit metaphor for the issue of a career of sin. Let us inquire who are some of those that thus reap.

I. IDOLATERS. It is of such that the prophet is more immediately speaking. The people of the ten tribes were "sowing the wind" when they prayed to the golden calves for abundant harvests; and they would presently "reap the whirlwind" in the three years' siege of Samaria by Shalmaneser, in the successive deportations into exile, and in the final ruin of the nationality of Ephraim. The generation that came out of Egypt seven centuries before had reaped a sad harvest from the calf-worship at Horeb. "There fell of the people that day about three thousand men" (Exod. xxxii. 28). And ever since that time the idolatries of Israel had been a standing grief to Jehovah their Redeemer (Ps. lxxxi. 8—16); until at length there was nothing for it but the two hurricanes of captivity, which respectively swept the ten tribes into Assyria, and the remaining two into Babylon. All heathendom, moreover, "reaps the whirlwind" still as the fruit of its idolatries—a harvest (as Paul tells us in Rom. i. 18—32) of moral corruption and vileness, overhung by the storm-cloud of the Divine wrath.

II. DESPOTS. The tyrant makes an idol of his own evil will, and "sows the wind" of ambition, and pride, and vain-glory, and disregard of the rights of others. Universal history teems with illustrations of the fact that those kings and grandees of the earth who will not give God the glory are doomed to reap a harvest of whirlwind. Take, *e.g.*, from sacred history such cases as Pharaoh, Ahab and Jezebel, Sennacherib, Haman, Herod. Or, from profane history, such illustrations as the Stuart kings of England, the Bourbon kings of France, and the fate of the two Napoleons. Some tyrants have foreseen the harvest before it began to be gathered in; like Louis XV., when he said to his courtiers, "After me, the deluge."

III. CARELESS PARENTS. All who neglect the godly upbringing of their children "sow the wind." There are well-meaning heads of households who fail to maintain a firm and resolute as well as kindly family government. They allow their young people to cherish self-will, or to follow pleasure as if it were the business of life, and neglect to exercise due restraint over them. This was the sin of Eli (1 Sam. iii. 13); and he reaped the tornado in the disgrace which was thus brought upon the priesthood, together with the destruction of his own house. There are parents, also, who in their own personal character fail to set a consistent godly example before their sons and daughters. David's great sin entailed evil upon his family like a whirlwind; some of his sons

became arrows in his heart, instead of "arrows in his hand." The historian shows us the poor king reaping his dismal harvest in the pathetic scene in which he bewailed the fate of Absalom (2 Sam. xviii. 33).

IV. VICIOUS MEN. The young man who "wastes his substance with riotous living" has his career described in our text. In following the impulse of his wild hot passions he "sows the wind." The sensualist, the drunkard, the gambler,—how profitless all their sowing "to their own flesh"! And what a harvest of torment and terror and shame they are compelled to reap! It has been so even with men of the most brilliant genius, as *e.g.* the poets Byron and Burns. A career of sinful pleasure produces the whirlwind as its natural harvest. It undermines the foundations of morality within the soul (ch. iv. 11). The appropriate epitaph for such a life is, on the one side of the tombstone, "Vanity of vanities;" and on the other, "Vexation of spirit."

V. ALL UNBELIEVERS. For even the man of good moral character "sows the wind," if he neglects the salvation of Jesus Christ. Every one who lives without God is without hope. He who believes that the only real life is a life of sense, and who therefore shuts his eyes to the world of the unseen, shall one day be fully undeceived. Should no whirlwind arise within his conscience during the present life, he shall find himself, when he passes into eternity, at once involved in tremendous wreaths of storm. He "shall eat of the fruit of his own way," and his "destruction shall come as a whirlwind" (Prov. i. 24—33). What a dreadful tempest is "the wrath of the Lamb" (Rev. vi. 12—17)! Yet the ungodly shall be exposed to all its fury. They shall "reap the whirlwind;" or, rather, the whirlwind shall reap them; they are "like the chaff which the wind driveth away" (Ps. i. 4).

LESSONS. 1. This life is the seed-time of eternity, and all are sowers. 2. The harvest depends upon the seed; hence the importance of sowing good seed. 3. To sow sin is a policy of wretched infatuation; it is like "sowing wind." 4. The harvest of sin is not only profitless, but terrific and destructive; it is "the whirlwind." 5. All men have "sown the wind," for all are sinners; but there is "a Man" who is able to shelter us from the whirlwind (Isa. xxxii. 2).—C. J.

Ver. 12.—*Holy Scripture, and man's neglect of it.* The complaint contained in this verse may reasonably be addressed to multitudes still. With even more reason, indeed, than to Ephraim seven centuries before Christ; for our completed Bible contains a much richer revelation of Divine truth than those earlier Scriptures which are here referred to.

I. GOD'S GREAT GIFT OF HOLY SCRIPTURE. "I have written to him the great things of my Law." 1. *What is God's "Law"?* The word is used in various senses. Sometimes it denotes the ten commandments alone; sometimes the five books of Moses as distinguished from the prophets; sometimes the Mosaic economy, in distinction from the gospel; and sometimes the whole will of God as published in Holy Writ to determine man's faith and to control his conduct. Hosea in this verse, without doubt, refers immediately to the Pentateuch; but, in applying the passage to ourselves, we must extend the application of the term "Law" so that it shall cover the whole Bible. 2. *What are "the great things" of God's Law?* These can be nothing else than those matters which constitute the substance of revelation. The Bible discloses truths which are: (1) *Great in themselves.* The Book is a revelation of God—his nature, his trinity in unity, his ways in providence, his love to sinners. It unveils to man his own origin and destiny; shows him the greatness of his nature, despite its ruins; supplies him with the perfect standard of moral purity; and satisfies his loftiest aspirations. The Book grapples with the problem of sin, and reveals the way of salvation, through the mediation of the Son of God, his incarnation, his obedience unto death, his resurrection and exaltation (1 Tim. iii. 16), and the ministry of the Holy Spirit. It anticipates "the last things"—the universal triumph of the gospel, the final resurrection, the general judgment, and the blessedness of the heavenly kingdom. (2) *Great in their importance to man.* For the Bible tells man what he most needs to know, in order to his highest well-being. It answers to all the wants of his many-sided nature—his desire of knowledge, his admiration of what is noble, his yearning after sympathy, his need of inward rest, his hunger for immortality. Holy Scripture is a lamp unto his feet. It is the storehouse of his spiritual food. It is the fountain of

life (see Ps. xix. 7—11). (3) *Great in their comprehensiveness.* Some read the clause thus: "I wrote to him the myriads [or, 'the fulnesses'] of my Law;" the reference being to the almost numberless individual ordinances connected with the Mosaic institutions. This thought may well remind us of the inexhaustible supplies of knowledge of all kinds—facts, doctrines, ethical principles, precepts, promises, predictions, etc.—which are stored up in Holy Scripture. The Book evinces its greatness in this respect, that it affords us sure rules and directions for our life under all circumstances. 3. *In what sense has God "written" these great things?* In the same sense, surely, in which a man reveals his thoughts through the medium of his writings. The Lord himself is the Author of the Bible. Its teachings rest upon his authority. Whatever is declared by inspired men to be part of Divine truth or of human duty, God declares to be such. Christians may and do differ regarding theories of inspiration, but every believer accepts the fact that the books of Scripture are the Word of God.

II. MAN'S SHAMEFUL NEGLECT OF THIS GIFT. "But they were counted as a strange thing." The people of the ten tribes treated the precepts of the Pentateuch as if they were a matter which did not concern them. Holy Scripture is treated similarly still: 1. *By worldly men.* Some refuse to receive it as a Divine revelation. They reject the supernatural, ignore the whole realm of faith, and particularly dislike the distinctive doctrines of Christianity. Many more, however, have an orthodox intellectual belief in the Bible as the Word of God; but their faith, such as it is, does not affect the conscience or the heart. When they read from the inspired volume, its words do not "come home to their business and bosoms." "They do not realize the grand evil which the Bible has come to cure, and they have not a heart to the blessings which it offers to bestow. The film of a fallen nature, self-maintained, is upon their eyes while they read" (Dr. John Ker). So, they neglect "the great things of God's Law" for the little matters of sense and worldly vanity. Many see no further grandeur in the Bible than its literary beauty. Others prize it simply as a book of moral culture, and nothing more. The baser sort profane Divine revelation by jesting with its holy subjects, and using its most sacred words as idle oaths. 2. *By many professing Christians.* Are there not such, to whom the Bible is "a strange thing," because they very seldom sit down to read it? And of those who do regularly read "their chapter," how many do so merely to pacify conscience, and thus make little or no effort to understand the meaning of the passages read! Some sincere believers confine their attention to a few pet chapters which contain what they call "the simple gospel," and ignore the rest, although the Scriptures are full of "the manifold wisdom of God." This very prophecy of Hosea, as one has said, is "too often a deserted well;" but those, however, who come and draw from it find it full of living water. One of the wants of the age among professing Christians is a more adequate acquaintance with the contents of the Bible. The man who would enjoy robustness of spiritual life must study the Scriptures book by book, that he may discern the drift and scope of each book, apprehend its particular place in the scheme of truth, and at the same time appropriate and assimilate its teaching for the nourishment of his soul.

III. HOW WE OUGHT TO USE HOLY SCRIPTURE. (See Westminster Shorter Catechism, Question 90.) If we would avoid incurring the censure of this text, we must: 1. *Receive the Book* with a believing and thankful heart; treat it with deep reverence as the Divine Word; and make what effort we can to circulate it throughout the world. 2. "*Search the Scriptures*" with regularity and system, that our intellectual acquaintance with them may be both accurate and comprehensive. 3. *Meditate upon Bible teaching* with self-application in our leisure hours, that our minds may be imbued with its principles of truth and duty, and that conscience and affections and will may become subject to their power. 4. "*Keep*" *God's Word* in our daily acts, and in the habits which we form, so that it may mould our character, and make us Christ-like. "My mother and my brethren are these which hear the Word of God, and do it" (Luke viii. 21). 5. And in all our use of Scripture we must *pray for the promised aid of the Holy Spirit*, without which our best efforts will be in vain. —C. J.

Ver. 2.—*On knowing God.* Ignorance of God or forgetfulness of him leads to moral depravity. This may be illustrated both by national history and by individual

experience. Israel was an example of this truth. The people had forsaken God, had turned to idols, and were therefore sunk in the licentiousness of pagan worship. Their only hope of moral restoration and of future blessedness lay in the fulfilment of the promise, "Israel shall cry unto me, My God, we know thee." The converse of our first statement is equally true. The habitual consciousness that God is near cannot but give simplicity, dignity, reverence, and holiness to life. This was the source of Abraham's magnanimity, of Joseph's purity, of Moses' dignity, of Daniel's heroism. "They endured as seeing him who is invisible." *Our* hope is to be found in the same source: "This is life eternal, that they might *know thee*," etc.

I. THE MEANS OF KNOWING GOD. They can be seen in the experience of Jacob, who first won for himself the name "Israel." 1. *Repentance* is the first step in such knowledge. No one can see goodness while gazing on sin, or know God while absorbed in self. A moral change, not a mental, is required of us as of Israel. The teaching of Christ was not too abstruse for comprehension, but it was too Divine for those absorbed in earthliness. His foes "loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil." Paul was surrounded by men of culture, yet declared "the natural man receiveth not the things of God . . . neither can he know them, for they are *spiritually* discerned." John knew the advantages of intelligent study, but he said, "He that *loveth* not knoweth not God." The change from sin to holiness involves, in the spiritual realm, the change from ignorance to knowledge. Exhibit this in the vision Jacob had at Mahanaim. He knew God's Name after he had repented of his old sin against Esau, and of the habitual subtlety it revealed. Then as Israel he could say, "My God, I know thee." 2. *Prayer* is the outcry of repentance. "Israel shall *cry* to me." We know a man by fellowship with him, and thus we may know God; and he who speaks to God oftenest knows him best. How infinite the condescension that permits this, the love that encourages it! None can make God known to others unless they know him themselves. Hence the special need of prayer on the part of all who speak of him. The Divine teachers of the race have been those who have come from the presence of the Eternal. Illustrations found in the great lawgiver, who had spoken to God in Midian and on Sinai; in David, whose psalms show the agony of his prayer, the intensity of his worship; in the prophets, who saw visions of God; in the apostles, who were prepared for service by being with Jesus, and not by rabbinical culture; in reformers and others, whose spiritual power has been proportionate to their intimacy with God. If all professing Christians could say, "My God, *we* know thee," a human priesthood would be abolished, and the scepticism of the world would be paralyzed. It is true of this knowledge, as of all the higher blessings, "He that asketh receiveth."

II. THE JOYS OF KNOWING GOD. 1. *The sense of personal relationship to him.* "*My* God." He who can say, "My God," implies such blessings as these: (1) Thou art the Pardoner of my sin; *e.g.* David in Ps. li. (2) The Bearer of my burdens: Esther and Nehemiah. (3) The Source of my strength: Paul, "I can do all things," etc. (4) The Place of my safety: Noah and Elijah. (5) The Spring of my hope: John in Patmos. (6) The Crowner of my life: Paul, "Henceforth there is laid up," etc. 2. *The sense of saintly association.* "Israel shall cry." In this cry the people of Hosea's time were associated with their forefathers. The God of their fathers was their God. He is the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever. Hence the helpfulness of the Scripture histories, which tell us what God has been to others. Dwell on the advantages of the history and the memories of the past. Show how the saints were accustomed to strengthen themselves for their present need by recalling former help. David recalled his experience as a shepherd; the exiles their former glory; the Jews their early deliverances, etc. Christian fellowship enlarges the possibilities of this. The experience of one is enriched by the memories of others. The joy of heaven will consist partly in the remembrances the redeemed have of the loving-kindness of God. Associations with the saintly are the noblest and most abiding.

III. THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF KNOWING GOD. They who know him are called upon: 1. *To wait on him in lowly prayer.* If he be God, he demands our constant homage. 2. *To serve him with loyal heart,* with no reserve of thought, or wish, or love. 3. *To learn of him by constant thought.* To one who knows him he says, "I will guide thee with mine eye." His glance, his whisper, is enough for us. 4. *To*

represent him by consecrated life. When Moses came from the presence of God his face shone with heavenly light. When the Sanhedrim saw the courage and wisdom of Peter and John, they saw that they had been with Jesus. So he who is habitually with God will have about him something of heaven's atmosphere and of Christ's Spirit.

CONCLUSION. "No man knoweth the Father but the Son, and he to whom the Son shall reveal him."—A. R.

Vers. 3, 5 (parts).—*Sin's mockery of the sinner.* "Israel hath cast off the thing that is good. . . . Thy calf, O Samaria, hath cast thee off." The power of the human will to choose good or evil. This evidenced by the representation Hosea gives of a people resolved on iniquity, whom God was longing to save. Refer to the teaching of our Lord upon this subject; *e.g.* "Ye will not come to me that ye might have life;" or, "How often would I have gathered thy children together as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, but ye would not!" Appeal to experience for proof of our power to receive or reject good. Our text describes a fallacious, sinful, and fatal choice. The sin for which sacrifice was made ultimately sacrificed the sinner. Look at the two sides of this moral picture.

I. THE CASTING OFF OF THE GOOD. "Israel hath cast off the thing that is good." Illustrate this by a delineation of the depraved condition of Israel at this period. Show that what they cast off is still being cast off by multitudes in modern life; *e.g.*: 1. *Faith in the nearness of God.* It was the loss of this which led Israel to form fatal alliances with the heathen. In our day materialism and Positivism are enervating, and sometimes destroying faith. The symbol of the spiritual is becoming the substitute for it. This may be traced both in the teachings of a school of philosophy, and in the sensuousness of ritualistic worship. Many have cast off the old faith—"the thing that is good"—instead of believing where they cannot prove. 2. *Fidelity in witnessing for God.* It had been the glory of Israel to proclaim, both by its worship and in its history, the unity, the invisibility, and the holiness of God. By turning to the worship of visible idols, diverse in their attributes, yet all hideous in their impurity, they had deliberately repudiated this Divine commission. Still it is man's peculiar dignity to appear as the witnesser and the worshipper of God, in whose image he was created, and over whose works he rules. Pre-eminently he may be the Divine witness by the moral character and the spiritual life inwrought in him by the Divine Spirit, who conforms us to the image of God's Son. Falling short of this, man fails (as Israel failed) to fulfil his destiny. Hence, in proportion as a man refuses the grace of God, he casts off the thing that is good. 3. *Obedience to the Law of God.* Show from pagan history, and from the condition of modern heathen, as well as from the growing degradation of those to whom Hosea spoke, that idolatry brings with it moral deterioration. The man who ignores the first table of the Law will of necessity ignore the second also. Religious faith and moral rightness stand or fall together. When Israel turned from Jehovah to Baal and Astarte, the nation gradually but surely became false, self-seeking, ambitious in its political alliances, and hideously corrupt in its inward social condition. Israel had cast off the thing that was good. 4. *Loyalty to sacred resolves.* The people often appeared about to repent, but their goodness was transient as the morning cloud. How frequently now right impressions and even holy vows are cast off! How jealously all should guard themselves against the subtle influence of a busy life, or of an alluring pleasure, or of an ill-chosen companionship! There are many whose hearts are hard, and whose lives are godless, respecting whom, in memory of their early promise, it may be truly and sadly said, "They have cast off the thing that is good."

II. THE CASTING OFF OF THE SINNER. "Thy calf, O Samaria, hath cast thee off." History shows that Israel was ruined by trusting to Egypt and to its own martial prowess, instead of confiding in God and simply doing righteousness. Jeremiah's words were fulfilled, "Cursed is the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord." Casting off good, Israel was cast off by evil. See how often this principle is exemplified in the broader sphere of human life. That which men put in the place of God sooner or later fails them. 1. *Pleasures fail to give satisfaction.* When the soul tries to quench its thirst with these, the words of Isaiah are fulfilled, "It shall even be as when a hungry man dreameth,

and, behold, he eateth; but he awaketh, and his soul is empty." The awakening comes ultimately to every man, and it is well when it does not come too late. 2. *Intellect fails to find spiritual truth.* Spiritual things are spiritually discerned, and the unrest of many arises from the fact that they have cast off the yoke of him who alone was able to say, "I am the . . . Truth." 3. *Self-righteousness fails to bring salvation.* See our Lord's words respecting the Pharisees. The house built on the sand stands side by side with the house founded upon the rock; but the testing-time comes to both. 4. *The world fails to afford a home.* Whether we will or not, the world must fail us at last. If we make it our servant, we shall rule like kings; if we make it our god, in our hour of helplessness it will cast us off.

CONCLUSION. "There be many that say, Who will show us any good? Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us."—A. R.

Ver. 7 (first clause).—"*What shall the harvest be?*" In Scripture "the wind" is an emblem of vanity or folly, and "the whirlwind" of sudden and unexpected destruction. Here the latter is declared to be the product of the former. As a gentle "wind" may be the precursor of the "whirlwind," so the foolish policy of Israel would be followed by resistless disaster. By a change of figure in the following clause, Hosea announces that plans which at first seemed successful would bring no ultimate advantage. The clause may be thus paraphrased: "That which is sown produces no stalk, or even if it does the stalk will yield no grain; or if so be it does yield any, foreign armies shall swallow it up." The principle which underlies this teaching is sufficiently evident in the first clause, the consideration of which suggests the following truths:—

I. THAT MEN SHALL REAP AS THEY HAVE SOWN IS A DIVINE AND UNIVERSAL LAW. 1. *This law is seen in nature.* Sow wheat, and without further anxiety you are confident that you will reap wheat, and not something else. And not in kind only, but in quantity, whether abundantly or sparsely, you will reap as you sowed. The child is surprised to see his own name appear written in living green; but he who sowed the seed in that form sees in it only what is natural and usual. 2. *This law asserts itself in social life.* If a nation allows its children to be brought up without regard to the sanctities of life, it finds its retribution in crowded jails and asylums, in political insecurity, in death-bringing pestilence, etc. Having sown the wind, it reaps the whirlwind. So is it with the methods adopted by despotic tyranny. History shows how often repressive measures, excessive and uncertain punishments, etc., have culminated in the whirlwind of revolution which has overwhelmed and wrecked orderly society. 3. *This law is visible in the culture of the mind and the occupations of life.* Contrast the destiny of the indolent shifty schoolboy with that of the steady student who yearly grows in intellectual capacity. 4. *This law never fails in the moral and religious sphere.* Suppose a man resolves to do that which will pay, in a financial sense. He deliberately abjures righteousness for expediency, resolving at all costs to win wealth. He *does* win it. He reaps according to the seed he has sown, but it is no wonder if in his moral being he is "given over to a reprobate mind." On the other hand, the religious man gives up a profitable practice because he believes it to be immoral. The result is that he fails to reap riches because he has not sown for them, but he does reap the bliss of having a conscience void of offence towards God and towards men.

II. THAT THIS LAW SOMETIMES ASSERTS ITSELF IN THE SAD EXPERIENCE OF SINNERS EVEN IN THIS PRESENT LIFE. "Even as I have seen, they that plough iniquity, and sow wickedness, reap the same" (Job iv. 8). Retribution often comes (as it came to Israel) through the sin that at first brought nothing but success. The notorious life of James Fisk, of New York, was a remarkable illustration of the declaration, "The wicked shall fall by their own wickedness." 1. *Examples from Scripture.* (1) *Haman* plotted against Mordecai to his own destruction. His was the vaulting ambition that overleaps itself. (2) *Daniel's foes* were themselves cast into the lion's den. (3) *The men of Babel* resolved to defy God by the power of social combination; but their scheme was the means of their scattering. (4) *The Pharisees* found that the cross to which they triumphantly nailed our Lord was at once the means of their confusion and of his victory over the world. 2. *Examples from experience.* Pope Alexander VI. tried to poison his friend Cardinal Adrian. Through the mistake of his cupbearer he himself died by the cup which was meant to destroy another. The Regent Morton was

another example. So was Thomas Cromwell, of whom Macaulay says, "No one ever made a more unscrupulous use of the legislative power for the destruction of his foes;" and it was by these means he was himself destroyed. 3. *Common proverbs illustrate the text.* "Ashes always fly in the face of him who throws them." "Harm watch, harm catch," etc. Thus, even in outward circumstances, the words of the text have been fulfilled; but how much more terribly in that inward retribution which is veiled even from the victim's dearest friends! The anxiety that fears detection, the loss of self-respect, the horror of being alone, the failure of hope, the growing dread of the future, have caused many a man, even on earth, to know what it is to "reap the whirlwind." But observe finally—

III. THAT THIS LAW WILL ULTIMATELY PROCLAIM ITSELF WITH UNMISTAKABLE DISTINCTNESS. Sin's retribution is not always seen here. Human laws may be powerless to reach a recognized offender. Social morality may be too degraded to rebuke his sin. For these and other reasons much is necessarily left to the future, when crooked things will be made straight. Perhaps it is well that it should be so. It is for our profit that we should walk by faith, and not by sight. God does not append instant pain to every act of disobedience. He deals with us as men, not as children. To do right not because it pays, but because it is right, is the obedience of the wise man, not that of the petted child; and it is the higher God ever seeks. Hence he has contented himself with giving a few signs that his Law cannot be broken with impunity, and these point us on to the day when righteousness and truth shall be crowned, and wrong and falsehood cursed amidst the "Amens" of the universe. In such events as those to which we have referred, we see a few ripening ears which tell us what the harvest *will* be when those who have sown the wind shall reap the whirlwind. This experience, so far as it refers to the future retribution, denotes: 1. *That it is sudden in its arrival.* (See Matt. xxiv. 37—39; Prov. xxix. 1; 1 Thess. v. 2.) 2. *That it is resistless in its approach.* Who can arrest the whirlwind (see Ps. i. 4; Rev. vi. 15)? 3. *That it is terrible in its effects.* Compare the destruction of men's works by a whirlwind, with the desolation of the worldling's hopes by death.

CONCLUSION. 1. *Show how close is the connection between this life and the life to come.* That is the reaping of this sowing. Therefore do not wait till harvest-time before beginning to sow in righteousness. 2. *Show how possible it is, through God's goodness, to reap a harvest.* Both of Christian character and of Christian work the promise is true, "He that soweth and he that reapeth will *rejoice* together."—A. R.

Ver. 12.—*The inspiration of Scripture.* This is an emphatic declaration of the Divine origin of Scripture. If it required utterance in Hosea's day, it equally demands our earnest consideration. The accessibility and cheapness of God's Word has tended to its neglect. Because it is less rare it appears to many less precious. In the reign of Edward I. a copy would cost £37, and as a labourer earned only three half-pence as his daily wage, it represented to him the product of fifteen years' work. How different now! Probably the abundance of religious and other literature has also done something to divert attention from the Bible. In fear of this Luther wished that his own books were burnt, "because," said he, "I fear lest they should hinder men from reading the Bible, that Book of books, in comparison whereof all the books in the world are but waste paper." If all were convinced that Scripture is a revelation from God, such neglect would be less frequent; and therefore it may be well to consider our belief in Divine inspiration, which the occult influence of materialistic philosophy has done much to weaken. May the Spirit of truth give us definiteness of conception, and may the Spirit of love give us generosity of tone!

I. THAT INSPIRATION IS CONSONANT WITH REASON. If it be admitted that God exists as the Creator of man, it is reasonable to expect that he would so far direct and control the human mind as to secure the ends of moral government. We do not believe that the laws of *physical* necessity are paramount. We refuse to throw the reins to the modern Phaeton, who drives he knows not whither, and who cares not though the whole world of Christian thought and of moral life be burnt to ashes. The theory that the universe is a vast machine, governed only by the laws of material organization, and that all its affairs are carried on by its own concreated powers, leads ultimately to the abasement of man and to the abolition of God; and from the abyss of despair to which

Positivism leads us we recoil with horror. Our soul is something more than the concatenation of physical causes and effects; thought is not the mere product of movements in the particles of brain-matter; and love to each other and to God is higher than the ganglionic affection with which it may be associated. We believe that, though we are endued with freedom, God has not renounced all control over us; that side by side with our plans is a concurrent Providence evolving good; that the words are profoundly true, "in him we live, and move, and have our being." It is to those with such a belief we are addressing ourselves, and say the inspiration of Scripture is what you might reasonably expect. If God control the physical world, it is not incongruous that he should present to human minds, and incline them to regard, and to communicate truths which relate to man's future destiny. If he make his sun to rise and flood the natural world with light, he will not leave the intellectual creation in darkness. In this thought lies the essential truth of inspiration. We shall not attempt to enumerate all the methods of Divine revelation. God's ways are various in this, as in the natural world. He can hurl up an island by volcanic force, or he can build it by the multitudinous labours of coral insects. He can split a rock by the crash of the sea, or let a tiny stream trickle through it till it falls asunder. So in his revelations. Sometimes a voice has spoken, as on Sinai, and during the ministry of our Lord. Sometimes angels have appeared to speak to Abraham in his tent, or to the women at Christ's grave. The future has been revealed, now in dreams, as to Joseph; now in visions, as to Ezekiel. But we speak not of these revelations (ἀποκαλύψις), but of inspiration (Θεοπνεύστια), the direct internal suggestion given to men who wrote and spoke for God, giving to us in Scripture an authoritative rule of faith and practice.

II. THAT INSPIRATION IS CLAIMED FOR ITSELF BY SCRIPTURE. 1. *These writers, who were evidently modest, humble men, declare* that they were imbued with supernatural knowledge; that they knew what they could not recognize by intellectual research, being wrought on directly by the Holy Ghost; *e.g.* 2 Sam. xxiii. 2; Matt. x. 20; 1 Pet. i. 11, etc. 2. *The truths they uttered justify such pretensions.* Think fairly of any one of these men, consider his previous culture, his mental capacity, the condition of the world around him, mentally and morally, and see whether the dignity of Mosaic theology, the devout wisdom of the psalms, the pregnancy of prophecy, the nobility of moral tone throughout Scripture, could find source in the writers themselves. Above and behind them all a voice says, "*I* have written the great [or, 'multitudinous'] things of my Law." 3. *We may rest our belief in the inspiration of the Old Testament on declarations in the New.* And these ultimately depend on the authority of Christ, the everlasting Word of God. Our Lord refers to several writers by name, appealing to them as of Divine authority, and using their utterances in his great conflict in the wilderness. He habitually spoke of "the Law and the prophets" as giving a revelation of God's will, saying about these, "I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil." His promises also to his disciples give authority to *their* utterances (comp. John xiv. 17, 26; xvi. 13). (Note the effects produced in human society by the direct and indirect influence of Scripture.)

III. THAT INSPIRATION IS TO BE DISTINGUISHED BOTH FROM (1) GENIUS AND (2) FROM THE ORDINARY WORK OF GRACE IN THE HEART OF MAN. 1. Job xxxii. 8 is a declaration that intellectual gifts are of God; and some speak of Shakespeare and of others as "inspired" men. In Job's sense they were inspired; but their thought is not parallel with the thought of Scripture. The Bible writers were not men of extraordinary ability; nothing in their history, or claims, or writings would indicate that they were; and sometimes they affirm that it was by giving up their own thinking for trust and prayer that they knew God's will. 2. Nor must the inspiration of the sacred writers be considered as identical with that being "filled with the Spirit," etc., of which we often read. It was even given sometimes independently of character, as to Balaam—though (as there is congruity in all God's works, so there was in this) usually it was associated with sanctified character. The two were separable, yet true men spoke of truth, pure men of purity, devout men of God. "*Holy* men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." *They were not unconscious instruments —mere automata.* God employed their faculties, but did not supersede them. Each man retained his own individuality. It is well for us that it was so. We read the psalms and hear the voice of God; yet we hear also in them the sobs and songs of man. We

find Divine truth in Paul's Epistles; yet it is commended to us in Paul's human argument. Whether, however, it be in the thunder of Isaiah or in the trembling of Jeremiah, whether in the logic of Paul or the mysticism of John, we hear throughout all the declaration of God, "*I* have written," etc. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God."

CONCLUSION. *Never account God's Word "a strange thing."* 1. We may do so by applying its precepts and promises to others and not to ourselves, as if they were foreign to us. 2. We may do so by allowing God's Word to lie beside us unread. Illustrate our duty by the story of the conversion of St. Augustine.—A. R.

Ver. 2.—*Israel's cry.* It could not be that, however tempted and however sinful, the children of the covenant should lose all remembrances of the mercies shown to them and the blessings promised to them. God had not forgotten them, neither did they altogether forget God. This cry, represented as rising to Heaven from Israel's lips, seems natural enough: "My God, we know thee."

I. WHEN A CRY OF HYPOCRISY, FEAR, OR SELFISHNESS, IT WAS VAIN. Alas! it was often this. Superstition led the people to conjoin the worship of Jehovah with the worship of idols. It would seem that, in their ignorant, selfish, worthless religiousness, they wished to stand well with both. There was a measure of truth in the cry; for the children of Abraham had a right to look to Jehovah and say, "My God," and they could justly add, "We know thee." Yet, occupying the position they did, their utterance was unheard by and unacceptable to the Searcher of hearts.

II. WHEN A CRY OF SINCERITY AND FAITH, IT WAS ACCEPTABLE. It was not that the words were wrong in themselves; it was the spirit that was defective and blamable. When such words came from filial, grateful, spiritual natures, most welcome were they to the ear of the Supreme. The language admits of, nay, it naturally expresses, devoutness—a joyful appropriation, heartfelt communion. It rejoices in an honourable and blessed relationship; it acknowledges a happy, elevating, and unbroken familiarity.—T.

Ver. 6.—*The broken idol.* The calf-worship in northern Palestine is an example of the inconsistencies to which human nature is liable, and the declensions incident to social and national life. The indignation of the prophet is a fit expression of the displeasure of Jehovah. And the threat conveyed in the language of the text must have been felt by those to whom it was addressed to be as righteously deserved as it was certain to be executed. The lesson of the passage is a more general and extensive one than appears upon the surface. We are reminded of—

I. MAN'S PRONENESS TO SET OTHER OBJECTS IN THE SUPREME PLACE WHICH OF RIGHT IS GOD'S. Every object, every being, every pursuit, which men place in the position which is God's alone, becomes an idol. Thus idolatry is a sin of all times. Pleasure, fame, learning, power, etc., all by turns assume the throne of the heart, stand in the shrine of Deity.

II. SUCH IDOLATRY CAN ONLY ISSUE IN HUMAN DISAPPOINTMENT. The vanity of trusting to the works of their own hands was impressed again and again upon Israel, until at length idolatry was rendered for ever impossible to them. How much of the Old Testament consists of warnings that to trust in other refuges, in other helpers, than in Jehovah is the way to shame, confusion, and destruction! "Confounded be all they that serve graven images." Who is there that has forsaken God, and sought another deliverer, but has been miserably disappointed?

III. THE DIVINE DISPLEASURE IS MANIFESTED TOWARDS SUCH AS FORSAKE GOD FOR OTHER HELPERS. His honour he will not give to another. He sent prophets to Israel, and inspired them to upbraid and to denounce the unfaithful and apostate. The greater the mercies the Hebrew nation had enjoyed, the greater the Divine indignation with those who, having been so favoured, had so rebelled.

IV. DOOM AND DESTRUCTION ARE PRONOUNCED BOTH UPON IDOLS AND UPON THOSE WHO TRUST IN THEM. "The calf shall be broken in pieces." The reed, upon which the faithless leans, shall pierce his side. He shall see the hosts in which he trusted melt into nothingness before his eyes. Riches shall take wings and fly away. The bubble of honour shall burst and vanish. The blossom of power shall be nipped, or the fruit shall fall unripe. Man is but man, and not God.

V. THE PURPOSE OF THIS PROVISION IS TO LEAD TO REPENTANCE AND TO RETURN UNTO THE LORD. Declarations of displeasure and denunciations of wrath afford no pleasure to the Divine mind that authorizes them. God's threat to destroy all rivals to his authority and supremacy must indeed be literally fulfilled. But for those who return to the God they have forsaken, there are open arms, there is a heart of mercy, there are words of pardon, there is welcome, restoration, and life.—T.

Ver. 7.—*Sowing the wind and reaping the whirlwind.* Sowing and reaping in the natural world are processes of husbandry so closely and vitally connected, that they obviously suggest corresponding connections in the spiritual realm. "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." Such is the great moral law. Yet there is a characteristic of the working of this law which is very suggestive. Whilst the *kind* remains the same, the *measure* of what is reaped largely exceeds the measure of what is sown. This is the lesson of the text. What is *sown* is the *wind*; what is *reaped* is the *whirlwind*.

I. IN WHAT SENSE SINNERS SOW THE WIND. The sins for which Israel was chiefly denounced by the prophet were idolatry and heathen alliances, in both of which the Lord's honour was given to another, and the confidence due to him was unrighteously and foolishly transferred. Now, the wind is the emblem of emptiness and unsubstantial vanity. Accordingly, the language of the text teaches that the conduct of Israel was foolish and vain. And this may be asserted of all who, by vice, or crime, or irreligion, depart from God.

II. IN WHAT SENSE SINNERS REAP THE WHIRLWIND. Under the government of a just and almighty Ruler, it could not be that Israel or any nation could forsake the true religion and abandon lofty principles, without suffering the consequences in the penalties attached to disobedience and rebellion. But the point of the text is to be found in the apparent disproportion between the offence and the penalty. Israel hoped for safety; instead of this, and as the result of apostasy, Israel went into captivity. The national life of the kingdom and people of Samaria was absolutely destroyed, never to be revived. Thus a mighty whirlwind, the messenger of Divine indignation, carried the people away in their sins. Thus is it with all high-handed and stiff-necked sinners. Their rebellion and apostasy has even to human eyes the appearance of a sowing to the wind; but in the order of the Divine government it is appointed that such shall reap the whirlwind. We read the lesson in the awful fate which has overtaken all nations which have been unfaithful to their calling, which have defied the righteous and Divine Governor. And in how many instances of individual life have we seen the operation of the same law! Moral ruin and utter overthrow have followed upon estrangement and rebellion. The very confidence which sinners repose in the idols they choose for themselves becomes the occasion of their more complete and irremediable confusion. Judgment is delayed; but the stores of retributive force accumulate, and in due time the tornado of Divine indignation sweeps down upon the sinner's head with irresistible force, issuing in the catastrophe of temporal and spiritual ruin.—T.

Ver. 9.—*Hired lovers.* Israel excited the displeasure of Jehovah by not merely renouncing confidence in him, but by placing confidence in foreign nations and strange gods. And Israel aggravated the offence by rejecting the aid which her covenant God would readily and gratuitously have bestowed, and by expending her treasure in purchasing from neighbouring nations assistance which proved to be vain and unprofitable. Her conduct is compared to that of an adulteress, so wanton as to purchase with her husband's money the affection and embraces of a stranger.

I. IT IS THE INFATUATION OF SIN TO FORSAKE THE FREE AND UNDESERVED FAVOUR OF GOD. The folly of such a course is apparent to all whose minds are not under the influence of prejudice and passion. When the fountain of living waters is accessible, how wretched is the self-delusion of those who turn away from it!

II. THIS INFATUATION IS STILL MORE APPARENT WHEN IT LEADS SINNERS TO TRUST TO VAIN REFUGES. The cisterns which are sought when the fountain is forsaken are broken cisterns, which can hold no water. Such was the powerlessness, the insufficiency of the gods and the kings whom Israel sought. And in that they represent the men,

the systems, the societies, the pursuits, which sinners are ever wont to exalt to the seat of God.

III. THE INFATUATION OF SINNERS LEADS THEM TO PART WITH EVERYTHING IN ORDER TO OBTAIN NOTHING. Israel spent her treasure, drained her resources; and for what? Only to endure the bitterest humiliation, the most cruel disappointment. There was none, in the day of her sorrow, that could help, deliver, or comfort her—none! And this was all she obtained for her apostasy. The lovers, the friends, whom she "hired" were unfaithful and unhelpful. So is it with all who put their confidence in men and in princes. Men give up character and friends, a good conscience, a bright hope; they part with all, and what do they receive in return? The pleasures of sin for a season; but very soon weariness, disappointment, and misery. And "the end of these things is death."—T.

Ver. 14.—*The Maker forgotten.* It is not an uncommon case that one who has received very substantial benefits from a fellow-man forgets his benefactor, and, when raised to a higher position in life, ignores those who by their exertions, sacrifices, and sympathy have contributed to his elevation. We deem such ingratitude reprehensible and almost monstrous. Yet how lightly do we regard those who are guilty of forgetfulness of their Creator and Redeemer! And yet this has been a common fault from the days of Israel of old down to the present time.

I. THE GUILT OF FORGETTING GOD, GENERALLY CONSIDERED. This appears when it is borne in mind: 1. That God is our Maker. To him we owe our existence; and to be unmindful of our Creator is the grossest sin. 2. That God has not forgotten us. He did not create man to leave him to himself, to live or to die. On the contrary, his care is ever over us, his love is always towards us. The tokens of his remembrances are always around us, in the bounties of his providence and in the proffers of his gospel. 3. That God has done much to keep himself in our memory. This is condescension indeed on the part of him who is the theme of heaven's eternal song; whom they praise day and night in his temple. Yet on every side we see tokens of God's presence, we hear the tones of his voice. He is not far from every one of us. Unnumbered suggestions of his presence, unnumbered reminders of his Fatherly love, aggravate the guilt of the unreflecting and ungrateful.

II. THE SPECIAL GUILT OF FORGETTING GOD ON THE PART OF ISRAEL OF OLD AND ON THE PART OF CHRISTIANS NOW. To the children of Abraham God was a covenant God; he had done great things for their fathers and for them. To forget One who had the highest claims upon their memory, their fidelity, their devotion,—this was guilt indeed. Yet not comparable to the guilt of those who enjoy the advantages secured to such as live under the sound of the gospel, and in the midst of the privileges of the Church. How, if *we* forget God, can we hope, can we ask, that he should remember us in mercy and for good?—T.

Vers. 1, 2.—*The conventional Church.* "Set the trumpet to thy mouth. He shall come as an eagle against the house of the Lord, because they have transgressed my covenant, and trespassed against my Law. Israel shall cry unto me, My God, we know thee." "It is not unusual," says Elzas, "for the prophets, without naming the invading foe, to announce his approach (see Isa. xiii.). The words are singularly abrupt, and indicate the suddenness of the threatened invader. 'Like an eagle.' If this be a prophecy against Judah, as some have supposed, then by the eagle Nebuchadnezzar is meant, who is often compared to the king of birds (see Jer. xlviii.; Ezek. xvii.; Dan. vii. 4). But if the prophecy be against Israel, which is the most likely, then Shalmaneser King of Assyria is intended, who for his rapidity, avarice, rapacity, and strength is fitly compared to the royal bird. 'The house of the Lord.' This cannot mean here the temple at Jerusalem, which is otherwise so designated, since the threatenings are most probably denounced against the kingdom of the ten tribes. It must therefore be taken to denote the people of Israel, the whole nation viewed as the family of God." By the "house of the Lord," therefore, we are to understand not the temple at Jerusalem, nor the land of Judæa, but Israel as a section of the professed people of God. The house of the Lord was a conventional Church. Look at the words as presenting a conventional Church in three aspects.

I. AS ENDANGERED. "He shall come as an eagle against the house of the Lord." How comes the eagle? Ravenously, suddenly, and swiftly; it pounces down on its prey with the rapidity of lightning, and fastens its talons on its heart. A conventional Church is in greater danger than any secular community. Why? 1. Its *guilt is greater.* It has the oracles of God, and it professes faith in those oracles, and yet its heart is out of sympathy with God and his laws. "Woe unto thee, Chorazin," etc.! "He that knoweth his master's will and doeth it not, shall be beaten with many stripes." The hell of conventional Churches will be, methinks, deeper and darker than any other hell in the black domain of retribution. 2. Its *influence is more pernicious.* Whose influence on society is the most baneful—the man who denies God, the man who ignores him, or the man that misrepresents him? The last, I trow. The conventional Church gives society a mal-representation of God and his religion. Of all the men in Christendom there is no man who is a greater bane to his race than he who wears the garb of religion but is destitute of its spirit. Surely the eagle of retribution will wing its way to no class more savagely and more quickly than to these conventional religionists.

II. AS WARNED. "Set the trumpet to thy mouth." This is Heaven's command to the prophet. Blow a blast that shall thrill every heart in the vast congregation of Israel. Why sound the warning? 1. Because the danger is *tremendous.* It is utter destruction. 2. Because the danger is *at hand.* The eagle has spread its pinions, has mounted the air, fastened his eye on the victim, and is about swooping down in fury. 3. Because the danger *may be avoided.* Were there no escape, why blow the trumpet? Why raise the alarm? Thank God there is escape as long as life continues.

"While the lamp holds out to burn
The vilest sinner may return."

What is wanted now is a ministry of warning to conventional Churches. We want bold, intrepid, fiery prophets, like unto Elijah, to sound the trumpet of alarm to all who are at ease in Zion.

III. AS REPENTANT. "Israel shall cry unto me, My God, we know thee." The alarm has been taken and the refuge is sought. "My God, we know thee." "This is life eternal to know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent." Oh, hasten the day when all conventional Churches shall be brought to a deep and experimental knowledge of God and his Son! When this transpires, the dense cloud that has concealed the sun of Christianity shall be swept away, and the quickening beam shall fall on every heart. The mountain that has obstructed the chariot of redemptive truth shall be levelled to a plain, and the wheels shall move with lightning speed. "The Word of the Lord shall have free course, and be glorified."—D. T.

Vers. 3, 4.—*The abandonment of good, and the consequent pursuit of evil.* "Israel hath cast off the thing that is good." Two things are contained in these verses.

I. THE ABANDONMENT OF GOOD. "Israel hath rejected what is good" (Elzas). The good here undoubtedly refers to the true worship of the true God. Observe: 1. That true worship is the "*good thing*" for *man.* It is good not only because God requires it, but because it is the necessary condition of spiritual life, growth, harmony, and blessedness. True worship is the soul's only heaven. 2. That this "good thing" man *sometimes abandons.* Israel was once a true worshipper, but the true worship it had now "cast off." Fallen angels were once true worshippers, and many a human spirit once inspired with true devotion has fallen into worldliness and idolatry. Moral mind has the power of abandoning the highest good. 3. That the abandonment of this "good thing" *imperils the soul.* "The enemy shall pursue them." Moral good is the only effective safeguard of the spirit; when this is given up or "cast off," all the gates of the soul are thrown open to tormenting fiends. The walls of the vineyard are broken down, and it lies exposed to the tread and ravages of every moral beast.

II. THE CONSEQUENT PURSUIT OF EVIL. "They have set up kings, but not by me," etc. The setting up of kings here refers to the founding of the kingdom by Jeroboam, and to the entire series of Israelitish kings. The kings of Israel were not according to Divine ordination (1 Kings xi. 27—40). "Their silver and their gold have they made them idols, that they may be cut off." From these kings of their own making came the setting up of the idolatrous calf-worship which was started by Jeroboam. Though

silver was not used in the construction of the golden calves, it was employed to support the idolatrous worship. Thus, because they abandoned the "good thing," they went wrong in their politics and religion. They made their own kings and their own gods. When once men give up the right they rush into the wrong. Let a man go wrong in relation to God, and he will go wrong in all his relations, secular and spiritual.

CONCLUSION. There is nothing in connection with the human race of such transcendent importance as worship. The religious element is the strongest of all elements; and men must have a god of some sort or other, and their god will fashion their character and determine their destiny.

"And yet from him we turn away,
And fill our hearts with worthless things;
And fires of avarice melt the clay,
And forth the idol springs.
Ambition's flame and passion's heat,
By wondrous alchemy, transmute
Earth's dross, to raise some gilded brute
To fill Jehovah's seat."

(J. H. Clinch.)

D. T.

Vers. 5—7.—*Idolatry.* "Thy calf, O Samaria, hath cast thee off." These verses present to us idolatry in five aspects.

I. AS ABHORRENT TO JEHOVAH. "Thy calf, O Samaria, hath cast thee off; mine anger is kindled against them." By a synecdoche, Samaria is here used for all the ten tribes. There is no allusion in history to any calf set up in the city of Samaria, but its existence in Bethel, the most celebrated place of worship in the kingdom, is a matter of certainty. "The introduction of the worship of the golden calves by Jeroboam, in imitation of that of Apis at Memphis, and of Mnevis at Heliopolis, which he must have seen during his residence in Egypt, paved the way for the imitation and adoption of the gross idolatries practised by the Phœnicians, Syrians, and Chaldeans." Now, against this idolatry Jehovah declares his anger "to be kindled." The language is, of course, anthropomorphic, and used only to express his unconquerable opposition to idolatry, the foulest of all evils—a violation of his command, "Thou shalt have no other god beside me." It is the abominable thing which he hates. The fact that idolatry is abhorrent to the great God is the grand reason why his loyal servants should consecrate themselves to his service.

II. AS ANTAGONISTIC TO MORAL PURITY. "How long shall they be incapable of purity?" (Elzas). Where there is not supreme love to the supremely Good, there is no soil in which one solitary virtue can germinate, there is no foundation on which one stone can be laid for the temple of goodness. Hence the history of idolatry shows that it is inseparably associated with pollution and crime. Idolatry is a fountain essentially corrupt, and all its streams are filthy and foul. Paul's description in the first chapter of Romans is true to universal fact. If the world is ever to be made virtuous, it must have the one true and living God presented to it as the one Object of supreme love and worship.

III. AS AN OUTRAGE ON REASON. "For from Israel was it also: the workman made it; therefore it is not God." "It is the greatest folly," says an old author, "to look upon that which derives its excellency from ourselves as superior to us, and that in the highest degree; to forsake God that made us, and to make that to be a god unto us that we have made ourselves. If one be maintained or raised by another, he is expected to be serviceable to him. In this relation we stand to God, but idolatry makes men go against the very principles of reason. They fashion the idol and yet account it their god; they are made and sustained by God, and yet forget him." And yet this folly men are constantly committing every day, not only in heathen lands, but in Christendom. Men are everywhere making their gods. *Power, money, pleasure, fame,*—these be thy gods, O England!

IV. AS DOOMED TO DESTRUCTION. "But the calf of Samaria shall be broken in pieces." "All idolatry must be destroyed" (Exod. xxxiv. 13; Deut. vii. 5; Ezek. xx. 7). 1. God *has destroyed* idols by the gospel. 2. God *is destroying* idols by the gospel.

"As I live, saith the Lord, all the earth shall be filled with my glory." "In that day a man shall cast his idols of silver, and his idols of gold, which they made each one for himself to worship, to the moles and to the bats: to go into the clefts of the rocks, and into the tops of the ragged rocks, for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of his majesty, when he ariseth to shake terribly the earth."

V. AS PRODUCTIVE OF GREAT EVIL. "They have sown the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind," etc. "As the husbandman reaps the same kind of grain which he has sown, but in far greater abundance, so he who sows the wind shall have the whirlwind to reap." "It hath no stalk." Nothing that can yield a blossom. "The bud shall yield no meal." "If they should have a stalk, and that stalk should have a blossom, that blossom shall yield no fruit; and if there be fruit, the sower shall not enjoy it, for strangers shall eat it. The Israelites should be unsuccessful in all their undertakings, and whatever partial gains they might acquire would be eagerly seized by the Assyrians" (Elzas). 1. All men are sowing. Every human act is a seed. 2. Some are sowing worthless seed—"wind." The worldling, the man of pleasure, the conventional religionist, the speculative sceptic, are all "sowing the wind." 3. The more worthless the seed sown, the more terrible the reaping. "Reap the whirlwind." Great is the power of the whirlwind. The Scripture describes it as very great. In 1 Kings xix. 11 it "rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks." Sabdicos reports that Cambyses' soldiers being at dinner in a sandy place, there arose a whirlwind and drove the sand upon them, so that it covered them all. "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."

"Hear, Father! hear and aid!
If I have loved too well; if I have shed,
In my vain fondness, o'er a mortal head
Gifts on thy shrine, my God, more fitly laid;
If I have sought to live
But in one light, and made a mortal eye
The lonely star of my idolatry;—
Thou art Love; oh, pity and forgive!"

(Mrs. Hemans.)

D. T.

Vers. 11, 12.—*Perversion of worship.* "Because Ephraim hath made many altars to sin." Israel was to have only one altar, and that in the place where the Lord would reveal his Name (Deut. xii. 5). But, instead of that, Ephraim had built a number of altars in different places to multiply the sin of idolatry, and thereby heap more and more guilt upon itself (Delitzsch). The passage leads us to notice the *perversion of worship.* This is one of the oldest, the most prevalent, and most baneful sins amongst mankind. Men have perverted worship, not only by making false gods, but by making false altars for the true God. There is only one altar in true worship, and that altar is Christ (Heb. xiii. 10). The text leads us to make two remarks in relation to false worship.

I. IT IS A GREAT SIN. 1. It is a *very propagative* sin. "Ephraim hath made many altars." "If men leave the rule," says an old author, "they know not where to stay; hence the multiplying of things thus amongst the Papists—five hundred altars in some one temple." How sublimely antagonistic the Jews were to the introduction of any altar but one (Josh. xxii. 11)! But now they had "many." Once admit a wrong thing in worship, and that one thing will multiply itself; superstition will give it fertility. The Romish Church is a sad illustration of this, and the Anglican Church in some sections is multiplying examples. 2. It is a *self-punishing sin.* "Altars shall be unto him to sin." The idea probably is, "As you have gone on persisting to multiply altars contrary to my will, I will let you alone; you shall go on. Your altars shall be a sin to you." That is, thus seeing they will have them, they shall have them; they shall have enough of them. Let them go on in their ways; let them multiply their sin. They make a great deal of stir for it, and have it they must; they refuse to see the light; they are prejudiced against the way of God's worship. Let them have their desires; let them have, saith God, governors to establish by their authority, and teachers to defend by their subtle arguments, what they wish for. They multiply altars to sin, and they

shall be to sin, even to harden them; their hearts are set upon them, and they will have them and love them, and they shall be hardened in their heart's desire in what is evil. And as it shall be to them for sin, so it shall be to them for misery, the fruit of sin; for so sin is taken very frequently in Scripture for the fruit of sin. They will have them to sin, and they shall find in them the fruit of sin—misery. The text leads us to remark that—

II. IT IS A SIN AGAINST GREAT LIGHT. "I have written to him the great things of my Law, but they were counted as a strange thing." They could not say they sinned in ignorance. God gave them directions most concise and abundant concerning the nature and object of true worship. Some translate the words, "I may prescribe my laws to them by myriads; they will treat it as a strange thing." 1. God *has given us* laws concerning worship. 2. Those laws are *oft repeated*. By myriads or by thousands. We have "line upon line, precept upon precept." 3. These oft-repeated laws leave *false worshippers without excuse*.—D. T.

Ver. 14.—*Neither the religion nor security of a nation to be judged by appearances.* "For Israel hath forgotten," etc. The "temples" referred to here are the idolatrous temples which Israel had built after the models of those built by the Syro-phœnicians; and the "fenced cities" refers to those fortified places which they had erected against foreign invaders. The words imply that neither the temples nor the "fenced cities" were any proof either of their religion or their security.

I. THE MULTIPLICATION OF TEMPLES IS NO INFALLIBLE PROOF OF THE GROWTH OF RELIGION IN A COUNTRY. Temples were now multiplied in Israel. And the reason assigned is forgetfulness of their Maker. When strangers visit England and witness the number of our churches of all sects, and measures of beauty and size, their first impression would be—What a religious people these English are! But when we think of the moral causes that often lead to the erection of temples, they rather prove our forgetfulness of God. 1. There is greed. Churches are sometimes built as an investment. 2. There is spite. One or two, or more, have received a grievance at the neighbouring Church, and, inspired by spite, they set to the erection of another. 3. There is sectism. Episcopalians, Wesleyans, Congregationalists, all seek to rival each other in this respect; so that the multiplication of temples, we fear, must not be taken as a proof of the growth of religion.

II. THE INCREASE OF NATIONAL DEFENCES IS NO PROOF OF THE INCREASE OF NATIONAL SECURITY. "I will send a fire upon his cities." When noble foreigners visit our shores, we, with our national vanity, seek to impress them with the greatness of our national defences. We exhibit our fleets, our standing armies, our fortifications; we have our naval and military reviews. What fools are they who think that national security is in these things! The safety of a people is in the moral excellence of their character and the guardianship of Heaven.—D. T.

Vers. 1—4.—*Doomsday.* The trumpet sounds the approach of judgment. It is judgment which begins at the house of God (1 Pet. iv. 17). The "eagle" is the Assyrian; in later times the Roman (cf. Deut. xxviii. 49). The cause of the judgment is that constantly insisted on: "They have transgressed my covenant, and trespassed against my Law" (ver. 1).

I. KNOWLEDGE OF GOD THROUGH JUDGMENT. (Ver. 2.) In the day of doom Israel would cry to God, "My God, we know thee, we Israel." So at the last judgment: 1. *Those who have hitherto denied God will be forced to acknowledge him.* Their startled cry, when it is too late, will be, "My God, we know thee." They will know him to their cost. They will no longer be able to disguise to themselves the fact of his existence or the reality of his power. No more pretence of ignorance, no more cavilling, no more blasphemous defiance. 2. *Those who have hitherto forgotten God will be forced to remember him.* They will experience a rude awakening from the careless security in which they have been living. They will find God's words to be true, his warnings real, the "wrath to come" a dreadful certainty. It will be impossible longer to put off reflection, or to shut out thoughts of him with whom they have to do. 3. *Those who have hitherto slighted God's friendship will be eager to make friends with him.* They will address him as their God ("My God"), will recall past knowledge of him,

will urge any pleas which they think will gain them mercy. They are as anxious now to make themselves out God's friends as formerly they were to have nothing to do with him. In times of affliction or peril, as well as on the approach of death or judgment, sinners show themselves very willing to call on God. "Many will say unto me in that day, Lord, Lord," etc. (Matt. vii. 22). Such pleas, however, will not avail. The repentance is too late, and it is not sincere. Israel would gain nothing by being of the seed of Jacob (cf. Matt. iii. 9).

II. AN INVARIABLE SEQUENCE. (Ver. 3.) Israel, having cast off good, would be pursued by the enemy. The sequence is short, simple, certain. It is as sure as any law of nature. 1. *Antecedent.* "Israel hath cast off good." In every sense Israel had done this. The nation had (1) cast out the knowledge of good (ch. iv. 6); (2) cast off the practice of good (ch. iv. 1, 7; v. 4; vi. 7; vii. 1, 2); (3) despised the hope of good, the blessing and salvation promised on condition of obedience. 2. *Consequent.* "The enemy shall [or, 'let the enemy'] pursue him." The enemy pursues those who cast off good. (1) Conscience pursues. The sinner cannot escape from its rebukes, scourgings, and pursuing memories. (2) The laws of nature pursue. Nature is so constituted that its laws are on the side of the virtuous, and against those that do evil. Sin is followed by inevitable natural penalties. (3) Divine justice pursues. There is, even in this life, a providential retribution which the sinner seldom escapes (cf. Deut. xxviii.). In any case there is a final judgment, when every one shall receive for the things done in the body, according to that he hath done, whether good or bad (2 Cor. v. 10).

III. REPRESENTATIVE TRANSGRESSION. (Ver. 4.) Israel's kings were not of God. They had been set up without consulting God, and had ruled in disregard of God's will. The worship of the calves was in direct opposition to Divine commandment. It had its ground in political expediency. This lays bare to us the essence of ungodliness. Ungodliness: 1. *Waives all regard to God's will in the shaping of life.* It plans existence irrespectively of God. Whatever the ungodly man "sets up," it is done "without God." He seeks an independent being. 2. *Makes gods for itself out of God's gifts.* "Of their silver and gold have they made them idols." The world becomes its god. 3. *The end*—"cut off."—J. O.

Vers. 5—7.—*Broken gods.* Samaria would now discover the folly of trusting in her calf.

I. SAMARIA'S CALF. (Vers. 5, 6.) 1. *The fatuity of making it.* "From Israel was it also: the workman made it; therefore it is not God" (ver. 6). Idolatry is a huge absurdity. That cannot be a god which we make with our own hands (cf. Isa. xl. 18—20; xliv. 9—20). As foolish is it to make a god of wealth, position, reputation, or anything created by man's effort. 2. *The folly of trusting in it.* "Thy calf, O Samaria, hath cast thee off" (ver. 5); "The calf of Samaria shall be broken in pieces" (ver. 6). (1) It could not help. (2) It was helpless to save itself. Anything earthly that man relies on will prove a vain help when God wills its overthrow, or the overthrow of him who depends on it. 3. *The reward of serving it.* "Mine anger is kindled against them" (ver. 5). God's anger was kindled (1) at the idolatry; (2) at the sins connected with the idolatry; (3) at the resistance shown to the means used for the nation's spiritual recovery. "How long will it be ere they attain to innocency?" The effects of this kindling of God's anger are described in ver. 7. One effect would be the destruction of their idol (ver. 6).

II. SIN'S PENALTIES. (Ver. 7.) Retribution is set forth under two images. 1. *The wind and whirlwind.* "They have sown the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind." "The wind is an image of vain human efforts, from which ruin is developed, as naturally as the wind becomes a tempest" (Schmoller). The image suggests: (1) The unsubstantiality of sinful objects of pursuit. Substanceless as wind (cf. ch. xii. 1). (2) That the sinner is not his own master. Wind is an image of the hurrying force of passion. The sinner's passions hurry him along. (3) That sin develops the elements of its own retribution. The sowing is congruous with the reaping. As the sinner is hurried along by sin, so he must submit to be swept along by God's judgments. As he lived an unsubstantial life, he must submit to have the unsubstantiality of his life revealed by the tempest that lays it in ruins. 2. *The blasted grain.* "It hath no

stalk," etc. The thought here is that of designs frustrated at every stage. It appears first as if there would be no stalk. Then such stalk as there is yields no fruit. Or if, perchance, there should be any, it is devoured by strangers. Thus, life without God proves to be but deceptive show, promise without performance, effort without result. It has to reckon with God's frown at every stage. He may nip its designs in their inception. He may thwart them a stage further on. He may prevent them from attaining final success. Or, if success be permitted, it is only that he may make their overthrow more striking in the end (Ps. lxxiii. 18; cf. ch. ix. 11, 16).—J. O.

Vers. 8—10.—*Israel among the Gentiles.* We have here the Nemesis of a false desire of independence.

I. MINGLING WITH THE WORLD LEADS TO ABSORPTION BY THE WORLD. (Ver. 8.) It was the complaint against Ephraim that he had mixed himself among the people (ch. vii. 8). He was not content to remain separate, as God had ordained. He must have his freedom (cf. Luke xv. 11—13). We now see the end of this: "Israel is swallowed up." He was: 1. *Absorbed by the world.* The Gentiles got wholly the possession of him. It is so spiritually with those who try to serve both God and mammon. The attempt to serve two masters proves vain. The world gains ground in the heart; God loses ground. By-and-by the world has the whole. The backslider is "swallowed up" (cf. 1 Tim. vi. 9, 10; 2 Tim. iv. 10). 2. *An object of contempt to the world.* "Among the Gentiles as a vessel wherein there is no pleasure." The world in its heart secretly despises those whom it has got under its influence, having turned them away from God. It holds them in contempt. Two kinds of men the world has respect for—its own kind, and the thoroughly godly. It has no respect at all for the third something, that tries to be both and yet is neither—the trimmer, the compromiser, the backslider. Nor, once it has them in its power, is it slow to show its contempt for them.

II. THE DESIRE TO BE INDEPENDENT OF GOD LEADS TO DEPENDENCE ON THE WORLD. (Ver. 9.) Israel went up to Assyria—"a wild ass alone by itself." We understand the figure to allude to Israel's untractable spirit and desire of independence. The nation must, at all costs, be rid of God's yoke, and go out "alone by itself." The use it makes of its independence, however, is to go to Assyria. The motive is not, of course, to have Assyria's yoke imposed on it instead of God's; but this is the result. Seeking independence of God, it sinks into dependence on Assyria. Herein is imaged the end of all attempts at a false independence. 1. *True freedom for man—true independence—lies in loyal acceptance of the rule of God.* This gives inward emancipation and superiority to the seductions of the world. 2. *Renouncing this, the soul sinks into a dependence on finite things, alien to its nature.* It falls into bondage. It exchanges God's service for a worse. It is ruled by the lust of the eye, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life (1 John ii. 16). The prodigal, leaving his father's house for freedom, ended by joining himself to a citizen in the "far country," who sent him into his fields to feed swine (Luke xv. 15, 16).

III. TRAFFICKING WITH THE WORLD LEADS TO OPPRESSION BY THE WORLD. (Ver. 10.) Israel trafficked with the world for its favour—"hired among the nations;" the result being that it was given up by God to be oppressed by the world—"the burden of the king of princes." The stages are (1) sinful desire towards the world—"hired lovers" (ver. 9); (2) propitiation of the world, by gifts, alliances, etc.; (3) absorption by the world and subjection to the world, as already described; (4) oppression by the world. This power of Assyria over Israel was: 1. *Divinely given.* "Now will I gather them." It was God, and no one else, who gave this people into the hands of the foreigners. 2. *Distressing.* Israel would suffer much in exile. Her burden would be heavy; her numbers would be diminished. The world is a terrible tyrant over those whom it gets in its power. 3. *Equitable.* We trace here the same proportionateness between sin and punishment as falls so frequently to be noticed. They voluntarily "hired" among the nations; now they are oppressed by Gentile tribute.—J. O.

Vers. 11—14.—*Religion become sin.* Israel's holiest things became sin to them through their disregard of God's commandments.

I. THE ALTAR BECOME SIN. (Ver. 11.) The law required that there should be but one altar, and that in the place where God had put his Name (Deut. xii.). Ephraim

disregarding this command, multiplied altars, and so committed sin. The worship at local altars was at most but tolerated in the days of the judges, of Samuel, and the early kings, in consideration of the unsettled state of the nation (1 Kings iii. 2). It became sin once a house had been built for God's worship. Had it been necessary, after the division of the nation, to appoint a district centre for Israel, God would have directed the people in the choice of one. They, however, neither desired nor sought for guidance, but organized their worship in their own way, blending with it idolatrous rites, and, beside Jehovah's altars, reared altars to idols (ch. x. 1). They thus sinned, both in the number of their altars and in the use they put them to. Accordingly, God declares that these very altars, the things whereby they professed to worship him, would be imputed to them for sin. We are taught: 1. That God claims to regulate his own worship. 2. That wanton departures from the rule he has given is imputed as transgression. 3. That will-worship is not acceptable to God (Col. ii. 23). 4. That we cannot condone for disobedience in the matter of worship by either the number or magnificence of our services.

II. THE LAW BECOME SIN. (Ver. 12.) God had given Israel a Law, the myriad precepts of which would have guided them aright in every situation of life; but this Law Israel had "counted as a strange thing." The Law, which was "holy, and just, and good," became sin to the people through their neglect of it. Consider: 1. *The dignity of the Law.* It is God's Law ("my Law"); one, yet many. Single in its principle—"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God," etc. (cf. Deut. vi. 5)—yet manifold in its applications; branching out into an infinite multiplicity of precepts, and extending to every detail of life. 2. *The accessibility of the Law.* God had, to secure its being kept in remembrance, put it in written form. The turn sometimes given to these words, "*I would have written* to him," etc., is meaningless in the connection. The prophet is dealing with what Ephraim has done, not with what he might have done under certain conceivable circumstances in which he was never placed. The passage is a testimony to the existence of a written Law. We should remember our own privileges in the possession of a written revelation. 3. *The neglect of the Law.* Ephraim permitted this Law, great, wonderful, and holy as it was, fitted to instruct and guide him in the way of life, to be as "a strange thing" unto him. He forbore to study it. He neglected to practise it. The very Law thus redounded to his condemnation. How many act in a similar way with the Bible! They possess it, but leave it unopened, unstudied. The unread Book becomes sin to them. It will rise against them in the judgment.

III. SACRIFICES BECOME SIN. (Ver. 13.) As seen before, sacrifices will not be accepted by God as a substitute for obedience (ch. vi. 6; 1 Sam. xv. 22). Without the right spirit in the offerer, they become as mere "flesh," in which God takes no pleasure. The sacred thing becomes a thing common. Instead of atoning for iniquity, the sacrifices became themselves iniquity. They were imputed for sin. Neither the number nor magnitude of them could avert the wrath that was decreed. "They shall return to Egypt," *i.e.* to a new Egypt, to Assyria.

IV. TEMPLES BECOME SIN. (Ver. 14.) As sacrifices cannot be taken instead of obedience, so temples cannot be accepted as a substitute for godliness. Israel "built temples," but had "forgotten his Maker." The very temples thus became as sin. The building of temples and the lavishing of outward adornment upon them often proceeds the more rapidly that God himself has been forgotten. Worship becomes externalism. The outward is made the most of, as if to condone for the want of the inward. It is not, however, outward temples that God primarily desires, but the temples of humble and contrite spirits (Isa. lvii. 15). The former without the latter are sin.

V. FENCED CITIES BECOME SIN. (Ver. 14.) It is added that Judah had multiplied fenced cities. As sacrifices were substituted for obedience, and temples were substituted for godliness, so fenced cities got to be put instead of God himself. The sin lay in looking away from the pledged Divine help to mere earthly defences. Those who do this are left at last to prove the worthlessness of their defences. God would send a fire upon the cities, and it would devour the palaces. Human strength is no protection in the absence of God's help; it is equally powerless to protect against God's judgments.—J. O.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER IX.

Vers. 1—9 contain a warning against security arising from temporary prosperity.

Ver. 1.—**Rejoice not, O Israel, for joy, as other people.** The occasion on which the prophet penned this section was some idolatrous merry-making in connection with harvest, and not any change of political situation. (1) The literal rendering of the first clause is, *rejoice not unto exultation*, or *exceedingly*, as the same expression is translated in Job iii. 22; it is thus climactic. (2) The old versions take *el-gil* as imperative, and read לְ; thus: μηδὲ εὐφραίνου; equivalent to "nor make merry;" and the Vulgate has *noli exultare*; but *al* is constructed with the future, not with the imperative. Again, some read *b* instead of *k*, and so render, "among the peoples," the words being addressed, not to Israel in exile, but still resident in their own land. **For thou hast gone a-whoring from thy God, thou hast loved a reward upon every corn-floor.** (1) According to this, which is the common rendering, the clause with *ki* assigns a reason for their foregoing such joy. But (2) Ewald and others translate by "that or for that thou hast committed whoredom," understanding this clause to express the object of their joy. We prefer the former, for their faithlessness and foul idolatry were sufficient reasons to prevent Israel indulging in the joy of harvest. The blessings of the harvest were regarded by them as rewards for the worship of their idol-gods, in other words, as gifts from Baalim and Ashtaroth or other idols, and thus as *ethnan*, a harlot's hire; not as tokens and pledges of the favour of Jehovah.

Ver. 2.—**The floor and the wine-press shall not feed them, and the new wine shall fail in her.** Thus Israel was not to enjoy the blessings of the harvest; the corn and oil and new wine, or corn and wine, would not prove as abundant as they expected or plenty would be succeeded by scarcity; or, rather, the people would be prevented enjoying the abundant produce of their land in consequence of being carried away captive to Assyria, as seems implied in the following verse. The floor and press—whether wine-press, or rather oil-press, as the mention of new wine follows—are put for their contents by a common figure of speech. The expression, "fail in her," is literally, "lie to her," and has many parallels; as, "The labour of the olive shall fail [margin, 'lie']," and Horace's "fundus mendax," equivalent to "a farm that belies his hopes."

Ver. 3.—**They shall not dwell in the Lord's land; but Ephraim shall return to Egypt, and they shall eat unclean things in Assyria.** The Lord's land was Canaan, which Jehovah chose to dwell there by visible symbol of the Shechinah-glory, and which he gave to Israel as his people. Israel expected to have it for a permanent place of abode, but that hope was frustrated by their sin. The remaining clauses of the verse may be understood either (1) that Ephraim would return to Egypt to obtain auxiliaries, but to no purpose,—for they would be carried away captive and be compelled to eat unclean things in the land of Assyria; or (2) the prophet threatens that some of them would go as exiles into Egypt, and others of them into Assyria. This latter explanation is much to be preferred; while with regard to Egypt the threatening thus understood would re-echo an older prophecy in Deut. xxviii. 68, "The Lord shall bring thee into Egypt again with ships, by the way whereof I spake unto thee, Thou shalt see it no more again: and there ye shall be sold unto your enemies for bondmen and bondwomen, and no man shall buy you." In Assyria also they would be obliged to eat things ceremonially unclean, as it would be impossible to conform to the requirements of the Law, according to which the eating of certain animals was prohibited. There is yet (3) another interpretation, which takes Assyria to be the place of exile, while Egypt figuratively represents the condition of that exile, namely, a state of hard bondage and sore oppression, such as Israel endured in Egypt in the days of yore.

Vers. 4, 5.—**They shall not offer wine offerings to the Lord, neither shall they be pleasing unto him: their sacrifices** shall be **unto them as the bread of mourners; all that eat thereof shall be polluted.** Having predicted their inability to observe the ritual distinctions between clean and unclean, which the Law prescribed, whether from the tyranny of their oppressors or from scarcity, or from the absence of sanctification by the presentation of the firstfruits, the prophet proceeds to predict their cessation altogether. Such is the prophet's picture of their miserable position in Assyria. It is aptly remarked by Grotius that "they failed to pour out libations to the Lord when they could; now the time shall come when they may wish to make such libations, but cannot." According to the Massoretic punctuation and the common rendering, (1) which is that of the Authorized Version, the people themselves are the subject of the second verb. They were neither

able to offer drink offerings, a part for the whole of the meat offerings and unbloody oblations; nor, if they did, could they hope for acceptance for them away from the sanctuary and its central altar. (2) Hitzig supplies *niskeyhem*, their drink offerings, from the foregoing clause, as subject to the verb of the following one, and the verb is explained by some in the sense of "mire." If (3) we neglect the *segholta*, and make *zibhchehem* the subject, the meaning is clearer, and the contrast between the unbloody and bloody offerings more obvious; thus: "They will not pour out libations of wine to Jehovah, nor will their sacrifices [equivalent to 'bloody oblations'] please him," that is to say, not such as were actually offered, but such as they might feel disposed to offer. The same noun may be repeated in next clause; thus, their sacrifices, or rather slaughtered meats, are unto him as bread of mourners, or, what is better, *their food* (supplied from *k' lechem*) *shall be unto them like bread of mourners*. Mourners' bread is that eaten at a funeral feast, or meal by persons mourning for the dead, and which was legally unclean, since a corpse defiled the house in which it was and all who entered it for seven days, as we read in Numb. xix. 14, "This is the law, when a man dieth in a tent: all that come into the tent, and all that is in the tent, shall be unclean seven days." Of course, all who partook of the food would be polluted; so with that of Israel in exile, being unsanctified by the offering of firstfruits. **For their bread for their soul shall not come into the house of the Lord.** "Their bread for their soul," that is, for appeasing their appetite, whatsoever their soul lusted after, or bread for the preservation of their life, would not come into the house of the Lord to be sanctified by representative offerings. **What will ye do in the solemn day, and in the day of the feast of the Lord?** On such occasions they would feel the misery of their position most keenly. Away in a far foreign land, without temple and without ritual, they would bewail the loss of their annual celebrations, their national festivals and religious solemnities—those holiday-times of general joy and spiritual gladness. The distinction between *moed* and *chag* is variously given. (1) By Grotius and Rosenmüller *moed* is referred to one of the three annual feasts—Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles; and *chag* to any of the other feasts, including the new moon. (2) Others restrict *chag* to the Feast of Tabernacles, or harvest festival, the most joyous of them all. Keil makes the words synonymous, except that in *chag* festival joy is made prominent.

Ver. 6.—**For, lo, they are gone because of destruction: Egypt shall gather them up, Memphis shall bury them.** Their future exile was seen in prophetic vision; and in consequence and because of its certainty he speaks of it as having already taken place. The destruction is the desolation and wasting of their native land, because of which, or away from which and leaving it behind, they are gone. The land of their banishment was the land of their bondage. There, far from the land of their birth, they were doomed to die and to be gathered together for a common burial. Memphis was the ancient capital of Lower Egypt; its situation was on the western bank of the Nile, and south of Old Cairo. There its ruins are still seen, with extensive burial-grounds, while amid those ruins is the village of Mitrahenni. Kimchi identifies Moph with Noph. **The pleasant places for their silver, nettles shall possess them: thorns shall be in their tabernacles.** The literal rendering of the first clause is, (1) *their cherished delight of silver*. By this some understand (*a*) silver idols; (*b*) others, valuables in silver; (*c*) the Jewish commentators, the houses of the precious treasures of their silver—so Rashi; "Their precious buildings where their silver treasures were"—so Kimchi; (*d*) Jerome understands their mansions and all the ornaments of their mansions purchased by silver; Keil also has, "houses ornamented and filled with the precious metals." This explanation is pretty generally accepted, and appears to us to deserve the preference. Their former homes, so pleasant and so richly decorated, were so utterly desolate and deserted that thorns and thistles overspread them. But (2) the sentence is differently translated and explained by Rosenmüller and some others; thus: "Moph (Memphis) will bury them out of desire for their silver." This violent divulsion destroys the parallelism of the second hemistich, besides ignoring the athnach. The LXX., again (3), puzzled by the word *machmad*, mistook it for a proper name: "Therefore, behold, they go forth from the trouble of Egypt, and Memphis shall receive them, and Machmas (Μάχμας) shall bury them." Giving a decided preference to (1) (*d*), we have a thrilling picture of distress. First comes the destruction of their native city; having looked their last look on the ruins where once stood their home, they have set forth —a miserable band of pilgrims—to the land of the stranger, and that stranger their conqueror and oppressor; they have reached the place of exile, there to find, not a home, but a grave, and not a single grave for each, according to the Jews' mode of sepulture to the present day, but a common place of burial into which they are huddled to-

gether, Egypt gathering them and Memphis burying them; while in the land that gave them birth, their once happy homesteads, richly decorated and expensively adorned, are left utterly desolate—a heritage for thorns and thistles.

Vers. 7—9.—These verses describe the season and source of punishment. **The days of visitation are come, the days of recompense are come.** Commentators have appropriately compared the Vergilian "Venit summa dies, et irreluctabile tempus," equivalent to "The final day and inevitable hour is come." **Israel shall know (it): the prophet is a fool, the spiritual man is mad.** Here the prophet and the man of the spirit (margin) are (1) the false prophets which pretended to inspiration, and flattered the people with false hopes and vain promises of safety and prosperity; and thus helped to confirm them in their sinful courses. The object of Israel's knowledge, though not introduced by *ki*, is the folly of such false prophets, and the madness of such pretenders to prophetic inspiration. That *ish ruach* may be used of a false prophet as well as of a true one is proved from *ish holekh ruach*, a man walking in the spirit, applied by Micah ii. 11 to one of these pretenders: "If a man walking in the spirit and falsehood do lie, saying, I will prophesy unto thee of wine and of strong drink; he shall even be the prophet of this people." Israel is doomed to know by bitter experience the folly and madness of those prophets who deceived and duped the people by lies soon detected, and their own folly and madness in giving ear to the delusive prospects they held forth. This explanation agrees with Kimchi's comment: "Then shall they confess, and say to the prophets of lies, who had led them astray, and had said to them, Peace (in time of greatest peril)—then shall they say unto them, A fool the prophet, a madman the man of spirit." The predicate precedes the subject for emphasis, and the article prefixed to the subject exhausts the class of those false prophets. (2) Aben Ezra, Ewald, and many others understand the prophet and spiritual man to mean true prophets, which the people called fools and madmen, and treated as such, contemning and persecuting them. Thus Aben Ezra: "The days of recompense are come to you from God, who will recompense you who said to the prophet of God, He is a fool, and to the man in whom the spirit of God was, He is mad." The word *meshuggah* is properly the participle Pual used as a substantive, and kindred in meaning to μάντις of the Greek, from μαίνομαι, to be frenzied. In confirmation of (1), comp. Ezek. xiii. 10 and Jer. xxviii. 15; and in favour of (2), 2 Kings ix. 11. (3) The Septuagint has καὶ κακωθήσεται, equivalent to "And shall be afflicted," taking, according to Jerome, *yod* for *vav*, and *daleth* for *resh*; while Jerome himself translates *scitote*, as if reading יֵדְעוּ. **For the multitude of thine iniquity, and the great hatred.** The source of all was sin. The visitation threatened, which was retributive—a recompense—was for the greatness of their iniquity. The last clause is thus dependent on and closely connected with the first, עַל ruling the construction first as a preposition, then as a conjunction: "And because the enmity is great." Ewald says, "If the first member states a reason (*e.g.* by using the preposition עַל, on account of, because of, and the following infinitive), the meaning requires that, whenever a finite verb follows, the conjunction 'because' shall be employed in forming the continuation." The hatred was (*a*) that of Israel against their fellowmen, and their God or his prophetic messengers; though others (*b*) understand it of the hatred of God against transgressors who had provoked his just indignation. The first exposition (*a*) suits the context, and is supported by the following verse. **The watchman of Ephraim was with my God.** This rendering is manifestly inaccurate, as the first noun is in the absolute, not in the construct state; the right rendering, therefore, is either, "A watchman is Ephraim with my God;" or, "The watchman, O Ephraim, is with my God." (1) If we adopt Aben Ezra's explanation of the prophet and spiritual man as true prophets whom the people jeeringly and scornfully called fools, fanatics, and madmen, the meaning of this clause of the next verse presents little difficulty. The prophet makes common cause with these divided prophets: his God was their God, and, however men treated them, they were under Divine protection. The sense of the *im*, with, in this case is well given by Pusey as follows: "The true prophet was at all times *with* God. He was *with* God, as holpen by God, *watching* or looking out and on into the future by the help of God. He was *with* God, as walking with God in a constant sense of his presence, and in continual communion with him. He was with God, as associated by God with himself in teaching, warning, correcting, exhorting his people, as the apostle says, 'We then are workers together with him.'" In the next clause the false prophet is described by way of contrast as a snare. (2) The word אֹרֵב is properly a participle, and Ephraim is thus exhibited by the prophet as on the outlook, (*a*) not for counsel and help beside or apart from God, as Gesenius understands it; but (*b*) as on the outlook for revelations

and prophecies along with my God; **i.e.** Ephraim, not satisfied with the genuine prophets, had prophets of his own, which spake to the people according to their wish. This exposition is in the main supported by Rashi and Kimchi: the former says, "They appoint for themselves prophets of their own;" and Kimchi more fully thus, "Ephraim has appointed for himself a watchman (or seer) at the side of his God; and he is the false prophet who speaks his prophecy in the name of his God." (But) **the prophet is a snare of a fowler in** (over) **all his ways, and hatred in the house of his God.** Whether we adopt (1) or (2) as the explanation of the first clause, we may understand the prophet of this clause as (1) the *false* prophet who—by way of contrast if we accept (1), or by way of continuation if we prefer (2)—**is** like the snare of a bird-catcher over all the people's path, to entangle, entrap, and draw them into destruction. (*a*) He is, moreover, inspired with hostility—a man of rancorous spirit against God and his true prophets. "This prophet of lies," says Aben Ezra, "is a snare of the bird-catcher." Similarly Kimchi says in his exposition, "This prophet is for Ephraim on all his ways as the snare of the bird-catcher that catcheth the fowls; so they catch Ephraim in the words of their prophets." (2) Some understand "prophet" in the middle clause of the verse as the *true* prophet, and the snare as the hostility and traps which the people prepared for the messengers of God; so Rashi: "For the true prophets they lay snares to catch them." According to this exposition we must render, "As for the prophet, the snare of the bird-catcher is over all his ways." (*b*) In the last clause, "house of his God," may mean the temple of the true God, or the idol-temple; thus Aben Ezra: "Enmity is in the house of his god;" while Kimchi thinks either sense admissible: "We may understand בית א of the house of the calves, which were his god, and the false prophet acted there as prophet, and caused enmity between himself and God; or we may explain it of the house of the true God, that is, the house of the sanctuary." Thus the hostility may refer to the prophet himself, of which he is the subject as (*a*), or the object according to Kimchi just cited, or the detestable idol-worship, or perhaps the Divine displeasure against the false prophet and the people led astray by him. **They have deeply corrupted** themselves, **as in the days of Gibeah.** The historical event here alluded to was the abominable and infamous treatment of the Levite's concubine by the men of Gibeah. This was the foulest blot on Israel's history during all the rule of the judges. For the loathsome particulars, Judg. xix. may be consulted. The construction is peculiar. The two verbs שׁחת are co-ordinated appositionally; "The leading verb, which in meaning is the leading one, is subordinated more palpably by being placed alongside of the preceding verb without a joining *and*" (Ewald). The former verb is often constructed with an infinitive, and sometimes with a noun. Some trace the reference, as already stated, (1) to the enormity of the men of Gibeah in relation to the Levite's concubine; others to the election of Saul, who was of Gibeah, to be king. Rashi mentions both: "Some say it was Gibeah of Benjamin in the matter of the concubine; but others say it was Gibeah of Saul, when they demanded for themselves a king and rebelled against the words of the prophet." Therefore **he will remember their iniquity, he will visit their sins.** The sin of Gibeah was fearfully avenged; its punishment resulted in almost the total extinction of a tribe in Israel—that of Benjamin. And as Israel had paralleled that of the men of Gibeah, he gives them to understand first implicitly that like punishment would overtake them, then he explicitly denounces visitation for their iniquity and retribution for their sin. The clause thus closes, as it commenced, with the sad note of coming calamity.

Ver. 10.—**I found Israel like grapes in the wilderness; I saw your fathers as the first-ripe in the fig tree at her first time.** Grapes and first figs are among the choicest and most refreshing fruits; but to find such delicious fruits in a dry, barren wilderness is specially grateful and delightful. There are three possible constructions of *bammidhbor:* (1) with "found," (2) with "grapes," and (3) with both. According to the first, which, on the whole, seems preferable, the meaning is, "I found Israel of old as a man finds grapes in a desert;" and the sense is God's good will towards and delight in Israel. Grapes found by a weary, exhausted traveller in a wilderness are a real boon, refreshing and strengthening him for continuing his journey and reaching his destination. Rashi gives the sense clearly and concisely thus: "As grapes which are precious and delicious in a desert, even so have I loved Israel." Aben Ezra, in his exposition, refers to Deut. xxxii. 10, "He found him in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness; he led him about, he instructed him, he kept him as the apple of his eye;" and then adds, "As grapes in a wilderness where no one dwells; every one that finds them rejoices in them, and so in the first-ripe figs." The comment of Kimchi is fuller and more satisfactory: "As a man, when he finds grapes in the wilderness which is dry and

fruitless, rejoices over them; and as he rejoices when he finds a firstfruit in the fig tree in its beginning; even so have I found Israel in the wilderness, and fed them and nourished them: they lacked nothing, equally as if they had been in an inhabited land; but they have not recognized my goodness." As the fig harvest is rather late in Palestine—about the middle of August—early figs have special worth, and are regarded as a delicacy. The comparison then is, according to Rashi, with the "early fig on the fig tree, which is ripe; like the fig on the fig tree in its beginning, *i.e.* in the beginning of the ripening of the figs;" then he subjoins, "Even so did your fathers appear in my eyes, that I loved them." But **they went to Baal-peor, and separated themselves unto that shame.** Israel did not continue long in a condition so pleasing to God, but fell away from him, forgot his benefits, and turned aside to the abominable idols of the surrounding Gentiles. As Aben Ezra somewhat pathetically expresses it, "Yet my joy was only small and of short duration, for they did homage to Baal-peor, and separated themselves from me." Long, therefore, before the sin of Gibeah they transgressed in Baal-peor; in the early period of their history they apostatized and proved unfaithful to Jehovah. To this hideous god, corresponding to Priapus of the Greeks, the maidens of Moab sacrificed their virginity. The Israelites were designed to be Nazarites, that is, separated to Jehovah and consecrated to his service, but they separated themselves unto that shame, either the idol or his worship. **And their abominations were according as they loved.** If men are slaves to appetite, they make a god of their belly; if to lust, Baal-peor is their god; and men become like what they worship, and abominable as the idols they serve, as the psalmist says, "They that make them are like unto them; so is every one that trusteth in them." They "became abominations like their lover" (*ohabh*, paramour; namely, Baal-peor), that is, as abominable and loathsome in the sight of God as the idols which they adulterously worshipped.

Vers. 11—14.—Having referred to the most flagrant instances of Israel's transgressions in the past—Gibeah in the time of the judges, Baal-peor at a still earlier period even in the days of Moses, and having merely indicated the parallel between their present sin and previous enormities, the prophet proceeds to denounce the punishments deserved and ready to descend upon them. As for **Ephraim, their glory shall fly away like a bird, from the birth, and from the womb, and from the conception.** The greatest glory, perhaps, of Ephraim was their fruitfulness—"double fruitfulness" being the very meaning of the name—and the multiplication of their numbers; now that glory of populousness was to vanish speedily and entirely, like birds winging their way swiftly and out of sight. After the figure comes the fact, and it is expressed in anti-climactic form—no child-bearing, no pregnancy, no conception. The course of barrenness takes the place of the blessing of fruitfulness. **Though they bring up their children, yet will I bereave them, that there shall not be a man left.** Even if their sons should grow up to manhood and attain maturity, yet they would be cut off by the sword and swept away by death, so that their progeny would perish. This accords with the threatened punishment of unfaithfulness recorded in Deut. xxxii. 25, "The sword without, and terror within, shall destroy both the young man and the virgin, the suckling also with the man of grey hairs." The negative sense of *min*, equivalent to "so that not," is common before verbs, also before nouns the *min* being put for the fuller מִהְיוֹת. **Yea, woe also to them when I depart from them!** This accounts for the coming calamity; it is the departure of Jehovah from Israel, and the withdrawal of his favour. The word שׁוּר (1) stands for סוּר, *sin* and *samech* being interchanged; or (2) it may be for שׁוּר, *sin* put for *shin* by a clerical error. The meaning is a little different: "when I look away from them." Rashi mentions the fact that this word belongs to those words written with *sin* but read with *samech*. His comment on the verse is correct: "For what benefit have they when they bring up their children? Because, if they do bring them up, then I bereave them so that they do not become men;" similarly Kimchi: "If there be some among them who escape these mishaps and reach the birth, and they (the parents) bring them up, yet shall they die in youth, and never reach the season when they shall be called men." (3) The misreading of בְּשׁוּרִי instead of בְּשׁוּבִי by the LXX. led to the strange misrendering, "Wherefore also there is a woe to them (though) my flesh is of them (διότι καὶ οὐαὶ αὐτοῖς ἐστι σάρξ μου ἐξ αὐτῶν)," of which Cyril connects the first member with the preceding words, and, detaching the remainder, interpreted, "Let my flesh be far from them;" *i.e.* let me and my race be as far away from them as possible; thus he prays for exemption from the punishment threatened. **Ephraim, as I saw Tyrus, is planted in a pleasant place: but Ephraim shall bring forth his children to the murderer.** The first member of this verse has called forth great diversity of translation and interpretation. It were tedious, and not conducive to the right understanding of the verse, to enumerate the various expositions given of it. A very few of the most important may be

briefly noticed. (1) The LXX., reading לָצוּר, כְּעִיר, rendered, "Ephraim, even as I saw, gave her children for a *prey* (εἰς θήραν)." (2) Ewald, conjecturing צֹאנָה, renders, "Ephraim is, as I judge, according to the *form*, a planting in a meadow." Rejecting both these, we come (3) to that of Gesenius: "Ephraim, like Tyre (as if it were Tyre), is planted in a beautiful meadow;" De Wette's is, "Ephraim, when (or if) I look as far as Tyre, is planted on a pleasant meadow;" Keil has, "Ephraim, as I selected it for a Tyre planted in the valley; so shall Ephraim lead out its sons to the murderer." All these renderings are faulty in one respect or other; some of them miss the sense altogether, and others of them obscure it. (4) The rendering that appears to us simplest, most in harmony with the Hebrew, and most suitable to the context, is that of Wünshe, but with a modification—that of a secure dwelling-place instead of meadow: "Ephraim, as I look towards Tyre, is planted on a meadow [rather, 'sure resting-place'], and Ephraim must lead out its sons to the murderer." The meaning, then, is that Ephraim is a lovely land, in whatever direction one looks towards it, like the famous Tyre; it was beautiful and blooming, populous as well as pleasant; or rather, strong in its natural fortifications, like the famous capital of Phœnicia; yet the wrath of Heaven hung over it—it would become waste and emptied of its male population, Ephraim being obliged to send forth the bravest of her sons to repel the hostile invader, and to perish in the tumult of the battle. By combining a part of Rashi's exposition with part of Kimchi's, we reach the correct sense. Rashi has, "Ephraim, as I look towards Tyre, which in its prosperity is crowned above all cities, so I look upon Ephraim planted on a meadow;" so far the explanation is correct, not so what follows: "And Ephraim—how does he reward me? He is busied in bringing forth his sons to the murderer in order to sacrifice them to idols;" in place of this latter part we substitute the following of Kimchi: "The enemies shall come upon them, and they shall march out from their cities to meet them in battle, and the enemies shall slay them." The infinitive with לְ, לְהוֹצִיא, implies the necessity imposed on Ephraim to do so. Ephraim is to lead out, or *must* lead out, his sons to the murderer. Rosenmüller, in his commentary, has the following remark on this idiom at the fifteenth verse of the forty-ninth psalm: "Tempus infinitivum positum esse *futuri* sive aoristi, vice, pro eo quod plenum esset עָתִיד לְ = paratus est," etc. He adds that the Syriac prefixes *atid*, equivalent to paratus est to the infinitive with *lomad*, and so makes a paraphrase of the future; while the Hebrews omit *atid*. Driver ('Hebrew Tenses,' p. 300) says of this usage of the so-called "periphrastic future," "Here the infinitive with לְ, expressing as usual a direction, tendency, or aim, forms the sole predicate: the subject, as a rule, stands first, so as to engage the mind, the purpose which is postulated for it follows; and thus the idea arises of an inevitable sequence or obligation, though not one of a formal or pronounced character, which is expressed in Hebrew by other means (*i.e.* by the addition of עַל, or of לְ, as עָלַי, equivalent to 'incumbent upon me'); Hos. ix. 13, 'And Ephraim *is for bringing forth* his sons to the slayer;' or, as this is the entire scope and object in regard to which Ephraim is here considered —*is to* or *must* bring forth." **Give them, O Lord: what wilt thou give? give them a miscarrying womb and dry breasts.** The prophet seems at a loss to know what he should ask for his countrymen. Though it was not total excision, but rather diminution of numbers, that was threatened in accordance with the statement, "If thou wilt not observe to do all the words of this Law . . . ye shall be left few in number, whereas ye were as the stars of heaven for multitude;" yet at every stage their offspring was to be cut off, or, if spared to arrive at manhood, it was only to fall by the hand of the murderer. No wonder, then, the prophet is perplexed in regard to the petition that would be most expedient for them. He hardly knew what was best to ask on their behalf. (1) The thought at length flashed upon him that utter childlessness was preferable to bringing up children to be slain with the sword or trained in idolatry; hence he prayed for what he regarded as the less calamity—"a miscarrying womb and dry breasts." Or (2) the prophet is agitated between compassion for his countrymen and indignation at their sin. Justly indignant at the heinousness of their iniquity, he is about to appeal to Heaven for vengeance on the transgressors, but in pity for the erring people he checks the half-uttered imprecation, or softens it into the milder request for their extinction by childlessness.

Vers. 15—17.—After the interruption by the excited question of the prophet in ver. 14, the terrible storm of denunciation sweeps on to the end of the chapter. **All their wickedness is in Gilgal: for there I hated them**; or, *there I conceived hatred against them*, the verb being used in an inchoative sense. Gilgal had been the scene of many mercies; there the rite of circumcision, the seal of the Abrahamic covenant, after its omission during the sojourn in the wilderness, was renewed; there the Passover, also intermitted from its second observance at

Sinai, was kept; there the twelve memorial stones had been set up; there the Captain of the host of the Lord had appeared to Joshua, reassuring him of Divine protection; there the tabernacle had stood before its removal to Shiloh; yet that very place—a place of such blessing and solemn covenanting—had become the scene of idolatry and iniquity. The wickedness of Israel had been concentrated there as in a focus; there Israel's rejection of the theocracy in its spiritual form had taken place; there that first plague-spot of ruin had been contracted; there the calf-worship had been developed; there the form of civil government had been shaped according to their own erring fancy, and their mode of religious worship had been corrupted. Thus Gilgal had become the centre of all their sin; but the scene of mercy became the source of wrath, for there God's fatherly love was turned by Israel's wickedness into hatred. **For the wickedness of their doings I will drive them out of my house, I will love them no more.** They were driven out like Hagar out of the house of the patriarch, that Ishmael might not inherit with Isaac; like an unfaithful wife divorced and driven out of the house of the husband whom she has dishonoured; or like an undutiful and disobedient son whom his father has disinherited. Further, God disowns the rebellious son, and acknowledges the paternal relationship no longer. The princes of Israel had become rebellious and stubborn; by an impressive Hebrew paronomasia, their *sarim*, rulers, had become *sorerim*, revolters. **Ephraim is smitten, their root is dried up, they shall bear no fruit.** Ephraim is a pleasant plant, but a worm has smitten the root and it has withered; Ephraim is a goodly tree, but the lightning of heaven has scorched and dried it up; there may be leafage for a time, but no fruitage ever. **Yea, though they bring forth, yet will I slay the beloved fruit of their womb.** The desires —margin, *dear delights*, or, *darlings*—perish, and so the figure is now dropped, and the fact is seen in all its severe and stern reality, while the dread denunciation of vers. 11 and 12 is repeated and emphasized. **My God will cast them away, because they did not hearken unto him; and they shall be wanderers among the nations.** The prophet submits his will to the Divine will, and acquiesces in the disposals of his providence, and in his own proper person predicts Israel's coming doom. He fills up the outline of the dark picture by stating the cause of their rejection. He specifies at the same time the character of rejection, namely, dispersion among the nations, like birds driven from their nest, for so the term *nod'dim* denotes.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—6.—*Sin is the cause of sorrow and the source of sadness.* The merry-making of wicked people is often both hollow and heartless; it is always without true ground or real cause; while the laughter of fools is like the crackling of thorns under a pot. The people of Israel were jubilant at the time referred to. The reason of their jubilation does not distinctly appear. It may have arisen from some losses having been retrieved, or some advantages gained, or some successes achieved, or some useful alliances secured, or the ordinary joy of harvest. Whatever it was, there was no good cause for it nor continuance of it. "Joy is forbidden fruit to wicked people." Among the losses which sin entails are, as we learn from the verses before us, the following:—

I. THE LOSS OF JOY. 1. Religion makes men joyful as well as cheerful. "Rejoice in the Lord alway," is the exhortation of an apostle, and an exhortation which he repeats. The joy of the Lord is our strength. How different with the wicked! They deprive themselves of all real joy. They may be outwardly prosperous and rejoice in that prosperity; but the wrath of God abideth on them, and a worm is at the root of their joy. 2. The professing people of God sometimes envy the seeming prosperity of the wicked; seeing the outward success of sinners, they are tempted to imitate their works and ways. They forget that in doing so their sin is more heinous than that of other people; it is aggravated by their engagement to be the Lord's, by the vows of God which are upon them, and by the various means and motives which they enjoy for pursuing the right course. Their sin is thus greater than that of other people; they are therefore forbidden to rejoice with the ordinary joy of other people. It was thus with Israel, when, forgetful or unmindful of their covenant relation, they went a-whoring from their God, and committed spiritual adultery by following idols. 3. Some men make a profession of religion for sake of worldly gain; they calculate the benefits, pecuniary, professional, political, or social, which they expect from religion; they

estimate religion by the outward advantages which they think to derive from it; or, what is much the same, they profess that religion or attach themselves to that denomination from which they hope for the greatest gain. Thus Israel attributed to her spiritual harlotry any temporary prosperity she enjoyed; it was her idols she thanked for any season of plenty that she was favoured with; she loved a reward on every corn-floor. Thus her religion was mercenary, her idolatry shameful, her prosperous state of short continuance, and her joy ill founded as evanescent.

II. THE LOSS OF THE MEANS OF SUBSISTENCE NOT UNFREQUENTLY FOLLOWS FROM A COURSE OF SIN. A career of sin has often reduced a man to a morsel of bread, or left him without bread altogether. When men are bent on the obtainment of worldly blessings, and make them their chief end, they are often denied the blessings which they covet: frequently they are disappointed of them; more frequently are they disappointed in them; even when they secure them they fail to find the satisfaction which they seek. "The floor and the wine-press shall not feed them," says the prophet; "much less feast them," quaintly but truly observes an old commentator, adding, "It shall either be blasted by the hand of God or plundered by the hand of man; the new wine with which they used to make merry shall fail in her. . . . We forfeit the good things of the world if we love them as the best things."

III. THE LOSS OF HOUSE AND HOME HAS OFTEN RESULTED FROM SINFUL INDULGENCE. A time of famine necessarily becomes a time of extensive emigration. But, apart from seasons of scarcity, when men are forced, in order to procure the means of a decent livelihood, to seek a home and a country in some distant land, it is no rare occurrence for men to find themselves expatriated through their own vices. When they beggar themselves by vicious indulgence, their last resort is a foreign land. In the case of Israel the hardship was peculiarly distressful. The land of promise was, in a special sense, "the Lord's land;" it was a good land, a gladsome land. How glowing as well as eloquent the eulogy bestowed upon it by the sacred writer when Israel was about to enter it! "The Lord thy God bringeth thee into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and depths that spring out of valleys and hills; a land of wheat, and barley, and vines, and fig trees, and pomegranates; a land of oil olive, and honey; a land wherein thou shalt eat bread without scarceness, thou shalt not lack anything in it; a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills thou mayest dig brass." Besides these blessings of a temporal kind, possessed by that land into which the Lord had led Israel, it was the Lord's land because of the spiritual privileges enjoyed there. It was distinguished by his special favour and gracious presence; it was the home of his priests and prophets; it was the seat of his holy oracle, and in all respects a delightsome land. But Israel had forfeited their title to it. It had been leased to them by the Lord, but by their idolatries and many sins they had broken every clause in that lease, and now they must turn their back on this land which the Lord had given them. They had loved idols, and now to the land of idols they must go. Into bondage in Egypt or into captivity in Assyria they are driven; the Lord's land "shall not only cease to feed them, but cease to lodge them, and to be a habitation for them; it shall spue them out, as it had done the Canaanites before them." Their performance of outward ceremonies had not sprung from a principle of love to the Divine Law; now they are no longer in a position, even if they are disposed, to obey that Law. They had abused the abundance of good things which God had given them; now for very want they must eat unclean things as repugnant to their feelings as opposed to their ritual. They had shown an infatuated fondness for idols in their own land, the Lord's land; now they must eat the unclean things offered to idols in a foreign land. Great had been their sinfulness, great in degree and similar in kind is their punishment.

IV. LOSS OF SPIRITUAL PRIVILEGES IS ANOTHER AND A WORSE CONSEQUENCE OF THEIR SINS. One of the greatest privations is the loss of the public ordinances of religion. Though the enjoyment of them when possessed may be little valued, the withdrawal of them is severely felt. There is no famine more distressing than that of hearing the Word of the Lord. Unfaithfulness to the light men have has often caused the candlestick to be removed out of its place. So with Israel at the period to which the prophet refers. They were deprived of libation as well as oblation, and of every offering whatever. Without the material, they were also without the means of offering any acceptable sacrifice. In a heathen land they were necessarily without sanctuary and altar and

priest. How sad their condition! and sadder still when they felt it to be the legitimate consequence of their sin, national, social, and individual!

V. LOSS OF RELIGIOUS SOLEMNITIES IS AN AGGRAVATION OF THEIR LOSS OF RELIGIOUS ORDINANCES. The solemn day, or day of the feast of the Lord, as often as it came round, was a high day as well as a holy day; a day of joy and gladness, of thanksgiving and praise. Besides the weekly sabbath solemnity and the monthly solemnity of the new moons, there were the three great annual festivals of the Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles. Of the benefit and blessing of these solemnities, with all their instruction, edification, comfort, and encouragement, they are now deprived. No wonder the prophet asks in a tone of pity, not unmingled with pathos, "What will ye do then?" To this inquiry a practical commentator makes the following not inappropriate reply: "You will then spend those days in sorrow and lamentation, which, if it had not been your fault, you might have been spending in joy and praise. You will then be made to know the worth of mercies by the want of them, and to prize spiritual bread by being made to feel a famine of it." To this he adds the pithy remark, "When we enjoy the means of grace, we ought to consider what we shall do if ever we should know the want of them; if either they should be taken from us, or we disabled to attend upon them."

VI. LOSS OF ALL THINGS ONCE HELD DEAR CONCLUDES THIS SAD SUMMARY OF THE EVIL EFFECTS OF SIN. Never was there a darker outlook, never was there a gloomier prospect! What havoc sin works! What distress it occasions! In a single verse are crowded together the destruction of their country by one heathen power, that of Assyria; their dispersion in the country of another, namely, Egypt; their death in that foreign land, and their deprivation of decent sepulture; the desolation of the dwellings they had left behind—a desolation so great that nettles had sprung up in their treasuries and thorns in their tabernacles; nor was respite, or relief, or restoration to be expected. They had deluded themselves with false hopes and had resorted to carnal devices, distrustful of God, as men often do, and with like result. Instead of returning to that God against whom they had rebelled, and who might have opened to them a door of hope, they departed more and more from him, placing their dependence on the sinful, unavailing shifts of their own devising.

Vers. 7—9.—*There is no joy, any more than peace, to the sinner.* However men put away from them the evil day, they can neither stave it off altogether nor delay its coming.

I. THE CERTAINTY OF THE DIVINE JUDGMENTS OVERTAKING SINNERS. In the previous verse the prophetic past is used, to intimate that, though the event predicted had not yet taken place, yet was it as sure of accomplishment as if it had already occurred. Here the words "are come" are repeated to apprise sinners of its certainty; thus we read in the same tense, and with like repetition, "Babylon is fallen, is fallen." So also in Ezek. vii. 6, "An end is come, the end is come; . . . behold, it is come;" while in the verse preceding, and in the one succeeding, the same expression is repeated to impress men with the fact of the threatened judgments being both sure and near, and thus prevent self-deception.

II. THE CHARACTER OF THE DIVINE JUDGMENTS. 1. They are days of Divine *visitation*. Men's sins shall be searched out and brought to light; they shall be scrutinized by the omniscient and heart-searching God. 2. They are days of *recompense*, when not only shall an exact account be taken, but a just recompense of reward dealt out to each according as his work shall be. The recompense shall correspond to the visitation; the stricter the former, the juster and more exact the latter. 3. They are days near at hand, so near as well as certain that they are spoken of as already come.

III. THE CONDUCT OF THE PROPHET. If, as some suppose, the prophet here mentioned is (1) the false prophet, he deluded the people with false hopes, and God gave the people over to strong delusion that they might believe a lie. They awake not out of their day-dream until roused by the visitation and recompense of the Almighty. God, by afflictive dispensations, has to stir men up when milder means have failed. But (2) the prophet mentioned may be a true prophet, and it may only be in the estimation of the people that he is fool and madman. In this case, those that thus treated him with

contempt and ridicule shall be awakened by the visitations of the Almighty to a sense of their sin and shame. Then (3) shall they know, as stated in the first clause, not only the nearness and certainty of the Divine visitation and recompense, but shall also know that a prophet had been among them, that he had discernment of the times, and had faithfully conveyed to them the message of God. They (4) shall know too, to their cost and by bitter experience, many things about God, about his ambassadors, and about their own heartless misconduct. They shall know, says an old divine, these things: "1. What a great God they had to deal with. 2. How vile a thing sin is. 3. The vanity of all their shiftings. 4. The dreadfulness of Divine wrath. 5. The faithfulness of God's prophets. 6. The wisdom of those who dared not do as they did. 7. The folly and vanity of all the false prophets that did before seduce them."

IV. THE CAUSE OF ALL THEIR ERRORS WAS THE MULTITUDE OF THEIR SINS. Faults in their life, as is not unusual with wicked men, bred errors in the brain. Their iniquity had been great and aggravated, and, in addition to their multiplied iniquity, they were just objects of hatred and subjects of the same—at once "hateful and hating." Besides their vile heart and wicked life, they hated God, his ambassadors, his ways, and all godliness. Could they fail to be children of wrath while their carnal mind was thus enmity to God? It was reasonable that God should abandon such persons to prophets of lies, to deceive and undo their souls; or, on the other hand, it was in keeping with the malignity of their hearts and the malice of their nature to calumniate the prophets of the Lord and vilify them as fools and madmen; while the fact of accounting them so, aggravated their sins, hastened the fast-coming visitation, and intensified the recompense of reward.

Vers. 10, 11.—*God's goodness met with ingratitude by a sinful people.* Instead of repenting of their sins, they persevered in their rebellion against God. As if God overlooked or connived at their enormities, they added their deep corruption in the matter of Gibeah, in the days of the judges, to the iniquity of Baal-peor at a still earlier period; while the sins of Gibeah and Baal-peor were equalled by those of the prophet's own day.

I. THE DELIGHT WHICH GOD TOOK IN THEIR FATHERS. Their sainted sires had been the favourites of Heaven; the fathers and founders of their race had sought God's "face and favour free," and, walking in his ways, enjoyed his benediction. 1. God's pleasure in the piety of his people is truly astonishing, though that piety is entirely traceable to his own gracious dealings with them. When a weary wanderer in a wilderness comes upon grapes rich and ripe, or figs the first and finest of the season, how he is refreshed by fruits so rare and luscious! Such is the strong and suggestive figure by which God expresses his delight in his servants of old; nor does he take less delight in them in the present than in the ancient days. Men like Abraham the faithful, or Isaac the meditative, or Jacob the prayerful, or Joseph the pure, or Moses the meek, enjoy the sunshine of God's favour still. 2. Where much is given much is required. If God thus delights in his people, surely his people should delight in God. If God views with such complacency the fruit of his own Spirit's operations in the hearts of his people, and the effects of his own grace seen reflected in their lives, surely it is our bounden duty as well as high privilege to reciprocate in some measure the Divine goodness, delighting in the Divine ordinances, living in the Divine service, and promoting the Divine glory. 3. God is particularly delighted with the firstfruits, and not only so, but with the first of the firstfruits. Here is special encouragement to the young to devote themselves early to God, and early to delight themselves in him. They are invited to give their young hearts to God when the dew of their youth is heavy upon them—when their perception is keen, their conscience tender, their affections warm, and their memory retentive.

II. THEIR DEGENERACY. Their fathers had been to God as grapes in a desert land, and as the first ripe in the fig tree at her first time; but the degenerate descendants of such godly ancestry had become like fruit bitter and sour. They resembled fruitless fig trees, or the wild vine with its small harsh berries; and that, notwithstanding all Jehovah's care and culture, they had long ceased to walk in the ways or follow the steps of their godly forefathers. The holiness of those forefathers, refreshing as grapes of best quality and figs of the first growth to the heart of God, was no longer to be found;

their fruit was sour, their ways corrupt. The God of their fathers had ceased to be their God. "Oh! it is a comfortable thing," says an old divine, "when a child is able to say, as Exod. xv. 2, 'My God,' and 'My father's God.' God was my father's God, and delighted in my father; and, blessed be his Name, he is my God, and I hope he has some delight in me."

III. THEIR DEPRAVITY. They for their part (the use of the pronoun adds emphasis) went to Baal-peor. 1. Here they are either contrasted with their godly forefathers, or the contrast is rather between God's care and goodness on the one hand, and their ingratitude and baseness on the other. The complaint of God resembles that of a fond and indulgent husband who has lavished his love on a worthless wife, and who, to his unspeakable mortification, discovers that he has been cherishing an adulteress. Instead of reciprocating his affection, she plays the wanton; instead of a suitable return for his many acts of kindness, tenderness, and care, she dishonours him by turning aside to some base adulterer. So with Israel when they turned from the living God to dumb idols; so with any people who, instead of setting their affections on God, transfer them to any earthly, sensual, or sinful object. 2. We see in the conduct of Israel a notable example of the perverted use of the Divine mercies. God had segregated Israel from the nations around them, and separated them to himself to be a peculiar people. The Nazarite who by his vow was separated and specially consecrated to Jehovah, was symbolical of the whole nation in its separation and consecration to God. But, regardless of God's mercy and reckless of their own privileges, they separated themselves to the service of a shameful idol. When they went to Baal-peor, whether the idol itself or rather the place of the idol (the same as Beth-peor), they engaged with full consecration, rather desecration, of all their powers in the infamous worship of Baal, here called *Bosheth*, their shame. 3. Their abominations were according as they loved; that is, (1) they became as abominable as that which they loved; or (2) their abominable idols were multiplied according to their heart's desire; or (3) their abominations were according as they loved. They were guided in the choice of them, not, of course, by the Word of God nor by the Law of God, but by their own inclination. In matters connected with religion and religious worship men should beware of being influenced by their personal likings, or private inclinations, or æsthetic tastes, but make sure of a warrant from the Word of God. Another evil is to be avoided in this matter, that of allowing our judgment to be overmastered by our affections, and thus of being unduly influenced in our religious views by those whom we love, whether husband, or wife, or kindred, or friends, or family. If the other sense be preferred, according to which people become as abominable as the objects which they love, it is an illustration of the well-known principle that men come to resemble those whom they love. A child imitates and so gets assimilated to the parent whom he loves; looking up to and admiring that parent, he comes in time to resemble him in habits of thought and modes of acting. 4. Here, in passing, we observe one of the many references and allusions of the prophet to the earlier books of Scripture. Through the evil counsel of Balaam a stumbling-block was placed in the way of the people of Israel, when they were enticed to impurity and so to idolatry by the daughters of Moab, and when, in consequence of their sin in the matter of Baal-peor, so many thousands perished in the plague.

IV. THEIR DESTRUCTION. Ephraim's glory consisted of many elements—prosperity, pomp, and power, but most especially their population and numerous progeny as contributing to that population. In this particularly did Ephraim glory; but the day of their glory comes to a speedy and disastrous end. 1. The departure of their glory is compared to the flight of a bird, and thus that departure is represented as *sudden*, like the flight of a bird when it is startled from its nest in the greenwood, or when some one throws open the door of the cage in the dwelling where it has been imprisoned; as *swift*, like the flight of the eagle toward heaven; as *irretrievable*, like the bird of powerful pinion, which distances pursuit and escapes beyond the possibility of being ever caught or found again. 2. Disaster awaits them at every stage—conception, gestation, and parturition. The curse of God pursues them from first to last, hindering the conception, or causing abortion, or preventing the birth.

APPLICATION. Learn hence: 1. The folly of glorying in any earthly prosperity or worldly advantage. "Wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not? for riches

certainly make themselves wings; they fly away as an eagle toward heaven." 2. The prosperity of the wicked lasts not long. Ephraim, comprehending the ten tribes, had enjoyed great prosperity, and had surpassed Judah in numbers. This was particularly the case in the reign of Jeroboam II., to which this Scripture may probably refer. They had enjoyed prosperity so long, they thought it would last alway; yet it passed away as in a moment. 3. Let us seek the glory that is real and abiding. "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord which exercise loving-kindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the Lord." 4. What reason we have to bless God for his preserving care. "He preserved us in the very conception, preserved us in our mother's womb, and then in the birth; and then in the cradle, in our childhood, in our youth, in our middle age, and in our old age; for we lie at his mercy at every point of time."

"Thy providence my life sustained,
And all my wants redressed,
When in the silent womb I lay,
And hung upon the breast."

Vers. 12—17.—"*The wicked shall not go unpunished.*" If they escape one calamity, they are sure to be overtaken and overwhelmed by another.

I. CALAMITY OF A TWOFOLD KIND THREATENED. There is: 1. *Bereavement*, and that of a most painful nature. To be childless altogether, or to lose children in infancy, is sorrowful enough; but to be bereft of children when they have grown up to manhood or womanhood is an unspeakably greater sorrow. After labour, and trouble, and care, and thought have been expended in their upbringing; after all difficulties have been surmounted; and when sons have become like plants grown up in their youth, and daughters like corner-stones polished after the similitude of a palace; when the conduct of both is characterized by dutifulness, love, and obedience; and when parents naturally expect much help and comfort from them, and have their affections twined round them—at such a time, to be deprived of them either by a sudden stroke, or by slow disease, is a condition more than ordinarily sorrowful. It is only the grace of God in large measure that can sustain and support parents so afflicted; while the exercise of grace on their part has no doubt compensatory blessings. The bereavement of Israel was to be complete—without a man left. If left, they might be left without the intellect of a man, or the physical strength of a man; they might be imbeciles or invalids, and thus in a worse condition than if not left at all. 2. But a still worse woe impends, namely, that of *Divine desertion*. This is God's withdrawal from a people or a person. When he thus withdraws, he withdraws his goodness and mercy, common graces, gifts, and comforts. When this withdrawal takes place we are utterly helpless; as the king of Israel said to the poor woman who cried for help, "If the Lord do not help thee, whence shall I help thee?" or as the apparition of Samuel to Saul, "Wherefore then dost thou ask of me, seeing the Lord is departed from thee?" We may pass through fiery trials, or be plunged in the deep waters of affliction; but if we enjoy the Divine presence we need not be afraid. As long as the Lord of hosts is with us, and the God of Jacob is our Refuge, we need not fear the raging of the great sea-billows, or the upheaval of the mountains, or even the shock of the earthquake. The sorest of all troubles is to be forsaken by God. Oh, how sad the lot of a man who, forsaken by God, is left in the power of his enemies! "I am sore distressed," said the unhappy monarch; "for the Philistines make war against me, and God is departed from me."

II. A COMPARISON INSTITUTED. Ephraim is compared to Tyre in prosperity, in position, in population, and in military prowess; and yet God was preparing to take his departure from them. 1. His presence maintains health, strength, and various other comforts; or if, in his wise providence, he sees fit to withdraw any of these, he sanctifies that withdrawal. But when God himself withdraws, then his mercies prepare for flight too; nor is any blessing left behind. Not only so; even when men are at the height of prosperity, as they think, God may be on the point of departing from them, as from Israel in the days of Jeroboam II., if we are right in referring this comparison of the prophet to that period. 2. How we should prize God's presence and pray for its

continuance, saying, "Leave us not," and avoid whatever would force or hasten his departure! But how may we be sure that he has not already forsaken us? The answer may be learned from the words of the psalmist: "I will keep thy statutes: oh, forsake me not utterly." As long as we are resolved to keep his statutes, we may have little fellowship with, but cannot be forsaken by, God. 3. How dreadful the doom of those from whom God has actually and already departed! It is like the withdrawal of the sun from the firmament. "Take a delightful summer's day, and how beautiful it is! Now compare that with a winter's dark, dismal night. What makes the difference between these two? The presence of the sun in the one, and its absence from the other. This is but the presence or the departing of one of God's creatures. Oh! if that makes such a difference in the world, what must the presence or departing of the infinite God do to the soul?" In the case of Ephraim, their children are brought forth to the murderers—not only murdered, but that murder perpetrated before the eyes of their parents. This seems the severest stroke of all. Even a heathen poet has most pathetically portrayed the extreme sadness of this condition in the death of Polites, a son of Priam, who addresses his murderer Pyrrhus in the well-known words: "May the gods, if there be any kind power in heaven to watch such deeds, yield you your due reward, who have defiled the father's eyes by the sight of his son's murder."

III. COMMISERATION EXPRESSED. The prophet prays for his people, but seems straitened in his petitions, or rather he is at a loss to know what was most expedient for them and conducive to the Divine glory. He does not pray for peace, nor for deliverance, nor for prosperity. He dared not venture. He knew too well the sins of his countrymen, their abuse of the Divine mercies, their contempt of warning, their hardness of heart, their searedness of conscience, and their gross misuse of all means used for their recovery. No wonder he pauses and hesitates. He cannot pray for a numerous progeny to be vouchsafed to his people, or for children at all. Better they should never come into the world at all than to be made the prey of the spoiler; better not to be born than to become victims of the murderer; better perish before birth or from the birth than live a life of sin and misery, and die a death of violence and hopelessness! At length, in view of the sinfulness of the people, the misery of times not far distant, and the fast-approaching calamities, he prays either that children might not be born at all, or that they might not be sustained so as long to survive their birth.

IV. CRIMINALITY EXPOSED. We are here reminded of the plan of Israel's criminal conduct, of the punishment of it, and of the princes who were ringleaders in it. 1. The *place* of their chief and greatest crimes was Gilgal. What a contrast! The place that testified to God's greatest mercies also witnessed Israel's greatest wickedness. In Gilgal the memorial stones were set up after the passage of the Jordan; in Gilgal the first Passover was celebrated after the Exodus; in Gilgal the rite of circumcision was renewed and the reproach of Egypt rolled away; in Gilgal Israel first ate the fruits of the promised land. Yet all their wickedness, their chief wickedness, was wrought there. There they threw off the government of God by judges, and would have Saul to be their king; there, in their superstition, they worshipped God instead of at Jerusalem, and thus trampled underfoot the Divine appointment. The more God signalizes a person or place by his mercies, the more severe his judgments on the wickedness of such. Every time God's eye rested on Gilgal, a feeling of hatred was roused against the works and workers of iniquity there. 2. The *punishment* of their wickedness was expulsion. "Some sins," as has been said, "provoke God to anger, and some to grief, but some to hatred. 'There I hated them.' It is dreadful when our sins provoke hatred. This is the great difference between the sins of the saints and others. The sins of the saints may anger God, may grieve God, but the sins of others provoke God to hatred." That hatred manifests itself in their expulsion. They are driven out of God's house, and so nationally unchurched—as a disobedient and unruly child is driven out of his father's house, or as a rebellious and unruly servant is turned out of the house of his master; while son and servant receive no more tokens of favour or good will. 3. Their *princes*, one and all, set the bad example of rebellion and revolt. As "like priest, like people," so like prince, like people. Persons in high places have it in their power to do much good or work much evil by their influence and example; for such they are responsible, and shall one day be called to account. Of every talent given us, whether

health, or wealth, or influence, or opportunities of doing or getting good, we must all one day give an exact account.

V. CONSUMPTION COMPLETED. A tree may lose its leaves, but a following spring will restore them; it may lose some of its branches in the process of pruning, but this will not prevent it growing again. Yea, "there is hope of a tree, if it be cut down, that it will sprout again, and that the tender branch thereof will not cease. Though the root thereof wax old in the earth, and the stock thereof die in the ground; yet through the scent of water it will bud, and bring forth boughs like a plant." So long as the root retains life, there is hope of the tree; but once the root is dried up and dead, ruin is inevitable. Thus Ephraim was smitten; thus many are smitten in just judgment from the Almighty. When the root is thus dried up, there can be no hope of fruit. If men will bear fruit to the world, or sin, or self, and not unto God, it is only just they should be left fruitless. If men will not bring up their children for God, training them in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, is it strange they should be left childless?

VI. CASTAWAYS AMONG THE NATIONS. This is the condition in which Israel remains till the present day. They cast away the truth of God, and now they are cast away. They rejected the Son; for he came to his own realms, and his subjects received him not; now they are outcast. Note the cause: "Because they did not hearken unto him." This was regarded by Luther as a notable statement, and worthy to be written on all our walls. How often we find men hearkening to the counsels of the wicked, or to the suggestions of worldly policy, or to the temptations of the evil one, or to their own lusts and passions, but not to God! Let men beware of refusing to give audience to God. Let them beware of acting as if they did not hear with the ear, nor understand with the heart. Every Jew one meets is a warning of the danger of not hearkening to God. While every Jew is a living monument to the truth of Scripture, he is at the same time a proof of the calamity incurred by not hearkening to God. 3. It is here predicted that they should be wanderers among the nations. The fulfilment of the prediction may be expressed in the sadly truthful words of the Hebrew melody—

> "Tribes of the wandering foot and weary breast,
> How shall ye flee away and be at rest!
> The wild dove hath her nest, the fox his cave,
> Mankind their country; Israel but the grave!"

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—9.—*The Assyrian captivity.* Israel had courted the favour of Assyria; but the result would be her absorption and destruction as a nation. In this and the succeeding chapter, notwithstanding acknowledged difficulties of interpretation, the distresses of the Exile are depicted with telling effect.

I. THE PROPHET'S INTERDICT AGAINST ISRAEL. (Ver. 1.) Hosea, as it were, appears suddenly among the people when they are preparing to hold some joyous festival, and sternly forbids it in Jehovah's Name. He is constrained by the burden of the Lord to act the unwelcome part of "the skeleton of the feast." He tells Israel that, in view of the dread realities of her position as a nation, this was no time for gladness. To ignore the facts would not obliterate them. To rejoice exultingly just now, merely because she had obtained a plentiful harvest, or secured some temporary relief from her political troubles, was to act with the folly of the ostrich, which thrusts her head into the sand, and thinks that all is well because she does not see her pursuers. If it is "better" for all men "to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting," it would be especially advantageous at present for the Israelitish people to do so. For the condition of the nation was extremely insecure. The prosperity in which they were rejoicing was hollow, and it would be evanescent.

II. THE GROUND OF THE INTERDICT. This is unfolded in the body of the passage. It is twofold. 1. *Israel's extreme sinfulness.* (Vers. 1, 7, 9.) "Other people," *i.e.* heathen nations, might more readily be excused for holding festivals of rapturous joy; for, not having the knowledge of God, they could not perceive how far they had transgressed his Law. But Israel had sinned against abundant light, and in spite of continual

warning. How sad that the chosen nation should look upon her harvests as the gift of heathen gods—as Baal's reward for her devoted service of him! Not only so, but Israel's wickedness was great all round. The people heartily hated both the Lord and his servants the true prophets. The whole country was now as notorious for its monstrous corruption, as Gibeah of Benjamin had been, since the time when the tragic atrocity of the Levite and his concubine had been perpetrated there (Judg. xix. 16, *et seq.*). The error of the men of Benjamin in shielding the villains who wrought that foul deed had involved the town of Gibeah in destruction, and the tribe itself almost in extirpation. And so also was it to be now with the ten tribes. 2. *Israel's impending misery.* The commonwealth was on the verge of destruction, and soon the people's place in the land would know them no more. Surely it were madness to rejoice now, when they are on the very eve of being carried away into captivity. The prophet proclaims most plainly the fiat of expulsion (ver. 3). The nation that is now "Lo-ammi," "Not my people," cannot be allowed any longer to remain in "the Lord's land." "Ephraim shall return to" the new "Egypt" of Assyria, and shall there undergo a second Egypt-like oppression. The Exile shall involve the withdrawal of all the blessings and privileges in which the people gloried; as, *e.g.*: (1) *Loss of harvests.* (Ver. 2.) Palestine was a land of inexhaustible plenty, and there Israel "did eat bread without scarceness;" but, in her effacement from the land, she shall of course lose her harvests. She shall have no happy harvest-homes in Assyria. (2) *Loss of national distinctions.* (Vers. 3, 4.) To "eat unclean things in Assyria" would prove a severe trial and a sore punishment. For the Jews, although they imitated the heathen in some things—as, *e.g.*, in desiring a king like the nations, and in falling into Gentile idolatries—plumed themselves all the while upon the fact that the Gentiles and they did not stand religiously upon the same level; and they clung to the Mosaic distinctions of meats because it was a badge of their peculiar privileges as the chosen nation (*vide* Smith's 'Dictionary of the Bible,' vol. iii. p. 1590). (3) *Loss of spiritual privileges.* (Vers. 4, 5.) In their exile the Hebrews would miss the opportunities of sacrifice to Jehovah which they had neglected while they "dwelt in the Lord's land." Jerusalem was the one place of sacrifice; and for the captives there would be no gracious presence of God in heathendom. No temple there, no ritual, no great annual feasts, no exuberant festal joy! The feast of tabernacles, as the grand harvest-home festival, used to be kept by the tribes with lively demonstrations of national gladness; but, alas! the "Greater Hallel" would never be sung amid the miseries of Assyria. (4) *Loss of inheritance in Canaan.* (Ver. 6.) That land had been given to the Hebrews, and was continued in their possession, upon condition of obedience to the Divine Law. The occupancy of "the Lord's land" was a symbol of the enjoyment of the Lord's favour. Now, however, seeing that the people have forfeited the blessing of Jehovah, they must be expelled for ever from that goodly heritage. The ten tribes shall not return to Palestine. The people shall find their graves in the Egypt-like exile of Assyria. Thistles and nettles shall spring up in luxuriance among the ruins of their once beautiful houses. The traveller finds these nettles still, growing rankly to a height of six feet—a sign of the curse that yet rests upon the land. (5) *Loss of the hopes held out by the false prophets.* (Vers. 7, 8.) At present there were false teachers among the people who kept saying, "Peace, peace," merely to flatter them, and to make matters pleasant for the time. But every prediction of prosperity would be falsified. The people would soon discover that these so-called prophets had been either "fools" or "snares," that is, either simpletons or sharpers. The expectations of well-being which these persons encouraged them to cherish would be miserably disappointed. It would presently be found that Hosea had been the real patriot, and the truest friend of his nation, although he did not prophesy good concerning it, but the worst of evils. The northern kingdom is to be wasted with misery; no wonder, then, that the prophet calls out, "Rejoice not, O Israel."

III. SOME LESSONS OF THE INTERDICT FOR OURSELVES. 1. The ungodly man has no rational ground for gladness or rejoicing (ver. 1). 2. Our harvest-joy should be a joy "before God" (vers. 1, 2). 3. In emigrating to a strange land there is often danger to one's spiritual nature, arising from the loss of religious privileges (vers. 3, 4). 4. It is supreme folly to banish all thought of "the solemn days" of life by giving one's self up to habits of frivolity and worldly pleasure (ver. 5). 5. We must "beware of false prophets," and "try the spirits, whether they are of God" (vers. 7, 8). 6. "The Lord's

land" is only for the Lord's people: for such alone the Lord Jesus prepares a place in the heavenly Canaan (vers. 1—9).—C. J.

Vers. 7, 8.—*The true and the false prophet.* Accepting the Authorized Version here as substantially correct, we interpret these verses as referring to both classes. Ver. 7 makes mention, in a parenthesis, of the false prophet. The first clause of ver. 8 refers to the true prophet; and the remainder of the verse contrasts the character of the false prophet with his. The theme thus suggested is an instructive and profitable one.

I. THE TRUE AND THE FALSE PROPHET ARE OFTEN CONTEMPORARIES. One of Satan's favourite methods for the support of his kingdom seems in all ages to have been to caricature the works of the Almighty, and to induce men to accept the counterfeit and reject the real. Whenever, accordingly, the Lord raised up a true prophet, Satan at the same time sent forth false prophets. Thus Moses, at the beginning of his career, had to contend with "the magicians of Egypt;" and, towards the close of it, against the influence of Balaam, who, although constrained to utter true predictions, was all the while the Anti-Moses. In like manner, Elijah confronted at Carmel four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal; and Micaiah at Samaria other four hundred (1 Kings xxii. 6—28). Elisha also lived contemporaneously with false prophets (2 Kings iii. 11—13; x. 19). Hosea, as he himself testifies both here and elsewhere (ch. iv. 5), was impeded and thwarted in his life-work by many impostors. And at last, when God incarnated himself in Jesus Christ as the supreme Prophet of the Church, the devil took care to send into the world "false Christs and false prophets." After nearly nineteen centuries of the gospel, Mohammedanism yet lives as the religion of "the false prophet," and in our day there are still pretenders to the dignity of "the Mahdi," or Moslem Messiah. In "the last time" there have already been "many antichrists;" and, before the Christian dispensation of truth shall close, the Antichrist *par excellence* must yet be revealed (1 John ii. 18).

II. THE WORK OF THE TRUE PROPHET. (Ver. 8.) It is that of a spiritual "watchman," stationed on the watch-tower of faith and prayer. He stands there, concentrating his gaze upon the unseen, that he may obtain Divine revelations of mercy or judgment, and report such to the people (Ezek. iii. 17; xxxiii. 7; Hab. ii. 1). God sent many such watchmen to the chosen nation. He sent some even to the ten tribes—the two writing prophets Hosea and Amos; such great prophets of action as Elijah and Elisha; besides also Ahijah, Micaiah, Jonah, etc. These "watchmen of Ephraim" were "with God," in the sense of being: 1. *Sent by God.* His Spirit called them to their office, put his words into their mouth, and even caused them sometimes to feel as if their own consciousness were absorbed into that of God. 2. *Helped by God.* He infused into their hearts the courage and strength which they needed boldly to speak his Word to a "gainsaying people," who hated them for their faithfulness. 3. *Responsible to God.* For the prophets would have to give account to him of the manner in which they had announced the revelations vouchsafed to them for the nation's guidance. Moses had been "with God," for "the Lord knew him face to face" (Deut. xxxiv. 10). Elijah had been "with God," for he spoke of him as Jehovah, "before whom I stand" (1 Kings xvii. 1). Elisha was called "a holy man of God" (2 Kings iv. 9). Hosea's name means *salvation;* and the name reflected the substance of his ultimate message, that of the redeeming love of Jehovah. And similarly still, under the gospel dispensation, the minister of Jesus Christ is to stand among men as a witness for "the things which are not seen," a watchman whose eye searches the invisible, and who points with his finger towards eternity and God. Every preacher should deliver his message as David Hume, the infidel, remarked that John Brown of Haddington did: "That old man preaches as if Christ were at his elbow."

III. THE CHARACTER OF THE FALSE PROPHET. The northern kingdom abounded in such persons in the time of Hosea. They professed to be prophets, *i.e.* for-speakers; but they did not really speak for God. They called themselves "spiritual men"—men of the spirit; but the spirit which possessed them was an evil and a lying spirit. Their pretended prophecies were soothing and flattering, all the while that the land reeked with idolatry and unmentionable vices. The false prophets "prophesied out of their own hearts," and "saw nothing" of the vision of the Lord (Ezek. xiii. 2, 3). At the very hour when the sword was about to come upon the land, and the throne

was tottering to its fall, they derided the earnest warnings of the true prophets, and hoodwinked the people into the persuasion that all would yet be well. Thus the false prophet, so far from being in any good sense a "watchman," was to the people "a snare of a fowler in all their ways;" and, with many a specious and plausible pretext, he allured the poor silly people to their ruin. When, at length, that ruin rushed upon them, it was demonstrated that the prophet who had misled them with the expectation of prosperity was a "fool" and "mad." Amid the horrors of their captivity in Assyria they would have leisure to reflect upon the folly of the impostors whom they had allowed to delude them. In these latter times, also, there are false prophets enough who are as "a snare of a fowler," and whom ever and again events prove to be "fools" and "mad." What mischief, *e.g.*, was wrought in Europe by the infidel writings of Voltaire and Rousseau! What a snare, to a certain class of minds, has Comte been! How many unwary souls have been beguiled by Strauss and Renan! How sadly is the welfare of the Lord's flock put in jeopardy by the revival of sacerdotalism in Churches professedly Protestant! Who can estimate the harm that is done to the cause of God by the baleful influence of ungodly and unfaithful ministers? Such, wherever found, are "a snare" to the people. Their example tends to drive souls away from God, and to drag them down to perdition.

IV. How the true prophet is to be distinguished from the false. 1. The false prophet, when the times are evil, "*speaks smooth things.*" He justifies the people's misdeeds, and fails to rebuke prevailing sins. He is a blind watchman; a dumb dog, that cannot bark—loving to slumber; and a greedy dog, which can never have enough. So he flatters the people, promises them peace, and tries to make matters pleasant all round. The true prophet, on the other hand, without thinking of his safety or of his means of subsistence, always "prophesies right things;" and in an evil time "cries aloud, spares not, lifts up his voice like a trumpet, and shows the people their transgressions." 2. The false prophet *comes "before Christ"* (John x. 8); *i.e.* he aims at intercepting men's view of him as the one Mediator, and does his work in opposition to the will and cause of Christ. The true prophet, on the other hand, never forgets that it is Christ who has sent him, and that "the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." 3. The false prophet *attracts ungodly men* to his teaching, and attaches them as his followers; "but the sheep will not hear him." His impostures are detected by those who enjoy the teaching of the Holy Spirit (1 John iv. 1—6). The true prophet, on the other hand, gathers around him those who are spiritually minded, and suffers persecution from the ungodly (*e.g.* Amos vii. 10, 11). 4. The false prophet shall be *finally branded as an impostor* when "the days of recompense" shall have come (ver. 7). Thus the field of Ramoth-gilead decided whether Micaiah or the four hundred prophets of Ahab had prophesied truly. And on the day of judgment the Lord Jesus shall say to many who have professed to prophesy in his Name, "I never knew you; depart from me, ye that work iniquity" (Matt. vii. 22, 23). The true prophet, on the other hand, "shall rest, and stand in his lot at the end of the days" (Dan. xii. 13).

"Ere long thy feet shall stand
Within the city of the Blessed One;
Thy perils past, thy heritage secure,
Thy tears all wiped away, thy joy for ever sure."

C. J.

Vers. 10—17.—*Bereavement, barrenness, and banishment.* Here the prophet (ver. 10) finds a background for his picture of the final distress and captivity of Ephraim, by contrasting therewith the fair promise of prosperity and usefulness which the Hebrew nation had shown during its infancy. The body of the strophe—uttered by Hosea with intense emotion—is full of lamentations and mourning and woe (vers. 11—16). And the closing words (ver. 17) summarize in one brief and pregnant sentence the burden of the entire paragraph.

I. A bright beginning. (Vers. 10, 13.) Jehovah "found Israel:" the people depended upon him for their preservation as a community. The emancipated slaves of Egypt would have been poor and helpless indeed but for his supporting care. But he set his love upon them, and planted and trained the Hebrew commonwealth as the

Oriental husbandman does his vines and fig trees. At Mount Sinai Jehovah made a gracious covenant with Israel, set up his tabernacle with a view to dwell among the people, and arranged the tribes in order as his sacramental host. When they struck their tents at Sinai, and journeyed towards Paran (Numb. x. 11, 12), the Lord looked upon them with complacency out of the cloudy pillar; and he marched on before the host, to lead Ephraim into a land beautiful for situation as that of the famous Tyre, and where they might become as rich and prosperous as the Tyrians. The people had solemnly chosen Jehovah for their God, and "no strange god" was among them. So the Lord delighted in them, as the weary traveller in the desert rejoices in the clusters of the vine, or in the firstfruits of the fig tree.

II. AN EARLY FALL. (Ver. 10.) Although God "had planted Israel a noble vine, wholly a right seed," very soon, alas! they "were turned into the degenerate plant of a strange vine unto him." They had left Egypt, but Egypt had not left them. During the forty years which they spent in the wilderness, they frequently rebelled against the Lord. But the prophet mentions here only one of their provocations, the idolatry of Baal-peor or Chemosh (Numb. xxv.), an idol whose rites of worship involved the practice of the grossest sensuality. The Hebrews, in fact, had in those early days indulged in precisely the same abominations with which Hosea was now so familiar in this last time of the northern kingdom. The unchaste worship of Baal and Astarte, even before the tribes entered Canaan, had brought a sad blight upon the fair early promise which for a little while the chosen people had given. "They separated themselves"—like an evil class of Nazarites—to the service of the filthiest of the gods of heathendom. "And their abominations were according as they loved;" *i.e.* they became more and more assimilated in their own character to the objects of their worship.

III. AN INFAMOUS CAREER. (Vers. 15, 17.) That early idolatry of Baal-peor repeated itself again and again, especially within the northern kingdom, after its revolt from the dynasty of David. There was: 1. *The desecration of sacred places.* "All their wickedness was in Gilgal;" it seemed concentrated as in a focus in that very locality which had been the first to be called "holy" within the Holy Land (Josh. v. 15), and which had been the scene of special mercies when the tribes began to take possession. It was a sore aggravation of Israel's sin that the people should pervert Beth-el into Beth-aven, and destroy the hallowed associations of such a place as Gilgal. 2. *The ungodliness of the kings.* "All their princes are revolters," *i.e.* apostates, men who with unanimous infatuation had departed from God and righteousness. All, without exception, were wicked men; therefore in the annals of the Books of Kings the same melancholy refrain constantly recurs: "He did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord: he departed not from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin." 3. *The wickedness of the people.* "They did not hearken unto God" (ver. 17). Israel "went after her lovers" the Baalim, prostituted herself to them, and forgot Jehovah her rightful Husband. He had long pleaded with her to return to him, but in vain. He had told her of his shame and anger because of her unworthiness, he had reproached her for perverting his gifts to the basest uses, he had threatened her with severe chastisements and even with final rejection; but she was "joined to idols," and "did not hearken unto him."

IV. A TERRIBLE PUNISHMENT. With the denunciation of this penalty the whole passage is saturated. "Ephraim is smitten" (ver. 16). There is to be: 1. *Bereavement.* (Vers. 12, 13, 16.) The once mighty and powerful nation is to have its ranks sadly thinned by sudden and violent deaths. "Ephraim shall bring forth his children to the murderer." The ten tribes are to have their numbers so greatly lessened as to be brought to the verge of extermination. "There shall not be a man left." This would prove a heavy humiliation to a people who expected that the blessing which Moses pronounced upon them would always be continued: "They are the ten thousands of Ephraim, and they are the thousands of Manasseh" (Deut. xxxiii. 17). 2. *Barrenness.* (Vers. 11, 14, 16.) The name Ephraim means "double fruitfulness," and the northern kingdom gloried in its numerous progeny; but, now that the curse of God is upon the nation, "their glory shall fly away like a bird," and they shall have few births, as well as many deaths. The very "root" of the once powerful and fruitful Ephraim has been smitten with an incurable hurt; and the fruit of Israel's

womb shall perish at the birth. For the nation has been guilty of both spiritual and literal harlotry; and of such sins barrenness is the appropriate penalty. *3. Banishment.* (Vers. 12, 15, 17.) This is the acme of Ephraim's doom. "Woe also to them when I depart from them!" They are banished: (1) From the *favour* of God: "I will love them no more;" "There I hated them." (2) From the "*house*" of God, *i.e.* from his family—from the blessings of his covenant. (3) From "the Lord's *land*" (ver. 3); for they are to become lost and hopeless "wanderers among the nations." This doom has been very fully suffered by Israel in the past, and the nation is lying under it still. The condition of the Jews during the past eighteen centuries has been a striking verification of Old Testament prophecy, as well as a convincing argument for the truth of Christianity.

LESSONS. 1. The attractiveness of early piety, and the advantages which flow from it (ver. 10). 2. The duty of gratitude for being "planted in a pleasant place," temporally and spiritually (ver. 13). 3. The danger of backsliding, which besets every Christian, and our need of humility, watchfulness, and prayer (ver. 10). 4. The leavening influence of sin upon the whole heart and life of the sinner (ver. 10). 5. The awfulness of the condition of every God-forsaken soul (vers. 15, 17).—C. J.

Ver. 3.—"*The Lord's land.*" Canaan was a land very dear to the Hebrew heart. Few things could cause the children of Israel deeper grief than the prospect of exile and banishment. When absent from their native and sacred soil, their thoughts were with the fair hills and fertile valleys of Palestine, its fenced cities, and above all its metropolis, the centre of religious worship and sacrifice. Accordingly the heart of Christendom has ever regarded "the holy land" as the symbol of spiritual privilege and enjoyment and fellowship. Christians dwell in "the Lord's land."

I. IT IS THE LAND OF PROMISE, as assured to them by a gracious and "covenant-keeping" God, even as Canaan was promised to the descendants of the patriarchs.

II. IT IS A LAND OF SPIRITUAL PLENTY. Canaan was represented as a "land flowing with milk and honey," and in this is a figure of the sufficient provision which God has made in the gospel for the spiritual needs of his obedient, loyal people.

III. IT IS A LAND OF DIVINE FAVOUR. Palestine was denominated a good land, upon which the eyes of the Lord rested "from the beginning of the year until the end of the year." Upon the citizens of the heavenly Canaan God ever lifts the light of his countenance.

IV. IT IS A LAND OF REST. Even as Israel rested in the promised inheritance after the wanderings of the wilderness, so Christians find that where God dwells, and where he appoints their habitation, there is rest spiritual and eternal.—T.

Ver. 5.—"*What will ye do?*" The prophet takes such measures as seem likely to be effective, in order to rouse Israel to a sense of the guilt and folly of forsaking Jehovah. He pictures them as exiles in an Eastern land, far from their beloved country, far from the sacred metropolis, and the temple with its priesthood and its sacrifices. He supposes the days of holy festivity to have come round, with which the chosen people associated national memories of Divine deliverance, or happy acknowledgments of Divine bounty. On the recurrence of such seasons of holy mirth and obedient observance and welcome fellowship, the captives might well be supposed bitterly to rue their rebellion and apostasy, which had involved them in calamities so dire and privations so disastrous. When so situated, Hosea asks them, "What will ye do?" It is a question which may well be put to those who are tempted to forsake God and to yield to the seductions of the enemy. The time of trial will come, and then what will ye do?

I. WHAT WILL YE DO WHEN EARTHLY PLANS AND PLEASURES FAIL? In the hot pursuit of worldly ends in life, in the absorbing enjoyment of the delights this world can yield, men forget their Maker and his claims, their Saviour and his love. But when the time comes—as come it soon may—when favourite projects dissolve as dreams, and when no more pleasure is to be found where it has long been sought and often experienced, what will ye do?

II. WHAT WILL YE DO WHEN ABANDONED BY EARTHLY FRIENDS? The countenance of companions in health and high spirits is cheering, their hilarity is contagious, their presence is fitted to banish gloomy apprehensions. But such friendships are often super-

ficial; times of adversity put them to a test too severe. Those who are willing to partake of hospitality and to heighten conviviality are seldom the friends "born for adversity;" they often vanish when sympathy is most needed, when solitude is most dreaded.

III. WHAT WILL YE DO WHEN RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCES ARE FOUND TO BE EMPTY FORMS? It is sometimes supposed that any time will do for religion, that religious aid and consolation are always at the service, at the beck and call, of every one of us. But it is not so. If we neglect and abuse our privileges, they will forsake us. The man who has long disused his Bible, and given up prayer, and forsaken public worship, may, in the time of anxiety and trouble, have recourse to what has been long neglected. But he may find that these ordinances and privileges are to him nothing but a form. *They* have not changed, but *he* has grown unspiritual, hardened, and morally incapable of using privileges within his reach. What then will he do?

IV. WHAT WILL YE DO IN THE PROSPECT OF DEATH AND JUDGMENT? In youth and in good spirits, men sometimes hear of these dread realities—for such they are to the impenitent and unpardoned—without at all realizing them, or believing that they have anything to do with themselves. But in sickness and in old age, eternity often draws near to the imagination and to the heart. Memory brings up evil deeds and words and thoughts. The foreboding soul feels, and feels justly, that the account must soon be given, that the judgment-seat must soon be faced. And yet there is no preparation, no defence, no plea. What a position! and what a prospect! Faithfulness and kindness induce the preacher of the Word to remind the careless hearer of the coming days, and the revelation they will bring; to urge upon him now, whilst it is of some use to consider the solemn question—What will ye then do?—T.

Ver. 7.—*The sin of despising God's prophets.* Every preacher of righteousness has to endure now and again the misunderstanding or the misrepresentation of some of those whom he addresses in the Name of the Lord. It is not to be desired that all men should speak well of him. The servant is not above his Master, and no calumny was too base, no blasphemy too enormous, for the enemies of Jesus to assail him with.

I. THE PREACHER OF RIGHTEOUSNESS OFTEN MEETS WITH SLIGHT AND WITH CONTEMPT FROM MEN. 1. The charges brought: "The prophet is a fool, the spiritual man is mad." Hosea and other prophets, from Noah down to the last of the order, had to contend with such foolish and wicked calumnies. As a shield for their own folly, sinners profess to find folly in those who rebuke them. 2. The motives which prompt to such charges. Sometimes it is done by the mistake of the unspiritual, who, to their shame, know no better, because of their insensibility to Divine realities, because of the low level upon which they live. Sometimes by the malice and calumnious wilfulness of opponents of truth and goodness, who hate nothing so much as to be rebuked for their evil deeds. 3. The conduct which calls forth such charges. Usually the real ground of hostility to prophets and to faithful preachers has been the interference which has aimed rebukes at prevalent sins. Thus the real fools and madmen are not the ministers of God's word, but those who despise it and blaspheme.

II. THE PREACHER OF RIGHTEOUSNESS WILL NEVERTHELESS BE VINDICATED BY GOD. Whilst unbelieving and impenitent sinners make a mock at sin, and jeer at those who condemn sin, God, the righteous Judge, observes the treatment with which his servants meet. 1. God approves and advances his faithful messengers. None can serve him faithfully and be neglected or passed over. The good and faithful servant, who has been deemed a madman by those themselves infatuated and mentally intoxicated, shall be commended and exalted in due time. 2. God will himself punish the mockers in the days of visitation and recompense. "He, that being often reproved hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy."—T.

Ver. 8.—*The watchman.* Among the many similitudes employed to set forth the character and office of the prophet, the spiritual teacher and counseller of men, none is more striking than this. It is a figure employed also by Ezekiel and Habakkuk, and may be presumed accordingly to have commended itself to the judgment of the people generally, or at least of those who reverenced the Lord's messengers. Every preacher and teacher may be regarded as a watchman stationed on the walls, bound to give the people warning of approaching danger, and so to secure their safety.

I. BY WHOM APPOINTED. The watchman is placed at his post by authority. "I have set thee a watchman," is the utterance of the Lord himself. The minister of Christ prefaces his counsels and admonitions, as did the olden prophets theirs, with the assertion "Thus saith the Lord."

II. OVER WHOM STATIONED. The Hebrew prophet testified to the Hebrew people. There is no limit to the commission of the Christian preacher, who is bound to witness to Jew and Gentile, to young and old, etc.

III. WITH WHAT FUNCTION CHARGED. St. Paul describes this when he writes of spiritual pastors and overseers, "They watch for your souls, as those who shall give account." Warning of the temptations which assail, counsels regarding the way of escape and the promises of deliverance,—these form a large part of the duties of the spiritual watchman's sacred office.

IV. WITH WHAT RESPONSIBILITY ATTACHED. The watchman who fulfils his trust is permitted to cast the responsibility upon those to whom he ministers. It is for them to take warning. If they do so, they will escape; if not, their blood will be upon their own head.

V. OF WHAT TREATMENT DESERVING. For his work's sake, for his message's sake, for his Master's sake, he merits a respectful hearing and a grateful regard. No superstitious reverence attaches to his person, but his office is a sacred office, and the herald is honoured when he faithfully carries his message to sinful men.

VI. THE PERSONAL PROBATION INVOLVED. Let it not be forgotten by him who is stationed upon the walls as a watchman entrusted with souls, that he also, as well as those to whom he ministers, is upon his trial. By faithfulness he may deliver his soul, whilst he secures the safety of the people and the approval of the Lord. By unfaithfulness he may not only be the means of ruining others; he may incur the displeasure of God, and may bring down upon himself the sentence due to disobedience or remissness.

APPLICATION. 1. The watchman is admonished to watch. 2. Those who hear his warning are entreated to give heed to what they hear, and thus escape the dangers of this probationary life, and avail themselves of the opportunities of salvation.—T.

Ver. 17.—"*Wanderers among the nations.*" Whether or not there was present to the mind of the prophet the actual fate which has overtaken his countrymen, it seems plain that the Spirit within him uttered in these words a doom of which long centuries have beheld the awful fulfilment. We see here—

I. NATIONAL CONTINUITY. The Hebrews were, and are, treated as one people. God visited, and still visits, the sins of the fathers upon the children. The Israelites who apostatized were one generation; the Israelites who suffered the ills and privations of captivity were another generation. Generation after generation of Israel's sons have been "scattered," "wanderers among the nations"—a fate incurred by the obstinate unbelief of their forefathers, who rejected and crucified the Son of God. This is no doubt a very mysterious arrangement of Providence; but we must acknowledge it as an indisputable fact.

II. DIVINE RIGHTEOUSNESS. God is a Ruler, a moral Governor, who never abdicates his regal and judicial functions. The prophets were inspired to insist upon this great fact with emphasis and with repetition. A covenant God, a God delighting in mercy, yet threatens his chosen people thus: "I will cast them away, because they did not hearken unto me: and they shall be wanderers among the nations." People, hearing from preachers of the gospel much about the pity and the love of God, sometimes scarcely believe in the equity and the moral sway and reign of him who is supremely just. Nevertheless, he will vindicate his government, he will assert his authority, and under his rule the wicked "shall not go unpunished."

III. DIVINE TRUTHFULNESS AND FORESIGHT. The language of the text has been so exactly verified that it might have been written *after* the event. Inspiration only could have written it *before*. Human sagacity might have predicted the captivity; only Divine foreknowledge could have predicted the dispersion. Thus in the process of time God's Word becomes its own warrant.

IV. PURPOSE AND PREPARATION FOR NATIONAL RESTORATION AND RETURN. Why are the Jews kept separate from the peoples in whose lands they dwell? Surely "he who scattereth will gather them"! It is the expectation of some that the Jews shall

be restored to the land of promise; it is the belief of all that the ingathering of the Jews into the Christian fold shall one day be brought about, and that their union with Gentiles, in subjection to the one Divine Lord and Saviour, shall be as "life from the dead."—T.

Ver. 5.—*The solemn days of life.* "What will ye do in the solemn day?" "What will ye do in the day of assembly?—when ye shall be despoiled of everything by the Assyrians; for the Israelites who remained in the land after its subjection to the Assyrians did worship the true God, and offer unto him the sacrifices appointed by the Law, though in an imperfect manner; and it was a great mortification to them to be deprived of their religious festivals in the land of strangers" (Elzas). The "solemn day" here evidently refers to one of the great Jewish feasts, either the Feast of the Passover, the Pentecost, or of the Tabernacles; and the literal meaning seems to be—What will you children of Abraham do when you are deprived by tyrannic strangers of the privilege of attending those solemn assemblies? Though the word "assembly" would be a better rendering than "solemn," yet inasmuch as these festive assemblies were very solemn, and the deprivation of them of all things the most solemn, we shall accept the word for purposes of practical application. There are solemn days awaiting all of us, and the appeal in the text is evermore befitting and urgent.

I. THE DAY OF PERSONAL AFFLICTION is a "solemn day." The day comes either by disease, accident, or infirmities of age, when, withdrawn from scenes of business, pleasure, or profession, we shall be confined to some lonely room, and languish on the couch of suffering and exhaustion. Such a day must come to all, and such a day will be "solemn"—a day with but little light in the firmament of earthly life, a day of darkness, and perhaps of tempests. "What will ye do in the solemn day?" What *can* you do? You will not be able to extricate yourself from the sad condition. No man can raise himself out of that physical suffering and weakness that are destined to come on his frame. What will ye do so as to be sustained in soul? Sceptical reasonings will be of no service, the recollections of past life will be of no service. "What will ye do in *that* solemn day?"

II. THE DAY OF SOCIAL BEREAVEMENT is a "solemn day." Much of the charm of life is in our social loves, the love of partners, parents, children, friends. The time must come when ruthless death will tear them from the heart. This will be a solemn day. What a dark day with the soul is that when we return from the grave where we have left for ever some dear object of the heart, and when we enter the home where the loved one was the centre and charm of the circle! Truly, a sunless, saddening day is this. And yet such a day must come to all. "What will ye do in *this* solemn day?" What will you do for consolation? What word of comfort has science to offer, has the world to present? What will you do?

III. THE DAY OF DEATH is a "solemn day." This awaits every man. "What man is he that liveth and shall not see death?" "There is no man that hath power over the spirit to retain the spirit; neither hath he power in the day of death: and there is no discharge in that war." What a "solemn day" is this! All earthly connections dissolving, the world receding, eternity parting its awful folds. What will ye do in this day, when heart and flesh shall fail? What will sustain your spirit then? Will you count your wealth? Will you gather about your dying bed your worldly companions? Will you seek to bury the remembrance of your past life? Something must be done—this you will feel; but what?

IV. THE DAY OF JUDGMENT is a "solemn day." "We must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ." What a day will that be! A "great and notable" day. "Howl ye, for the day of the Lord is at hand." What will ye do? Will ye call "to the mountains and rocks to fall on you, and hide you from the eyes of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb"?

CONCLUSION. "What will ye do in the solemn day?" "Do!" Why, do what you should do every day of your life—exercise a practical and unbounded faith in the love of God through our Lord Jesus Christ. "I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

"'Tis not the Stoic's lessons, got by rote,
The pomp of words and pedant dissertations,
That can sustain thee in that hour of terror:
Books have taught cowards to talk nobly of it,
But when the trial comes they stand aghast.
Hast thou considered what may happen after it?
How thy account may stand, and what the answer?"
(Nicholas Rowe.)

D. T.

Ver. 7.—*Charge against religious ministers.* "The prophet is a fool, and the spiritual man is mad." What the prophet means here seems to be this—that when the predicted retribution had come Israel would learn that the prosperity which some of the prophets had predicted (Ezek. xiii. 10) proved them infatuated fools. Although some render the expression, "the spiritual man is mad," a mad man the man of spirit, the man of the spirit is frantic, the idea seems to be the same as that conveyed in our version, viz. that the man pretending to have spiritual inspiration and prophesying was mad. We may take the words as a charge against religious ministers, and make two observations.

I. IT IS A CHARGE THAT IS SOMETIMES TOO TRUE. There have been religious ministers in all ages, and there are still in connection even with Christianity, who are foolish and "mad." 1. There are men of *weak minds.* There are men in the ministry utterly incapable, not only of taking a harmonious view of truth, but even of forming a clear and complete conception of any great principle. We say not a word in disparagement of men of small cerebral power and feeble understanding. Heaven made them what they are; but they were never intended for the ministry. In the ministry they do enormous mischief. Their silly sentimentalities, their crude notions, their inane conceptions, bring the pulpit into contempt. They are "fools." 2. There are men of *irrational theologies.* There are men who, though not always naturally weak-minded, nevertheless propound theological dogmas which are utterly incongruous with human reason, and therefore unbiblical and un-Divine. The doctrines that multitudes of men are predestined to eternal misery, that Christ's death procured the love of God, that all that men require to make them good and happy for ever is to believe in something that took place eighteen hundred years ago,—such dogmas as these are often propounded in pulpits, and they are utterly foolish; they strike against the common sense of humanity, and have no foundation in the teaching of him who is the "Wisdom of God." The prophet that talks such things is a "fool," and the spiritual man is "mad." 3. There are men of *silly rituals.* The crossings, the kneelings, the bowings, the robings, the upholstering, the grimacings, which constitute much of the ministry of a large number of what are called Protestant ministers, justify the people in calling them fools and madmen. The outside world is constantly pointing to the pulpit, and saying, "The prophet is a fool, and the spiritual man is mad." Alas! that there should be any cause for it!

II. IT IS A CHARGE THAT IS OFTEN A SCOFFING CALUMNY. The unregenerate world have from the beginning identified preaching with folly and fanaticism. The general impression to-day in England is that preachers are intellectually a feeble folk, effeminate, lackadaisical, unfit for the business of the world. Now, an ideal preacher of Christianity, instead of being a "fool" or "mad," is the wisest and most philosophic man of his age, and that for three reasons. 1. He *aims at the highest end.* What is that? To make himself and his fellow-men what they ought to be in relation to themselves, in relation to society, in relation to the universe, and in relation to God. Men are wrong in all these respects, and their wrongness is the cause of all the crimes and miseries of the world. 2. He *works in the right direction.* Where does he begin this work of moral reformation? At the heart. "Out of the heart are the issues of life." All human institutions, conduct, actions, flow from the likings and dislikings of the human heart. He deals therefore as a philosopher with the fontal sympathies and antipathies of the soul. To clear the stream he goes to the fountain, to strengthen the tree he goes to the roots, to improve the productions of the world he works upon the soil. 3. He *employs the best means.* What are the best means to touch the heart effectively, to give its sympathies a new and right direction? Legislation, art, poetry, rhetoric? No;

LOVE. What love? Human, angelic? No; too weak. Divine love. Divine love, not merely in nature, nor in propositions, but in example, the example of God himself. This is moral omnipotence, this is the Cross, this is the power of God unto salvation. Let no man say that the ideal minister is a fool; the man who *says* it is a fool.

"I saw one man, armed simply with God's Word,
Enter the souls of many fellow-men,
And pierce them sharply as a two-edged sword,
While conscience echoed back his words again,
Till, even as showers of fertilizing rain
Sink through the bosom of the valley clod,
So their hearts opened to the wholesome pain,
And hundreds knelt upon the flowery sod—
One good man's earnest prayer the link 'twixt them and God."

(Caroline Norton.)

D. T.

Vers. 1—6.—*The Lord's land for the Lord's people.* This chapter may fall in the interval between the Assyrian invasions of B.C. 743—738, and the invasions ending in the overthrow of Pekah, B.C. 734—730 (cf. 2 Kings xv. 29, 30; 2 Chron. xxviii. 16—21, and Assyrian monuments). The interval seems to have been one of revived prosperity (2 Chron. xxviii. 6—15).

I. ABUSED GOODNESS. (Vers. 1, 2.) 1. *A glimpse of prosperity.* Israel had been rejoiced with a bounteous harvest. Land and people had previously suffered sore from the Assyrian. For a moment judgment pauses. It would be interesting if we could connect this gleam of prosperity with the momentary gleam of better feeling in the nation, as recorded in 2 Chron. xxviii. God tries all methods with the sinner. He varies judgment with mercy. He pauses, as it were, to give space for repentance. He tries, having humbled by application, again to melt by goodness (Rom. ii. 4). 2. *Goodness abused.* Israel knew not the meaning of this grace. The momentary softening led to no good results. The people, reassured by the heaped-up corn-floor and the full wine-press, fell into the old error of attributing their prosperity to the idols (ch. ii. 5), and renewed their assiduity in their service. Our joy in the use of God's good gifts becomes sinful when, (1) excluding God, we boastfully attribute them to our own labour, or to "nature" (Deut. viii. 17); (2) our joy in them is purely natural, without recognition of, or gratitude towards, the great Giver; (3) we abuse them by gluttony or drunkenness. In any case, with doom hanging over his head, the sinner's joy is a species of madness. 3. *The disappointed expectation.* "The floor and the wine-press shall not feed them," etc. One swallow does not make a summer, and the sinner errs if he supposes that one returning glimpse of prosperity means the reversal or collapse of God's threatenings. God punishes the abuse of his gifts: (1) By their removal. "When they thought themselves most secure, when the corn was stored on the floor, and the grapes were in the presses, then God would deprive them of them" (Pusey). (2) By denying his blessing with them. "I will curse your blessings" (Mal. ii. 2). (3) By their failure to satisfy. The good which the sinner seeks in a godless enjoyment of natural things, he is doomed not to find. They "lie" unto him. They constantly cheat his hopes.

II. DECREED EXPULSION. (Ver. 3.) The glimpse of prosperity did not mean much. The sinner, notwithstanding passing appearances to the contrary, abides under wrath (John iii. 36). The decree of judgment stands unrepealed. "They shall not dwell in the Lord's land," etc. 1. *The Lord's land only for the holy.* Canaan was chosen by God as the seat of his majesty, the place of his abode. His presence sanctified it. Israel possessed it as his people. They held it on condition of obedience. Their first work in it was to purge it of the impurities which had formerly desecrated it (Deut. vii. 1—6). Now that Israel themselves had become unholy, they must, in turn, be expelled from the land. God could not allow them to remain in it. The "holy land" is for a holy people. So it is said of heaven that into it "shall in no wise enter anything that defileth" (Rev. xxi. 27). 2. *The Lord resuming his own from the wicked.* The land was the Lord's, and, when Israel proved incorrigible, the Lord took his own from them. They had not owned him in the possession of what he gave, and he now

resumed his gift. The sinner, who depends on God for "life, and breath, and all things," would fain keep the gifts, while declining all recognition of the Giver. This God refuses to permit. The day is coming when he will strip the sinner of all he has. The Lord has given, and the Lord will take away. 3. *Egypt-bondage.* "Ephraim shall return to Egypt." The people were to sink back into the state of oppression, misery, and mixture with the heathen in which they were when God took pity on them in Egypt. The Exodus gave them a national existence, a calling, and a land. They were now to become a "no people" to God, and be sent back, as it were, to Egypt again. Rejection by God means the loss of distinctive being, of life-aim, of sphere, of liberty, and subjection to the hard tyranny of sin, Satan, and the world.

III. UNCLEANNESS IN ASSYRIA. (Vers. 3—5.) "They shall eat unclean things in Assyria," etc. Israel's condition in exile would be marked by: 1. *Privation of privilege.* They would be cut off from the sanctuary ("house of the Lord"), and prevented from observing their feasts, and bringing their usual offerings (cf. ch. iii. 4). Their worship, as it stood, was not acceptable to God. They, however, attached importance to their sanctuaries, altars, wine offerings, sacrifices, etc. And it would be part of their punishment that they would be deprived of them. 2. *Legal uncleanness.* The prophet speaks here also from the standpoint of the people. Their outward life, even in Canaan, had no right sanctification in it. Now, however, their food, sacrifices, etc., would become even formally unclean. Uncleanness would arise (1) from inability in a heathen country properly to observe the laws of food; (2) from the fact that the heathen country was itself polluted, and communicated its uncleanness to food and offerings (cf. Amos vii. 17); (3) from the food not being properly sanctified by the presentation of the firstfruits (ver. 4). Israel, in short, would lose even their outward distinctness as a sacred people, and would sink to the level of the profaneness of the nations around. [It seems better, in ver. 4, to read, "their sacrifices shall not be pleasing to him; (their bread shall be) as bread of mourners unto them."] Separation from God renders existence as a whole unclean. The principle is, first, the consecration of the person, then the consecration of the life. If *we* are not consecrated to God, nothing we think, say, or do can be spiritually acceptable. Prayers, good works, eating and drinking, all remain unclean. We eat unclean things in Assyria—in the spiritual Egypt. The taint of death pollutes body, soul, and spirit. 3. *An end of joy.* (Ver. 5; cf. ch. ii. 11.)

IV. DESOLATE HABITATIONS. (Ver. 6.) 1. *Exile as burial.* "Egypt shall gather them up, Memphis [a noted place of burial] shall bury them." The allusion is still to Assyria figured as a second Egypt. The tribes would be lost in it as in a grave. Hence recovery is described as resurrection (ch. vi. 2). Sin is death. Those abandoned to sin are as the dead in graves. 2. *Deserted dwellings.* "Their pleasant places for their silver [or, 'valuables of silver'], nettles shall possess them: thorns shall be in their habitation." The present state of the Holy Land is the best commentary on this prediction. Sin leaves behind it rank desolation. Look at man's own soul! What desolation there! Nettles, thorns, a temple in ruins.—J. O.

Vers. 7, 8.—*Prophet and prophet.* We are disposed to prefer the view which takes ver. 7 to refer to the true prophet, Hosea himself; and ver. 8 to the prophets Ephraim had set up for himself alongside of the true.—"Ephraim is a watcher with [along with, but independently of] my God"—prophets who were as "the snare of a fowler" to the people.

I. THE TRUE PROPHET. (Ver. 7.) 1. *What he saw.* "The days of visitation are come, the days of recompense are come." The true prophet saw, and did not hesitate to declare in the ears of all, the full extent of the ruin which was soon to overwhelm the nation. He did not, like the false prophets, say, "Peace, peace," when there was no peace (Jer. viii. 11). He told the awful truth. The event verified his words. God's messengers are faithful. 2. *What he felt.* "The prophet is a fool, the spiritual man is mad." (Cf. Robertson Smith's 'Prophets of Israel,' p. 157.) The words may express at once: (1) The judgment passed on the prophet by his contemporaries. They thought him "beside himself" (cf. Acts xxvi. 24; 2 Cor. v. 13). They set down his excited utterances as ravings. (2) The sympathetic anguish which actually made the

prophet feel as one beside himself. "Hosea was a stranger among his own people, oppressed by continual contact with their sin, lacerated at heart by the bitterness of their enmity, till his reason seemed ready to give way under the trial." 3. *His moral mission.* "For the multitude of thine iniquities, and the great hatred." His eye pierced to the moral cause of the judgments that were impending. He read their origin in the people's sin, and in their hatred of what was good. A true prophet is known by the intensity of his grasp upon moral truth.

II. THE FALSE PROPHET. (Ver. 8.) The prophets in whom Ephraim trusted were: 1. *Self-constituted.* "The watchman of Ephraim was with my God," or, "Ephraim is a watchman," etc. Ephraim was not content with the prophets God gave him. He must have prophets after his own heart. He must be a "watchman" on his own account. The false prophet thus ran without being sent (Jer. xxiii. 21). He was not, like the true prophet, a "man of the spirit." If any spirit was in him, it was a lying spirit. 2. *Ensnarers of the people.* "The prophet is the snare of a fowler in all his ways." They snared the people to their ruin (1) by their teaching, promising peace and prosperity when there was none; (2) by their example, encouraging the people in their idolatries and follies; (3) by making light of the moral element in conduct. They "strengthened the hands of the wicked, that he should not return from his wicked way, by promising him life" (Ezek. xiii. 22). They flattered the people's wishes; felt none of that agonizing sympathy with them which made Hosea seem as one mad; kept away from all denunciation of their sins. They were hirelings, whose own the sheep were not, and who cared not for the sheep (John x. 12, 13). They were a snare "in all their ways"—out and out in everything they did. 3. *Themselves as bad as the rest.* "Hatred in the house of his God." Professing to speak in God's Name, the prophet was full of malignant hatred of God, and of those who spoke in God's Name (cf. Amos vii. 10—13).—J. O.

Vers. 9, 10.—*Gibeah and Baal-peor.* From this point the mind of the prophet reverts largely to the past. He sees mirrored in it both God's love and the people's sins. Allusion is made here to God's early love for Israel, and to the sins of Gibeah and Baal-peor.

I. THE EVIL OF SIN IS SEEN BY COMPARISON WITH FORMER SINS, THE HEINOUSNESS OF WHICH ALL ADMIT. Two such outstanding sins of the past were those of Gibeah, and, at a still earlier period, of Baal-peor. The former (cf. Judg. xix., xx.) was a sin revealing depths of corruption in Israel such as had not previously been heard of (Judg. xix. 30). It shocked the national conscience. It led to fierce vengeance being taken on the transgressors, and on the Benjamites who sided with them. The latter was a sin of wider scope, and scarcely less heinous in its character (Numb. xxv. 1—18). It combined idolatry with whoredom in a peculiarly daring and offensive manner. It led to the destruction of twenty-four thousand in the camp of Israel by a plague, and to the after extermination of the Midianites. These were the "deep corruptions" which were now reproducing themselves in Israel. The people might refuse to give the right name to the iniquity as practised by themselves, but they could scarcely fail to reprobate it when presented in these earlier instances. It was a peculiarity of these sins that *they had been judged by Israel itself.* It was the tribes that pronounced sentence on the evil-doers at Gibeah; and Phinehas had executed judgment on Zimri, as afterwards the men of war did on the Midianites. This, accordingly, was a case to which Paul's principle applied, that ability to judge of an offence in another renders one inexcusable if he does the same thing (Rom. ii. 1). We are often, however, willing to condemn in others sins which we inconsistently tolerate in ourselves.

II. THE EVIL OF SIN ONLY BECOMES FULLY APPARENT AGAINST THE BACKGROUND OF DIVINE LOVE. This is brought out in ver. 10 in the case of Baal-peor. The enormity of that sin was only fully seen when set against the manifestations of Divine love which had preceded. "I found Israel like grapes in the wilderness; I saw your fathers as the first ripe in the fig tree at her first time." There is indicated here: 1. *God's choice of Israel.* He "found" them "in the wilderness;" he "saw" them there, and chose them. 2. *God's delight in Israel.* The nation was pleasant to him as grapes in the desert, or as the first-ripe fig. His choice and his affection were both manifested in many wonderful ways. It was this love shown to Israel which made such acts as

the making of the golden calf, and, again, the shameful apostasy of Baal-peor, so inexcusably wicked. To see sin in its full enormity we must count up the mercies of God against which we are offending—must reflect, above all, on God's love to us as displayed in Christ.

III. THE PRINCIPLE OF CONTINUITY IN SIN. Israel's apostasy, Hosea seeks to show, was no new thing. It began at a very early period (cf. ch. x. 9). The strain of it had continued in the blood of the people ever since. It was proved to be a constitutional disorder which no mild treatment would eradicate. We gain insight into the virulence of depravity by studying its hereditary manifestation.—J. O.

Vers. 11—17.—*Ephraim's woe.* "Woe also to them when I depart from them" (ver. 12). It is this thought of woe as the result of God departing from Ephraim—"hating them," "loving them no more" (ver. 15)—which is the key-note of the passage. The prophet compares the ideal which God set up for Ephraim—fruitfulness, Tyre-like pleasantness of situation, settled habitation in Canaan—with the miserable end now awaiting the people. His mind dwells with a sort of fixity of horror on the bringing forth of the children to slaughter with the sword (vers. 12, 13, 16). Woe would descend on Ephraim to the reversal of the Divine ideal.

I. IN RESPECT OF FRUITFULNESS. (Vers. 11, 12.) Fruitfulness and strength of numbers was an especial part of the promise to Ephraim (Gen. xlix. 22, 26; Deut. xxxiii. 17), even as a numerous posterity was the promise to Israel generally. This "glory" would now be taken from the people that boasted of it. Licentiousness had already, in part, undermined the nation's strength (ch. iv. 10). The sword would now finish what their own misconduct had begun. As in a previous figure (ch. viii. 7), and in ver. 16, the curse is represented as working to the frustration of the people's wishes at every stage in the advance of their hopes. First, there is no conception; then, in the cases where there is conception, there is "a miscarrying womb" (ver. 14); then, at the stage of birth, there is failure to bring forth; even if the child is born, it is doomed to be killed by the sword. Nothing goes right; everything goes wrong; there is but woe, failure, frustration, disappointment, when God departs from us. The numbers of a nation are in God's hand. He can bless or he can blast. His judgment works both through natural laws and events of providence.

II. IN RESPECT OF PLEASANTNESS. (Vers. 13, 14, 16.) God designed for Ephraim a situation pleasant as that of Tyre; he had in reserve for him all "precious things"—"blessings of the heaven above, blessings of the deep that lieth under" (Gen. xlix. 25, 26; Deut. xxxiii. 13—15). Thus gloriously planted, Ephraim was to be the cynosure of the tribes, a paragon of sweetness and beauty. How ghastly the contrast—"But Ephraim shall bring forth his children to the murderer" (ver. 13)! 1. *A worm at the root.* "Ephraim is smitten, their root is dried up, they shall bear no fruit," etc. (ver. 16). This is the fate of all glory without God. Its root is not drawn from the sources of perennial life in the eternal One. It has in it the principle of decay. It is a glory of the world, fading, perishing. *Sic transeat.* The Christian's inheritance is incorruptible, undefiled, and fadeth not away (1 Pet. i. 4). 2. *Ruthless butchery.* (Vers. 13, 16.) The pleasantness of Ephraim would be smutched with the blood of his own children—the "beloved" ones, the "darlings" of the womb. The very thought of the carnage that is to come almost makes the prophet's brain reel. He has threatened Ephraim with barrenness, but now that he has to frame a prayer for his people, he can think of no kinder one than that they may have "a miscarrying womb and dry breasts" (cf. Luke xxiii. 29). One woe swallows up another, and makes it all but seem a blessing in comparison. Terrible, truly, when God departs!

III. IN RESPECT OF SETTLEMENT. (Vers. 15, 17.) Ephraim would be driven from God's house, *i.e.* rejected from being his people, or spiritual house, and would be sent abroad as "wanderers among the nations." This, again, was in contradistinction to the original design of a permanent settlement as the Lord's people in the Lord's land. 1. The often-reiterated *cause* of the banishment is here again specified. The people were driven out (1) for their wickedness, which had assumed peculiarly aggravated and concentrated forms ("in Gilgal"); and (2) for their obduracy: "They did not hearken unto him," *i.e.* God. Even their wickedness would not have ruined them, had they repented of it when God reproved and pleaded with them. Now the day for repentance

was past. "I will love them *no more*." 2. The *doom* is further individualized. "Wanderers among the nations." Such are the Jews at this day. Prophecy never spoke a truer word.—J. O.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER X.

The concluding thought of the last chapter is the commencing one of this; while the sad subject of Israel's guilt being resumed continues in the first section (vers. 1—8) of the chapter, and that of their punishment in the second section (vers. 9—15), with a solemn caution to make a better use of the future than they had done of the past.

Ver. 1.—**Israel is an empty vine.** The comparison of Israel to a vine is frequent; but the epithet *boqeq* is variously rendered; (1) as "empty." Thus Aben Ezra explains it as "empty in which there is no strength to bring forth fruit, nor fruit;" and thus also Kimchi explains it: "An empty vine in which there is not any life-sap;" and in the same sense בוקה, "empty and sick," Nah. ii. 11. This, too, is the meaning of the Authorized Version, but is irreconcilable with the statement in the following clause, "he bringeth forth fruit." The Chaldee had preceded in giving the word the sense of "plundered," "empty," "waste." But (2) some take *boqeq* transitively, and attach to it the signification of "emptying out its fruit." In this way Rashi explains it: "The Israelites resemble a vine which casts all its good fruit;" and similarly the marginal rendering of the Authorized Version has, "a vine emptying the fruit which it giveth." There is (3) a signification derivable from the primary meaning of *boqeq* more suitable than either of the preceding. From the primary sense of "pouring," "pouring itself out," or "poured out," and so overflowing, comes that of "luxuriant." Accordingly Gesenius translates, "a wide-spreading vine." This agrees with the Septuagint εὐκληματοῦσα, "a vine with goodly branches," to which the Vulgate *frondosa*, "leafy," nearly corresponds. In like manner De Wette renders it *wucherader*, "growing prosperously." It was thus a vine of vigorous growth, and extending its branches far and wide; a parallel expression is found in the נפרצה of Ezek. xvii. 6, "a spreading vine." **He (rather, *it*) bringeth forth fruit unto himself (*itself*).** The word יָשִׁיב literally signifies "to set to" or "on," and is rightly rendered by Gesenius "to set" or "yield fruit." It is variously interpreted by the Hebrew commentators, but more or less erroneously by them all. Rashi takes it in the sense of "to profit;" Aben Ezra, "to bear" or "make equal;" and Kimchi informs us that the older interpreters understood in the sense of "lying," as if שׁוא, the whole phrase meaning, "the fruit will lie to him," that is, deceive or fail him (like ch. ix. 2). Kimchi himself takes the verb in the right sense, but, misled by his erroneous explanation of *boqeq*, empty or plundered, takes the clause interrogatively; "How shall he set on himself [equivalent to 'yield' any fruit], since he is as a plundered vine; for the enemies have plundered him and set him as an empty vessel? how should he still thrive and become numerous in children and treasures?" It makes little difference whether we take the second part of the first clause relatively or independently, as the sense amounts to the same. The meaning of the two difficult and disputed words then we take to be respectively "luxuriant" and "yield;" and the sense of the whole is either (1) a comparison of the former state of Israel to a vine luxuriant and likely, as far as appearance went, to set forth fruit; but the luxuriance degenerated into leafage, and the likelihood of fruitage failed; or (2) Israel is compared to a vine luxuriant in growth and abundant in fruit—but only *for itself*. The former explanation accords with that of Jerome when he says, "Unpruned vines luxuriate in the juice and leaves which they ought to transmute into wine. They disperse in the idle ambitious show of leaves and branches." The more abundantly a fruit tree gives out its strength in leaves and branches, the less abundant and the worse the quality of the fruit. Thus it was with the fig tree, with its abundant leaves and no fruit, which our Lord cursed. But with the same or a similar rendering there is the alternative sense of prosperous growth and plenteous fruit, but that fruit wasted on self or sin; and thus the meaning in either case is much the same. The Septuagint favours this by ὁ καρπὸς εὐθηνῶν αὐτῆς, equivalent to "its fruit exuberant." Cyril favours this latter also in saying, "When Israel still wisely led a life in accordance with the Divine Law, it was as a beautiful vine adorned with branches, which even the neighbouring nations admired." This was exactly the state of Israel in the days of Joash and Jeroboam II.; but their prosperity was prostituted to purposes of idolatry. Jerome also, in another part of his exposition,

approaches this sense. Taking שׁוה in the sense of "to equal," he says, "The fecundity of the grapes equalled the fecundity of the branches; but they who had previously been so fruitful before they offended God, afterwards turned the abundance of fruits into multiplied occasions of offence; and the greater the population they possessed, the more altars they built, and exceeded the abundant produce of the land by the multitude of their idols." Or the verb may mean, "it made fruit equal to itself;" nearly so the Vulgate. The fruit is agreeable to it. **According to the multitude of his fruit he hath increased the altars.** In this second or middle clause of the verse the figure passes into the fact represented by it. It is no longer the vine, but Israel. The altars kept pace with the increase of population and abundant produce; the multiplication of altars for idolatrous sacrifice and service was proportionate to their prosperity. The *l*ᵉ here and in next clause marks the circumlocutory genitive, and the *k*ᵉ is quantitative. **According to the goodness of his land they have made goodly images** (margin, *statues*, or, *standing images*). The *matstsevoth* here mentioned are στήλης in the LXX., that is, statues or pillars, and those pillars were erected to Baal or some other idol, as we read in 1 Kings xiv. 23. The plural of the verb in this last clause arises from Israel being a noun of multitude. Rashi gives the following brief exposition: "Just in proportion as I caused their prosperity to overflow to them, they multiplied calves for the altars;" but Kimchi explains both clauses more fully and accurately thus: "As I increased their prosperous state in treasures and children, they multiplied altars to Baal; as I did good to their land in corn and wine and oil, they waxed strong in setting up pillars for other gods;" the verb יטב has the same sense here as חתם in Jonah iv. 9.

Ver. 2.—**Their heart is divided.** Here their wickedness is traced to its fountain-head; its source was in the corrupt state of the heart. Their heart was (1) divided, and so they halted between two opinions—between the worship of Jehovah and idolatry. *Chalaq* is taken in this signification by the Chaldee, Syriac, Septuagint, and Jerome, as also by the Hebrew commentators. The LXX. have (*a*) ἐμέρισεν in the singular, which affords some support to Hitzig's rendering, "He (God) divided their heart,"—but this is unsuitable and unscriptural; another (*b*) reading of the same version is ἐμέρισαν, "They have divided their hearts," which is somewhat better, yet incorrect. (*c*) The Authorized Version is also questionable, as the verb is not used intransitively in Qal. (2) Kimchi, indeed, understands *chalaq* as equivalent to *nichloq* in the Niphal, and interprets, "From the fear of God and from his Law their heart is divided," *i.e.* separated: similarly Rashi: "Their heart is divided from me;" Aben Ezra somewhat peculiarly, though to the same purport: "They (their heart) has not one part (but several)," or is divided. But, notwithstanding this consensus in favour of the meaning of "divide," the rendering preferred, and justly so, by modern expositors in general, is "smooth." This is, indeed, the primary sense, that of "divide" being secondary, as division was made by lot or a smooth stone, *cheleq*, used for the purpose. (3) "Their heart is *smooth*," that is, bland, deceitful, hypocritical; though it must be admitted that the word is mostly applied to the tongue, lip, throat, mouth, speech, and not to the heart. Their heart was hypocritical and faithless. **Now shall they be found faulty**; rather, *they shall be dealt with as such*, or *punished*; better still, perhaps, is the rendering, *now shall they atone*. The "now" defines sharply the turning-point between God's love and God's wrath. The state of things hitherto existing cannot continue; it must soon come to an end. Ere long they are doomed to discover their guilt in its punishment; they shall find out their sin by suffering; suddenly and to their cost they shall have a fearful awaking to a sense of their iniquity by the inflictions of Divine wrath upon their guilty heads. **He shall break down their altars, he shall spoil their images.** The verb ערף is peculiar; being a denominative from עֹרֶף, the neck, it signifies "to break the neck of," like the Greek τραχηλίζειν, decollate, then figuratively "tear down," "break in pieces." This bold expression of breaking the neck of the altars may allude to their destruction by breaking off the horns of the altars, or rather to their beheading, cutting off the heads of victims at those altars. The Hebrew expositors make the heart of the people, not God, the immediate object of the verb. "Their heart," says one of them, "shall tear down their altars and lay waste their pillars, because it is divided from me. It will tear down their altars which they are said also to have multiplied, and lay waste their pillars which they made so goodly." The means of sinning shall be taken from them and destroyed—their altars broken down and their images spoiled. As the heads of victims had been cut off at these altars erected for idolatrous worship; so the heads of their altars would be broken off.

Ver. 3.—**For now they shall say, We have no king, because we feared not the Lord.** In the day of their destruction Israel would be brought to see and even feel that the king appointed through their own self-will and

fancied plenitude of power was unable to protect or help them, and that because they had rejected Jehovah and cast aside his fear. The point of time denoted by "now" is either when they see destruction before their eyes, or when Israel is already in captivity. Rashi explains it in the former sense: "When destruction shall come upon them, they shall say, 'We have no king,' that is, our king on whom we set our hopes when we said, 'Our king shall go out before us and fight our battles,' affords us no help whatever." Kimchi explains similarly, but fixes the "now" in the time of the Captivity: "Now, when they shall be carried out of their land, they shall recognize and say, 'We have no king;' the explanation is, as if we had no king among us, for there is no strength in him to deliver us out of the hand of our enemies, as we thought when we asked for a king who should march at our head and fight our battles. God—blessed be he!—was our King, and we needed no king, and he it was that delivered us out of the hand of our enemies when we did his will." Aben Ezra and others understand it as the expression of a wild licence on the part of Israel, recklessly giving vent to an anarchical and atheistic spirit: "As soon as their heart was divided they had no wish to have a king over them, and had no fear of Jehovah; therefore they had no fear, and every one did what was right in his own eyes." This exposition neglects the note of time, as also the causal particle that follows. They bethought themselves that, as they had not feared Jehovah, but neglected his Law, the king which they had demanded could do them no good. "What," they asked, "can the king do for us? He has no power to deliver us, since God is angry with us, for we have sinned against him?" Such is the confession of Israel in captivity. Pusey remarks in reference to this: "In sin, all Israel had asked for a king, when the Lord was their King; in sin, Ephraim had made Jeroboam king; in sin, their subsequent kings were made, without the counsel and advice of God; and now, as the close of all, they reflect how fruitless it all was."

Ver. 4.—God, by the prophet, had charged Israel with fruitlessness, or with bringing forth fruit to themselves; with perverting the bounties of his providence in promoting idolatry; with their division of heart, or deceitfulness of heart. He had also threatened to punish them for their sin, and to deprive them of the means of sinning by destroying the instruments thereof, and to prevent their obtaining any help from their king, proving to them the folly of depending on him. He now proceeds, in this and following verses (4—8), to point out their moral corruption, the usual consequence or concomitant of irreligion and of false religion, instancing their deceptive dealing in the common affairs of life and their perjury in public compacts or covenants, as also their general unrighteousness. He threatens to destroy their idols to the distress of their worshippers and ministering priests as well as of their chief city. He threatens further to cause their calf-idols to be carried into captivity, pouring shame and contempt on their enterprises; to cut off their king; to leave the places of their idol-worship desolate, filling the people with distress and despair because of all their sins. **They have spoken words, swearing falsely in making a covenant.** In this fourth verse the prophet deplores the absence of truth, faithfulness, and loyalty to duty. This expression, "they have spoken words," is generally understood to signify (*a*) "empty words," "false words," only words and no more, like the Latin *verba alicui dare*. Thus their vain, deceitful, lying words in private transactions and common affairs of everyday life would correspond to their perjury in public treaties and covenants. Their words were deceitful and their oaths falsehood. In their ordinary business transactions they used words, empty words, words without truth, corresponding thereto; in international concerns they had pursued the same course of falsifying and covenant-breaking. After entering into an engagement with the Assyrian king Shalmaneser, they made a covenant with So King of Egypt, as we read in 2 Kings xvii. 4, "And the King of Assyria found conspiracy in Hoshea: for he had sent messengers to So King of Egypt, and brought no present to the King of Assyria, as he had done year by year." In this latter case they acted as covenant-breakers, and at the same time contravened the Divine command, which forbade them entering into covenants with foreigners. The first clause, however, is understood by some (*b*) in the sense of "deliberating." Thus Kimchi understands it, erroneously referring it to Jeroboam and his countrymen; thus: "Jeroboam and his companions took counsel what they should do in order to strengthen the government in his hand, and they deliberated (or held consultation) that the people should not go up to Jerusalem to the house of the sanctuary; and for this purpose they bound themselves by oath and made a covenant. But their oath was a vain one, because their oath was intended to frustrate the words of the Law and the command of God, and to make images for their worship." The words אָלוֹת שָׁוְא have been explained by some (1) as "oaths of vanity," that is, oaths by vanity or an idol, as an oath of Jehovah is an oath by Jehovah, אָלוֹת being taken for a noun in

the plural; (2) as predicate, while the following words supply the subject; thus: "their covenant contracts are oaths of vanity." This mistake of taking אָלוֹת for a noun arose from the anomalous form of the word, which is really a verb. The *form* is explained by Aben Ezra, who calls it an irregular formation, as if it were compounded of the infinitive construct as indicated by the ending וֹת־, and the infinitive absolute as indicated by the *gamets* in the first syllable; it is in reality the infinitive absolute, and the irregularity is owing to the assonance with *karoth* thence resulting. As to the *construction*, it is that of the infinitive standing in place of the finite verb, of which Gesenius says, "This is frequent . . . in the expression of several successive acts or states, where only the first of the verbs employed takes the required form in respect to tense and person, the others being simply put in the infinitive with the same tense and person implied." The meaning of the clause is obviously that there was no longer any respect for the sanctity of an oath; while the treaties refer to those made with the Assyrian king, with the object of securing and upholding the government. **Thus judgment springeth up as hemlock in the furrows of the field.** The judgment here spoken of is understood (1) by the Hebrew interpreters, following the Chaldee Version, as the judgment of God and consequent punishment of Israel because of sin; thus Kinchi: "Therefore there springs up against them the judgment of chastisements and punishments like hemlock, which is a bitter herb that springs up on the furrows of the field." Some, again, (2) explain it of the decree of the kings of Israel in reference to the worship of idols, which, like a bitter herb, was to issue in national ruin. We much prefer (3) the more obvious sense of the clause which refers it to the perversion of judgment and justice. Thus Amos addresses them as those who "turn judgment to wormwood, and leave off righteousness in the earth," and calls on them to "establish judgment in the gate;" and Habakkuk writes, "Wrong [wrested] judgment proceedeth." It is implied in the mention of *furrows* that there has been careful preparation for the intended crop. The seed they sow is injustice; and the plant that springs up from it is a poison-plant—hemlock, bitter and noxious, and is everywhere rampant. Another (4) explanation understands "judgment" in the sense of crime which calls on judgment for punishment. The field is that of the Israelitish nation; in all the furrows of that wide field judgment, that is, crime, springs up as luxuriantly and abundantly as hemlock. The multiplication of crime in Israel, like a luxurious noxious growth in some large field, is the idea thus conveyed. This explanation has the appearance at least of being somewhat strained and forced, though it yields a good sense.

Ver. 5.—**The inhabitants of Samaria shall fear because of the calves of Beth-aven.** Samaria was the capital of Israel, the northern kingdom. Beth-el means "house of God," once a place of sacred memory from its association with the history of the patriarch Jacob; afterward one of the two centres of idolatrous worship, and here called Beth-aven, "house of vanity," because of the idolatry. The word for "calves" is in the feminine, in order to express contempt for those idols which Jeroboam set up. With this have been compared the following expressions in Greek and Latin: Ἀχαιΐδες οὐκ ἔτ' Ἀχαιοί, and *O vere Phrygiæ, nec enim Phryges!* The Hebrews ignored the existence of female divinities, as of their ten names of the Deity all are masculine. The feminine may also imply their weakness; so far from helping their worshippers, their worshippers were in trepidation for them, or rather it, lest it should be carried away captive. Further, this same word is in the plural, to cast ridicule on it, as if mimicking the plural of majesty, or rather, perhaps, to include that of Dan, or to intimate that the calf of Bethel, the more celebrated place, was that after which the calf of Dan and probably those of other places were fashioned, especially so as it is afterwards referred to in the singular. Besides, a few —a very few—manuscripts, it is true, read the singular, as also the LXX., which has μόσχος, and the Syriac; while Dathe, relying on these authorities, maintains the reading to have been לְעֵגְלַת in the singular. Others suppose an enallage of both gender and number; or an indefinite generality is expressed by the plural, while for abstracts the feminine is used. The coming punishment is casting its shadow before, so that the inhabitants, perceiving symptoms of its approach, tremble for their god of gold, now, like themselves, in greatest jeopardy. **For the people thereof shall mourn over it.** The people of Israel are now called the people of the calf, as once they had been the people of Jehovah, and as Moab was called the people of Chemosh. They had chosen the calf for their god. Of their own free-will they had done so, though at first enjoined and prompted to adopt this course by the mandate of their king; they had even rejoiced and gloried in it. Now they mourn for their idol, which can neither help itself nor them. **And the priests thereof that rejoiced on it, for the glory thereof, because it is departed from it.** According to this rendering, the relative must be understood

before "rejoiced," which, though quite possible and not ungrammatical, is, however, unnecessary. The Hebrew commentators all understand the word in the sense of "joy" or "jubilation;" thus Rashi says, "Why is it that its people mourn over, it and its priests, who always rejoiced over it, now mourn over its glory that is gone away?" The word גִּיל, however, is primarily "to twist or whirl one's self," and is thence applied to any violent emotion, generally of joy, also of anxiety and fear, as here, so that the simpler and more correct rendering is, *the priests thereof shall tremble for it, for its glory, because it is departed from it.* The priests here mentioned have a peculiar name, *kmarim*, from *kamar*, to be black, from the black garments in which they ministered, and are thus distinguished as ministers of a foreign cult; for *kohen* is the usual word for a Hebrew priest, and his robe of office is said to have been white. The glory of the calf-god was not the temple treasure at Bethel, nor its glory as the state God set up there, but the honour and the Divine halo with which its worship there was surrounded. Thus Kimchi: "When its glory is departed from it; and this means the honour of its worship. When the calf is broken before their eyes its glory shall depart from it." The perfects of "mourn" and "departed" are prophetic, denoting the certainty of the events, though yet future; while *galah* and *yagilu* form the favourite assonance. But a question still remains—Why is Samaria and not Beth-aven said to mourn? To this the explanation of Kimchi is a satisfactory reply: "The inhabitants of Samaria tremble. And the prophet makes mention of Samaria, though there were no calves there, because it was the metropolis of the kingdom, where the kings of Israel resided, and it was these kings who strengthened the people in the worship of the calves. And he says, "When Bethel is laid waste, and the calves cannot deliver it, the inhabitants of Samaria tremble for themselves, which place (Samaria) the King of Assyria laid siege to for three years."

Ver. 6.—**It shall be also carried unto Assyria for a present to King Jareb.** Here we have an explanation and confirmation of what has just been said in the preceding verse. The calf, the glorious and magnificent national god, as Israel considered it, is brought to Assyria, and there offered as a present to the Assyrian king. The word *gam* is emphatic; that is, "it also," "itself also," or "it also with men and other spoils" —the golden idol of Beth-aven. Kimchi's explanation of *gam* is as follows: "*Gam*, extension or generalization of the term, refers to the glory he had mentioned. He says, 'Lo, in its place the glory shall depart from it as soon as they shall break it. *Also*, the stump of the calf, namely, the gold thereon, after its form is broken, they shall take away as a present to King Jareb.'" The sign of the accusative with suffix אֹתוֹ, which here stands before a passive verb, may be taken either (1) absolutely, "as to it also," "it shall be brought;" or (2) as an instance of anacoluthon; or (3), according to Gesenius, the passive may be regarded as an impersonal active, and thus it may take the object of the action in the accusative. The word *yubhal* is from *yabhal*, primarily used of flowing in a strong and violent stream, and so the root of מַבּוּל, the flood; then it signifies "to go," "to be brought or carried." The *minchah* here spoken of cannot well mean tribute, but is rather a gift of homage to the Assyrian conqueror, whom the prophet in vision sees already wasting the land of Israel and carrying away all its treasures and precious things. **Ephraim shall receive shame, and Israel shall be ashamed of his own counsel.** The feminine form, בֹּשָׁנָה—of which בֹּשֶׁן, the masculine, by analogy, is not in use—is wrongly explained by the Hebrew expositors as having a pleonastic *nun*. The construction usually preferred is (1) that given above. (2) Others render it, "Shame shall seize Ephraim;" but this constructs a feminine noun with a masculine verb, contrary to grammar. (3) Hitzig translates, "He (the Assyrian king) shall take away or carry off the shame of Ephraim; that is, the calf-idol." He remarks that the construct feminine does not always in the speech of North Israel end in ־ת, and cites several passages in proof. The *counsel* of which Israel would be ashamed is understood (1) of the consultation held before making a covenant or treaty with the King of Assyria; (2) it is generally and more correctly understood of Jeroboam taking counsel with his tribesmen of Ephraim about setting up the calf-idols. Jareb is a proper name, or rather an appellation. The King of Assyria, or the great king, was looked up to by the smaller Asiatic states for protection, and consequently styled their *Jareb*, avenger or defender, just as σώτηρ, saviour, was a title applied to or assumed by certain kings for a similar reason, as Ptolemy Soter and others. The object of Israel's idolatry is carried off as a present to propitiate or appease the wrath of the Assyrian patron and protector—probably Shalmaneser in the present instance—or taken as a trophy to grace the triumph of the conqueror. So far from defending the calf-people, as Israel had become, their calf-god could not defend itself; instead of preserving its worshippers from deportation, it was doomed itself to deportation. Ephraim, the premier tribe, received shame, and Israel, the remaining tribes that had followed its lead and adopted

its evil counsel, shared the shame; all of them together were thoroughly put to shame because of their mistaken and wicked policy. The counsel of Jeroboam—for to it, in our opinion, is the reference—appeared an able stroke of policy; but this policy, by which he hoped to detach Israel from Judah, was not only frustrated, but proved positively ruinous, so far were the means from effecting the end, or the end from justifying the wisdom of the means.

Ver. 7.—**As for Samaria, her king is cut off as the foam upon the water** (*face of the waters*). Instead of the throne of Samaria being established, or the kingdom consolidated by the idolatrous measures which Jeroboam had adopted for the purpose, the king himself was cut off as foam upon the surface of the waters, or as a chip carried off by the current, and the kingdom ingloriously ruined. Though the sense is sufficiently plain, the sentence has been variously constructed. Thus (1) one of the Hebrew commentators renders it, "In the city of Samaria her king has been made like foam on the surface of the water" (*b*ᵉ being understood and נדמה taken in the sense of "being like"). (2) Rashi, understanding the verb to signify being "reduced to silence," explains, "The King of Samaria is brought to silence." (3) The correct signification of the verb, however, is "cut off" or "annihilated," while the construction may be (*a*) an asyndeton; thus: "Samaria (and) her king;" or (*b*) Samaria taken as nominative absolute,—thus in the Authorized Version, "(As for) Samaria, her king is cut off;" or (*c*), supplying נדמה to the second noun, with Aben Ezra, "Samaria is cut off, her king is cut off." Some (*d*) consider it simpler to translate as follows: "Samaria is cut off; her king is like [literally, 'as'] a chip on the surface of the waters." In this way the Massoretic punctuation is neglected. *Shomron* is feminine, as the names of cities and countries usually are, and therefore the suffix to "king" is feminine, while the masculine form, נִדְמָה, is justified by its position at the head of the sentence; for, according to Gesenius, the predicate at the beginning of a clause or sentence "often takes its simplest and readiest form, viz. the masculine singular, even when the subject," not yet expressed, but coming after, "is feminine or plural." קִצֵּף is explained either as "foam" or "splinter." The latter is, perhaps, preferable, as the verbal root cognate with the Arabic *katsapha* signifies "to break," "break off," "crack;" then "to be angry" (its most common meaning) from the sudden breaking out or breaking loose of passion, with which may be compared the Greek ῥήγνυμι. The word קצפה in Joel i. 7, from the same root, is literally a "breaking or breaking off," "barking." The word דמה, again, has two principal meanings—one "to be like," the other "to be silent" (connected, according to Gesenius, with a different root, *damam*, *dum*, like the English "dumb"); or the meanings are traceable to one root, in the sense of "making flat," "plane," "smooth;" then "silent," and so "reduced to silence," "destroyed."

Ver. 8.—**The high places also of Aven, the sin of Israel, shall be destroyed.** By Aven is generally understood *Beth-aven*, that is, Bethel; but some take the word as an appellative, and thus *bamoth-aven* would signify the "high places of iniquity." These unlawful places of sacrifice and unholy places of iniquity are further characterized by the appositional "the sin of Israel." By constructing and frequenting such places Israel had primarily and grievously sinned. By sacrificing to and worshipping even Jehovah on these high places instead of in Jerusalem, the only legal place for Divine service under the Law, their national sin in the matter of worship began; subsequently, however, things became worse, and these high places became scenes of most abominable idolatries and shamelessly sinful practices. Those places—one and all—are in the words before us doomed to destruction. **The thorn and the thistle shall come up on their altars.** The destruction is thus vividly described as total and complete; those bad eminences were devoted to entire wasteness and desolation. "It is a sign of extreme solitude," says Jerome, "so that no traces even of wall or buildings remained to be seen;" similarly Rashi says, "Thorns and thistles shall grow up upon their altars, because the worshippers thereof have departed and no one longer remains to attend to them;" so Kimchi: "On the altars of Israel which they (the enemies) shall lay waste shall thorns spring up." **And they shall say to the mountains, Cover us; and to the hills, Fall on us.** The sight of such fearful ruin and desolation overwhelms the wretched inhabitants of the land with distress and dismay; in sheer despair and even desperation they invoke a sure and sudden death as much preferable to their remaining longer spectators of such heart-rending scenes. Their exclamation appears to be proverbial, and to have had its origin in the custom of the Israelites fleeing, in seasons of great calamities, to the mountains and clefts of the rocks to hide themselves; thus in Judg. iv. 2 we read that "because of the Midianites the children of Israel made them the dens which are in the mountains, and caves, and strongholds." The object of their exclamation is to be buried under the hills or mountains rather than endure such calamities

longer; or rather than the enemies should see them in their shame. Aben Ezra makes "altars" the subject of "shall say," as if it were the wish of the altars to be covered that they may never more be seen. Theodoret considers the sense of the passage to be that the multitude of calamities in the war occasioned by hostile invasion would be so great that there would be no one who would not prefer being overwhelmed in an earthquake or by the sudden fall of the mountains, rather than endure the calamities inflicted by the enemies. Similarly, but more concisely, Jerome says, "They are more willing to die than see the evils that bring death."

Ver. 9.—**O Israel, thou hast sinned from the days of Gibeah.** Two explanations given of this clause—namely, that which understands, *min* comparatively, that is, "more than"—their sins were greater than those of the Benjamites in the days of Gibeah; and that which refers the sin here spoken of to the appointment of Saul, who was of Gibeah of Benjamin, to be king—must be unhesitatingly rejected. The sin of the men of Gibeah was the shameful outrage committed on the Levite's concubine by the men of Gibeah, which with its consequences is recorded in Judg. xix. and xx. That sin became proverbial, overtopping, as it did, all ordinary iniquities by its shameless atrocity and heinousness. By a long-continued course of sin, even from ancient days, Ephraim has been preparing for a fearful doom. **There they stood: the battle in Gibeah against the children of iniquity did not overtake them.** This portion of the verse is not a little perplexing, and in consequence has called forth considerable diversity of exposition. There is (1) that which is implied in the Authorized Version, viz. "there they *stood*," smitten twice but not destroyed, chastened but not killed, the battle in Gibeah against the children of iniquity did not overtake them then so as utterly to destroy them, but it shall overtake them now. Or if the verb "overtake," which is future, be strictly rendered, the meaning is—Not a battle like that in Gibeah against the children of iniquity shall overtake them, but one much more sanguinary and terrible, resulting, not in the reduction of a single tribe to six hundred men, but in the extirpation of ten tribes. (2) That of Keil and others, though not the same, is similar. It is: "There, in Gibeah, did they *remain*, persevering in the sin of Gibeah, and yet the war in Gibeah against the sinners has not overtaken them." This makes the meaning of the prophet to be that since the days of Gibeah the Israelites persevered in the same or like sin as the Gibeahites; and, though the Gibeahites were so severely punished, actually destroyed, because of their sin, the ten tribes of Israel, persisting in the same or similar sin, have not yet been resisted with any such exterminating war. Jehovah announces his intention *now* to visit them with punishment and severest chastisement for all. The meaning which Keil aims at may be better brought out by rendering the latter clause interrogatively; thus: "There they stood — persisting in the criminality of Gibeah — shall there not overtake them, living as they do in Gibeah, the war which exterminated the children of crime?" It is admitted that עמר may have been the meaning of "persevering;" but a better sense (3) is gained by Wünsche referring the subject of עמדו to the Benjamites; the suffix ם of תשׂים to the בני עולה, or "children of iniquity," that is, their guilty tribesmen in Gibeah; taking the intermediate clause parenthetically; and עמד with על to "stand in defence of;" thus: "Since the days of Gibeah hast thou sinned, O Israel: there they (the Benjamites) stood in defence of the children of iniquity, that the war might not reach them in Gibeah." This gives a satisfactory sense, and intimates that, by a long-continued course of iniquity and crime, the Ephraimites were preparing themselves for a fearful fate. Already from days long gone by grievous guilt cleaved to them; thus in the days of Gibeah they (the Benjamites) stood by their iniquitous brethren that the battle in Gibeah might not reach them. As this was before the disruption, the Benjamites were part and parcel of Israel here represented by them. (4) Rosenmüller's explanation is the following: "They (the Benjamites) *survived* (עָמַד, opposed to אָבַד, as in Ps. cii. 27) being severely punished, though they did not entirely perish, six hundred being left to revive the tribe." But a still severer punishment awaits the Israelites (the person being changed from the second to the third, and the prophet addressing himself to hearer or reader): not the war waged in Gibeah (or on account of the crime committed there) against the children of iniquity shall overtake them, but a far more deadly and destructive war. The word עלוה is by metathesis for עוֹלָה as זְעָוָה for זַעֲוָה, commotion; כָּשָׁב for כָּבַשׁ; and שַׁלְמָה for שִׁמְלָה.

Ver. 10.—**It is in my desire that I should chastise them; and the people shall be gathered against them.** This is better translated thus: *When I desire it, then* (*vav* of the apodosis) *shall I chastise them; and the peoples shall be gathered against them.* This expresses God's determination to punish sin and vindicate his justice as the infinitely Holy One. It means, not only that his desire to punish them does exist,

but that, this desire being taken for granted, there shall be no let nor hindrance; nothing can stay his hand. Then the mode and means of chastisement are indicated—peoples, foreign invaders, shall be gathered against them. The verb אֶסֹּר is future Qal of יסר irregularly, as if coming from נסר, the daghesh in *samech* compensating for the absorbed *yod*. **When they shall bind themselves in their two furrows**; margin, *When I shall bind them for their two transgressions*, or, *in their two habitations*. (1) Gesenius, Ewald, and others, abiding by the Kethir or textual reading of the original, translate, "Jehovah will chastise them before with thoir eyes," that is, not in secret, but openly before the world. They thus refer the word to עַיִן, eye, but עֵינוֹת is "fountains," not "eyes." (2) The Hebrew commentators, Aben Ezra and Kimchi, explain the word in the sense of "two furrows" as in Authorized Version; and refer them to Judah and Ephraim. Thus Kimchi says, "The prophet compares Judah and Ephraim to two ploughing oxen. I thought they would plough well, but they have ploughed ill, since they have bound themselves together one with the other and have allied themselves the one with the other to do evil in the eyes of Jehovah." Similarly Rosenmüller: "To be bound to two furrows is said of oxen ploughing when they are bound together in a common yoke, so that in two adjacent furrows they walk together and with equal pace." (3) The Septuagint rendering, based on the Qeri and followed by the Syriac and Arabic, gives a better and clearer sense than the preceding. It is, Ἐν ταῖς δυσὶν δικίαις αὐτῶν, and is followed by Jerome in *Super duas iniquitates suas*, as also by the most judicious expositors of ancient and modern times. Yet there is great variety as to what those iniquities are. Some, like Jerome, refer to the double idolatry—that of Micah and that of Jeroboam; others, like Dathe, to the two golden calves set up at Dan and Bethel; Cyril and Theodoret to the apostasy of Israel from Jehovah, and devotion to idols; De Wette and Keil to the double unfaithfulness of Israel to Jehovah and the royal house of David. The exact rendering would, according to any of these views, be, "When I bind them to their two transgressions," or, "When I allow the foreigners to bind them on account of their two transgressions;" that is to connect or yoke them to their two transgressions by the punishment, so that they, like beasts of burden, must drag them after them, whatever be the view we take of the nature of those transgressions.

Ver. 11.—**And Ephraim is as an heifer that is taught, and loveth to tread out the corn.** Ephraim is compared to a heifer trained. The work she was taught to do was treading out the corn; by training and habit it had become a second nature, so that she took delight in it. The connecting vowel *i* occurs seldom, and usually with an antique colouring in prose, according to Ewald; it is poetical besides, and used in the concourse of words somewhat closely connected, but not in the strict construct state. Thus is אֹהֶבֶת accounted for. This work was probably easier, at all events pleasanter, than ploughing or harrowing. In treading out corn oxen were not yoked together, but worked singly, treading it with their feet, or drawing a threshing-sledge, or iron-armed cylinder, over it; they were unmuzzled also, so that they were free to snatch an occasional mouthful of the grain, and frequently fattened by such indulgence. Such had been the position of Ephraim in easy employment, comfortable circumstances like the heifer threshing and allowed to eat at pleasure, pleasantly situated, prosperous, self-indulgent, and luxurious. The victories of Ephraim—threshing and treading down—may perhaps be also hinted at. **But I passed over upon her fair neck** (margin, *the beauty of her neck*): **I will make Ephraim to ride; Judah shall plough, and Jacob shall break his clods** Times have changed, as is here indicated. a yoke, that of Assyria, is placed on the fair neck, a rider is set on the sleek back. More onerous and less pleasant labour is now imposed. Judah too is to share the toil, being put to the heavier work of ploughing; while Jacob—the ten tribes, or the twelve including both Judah and Israel—shall cross-plough; and thus both alike shall be henceforth employed in the heaviest labours of the field and the severest toils of agriculture. Once victorious, Ephraim is now to be subdued; once free and intractable, it must now receive the yoke and engage in laborious service. The expression עבר, followed by עַל, is generally used in a bad sense; "to *pass over*," says Jerome, "especially when it is said of God, always signifies inflictions and troubles." The fatness of the neck is the ox's ornament or beauty. That is now to be assaulted or invaded gently it may be, and softly, as men are wont to approach a young untamed animal in order to put the yoke upon it. This passing over, however tender, fixes the yoke on Ephraim's neck all the same. A more difficult word is אֶרְכִּיב, which Ewald (1) renders, "I will set a rider" on Ephraim, of course to subdue and tame; (2) Jerome has, "I will mount or ride," thus representing Jehovah himself as the mediate rider on Ephraim. The first sense has a parallel in Ps. lvi. 12, "Thou hast made men to ride over our head," and thus ruling them at pleasure. Unwilling to bear the easy yoke of their Divine Ruler,

they shall be subjected to the tyrant mastery of man. But (3) Keil says the word here is "not 'to mount or ride,' but 'to drive or use for drawing and driving,' *i.e.* to harness," as to the plough and harrow. This meaning is best reached by understanding the words thus: "I will make the yoke to ride on Ephraim's neck;" as הרכב is used in 2 Kings xiii. 16, for "put thine hand upon the bow," margin, "make thine hand to ride upon the bow." The remaining clauses of the verse is a further development of this expression, but extending to Judah; and thus including both Judah and Ephraim, or Jacob—both kingdoms. The Septuagint version of the last clause is peculiar; it is Παρασιωπήσομαι Ἰούδαν, ἐνισχύσει αὐτῷ Ἰακώβ. That is, as explained by Jerome, "I shall leave Judah for the present and say nothing about him; but whoever, whether of Ephraim or Judah, shall observe my precepts, he shall acquire strength for himself and be called Jacob."

Vers. 12, 13.—**Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy.** These two verses contain a call to repentance and reformation of life, in figurative language borrowed from the same department of human industry. לצדקה is "*for* righteousness;" that is, sow such seed as that righteousness may spring from it. לפי חסד is "according to," or "in proportion to, mercy." When two imperatives are joined, as here, the latter indicates a promise, and may be expressed by a future, as, "Do this and live," *i.e.* "ye shall live" (Gen. xlii. 18). Kimchi explains it correctly, thus: "Sow to yourselves, etc., that is, do good in mine eyes, and the recompense from me shall be far greater than your good deeds, just as if one sows a measure (seah), and hopes to reap therefor two measures (seahs) or still more. Therefore, he uses in sowing righteousness, and in connection with reaping grace, in order to intimate that grace surpasses righteousness." Or that God rewards men's actions, not according to merit, but according to grace. As men sow, they reap; accordingly Israel is directed to sow according to righteousness—to act righteously in their dealings with their fellow-men; and their reaping or reward would be, not in proportion to what they had sown, not merely commensurate with their righteous actions or dealings, not proportionate to what justice would give, but in proportion to mercy—Divine mercy, and so far above their highest deserts. They are promised a reward far above their poor doings, and irrespective of their sad failings—a reward, not of debt, not of merit, but of grace. The seed-time of righteousness would be followed by a reaping-time proportionate to the boundless measure of the Divine mercy. **Break up your fallow ground: for it is time to seek the Lord, till he come and rain righteousness upon you.** Here they are urged to turn over a new leaf, as we say; to begin a new life; to root out the weeds of sin; to eradicate those evil passions that checked and stifled any noble feelings, as the husbandman runs his plough through the fallow field, and breaks it up, clearing out the weeds and roots, that the ground may be pure and clean for the sowing of the seed in spring. The LXX., reading נורו, instead of נִיר, וּנִירוּ for נִיר, and נָעָה for נָעָת, translates accordingly by φωτίσατε ἑαυτοῖς φῶς γνώσεως. They are further reminded that it is high time to begin this process, laying aside their stiff-necked, perverse ways; expelling from their heart the noxious growth that had overspread it; and by every way and means working earnestly and zealously for a renewal of life and return to the long-neglected work and worship of Jehovah. Neither were they to relax their efforts till the blessed end was attained, עַד, with imperfect, marking the goal to be reached; nor would their efforts be in vain. The Lord would rain—bestow abundantly—upon them, or touch (another and more frequent meaning of the word), their righteousness. Thus the ground that had long lain fallow must be broken up; its waste, wild state must cease and give place to cultivation; the ploughshare must be driven through it; its wild growths and weeds must be out down and uprooted. A process of renewal must succeed; the vices of their natural state, the idolatrous and wicked practices that had sprung up, must be abandoned. Renewal and radical reform are imperatively demanded. Matters had remained too long in a miserable and unsatisfactory condition. A long night of sinful slumber had overcome them; it was high time to awake out of that sleep. Too long had they shamefully forgotten and forsaken God; it was more than time to wait upon him. Nor would such waiting, if persevered in, end in disappointment; notwithstanding their great and manifold provocations, he would come and rain righteousness in welcome, refreshing, and plenteous showers upon returning penitents; and with righteousness would be conjoined its reward of blessing and salvation, both temporal and spiritual.

Ver. 13.—**Ye have ploughed wickedness, ye have reaped iniquity; ye have eaten the fruit of lies.** Hitherto their course had been the very opposite of that which they are now exhorted to enter on. Hitherto their work had been wickedness, and their wages, as might be expected, the fruit of iniquity. What they had wrought for they reaped. Their ploughing had been sin, their sowing wickedness, and their harvest sorrow. Wickedness against God and man

was what they both ploughed and sowed; oppression at the hand of their enemies was the harvest or reward of iniquity which they reaped. Their lies, including their idolatry in reference to God, disloyalty to their king, their false words and false works with one another, bore fruit, bitter fruit, sour fruit, and they were obliged to eat that fruit till their teeth were set on edge. Thus Kimchi explains it: "After the ploughing follows the sowing, and both of them are a figurative representation of work, as we have explained it. The prophet says, 'Ye have done the opposite of that which I commanded you, when I said, Sow to yourselves in righteousness.'" The harvest is the reward of the work done; the genitive is expressive of contents—that in which the fruit consists; the fruit of lies against God is the fruit which disappoints those who wait for it. *Ki* directs attention to the ground of Israel's gradual declension and final destruction; the two fundamental errors, or rather evils, that led on to Israel's ruin, were apostasy from Jehovah and sinful self-confidence. Sunk in idolatry, they no longer looked to Jehovah as the Source of their power and strength; while they pursued their own ways, confident of the excellence of their own sagacity and foresight. **Because thou didst trust in thy way, in the multitude of thy mighty men.** They had placed their confidence in the wisdom of their own ways—their prudent plans and wise counsels; in the heroism of their soldiers and the excellence of their preparations of war. By these means they fancied themselves independent of the Almighty, and sufficiently defended against their enemies. "Thou hast trusted," says Kimchi, in his exposition, "to thine own way which thou goest; and that is the way of iniquity and of confidence in evil; and in like manner thou hast trusted in the multitude of thy men of war which thou hast had among thine own people, or among the Egyptians, from whom they sought help, and thou hast made flesh thine arm, and not trusted in me; therefore thou hast stumbled."

Ver. 14.—**Therefore shall a tumult arise among thy people, and all thy fortresses shall be spoiled.** This was the fruit of their doings, the result of their sins. The tumult of war is already heard, and the work of destruction has begun. The word *shaon*, tumult, is from שָׁאָה, as applied to the loud rushing of waters, then the tumult of advancing warriors. The preposition *b·* is rendered (1) as above by the Authorized Version, Umbreit, and others; and, joined with "peoples" (which is plural), signifies that the confused noise of war would be heard among their own peoples, or the multitude of the mighty ones in whom they had had such confidence; or the plural may refer to the tribes of Israel, each of which was an עַם, though Keil would confine this meaning to Pentateuchal times. Most of the versions read the singular, like our own Authorized Version, yet it must still be referred to the people of Israel. But (2) the preposition is translated "against" by many modern interpreters, and thus the confused noise of the advance of the enemy against Israel is denoted. The attack of the invaders is directed against the *fortresses*, or fenced cities, so called from a verb denoting "to cut off" (בצר), as if all approach to them were cut off, and assault impossible. Nevertheless they were to go down, all of them, before the enemy—laid waste and spoiled; while inhuman cruelty would characterize the conquerors. As an illustration of or specimen resembling that cruelty, an obscure piece of history is quoted. **As Shalman spoiled Beth-arbel in the day of battle: the mother was dashed in pieces upon her children.** In the great variety of opinion with respect to the event referred to, and the consequent diversity of exposition, we shall not venture to do more than select that which on the whole, notwithstanding a certain chronological difficulty that lies against it, appears the most probable. Accordingly, Beth-arbel may have been Arbela, mentioned in 1 Macc. ix. 2 and more than once by Josephus, in Upper Galilee, in the tribe of Naphtali, between Sephoris and Tiberias, now *Irbid;* and *Shalman* may be an abbreviation for Shalmaneser; while the circumstance here mentioned may have been an incident of the campaign of which we read in 2 Kings xvii. 3, 5, "Against him came up Shalmaneser King of Assyria; and Hoshea became his servant. . . . Then the King of Assyria came up throughout all the land, and went up to Samaria, and besieged it three years." The manifestation of the cruelty was when the mother, with true motherly affection, bent over her children to defend them, and she and they perished in a common ruin, or when the children were dashed to the ground before their mother's eyes, and she, done to death, hurled upon them.

Ver. 15.—**So shall Bethel do unto you because of your great wickedness** (margin, *the evil of your evil*): **in a morning shall the King of Israel utterly be cut off.** Their coming sufferings were all traceable to their sin. Bethel, the principal place of calf-worship, was the cause of their coming calamities, not the place itself, but the wickedness of which it was the scene. The real cause was the great and crowning wickedness practised there. Bethel, once the house of God, would in consequence

become another Beth-arbel, the house of the ambush of God. In the morning, when perhaps a season of prosperity seemed beginning to dawn, or at an early date and in a speedy manner, quickly as the morning dawn gives place before the rising sun, the king, Hoshea, or perhaps no particular king, but merely the representative of the royal office, would be cut off—entirely cut off. Thus their main refuge would come to an ignominious end, bringing along with it the frustration of all their hopes and the conclusion of their mistaken and misplaced confidences.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—3.—*Sin and its retribution.* I. PERVERTED USE OF PROSPERITY. Israel is a vine not empty, nor emptied, nor plundered, according to Calvin, say, by the tribute paid to Pul; for, if empty, how then could he bring forth fruit, except, indeed, at some subsequent season? He is compared, rather, to a wide-spreading vine, pouring out its strength in luxuriant leafage and show of fruit; or even suitable fruit. But the fruit thus yielded was not fruit to God, as it should have been, but fruit to itself and for itself. The figure of a flourishing vine, condensed by the prophet here, is fully expanded and developed by the psalmist in the eightieth psalm: "Thou hast brought a vine out of Egypt: thou hast cast out the heathen, and planted it. Thou preparedst room before it, and didst cause it to take deep root, and it filled the land. The hills were covered with the shadow of it, and the boughs thereof were like the goodly cedars. She sent out her boughs unto the sea, and her branches unto the river." Such had Israel been aforetime. Their fruit trees produced abundantly; their land was very fertile: the fruit of man and beast and tree multiplied, and their land increased in fertility; but these blessings of Providence were abused. Instead of leading them to repentance, these good gifts of God's providence were sadly misused and shockingly perverted; instead of being employed in the service and to the glory of the Giver, they were used for idolatrous purposes, and thus they ministered to sin. Altars were reared to idols and statues set up; they multiplied their altars and made goodly images.

II. PUNISHMENT IS SURE TO FOLLOW SUCH PERVERSION. God had blessed them with prosperity and plenty, but they made a poor return; nay, they returned evil for his goodness. They might well be compared to an emptying vine, casting its fruit before it was ripe, according to one explanation of the word, for they emptied themselves of the riches he conferred on them by sending presents to foreign princes, or purchasing their alliance, or paying tribute to their conquerors; or they wasted their wealth on their idols and in idolatrous practices, or on self and sin in some form. Or, if they brought forth fruit unto maturity, that fruit did not redound to the Divine glory; the fruit borne by them was not the fruit of righteousness; the seemingly good works done by them were not to the praise and glory of God. What they did they did for their own profit or pleasure, or to gain the praise of men. The blessings bestowed on them were not used to promote the Divine glory, or to help the Divine service, or to advance the cause of true religion in any way, but were lavished on their own lusts, or selfish gratifications, or abominable idolatries, multiplying altars to their idols, offering sacrifices more numerous and expensive, making pillars or statues of costlier metal and with richer ornaments. 1. The root of the evil was within. The seat of all their sin was within, and out of the heart it proceeded; their heart was divided, or hypocritical, and therefore not right with God. Persons guilty of such sin and folly and gross ingratitude God could not hold guiltless. They were dealt with as guilty and punished, or were left desolate—their land wasted, and themselves led into captivity. 2. Accumulated wrath issues in aggravated punishment. The means God graciously gave them for charitable and noble purposes of benevolence, or for high and holy service, they threw away recklessly on vile and worthless objects; as the means increased, the wickedness increased. God tried them with prosperity; he proved them, but they did not stand the test; every day they persisted in their mad career of sin. They were treasuring up for themselves wrath against the day of wrath. 3. God corrects in measure that men may repent of sin and turn to God. If the day of visitation is improved, it is well; if, when God withdraws his hand and grants a respite, or suspends the stroke, his gracious design is duly responded to, the chastisement is sanctified, and the person so treated

has good cause to say, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted." If otherwise, if individuals are found faulty, if their sin has found them out, then the means of sinning are suddenly and unexpectedly snatched from them, and themselves swept awfully as with the besom of destruction. 4. Whoever be the instrument or whatever the means, the Author of the Infliction is God. The subject here is not specified; as far as the grammar goes, it might be the Assyrian or other enemy that broke down their altars and spoiled their images, but sense and Scripture lead the thoughts up to God. Though indefinite, the emphatic use of the pronoun fixes the sense.

III. PROSPECT OF A GLOOMY FUTURE IS THE NATURAL SEQUEL OF A SINFUL PRESENT. Thus it is with those who, having perverted the gifts of God's goodness, do not profit by punishment mildly administered. Israel, who had rejected their heavenly King, were soon to find themselves deprived of their earthly king, and reduced to a state of anarchy. They would soon be forced to say, "We have no king, no protector." This is assigned as the cause of the preceding statement about the wreck of their altars and the ruin of their statues or pillars. This catastrophe is looked upon as brought about in consequence of their having no kingly protection or defence. Their rejection of Jehovah in the double capacity of God and King, by their turning to idolatry and refusing the theocracy, led eventually to ecclesiastical disaster, and civil or secular distress. Forsaking God as King, they have now no king—no upholder of either Church or state; consequently their altars, as they conceived, were broken down and their images spoiled. Thus they bemoan their present anomalous and perilous position. But they bethink themselves that even if they had a king he could do them no good, seeing that Divine power was opposed to them, and Divine wrath incurred by them. What, then, under such untoward circumstances, could a king do for them? Here is the exact converse of the believer's confidence: "If God be for us, who can be against us?" Jerome's exposition brings out the sense well, as follows: "After God shall have shattered the images of Israel, and utterly destroyed their altars and statues, and the final captivity shall have come, they shall say, 'We have no king.' And lest they should think that the sentence would be deferred for a long time, he added, They shall say *now*: when they are being laid waste, when they shall perceive that Hoshea, their last king, has been removed from them—'a king is taken away from us, because we did not fear God, our true King; for what could a human king avail us?'"

Vers. 4—8.—*Israel's sin, sorrow, shame, and suffering.* These verses exhibit them with marvellous conciseness and great impressiveness.

I. ISRAEL'S SIN OF UNFAITHFULNESS. Israel's unfaithfulness at the period of which the prophet speaks was of the most reckless kind. It took the form (1) of idolatry with respect to God, (2) of disloyalty to their sovereign, and (3) of falsehood in their dealings with their fellow-men in general. By their idolatry they renounced the covenant of their God, which had the seal of circumcision; their promises of reformation, when they made such, were falsified; the vows wrung from them in distress or otherwise they failed to pay. The most sacred bonds did not bind them; subjects violated their oath of allegiance, and sovereigns their coronation oath; alike in treaties with foreign powers as in contracts with their fellow-men, they made no conscience of keeping faith. Add to all this the perversion of justice and the misuse of judgment, and the picture is complete; perfidy, perjury, and the perversion of judgment being in the foreground, and untruthfulness the dark background of all. Such was the growth, prolific and pestiferous as hemlock, which at this period overspread the land of Israel as if in furrows specially prepared for it.

II. ISRAEL'S SORROW IN CONSEQUENCE OF SIN. Men may be sure that their sin shall find them out, by detection, or punishment, or both; while sorrow follows in the wake of sin. The inhabitants of the northern capital, like the people of Bethel or Beth-aven, being calf-worshippers, and therefore called the people of the calf, would naturally be overwhelmed with consternation and alarm, when the news of an invading host approaching the provincial town, which was the chief seat of the calf-worship, reached them; still more so when that hostile host had actually entered it and carried off their idol. Their fear before the event would be succeeded by sorrow after it. Not only would the Samaritans sympathize with their coreligionists of Bethel in their calamity and loss, but tremble because of their own proximity to peril, not knowing how soon the tide of

conquest should sweep over themselves. Both peoples, Samaritans and Beth-avenites, united in a common cause, and, involved in a common calamity or soon to be so, would mourn for the loss of their idol. This Scripture may well impress its lesson, and a most salutary one, on all idolaters, whether those who bow down to those idol vanities of wood, or stone, or metal, made by their own hands, or those spiritual idolaters whose hearts are swayed by some lust or passion, or any other object than God. Any earthly object that engrosses our affections, or usurps that place in our heart which belongs to God alone, is our god for the time being—our idol, and that which commands our homage or adoration. And surely, as we set up any such object of spiritual idolatry in our heart and elevate it to the throne of our affections, we shall come to grief; we shall be disappointed in it while we possess it, or disappointed of it when we lose it. Bitterly shall we be made to feel and to mourn its loss; nor is this to be wondered at or complained of, for God is a jealous God, and will not give his glory to another. Matthew Henry has well observed that "whatever men make a god of, they will mourn for the loss of; and inordinate sorrow for the loss of any worldly good is a sign we made an idol of it." The idol-priests who derived their emolument and livelihood from idolatry were plunged in still greater mourning than the people for whom they ministered. The wages of sin do not last long, and do not satisfy the short time they do last. Thus it was with the priests when the source of their gain and the object of their glory departed.

III. ISRAEL'S SHAME WAS ANOTHER CONCOMITANT, OR RATHER CONSEQUENCE, OF ISRAEL'S SIN. The shame was twofold; shame to see their idol thrown down and defaced, and yet more to see it, or at least the gold that adorned it, carried away in triumph as a present or peace offering to King Jareb. There was yet deeper cause of shame. It was not only that they gloried in their god of gold, and confided in it for protection, but that their policy was completely frustrated. The political sagacity on which, no doubt, they piqued themselves, as certain to keep Israel separate from Judah by detaching the former from the latter in worshipping at the national sanctuary in Jerusalem, resulted in Israel's ruin. No wonder that Ephraim, the tribe with which this separation originated, received shame; while the remaining tribes of Israel, that with such facile compliance acquiesced in their counsel and followed their example, were put to shame. Thus the wise are often caught in their own craftiness.

> "The sinners' hands do make the snares
> Wherewith themselves are caught."

IV. SUFFERING IS ANOTHER RESULT OF SIN. Creature-confidences fail to succour; without Divine help and blessing, sovereign and subject are alike powerless and resourceless. The king, on the appointment of whom the people had so set their heart at first, and on whose power all along they continued to place such confidence, was too weak to help; and in utter impotence was himself cut off—cut off ignominiously as foam on the face of the water, or chip carried headlong by the current. The scenes of their sin were so desolated, and left without a single worshipper, that thorns and thistles came up upon those altars where multitudes once had worshipped. So true it is that "if the grace of God prevail not to destroy the love of sin in us, it is just that the providence of God should destroy the food and fuel of sin about us." Sinners in general suffer sooner or later shame and contempt, disgrace and disappointment, poignant sorrow and mental anguish. To such an extent was this the case with the hapless idolaters, that their distress was so intolerable that, feeling life not worth living, they preferred death to life. Times there are so sad, and suffering, both bodily and mental, so acute, that death is more than welcome. To be swallowed in the yawning earth, or covered by the falling hill, or whelmed in the surging sea, was welcome to such sufferers. So with impenitent sinners in the day of judgment (Rev. vi. 16). So with the Jews in their distressful circumstances at the siege of Jerusalem by the Romans (Luke xxiii. 30). This cry for death passed into a proverb; it was the offspring of despair.

V. SUMMARY OF THIS SECTION. Such a summary is contained in vers. 7 and 8. Israel's two chief sources of confidence were their king and their idolatry—one civil or secular, the other ecclesiastical or sacred, both to the rejection and neglect of the true Source of hope and help. Neither of these is any longer available or any longer reliable. The king or head of their civil polity is cut off like foam on the surface of a stream—a moment there, then gone for ever. The high places of Aven, that is, Beth-aven,

"house of vanity," the name given in contemptuous reproof of idolatry to Beth-el, once the "house of God"—these high places consecrated to idolatry, at once the occasions of sin to Israel, and places polluted by that people's sin, are doomed to destruction, total destruction. The altars erected thereon are destined to be heaps of ruins, so forsaken and desolate, that where the whole burnt offering *went up* in smoke (עֹלָה, whole burnt offering, from עָלָה, to go up), the thorn and the thistle now *go up* (יַעֲלֶה), and bear undisputed sway. The sin-laden people who had forsaken their own mercies and pursued their idolatrous practices on those hills and at those altars, are in the end so overwhelmed with calamity and so thoroughly miserable, that, as we have seen, they prefer death to life, reckoning a life so wretched not worth living. Hence arose their cry of desperation—a cry that may have had its origin in the local situation of the people who uttered it. Situated on a hill as Samaria was, and surrounded by an amphitheatre of hills still higher, the intervening valley and narrow outlets being occupied by the enemy, those hills to which they once looked for safety, instead of helping, now hemmed them in, and the only help they could now afford was to fall on their devoted heads, to screen them from wrath and deliver them from misery.

Vers. 9—12.—*A chequered picture.* These verses exhibit the continuance in sin and its consequences, chastisement and its lessons, change of circumstances and its bitter experiences, the call to repentance and the blessed promises to the penitent.

I. CONTINUANCE IN SIN. Israel had corrupted themselves as in the days of Gibeah (ch. ix. 9), and, as we are told in ch. x. 9, had sinned from the days of Gibeah. 1. Grievous as their sin had been at first, it was greatly aggravated by being long continued. Age after age sin had run its course; one generation after another had helped to fill up the cup of iniquity until it had become brimful. A heathen complains of successive generations thus corrupting themselves, each outstripping that which preceded in iniquity: "What is there wasting time does not impair? The age of our parents, worse than our grandsires, has borne us yet more wicked, who in our turn are destined to beget a progeny more sinful still." 2. This continuance in sin shall be attended by dreadful consequences some day. This is a legitimate inference, whatever view we take of this difficult ninth verse. Whether the meaning be that the Israelites stood their ground, and did not perish though twice defeated by the men of Benjamin, and that with a loss of forty thousand slain; and that, though spared, their destruction as dreadful as deserved shall overtake them now, and that without any possibility of escape, and when it does come it shall be found all the more dreadful from having been delayed in its course; or whether the sense is that Israel, as if forsaken of God and alienated from his favour (possibly implied by the change from the second to the third person), have stood, that is, persisted in their sin as there and then so ever since; shall not the battle overtake such incorrigible offenders; persevering so long in sin like the men of Gibeah, can they expect to escape the war that of old did all but exterminate the transgressors? Or whether the sense be that the Benjamites, then an integral part of Israel, stood by the Gibeahites, defending, and so virtually abetting them in their iniquity, that the battle in Gibeah might not overtake those vile delinquents, and that Israel, resembling the Benjamites in spirit, have sinned ever since, aiding, abetting, and taking part in similar or greater atrocities and abominations. They are then left to infer that a day of reckoning still more terrible was to be expected by them.

II. CHASTISEMENT AND ITS LESSONS. In the case of Israel, they were not left merely to infer the approach of chastisement, they were positively assured of it. 1. Men are forewarned that they may be forearmed. God had exercised much long-suffering and forbearance, but his goodness failed to lead them to repentance. They had abused his patience, and now his purpose is to chastise; but even in chastising them he is exercising mercy in order to prevent final and inevitable ruin. He had rejoiced over them to do them good; he now takes pleasure in correcting them—it is his desire. The nature of the chastisement with which Israel is to be visited closely resembles that which had been inflicted on the Benjamites. 2. The reference to that transaction may have suggested to the prophet his description of the coming chastisement. The tribes of Israel banded themselves against Benjamin in the battle of Gibeah; so the peoples, the Assyrians and their allies, would be gathered against Israel. Kimchi has well expressed

the cause of the chastisement by representing God as saying, "According to my good will and pleasure will I chastise them; because they do not receive chastisement from me by my prophets who rebuke them in my Name, I will chastise them by the hands of the peoples which shall be gathered against them." 3. When men refuse to be God's freemen, and prefer continuing to be servants of sin, they are preparing themselves to be the bondmen of their enemies. The allusion in the last clause of ver. 10 is obscure, and yet the general sense is tolerably plain. Much depends on the one word variously rendered "eyes," "furrows," "habitations," or "sins." The figure may be taken from two oxen abreast in a yoke, ploughing together side by side in two adjacent furrows; and it may indicate the combination of the Israelites to ward off the threatened danger, but to no purpose, since Jehovah had decreed their chastisement, and, in case it failed, their destruction; or the two divisions of Israel and Judah, and their respective places of habitation; or the two places of idolatrous worship, Dan and Bethel; or their two cohabitations with God and idols; or their two transgressions, which appears the preferable sense. Whichever of these we adopt, the idea of binding, that is, of thraldom or captivity, remains the same. 4. There are two kinds of service and two claimants for the soul of man: there is the service of sin, and the wages of that service is death; there is the service of God, and the fruit of that service is unto holiness, and the end everlasting life. Satan claims us, but he is a usurper; besides, he is the worst of all masters—keeping his servants in bondage, working them to death, and at last paying them with damnation. God claims us. His claim is just; he is the rightful Proprietor; he made us, and not we ourselves. His claim is, in fact, threefold—creation, preservation, and redemption. We cannot serve two masters; we cannot obey both; and we may not attempt the unholy compromise made by the peoples brought from the regions of Assyria and planted in the lands of the dispossessed Israelites, who worshipped the Lord and served their own gods. To be the slaves of Satan or the freemen of Jehovah, that is the question; the bondage of sin or the freedom of righteousness is the alternative. There must be decision in the matter. Let our determination be like Joshua's, that whatever others do, we will serve the Lord.

III. CHANGE OF CIRCUMSTANCES AND BITTER EXPERIENCES. When Israel had, by idolatry and other sins, bound themselves for slavery, like oxen labouring in the yoke up and down the furrows of the field, the change came. Ephraim had been treated gently and trained indulgently; their yoke had been an easy one, and their burden a light one; but they did not value their privileges, nor know the day of their merciful visitation. They had been in easy circumstances; the lines had fallen to them in pleasant places; they had long enjoyed privileges and advantages of no ordinary kind. But times are now changed, and that change, the bitter fruit of their own doings, was sad as it was sudden. A yoke is now put on the neck, a rider on the back, and drudgery becomes the lot of the once fair and delicate heifer. Subjection and slavery to foreigners, with hardships great and many, and such as they had never experienced before, now awaited Ephraim; while Judah too would come in for share of the punishment, as they had had part in the sin; and thus at last Jacob, that is, both kingdoms, the northern and the southern, having thrown off the yoke of Jehovah, fall each in turn under the galling yoke of Assyrian and Chaldean conqueror. Let men beware of exchanging the pleasant service of the Saviour for the painful drudgery of Satan!

IV. THE CALL TO REPENTANCE AND ITS BLESSED PROSPECTS. The severity of the foregoing threatenings is alleviated by the present call to reformation and repentance, with the accompanying promises. 1. A seed-time of righteousness must precede a reaping-time of mercy. The figures are still borrowed from husbandry; and thus every action is represented as seed sown, and every good work is seed sown in righteousness. The rule of righteousness is the Law of God, and the directions of that rule include our duty both to God and man. To sow in righteousness, therefore, is to discharge the duties of righteousness, comprehending piety towards God, justice and charity towards man, together with propriety of personal conduct. 2. The seed sown shall come up one day. If we sow tares, they will come up; if we sow wheat, it will come up. The seed of righteousness is called by the psalmist precious seed. It is not in the power of man to cause a single seed to germinate and spring up; but God in his justice will bring up the bad seed for punishment, and in his mercy the good seed for reward. 3. There is a correspondence between the seed-time and the harvest. If men sow to the

flesh, they shall reap corruption; if to the Spirit, they shall reap life everlasting. As we sow we reap, and what we sow we reap. Our reaping shall be according to the measure of God's mercy. Not a reward of merit, but of mercy; not a recompense of desert, but of grace. Men often sow in tears, but if the seed be that of righteousness, and the sowing after the right method and with the right motive, they shall reap in joy. "Blessed," says the saintly Burroughs, "are those who have sown much for God in their lifetime! Oh, the glorious harvest that these shall have! The very angels shall help them to take in their harvest at the great day; and they need not take thought for barns—the very heavens shall be their barns. And oh, the joy that there shall be in that harvest! The angels will help to sing the harvest-song that they shall sing who have been sowers in righteousness." 4. Reformation is the effect and evidence of repentance. If reformation be genuine, repentance must go before; a change of life that is real and permanent must be preceded by a change of heart. Thus, in order to sow in righteousness, the fallow ground must be broken up. If the seed is to take root in the soil, grow up and yield an abundant increase at the time of harvest, the soil must be carefully prepared. The ploughing, though mentioned after the sowing, must precede it, otherwise the seed of truth will be lost or choked by the weeds of sin. Dropping the figure, or realizing the fact set forth by it, we must break up the fallow ground of the heart. The weeds and thorns and thistles that overspread it in its natural state must be rooted out; the evil passions, corrupt affections, and hateful lusts must be eradicated; the heart itself must be broken and contrite on account of sin; the spirit must be subdued by a sense of sin; shame and sorrow must penetrate the soul because of sin; like land long untilled, and so hard and difficult to plough, the hard heart must be broken with contrition and softened, and the stubborn will subdued. Thus, too, the field that had lain fallow after a first ploughing must be broken up anew and made to shine (as the original word, from נו, according to Gesenius and Ewald, signifies), and prepared for future and abundant fruitfulness. 5. The exhortation is enforced by two arguments—the past loss of time, and prospective spiritual prosperity. (1) Much time had been misspent; the duty of seeking God had been sadly and sinfully neglected. The language of the prophet here is expanded and enforced by the apostle, when he says, "The time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries." We are now called to redeem the time. It is our duty at all times to seek the Lord, but especially so after such long delay on our part, and such forbearance and long-suffering on God's part. And yet there is time. It is of his mercy that we are still allowed opportunity to repent and return to him. Even now is the accepted time; but soon it may be too late. Let us, then, seek the Lord while he may be found, and call upon him while he is near, before he withdraws himself, and swears in his wrath that we shall not enter into his rest. (2) Another source of encouragement is here presented. If we seek him he shall be found of us, according to the promise, "Seek, and ye shall find." Thus encouraged, let us seek him presently, patiently, and perseveringly until he comes, as he will be sure to do, and rain righteousness upon us. In the fulness of time the Saviour came, who is "the Lord our Righteousness;" he came as "a Light to lighten the Gentiles, and the Glory of his people Israel." He will come to the individual soul, Gentile or Jew, that seeks him, and when he comes he will rain righteousness upon us. 6. Righteousness, like the rain, descends from above; for "every good gift and every perfect gift cometh down from above, even from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." He will bestow it in great abundance, for he will rain it upon us; sending down, not merely a few drops, but a plentiful rain and copious showers. The righteousness so abundantly vouchsafed includes his righteous fulfilment of his promises; the righteousness, moreover, that is witnessed both by the Law and the prophets—righteousness reckoned to us for justification, and righteousness wrought in us for sanctification. The effect of this righteousness is blessed and beneficent. As the natural seeds sown in the soil of the earth which has been ploughed and prepared for them require, besides, the rain of heaven to make them bud and bring forth the blade, the ear, and the full corn in the ear; so the spiritual seeds that men sow in righteousness require the rain of righteousness and the rich blessing of heaven to fructify and refresh.

Vers. 13—15.—*The prolific fruits of evil.* The Israelites are not only charged with neglect of duty, but with sins of commission. The concluding verses of the chapter point out this contrariety of their conduct to the foregoing exhortation, and its consequences; trace the source of their sinful courses to their carnal confidences; and foretell the coming calamities caused thereby.

I. THE CONDUCT OF THE PEOPLE HAD BEEN DIRECTLY CONTRARY TO THE ADMONITION JUST GIVEN. 1. They had been not only neglectful of duty, indifferent and careless about spiritual concerns, and self-satisfied with their sinful course, but had taken much pains in pursuing a course the opposite of what duty demanded. They had not only lived in sin, enjoying its so-called pleasures, but had laboured in the practice of it, serving Satan and doing his drudgery. Thus they ploughed wickedness. Not content with the spontaneous growth thereof, which is sufficiently abundant in every natural heart, they actually cultivated it, sparing no pains and grudging no diligence in its culture. Thus they ploughed and sowed laboriously; but it was tares, not wheat or good grain they spent their labour on. 2. As they ploughed and sowed, so they reaped; the crop in harvest-time corresponded with the seed which they had sown, and for which they had made such careful preparation. The harvest was abundant, the increase thirty, or sixty, or a hundredfold. The quantity was large, but the quality was bad. "In all labour there is profit," said a minister to a man at work. "There is one exception," was the reply; "for years I laboured in the service of Satan, and of that labour I can truly say, 'What fruit had ye in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of those things is death.'" 3. The fruit of lies, like lies themselves, is deceptive; such fruit resembles the fabled apples on the shore of the Dead Sea—attractive in appearance, but ashes in the mouth. The pleasures of the wicked don't satisfy; their gains don't profit in the end; all sinful works are unfruitful works. Thus it was with Israel's hypocrisy, idolatry, and other abominations.

II. THEIR CARNAL CONFIDENCES WERE THE SOURCE OF ISRAEL'S SINS. They are also a common source of sin still. The people of Israel trusted in their ways of political wisdom, and the power and prowess of their mighty men. Their statecraft, their calf-worship, their military preparations, were their confidences. The fountain-head of their offending, the source whence such bitter waters flowed, and flowed so copiously, was the confidence they reposed in refuges of lies—their way inclusive of their wicked calf-worship, their tortuous worldly policy, and their forbidden foreign alliances with the heathen. Such was their internal safeguard, while the multitude of their mighty men was their external defence. All these confidences failed them. Every promise that sin makes to the sinner is a lie; the fruit of sin, like sin itself, is fallacious and deceptive.

III. CALAMITIES CROWDED ON THEM AS THE CONSEQUENCES, AND IN PUNISHMENT, OF SIN. 1. Their cities were sacked, their fortresses dismantled, their citizens and countrymen butchered, and unheard-of cruelties perpetrated. 2. Here we see how the worldly wise are taken in their own craftiness, and how sin finds the sinner out. The consequence of all was not a time of peace, but the tumult of war extending to the whole people in their tribal divisions, and probably to their neighbours, with whom they were in alliance; while the issue of the war was defeat and disaster—their defences were destroyed, their strongholds rifled, the triumph of the enemy complete, and their cruelty unchecked. 3. See the bitter fruit of sin.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—8.—*The calves and the kings.* The "burden" is still the same—Israel's guilt and punishment. But in the verses before us these are dealt with mainly in their external and national aspects. The most prominent thought of the passage centres in the calves and the kings.

I. THE NATIONAL SIN. Although the prophet handles his theme in this strophe for the most part on its external side, yet in one or two expressions he refers to the root of the evil in the hearts of the people. "We feared not the Lord" (ver. 3); *i.e.* the men of Israel had forsaken the service of Jehovah, and rejected him as their Portion. "Their heart is divided" (ver. 2), or "smooth," *i.e.* insincere. They did not devote

themselves to the love and worship of God, and yet they could not make up their minds to part altogether either with him or with their idols. Such was the root of the national sinfulness. But Hosea here calls attention rather to: 1. *Its forms in the national life.* These were principally two. (1) Trust in *idols.* Israel had allowed his sense of the solitariness of the Godhead to be broken down, and had "increased" the number of altars to heathen divinities. So far from realizing that all the "springs" of the nation were in Jehovah alone, the people gave "his praise to graven images;" and the glory which was his due, to the personified powers of physical nature. (2) Trust in *kings.* The Hebrews had been guilty of high treason against Jehovah when, in the days of Samuel, they insisted upon having an earthly king set over them. And this sin became even more aggravated, on the part of the ten tribes, when they revolted from the theocratic monarchy which God had established at Jerusalem, and gave their allegiance to the usurpers who exercised the functions of royalty at Samaria. 2. *Its manifestations in the national character.* The people's sin incorporated itself with them, and they lapsed further and further into moral degradation. There was: (1) *Self-indulgence.* (Ver. 1.) Israel had been a thriving and luxuriant "vine;" but his fruitfulness took a wrong direction: "he brought forth fruit unto himself," and was "empty" towards God. The people regarded themselves as at once the source and the end of their own prosperity; so, they abused it by spending it upon their lusts. (2) *Ingratitude.* (Ver. 1.) Increase of wealth, instead of attracting them to God's temple to express thankfulness to him as the great Giver, led them instead to multiply their altars and idolatrous superstitions. (3) *Deceit and perjury.* (Ver. 4.) Their "words" were insincere and untruthful; the "covenants" which they made (*e.g.* with Assyria) were deceitful. Nothing that the nation said could be depended on; the life of the community was a lie. (4) *Perversion of justice.* (Ver. 4.) A wicked king and a corrupt court poisoned the administration of law among the people. The judges took bribes, and their unrighteous decisions were as "hemlock" overgrowing fields which ought to have been waving with a healthful harvest of righteousness.

II. THE NATIONAL PUNISHMENT. Israel is about to lose all the false defences in which he gloried, and his heart shall have fear and shame for its melancholy heritage. The punishment is in these verses contemplated from a twofold point of view, viz.: 1. *Its forms in the national life.* (1) As regards the *idols.* There would presently be "*fear*" for them (ver. 5). The very calves which had been an object of trust and stay would become a source of anxious solicitude. Instead of feeling safe under the protection of their golden gods, the people would tremble for the safety of the gods themselves. "In the fear of the Lord is strong confidence;" but the men of Israel "feared not the Lord" (ver. 3), and their punishment was to "fear because of the calves." More than this, they would suffer the *loss* of them (vers. 2, 5, 6, 8). The images which Jeroboam had set up would be carried into captivity as a tribute "to King Jareb," the avenging Assyrian. In that way the calf-worship of the northern kingdom would come to an end. Bethel and Dan, Samaria and Gilgal, the centres of Israel's idolatry, would be destroyed. The shrines of Baal and Ashtaroth would be broken down, and thorns and thistles would grow luxuriantly upon the idol-altars. (2) As regards the *kings.* Already the monarchy was *helpless* (ver. 3). Although it may be that Hoshea (who proved to be the last king in Ephraim) was still upon the throne, the people were saying, "We have no king;" "What would a king do for us?" They see now, when it is too late, that it is vain to expect deliverance from monarchs who themselves do not fear God, and who have assumed their royalty in opposition to his will. Soon, too, the monarchy shall be finally *destroyed* (ver. 7). The king shall be "cut off as the foam upon the water," or as a chip which is carried down the stream and lost. Presently the long siege of Samaria shall begin; and in three years thereafter the standards of Shalmaneser shall wave over the ruined strongholds of that wicked city. But, again, the prophet refers to the national punishment in: 2. *Its moral results upon the people.* It would produce: (1) *Mourning.* (Ver. 5.) The people would lament because of the helplessness of the golden idols, in which they had gloried, and in which their false priests had rejoiced. They would sadly grieve because of the ignominious deportation of the calves to Assyria. (2) *Shame* (ver. 6), because of "their own counsel;" the reference being to the untheocratic policy of the ten tribes in separating themselves ecclesiastically and politically from Judah and Jerusalem. The worldly-wise statecraft of Jeroboam, which

for a time seemed to be so successful, involved Israel in an inheritance of shame. (3) *Despair.* (Ver. 8.) The calamities that were impending would be so dreadful, that thousands of the people would choose death rather than life. To die outright they would hail as a welcome relief from their burden of wretchedness and shame. They would desire that the hills upon which their idol-altars had stood might not merely hide them, but overwhelm and destroy them.

LESSONS. 1. The spiritual dangers which accompany material prosperity. "Jeshurun waxed fat, and kicked" (Deut. xxxii. 15). It is difficult to carry the full cup steadily (ver. 1). 2. The necessity, in order to a man's spiritual well-being, that he "keep his heart with all diligence" (ver. 2). 3. The sadness which comes from learning the truth too late, and the horrors of a too-late repentance (ver. 3). 4. The diffusive and self-disseminating power of evil (ver. 4). 5. The mourning of the wicked is for their losses rather than for their sins (vers. 5, 6). 6. The one true security and strength of a nation consists in the fear of God (vers. 3, 7). 7. The judgment denounced here upon the ten tribes, like that of the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans, is a type of the final general judgment (ver. 8; Luke xxiii. 30; Rev. vi. 16). —C. J.

Vers. 9—15.—*National prosperity and calamity.* In this passage, for the second time (*vide* ch. ix. 10), the prophet starts with a brief reminiscence of former days, and then proceeds to deliver an urgent exhortation to present duty; but all serves merely as a basis for more denunciation and announcement of retribution.

I. THE IDEAL LIFE OF A NATION. (Ver. 12.) Although this verse is in the first instance a summons to Israel to repent and reform, we may view it as indicating also what the life of every commonwealth ought to be. 1. *Its activities.* Foremost amongst these is: (1) *The pursuit of godliness.* The ideal nation "seeks the Lord," and recognizes that always "it is time" to do so. It acknowledges Jehovah as its supreme King. It aims at making all the legislation upon its statute-book in harmony with the laws of the Bible. The Lord of hosts regards such a country as "a delightsome land" (Mal. iii. 12). "Happy is that people, whose God is the Lord" (Ps. cxliv. 15). (2) *The cultivation of morality.* "Sow to yourselves in righteousness." Ploughing and sowing and reaping in this passage denote the moral conduct of the community. And the one great principle which should determine the activities of a nation should be that of "righteousness." Its supreme aim should be, not the accumulation of wealth, nor the acquisition of power and prestige, but the establishment of righteousness. It should strive after what is true and just and equitable in everything. (3) *The accomplishment of needful reforms.* "Break up your fallow ground." The model nation looks out for new soil as well as for right seed, and for that Divine influence which is necessary to the harvest. As soon as it discovers any neglected portion of its own life, it will endeavour to subject that to spiritual husbandry, and bring it into cultivation. It will be continually anxious to reform, wherever it finds at any time that reform is necessary. But the life of the model nation has also: 2. *Its rewards.* (1) *The Lord will "come"* to the community that seek him. He will dwell among them, and be "unto them a wall of fire round about." He will "come" in Christ, the King of nations; and by the Holy Spirit, who is the principle of the life of every godly commonwealth. (2) The holy nation shall reap *a harvest of mercy.* They shall gather mercy as the fruit of the good seed of righteousness which they have sown. The best of men, when they have done their best, are "unprofitable servants;" so that the rewards which shall accrue from their works of faith and love must be all of grace. But the harvest shall be a glorious one; for it shall be proportionate, not only to our humble sowing, but to God's infinite mercy. (3) They shall receive *a rain of righteousness.* Wherever the Lord Jesus comes as King, he brings with him this blessing (Ps. lxxii. 1—7). Wherever the Holy Spirit dwells, he "creates a clean heart," and "renews a right spirit" (Ps. li. 10—12). The people that sow righteousness sow "to themselves;" for "to him that soweth righteousness shall be a sure reward" (Prov. xi. 18). In proportion to their willingness to "do God's will," shall they "know of the doctrine," and reap its blessed fruits in their hearts and lives. The angle of reflection shall be equal to the angle of incidence; that is, their obedience shall be the measure of their assurance and of their reward.

II. THE ACTUAL LIFE OF ISRAEL. This was quite the reverse of the ideal above described. Its wrongness had begun very early, for the nation had "sinned from the days of Gibeah" (Judg. XIX., XX.); and, alas! it persisted in the sin of Gibeah still. The corruption of the community was deeply rooted in ancestral habit. In describing the actual life of Israel, Hosea refers to: 1. *Its basis.* (Ver. 13.) The foundation of the whole lay in sinful self-confidence. Israel "trusted in his way," *i.e.* in his own political devices and idolatrous worship. He relied also upon "the multitude of his mighty men," as if Providence were on the side of the strong battalions. 2. *Its pursuits.* Ephraim led a self-indulgent life. In the days of Jeroboam II., when he was victorious and prosperous, he was "as a heifer that loveth to tread out the corn" (ver. 11). The nation was self-reliant, and it grew rich; so it became pampered and selfish. Really, however, the people all the while were following a career of laborious sin. "They ploughed wickedness, and reaped iniquity" (ver. 13). Like self-made slaves, they "bound themselves in their two transgressions" (ver. 10)—their double sin of apostasy from Jehovah and revolt from the dynasty of David. 3. *Its results.* As sin is the evil of evils, the consequence of the people's long course of iniquity could not but be ruinous. Disaster fell upon them as the outcome of natural law, and also because at last it was God's "desire to chastise them" (ver. 10). Hitherto the ten tribes, although they had lived in the commission of the sin of Gibeah, had not been destroyed in war, like the Gibeahites; now at last, however, the Divine vengeance is to descend upon them. There is to be: (1) *Invasion.* (Ver. 10.) The Assyrians, with their allies, "shall be gathered against them." (2) *Bondage.* (Ver. 11.) A heavy yoke shall be put upon the "fair neck" of the heifer Ephraim; and in her state of subjugation she shall have to perform hard labour. Judah also shall undergo a similar punishment. This threatening was fulfilled in the two captivities, the Assyrian and the Babylonish. (3) *Disappointment.* (Ver. 13.) Israel's reward for his wickedness was that he had "eaten the fruit of lies." The idolatry which he practised was a lie; and this, instead of promoting the prosperity of the nation, as for a time it seemed to be doing, led to its utter humiliation and decay. (4) *National ruin.* (Vers. 14, 15.) The "tumult" of war is soon to arise. Shalmaneser shall overthrow the strongholds of Ephraim, as he had lately "spoiled Beth-arbel." The land shall be devastated, and its inhabitants cruelly murdered. And, in consequence, the kingdom of Israel shall be destroyed for ever.

LESSONS. 1. God's long forbearance with a wicked nation before he proceeds to visit it according to its works (ver. 9). 2. The determination to which at length he must inevitably come, to vindicate his justice (ver. 10). 3. The folly of those who expect to enjoy the comforts of religion while neglecting to discharge its duties (ver. 11). 4. The history of the kingdom of the ten tribes an illustration of the truth that "pride goeth before destruction" (ver. 11). 5. The deceitfulness of sin, as being "the fruit of lies" (ver. 13). 6. This passage should lead us to cherish gratitude to Almighty God for his goodness to our nation, and should suggest to Great Britain to take warning from the doom of Ephraim.—C. J.

Ver. 2 (first clause).—*The divided heart.* The preceding verse describes the sin of the people; this points us to its source. Like a vine, luxuriant in branch yet yielding no sound fruit, Israel deserved the curse which, during the ministry of our Lord, fell on the barren fig tree. The first verse may be compared advantageously with the description given of Israel in Ps. lxxx. 8—15. The third clause in that verse does not continue to develop the figure, but makes a declaration which was literally true, viz. that in proportion as the fields were fruitful Israel multiplied idolatrous altars; and as the land was made good, so the images they worshipped were adorned with beauty. In other words, God's gifts were abused, and were dedicated, not to him, but to false gods. The fear of Moses was justified. Now they enjoyed the goodly land they were forgetting the Lord their God. Point out the enervating effect of prosperity in such men as Hezekiah, and in the decline and fall of great nations. The cause of Israel's sin was to be found in the fact that they were not whole-hearted in the worship of God; but while they kept up still the outward forms of the old religion, with "divided hearts" they mingled with it, or supported beside it, idolatrous practices. The question of Elijah, "How long halt ye between two opinions?" needed repetition in those days, and in these,

Our Lord has distinctly declared that the frequent and sinful attempt of men to serve God and mammon is vain. Subject—*The divided heart.*

I. ITS CONDITION first demands consideration. Whether in the physical or in the moral life of man, if we are in doubt about the state of our heart, we cannot be too careful in diagnosis. Diseases assail it which are so occult that they may not reveal themselves till they become fatal in result. Other diseases may have outward signs which any onlooker can recognize. Some heart-diseases are as insidious as they are perilous, betraying themselves neither by rash nor by pain. As the heart is the centre of our physical life, so here and elsewhere in Scripture it is alluded to as the centre of moral life; and in that aspect of it the words are true, "The heart is deceitful above all things." (Some such idea underlies the Hebrew word which Keil translates "smooth," or "flattering.") None but God and a man's own consciousness can declare whether this be true of any one, "his heart is divided." This is so, however, with any whose attitude towards God and his truth is as follows: (1) If their minds are convinced; (2) if their fears are aroused; (3) if their consciences are disturbed; while yet they yield no genuine homage to him whose existence and claims they dare not deny.

II. ITS EVIDENCES may be discovered in such characteristics as these: 1. *Formality in worship.* "This people draweth nigh to me with their mouth," etc. "God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." The scribes and Pharisees were examples of this, exposed and rebuked by our Lord. 2. *Inconsistency in conduct.* This may be glaringly conspicuous, or it may be that the unholiness or unrighteousness is too *secretly practised* to be discovered by the world, or too *subtle* to be described and condemned by the Church, or too *generally practised* to be reprobated by society. Give examples of each in professional, or commercial, or social life. 3. *Fickleness in effort.* It is a sure sign of reality when we are "steadfast and immovable, *always* abounding in the work of the Lord;" when the world frowns as well as when it smiles; when the service is uncongenial as well as when it is delightful. He who readily takes up Christian work and then suddenly abandons it, may fairly ask himself whether his heart is not divided. The great Sower still sees the shallow soil of a sentimental character, where there is no depth and therefore no stability.

III. ITS CAUSES. 1. *The love of sin.* We must lay aside "the sin that doth so easily beset us" if we would run the race and win the crown. He who will not give sin up for Christ's sake has the "divided heart." 2. *The fear of man.* The lad at school, or the man in business, is often disloyal to conviction, and refuses to lay to heart the declaration of Christ, "He that is not with me is against me." 3. *The habit of procrastination.* The child says, "I will wait till I am old enough to take my own place in life;" the busy man or woman waits the leisure of old age; the vigorous delay till illness gives time for thought; and so life speeds away, and the words of Christ are unheeded, "My son, give me thine heart."

IV. ITS EFFECTS. 1. *Present unhappiness.* The undecided man knows too much to find rest in the world, but he loves too little to find rest in Christ. The consciousness of being wrong, the thought of a solemn duty left undone, the fear of discovery by Christian friends, the dread of death and its issue, with more or less frequency and intensity, bring him misery. 2. *Disastrous influence.* If he professes to be a Christian, he dishonours his Lord by his conduct in the world far more than one who avows himself to be an unbeliever. His Christian name injures the world, while his worldly character injures the Church. Examples: Judas, Demas, Ananias. 3. *Certain retribution.* "Some will awake . . . to everlasting contempt." "Let both grow together to the harvest," etc.

CONCLUSION. *Encouragement to offer to our God the broken heart* of true penitence, which he will not despise.—A. R.

Ver. 11.—*Moral abasement.* Figures drawn from the work of husbandry are frequently found in the sacred Scriptures. No others could have been so wisely employed. As Divine truths were intended for all nations, it was well that illustrations of them should be found in all lands. The breaking up of the ground, the sowing of seed, the reaping of the harvest, are phenomena well known in every country, and the process has been essentially the same in every age. Whether the harvest grows in the small allotment of the Eastern labourer, who irrigates it with toil and care, or whether it is

seen on vast prairie-lands, rippling under the breeze like a sea of gold, the laws of its growth, the mode of its production, are not different; and so wherever he may be the religious teacher may find the old illustrations of spiritual truths. How much poorer would the world have been had Divine lessons been represented by the variable fashions or changeful machinery of man's invention, which only the archæologist would understand, instead of being written as they are in the harvest-fields where any wayfarer may read them! Still are the different conditions of "hearers of the Word" represented truly by the different soils which the sower sees in any land. Another and profounder reason for the Divine choice of such illustrations lies in the truth that both nature and grace are of God. The two spheres of being proceed from the same Source, the material being the image of the spiritual. There is a true sowing and reaping in the inward as well as in the outward world; so that in these inspired words we get, not only illustrations, but analogies. Hence the wisdom of the metaphor which is found in vers. 11—13. The twelfth verse shows Israel what it should be, while our text depicts what Israel actually was, and affords us an example of *moral abasement* which we shall do well to consider.

I. MORAL ABASEMENT IS SHOWN IN PREFERRING THE LOWER TO THE HIGHER LIFE. "Ephraim is as a heifer;" whereas, in the next verse, Ephraim is exhorted to be as a husbandman. The former is what the people had become, the latter is what God meant them to be. It is the constant tendency of man thus to sink below a possible ideal. Men of the highest intellectual culture will deprive themselves in their religious life of the liberty and dignity of the sons of God. Many hearers avowedly wait for some overpowering manifestation of God's presence before they believe in him. They would have upon them some influence so mighty as to be resistless. The evil and adulterous generation is still seeking a sign; and gathers around the Christ, asking, "What sign showest thou? what dost thou work?" Now, the tendency of all this is to ask God that we may be dealt with as animals, not as men— as those who are without the spiritual capacities which belong to beings made in the image of God. We would be as the heifer, wanting the yoke and the goad; not as the husbandman, who, obedient to the inner thought that is given to him, intelligently, and freely breaks up the fallow ground, sows the seed, and seeks upon it the blessing of God. But listen to the exhortation of the psalmist: "Be ye not as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding, whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle [not, 'lest they come near,' but] because they will not come near to thee" to do thee service; but rather be as a child, so looking for the Father's glance, so ready to obey his faintest sign, that he can say, "I will guide thee with mine eye" (Ps. xxxii. 8, 9). Ephraim was called to be as the husbandman (ver. 12), but was content to be as the heifer.

II. MORAL ABASEMENT IS SHOWN IN RENDERING A PERFUNCTORY AND IRRELIGIOUS SERVICE. "Ephraim is as a heifer that is taught." She is accustomed to do a certain kind of work, and does it day after day from the memory of the past; as a perfunctory performance, without the inspiration of the thought that it will please her master. Such obedience abounds amongst men. Right acts are done by multitudes, as they were by scribes and Pharisees, without there being in them the moral worth God looks for. For example, it is right for a man to be diligent in business, to do his work with all his might. The idle and thriftless sink ever lower in character and circumstances. But it would not be difficult to find one who is regular and punctual, failing in no engagement, prompt in all his dealings, setting before others a commendable example of hard work thoroughly done, who never has a thought of his Lord's approval, sees nothing of the eternal issues which may flow from the present life, but is "as a heifer accustomed to the yoke." Such perfunctoriness may creep into *religious* service; into the prayers which are said by rote, into the gifts which are given from custom, into the work and organization which is the outcome of habit, etc.

III. MORAL ABASEMENT IS SHOWN IN OBEYING PROFITABLE COMMANDS FOR THE SAKE OF THEIR PROFIT. "Ephraim is as a heifer that... loveth to tread out the corn." The allusion is to the Eastern custom of driving oxen over the reaped corn, that by their feet or by the implement they dragged behind them the grain might be separated from the straw. In the Pentateuch (Deut. xxv. 4) the command was given, "Thou shalt not muzzle the ox when he treadeth out the corn." The ox was to share in the bountiful gifts God had bestowed on man in the harvest, and might eat what he pleased.

Hence, when it is said "Ephraim is as a heifer that . . . loveth to tread out the corn," yet refuses to plough till the yoke is forced on its fair neck, the meaning is that Israel obeyed the command of God when they could get any immediate good as the result of obedience, but refused to obey when obedience, like ploughing, brought no instant fruit. Well may Trapp remark, "It is an ill sign when men must pick and choose their work; this they will do for God, but not that . . . Judas will bear the cross, so he may have the bag." It was because our Lord discerned this spirit in his hearers at Capernaum that he rebuked them, saying, "Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled. Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you" (John vi. 26, 27; see also Matt. vi. 33). The true test of character is to be found, not in the morality that wins applause and popularity, but in the righteousness which is followed through evil as well as good report. To all those who are toiling for the sake of what they can get of earthly good, Christ says, "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, and ye shall find rest to your souls." If the Spirit of Christ be ours, then we shall find—

"A life of self-renouncing love
Is a life of liberty."

A. R.

Ver. 12.—*Spiritual husbandry.* The union of precept and promise in Scripture runs parallel with the union of work and blessing in life. The same mind and will is the source of both. Our text reminds us of the co-operation of the human and Divine as essential to the harvest of good. A true reformation is only accomplished by God indirectly, through the agency of man. Thus the coming of Christ Jesus was prepared for by the ministry of John, which roused men to thoughts of sin and of righteousness. In the graphic imagery of Isaiah, "crooked things were made straight, and rough places plain, and then the glory of the Lord was revealed." So in the establishment of the Christian Church: God wrought through the energies of men. The Holy Spirit was not poured down directly from heaven upon the nations, but upon a few men whose hearts were prepared, and through their ministry the conscience of the world was stirred. No farmer waits inactively in the spring-time, when the earth is made soft with showers, expecting a harvest to come, while his plough rusts in the shed and his seed rots in the granary; and no true Christian is satisfied to pray for the fulfilment of the promises while he does nothing of the work that lies to his hand. The message comes home to him, "Sow to yourselves," etc. *Human responsibility* and *Divine recompense* are the two factors in *spiritual husbandry* which demand consideration.

I. HUMAN RESPONSIBILITY lies in the direction of these activities. 1. *Sowing the seed.* "Sow to yourselves in righteousness." Show how deficient Israel was in righteousness, both in national affairs and in social and civil life, during Hosea's ministry. (1) *National righteousness* is demanded. Honesty in diplomacy, equitable dealing with weaker peoples, fairness in commercial enterprise, choice of the right, and not of the profitable, etc. (2) *Church righteousness*, which will not allow us to neglect the poor, or to be careless of the interests of Divine truth, or to restrain prayer before God. (3) *Individual righteousness*, which may be shown by every Christian in all the varied relations of life. Sowing to ourselves in righteousness is not always easy, and is not often immediately recompensed; but "in due season we shall reap, if we faint not." 2. *Preparing the soil.* "Break up your fallow ground." The work referred to is monotonous, hard, continuous. The ploughman does not see around him the glow of the golden harvest; he does not hear the merriment of those who are binding the sheaves; he has not the stimulus of the happy speed which the hope of finishing gives the reaper. Yet his work is as necessary. The reference is not to the cleaning from weeds of land already sown, but to the breaking up of virgin soil, *i.e.* of the parts of a field which were neglected before. (1) *Make application to the development of Christian character.* There is generally a want of completeness about this. Sins of pleasure and indolence are gone; but if sins of pride, ambition, censoriousness, remain, these also must be turned up by the plough of resolution. We must not be content with saying, "This part of my character is fertile," while that part lies fallow. So with Christian graces.

We may have courage without tenderness, patience without enterprise, and thus have fallow ground yet to be broken up. (2) *Make application to the advance of Christ's kingdom.* Parts of the world sown with the good seed are fairly productive, other parts are moral wastes. This calls for missionary enterprise. Congregations comfortably worship, yet amongst the godless and ignorant "fallow ground" still lies around them. The world will become a paradise only when each does his own work in his own sphere. In the Western States, land is not brought under cultivation by the expenditure of a millionaire; but each settler has his own allotment, effects his own clearing, builds his own log hut, adds field to field till his farm touches the next, and by this process the wilderness begins to rejoice and blossom like the rose. 3. *Seeking the Lord.* Hosea would have the people eagerly expecting Messiah, and ready to welcome him. Some of John's disciples were thus "seeking the Lord," and it was on these Christ rained righteousness, in the truths he taught and the Spirit he gave. Readiness for the second advent becomes the Christian still; and the Church is sighing for it. Meantime the Lord comes in holy thought, in right resolve, in chastened feeling. He comes down on weary hearts like "rain upon the mown grass, as showers that water the earth."

II. DIVINE RECOMPENSE. 1. *It is generous.* "Reap [not 'in,' but] according to mercy;" not in proportion to desert, or to justice, but to the boundless mercy of the Lord. Of all reaping that is true. When we sow our seed we give it over to the care of God. It would be something to receive it back again uninjured; but it is multiplied, "according to the mercy" of God, and harvest-fields come from a few bushels of seed. God gives "good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over." If we are thus requited in the natural, we shall be in the moral husbandry. Grace used brings more grace. The five talents employed become the ten talents. If we give, the habit of giving becomes a luxury. If we pray, prayer becomes easier, more refreshing, more essential. If ours are the tears of penitence, the light of God's love shines through them and creates the rainbow of peace. If, like the prodigal, we sow in righteous acknowledgment of sin, we reap peace and joy "according to God's mercy." 2. *It is from above.* "Until he come and rain righteousness upon you." When rain falls from heaven it blesses your garden, or your carefully tended plant, but it does not content itself with that. Fields you never saw are greener, limpid streams in distant counties are fuller, leaves and ferns and unnoticed flowers are touched and blessed. All Churches need this outpouring from above. To do the right, to break up the fallow ground which has been unblessed before by enterprise, will all be useless unless he rains righteousness upon us. And for this great blessing a sinful world, a weakened Church, a conscious yearning, say, "It is *time* to seek the Lord."

CONCLUSION. *Beware lest, in the sight of the Searcher of hearts, your condition should be described by the words which follow our text.* "Ye have ploughed wickedness, ye have reaped iniquity." "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."—A. R.

Ver. 2.—*A divided heart.* The history of the people of Israel furnishes many an illustration of the state of mind vividly depicted in these words. For instance, in the time of Elijah, the heart of Israel was divided between Jehovah and Baal. Hosea had to complain of the same distraction of mind as characteristic of the generation to which he ministered. And what congregation is there addressed by a Christian preacher which does not contain many "a divided heart"?

I. THE CAUSES OF A DIVIDED HEART. 1. Others beside the Lord lay claim to the heart. In the case of Israel, there were idols who were reputed by neighbouring nations to be powerful and helpful. In the case of those professing Christianity, there are many rivals, in the person of earthly and human claimants, and in the shape of various preoccupations, pleasures, and pursuits. 2. There is native weakness and vacillation. Many natures are by constitution unstable; and many have encouraged weakness by yielding to temptation.

II. THE SYMPTOMS OF A DIVIDED HEART. The case is not that of one who has actually renounced and abjured the worship and service of the Lord. But in hesitating between the two different and inconsistent allegiances, the divided heart is faithful to neither. We meet with instances of such indecision in domestic and social life.

There may be a vigorous intellect where there is a vacillating heart, affections easily won and easily lost, prone to transference hither and thither. And in religion we find persons who strive to serve God and mammon at the same time; or who seem to be earnest in the service of God, and shortly after equally devoted to the incompatible service of God's enemy.

III. THE MISCHIEFS OF A DIVIDED HEART. 1. It is ruinous to the individual nature. No man can live an inconsistent life, such as a divided heart involves, without moral deterioration. He loses self-respect and moral dignity. 2. It is injurious to society. Men respect decision, but they are repelled by its opposite, and they despise a professor of religion whose spirit and demeanour are inconsistent with his profession. 3. It is hateful to God, who says, "Give me thy heart," and who will accept no compromise or composition.

IV. THE CURE FOR A DIVIDED HEART. The only cure is a radical and severe one. The heart must be withdrawn from God's rivals, and yielded, without reserve and without delay, to him who has a right to it, and who claims it as his own.

"Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it;
Prone to leave the God I love!
Here's my heart, Lord; take and seal it—
Seal it from thy courts above."

T.

Ver. 7.—"*Foam upon the water.*" A graphic and picturesque image is this, aptly setting forth the emptiness and transitoriness of that monarchy which was established at Samaria, in defiance of God's will; and which was continued by vacillating or by wholly idolatrous kings, with no regard to God's honour, to God's ordinances, to God's prophets and messengers.

I. THE PRINCIPLE FIGURATIVELY ENUNCIATED. All persons and systems and principles which are opposed to God are doomed to perish. As the foam raised upon the surface of the torrent as it plunges over the rocks vanishes even whilst it is borne down by the swiftness of the current, so all persons, things, and institutions which God condemns as inimical to himself, as hostile to his authority and reign, are destined to disappear and sink into the dark depths of oblivion. As our Lord Jesus declared, making use of a different figure, "Every plant which my heavenly Father hath not planted shall be rooted up."

II. ACTUAL EXEMPLIFICATIONS OF THIS PRINCIPLE. 1. The instance of the passage from which the text is taken. The godless and often idolatrous kingdom, established in Samaria as its capital, comes to nought. 2. National examples abound. Peoples who have been unfaithful to their trust, or negligent of their privileges, or wavering in their policy, have come to nought.

"And, like a snow-flake on the river,
One moment seen, then gone for ever."

3. How many cases of individuals known to us exemplify the principle thus figuratively set forth! Brilliant gifts, fine opportunities, glowing hopes, and, at the same time, want of true principle, of thorough consecration to God,—who has not seen the combination? And who that has watched and followed such cases has not had occasion to remark that the laws of God cannot be violated with impunity, that the Lord reigneth, and that all which is not based upon a right relation with the supreme Lord and Saviour must surely come to nought, and be no more seen?—T.

Ver. 8.—*Despair.* The picture of the text is awful in the extreme. The condition of those to whom destruction and annihilation would be a relief is appalling to contemplate. What fearful vengeance must be overtaking those, what indescribable forebodings must have taken possession of their nature, who cry, "Mountains, cover us! Rocks, fall upon us!" It is the language of despair!

I. THE CAUSES OF DESPAIR. Much must have transpired before such a state of mind could exist. There must have been (1) sin committed, (2) mercy rejected, (3) authority defied, (4) forbearance abused, before the soul of man could have abandoned itself to hopelessness like this.

II. THE HORROR OF DESPAIR. This is not unnatural. It arises from reflection upon the rebellion and inexcusable wilfulness of the past; from the declaration of conscience to the effect that God has observed that rebellion, that sinfulness, with indignation, and from the anticipation of impending judgment. Only such thoughts and feelings could account for the unparalleled horror declaring itself in such invocations and imprecations as these.

III. THE CRY OF DESPAIR. The dreadful language proceeding from the lips of the hopeless is an appeal to nature to save the sinner from nature's Lord. It is an appeal unreasonable and absurd, but not unnatural, as uttered by a bewildered, terrified, and unfriended soul. Can anything give a more awful and impressive representation of the wretchedness into which he is surely led who perseveres in sin, and hardens himself against both the Law and the Gospel?

IV. THE PREVENTION OF DESPAIR. It may be well to see whither a certain course leads us, if the result be to save us from the issue, by saving us from what involves it. It is to be remembered with gratitude that hearers of the gospel of Christ have not reached the stage now described. They may be prisoners, but they are "prisoners of hope." The word of the Lord does indeed come as a word of warning, but it comes also as a word of promise. Neglected, it will be a sentence of condemnation; accepted, it will be an assurance of pardon and a pledge of life eternal.—T.

Ver. 12.—*Prepare for the time of Divine favour.* This is one of many passages in which the inspired writers make use of imagery derived from the processes of nature and the practices of husbandry, with the view of explaining and enforcing spiritual truth and personal duty.

I. HUMAN PREPARATION FOR DIVINE BLESSING. Man must do his part, and is admonished by authority to do so. The readiness which is here required, as a condition of heavenly blessing and spiritual prosperity, is twofold. 1. *In the heart and life.* By "breaking up the fallow ground" may be understood repentance, by which the heart long hard and stony becomes soft and pliable to what is good, and receptive of heavenly seed. By "sowing to one's self in righteousness" may be understood reformation of principles and of practice. It is not enough to forsake the evil; it is necessary to seek, to cleave to, that which is good. All this, it is presumed, will be done by the aid of Divine grace, and under the influence of Christian motives. 2. *By prayer.* "It is time to seek the Lord." Human means are good; it is by express instruction from on high that they are employed; but alone they are insufficient. The spiritual life has its devotional as well as its practical side. We have to look earthwards, that we may till the soil and sow the seed; but we have also to look heavenwards, that we may obtain the needed blessing.

II. DIVINE BLESSING IN RESPONSE TO HUMAN PREPARATION. 1. God shall "rain righteousness," by which we may understand he will bestow those favours which his own Word has pledged him to confer. By rain we understand also the abundance of those blessings; which are bestowed, not in drops, but in showers—copious showers from the opened windows of heaven. 2. God's people shall "reap mercy." This is the harvest for which all human cultivation and all Divine effluences are designed to concur. Mercy for time and mercy for eternity, from a merciful God, for a mercy-needing humanity. "The Lord grant that we may all obtain mercy of the Lord in that day!"—T.

Ver. 1.—*The abuse of worldly prosperity.* "Israel is an empty vine, he bringeth forth fruit unto himself." Were this version correct we should have two ideas suggested. 1. *A fruitlessness that makes life worthless.* This empty vine produced fruit, but the fruit was worthless. A fruitless vine is among the most worthless of all plants. It is *unbeautiful.* Its aspect is dry, stringy, deadly. It is true its foliage is luxuriant, but that is short-lived and disappointing; and it is as *inutile* as it is unbeautiful. What piece of furniture or art can you make out of the vine tree? It is only fit for the fire. 2. *A fruitfulness that makes life wicked.* "Bringeth forth fruit unto himself." Whatever is produced is laid out on self—aggrandizement and indulgence. But our version is undoubtedly faulty. "Israel is a luxuriant vine, he putteth forth his fruit (Henderson); "Israel is a running vine, it setteth fruit for itself" (Keil); "Israel is a luxurious vine, whose fruit is very abundant" (Elzas). Israel is often represented as a vine.

"Thou hast brought a vine out of Egypt,
Thou hast cast out the heathen and planted it,
Thou preparedst room before it,
And didst cause it to take deep root;
And it filled the land,
The hills were covered with the shadow of it,
And the boughs thereof were like goodly cedars."
(Ps. lxxx. 8—10.)

Our subject is *the abuse of worldly prosperity*. Some men are very prosperous; they are like the luxuriant vine. Every branch of their life clusters with fruit. Some nations are very prosperous. England was never more prosperous than now; the sun of prosperity shines on our island home. Great Britain is just now a luxuriant vine, and its clustering branches enrich distant nations. When is prosperity abused?

I. WHEN IT IS USED WITH AN EXCLUSIVE REGARD TO OUR OWN SELFISH ENDS. When men employ it: 1. For *self-indulgence*. How much wealth is lavished on the pampering of appetites, and the gratification of the sensuous, the carnal, and the gross? 2. For *self-aggrandizement*. How much wealth is expended in order to make a grand appearance, to move through life in pageantry and pomp, and thus to gratify mere vanity and pride! All selfish use of property is an abuse of it. What we have obtained is only *common* property, which, because it has come into our possession, we have a right to distribute for the common weal. The right which property gives us is not the right to lay it out purely for our own selfish ends, but the right to lay it out for the benefit of our fellow-men.

II. WHEN IT IS USED WITHOUT A SUPREME REGARD TO THE CLAIMS OF GOD. Whatever we have we hold as stewards, and unless we employ our property according to the directions of the great Proprietor we abuse the trust. How does God require us to employ our property? 1. For the *amelioration of human woes*. 2. For the *dispersion of human ignorance*. 3. For the *elevation of the human soul*. To raise it to the knowledge, the image, the fellowship, and the enjoyment of God.

CONCLUSION. How are we as a nation using our enormous prosperity? Let the increase of grand mansions, palaces of amusement, temples of intemperance, worthless and putrescent literary productions, be compared with the increase of our churches, our schools, and our books of real, intellectual, and moral merit; and the humiliating answer will come.—D. T.

Ver. 4.—*Social sins and their result.* "They have spoken words, swearing falsely in making a covenant: thus judgment springeth up as hemlock in the furrows of the field."

I. SOCIAL SINS. There are three sins referred to in this verse. 1. *Vain speech.* "They have spoken words." This means, according to Henderson, Elzas, and others, "They utter *empty* speeches." Not only are words of falsehood, blasphemy, and unchastity sinful, but *empty* words. For every "idle word" we shall have to give an account. How much idle language is there current in society! The chat of gossip, the formalities of etiquette, the vapid compliments of society, as well as those airy words of wit and humour which sometimes delude, sometimes pain, and sometimes please. 2. *False swearing.* False speech is bad enough, for it misrepresents facts, and often does serious mischief; but when backed by an oath its heinousness is intensified and blackened. How much false swearing there is in society! Not merely in judicial courts, but in homes, in shops, in fields, in general society. 3. *Unrighteous treaties.* "Making a covenant." The word "bad" is implied here, for there is no harm in making covenants. Making a bad covenant. The primal reference, perhaps, is to certain treaties Israel had formed with foreign nations. How much wicked contracting there is going on in society every day in commerce, in politics, as well as in private life. Untruthful as well as unrighteous bargains are being struck every hour in all circles. In truth, the sins here charged to Israel are not uncommon in England this day—empty speech, false swearing, and making unrighteous treaties.

II. RESULTS OF SOCIAL SINS. "Thus judgment springeth up as hemlock in the furrows of the field." It matters not to the sense of the passage whether you read "poppy" for "hemlock," or ridges" for "furrows;" the idea is the same—viz. that out

of the social sins certain results appear. How do they come? 1. They come as a *growth*. They "spring up" or blossom. Sins bring with them their own punishment—no positive infliction is required; every sin is a seed from which a pestiferous plant must spring. 2. They come as a *poison*. "Hemlock;" some read "poppy," and some "darnel," but all agree in the poisonousness of its production. In any case it is a "hemlock," a small decoction of which destroyed a Socrates. "Sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death." 3. They come in *abundance*. "That springeth up as hemlock in the *furrows* of the field." Very prolific is sin. See its plants growing in the ridges and furrows of life; in sick-chambers, in hospitals, in workhouses, in prisons, in battle-fields also! How thickly the hemlock grows!—D. T.

Ver. 12.—*The Divine voice to a worthless people.* "Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground: for it is time to seek the Lord, till he come and rain righteousness upon you." "Sow to yourselves for righteousness, reap according to love, plough for yourselves virgin soil; for it is time to seek Jehovah, till he come and rain righteousness upon you" (Delitzsch). Sowing and reaping are figures here used to denote the spiritual and moral conduct of the people. Indeed, all human life consists of sowing and reaping. We reap to-day what we sowed yesterday, and we sow to-day what we shall reap to-morrow, and so on through all future. Every intelligent act embodies a moral principle, contains a seed that must germinate and grow. We have here several things worthy of study.

I. A WRETCHED MORAL STATE. "Fallow ground," uncultivated earth. A state of: 1. *Unloveliness.* It is either an expanse of grey earth, or of weeds, thistles, and thorns. 2. *Unfruitfulness.* Unless the earth is cultivated, there is no fruit, and the land is worthless. 3. *Wastefulness.* On the fallow ground fall the rain, the dew, the sunshine, and the frost; but all in vain. How much Divine grace is wasted on unregenerate men! Sermons, books, Bibles, providences, means of grace all wasted.

II. AN URGENT MORAL DUTY. 1. Moral *ploughing.* "Break up your fallow ground." Drive the ploughshare through it. How can you break up the soil of the heart? Not by *mere* volition, but by thinking on the subjects suited to excite. Think especially on two things. (1) What God has been to us. (2) What we have been to him. 2. Moral *sowing.* "Sow in righteousness." Go in for righteousness. Work to put yourself and fellow-men right with themselves, God, and others; implant everywhere righteous ideas and actions. 3. Moral *reaping.* "Reap in mercy." Accept what comes to you in sentiments of love and mercy.

III. A SOLEMN MORAL SUGGESTION. "It is time." 1. No time to lose. 2. Much has been lost. 3. It is only now the work can be effectively done.

IV. A GLORIOUS MORAL PROSPECT. He will "rain righteousness," or, as some render it, "teach you righteousness." Pursue this work of moral agriculture properly, and God himself will come and teach you righteousness.—D. T.

Vers. 1—3.—*The empty vine.* "Empty;" literally, "poured forth;" *i.e.* poured forth in leaves and branches, with the effect that there is comparatively little fruit. When there was fruit, Israel gave not God the glory. The more they increased, the more they transgressed. The result was degeneracy. They spurned God's control, and life, in consequence, ran to waste. Undisciplined luxuriance becomes degenerate luxuriance. Fruit fails.

I. FRUIT, BUT NOT UNTO GOD. (Ver. 1.) Such fruit as Israel brought forth was "unto himself." We have here recognized: 1. *A native capacity of fruitfulness.* God had given to the nation a thriving vigorous life, capable of striking out in many noble directions, and of achieving distinction in many kinds of enterprise. This was its natural endowment. It enabled it at times, with God's assistance, to rise to a high degree of prosperity. So God bestows on men the gifts of body and mind, the natural genius, the powers to think and act, which form the basis of their manifold endeavours. 2. *A perversion of this capacity.* This power of fruitful endeavour in Israel was not directed to God's glory as its end. The life of the nation was solely "from itself to itself." Its bent was towards self-gratification, self-glory, self-enrichment; not towards the realization of a Divine ideal. They set up kings, but not by God (ch. viii. 4). The calf was "from Israel also" (ver. 5). This is the root-sin of mankind. They have

turned aside from their being's end and aim. There is endeavour, but it is for self. God's glory is unthought of, unsought. 3. *Consequent failure.* From this perversion of existence in Israel arose (1) rejection of Divine control, figured in the vine's lawless, untutored luxuriance; and (2) ultimate degeneracy. The sinful life, however vigorous, powerful, and thriving-looking at first, has this as its penalty, that it is unable permanently to maintain its vitality. Even when, to outward appearance, it seems flourishing, it is found, on closer examination, to be without substance, without healthy fruitfulness. "It is smitten, its root is dried up, it bears no fruit" (cf. ch. ix. 16). Only of the righteous can it be said, "He bringeth forth fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither" (Ps. i. 3). "They shall bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be fat and flourishing" (Ps. xcii. 14).

II. GLORY, BUT NOT TO THE CREATOR. (Ver. 1.) The more God gave to Israel, the more they sinned against him. Their altars were multiplied as their fruit increased. The better God made their land, the goodlier became their images. 1. *They withheld from God the glory due to him.* They denied him in his gifts. They did not own him as the Author of their prosperity. They felt no thankfulness. They did not glorify him in the use they made of what he gave. How common is this sin! 2. *They gave his glory to another.* Altars and pillars were multiplied to the idols. Baal was praised and served for the prosperity which came from Jehovah. God was dishonoured to his face. In the Lord's own land his glory was given to "graven images." The glory which ought to be given to God is often retained for self, or distributed out to the powers which we secretly idolize. Hero and nature worship, Bacchus-worship, idolatry of wealth, glorification of military might, etc. 3. *They made his goodness the occasion of greater sin.* The bent being evil, sin only assumes the greater proportions the larger the powers put at its disposal. With plenty in the land the people had more to sin with. They had more time and means, and they lavished more freely on their idols. They built more altars, and made their pillars higher and goodlier. Man's sin thus keeps pace with God's goodness. The wealthy, talented, powerful, robust, exalted, are able to sin in a way and to an extent not possible to others. The facilities for sin are greater. More extravagance, pride, worldly display, dissipation, self-confidence, etc.

III. WORSHIP, BUT WITH A DIVIDED HEART. (Ver. 2.) Israel's heart was "smooth" or "divided." It was deceitful towards God. His worship was ostensibly maintained, but the worship of the Baals was kept up alongside of it, and was the real worship of the people. Nay, while in name honouring Jehovah, the people had "changed the truth of God into a lie" (Rom. i. 25), by setting up the images of the calves. Their whole worship was thus an abomination to the Lord, and he would avenge his insulted honour by a judgment which would lay their altars in the dust. 1. *In worship, it is the heart God looks to.* He is not deceived by the outward appearance, or by flattering words. He desires truth in the inward parts (Ps. li. 6). The utmost lavishing on externals will not condone for the want of the right spirit. 2. *The heart is insincere towards God when it is divided between God and other objects.* God is not honoured as God when the whole heart is not given up to him. He ought, as God, to receive all. He will not share his glory with another. A really divided state of the affections cannot last (Matt. vi. 24). The division of the heart between God and the world ends by the world getting all. 3. *God will punish the divided heart by taking its idols from it.* He may do so in this world. He will certainly do so at last.

IV. A KING, YET NO KING. (Ver. 3.) When the judgment fell on Israel, the people would not be slow to realize the cause of their misfortunes. "We have no king, because we feared not the Lord." 1. *They had a king, but not a king from God.* Since the extinction of the house of Jehu, no king had reigned in Israel with even a semblance of Divine right. The throne had been held by a succession of usurpers. Hoshea gained it by slaying Pekah, as Pekah had raised himself to power by killing the son of Menahem (2 Kings xv. 25—30). The people could not feel to an anarchical usurper as towards a true king. Their feeling was that the days of legitimate kings were over. They had, at least, no king through whom they could expect God to send them deliverance. These frequent and violent usurpations were a proof that God had departed from them. 2. *Their state was such that a king could no longer do them any good.* He who ought to have been their King, Jehovah himself, had cast them off. They had provoked him

till there was no remedy. They felt this now in the bitterness of their despair. "What should a king do for us?"—J. O.

Vers. 4—8.—*The end of calf-worship.* The people were preparing the way for their own punishment by their false dealing with Assyria. Vengeance would overtake them. The calf in which they trusted would be carried away captive. The kingdom would be overthrown. Their altars would grow up with thorns and thistles. They would be glad of death to relieve them of their misery. "Ephraim shall receive shame, and Israel shall be ashamed of his own counsel."

I. A SOWING OF JUDGMENT. (Ver. 4.) Israel's overthrow was connected with: 1. *Falsity to international engagements.* "Swearing falsely in making a covenant." The allusion is probably to Hoshea's false dealing with Shalmaneser (2 Kings xvii. 3, 4; cf. ch. xii. 1), which was the immediate occasion of the overthrow of Samaria. In international diplomacy there is too much of this "speaking words" and "swearing falsely." Engagements are entered into which neither side intends to keep longer than it suits. The result is breach of faith, and sometimes war. 2. *Perversion of right at home.* This, if we follow the analogy of Amos v. 7, vi. 12, is what is meant by judgment or justice "springing up as hemlock in the furrows of the field." Maladministered justice is the most deadly and poisonous of all things. Another and, taken by itself, more natural interpretation of the words is, that judgment would spring up for woe to Israel in the track on the falsehoods of which the nation had been guilty. The sinner's own hands make the furrows in which retribution springs up like deadly hemlock. His treacheries and duplicities recoil upon himself. Speaking false words is the sowing of dragon's teeth.

II. THE CAPTIVE CALF. (Vers. 5, 6.) 1. *Ephraim's idol in danger.* "The inhabitants of Samaria shall fear because of the calves of Beth-aven." What a picture of the folly of idolatry! The people tremble for the safety of the idol-god to whom they yet look to protect them. Have we not here an indication of the lurking consciousness there is in the idolater's mind that after all his god is no god? Trembling for themselves, the inhabitants of Samaria are yet more afraid lest anything should happen to their deity. We read of idolaters beating their gods when they do not please them. Was Samaria's conduct more rational in *trembling* for its god? Their trembling is a proof that they worshipped the calves, not because in their inmost hearts they thought an idol could help them, or was a right thing to have, but simply because, in defiance of God's commandment ("his own counsel," ver. 6), it pleased them better to have an idol. 2. *Ephraim mourning for his idol.* "The people thereof shall mourn over it," etc. Mark in this: (1) How God separates himself from the image by which the people represented him (the calf), and also separates himself from the people. The place of the calf-worship is no longer Beth-el ("house of God"), but Beth-aven ("house of vanity"). The people are not his people, but the people of the calf—its votaries, not his; he disowns them. (2) How, when they see their calf ignominiously shorn of its glory, they mourn for it, both priests and people. The sinner's idols will be taken from him, and their vanity exposed. This fills him with mourning. It is, however, his idols, not his sins, that he mourns for. 3. *Ephraim ashamed of his idol.* "It shall be also carried unto Assyria for a present to King Jareb: Ephraim shall receive shame," etc. What a burst bubble the worship of the calf now appeared! Unable to save itself, not to speak of others, it is now ignominiously carried off as a present to a heathen king. Yet Ephraim in his heart, no doubt, grieved for his calf, and would gladly, had he been permitted, have returned to its service. The sinner's idols shall yet cover him with shame. "What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of those things is death" (Rom. vi. 21).

III. FINAL OVERTHROW. (Vers. 7, 8.) 1. *A destroyed kingdom.* "Samaria is destroyed; her king is like a chip on the face of the water." Light, helpless, borne away by the impetuous current, submerged, and seen no more. Such would be Samaria's king (cf. ver. 3)—the same flood which swept him away destroying also the kingdom. 2. *Desolate altars.* "The high places also of Aven, the sin of Israel, shall be destroyed: the thorn and the thistle shall come upon their altars." The judgment would strike very specially the place of sin. The utter end of the false system of worship is figured in the thorn and thistle covered altars. Broken and disused, they

are to stand as monuments of wrath. 3. *Prayer for annihilation.* "They shall say to the mountains, Cover us; and to the hills, Fall on us." This would be preferable to the awful misery of falling into the hands of the Assyrian foe (ver. 14; ch. xiii. 16). The scene of judgment, with a like dreadful prayer, would be repeated at the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans (Luke xxiii. 30). Yet these are but feeble prefigurations of the woe and consternation that shall prevail on the day of the "wrath of the Lamb" (Rev. vi. 16). Men shall pray for annihilation; but, it is noteworthy, *this is a prayer which is not granted.*—J. O.

Vers. 9—11.—*Past and present.* We have here—

I. A PAST OF SIN—A PRESENT OF RETRIBUTION. (Vers. 9, 10.) Israel's sin was: 1 *Of old date.* "Thou hast sinned from the days of Gibeah" (cf. on ch. ix. 9). The sin of Gibeah was an early and outstanding instance of wickedness. It may have taken place not long after "the days of the elders which overlived Joshua" (Josh. xxiv. 31), and so have been the first public mark of the new departure in transgression. 2. *Steadily persisted in.* "There they stood." From that day on, a strain of deep corruption had run through the history of Israel. 3. *As yet unavenged.* "The battle in Gibeah against the children of iniquity did not overtake them." Fierce as was the slaughter on both sides in that day of Gibeah, it had not sufficed to eradicate this evil strain. A seed by corruption survived which steadily propagated itself, and had now increased till it included the whole nation. The punishment of this sin was yet to come. 4. *To be avenged now.* "It is in my desire that I should chastise [or, 'bind'] them; and the people shall be gathered against them, in the binding them for their two transgressions." The double sin for which Israel was to be punished was their departure from God, with its attendant idolatry and resultant moral corruption; and their attitude of antagonism to the house of David, to which they ought to have been willing to return at the earliest possible moment. This long-accumulating national sin God was now determined to punish, and was gathering the peoples to execute his decree, as before the tribes had assembled to avenge the sin of Gibeah. There is an entail of sin which the descendants of the wicked can only cut off by repentance (Matt. xxiii. 35, 36).

II. A PAST OF EASE AND PLENTY—A PRESENT OF HARD SERVICE. (Ver. 11.) 1. *Past comfort.* The people of Israel had a fat portion, and had grown accustomed to the life of ease and luxury. Like the trained heifer, which treads out the corn as a matter of habit, and feeds at its ease as it does so, they loved their prosperity, and took it as a thing of course. It is easy to settle in prosperity. We take our good things as though they came to us by right. We form habits in accordance with them. We survey the situation with lazy complacency, and conclude that this happy fortune must be what we were born to. 2. *A present yoke.* "I (have) passed over her fair neck." Already God had taught Israel the vanity of her complacency by subjecting her to the tribute of the kings of Assyria. This, however, had failed to lead to repentance; so worse was now in store. 3. *Approaching hard service.* "I will yoke Ephraim; Judah shall plough; Jacob shall break his clods." The image is taken from severe field labour, as contrasted with the easy work of the threshing heifer. Sin ends in bondage; in hard service; in the yoke and goad. The way of the transgressor is hard (Prov. xiii. 15). There may be ease and luxury at first, but the end is that he "labours and is heavy laden" (Matt. xi. 28).—J. O.

Vers. 12—15.—*Moral husbandry.* Israel's duty is here contrasted with their practice.

I. THE KIND OF HUSBANDRY ISRAEL OUGHT TO HAVE FOLLOWED. (Ver. 12.) 1. *Preparation of the soil.* Israel is first bid to sow; then, going a step further back, the people are commanded, "Break up your fallow ground." If fruits of righteousness are to be produced, it needs, not simply a weeding and recultivation of the old soil—the natural, unrenewed heart—but the preparation of a soil entirely new. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (John iii. 6). Ezekiel, accordingly, promises that God will take away the hard and stony heart from Israel, and will give them a heart of flesh (Ezek. xxxvi. 26). The first need of our souls is renewal. Yet we have the duty laid on us of seeking this renewal, and of co-operating (by prayer, use of means of grace, faith, repentance) in bringing it about.

"Make you a new heart, and a new spirit" (Ezek. xviii. 31). 2. *Sowing in the soil.* The sowing is to be "in righteousness," *i.e.* in the practice of truth, kindness, justice, mercy, godliness, and everything else which the Law of God requires. Each must sow for himself. The sowing cannot be done by proxy. Sowing in righteousness is "for ourselves" in the sense also that our own highest well-being is involved in it (Ps. xix. 11). Righteousness in the long run profits the doer himself more than it profits any other. It is his "life" (Deut. xxxii. 47). 3. *Waiting on God.* "For it is time to seek the Lord, till he come and rain righteousness upon you." As in the outer world rain is indispensable to growth, so is the blessing of God, given in rains of his Spirit, essential to growth in grace. In raining the Spirit upon us, God rains righteousness. Cause is put for effect. It is the Spirit's influences which cause righteousness to spring up. This waiting on God must accompany the whole process. It implies an earnest direction of the heart, supplication, and patient looking for the blessing. It is always "time" for the sinner to seek the Lord. He cannot do it too soon. 4. *The gracious reaping.* "Reap in mercy." Not according to desert, but according to God's infinite grace and love. The reaping is (1) a reaping of righteousness (Rom. vi. 19, 22); (2) of other spiritual and temporal blessings (Matt. vi. 33; Eph. i. 3); (3) of eternal life (Rom. vi. 12).

II. THE KIND OF HUSBANDRY ISRAEL DID FOLLOW. (Ver. 13.) 1. Instead of "sowing in righteousness," *Israel ploughed wickedness.* They took pains to do evil, bestowed labour upon it, prepared the soil in which it might grow, and seemed to delight in multiplying transgressions. If God's people were as diligent in cultivating goodness as sinners are in cultivating sin, the Church would soon be in a healthier condition. 2. Instead of "reaping in mercy," *they reaped iniquity.* Sin brought forth sin. They served "iniquity unto iniquity" (Rom. vi. 19). As weeds multiply quicker than good grain, so sin, in the same space of time, yields a far greater harvest (of its own kind) than righteousness. 3. Instead of spiritual and temporal blessings, *Israel reaped disappointment and ruin.* (1) They reaped lies (disappointment). "Ye have eaten the fruit of lies." Their hopes, built chiefly on the multitude of their fighting men (ver. 15), deceived them. They proved utterly vain. They had sown lies in "speaking words" and "swearing falsely in making a covenant" (ver. 4); they now reaped the fruit of this, in seeing their hosts utterly routed, their fortresses captured, and their women and children dashed to pieces (ver. 14)—judgment springing up in the furrows they had themselves made (ver. 4). (2) They reaped ruin. When war arose, the sword of the Assyrian swept all before it. Israel could read in recent atrocities of Shalman the doom which awaited themselves (ver. 14). King and kingdom would be cut off (ver. 15)—"in a morning," *i.e.* early. This was the result of their sowing. This was what Bethel, with its "evil of evil," had done for them. Oh that the sinner would take warning!—J. O.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER XI.

In vers. 1—4 Jehovah enumerates the benefits conferred on Israel all along from the time of their departure out of Egypt. But parallel with this enumeration runs the history of Israel's ingratitude.

Ver. 1.—When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt. Driver uses this verse to exemplify the principle that when the reference is to what is past or certain, rather than to what is future or indefinite, we find the predicate or the apodosis introduced by ו, though not with nearly the same frequency as ה perfect and *vav* causes (1) with subject or object prefixed; (2) after time-determinations. The life of a nation has its stages of rise, progress, and development, like the life of an individual man. The prophet goes back to that early period when the national life of Israel was in its infancy; it was then that a few patriarchs who had gone down to sojourn in Egypt were becoming a people; the predicate precedes, to emphasize, that early day when Israel became God's peculiar people. The *vav* marks the apodosis recording God's love in choosing that people, calling them into the relation of sonship, and delivering them out of Egypt. Thus Kimchi says, "When Israel was yet a child, *i.e.* in Egypt, then I loved him, therefore I am more angry with them than with the rest of the nations;

for from their youth onward I have loved them, and delivered them out of the hands of their enemies. But when they transgress my commandments it is incumbent on me to chastise them as a man chastises his son." (1) The people of Israel is called God's son in consequence of God choosing them and bringing them into close relationship to himself, such as that of a son to a father. The commencement was the message to Pharaoh by Moses in the words, "Israel is my son, even my firstborn: and I say unto thee, Let my son go, that he may serve me." This sonship was solemnly ratified by the giving of the Law at Sinai; and the condition clearly stated that, in the event of their preserving the knowledge of God, fulfilling his Law, and doing his will, they would at all times enjoy Divine protection, defence, and blessing, while from generation to generation they were addressed by that honourable title. (2) As the deliverance from Egypt is always described as a "leading" or "bringing out," and never elsewhere as a "calling out," some expositors maintain that the words, "out of Egypt," signify from the time Israel was in Egypt, and are parallel to "when Israel was a child," both referring to time, the time of national infancy. From that period God began to manifest his love, and in its manifestation he called him by the endearing name of "son"—my son. The words of this verse are applied by St. Matthew to the sojourn of Jesus in Egypt. The older interpreters refer (*a*) the first part of the verse to Israel and the second part typically to the history of Messiah's childhood, in whom that of Israel reached its completeness. Rather (*b*) the verse was applied typically to Israel, and to Jesus as the antitype; to the former primarily, and to the latter secondarily. Thus the head and the members are comprehended in one common prediction.

Ver. 2.—**As they called them, so they went from them: they sacrificed unto Baalim, and burned incense to graven images.** (1) Adverting to his own call mentioned in the first verse, God here refers to the many subsequent calls which he addressed to them through his servants the prophets and other messengers. (2) The subject of the verb is erroneously understood by some, as, for example, Aben Ezra and Eichhorn, to be the idols, or their false priests or prophets; while (3) Jerome is also mistaken in referring the words to the time of Israel's rebelling when Moses and Aaron wished to lead them out of Egypt. The correct reference is that first stated, and the sense is that, instead of appreciating the invitations and monitions of the prophets of God, they showed their utter insensibility and thanklessness, turning away from them in contempt and scorn. Nay, the more the messengers of God called them, the more **they turned a deaf ear** to those who were their truest friends and best advisers. Pursuing their idolatrous practices, they sacrificed to Baal, that is to say, the various representations of that idol, and burned incense to their images, whether of wood or stone or precious metal. Thus Kimchi correctly comments as follows: "The prophets which I sent to them called to them morning and evening to turn to Jehovah, so (much the more) did they go away from them, not hearkening to their words nor desisting from their evil works." The word כֵּן, even so, denoting the measure or relation, corresponds to כאשר to be supplied in the first clause. The imperfects imply continuance of action or a general truth. (4) The Septuagint rendering, followed by the Syriac, is ἐκ προσώπου μου· αὐτοί, "from my presence: they;" as if they had read מִפָּנַי הֵם instead of the present text.

Ver. 3.—**I taught Ephraim also to go, taking them by their arms; but they knew not that I healed them.** This picture of God's guiding and guarding care of Ephraim is very touching and tender. It is that of an affectionate parent or tender nurse teaching a child to walk by leading-strings; taking it up in the arms when stumbling or making a false step; and in case it fell curing the wound. Thus, nurse-like, God taught Ephraim, his wayward perverse child, to use his feet (so the original word imports), all the while lending considerate help and seasonable aid. He took them by the hand to guide them, that they might not stray; he took them in his arms to hold them up, that they might not stumble and to help them over any obstacle that might lie in the way; and when, left to themselves during a short season, and in order to test their strength, they did stumble and fall, he healed their hurt. And yet they did not apprehend nor appreciate God's gracious design and dealings with them in thus guiding and guarding them, and in healing their diseases both temporal and spiritual. There is, perhaps, an allusion to Exod. xv. 26, "I will put none of these diseases upon thee which I have brought upon the Egyptians: for I am the Lord that healeth thee." This promise, it will be remembered, was vouchsafed immediately after the bitter waters of Marah had been sweetened by the tree which, according to Divine direction, had been cast therein. Thus Kimchi: "And they have not acknowledged that I healed them of every sickness and every affliction, as he said, 'I will put none of these diseases upon thee.'" The reference is rather to all those evidences of his love which God manifested to them during their forty years' wandering in the wilderness; or perhaps to his guidance of

them by his Law throughout their entire history. Rashi remarks that "they knew it very well, but dissembled [literally, 'trod it down with the heel,' equivalent to 'despised'] and acted as if they did not know." The word תרגלתי is properly taken both by Kimchi and Gesenius (1) for הרגלתי; the former says; "The *tav* stands in place of *he:* this is the opinion of the grammarians;" the latter regards it as a solitary example of Tiphel; others again consider it a corrupt reading instead of the ordinary form of Hiph. (2) Some take it for a noun, as J. Kimchi, who says it is "a noun after the form of תפארתי, and although the word is Milel (while in תפארתי it is Milra), yet it is the same form;" thus the translation is, "As for me, my guidance was to Ephraim;" so Jerome, "I have been as if a nurse to Ephraim;" likewise also Cyril. The former explanation is simpler and also otherwise preferable. (3) The Septuagint has the incorrect rendering *συνεπόδισα*, "I bound the feet of Ephraim," which Jerome explains, "I bound the feet of Ephraim that they might not fly further from me," though his own rendering is that given above. The word קחם has also occasioned some difficulty and consequent diversity of explanation. (1) Some explain it to be an infinitive construct equivalent to the Latin gerund in *-do*, as elsewhere. Thus in the Authorized Version it is "taking them by their arms;" but the common form of the infinitive of this verb is קחת; besides, the suffixes ם֫ and יו֫ are contradictory. (2) Olshausen and Ewald read אֶקָּחֵם in the first person, the received text having, according to the latter, maintained its place only through רועתי; but this is conjectural and wants manuscript authority. (3) Still worse is Abarbanel's interpretation, who understands the subject of the verb and the suffix of the noun as referring to Ephraim; thus: "He (Ephraim) took them (*i.e.* the idols) on his arms." (4) The correct explanation, as we think, is that of Kimchi and Gesenius, who take the verb for לָקָחַם by a not unusual aphæris of the *lamed:* "He took them in his arms," the transition from the first to the third person being justified by the pictorially descriptive style of the passage. The following comment of Kimchi is worthy of attention: "The prophet only mentions Ephraim (instead of all Israel), because it was he that made the calves. He says, 'And how does Ephraim reward me for this that I bestowed on them so many benefits, and accustomed them to go on their feet, and did not burthen them with my commandments and my service?' And because he has compared Ephraim to a boy, he uses the word, 'I led them by strings.' Just as one leads a boy that he may accustom himself to go little by little without trouble, so I led them from station to station, when I brought them out of Egypt; I led them gradually without overexertion, the cloud going before them by day, and the pillar of fire by night."

Ver. 4.—**I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love.** This verse contains a further representation of Jehovah's fatherly guidance of Israel. The *cords of a man* are such as parents use in leading weak or young children. *Bands of love* qualify more closely the preceding expression, "cords of a man," and are the opposite of those which men employ in taming or breaking wild and unmanageable animals. The explanation of Rashi is similar: "I have always led them with tender cords such as those with which a man leads his child, as if he said with loving guidance." Aben Ezra and Kimchi, in their explanations, carry out more fully the same idea. The former says, "The bands of love are not like the bands which are fastened on the neck of a ploughing heifer;" the latter, "Because he compared Ephraim to a heifer, and people lead a heifer with cords, he says, 'I have led Israel by the cords of a man, and not the cords of a heifer which one drags along with resistance, but as a man draws his fellow-man without compelling him to go with resistance: even so I have led them after a gentle method;' and therefore he afterward calls them (cords of a man) bands of love." The LXX., taking חֲבָל from חָבַל, in the sense of "injure," "destroy," have the mistaken rendering *ἐν διαφθορᾷ ἀνθρώπων . . . ἐξέτεινα αὐτούς*, "When men were destroyed I drew them." The other Greek versions have the correct rendering. **And I was to them as they that take off the yoke.** The word *herim* does not mean "to lift up on" and so "impose a yoke," as some think, nor "to take away the yoke," but "to lift it up." The figure is that of a humane and compassionate husbandman raising upwards or pushing backwards the yoke over the cheeks or dewlaps of the ox, that it may not press too heavily upon him or hinder him while eating. The reference is, according to Kimchi, to 'taking the yoke off the neck, and letting it hang on the jaw, that it may not pull but rest from labour one or more hours of the day." The fact thus figuratively expressed is, not the deliverance from the bondage of Egypt, but the loving-kindness of Jehovah in lightening the fulfilment of the Law to Israel. (2) The LXX. omit the word עֹל, yoke, and strangely translates the clause, "I will bo to them as a man smiting (another) on the cheeks." **And I laid meat unto them.** The older and many

modern interpreters, (1) taking וָאֶם as the first person future apoc., Hiph., from נמם, translate, "And I reached them food to eat," namely, the manna in the wilderness. This would require וָאֵם, which some substitute for the present reading. (2) Ewald, Keil, and others take אם as an adverb in the sense of "gradually," "gently," translating, "And gently towards him did I give him food," or "I gently fed him." Some, again, as Kimchi, take (*a*) אוכיל as a noun, after the form of אופיר; and others (*b*) take it to be an anomalous form for אַאכִיל, the first person future Hiph., like אוֹבִד for אַאבִד (Jer. xlvi. 8). (3) In this clause also the Septuagint, probably reading as follows: וָאֵם אֵלַי אוּכַל לוֹ, translates, Ἐπιβλέψομαι πρὸς αὐτὸν δυνήσομαι αὐτῷ, "I will have respect to him; I will prevail with him." Continuing the several clauses of this verse, we may express the meaning of the whole as follows: "Cords of a man" denote humane methods which Jehovah employed in dealing with and drawing his people—not such cords as oxen or other animals are drawn by; while "bands of love" is a kindred expression, explaining and emphasizing the former, and signifying such leading-strings as those with which a parent lovingly guides his child. The means employed by God for the help, encouragement, and support of his people were kind as they were bountiful. His benevolent and beneficent modes of procedure are further exhibited by another figure of like origin; for just as a considerate and compassionate man, a humane husbandman, gives respite and relief to the oxen at work by loosening the yoke and lifting it up off the neck upon the cheeks; and thus affords not only temporary rest and ease, but also allows an occasional mouthful or more of food, or even abundant provender, to the animal which toils in the yoke while ploughing or at other work; so Jehovah extended to Israel, notwithstanding their frequent acts of unfaithfulness, his sparing mercy and tender compassions, supplying them in abundant measure with all that they needed for the sustenance and even comforts of life. Thus their sin in turning aside to other gods, which were no gods, in quest of larger benefits and more liberal support and succour, was all the more inexcusable.

The next three verses (5—7) describe the severe chastisement Israel incurred by ingratitude for, and contempt of, the Divine love.

Ver. 5.—**He shall not return into the land of Egypt, but the Assyrian shall be his king, because they refused to return.** These words sound like an announcement that the season of Divine grace, so long extended to that sin-laden people, had at length expired; and that on account of their stubborn and ungrateful rebellion against Jehovah they would be forced to go into exile and become subject to the monarch of Assyria. (1) They had been threatened with a return to Egypt and its bondage in ch. viii. 13, "They shall return to Egypt;" and ch. ix. 3, "Ephraim shall return to Egypt;" yet now God, without any change of purpose, changes his mode of procedure, not allowing them to return to Egypt, but dooming them to a worse bondage under the Assyrians. (2) Having been tributary to Assyria from the time of Menahem, they had revolted and applied to Egypt for help; now, however, no help would be permitted to come from Egypt nor even an opportunity of applying for it allowed. The power of Assyria would be paramount; instead, therefore, of native kings and Egyptian auxiliaries, Israel would have to submit to that iron yoke. However desirous of returning to Egypt, they would have neither the power nor the privilege of doing so. And this poor privilege of a choice of masters they were refused as a just retribution, because they had not repented of their sin and returned to God. Various methods have been resorted to to harmonize the apparent contradiction alluded to, that is, between the affirmative and negative statements about Israel's return into Egypt. (1) Dathe, Eichhorn, and De Wette agree with the LXX. in reading לוֹ instead of לֹא, and connecting it with the preceding verse; but the other versions, as well as the manuscripts, support the received text. (2) Jerome and Rosenmüller explain it of the people's desire to conclude an alliance with Egypt in order to throw off the yoke of Assyria, being frustrated by the superior power of the latter; thus the sense is that they shall not return any more to Egypt, as they had lately done by their ambassadors, to seek help from that land or its people. Then he assigns the reason why they would not again send ambassadors to Egypt for the purpose indicated, because the Assyrian alone would be their king. The objection to this is that *lo yashubu* must refer to the whole people rather than to their ambassador going to and fro between the countries. (3) Ewald, Maurer, and others cut the knot by taking *lo* interrogatively, as if it were *halo*, and thus equivalent to an affirmative, *i.e.* "Shall they not return to Egypt and the Assyrian be their king?" The expected answer would be in the affirmative. Neither grammar nor context sanctions this interrogative sense. (4) According to Hitzig, Keil, Simson, and others, we are to understand Egypt in the previous places, viz. ch. viii. 13 and ch. ix. 3, as *typical* of the land of

bondage, where in the present passage the typical sense is inadmissible, owing to the contrast with Assyria. Into Egypt Israel should not return, lest the object of the Exodus might seem frustrated, but a worse lot lay before them—another and harder bondage awaited them; the King of Assyria would be their king and reign over them, and all because of their impenitence and refusal to return to Jehovah. The following is the explanation of Kimchi: "They should not have returned to the land of Egypt to seek help; I had already said to them, 'Ye shall henceforth return no more that way;' for if they had returned to me, they would not have needed help from Egypt. And against their will Assyria rules over them, and they serve him and send him a present year by year. And why is all this? Because they refused, etc.; as if he said (they refused) to return to me; for if they had returned to me, foreign kings (literally, 'kings of the nations') would not have ruled over them, but they would have ruled over the nations as they had done in the days of David and Solomon, when they did my will; and so have I assured them, 'Thou shalt reign over many nations, but they shall not reign over thee.'" The root of מאן is cognate with מנע, to hold back, refuse; the *l*ᵉ strengthens the connection of the objective infinitive with the governing verb; the ellipsis of אֹתִי is obvious.

Ver. 6.—**And the sword shall abide on his cities, and shall consume his branches, and devour them.** A more accurate rendering would be, *and the sword shall sweep round in its cities, and destroy its bolts and devour.* Nay, they could not free themselves from invasion and attack. The sword of war would whirl down upon their cities and consume the branches, that is, the villages, or the city bars, or the strong warriors set for defence. Some understand the word so variously interpreted in the sense of "liars," and refer it to the prophets, priests, and politicians who spake falsehood and acted deceitfully. The word חלח is rendered (1) "the sword," as the principal weapon in ancient warfare and the symbol of war's destructive power shall *sweep round in*, circulate, or make the round of the cities of Israel; but (2) others, "whirl down," "light on;" thus both Rashi and Kimchi. Again, בדים is, as already intimated, variously rendered. The most appropriate translation (*a*) is (literally, "poles for carrying the ark," Exod. xxv. 13) "bolts or bars" for securing gates, the root being בדר, to separate. (*b*) Some explain it as a figure for "mighty men;" so Jerome and the Targum, as also Rashi: "It destroys his heroes and consumes them." This is the meaning of the word preferred by Gesenius. (*c*) Ewald understands it in the sense of "fortresses," especially on the frontier, by which a land is shut against or opened to the enemy. (*d*) Aben Ezra and Kimchi take it to mean "branches," *i.e.* villages, and are followed by the Authorized Version. "The explanation of ב," says Kimchi, "is 'branches,' and it is a figure for villages, for he had already mentioned his cities; and villages are related to cities as branches to a tree; in like manner they are called 'daughters,' being related to a city as daughters to a mother." (*e*) The LXX. render it by ἐν ταῖς χερσὶν αὐτοῦ, having read בְּיָדִי, as also the Syriac. **Because of their own counsels.** The cause of all their calamitous invasions, which city gates barred and bolted could not shut out, was their evil counsels in departing from the Lord, as Kimchi correctly explains: "All this comes upon them in consequence of their evil counsel, because they have forsaken my service to serve other gods." Rashi draws attention to the peculiarity of the accentuation—tasha and sellug—to separate it from the preceding word. The Septuagint here again blunders, obviously reading וְאָכְלוּ, and translating, "And shall eat (the fruit) of their evil counsel."

Ver. 7.—**And my people are bent to backsliding from me.** This first clause of the verse is very expressive, every word almost having an emphasis of its own. With all their sinfulness and shortcomings, Israel was still the people of God—*my people;* they were guilty of the sin of backsliding, and of backsliding from God, the best of benefactors and their chief good. Nor was it occasionally and after long intervals of time that they backslided; it was their habit, their tendency. They were suspended on, or rather fastened on, backsliding. **Though they called them to the Most High, none at all would exalt him;** margin, *together they exalted him not.* This second clause signifies either (1) that the prophets called Israel from their idols to the Most High, yet none exalted him (literally, "together they did not or would not exalt him") by abandoning their idols and abstaining from backsliding; or, (2) "though they call him (Israel) upwards, yet not one of them all will lift himself up," that is, they together—one and all—refused or neglected to lift themselves upward towards God or goodness. The word תלואים is equivalent to תָּלְאִים, the same as תלוים, from תלא, equivalent to תָּלָה, so that it signifies, according to Keil, (1) "suspended," "hung up," "hanging fast upon," "impaled on;" Hengstenberg, (2) "swaying about from inconstancy," and "in danger of falling away;" but Pusey seems to combine both in

the original sense of the word, and explains it as follows: "Literally, hung to it! as we say, 'a man's whole being *hangs* on a thing.' A thing *hung to* or *on* another sways to and fro within certain limits, but its relation to that on which it is hung remains immovable. Its power of motion is restrained within these limits. So Israel, so the sinner, however he veer to and fro in the details and circumstances of his sin, is fixed and immovable in his adherence to his sin itself." Though Rashi and the Targum of Jonathan make מְשׁוּבָה as synonymous with תְּשׁוּבָה, thus: "When the prophets teach them to return to me, they are in suspense whether *to return* or not to return; with difficulty do they return to me,"—they are, however, distinguished as turning away from and turning to God—*aversion from* and *conversion to him;* while the suffix יִ is objective, that is, "My people are hung to apostatizing from me." The phrase אֶל־עַל is variously interpreted, by some as (1) "upwards," the prophets being the subject; thus Rashi: "To the matter that is above him (Israel) the prophets call him unitedly; but my people do not lift themselves up nor desire to do it." Corruption was so deeply seated in Israel, that the idle mass gave no response to the voice of the prophets urging them upwards. (2) Aben Ezra and Kimchi both take עַל as an adjective, and synonymous with עֶלְיוֹן, the Most High. Kimchi explains as follows: "He says, My people oscillate between distress and freedom; sometimes distress comes upon them, and again they are in the condition of freedom, and this takes place for their *backsliding* from me, as if he said, because of the backsliding and rebellion which they practise against me. . . . The prophets call them constantly to return to *God most high.*" So Aben Ezra: "The interpretation is, the callers call him to *the Most High*, and they are the prophets of God; but they all in one way raise not the head." (3) Jerome takes it for עֹל, a yoke, and renders accordingly: "But a yoke shall be imposed on them together, that is not taken away." The verb יְרוֹמֵם signifies, (1) according to Gesenius and many others, "to celebrate with praises," or "extol." It is rather (2) "to lift one's self up," "rise upwards;" nor is it necessary with this sense to supply רֹאשׁוֹ, his head, with Grotius, nor yet to understand it written for or in the sense of יְרוֹמֵם, with Joseph Kimchi. Similarly the Syriac: "They call him to God, but they think together, conspire, and do not raise themselves." The word יחד is "all together," and therefore יְחַדְלוּ is "no one." The LXX. translate (3) the second clause as follows: "But God shall be angry with his precious things, and shall not at all exalt him," having probably read וְאֵל־עַל יִקְצְפוּ יְהוָה.

Ver. 8.—**How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel? how shall I make thee as Admah? how shall I set thee as Zeboim?** This verse paves the way for transition to promise. Although the Israelites on account of such conduct had merited complete annihilation, yet Jehovah, for his love and mercy's sake, substitutes grace for justice, and will not destroy them from off the face of the earth. One rendering (1) gives the clause the turn of an exclamation rather than of an interrogation; thus: "How readily and justly could I [or should I, or how thoroughly could I if I punished thy rebellion as I deserved] give thee up to destruction!" We prefer (2) the ordinary rendering, by which it is treated as a question: "How shall I give thee up to the power of the enemy, and not only that, but destroy thee?" Calvin's expositiou seems indeed to favour the former: "Here," he says, "God consults what he is to do with the people; and first, indeed, he shows that it was his purpose to execute vengeance such as the Israelites deserved, even wholly to destroy them; but yet he assumes the character of one deliberating, that none might think that he hastily fell into anger, or that, being soon excited by excessive fury, he devoted to ruin those who had lightly sinned, or were guilty of no great crimes. . . . By these expressions of the text God shows what the Israelites deserved, and that he was now inclined to inflict the punishment of which they were worthy, and yet not without repentance, or at least not without hesitation. He afterwards adds in the next clause, *This I will not do; my heart is within me changed.*" **Mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together.** The עַל, literally, "upon," "with," then, "in," or "within:" "My heart is turned or changed from anger to pity in me." The expression, יְהֹוָה נֶכְמְרוּ, signifies, according to Rashi, "one *warmed*," as in Gen. xliii. 30, where this same word is rendered in the Authorized Version, "yearned:" "His bowels did yearn upon his brother," or "warmed towards." But (2) many modern interpreters understand the word in the sense of "gathering themselves together:" "The feelings of compassion gathered themselves together;" *nichumim*, from Piel נָחַם, a noun of the form הִבּוּר, less definite than *rachămim*, bowels, as the seat of the emotions, "gathered themselves together," or "were excited all at once." The cities of the plain included Admah and Zeboim, Sodom and Gomorrah, all of which, in consequence of their sins, were overthrown

and perished in one common calamity. In Deut. xxix. 23 these cities are all named, though Admah and Zeboim are not mentioned by name in the narrative of the catastrophe contained in Genesis. Though Israel had been as guilty and deserving of wrath as these, God expresses strong reluctance to deliver them over into the hands and power of their enemies, or to give them up to destruction. His heart revolted at the thought, and turned aside from the fierceness of his anger, though so fully deserved, into the direction of mercy; a new turn was given to his feelings in the direction of compassion. All his relentings or repentings together—one and all—yearned or were at once aroused. Repenting on the part of God is an expression suited to human comprehension, implying no change of purpose on the side of God, but only a change of procedure consistent with his purpose of everlasting love. "The Law speaks in the language of the sons of men."

Ver. 9.—**I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger, I will not return to destroy Ephraim.** The promise of this verse is in harmony with the spirit of compassion expressed in the preceding. It is at once the effect and evidence of that feeling of Divine compassion. God would neither execute the burning heat of his wrath, for so the words literally mean, nor destroy Ephraim utterly, or again any more as formerly. The historic event referred to may be the destruction effected by Tiglath-pileser, ally of Ahaz King of Judah against Pekah King of Israel and Rezin King of Syria, when he carried away captive the inhabitants of Gilead, Galilee, and Naphtali, as we read in 2 Kings xv. 29, "In the days of Pekah King of Israel came Tiglath-pileser King of Assyria, and took Ijon, and Abel-beth-maachah, and Janoah, and Kedesh, and Hazor, and Gilead, and Galilee, all the land of Naphtali, and carried them captive to Assyria." But while this is probably the primary allusion, there is an ulterior reference to the future restoration of Israel. **For I am God, and not man; the Holy One in the midst of thee: and I will not enter into the city** (or, *come into burning wrath*, Keil). A reason is here assigned for the exercise of the Divine commiseration just expressed; this reason is God's covenant of everlasting love. He is God, and must be measured by a Divine standard—not man, implacable and revengeful; though his people's provocation had been grievous, God was in the midst of them as their God, long-suffering and steadfast to his covenant of love and purposes of mercy. He would not enter (*a*) into the city as an enemy, and for the purpose of utter destruction, as he had entered into the cities of the plain for their entire and final ruin; or, (*b*) if the alternative rendering be preferred, he would not come into burning wrath. The fiery heat or fierceness of God's wrath tends to destruction, not the amendment of the impenitent. The expression, "I will not return," may also be understood as equivalent to (1) "I will not turn from my pity and promises;" or, "I will not turn away from Israel;" but (2) it suits the context better to translate on the principle of two verbs expressing one idea in a modified sense, *i.e.* "I will not return to destroy," that is, "I will not again destroy Ephraim." Jerome's explanation favours the first, and is, "I will not act according to the fury of my anger, nor change from my clemency to destroy Ephraim; for I do not strike to destroy for ever, but to amend . . . for I am God and not man. Man punishes for this purpose of destroying; God chastises for the purpose of amending." As God, his purpose of mercy was changeless; as the Holy One in Israel, he was infinitely pure and absolutely perfect, "the Father of lights, with whom can be no variation, neither shadow that is cast by turning." The meaning (1) already given of coming into the city is supported by ancient versions, Hebrew expositors, and some of the ablest Christian commentators; yet (2) we prefer that which understands עִיר in the sense of "the heat of wrath," deriving it from עוּר, effervescence, which is that given in Keil's translation. There is (3) an explanation strongly advocated by Bishop Lowth and adopted by Rosenmüller. It is as follows in the words of the bishop: "Jerome is almost singular in his explanation: 'I am not one of those who inhabit cities; who live according to human laws; who think cruelty justice.' Castalio follows Jerome. There is, in fact, in the latter member of the sentence, לֹא אִישׁ, a parallelism and synonym to לֹא אָבֹא in the former. The future אָבֹא has a frequentative power (see Ps. xxii. 3 and 8), 'I am not accustomed to enter a city: I am not an inhabitant of a city.' For there is a beautiful opposition of the different parts: 'I am God, and not man.' This is amplified in the next line, and the antithesis a little varied: 'I am thy God, inhabiting with thee, but in a peculiar and extraordinary manner, not in the manner of men.' Nothing, I think, can be plainer or more elegant than this." The bishop's rendering of the whole verse is—

"I will not do according to the fervour of my wrath,
I will not return [1] to destroy Ephraim:

[1] A beautiful Hebraism to express the

For I am God, and not man;
Holy in the midst of thee, though I inhabit not thy cities."

Ver. 10.—**They shall walk after the Lord: he shall roar like a lion: when he shall roar, then the children shall tremble from the west.** Others translate, "After the Lord shall they go as after a lion that roareth." But this necessitates a double ellipsis of "after which." They would go after the Lord in obedience to his summons. That summons is represented as far-reaching and terrible. Calling his people to return, the Lord roars as a lion, to denote at once the loudness of the call, and the awful majesty of the Lord when thus calling his people to return. "As a lion," says Kimchi, "which roars that the animals whose king he is may assemble to him, so the Israelites shall assemble on hearing the voice of the Lord when he roars." The roaring of the lion may signify his terrible judgments on Israel's enemies, when he calls his people home from the lands of their dispersion.

repetition of a thing; in this place it has peculiar force and pathos.

The result would be a speedy return of his children from the lands of the West—the countries round or beyond the Mediterranean.

Ver. 11.—**They shall tremble as a bird out of Egypt.** The trembling here is eager haste, or precipitate agitation, in which they would hurry home, and that from west and east and south—from west as we infer from ver. 10, from Assyria in the east and Egypt in the south. They would thus hurry as a bird home to its nest in the greenwood; as a dove no longer a silly dove, but flying home to its window. This chapter is regarded by some as ending here. Others include ver. 12.

Ver. 12.—**Ephraim compasseth me about with lies, and the house of Israel with deceit: but Judah yet ruleth with God, and is faithful with the saints.** The first clause sets forth the faithlessness and insincerity of Israel, and that in contrast with Judah. Thus understood, the verse properly belongs to the present chapter. But others understand the last clause differently, and deny the contrast, viz. "Judah is yet defiant towards God and towards the All-Holy One, who is faithful."

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—4.—*A rich display of God's mercy, love, and long-suffering.* One chief design of Scripture is to recommend to sinners the goodness and grace of God "The whole Scripture," says Luther, "aims especially at this, that we doubt not, but certainly hope, trust, and believe that God is gracious, merciful, and long-suffering."

I. GOD'S LOVE IS UNMERITED. This is evident from the condition of Israel when he became the object of this love. That condition was one of childhood, and so of childish ignorance, of childish impotence, of childish folly; for folly is bound up in the heart of a child. Nay, if we compare Ezek. xvi. 4—8, we find the natural state of the nation to have been still worse; that wretched state is there vividly exhibited under the similitude of a poor perishing infant in the most pitiable condition. So with persons individually as well as nationally. When, to use the figure of the prophet, we were polluted, literally trodden down, and perishing in our own blood, he passed by us and looked upon us, and his tone was a tone of love.

II. GOD'S LOVE IS A LOVE OF BENEVOLENCE. He calls Israel his son. The relation of a son to a father is a very near and dear one. The privilege of sonship is very great. David esteemed it no light thing to be a king's son-in-law. How unspeakably greater it is to be a son of God by adoption as well as by creation, and thus to be an heir of glory! "Is Ephraim my dear son?" God inquires; and again he says, "I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him." But though the privilege of being a son of God is great and the dignity high, it does not necessarily exempt us from sore trials and severe sufferings; it rather secures for us such paternal chastening as for the present is not joyous but grievous, nevertheless afterward productive of the peaceable fruits of righteousness. Though Israel was God's son, yet Israel was for years in Egypt.

III. GOD'S LOVE IS A LOVE OF BENEFICENCE. God not only wishes well but does well to every son whom he receiveth into his family. Though Israel had been long in Egypt, he was not allowed to remain there. God in due time called his son out of Egypt. It was a night much to be remembered when that call reached them. God speaks the word and it is done; his call is effectual for the purpose intended. However great our distress, it only requires a word from God to relieve us; and that word is as

easily spoken as the call which one man addresses to another when he would invite him from some distance to his side. Strange indeed it may appear to us that God's people Israel had been so long left in Egypt, and equally strange it is that the dearly beloved of his soul are often delivered into the hand of their enemies. "It is a strange sight indeed to see a child of God, an heir of heaven, a co-heir with Jesus Christ, one dearer to God than heaven and earth, subject to the power, the caprice, and lusts of wicked, base, ungodly men; yea, it may be, for a time slaves to Satan."

IV. GOD'S LOVE IS FREQUENTLY UNREQUITED LOVE. As God by his messengers called Israel, Israel turned his back upon those messengers and a deaf ear to their call. Nay, like disobedient children or stubborn servants, they actually turned in the opposite direction. As God's mercy was manifested in delivering them out of the furnace of affliction and then calling to obedience; so their stubbornness appeared in, and their sin was aggravated by, their refusal to hearken to that call, and still more by their running in a direction the right opposed. Thus we read in Jeremiah, "They turned unto me the back, and not the face."

V. GOD'S LOVE IS TENDER LOVE. 1. It combines the tenderness of a parent with the carefulness of a nurse. When the way was dark and obscure, he guided them as by the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night. Thus he pointed out the way and showed them the direction in which they were to walk. Thus he taught them to go. When obstacles lay in the way and difficulties blocked it, he lifted them up by the arms and carried them over all hindrances. Similarly we read in Deuteronomy, "In the wilderness, where thou hast seen how that the Lord thy God bare thee, as a man doth bear his son, in all the way that ye went." Now he took them by the hand and led them again; he lifted them up and carried them in the arms, ever conducting them in the right way. 2. So with us all more or less the path in life is untrodden; frequently we are at a standstill; often we are sorely perplexed to know which way we should go; often and often we go astray and wander from the way. Again, there are stumbling-blocks in the way, and we stumble and fall over them. What need we have to depend on Divine love all the way, ever praying, "Lord, take us by the hand and lead us; Lord, hold up our goings in thy paths that our footsteps slip not; Lord, keep our feet from falling, our eyes from tears, and our soul from death"! 3. The way may be *strait*, as when Israel was hemmed in between mountains, the sea before them and Pharaoh's host behind; or it may be *difficult*, and so steep as well as strait; or it may be *dangerous*, for in the way through the wilderness there is the place of lions' dens and the mountains of the leopards; but, notwithstanding all such drawbacks, we have reason to bless God for leading us forth by the right way. And when we are in greatest straits and the way is hardest, we have only to cry to God in our trouble; and as he led Israel of old, so will he lead us also forth by the right way. "They shall come with weeping, and with supplications will I lead them: I will cause them to walk by the rivers of waters in a straight way, wherein they shall not stumble: for I am a Father to Israel, and Ephraim is my firstborn." Thus God not only bears his people, but bears with his people; and commissions his ministering servants to do likewise, as he commanded Moses, "Carry them in thy bosom, as a nursing father beareth the sucking child."

VI. GOD'S LOVE IS RESTORATIVE. In spite of all God's love and care, we run into the way of danger through our own frowardness or folly. We stumble and fall, getting many a sore bruise and severe knock. Yet God in his love restores us; he heals us. As the child, when hurt, runs to the parent for sympathy—to the mother to kiss the wound and make it well; so, when unhappily we have strayed from the way, and got bruised and hurt and painfully wounded through our own wilfulness, we are encouraged to return to God, and he will heal us. God might, indeed, if he dealt with us in strict justice, leave us to ourselves and to the sad consequences of our own sinful waywardness, and refuse to lead us any more. Not so, however. As he says by the Prophet Isaiah, "I have seen his ways, and will heal him: I will lead him also, and restore comforts unto him, and to his mourners."

VII. GOD'S LOVE IS PERSUASIVE MORALLY, NOT MECHANICALLY. He deals with us as a rational being, treating us neither as machines nor yet as "dumb driven cattle." The lower animal must sometimes be drawn, or forced with a degree of violence; but God does not draw men in this way. In drawing them he uses neither hard cords nor

iron bands. He draws us by *rational* means, addressing himself to our intelligence and appealing to our affections. Thus Paul says, "I speak as to wise men; judge ye what I say." He draws us by persuasion and argument. He draws us with *gentleness*, and not by force. He employs the mildest means and the tenderest motives. He draws us in a manner *suitable* to the dignity of our nature. Made in the image of God, originally created in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness, and still possessed of great susceptibilities, strong affections, warm emotions, and tender sensibilities, we are treated by God with a considerate regard to the high qualities with which he has endowed us. Accordingly he draws us with human cords and Divine love. The instrumentality employed is human, and the love that employs it is Divine.

VIII. GOD'S LOVE IS ALLEVIATING LOVE. As the humane husbandman lightens the labour of the weary beasts, and lifts up the yoke on its jaws in order to ease it and give it some respite, so God lifts up the weight that presses on the back of poor humanity. He sustains us under our burdens, or even shares with us the load. Sometimes he removes the yoke entirely; oftener he gives respite and refreshment; always he sanctifies the load of labour, or care, or trouble, or suffering, or sorrow of whatever kind which his own hand has laid on the back of his people, and never does he lay more on them than he enables them by his grace and strength to bear.

IX. GOD'S LOVE IS SATISFYING LOVE. The figure is continued in the words, "And laid meat unto them." The same kind hand that lifts up the yoke, by way of respite and relief, supplies provender for the purpose of refreshment. God laid meat before his people in the desert, when he rained down manna and sent them quails. The same bountiful Benefactor spreads a table before us daily, and makes our cup run over. Better still, and surer token of his love, is the abundant spiritual provision he has made for the souls of his people, in giving them the bread that cometh down from heaven. "We are satisfied with the goodness of his house, even of his holy temple."

Vers. 5—12.—*The ingratitude of Israel and its punishment.* Both are remarkably manifested in these verses. After all God's loving-kindness they refuse to turn to God.

I. THEIR PERVERSENESS. History repeats itself. This is true ecclesiastically as well as civilly, under the Jewish economy as in the Christian dispensation. Once before, at an early period in Hebrew history and on a remarkable occasion, the Israelites, discouraged by the teachings of the spies, debased by previous servitude, deficient in moral courage, and, worst of all, distrustful of Divine providence, refused to march into Canaan. They murmured against God and against Moses. "Back to Egypt," was their cry. And back they went, not to Egypt, but to wander in the wilderness for eight and thirty years longer, as a justly merited punishment for their unthankfulness and rebellion against God. Similarly on the occasion to which the prophet here refers. They had grievously sinned against God, yet they fancied they would find refuge in Egypt; they had rebelled and resisted all the means employed to bring them back to God, but they would not return to him. And now they cry, like their forefathers, "To Egypt," as if shelter and safety could be obtained there. But God frustrates their silly, sinful purpose. A worse than the bondage of Egypt awaits them; they were destined to go into captivity to Assyria. 2. So with stubborn and stout-hearted sinners still. They will go anywhere, or resort to any expedient, even returning to Egypt, rather than return to God. For a time the prodigal would rather be a swineherd, and share the husks on which the swine fed, than return to the abundance of his father's house. "Some stubborn children care not what miseries they suffer rather than return and humble themselves to their parents;" so some stubborn spirits seem disposed, in their folly and desperation, to return to their former state of bondage and misery rather than repent and submit themselves to God. Let such beware lest, owing to their impatience and impenitence, a worse thing befall them.

II. THEIR PUNISHMENT. The three chief scourges by which God chastises a disobedient people are famine, pestilence, and the sword. 1. Of the three, the sword is, perhaps, the worst. At all events David thought it so. When he was called to make choice between seven years of famine, three days' pestilence, and three months' flight before the pursuing sword of the enemy, he preferred falling into the hand of God rather than into the hand of man, choosing the pestilence rather than the sword. 2. And yet the sword also has its commission from God, as we learn from the exclamation of the

prophet, "O thou sword of the Lord, how long will it be ere thou be quiet? put up thyself into thy scabbard, rest, and be still." But it is added, in answer to this inquiry, "How can it be quiet, seeing the Lord hath given it a charge against Ashkelon, and against the sea-shore? there hath he appointed it." 3. The Prophet Hosea pictures the severity of the stroke either by the wide area which the sword swept over, or the length of time it continued to distress them; also by the fact that the cities which were looked upon as the strong fortresses, at all events the strength of the land, were the main objects of attack. Elsewhere in the fields or open country the ravages of war are not quite so dreadful as in the city with its crowded population, where human beings, densely massed together, are literally mowed down. Nor yet were the villages spared, nor did their bars shut out the enemy. 4. The duty of prayer is incumbent in time of war. This lesson is inculcated by the example of the psalmist. After speaking in the fifty-fifth psalm of having seen violence and strife in the city, while men hurried to and fro upon the walls, with other sad accompaniments of troublous times—mischief, sorrow, wickedness, deceit, and guile—he announces the course he pursued: "As for me, I will call upon God; and the Lord shall save me. Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray, and call aloud: and he shall hear my voice;" while peace and deliverance were the happy outcome of his prayers: "He hath delivered my soul in peace from the battle that was against me: for there were many with me."

III. THEIR PRONENESS TO BACKSLIDE. Proneness to backsliding was not peculiar to the people or the period of Hosea's prophesyings. The unregenerate heart is invariably the source of backsliding. When a religious profession is influenced only by external motive and not by internal power, men may be expected to backslide. In the days of our Lord it was sorrowfully said of some that they went back and walked no more with Jesus. In seasons of religious revival, of many who make a profession of religion, that profession, in the case of some, proceeds from an outward impulse, certain convictions, or even the power of sympathy, and soon as the time of excitement is over they backslide; their convictions did not ripen into conversion; the root of the matter was never in them. The same is occasionally found in the case of some young communicants. At the first communion, the boy in the freshness of his youth, the girl in the purity of her childhood, feel much ardour of affection and manifest much fervour of devotion; but what from unfavourable surroundings, or evil communications, or little sins unchecked, the love of their espousals grows cold, and backsliding ensues. Even in the case of persons truly converted, a degree of coldness creeps over them; they seem to grow weary of the ways of God; they become apathetic, and backslide for a time. Beware of grieving the Holy Spirit; beware of resisting the strivings and stirrings of conscience; beware of putting the hand to the plough and then turning back or turning aside to folly; in a word, beware of backsliding. Be warned by that solemn Scripture, "If any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him."

IV. THE PERPLEXITY CAUSED TO THE ALMIGHTY. With reverence be it spoken, the conduct of Israel seems to have puzzled the all-merciful One himself. Judgment was due, but love holds it in check; the vials of wrath were ready to be poured out, but the voice of mercy intercedes; punishment was well deserved, but the hand of pity pushes it aside. They had been called to the Most High, to acquaint themselves with him, to acknowledge him, and to accept him as their God and King; but they stopped their ears against those calls. They refused to lift themselves up from their low grovelling course of conduct, and they refused to exalt the Most High, or to bless that glorious Name which is above all blessing and praise. We cannot exalt God, or make him more glorious than he is, "yet then God accounts himself to be exalted when he is known and acknowledged as the high, supreme, first Being; when we fear him as God; when we humble ourselves before him as before a God; when we are sensible of the infinite distance there is between him and us; when we are willing to consecrate what we are, or have, or can do, to the furtherance of his praise; when his will is made the rule of all our ways, and especially of his worship; when we make him the last end of all; when it is the great care of our souls and work of our lives to do what possibly we can, that he may be magnified and lifted up in the world; and when we account the least sin a greater evil than can be recompensed by all the good which heaven and earth can afford us;—when we do thus, God accounts himself exalted by us." But Israel had acted in opposition to all this; hence the controversy, the perplexity, the

puzzling questions which follow. Four questions are followed by four answers. (1) "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim?" to which the answer is, "Mine heart is turned within me." (2) "How shall I deliver thee, Israel?" to which the reply is, "My repentings are kindled together." (3) "How shall I make thee as Admah?" to which the response is, "I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger." (4) "How shall I set thee as Zeboim?" to which the rejoinder is, "I will not return to destroy Ephraim."

V. THE PURPOSE DENOUNCED. He will not execute the fierceness of his wrath, nor return to destroy Ephraim, nor enter into the city. Here we note a remarkable contrast in God's dealings with us. He compares himself to a man in the exercise of mercy. It is different in regard to the execution of his wrath; then he is God and not man. In expressing his mercy he speaks after the manner of men; in the yearnings of his bowels, in the extent of his mercifulness, he expresses himself as man, though more, infinitely more, than man. But when he speaks of wrath, he assures us he is God and not man. A man of war may, with the soldiers under him, come upon a town or city, capture it, and plunder it; months or years elapse, and he returns to the same place again, lays siege to it, and sacks it, leaving it in a much worse state than at first. But God will not so return to destroy. He is God, not man. Free from all the weakness of human passion, from all vindictiveness of feeling, from all fickleness of purpose, from all the littlenesses of the human spirit, he does not revoke his purposes nor recall his promises of mercy, neither does he retain his anger for ever, nor renew the outpouring of the vials of his wrath. 2. He is, besides, the Holy One: even in his vindicatory justice he is holy; no unholy element of any kind mingles with his wrath. Holiness is at once an attribute of his nature and a characteristic of all his administrations. Oh, to be holy as God is holy, pure as Christ is pure, perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect! His presence is with his people, according to his promise, "I will walk among you, and will be your God, and ye shall be my people;" nay, more, "I will dwell in them, and walk in them." 4. When, in the close of ver. 9, God says, "I will not enter into the city," it is "to be taken in reference to the manner of God's proceedings in the destruction of Sodom; after he had done conferring with Abraham, he entered into the city, and destroyed it by fire and brimstone. God many times stands at the gates of a city, ready to enter in and destroy it, but humiliation in prayer and reformation keep him out. . . . Oh! let not our sins cause a merciful God to go out, and a provoked God to enter in."

VI. THE PREDICTION UTTERED. 1. The walking after the Lord here predicted is to follow the Lord whithersoever he leadeth. The Saviour is given for a Leader to his people; he is represented as the Captain of salvation, and just as a good soldier follows his superior officer at the head of the storming party or in the perilous breach, in the onward march and in the unwelcome but necessary retreat; so the Christian soldier, loyal to his Lord, follows him fully, faithfully, fearlessly, through evil report as well as good report, closely, carefully, and constantly. "These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth." The path may appear perilous, the way may be difficult; we may have to turn our backs on our dearest delights, on our sweetest comforts; we may be ignorant of the immediate goal to which the Lord leads us, or the use he intends to make of us, or what he means to do with us; yet none of these things shall deter us. If we only make sure that the Lord is leading us, we run no risk in following him; and though he lead us by a way that we know not, we are sure it is the right way, the safe way, and in every respect the best way in the end. The opposite course is that pursued by those who walk, not after the Lord, but after the lusts of their own hearts, or their own inclinations, or their own inventions, or their own counsels, or the example of wicked men. 2. The prediction includes a hasty return in obedience to the Divine summons. God's calling people to return to him is not inaptly compared to the roaring of a lion. By judgments on the adversary, or by a solemn awe on the spirits of his people, or by terrible things in righteousness, God summons men to submission and obedience. 3. When God speaks the word in whatever way, his children hurry home out of many lands from the far West, the distant East, and the remote South. Thus it is in seasons of revival, thus it shall be more literally in the millennial period, and in the time of the restitution of all things When the Spirit shall be poured out from on high in Pentecostal power and in

Pentecostal plenty, men shall, as at the first Pentecost, when they were assembled from many lands, join themselves to God's people. They shall not only come hastily, but swiftly. Their hasty arrival is compared to a flight resembling that of the dove, which flies swiftly, as implied in the psalmist's words, "Oh that I had wings like a dove!" They shall, moreover, arrive in great numbers, as doves fly in flocks, as implied in the words of the prophet, "Who are these that fly as a cloud, and as doves to their windows?" 4. A place of rest is promised them. When men walk after the Lord and unite themselves lovingly with his people, they are assured both of rest and refreshment. Whether this may have had a literal fulfilment, in the return of members of the ten tribes from Assyria with their brethren of Judah from Babylon, and others of the same people from Egypt, we do not know for certain; but this much is sure, that such a return of God's people to him shall actually take place in the day of the restitution of all things; while its figurative application repeats itself in every real revival of religion, when sinners, truly penitent like the prodigal, shall return from many a far country of sin and shame and sorrow to their Father's house and home, renouncing the swineherd's husks for that rich spiritual abundance of bread enough and to spare.

VII. THE PRETENCES OF ISRAEL. The people of Israel, or the ten tribes with Ephraim at their head, that is, rulers and ruled, are here charged with lies and deceit. Their professions of worship were nothing better than lying pretences; their political schemes were little less than deceitful manœuvres. Their piety and their policy were alike hollow and futile. With such false worship and carefully devised strokes of policy, which were but deceitful tricks, they compassed God as though they could deceive the omniscient One himself. The following illustration from an old divine seems apt, though homely: "I am, in respect of their sins, as a man beset round, who would have egress, but when he goes one way there he is stopped, and another way he is stopped there too. God compares himself to such a man, as if, in going on in the ways of mercy, he is there stopped by some course of sin, and entering on another part he is there stopped again." How many there are whose acts of worship are so many solemn lies! Their professions of piety are mere pretences; their prayers may be eloquent and comprehensive, but they do not proceed from the heart; their presence in the sanctuary is only bodily, their thoughts being away about their worldly business, or roaming over mountains of vanity. Many there are who are ready to acknowledge God, his greatness and glory, his glorious majesty, his almighty power, his infinite wisdom, and his sovereign disposal of all human affairs; but they do not realize the august nature of the Divine attributes, nor the wondrous workings of his providence. Many, too, confess their great sinfulness, and profess deep humiliation on account of it; but their confession is not accompanied by contrition, nor is their professed humiliation either provable by facts or practical in its effects. 3. Strange, passing strange, it is that men thus impose on themselves, or attempt to deceive God! "They did flatter him with their mouth," says the psalmist, "and they lied unto him with their tongues." And if this is the conduct men venture on in relation to God, how much more likely they are to compass their fellow-men with lies, or overreach them by deceit! If they carry their deceit into the sacred exercises of religion and the solemn services of the sanctuary, how much more may we expect to find fraudulent transactions and deceitful dealings in their intercourse with fellow-men!

VIII. THE PRE-EMINENCE OF JUDAH. While Israel or the ten tribes were besetting God with their lies and provoking him by deceit, their worship being idolatrous and their service false, Judah for so far continued in the true worship. With not a few drawbacks and many defects, they had hitherto adhered to the ordinances he had prescribed, the place he had chosen, and the mode and ministers of religion he had appointed. Such is the drift of the verse according to the Authorized Version. Assuming this to be the right rendering, we find Israel left without excuse. They could not plead the example of Judah. If an evil example had been set them by Judah, it might have in some sort extenuated, but could not have excused, sin in Israel. The absence of such example was no small aggravation of their guilt. 3. It redounded to the honour of Judah that in the day of Israel's defection they persevered in the way of truth, and maintained the true worship of Jehovah. It is recorded to the credit of those Sardians who remained faithful in a corrupt place and a degenerate age, "Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy." 4. When we serve God we reign with

him. It is righteousness that exalts a nation and elevates an individual. To serve God is our highest glory, and to enjoy him our greatest happiness. To serve God is the most honourable service; hence our blessed Lord has made us kings as well as priests unto God. Luther, commenting on this verse, speaks of certain errorists "not venturing to embrace the true doctrine for fear their rule should be lost. So is it with many people; they are afraid of the loss of their rule if they should entertain the true ways of God's worship; they think that the true ways of God's worship cannot consist with their rule and power, and therefore they had rather retain them and let the true worship of God go."

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Ver. 1.—*Called out of Egypt.* These words refer primarily, of course, to the historical event of the Exodus. But they are also prophetic words, and as such they have been already verified, and still await further verification. When a stone is thrown into a pond, a series of ever-enlarging concentric rings is formed, which extend perhaps to the banks of the water; so in like manner, although the first fulfilment of a prophecy may be near at hand, the prediction may also receive various further and wider fulfilments, until at last it is completely verified, on the largest scale, at the end of the world. The words before us have several applications. They apply—

I. To THE JEWISH NATION. God elected Israel as his "firstborn son" among the nations (Exod. iv. 22), thus constituting the Hebrews the aristocracy of the human race. He set his love upon them when they were a community of slaves. He heard their groaning by reason of their bondage. When the people were lying like toads under the harrows of their taskmasters, he interposed to save them. He raised up Moses to be their emancipator. Jehovah wrought on their behalf the ten plagues of Egypt. He led them, by a mighty miracle, through the bed of the Red Sea, while Pharaoh and his army perished in the waters. Jehovah protected and supported and guided Israel in the wilderness. He rained bread from heaven upon them, and brought them streams also out of the rock. He kept their clothes and shoes from wearing out. He led them by the cloudy pillar. He delivered them from their enemies. He entered into covenant with them, taught them his Word and will, and brought them at last into a goodly inheritance in Canaan. No other nation ever received such marks of honour. To Israel alone "pertained the adoption" (Rom. ix. 4).

II. To JESUS CHRIST. Matthew says that this word of Hosea was fulfilled when the Child Jesus was brought up out of Egypt (Matt. ii. 15). If Israel was "God's son, even his firstborn," Jesus is "the only-begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father." The history of Israel typified and foreshadowed his career. He is the true seed of Abraham, the true Representative of the ancient Hebrew nation. "All the magnificence of prophecy, limited to Israel, would be bombast; Christ alone fulfils the idea which Israel stood for" (F. W. Robertson). The paternal love of God was exhibited more richly in the protection and deliverance of his holy Child Jesus than even in the great blessing of the Exodus. It was to avoid the danger of destruction that the infant Saviour and his mother were taken down into Egypt. The Lord of heaven and earth, just now a wailing infant, must hide for a little season under the shadow of the Pyramids. By-and-by he shall be "called out of Egypt" to return to the Holy Land, and to become at length what Israel ought to have been—the great Witness for God, and Teacher of his will to all the nations of the world.

III. To THE CHRISTIAN. Believers are all the sons of God by faith in Jesus Christ. And the redemption from Egypt was a type of deliverance through him from sin and death. Just as to the Hebrews in the time of Hosea "Egypt" stood for Assyria, or Babylon, or any land which they were to associate with a state of bondage (ch. viii. 13; ix. 3, 6), so now to us Gentiles "Egypt" is the symbol of our unregenerate state, and the Egyptian bondage is a type of the bondage of sin. All men are by nature the slaves of sin, and Satan is a much harder taskmaster than the Egyptian overseers. The natural man labours helplessly under the burden of evil. But God calls his people "out of Egypt" with an effectual and a holy calling. He redeems the believer from the bondage of guilt (Gal. iii. 13), from subjection to the Law (Gal. iv. 5), and from

the slavery of sin (Titus ii. 14). The very word "Redeemer," which is so dear to the renewed heart, was first consecrated as a sacred name at the time when God "called his Son out of Egypt." To the Christian the song of Moses is also the song of the Lamb (Rev. xv. 3); and the preface to the ten commandments (Exod. xx. 2) expresses the most forcible and yet tender of all inducements to lead a holy life.

IV. To THE HOLY CATHOLIC CHURCH. The Church of Christ is the true Israel, God's adopted firstborn son. And this world, in which the Church presently sojourns, may be compared to the land of bondage. It is "this present evil world;" and God's people look to be delivered from it, just as ancient Israel expected deliverance from Egypt. The time is fast coming when the Lord Jesus shall finally redeem his people from all evil. Often in the New Testament the word "redemption" is used to denote the consummation of the Church's hope. Jesus told his disciples that the occurrence of the signs of his second advent would announce to them that their "redemption was drawing nigh" (Luke xxi. 28). The whole Church is waiting for "the redemption of our body" (Rom. viii. 23). Here, though believers "serve the Law of God with their mind," they yet groan constantly under the burden of indwelling sin. But the hope of Israel—"that blessed hope"—is that Jehovah shall "call him out of Egypt." The Lord Jesus shall one day translate his Church to heaven—the land of perfect spiritual freedom and eternal joy. There bondage shall in every sense be gone for ever. So long as Israel is in this world, he is "a child;" but in glory he shall become a man, and "put away childish things." God loves him now as a child; and his adopting grace is the pledge that the ransomed Church shall one day stand by the glassy sea, and sing the song of Moses and the Lamb.—C. J.

Vers. 1—4.—*Crowned with tender mercies.* This is an extremely beautiful passage. It recalls, in a few most touching expressions, Jehovah's love and condescension and tenderness towards his ancient people. But, alas! the very record of God's kindness becomes the means of throwing into deeper relief the blackness of Israel's sin.

I. GOD'S KINDLY DEALINGS WITH ISRAEL. These had been manifested continually—in the infancy of the nation, during its childhood, and throughout its youth and manhood. Jehovah had been to the Hebrew people: 1. *A loving Father.* (Ver. 1.) He loved them, and chose them to be his own inheritance. He spoke of Israel as his "son," even during the bondage in Egypt (Exod. iv. 22). He showed his fatherly love by accomplishing for his people the grand deliverance of the Exodus. And the Lord is the same still to the spiritual Israel. Those blessings which were shadowed forth in the theocratic adoption belong now to Christians. We are "predestinated unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself" (Eph. i. 5). The believer receives the nature of God. He bears his Name. He enjoys free access to him. He obtains needed protection and provision. He is subjected to suitable training and discipline. And he has an eternal inheritance in reversion (1 John iii. 1, 2). 2. *A careful Nurse.* (Ver. 3.) Jehovah had himself tended his son Israel during the forty years of childhood in the Arabian desert. He "bare him" (Deut. i. 31), "took him by the hand" (Jer. xxxi. 32), and tenderly supported him. As a nursing father, he had used soft and kindly leading-strings. He knew his people's needs. He was "touched with the feeling of their infirmities." He took upon himself the entire charge of the nation. For their schooling he gave them object-lessons—setting up the tabernacle and its ritual as a spiritual "kindergarten." When they wandered from him he brought them back, and patiently "healed them" from those distresses which their apostasy had entailed. And God is the same careful Nurse to his spiritual children. He bears the believer, and bears with him. The Holy Spirit teaches the child of God "to go," and "leads him in the way everlasting." He raises him when he falls, heals his bruises, and is "a very present Help in trouble." The path of duty may lead the believer into slippery places, but "underneath are the everlasting arms" (Deut. xxxiii. 27). 3. *A kindly Monitor.* (Ver. 4, first part.) If ver. 1 refers to the Exodus, and ver. 3 to the forty years in the wilderness, ver. 4 may be applied to Jehovah's dealings with Israel throughout his entire history as a nation. All along the Lord treated his people, not as prisoners or slaves, but as sons. He "drew them with cords of a man;" *i.e.* his methods of government were humane, and had their seat in reason. He drew them "with bands of love;" *i.e.* his arguments or influences were tender and persuasive. The mercies showered

upon Israel were countless. The Divine forbearance with the people was wonderful. One special mark of God's favour was his raising up the prophets, one after another, to "call them" (ver. 2) from their idols, and to "draw them" back to himself. And does not the Lord deal just thus with men still? His methods of touching the heart are humane and affectionate. We see the "gentleness" of God in his kindly providence, in his wonderful redemption, and in the means and motives towards holiness which he employs. He calls to the sinner, "Come now, and let us reason together" (Isa. i. 18). He tells the believer that a consecrated life is "your reasonable service" (Rom. xii. 1). 4. *A considerate Master.* (Ver. 4, second part.) The Lord did not act towards Israel as brute beasts are often treated by ungentle drivers. A kind farmer treats his ox humanely, both when it is treading out the corn and when it is feeding in the stall; he withdraws the muzzle, or looseus the yoke-strap, that the animal may eat with comfort. Now, God had always acted so towards the Hebrews. In the innumerable blessings which he sent them, in the means of grace which he maintained amongst them, and in the immunities which they enjoyed as his chosen people, God said to them, "My yoke is easy." So, in like manner, does the Lord still deal with his redeemed people. He "removes their shoulder from the burden," taking off the yoke of guilt, the yoke of sin, the yoke of the Law, the yoke of unrest, the yoke of fear. And he "lays meat unto them"—"the hidden manna" of his grace, and "the fatness of his house."

II. ISRAEL'S VILE TREATMENT OF GOD. (Vers. 2, 3.) The nation had proved altogether unworthy of its sunny and glorious past. The people had been: 1. *Ungrateful.* They persistently forgot both the fact of their redemption and the continued presence of their Redeemer. The prophets "called them," but in vain. God "healed them," but they ascribed their deliverances to others. 2. *Unfaithful.* Israel requited the tender love of Jehovah with base apostasy. They opposed and rejected him. "They turned their back unto him, and not their face" (Jer. ii. 27). They shamefully denied him by their sacrifices to Baal. 3. *Obstinate in their wickedness.* The career of the northern kingdom especially had been one of universal and continuous desertion. People and priests, princes and kings, had alike conspired to return hatred for Jehovah's love. And now, at length, Ephraim's hour of gracious opportunity seemed past. Only by a miracle could the avalanche of judgment be arrested. What a lesson to ourselves is unfolded in this representation of the outrageous guilt of Israel! We must beware of trusting in our national advantages or our spiritual privileges. How often have we, too, acted ungratefully and unfaithfully! God's wonderful tender mercies are a sore aggravation of our sin.

> "Lord, with what care hast thou begirt us round!
> Parents first season us. Then schoolmasters
> Deliver us to laws. They send us bound
> To rules of reason. Holy messengers;
> Pulpits and Sundays; sorrow dogging sin;
> Afflictions sorted; anguish of all sizes;
> Fine nets and stratagems to catch us in!
> Bibles laid open; millions of surprises;
> Blessings beforehand; ties of gratefulness;
> The sounds of glory ringing in our ears;
> Without, our shame; within, our consciences;
> Angels and grace; eternal hopes and fears!
> Yet all these fences, and their whole array,
> One cunning bosom sin blows quite away."
>
> (George Herbert.)

C. J.

Ver. 4.—*The magnet of love.* "I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love." These words refer, in the first instance, to ancient Israel, and remind us how kindly and tender had been the Lord's dealings with them. In applying the text to ourselves, we shall consider it under two aspects. We have here—

I. A REPRESENTATION OF GOD'S WAY OF DEALING WITH MEN. The supreme power over the world of mankind is not the relentless power of natural law. The forces of nature dominate the physical universe; but man is a moral being, and is conscious of

moral freedom. The force which draws his mind is reason—"cords of a man;" and the power which influences his heart is tenderness—"bands of love." God uses these forces: 1. *In his common providence.* His love for his creatures is analogous to parental affection: it is as human, and more tender than that of a mother for her child. His mercy is long-suffering and indestructible. It leads him "daily to load us with benefits." And even the cords of affliction with which he sometimes binds us are "bands of love" cast around us to draw us to himself. 2. *In the plan of redemption.* "The Word was made flesh" in order to draw men by cords of human sympathy. What blessing the Incarnation has brought to the reason of man! In looking upon the Lord Jesus Christ we see truth in the concrete. He is himself "the Truth," "the Word of Life."

"Though truths in manhood darkly join
Deep-seated in our mystic frame,
We yield all blessing to the Name
Of him that made them current coin;

"For Wisdom dealt with mortal powers,
Where truth in closest words shall fail,
When truth embodied in a tale
Shall enter in at lowly doors.

"And so the Word had breath, and wrought
With human hands the creed of creeds
In loveliness of perfect deeds,
More strong than all poetic thought."

(Tennyson.)

What blessing, also, the Incarnation has brought to the heart of man! The Lord Jesus is bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh. He was the "Son of Mary," and he "shed the human tear." So he is qualified, as our merciful and sympathizing High Priest, to enter into all our feelings, and thereby to bind us to himself and to God. 3. *In the invitations of the gospel.* The Lord, in these, appeals to us as rational and moral beings. The invitation, *e.g.*, "Come now, and let us reason together" (Isa. i. 18), suggests that the most rational of all the actions of the human mind is to accept of Christ as the Saviour; and that a life of faith in him is the only reasonable and manly and truly successful life. The gospel voices, moreover, are "bands of love." The prodigal son, so soon as he returned to reason, was led by the remembrance of his father's love to return home (Luke xv. 17, 18). And, similarly, the love of God is the loadstar which leads poor sinners to himself. 4. *In the appointed means of grace.* Take: (1) The *Word* of God. The Bible is a Divine Book, but it is also intensely human. The sacred writers display everywhere a profound knowledge of human nature. The spirit of the Book is humane and tender; it draws "with bands of love." In the universities of Scotland, the Professor of Latin is usually called "Professor of Humanity," from the supposed beneficial effects of the study of Roman literature; but surely the supreme humanizing influence in letters is the Word of God. (2) The *sacraments.* As "signs," baptism and the Lord's Supper are "cords of a man." They appeal to the physical senses as well as to mind and heart. They are like pictures or illustrative diagrams of the great truths of redemption. The sacraments are also "seals;" and, as such, "bands of love." Each of them is, as it were, a keepsake, or love-token, given by the Redeemer to his Church. Once more, take (3) *Prayer.* Prayer is the converse with God of his human children. It has for its key-note the child's cry, "Our Father." It is the voice of childlike trust in the humanity, the tenderness, the father-pity of our Maker and Redeemer. 5. *As the motive-powers to holiness of life.* Our text expresses the master consideration which impels the believer to a career of Christian consecration. The Apostle Paul urges the same in Rom. xii. 1: "Your reasonable service," *i.e.* "cords of a man;" "by the mercies of God," *i.e.* "bands of love." The meaning is that in a life of devotion to God all the rational faculties find their chief end, and that to such a life "the love of Christ constraineth us."

II. A LESSON OF CONDUCT FOR OURSELVES. The words before us reveal the secret of influence. They point out the magnet with which we are to attract our fellow-men in all the relations of life. God Almighty draws with the loadstone of love; and in this we are to be "imitators of God, as dear children" (Eph. v. 1). Here is a lesson to: 1.

Parents. The family bond is love. We must throw "cords of a man" around our children, if we would train them to live to the Redeemer. Our training must be humane, and in harmony with the moral nature of its subjects. A father ought, as soon as possible, to enlist his child's reason on the side of obedience. When our children do well, let us praise them without stint. When they do wrong, and we must show displeasure, let us welcome the earliest tokens of penitence, and be very ready to forgive. Next to Divine grace itself, the bands of paternal love are the strongest that can attract the child-heart. 2. *Teachers.* Humaneness of spirit is the mainspring of an educator's influence. The most effectual stimulus to learn is not that which is supplied by the rod, but that which is given by the "cords of a man." The secret of Dr. Arnold's influence at Rugby was his intense human sympathy, added to the regal supremacy of his spiritual character. In sabbath school work, especially, we must use these "cords" and "bands;" we must come to our classes "in love, and in the spirit of meekness." 3. *Pastors.* The preacher is to be himself a man, every inch of him. His influence in the community ought to be a masculine influence. He is to be "a preacher of righteousness." And he must take care to use "bands of love." His life-work is to "win" souls; and there is no way of winning without love (1 Cor. xiii. 1). Like the high priest, the pastor ought to be one "who can bear gently with the ignorant and erring" (Heb. v. 2). No Christian teacher has ever been more successful than the Apostle Paul; and Paul drew "with cords of a man" (1 Cor. ix. 19—23), and "with bands of love" (1 Thess. ii. 7, 8). 4. *Employers.* This relationship, alike in business and domestic life, should be characterized by kindness. Masters ought to "forbear threatening" (Eph. vi. 9), and extend sympathy and confidence to their workmen. The responsibilities of an employer do not end with the punctual payment of wages. He is not to think of his workmen merely as "hands," *i.e.* as machines by using which he hopes to make money; but rather as his own flesh and blood, in whose welfare he ought to take a warm interest. And so, also, in the sphere of domestic service. Mistresses ought to treat their servants as part of the family, and see to their comfort as they see to their own. Happiness will enter our households through the door which has written over it these words: "I drew them with bands of love." 5. *Neighbours*, in their mutual intercourse. We who profess to be Christ's people ought to show the grace that dwells in us by striving to be eminent in courtesy and gentleness. We ought to be so even to the ungodly and profane, and to those who treat us as enemies. "A soft answer turneth away wrath." And if love is the fire that will melt an enemy, is it not also the tie which binds believers together into a goodly fellowship? A strong and healthy Church is one the members of which "increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men" (1 Thess. iii. 12).

CONCLUSION. To draw with these "cords" and "bands" is always, at least, *self-rewarding.* It is true that love will sometimes fail with its object. Jehovah himself failed with Ephraim during long centuries. Similarly, some whom we attempt to draw may say persistently, "Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us." In such circumstances we ought to remember that duty is ours, and that results are with God. "Though Israel be not gathered, yet shall I be glorious in the eyes of the Lord, and my God shall be my Strength" (Isa. xlix. 5).—C. J.

Vers. 5—7.—*The Divine goodness despised.* Ephraim had acted as if the mercy of God were unconditional; and he persistently contravened the one condition, viz. repentance, upon which alone that favour could be continued. He was thus guilty of despising the Divine loving-kindness; and hence these words of grievous denunciation. We learn from them—

I. THE FOLLY OF CARNAL CONFIDENCES. (Ver. 6.) The ten tribes had followed "their own counsels," but these were the result of wicked infatuation. The calves which the men of Israel kissed led to the national ruin. Egypt would afford the tribes no asylum; there was no hope of relief from her as an auxiliary against Assyria. It was indeed strange that the people should think of returning to Egypt, the land of their ancient bondage. Now, however, they are to endure a more dreadful tyranny than their fathers had suffered there. The devouring sword of the Assyrian is to make the round of the cities of Israel. The northern kingdom, with its rich territory and its sacred places—Shiloh, Shechem, Ebal and Gerizim, Sharon, Carmel, and the valley of Jezreel—

is to pass into the possession of the heathen. Such was only the natural result of Israel's wickedness, and it stands in history as an affecting warning against ungodly counsels. "Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord" (Jer. xvii. 5—8). "My brethren, it is a great mercy of God to be so wholly taken from all carnal props, from all vain shifts and hopes, as to be thoroughly convinced that there is no help in any thing, or in any creature, in heaven and earth, but only in turning to God, and casting the soul down before mercy; if that saves me not, I am undone for ever" (Jeremiah Burroughs, *in loc.*).

II. THE POWER OF SIN TO HOLD FAST THE SOUL. (Ver. 7.) Israel was "bent on backsliding" from Jehovah. They were "fastened to defection" (Calvin); or, "impaled upon apostasy as upon a stake" (Keil). The prophets "called" and exhorted the people, but in vain. They refused to raise themselves, in order to return to the Most High. Such is the effect of sin when long persisted in. All of us have by nature this fixed aversion to God and Divine things, unless he interpose in his grace to wean us from our idols. Even while the Word is calling us to rise, the flesh persistently drags us downwards, and with a dead weight which only the might of the Spirit of God can overcome. Many professors of religion suddenly fall away, because, the "good work" never having been begun in them, they cannot restrain themselves from at last following visibly the "bent" of nature. And how hard it is, even for the Lord's true people, to escape from the entanglement of old habits of sin! During the process the soul may be often convulsed, if not almost torn asunder. A good man will sometimes continue throughout life to follow a trade or profession about the moral lawfulness of which his conscience is continually uneasy. Only by steadfastly looking to Christ, and allowing his love to flow into the heart, can we be set free from the dangers of backsliding. Clothed with his strength, the believer, instead of being "impaled upon apostasy," shall daily "crucify the flesh with the affections and lusts." Once more, this passage reminds us that—

III. TO "REFUSE TO RETURN" TO JEHOVAH IS THE SIN OF SINS. (Ver. 5.) Ephraim had done more and worse than to reject the Lord as the chief good. He had, besides, scorned the Divine grace and mercy which had so long and lovingly "called" him to "return," and promised to "heal his backsliding." For such foul and shocking ingratitude the ruin of the northern kingdom was a righteous retribution. And so now, in these gospel times, the denial of the Lord Jesus Christ as the Saviour is the crowning sin of man. To reject him is to "refuse to return" to Jehovah. It is to oppose the clearest light, and to despise the dearest love. It is to elect to serve Satan rather than God. This sin of sins does not render it necessary that sentence be pronounced against those who are guilty of it: the sinner's unbelief is of itself his sentence. "He that believeth not hath been judged already" (John iii. 18). If we neglect the great salvation, there can be no escape for us from eternal shame and ruin. Sins against law do not exclude the possibility of the exercise of mercy, but the persistent rejection of mercy must close the door of hope against the soul for ever (Prov. i. 24—33).—C. J.

Vers. 8—11.—"*Mercy seasons justice.*" Jehovah's love for Israel had been conspicuous during the infancy of the nation (vers. 1—4); but it seems even more wonderful now, in the time of Ephraim's moral decrepitude and premature decay. There is no more exquisitely pathetic passage in Holy Scripture than the one before us. It is of a piece with Jeremiah's prophecy respecting the restoration of the ten tribes (Jer. xxxi. 20). The denunciation of punishment contained in vers. 5—7 suddenly dissolves into an ecstasy of tenderness, which is followed by a promise of blessing.

I. THE LORD'S MERCY TO EPHRAIM. (Vers. 8, 9.) Moses had predicted (Deut. xxix. 23) that the lapse of the nation into confirmed idolatry would be punished with a curse upon "the whole land," like that which overtook the cities of the plain (Gen. xix.). But just when we might expect the lawgiver's words to be at once fulfilled, there is an outburst of Divine compassion. Here the Lord is: 1. *Apparently changeful.* It often seems as if, instead of there being one centre of thought in this book, there were rather two foci. In Hosea's message threats and promises alternate, and sometimes commingle. In ver. 8 the Lord, speaking after the manner of men, appears as if in doubt as to his course of action. Is justice to have its way to the end, or is any place to be found for

mercy? Jehovah's attitude is like that of the tender-hearted monarch who trembles when the death-warrant is placed before him, and hesitates whether he will sign it. But he declares at length that he cannot sacrifice his brooding yearning love for Ephraim even to the most righteous anger. He is resolved to exercise his mercy; he will display his grace more conspicuously than his justice. In all this, however, the Lord is: 2. *Really unchangeable.* He is "God, and not man." The apparent conflict within his heart is only apparent. All the time that he has been threatening vengeance, his bowels have been melting with love. He cannot forget that Ephraim is his "son." Yet the Lord's mercy does not blind the eyes of his justice. He says here, in effect, that Ephraim fully deserved the irreparable doom of the Cities of the Plain. And he must inflict judgment upon the present generation of Israelites. But the three years' siege of Samaria, and the long Assyrian captivity, with the total oblivion of the northern kingdom as such, are not "the fierceness of his anger." On the other side of these judgments there will be rich mercy for Israel. In the New Testament gospel, in like manner, we "behold the goodness and severity of God." Jehovah says now, more distinctly than ever, "As I live, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked" (Ezek. xxxiii. 11). Calvary shows that God is "just, and the Justifier of him which believeth in Jesus" (Rom. iii. 26).

II. THE GROUND OF THIS MERCY. (Ver. 9.) It has a twofold basis. 1. *The nature of God.* Jehovah speaks after the manner of men; but he is "God, and not man." Were he not God, he would not tolerate the wicked world for a single day. Because he is "God," and "the Holy One," he "in wrath remembers mercy." The Divine compassion is self-originated; it wells up out of the infinite fountain of the Divine nature. God has the heart of a father; but he is without the infirmities of a human parent. His mind is not discomposed by frail human passions; and he never in his thoughts—as finite men do—straitens the abundance of his grace. 2. *The Divine covenant with Israel.* "In the midst of thee" (ver. 9). "I will dwell among them" had been Jehovah's promise to the Hebrew nation. Of this promised presence there had been many symbols; as, *e.g.*, the burning bush, the tabernacle, Jerusalem, and the temple. "And what was the purport of the covenant which God made with Israel? Even that God would punish his people; yet so as ever to leave some seed remaining" (Calvin). In the New Testament gospel we see God's mercy similarly grounded. Its basis is the Divine nature. That nature is love. "God *so* loved the world." And its basis is also the Divine covenant; for we live under a new and better dispensation of the covenant of grace (Heb. viii. 6—13).

III. ITS FRUIT IN EPHRAIM'S RESTORATION. (Vers. 10, 11.) These verses shall be fulfilled in Messianic times. In the last days, the "Lion" of the tribe of Judah "shall roar," earnestly calling the Hebrews to repentance. 1. *The restoration will consist in heart-renewal.* "They shall walk after the Lord," *i.e.* spiritually. The time is coming when the house of Israel shall accept of Jesus as the Messiah, and clothe themselves with his righteousness. "The children" of the exiles "shall tremble" with convictions of guilt, with conscious unworthiness, and yet with eagerness to accept the gospel call. They shall return to a relation of intimate friendship and fellowship with God. 2. *It will be national and universal.* The Jews shall at last return from all the various lands to which they have been banished. The Lord shall "gather together the outcasts of Israel." Students of prophecy, indeed, are not agreed whether there is to be a literal restoration to Palestine; but all expect an infinitely more blessed consummation—the admission of Israel as a people into the kingdom of Christ, as the result of their repentance and faith in him. This oracle applies also to all the spiritual seed of Abraham. Jew and Gentile, in these gospel times, are adopted into God's household upon precisely the same footing. "The west" (ver. 10) stands mainly for Gentile Europe; "Egypt" represents (ver. 11) the whole continent of Africa beyond itself; and "Assyria" in like manner the continent of Asia. "They shall come from the east and from the west," etc. (Luke xiii. 29). The doom denounced in Hosea has been inflicted; and in that fact have we not a pledge that the promises which this prophet makes shall also be fulfilled? "Two rabbis approaching Jerusalem saw a fox running upon the hill of Zion; and Rabbi Joshua wept, but Rabbi Eliezer laughed. 'Wherefore dost thou laugh?' said he who wept. 'Nay, wherefore dost thou weep?' demanded Eliezer. 'I weep,' replied the Rabbi Joshua, 'because I see what is written in the Lamentations fulfilled!

because of the mountain of Zion, which is desolate, the foxes walk upon it.' 'And, therefore,' said Rabbi Eliezer, 'do I laugh; for when I see with mine own eyes that God has fulfilled his *threatenings* to the very letter, I have thereby a pledge that not one of his *promises* shall fail, for he is ever more ready to show mercy than judgment.'"

LESSONS. 1. In the gospel "*mercy and truth are met together.*" God "spared not his own Son," that he might not have to "give up" such as Ephraim. 2. *The hindrance to salvation is not in God,* but in the sinner's wicked will. "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often would I have gathered thy children together, and ye would not!" (Matt. xxiii. 37). 3. If God deals so tenderly with the sinner, *how complete must be the security of the believer!* "For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be renewed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee" (Isa. liv. 10).—C. J.

Ver. 12.—(See next chapter.)—C. J.

Ver. 3 (first clause).—*The tenderness of Divine discipline.* Amidst Hosea's strong denunciations of sin, such a description as this of Divine tenderness to wayward men is sweet as a song amidst a storm. Both sternness and sweetness must of necessity appear before us in order to give a true apprehension of the method of God's dealing with human souls. That method is as varied as are the works of the same God in nature, where every flower and leaf, every wind and stream, has its own place and its own use. We cannot expect to find a uniform religious experience amongst men. We have no right to demand of others the agony of shame or the rapture of pardon we ourselves know, or to declare that their experience is unreal because it is different from our own. The metaphors of the Bible might teach us this. One series represents the Word as the hammer, that breaks the rock with resistless power; as the sword, which pierces the inmost soul and kills the old life; as the fire, that burns out the dross of character and fuses the whole nature in a glow of love to God. But there are metaphors which represent the same Word as being like the sun, gradually diffusing light, slowly developing the flowers and fruits; as the attractive force, so subtle that it can only be known by its result; as the key which fits, and silently turns the lock, so that the door is opened and the heavenly guests come in to abide there in holy fellowship. It is in harmony with all we know of the variety of God's dealings with men, that the same prophet who speaks of the unwilling heifer dragged onward by ropes, should also speak of the little child who is lovingly upheld by his father when he takes his first tottering steps.

I. THE FIGURE THAT SETS FORTH THE TRUTH. 1. *Its boldness.* None but an inspired man, who was conscious of inspiration, would have dared thus to describe the God he humbly reverenced. Sometimes a painting represents the glories of sunset, or the swell of the sea after a storm, the colours of which are so vivid that the onlooker at first says, "That is unnatural." A second-rate artist might have shrunk from such a bold representation, but the great artist revels in the splendour of the scene; he feels that he must represent to others what was revealed to him; and so hands down to the future what had appeared at first a startling revelation of glory, even to himself. A people accustomed, like the Jews, to the signs of awful reverence with which Jehovah was approached would have been more surprised than we, who know God in Christ, to hear the prophet speak of him as a Father, or Mother, or Nurse, holding the child by the arms as he totters and trembles over his first footsteps. 2. *Its beauty.* Any natural figure drawn from a human home is beautiful. It is well that family life has so often been made the basis of religious teaching. There are few scenes more universally familiar than this. When we exercise care and forethought for our children, and our hearts go out in tenderness to them in their helplessness, we know what God is to us. When we remember the sense of rest and sympathy and help which was ours in childhood's home, we become more conscious of what we may find, yet so often fail to find, in our heavenly Father's love. 3. *Its truthfulness.* Israel had become a great nation because of the Divine care which overshadowed them in their feeble infancy. In Egypt they had no national life, but were degraded serfs for whom revolt was useless. Brought out by Divine power, they became conscious of new powers and possibilities. In the wilderness they were fed, not only with manna, but with the rudiments of piety, which were well adapted to their infancy. By penalties which immediately and visibly followed

disobedience to Law, they learnt that God was King, that he was near, that he was wise; and imperfect though the revelation was, it was the most they could receive. God spake as they were able to bear it. He dealt with them as we deal with children. Nor is he less wise or less tender in *our* culture, but bears with us while we are feeble in thought and resolve, and blesses us in the first trembling steps we essay in the way of righteousness.

II. THE TRUTH SET FORTH BY THE FIGURE—namely, that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy. 1. *In his condescension he does not despise us.* Ezekiel describes a newly born child, taken up in its poverty and misery by tender hands, as a representation of what Israel had been to God. We have known such examples of human kindness: the foundling left to the stranger, whose motherly heart went out in pity, as she resolved that, in spite of all her own cares, the little one should not perish for want because of its parent's sin. Much more unworthy are we of the Divine regard, for each may say, "I am no more worthy to be called thy son." Even in earthly advantages we never won nor deserved, how many of us have been blessed! The home where no evil words are heard, where those who love us are daily witnesses for God, the heritage of a good name and wholesome habits, the tears and entreaties and prayers which win us to the love of righteousness,—all these are signs that God can say of many now in wisdom's way, "I taught you to walk, taking you by the arms." 2. *In his wisdom he does not force us.* We are not automatons. They may do wonderful things without noise, or disobedience, or wrangling; but God has not made us thus. We are, as the text suggests, children, who can make their own effort, but to it they must be prompted, in it they must be supported and helped. When the stirrings of a new life are felt in the soul, the question comes, "Who then is *willing* to consecrate himself to the Lord?" and it is only the self-consecrated servants God will have. It is a poor thing to employ the forced labour of those whose bodies are their owner's, but whose souls loathe him; but a blessed thing to have the loyal and loving service of the child, to whom a glance or a whisper means a command which it is his joy to obey. 3. *In his graciousness he does not curse us.* Children are weak and wayward; they forget what they are told, and do what is amiss; but their father says to himself, "They are but children," and he cannot be bitter or unjust. When Peter denied his Lord, falling through moral weakness, an angry curse might have driven him to despair; but "the Lord turned and looked on him," and as he went out, weeping bitterly, he yet could say, "The Lord loves me still." Christ drew him back with cords of love. 4. *In his patience he does not demand of us instant perfection.* Picture the scene suggested here. A child is about to take his first step. The mother is beside him, encouraging every step, or half-step, with a smile. Her eye does not wander from him for a moment; her hands are out to encourage, to support, to save, as she says, "Try, dear, try." When at last the effort is made, she catches him up in her arms and kisses him; and if you wondered at so much gladness and love being shown over such a feeble attempt, she would be annoyed at your dulness, because *she* sees in this the promise of the future. By such a homely illustration does Hosea set forth the Divine tenderness. God's "gentleness makes us great." Christ Jesus expected nothing wonderful from his disciples; but patiently lived with them and taught them, forgiving, encouraging, and upholding, till they became brave and stalwart heroes of the cross. Only let us keep near him, and as we recognize the difficulties of our way and the weakness of our nature, let the prayer of the psalmist be ours, "Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe."—A. R.

Ver. 4 (first clause).—*The attractiveness of God.* These words are true for all ages and peoples. Human laws are limited, but Divine laws are universal. Gravitation, for example, draws material things to each other, whether they be the ice-floes that float in the polar seas, or the creepers which hang in heavy festoons in tropical forests; whether in the land where liberty loves the light, or in the kingdom where tyrants brood and conspirators glower in the darkness. The bold use of the second verse in this chapter by Matthew (ii. 15) shows how in the special historical fact may be discerned the general and universal principle. The Divine care of Israel was but a manifestation of the Divine care of the Babe of Bethlehem, and of every one led out of bondage and darkness into light and liberty. The soul's exodus and pilgrimage is as real now as then, and of those rejoicing in nearness to God he can say, "I drew

them with cords of a man, with bands of love." Let us consider the evidence and the influence of the Divine attractiveness.

I. ITS EVIDENCE. 1. *As exhibited in the mission of Christ.* Instead of coming in the clouds of heaven to compel the homage of the world, he came in the likeness of men, and won the love of those round him in Bethlehem and Nazareth as a human child. "He grew . . . in favour with God and man." During his ministry the same method was pursued; he drew disciples around him "with the cords of a man, even with bands of love." His chosen disciples were not those whose enthusiasm was aroused by works of superhuman character; on the contrary, such as these had to be repressed, as they were when they would take Jesus by force to make him a King. John and Peter and others who were specially his own were won by his love, were drawn with the cords of a man. It was those who were thus drawn who were ready for the higher blessing. While a wicked and adulterous generation in vain sought after a sign, despised sinners and humble children were enriched beyond all expectation. Still Christ seeks to win such confidence, and to win it by the same means. He speaks not from the throne of glory, but from the cross of Calvary. Divine love is pleading with us through the weakness of mortality. "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will *draw* all men unto me." 2. *As exhibited in the experience of Christians.* If we would know the laws of mental life we do not seek them in the phenomena of physical life, and it would be equally absurd to expect the physiologist from his study of brain-movements, or the metaphysician from his acquaintance with the laws of intellect, to unveil to us the secrets of spiritual experience. The subtle movements of religious life can only be known by religious men. They, without one discordant voice, declare that they have been and are sensible of Divine drawings. Listen to such utterances as these: "By the grace of God I am what I am;" "We love him, because he first loved us;" "We are not sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God." What are these but confirmations of the text, and of our Lord's declaration, "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him"? Here is a quotation from Augustine, which shows how he had been drawn to the Saviour he had so long ignored: "How sweet did it at once become to me to want the sweetnesses of those toys! and what I feared to be parted from was now a joy to part with. For thou didst cast them forth, and for them enteredst in thyself sweeter than all pleasures, though not to flesh and blood; brighter than all light, but more hidden than all depths; higher than all honour, but not to the high in their own conceits." Every saint on earth and in heaven can say—

> "He drew me, and I followed on,
> Glad to confess the voice Divine."

II. ITS PURPOSE. Why does God thus lovingly affect the souls of men? 1. *He would draw us to his feet for pardon.* The prodigal was not forced home. In his abject misery thoughts came to him of his father's love, and with them the idea of returning stole in. So the thought of God's great goodness should incite the worst sinner to return to the Lord, who will abundantly pardon. "Knowest thou not that the goodness of the Lord leadeth thee to repentance?" 2. *He would draw us to his arms for protection.* To feel that God is about us is at once our strength and defence, our comfort and joy. Refer to Joseph in Potiphar's house, to Jacob at Bethel, and to Moses before the burning bush, etc., for illustrations of this. Still in this world, which is sobbing with sorrow, dark with foreboding, saddened by sin, the ark of safety may be found, and the door is open. 3. *He would draw us to his home for rest.* If life were to be lived out here, it would not be worth living. But as strangers and pilgrims we are passing through the world, sometimes driven onward by grief, sometimes allured onward by joy, but ever journeying towards "the rest that remains for the people of God." Beside us, in life, in death, in eternity, is One who, with love greater than that of any father to his child, still declares, "I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love."—A. R.

Ver. 8.—*God's yearning over rebels.* Our text tells the old story of man's rebellion and God's love. The subject has its human and its Divine aspect, which we will consider in turn.

I. MAN'S REBELLION is implied in the text and described graphically in other parts of the prophecy. 1. *Its signs*, as they are illustrated in the moral condition of Israel. (1) *The dethronement of God.* He was no longer the object of worship or the source of authority. Baal was worshipped in the high places, and Astarte in the groves. In other words, confidence in one's own power, or contentment with sensuous pleasures, now displaced devotion to God. This is not brought about with startling rapidity. There is no sensible shock felt when a man breaks with God. There is a progressiveness in evil almost imperceptible. Israel first professed to worship God in the calf, but at last worshipped the devil in Astarte. Sin is generally progressive in the hold it gets upon its victims. Judas Iscariot is an example of this. (2) *The confidence in man.* Many shrewd men in Israel held aloof from idolatrous worship as degrading superstition, yet were equally with the worshippers in rebellion against God. For national deliverance they would not trust to Baal, but they would trust in Egypt, which was equally distrust of Jehovah. Many now are free from the folly and the degradation of heathendom, yet are in God's sight rebels against his authority. In their judgment they are righteous enough to do without his pardon, strong enough to do without his aid, wise enough to do without his revelation. 2. *Its consequences.* (1) *Disappointment.* (Read ver. 5.) Hoshea was subject to Assyria, but joined Egypt to win independence. The result was that the Assyrian king destroyed Israel, carrying the people away into an exile from which there was no return. Similarly, one who from a spirit of self-reliance says of Christ, "We will not have this man to rule over us," becomes the slave of human opinion, of popular customs, of evil passions, etc. Others who live in forbidden pleasure find in old age, not only the pleasure gone, but the retribution come, physically as well as morally. "Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread?" Happy is it if the prodigal grows sick of the husks the swine eat, before it is too late to return to the Father's house, where there is bread enough and to spare. (2) *Punishment.* In the wilderness days the people, in plagues and defeats, had signs of this. Here it was foretold that the sword should abide on their cities (ver. 6). And in our text reference is made to a standing example of Divine retribution—the destruction of the cities of the plain. Admah and Zeboim are selected, as the smallest or least known, to indicate that the most insignificant would not escape the judgment of God. In reference to the coming punishment of the impenitent, even our loving Saviour speaks awful and ominous words. It is in the New Testament, the special revelation of God's love, that we read of "the fire that cannot be quenched;" of "the second death;" of the "outer darkness, where shall be weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth."

II. GOD'S COMPASSION. 1. *It is described by the prophet.* He represents God as saying, "How shall I make thee as Admah?" etc. "Thy sin merits a punishment fearful as was that, yet my heart is heavy within me at the thought of its coming to thee, my child; yea, my strong compassions are kindled by my love." Such language is in harmony with the whole teaching of Scripture. "God is not willing that any should perish," etc. Note: It would be well if all the children of God in this were like him. Some, however, are indifferent to the sins of their fellows, as if sins were of little consequence, or as if they themselves had no more sense of responsibility than Cain acknowledged when he said, "Am I my brother's keeper?" Others are indignant and angry with the fallen, as were the Pharisees in the house of Simon. But in the eye of him who abhors evil, the sinner, going away from hope and light and heaven is too pitiful for resentment, though too wilful for excuse. Therefore he says, "How shall I give thee up?" etc. 2. *It is proclaimed in the gospel. The coming* of the beloved Son is well described by the Lord himself, in his parables of the wicked husbandmen, of the good shepherd seeking the one sheep that was lost, etc. See in these the unmerited love, the infinite tenderness, of him who so loved us as to give his only Son for our redemption. *In the ministry* of him who was the express Image of God's Person we see proofs of the truth in the text; not only in his miracles, but in his invitations, notably in the words, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, . . . how often would I have gathered thy children together as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not!" *In the commission* given to the apostles the text reappears. What pathetic meaning in the words, "beginning at Jerusalem"! *In the experience* of the redeemed this assurance is re-echoed. Saul of Tarsus, the chief of sinners, obtained mercy as a pattern for those who should hereafter believe.

CONCLUSION. *Beware of presuming on Divine long-suffering.* What more mad and perilous than to leap into the angry sea because the lifeboat is there! What more ungenerous and unmanly than the conduct of him who says in his heart, "I will be hard, because God is so tender; I will withdraw further from him, because I know he loves me"! "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?"—A. R.

Ver. 1.—"*When Israel was a child.*" There is something wonderfully touching in this representation of God's affection and compassion towards the nation of his choice. The father, distressed in heart because of his son's waywardness and disaffection, recalls the period of that son's childhood, when parental care and love watched over and upheld and guided him. Now that Israel has done wickedly in departing from God, in the midst of deserved upbraiding and rebuke, the Lord appeals to the memory of early and better days. Israel symbolizes humanity, and Jehovah's watchful care and tender love to Israel is representative of his feelings towards and his treatment of the children of men. Three stages are here noticeable.

I. LOVE. To Abraham, God had revealed himself as an attached and affectionate Friend; he was designated "the friend of God." Towards the second father of the nation, Moses, Jehovah had manifested himself in a manner remarkable for intimacy. The love which marked the call of Abraham was displayed in the treatment of his descendants. But "God is love," and mankind is the object of his fatherly regard. Love revealed in Christ appeals to our hearts. "We love him, because he first loved us."

II. ADOPTION. Jehovah is represented as regarding and treating Israel as his son, as thinking with a fatherly fondness and tenderness of Israel's early days: "When Israel was a child." It is the glory of revelation that it has taught us to look up and to say, "Our Father, which art in heaven." The effect of our Saviour's work is that his disciples may have the adoption of sons; the Spirit of God within them is the Spirit of adoption.

III. DELIVERANCE. Jehovah "called his son out of Egypt." A reminder of merciful interposition and mighty deliverance was a fit summons to submission and reconciliation. It is, indeed, a Divine appeal. By the memory of the great Redemption, the God of righteousness calls for our obedience and devotion. He has redeemed us that we may be a holy, filial, and devoted people, recognizing his fatherly favour, and evincing our gratitude for his delivering hand which has interposed on our behalf.—T.

Ver. 3.—*Healing grace unrecognized.* The gentle, considerate, and tender manner in which Jehovah had treated Ephraim is very strikingly portrayed in the figurative language of the first part of this verse. Ephraim is depicted as a little child who is just learning to walk. The Lord condescends to represent himself as taking Ephraim by the arms, upholding the feeble, tottering form, and guiding the uncertain, unsteady steps. Such treatment augments the sin of insensibility and ingratitude on the part of those who have been dealt with so compassionately, and yet have forgotten their Helper.

I. THE CHARACTER IN WHICH GOD REVEALED HIMSELF TO ISRAEL. He was their "Healer," which implies that they had been wounded, sick, and helpless. When Israel had been in such a case, their covenant God had again and again interposed upon their behalf to succour, to heal, to save them.

II. THE INSENSIBILITY WHICH ISRAEL HAD DISPLAYED TO SUCH GRACIOUS TREATMENT. 1. This insensibility was a proof that the spiritual benefit intended had not been realized. Men often resemble Israel in receiving temporal advantages and bounties from the hand of God, without learning the lesson of devout acknowledgment and filial affection. 2. This insensibility was an occasion of sorrow to the Divine Benefactor. God is not indifferent to such a response rendered to his kindness and love; it distresses his fatherly heart. 3. This insensibility called for repentance and a better mind; or must needs involve, if persevered in, debasement and punishment.—T.

Ver. 4.—"*Cords of a man.*" Language is lavished to impress upon Israel the gracious, the undeserved, but generous and forbearing treatment received from the Most High. As though an exhibition of the justice of obedience and piety were insufficient, there is added many a representation of the mercy which has marked the Lord's treatment of his ungrateful and rebellious people.

I. GRACIOUS ATTRACTION. Instead of driving men with authority, God draws them with a truly humane and tender persuasion. We see this in the whole Christian scheme, in the gift of Jesus Christ, in his spiritual dispensation, in which he is "drawing all men unto himself." No violence, but a sweet and hallowed constraint is, in the gospel, brought to bear upon the heart. We feel that the motives addressed to us are very different from what we might have expected, and from what human authority would probably have employed.

II. MERCIFUL RELIEF. God's treatment of Israel is represented as resembling that of the husbandman who suffers the labouring ox to pause in his toil, and who lifts the oppressive and galling yoke to afford the beast a little welcome relief. Similarly, God has not dealt with us after our sins. In the midst of wrath he has remembered mercy. It is his delight to unloose the heavy burden, and to let the oppressed go free. Christ's prized invitation is an instance in point: "Come unto me, all ye that labour. . . . My yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

III. BOUNTIFUL PROVISION. The Hebrew was forbidden to muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. The conduct here recorded goes beyond a mere permission to feed; for the generous owner is depicted as setting food before the hungry animal. A homely but just and impressive image of the Divine treatment of those who look to him. "He openeth his hands, and satisfieth," etc. He gives them "bread from heaven to eat." The provisions of the gospel are spread before the hungering, needy soul, and the invitation is addressed to all who are in want: "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters!"—T.

Ver. 8.—"*How shall I give thee up?*" It was an idolatrous and rebellious generation to which Hosea prophesied. Sundered from Jerusalem, Israel had lapsed from the worship and service of Jehovah The prophet was not satisfied merely to discover in forcible language the sin of the people, merely to threaten with deserved punishment. He was touched with the spectacle of apostasy. He expressed the mind of the Lord in mingling expostulations and promises with denunciations and threats. The most pathetic language of the text implies—

I. EFFORTS ALREADY MADE FOR THE SALVATION OF THE SINFUL. Evidently this was not a first appeal; many and urgent counsels and entreaties had been already addressed to Israel. Looking over a wider field, we may recognize that God has in mercy visited men, in the messages of revelation, in the Law which declares his will, by the prophets who have presented motives and appeals, and especially by his own Son, his own Spirit, his own gospel. His aim in all has been to lead men to repentance and faith, to bring them to eternal life.

II. THE THWARTING OF SUCH EFFORTS BY HUMAN NEGLECT AND WILFULNESS. The free nature with which God the Creator has endowed man is capable of rebellion; and he can only save us upon our repentance and renewal. But what resistance do his gracious designs meet from sinful men! In some cases, obstinate love of sin, determined opposition to truth, prolonged insensibility; in other cases, transient gleams of good, followed by relapse; in yet other cases, shameful apostasy;—account for this alienation of the heart from a God of mercy. Yet observe—

III. GOD'S GRACIOUS RELUCTANCE TO ABANDON EVEN REBELS. 1. This arises from *his own compassionate nature.* Exhibited *e.g.* in the long-suffering during the days of Noah; by the Lord Jesus in his grief over Jerusalem. 2. And from *his desire that the gift of his Son may not be in vain.* He is the Saviour, in order that he may save. The Father delights in the satisfaction of the Son, when he sees of the travail of his soul. 3. And from *his regard for men's interests and happiness.* As the mechanic wishes the engine he has made to work well, as the husbandman wishes to reap a harvest from the land upon which he has laboured, as the statesman hopes for the success of the measure he has devised, as the parent longs for the realization of the plans he has formed for his child, so the Lord and Father of us all desires our salvation. He knows that there is no happiness for men except in their subjection and devotion to him. He can have no motive in seeking our welfare except Divine, unwearying, and unmerited love; and he asks, "How can I give thee up?"

APPLICATION. 1. If God so bears with us, we Christians, and especially Christian ministers, must not be ready to "give up" even obstinate sinners. 2. God pleads again with the unbelieving and the wavering, saying, "Why will ye die?"—T.

VER. 9.—*God and not man.* Well is it for us that there are respects in which God is as man; that he is sympathizing and (as we say) humane. But better is it for us that in other respects God is not as man; for, had he been subject to like passions with ourselves, he would not have borne with us, and we should have been utterly consumed.

I. A REVELATION OF DIVINE SUPERIORITY. God, in his treatment of mankind, has shown himself to be altogether superior: 1. To human *ignorance.* He knows us as we cannot know one another, and all his counsels have been counsels of consummate wisdom. 2. To human *vacillation.* We are prone to be swayed, now by this motive and again by that; there is no such thing as perfect consistency and steadfastness in man. But God is above all such human weakness. "I am the Lord that changeth not, therefore the sons of Jacob are not consumed." "God is faithful," and we may trust him with an implicit confidence. 3. To human *impatience.* The hasty impatience of man with his fellow-man is in striking contrast with the forbearance of the supreme Ruler. Long-suffering is ever represented in the Scriptures as his especial attribute, and there is none for which we have more reason to be grateful. Had he not been a patient God he would not have borne with any one of us, for all have taxed and tried his patience.

II. AN ENCOURAGEMENT TO HUMAN CONFIDENCE. It is well always to begin with the consideration of God's character and attributes. But we cannot end there. We naturally and properly turn our regard towards ourselves, and see what is the bearing of the Divine attributes upon our necessities. This we may learn from the assurance that we are in the hands of One who is God and not man—we may learn to cast ourselves with unhesitating confidence upon the Divine faithfulness and grace. No human pettiness shall we meet with from him, but large-hearted forbearance, sympathy, bounty, and love.—T.

VERS. 1—7.—*A typical portrait of a people.* "When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt. As they called them, so they went from them: they sacrificed unto Baalim, and burned incense to graven images. I taught Ephraim also to go, taking them by their arms; but they knew not that I healed them. I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love: and I was to them as they that take off the yoke on their jaws, and I laid meat unto them. He shall not return into the land of Egypt, but the Assyrian shall be his king, because they refused to return. And the sword shall abide on his cities, and shall consume his branches, and devour them, because of their own counsels. And my people are bent to backsliding from me; though they called them to the Most High, none at all would exalt him." In these verses we have three things worthy of note.

I. A HIGHLY FAVOURED PEOPLE. What is said here concerning the people of Israel? 1. God *loved* them. "When Israel was a child, then I loved him." "Thus saith the Lord, Israel is my son, even my firstborn" (Exod. iv. 22). The early period of the existence of the Hebrew people is frequently represented as their youth (Isa. liv. 15; Jer. ii. 2). Why the Almighty should have manifested a special interest in the descendants of Abraham is a question which the Infinite only can answer. We know, however, that he loves all men. "God so loved the world, that he gave," etc. 2. God *emancipated* them. "And called my son out of Egypt." He broke the rod of their oppressor. He delivered them from Egyptian thraldom. This material emancipation of the Jews is a striking emblem of the great moral emancipation. 3. God *educated* them. "I taught Ephraim also to go." Some read this line, "I have given Ephraim a leader"—referring to Moses. Moses was only the instrument. "I taught Ephraim also to go"—as a child in leading-strings is taught. When they were in the wilderness God led them by a pillar of cloud. 4. God *healed* them. "I healed them." "I am the Lord that healeth thee" (Exod. xv. 26). 5. God *guided* them. "I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love." With human cords I drew them, with bands of love. He did not draw them by might; he attracted them by mercy. 6. God *relieved* them. "I was to them as they that take off the yoke on their jaws." As the kind farmer raises from the neck and cheek of the ox the heavy yoke, so as to leave him freedom to eat his food, so I raised from your neck the yoke of Egyptian bondage. 7. God *fed* them. "I laid meat unto them." He rained manna about their camp. He gave them bread from heaven, and water from the rock. What a kind God he was to these

people! And has he not been even more kind to us, the favoured men of this land and age?

II. A SIGNALLY UNGRATEFUL PEOPLE. 1. They *disobeyed God's teaching.* "As they called them, so they went from them." "They"—the lawgivers, judges, priests, prophets, whom he employed. "They went from them." That is, the people went from their Divine teachers—went from them in heart. 2. They *gave themselves to idolatry.* "They sacrificed unto Baalim, and burned incense to graven images." Idolatry was their besetting sin. It marked their history more or less from the beginning to the end. What is idolatry but giving that love to inferior objects that is due to God and God alone? 3. They *ignored God's kindness.* "They knew not that I healed them." They ascribed their restoration either to themselves or others, not to God. 4. They *persistently backslided.* "And my people are bent to backsliding from me." They forsake me and are bent on doing so. Such is the *signally ungrateful* conduct of this people.

III. A RIGHTEOUSLY PUNISHED PEOPLE. "He shall not return into the land of Egypt, but the Assyrian shall be his king, because they refused to return. And the sword shall abide on his cities, and shall consume his branches, and devour them, because of their own counsels." Whilst they would not be driven back to Egypt again, judgment should overtake them even in the promised land, and the judgment would be: 1. *Extensive.* "On the cities," and on the "branches." The large town and the little hamlets. 2. *Continuous.* "Abide on his cities." 3. *Destructive.* "Consume his branches."

CONCLUSION. Is not the history of this people *typical?* Do not they represent especially the peoples of modern Christendom, highly favoured of God, signally ungrateful to God, and exposed to punishment from God?—D. T.

Vers. 8, 9.—*Justice and mercy in the heart of God.* "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel? how shall I make thee as Admah? how shall I set thee as Zeboim? mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together. I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger, I will not return to destroy Ephraim: for I am God, and not man; the Holy One in the midst of thee: and I will not enter into the city." The Bible is pre-eminently an anthropomorphitic book, that is, a book revealing God, not directly in his absolute glory, nor through the affections, thoughts, and conduct of angels, but through man—through man's emotions, modes of thought, and actions. It sometimes brings God before us in the character of a Husband, that we may appreciate his fidelity and tenderness; sometimes in the character of a Warrior, that we may appreciate his invincibility and the victories that attend his procedure; sometimes as a Monarch, that we may appreciate his wealth, splendour, and authority; sometimes as a Father, that we may appreciate the reality, depth, and solicitude of his love. It is in this last character, the character of a father, that these verses present him to our notice. No human character, of course, can give a full or perfect revelation of him—all fall infinitely short. The brightest human representation of him is to his glory less than the dimmest glow-worm to the central fires of the universe. And yet it is only through man that we can get any clear or impressive idea of him. It is only through human love, human faithfulness, human justice, that we can gain any conception of the love, faithfulness, and justice of the Eternal. The verses lead us to consider several things.

I. Mercy and justice as CO-EXISTING in the heart of the great Father. "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel? how shall I make thee as Admah? how shall I set thee as Zeboim?" To give up to ruin, to deliver to destruction, burn up, as Admah and Zeboim—cities of the plain—were burnt up, is the demand of *justice.* "Mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together." This is the voice of *mercy.* Here, then, in the heart of this great Father is justice and mercy. What is justice? It is that sentiment that demands that every one should have his due, that virtue should be rewarded, that vice should be punished. What is mercy? A disposition to overlook injuries and to treat beings better than they deserve. These two must never be regarded as elements *essentially* distinct; they are branches from the same root, streams from the same fountain. Both are but modifications of love. Justice is but love standing up sternly against the wrong; mercy is but love bending

in tenderness over the helpless and the suffering. Now, in the heart of God this love assumes these two phases or manifestations. 1. *Material nature* shows that there is the stern and the mild in God. Winter reveals his sternness, summer his amiability and kindness. 2. *Providence* shows that there is the stern and the mild in God. The heavy afflictions that befall nations, families, and individuals reveal his sternness; the health and the joy that gladden life reveal his mercy. 3. The *spiritual constitution of man* shows that there is the stern and the mild in God. In the human soul there is an instinct to revenge the wrong, often stern, inexorable, and heartless. There is also an instinct of tenderness and compassion. Whence came these? From the great Father. In God, then, there is justice and mercy.

II. Mercy and justice as EXCITED BY MAN in the heart of the Father. 1. The *moral wickedness* of Ephraim evoked his *justice*. Ephraim, unfaithful, sensual, false, idolatrous, justly deserved punishment. Justice awoke, demands destruction; it says, "Let Ephraim be given up, make no more efforts for its restoration and happiness; let it be delivered into the hand of the enemy, let it be torn to pieces. Rain fire from heaven upon it, and let it burn to ashes, as did Admah and Zeboim." Human wickedness is always stirring, so to say, the justice of the infinite heart. 2. The *filial suffering* of Ephraim evoked his *mercy*. Elsewhere (Jer. xxxi. 20) we have these remarkable words: "Is Ephraim my dear son? is he a pleasant child? for since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still: therefore my bowels are troubled for him; I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord." God calls Ephraim his son, and Ephraim was in suffering, and hence his compassion was turned. Why does the eternal Father show mercy unto mankind? They deserve destruction on account of their sins; but men are his children, and his children in suffering.

III. Mercy STRUGGLING AGAINST justice in the heart of the great Father. There is a father who has a son, not only disobedient, but unloving and malignantly hostile; he spurns his father's authority, and pursues a course of conduct antagonistic to his father's will and interests. Often has the father reproved him with love and entreated him to reform, but he has grown worse and worse, and has become incorrigible. The wickedness of the son rouses the sentiment of justice in the heart of the father, and the father says, "I will give you up, I will shut my door against you, I will disown you, and send you as a vagabond on the world; never more shall you cross the threshold of my home, never more will I speak to you." This is justice; but then the thought that he is his son rouses the other sentiment, love, and here is the struggle: "How shall I give thee up?" Such experience as this is, alas! too common in human life. Such a struggle between mercy and justice is going on now in the heart of many a father in London. The passage gives us to understand there is something like this in the heart of the infinite Father. Justice crying out, "Damn!" mercy crying out, "Save!" This is wonderful. I cannot understand it; it transcends my conception; and yet this passage suggests the fact.

IV. Mercy TRIUMPHING OVER justice in the heart of the great Father. "Mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together. I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger, I will not return to destroy Ephraim." 1. Mercy has triumphed over justice in the *perpetuation of the race*. Justice said, "In the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." Adam did eat of the fruit, but lived and became the father of a countless and ever-multiplying race. Why? Mercy triumphed. 2. Mercy has triumphed over justice in the *experience of every living man*. Every man is a sinner, and his sins cry out for destruction; and he lives on because mercy has triumphed. 3. Mercy has triumphed over justice in *the redemptive mission of Christ*. In relation to the whole family tree, justice said, "Cut it down, for it cumbereth the ground;" but mercy interposed, and said, "Spare it a little longer." How comes it to pass that mercy thus triumphs? Here is the answer. "For I am God, and not man." Had I been a man it would have been otherwise. "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord."—D. T.

Ver. 12.—*The lies of a people.* "Ephraim compasseth me about with lies, and the house of Israel with deceit." The Almighty here represents himself as a man beset with lies on every hand, as if he could not move either one way or the other. Let us notice—

I. THE NATURE OF THE LIES OF A NATION. Lies are as abundant in England to-day as they were in Ephraim centuries ago. The social atmosphere is infested with falsehoods. 1. There are *commercial* lies. From the largest warehouse to the pedlar's paltry stall lies abound. They infest the commercial world more densely far than insects the summer air. 2. There are *theological* lies. Doctrines are propounded and enforced from the press and theological chairs utterly untrue to eternal realities. 3. There are *religious* lies. Sentiments and aspirations are expressed in the prayers, psalmodies, and liturgies of congregations, untrue to facts, untrue to the experience of those who give them utterance. 4. There are *literary* lies. The journals and volumes that stream from the modern press teem with falsehood. Surely, if the Almighty were to speak of England as he spoke of Ephraim in olden times, he would say it "compasseth me about with lies."

"How false are men, both in their heads and hearts!
And there is falsehood in all trades and arts.
Lawyers deceive their clients by false law;
Priests, by false gods, keep all the world in awe.
For their false tongues such flatt'ring knaves are raised,
For their false wit scribblers by fools are praised."
(John Crown.)

II. THE CAUSE OF THE LIES OF A NATION. All lies spring from at least three sources. 1 *Vanity*. A desire to appear before our compeers in the world greater than we are, leads to the exaggeration of our virtues, if we have any, and to the denial of our infirmities and faults. 2. *Greed*. Greed is a prolific source of falsehood. Greed creates the lies that crowd our markets. 3. *Fear*. Fear creates lies as shields of defence. Religious lies spring in a great measure from fear. Nearly all the lies that fill the world are the children either of vanity, greed, or fear.

III. THE EVIL OF THE LIES OF A NATION. All lies are bad things. 1. They are bad in *themselves*. They are repugnant to the God of truth. They are a miasma in the moral atmosphere, essentially offensive as well as pernicious. 2. They are bad in their *influence*. Lies deceive and ruin. Every system built on lies, commercial, scientific, political, and religious, is like a house built on the sand that must tumble down before the rushing storms of reality.

"Let falsehood be a stranger to thy lips:
Shame on the policy that first began
To tamper with the heart to hide its thoughts!
And doubly shame on that inglorious tongue
That sold its honesty and told a lie!"
(William Havard.)

D. T.

Vers. 1—4.—*God's early love for Israel.* The mind, pained by ingratitude, naturally reverts to the kindnesses formerly showered on the unworthy recipient. God here reminds Israel of his early love to the nation—how he had adopted it as his son, called it out of Egypt, taught it to go alone, drawn it with love, and bountifully provided for it. No sin is so odious as filial ingratitude (Isa. i. 3). None is so grievous to the heart of a parent. It is this sin which God here charges on Israel.

I. THE CHILDHOOD OF ISRAEL. "When Israel was a child, then I loved him" (ver. 1). 1. *Israel had a childhood.* Every nation has. There is a time when, in the natural development of society, the patriarchal stage passes over into the political. This time came to Israel in Egypt. The patriarchal family had grown into a horde. It had lost its domestic character, yet it had no polity. It might never have had one had the people remained in bondage. God gave them freedom, and with it nationality. Thus the nation was created. 2. *The individual has a childhood.* He is cast on God's care from the womb (Ps. xxii. 9, 10). One can sometimes almost trace a special providence in the care of children. Those who can look back on special mercies in childhood and early life are in the position of Israel here. 3. *The spiritual life has a childhood.* It has its feeble beginnings. There are those who are but "babes in Christ" (1 Cor. iii. 1). They are as "new-born babes," needing "the sincere milk of the Word," that they may "grow thereby" (1 Pet. ii. 2). God is tenderly careful of such, considerate of their weakness and watchful in their nurture.

II. GOD'S LOVE TO ISRAEL IN HIS CHILDHOOD. "I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt," etc. (vers. 1, 3, 4). God's love to Israel was shown: 1. *In his adoption.* He chose the nation, and called it "My son, my firstborn" (Exod. iv. 22). "Israel was a type of Christ, and for the sake of him who was to be born of the seed of Israel did God call Israel 'My Son.'" In Christ the honour is extended to each individual believer (1 John iii. 1). The relation expressed is one of peculiar endearment and of pre-eminent privilege. It is connected, in the case of believers, with the impartation of a new principle of life in regeneration (1 John iii. 9). The children of believers are "holy" (1 Cor. vii. 14). God claims them in baptism as *his* children. The name "sons of God" shall be restored to Israel on their conversion (ch. i. 10). 2. *In calling him out of Egypt.* Freedom is an attribute of God's children (Rom. viii. 21). When God made Israel his son he bound himself to deliver him. He gives freedom to all his spiritual children. The call to leave Egypt was, moreover, a proof of God's faithfulness and love, in view of the promises made to the fathers. It bore also a prophetic character (Matt. i. 15). Egypt having, by express Divine selection, been chosen a second time as a place of refuge for God's Son—for him of whom Israel, God's firstborn, was but a type—the former call became prophetically a pledge that in this case also the Father's summons would in due time arrive. Arrive, accordingly, it did. The word, "Out of Egypt have I called my son," found a new and higher fulfilment. On the Divine side, the fulfilment was neither unforeseen nor undesigned. 3. *In training him to go alone.* "I taught Ephraim also to go, taking them by the arms." God gave the nation freedom. He further taught it to use its freedom. Freedom, without power to use it, is a sorry gift. In the training of Israel we observe: (1) Wisdom. The people, as they came from Egypt, were unfit for independent national existence. They could not go alone. The bondage they had experienced had broken their manliness. They were servile, cowardly, fickle, petulant, disunited. They had to be guided at every step—treated like children who cannot walk alone. But the point is, that God sought to train them to walk. It is not his wish that his children should go in leading-strings. He would train them to self-reliance. He therefore put the people in situations fitted to develop their own powers. His training was wise. (2) Care. God was kind and tender with Israel while yet they were weak. He did not try them above what they were able. In difficult situations he brought help to them in time. He was like a nurse who stands near while the child is walking, ready to catch it if it totters, and to support it when it can walk no further. Thus God deals with all his children (cf. 1 Thess. ii. 7). Wisdom, goodness, and care are manifest in his leading of them, especially in the beginning of their way. 4. *In drawing the people with love.* "I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love." The people needed to be drawn. They were often recalcitrant and ill to manage. God emphasizes here: (1) The *humanness* of his drawing of them. "Cords of a man." There was a humanness in the manner of his approach to them—speaking to them in human words, through human servants, and with the persuasions of human affection. The heart of God was found to be like the heart of man. The Almighty tempered his glory, and spake to Israel as Father to Son. His cords were those of a man in another sense. He drew them by rational considerations. He treated them as rational beings, and appealed to them throughout on rational grounds. God draws men in this way still. The Bible is the most human book in the world. Christ is God become man. The Spirit acts through rational motives on the will. (2) The *gentleness* of his drawing of them. "Bands of love." God employed, not stern, but gentle methods to overcome the people's refractoriness. He sought to draw them to himself by kindness. Especially in the earlier stages of the wilderness discipline do we find him making large and merciful allowances for them. The people are constantly rebelling, but seldom do we read of God so much as chiding them; he bore with them, like a father bearing with his children. He knew how ignorant they were; how much infirmity there was about them; how novel and trying were the situations in which he was placing them; and he mercifully gave them time to improve. This was the drawing of love, of which every one who knows God has also had ample experience. 5. *In bountifully providing for them.* "I was to them as they that take off the yoke on their jaws, and I laid meat unto them." God provided for Israel all that was necessary for their sustenance, and not only thus supplied their creature wants, but was kind in his manner of doing it. He was also the Healer of their diseases (Exod. xv. 26).

III. ISRAEL'S REQUITAL OF THIS LOVE. (Vers. 2, 3.) Israel had made God a shameful return for all his goodness to them. They: 1. *Refused obedience.* "As they [the prophets] called them, so they went from them." They flatly turned their back on duty. They went further in sin the more they were warned. 2. *Dishonoured God in the very article of his Godhead.* "They sacrificed to Baalim, and burned incense to graven images," thus breaking the first and second commandments. 3. *Renounced God as a Healer.* "They knew not that I healed them" (cf. ch. v. 13).—J. O.

Vers. 5—7.—*Fatal courses.* So the wise man teaches, "There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death" (Prov. xvi. 25). We have here—

I. ISRAEL'S BANE. They insisted on thinking their own way better than God's. This is brought out in the different expressions: "They refused to return" (ver. 5); "Because of their own counsels" (ver. 6); "My people are bent on backsliding from me" (ver. 7); "None at all would exalt him" (or exalt themselves, raise themselves up to God). They were in error, but they would not be persuaded of it. They were hugging a delusion, but they clung to it as wisdom. They thought their own way right, and the way which the prophets pointed out to them silly, stupid, contemptible. This is the folly of the sinner. He sets himself up as wiser than God. He snaps his fingers at those who call him to the Most High (ver. 7). The folly of *his* way might seem self-evident, but, unwarned by the lessons of the past, he sounds its praises as if reason and experience were entirely on his side.

II. ISRAEL'S PUNISHMENT. The roads of sin, unhappily, lead to destruction, whether those who walk in them are persuaded of the fact or not. So Israel found it. Their own counsels, which they preferred to God's, cost them: 1. *Relegation to bondage.* (Ver. 5.) The freedom God had bestowed upon them (ver. 1) he would again deprive them of. Their destination, however, would not be the literal Egypt, but Assyria. The principles of God's moral administration abide, but they seldom embody themselves in precisely the same outward forms. 2. *A whirling sword.* (Ver. 6.) The sword would whirl and devour till it had devastated the whole kingdom. A type of the more terrible wrath that will consume the sinner.—J. O.

Vers. 8—11.—*Divine relentings.* God's wrath, had it burned against Ephraim according to his deserts, would have utterly consumed him. It would have made him like Admah and Zeboim, cities of the plain, "which the Lord overthrew in his anger, and in his wrath" (Deut. xxix. 23). But Divine compassion sets limits to Divine wrath. God would punish, but, in remembrance of the covenant made with the fathers, would yet spare a part, and in the end would recover and restore. For "city" (ver. 9), read "heat (of wrath)."

I. COMPASSIONATE, YET PUNISHING. (Ver. 8.) 1. *God's wrath is limited by his compassion.* "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel?" In the threatenings, God speaks as if he would destroy Israel altogether. He states what their sins deserve, and what, having regard to his wrath only, he would be bound to inflict. Their sins kindled an indignation which, had it burned unchecked, would have consumed them from the face of the earth. He now shows how compassion works to limit this. God, having set his love on Ephraim, cannot give him up. Wrath is not the only principle in the Divine breast, and wrath having uttered itself in threatenings, pity is called forth by the thought of the woe with which the threatenings are charged. So God says, "Mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled" (cf. Ps. lviii. 38, 39). Were it not for God's compassions, sinners would not be so long borne with, nor would their punishments so often stop short of destruction (Lam. iii. 22). 2. *God's compassion does not alter the determination to punish.* Though God's repentings were kindled, this did not mean that Ephraim was to escape the punishment of his sins. Right must be maintained. If God—the "Holy One"—is not sanctified in men, he must be sanctified upon them. God declares only that he will turn from the "fierceness" of his anger—that he will not utterly destroy Israel (ver. 9). The sinner, therefore, need not build hopes on the Divine mercy, as though he could sin and yet evade penalty. His sins may even reach a point at which mercy can do no more for him.

II. REPENTING, YET IMMUTABLE. God's repentings are kindled, yet the guarantee

given that he will not destroy Ephraim is that he is "God, and not man"—"the Holy One," an attribute of whose character is faithfulness (ver. 9). The apparent contradiction is to be resolved, not by turning what is said of the Divine relentings into a mere anthropomorphism, but by remembering—what immutability involves—that the same principles which operate in the Divine breast in the execution of his purposes operated also in the forming of them. God, that is, in the forming of his purposes had in view both what justice would dictate and what love would desire. His purpose was framed in the interest of both. The evolution of the purpose in history brings God into living relations with men, and calls the forces of the Divine nature into active and intensely real exercise. 1. *God is not man in his long-suffering.* Man would not bear with man as God bears with sinners. He would not forgive as God forgives. He would not show the same patience in working for his fellow-man's recovery. He would not be so easily entreated. He would not stoop, as God stoops, to love the worthless. He would not make the sacrifice which God has made for the salvation of enemies (Rom. v. 6—8). 2. *God is not man in his unchangeability.* He "is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent" (Numb. xxiii. 19). He is not swayed by passing feelings to change his intentions. "I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed" (Mal. iii. 6). God had in view the promise to the fathers, and would not be false to it. God's faithfulness is the saint's consolation and the repentant sinner's hope. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins" (1 John i. 9). "He abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself" (2 Tim. ii. 13).

III. REJECTING, YET PROMISING TO RESTORE. (Vers. 10, 11.) Israel was to become a "No-people" to Jehovah (ch. i. 9), but not absolutely. They would ultimately be restored. A day of grace was set for them. The return would be: 1. *In response to a Divine call.* "He shall roar as a lion: when he shall roar, then the children shall tremble from the west." God's call would be loud, far-reaching, effectual. God's call precedes the sinner's return. Believers are designated "the called." This call came in a preliminary way to Israel at the time of the return from captivity under Cyrus (Ezra i. 1—3). It was then but very partially answered. It comes spiritually in the preaching of the gospel. The complete fulfilment is yet in the future. 2. *Joyful and prompt.* They "shall tremble from the west. They shall tremble as a bird out of Egypt, and as a dove out of the land of Assyria." The trembling would be in holy joy and fear. The return would be in haste, as a bird flies to its nest, and a dove to its dove-cote. It would be from west and east, *i.e.* from all quarters whither God had scattered them. 3. *Permanent.* "And I will place them in their houses, saith the Lord." The prediction will have its main fulfilment in the reception of Israel back into the kingdom of God. It may have a lower temporal fulfilment in the restoration of the nation to their own land.—J. O.

Ver. 12.—(See next chapter.)—J. O.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER XII.

In vers. 1—6 God continues his complaint against Ephraim, charging them specially with the pursuit of vain and futile courses to their great detriment. Instead of repairing to the true and everlasting source of safety and salvation, they had recourse to foreign alliances to support and strengthen their decaying state and sinking interests. And yet the only staying power was Jehovah. The controversy now embraces Judah also; and thus Jacob—both Israel and Judah—is threatened with such punishment as their doings deserved. The mention of their great ancestor Jacob naturally suggests a contrast; while his conduct is proposed to them for an example. They are accordingly invited to follow in his footsteps, imitate the piety and wisdom of his course, and so entertain good hope of similar success from the unchanging and unchangeable God of their pious ancestor.

Ver. 1.—Ephraim feedeth on wind, and followeth after the east wind. "Wind" is employed figuratively to denote what is

empty and vain, of no real worth or practical benefit. 1. To feed on wind is to take pleasure in or draw sustenance from what can really afford neither; while following after the east wind is (1) to pursue vain hopes and ideals which are unattainable. According to this view, the prominent idea of the east wind is its fleetness, which passed into a proverb; thus Horace says, "Agente nimbos Ocior Euro." To outrun the swift and stormy east wind would represent an undertaking at once impracticable and hopeless. But (2) it is rather the blasting influence of the east wind that is referred to, so that it is a figurative representation, not so much of what is vain and hopeless, as of what is pernicious and destructive. Thus their course was not only idle, but injurious; not only delusive, but destructive; not only fruitless, but fatal. Their career, which is thus represented, included their idolatry and foreign alliances. Kimchi explains this clause as follows: "In his service of the calves he is like him who opens his mouth to the wind and feeds on it, though he cannot support life thereby. 'And followeth after the east wind;' he repeats the sense in different words, and mentions the east wind because it is the strongest and most injurious of winds to the sons of men. So with them: it is not enough that the idolatry of the calves does not profit them, but it actually injures them." 2. The Septuagint rendering is Ὁ δὲ Ἐφραὶμ πονηρὸν πνεῦμα, ἐδίωξε καυσῶνα, equivalent to "But Ephraim is an evil spirit; he has chased the east wind." **He daily** (rather, *all the day*) **increaseth lies and desolation.** Some understood these words (1) as descriptive of Ephraim's attitude towards Jehovah; and thus what is figuratively set forth in the first clause is here represented literally. Thus Kimchi says, "He does not turn back from his wickedness, but all the days he multiplies lying, which is the worship of the calves, and so increases the desolation and destruction that shall come as a punishment for their service. And with all this he does not perceive nor return from the worship of the calves to the worship of the blessed God." But (2) we prefer understanding the second clause of Ephraim's conduct towards his neighbour or fellow-man. Thus, Hitzig, who shows that שׁד cannot refer to their conduct towards Jehovah, nor could their lies and desolation continue the whole day if referred to his service. חָמָס וָשֹׁד, "violence and robbery," or "spoil," are also joined in a similar manner in Amos iii. 10 and Jer. vi. 7, to characterize men's conduct towards their neighbours. In the passage before us, if we refer the words, "lies and desolation," as we think they ought to be referred, to Ephraim's conduct towards men, the כזב and שׁד may be distinguished thus: the former designates low lying and fraudulent dealing; while the latter expresses that brutal violence by which dishonest men unscrupulously take possession of their neighbours' property. **And they do make a covenant with the Assyrians, and oil is carried into Egypt.** This fondness for foreign alliances is specified as a positive proof of their apostasy from, and want of confidence in, Jehovah. This is well explained by Kimchi in the following comment: "But what doeth Ephraim? When oppression of the enemy comes upon him, they make a covenant with Assyria for their assistance, and likewise with Egypt—one time with this, another time with that." The expression כרת ברית, "to cut a covenant," has its parallel in the Greek ὅρκια τεμνεῖν and Latin *fœdus ferire*, as also in the Arabic, doubtless from the circumstance of slaying the victims in its ratification. The conduct here censured is Ephraim's faithlessness to the theocratic covenant rather than their treacherous manœuvring in "playing off" Egypt against Assyria, and Assyria against Egypt alternately. The land of Israel abounded in oil-olive and honey, as we read in Deut. viii. 8 and elsewhere. The object of sending it to Egypt was as a present to the Egyptians to secure their interest and help against Assyria. It is thus properly explained both by Rashi and Kimchi. The former says, "And their oil they bring to Egypt to give it to them as a present that they may help them;" the latter likewise, "They bring their oil to the Egyptians for a present, for oil came to Egypt and to other lands out of the land of Israel. The land of Israel was rich in olive oil."

Ver. 2.—**The Lord hath also a controversy with Judah, and will punish** (margin, *visit upon*) **Jacob according to his ways.** God here presents himself at once as plaintiff and judge, widening the range of his pleadings. The controversy with Israel takes a wider sweep, and comprehends Judah culpable, though apparently in a less degree. But though Judah comes in for a share of punishment, that punishment shall be proportionate to their delinquencies—those like Judah that sinned less shall suffer less; while the more heinous transgressors, such as Israel had proved to be, would come in for severer punishment. To Jacob, here embracing the ten tribes of Israel and the two of Judah, the chastisement would be meted out in exact accordance with his ways. The apparent contradiction between ver. 12 of last chapter, where, as most translate it, Judah is represented as ruling with God and being faithful with the saints, and the present inclusion of Judah in controversy with Jehovah, occasioned (1) a rendering

and explanation of this verse which Aben Ezra declares to be both ungrammatical and unscriptural. "He," says Aben Ezra, "who explains that Judah is faithful and he shall be reproving, and asserts that Scripture makes no mention of Jehovah having a controversy against Judah, but [employs] עִם, the sense being that Jehovah and Judah have a strife against Ephraim, errs from the way of Scripture and grammar, for the prophet has written above (ver. 13), 'Judah saw his wound;' 'I will make Ephraim to ride; Judah shall plough;' and in reference to both of them he says, 'Ye shall eat the fruit of lies.' He also forgets 'The herdmen of Gerar did strive with (עם) Isaac's herdmen;' 'And the people strove with Moses;' and many other places [*i.e.* where עִם is found with the sense of 'contending']. Therefore he joins Ephraim with Judah, and says, 'The Lord hath also a controversy with Judah, and will punish Jacob according to his ways,' because this name (*i.e.* Jacob) comprehends them both (Ephraim and Judah)." (2) The meaning is given concisely and correctly by Rashi thus: "He (Jehovah) announces to them the words of his controversy which their brethren of the house of Israel had caused him; and they should not wonder if he would punish (literally, 'visit on') Jacob according to his ways." The change in the case of Judah, Kimchi accounts for by reference to their subsequent apostasy, especially that of their kings, as follows: "Although he said, 'And Judah yet reigneth with God,' he meant, although he holds fast by the service of God in the house of the sanctuary; so afterwards they practised evil deeds as their kings were evil; therefore he said, 'Jehovah has a controversy and correction with Judah and Jacob to visit upon them according to their doings, as their kings were evil, for they did not remember my mercy with them and with their father Jacob, because the whole was for sake of his posterity; and I showed him a sign which should be to his seed after him, if they gave their heart to me. . . . And the sign which I showed them is only done for sake of his seed. But they have not acknowledged this, for if they had acknowledged this, they would have cleaved to me and my service, and I would have ratified to them the blessing of Jacob their father.'" The infinitive with *l* is not unfrequently employed in the sense of our future, thus, לִפְקֹד, it is to be visited, equivalent to "he shall or must visit upon it." This idiom is common in Syriac, but always with *atid*. **According to his doings will he recompense him.** The milder expression is applied to Judah—he has a controversy with him, but will punish Jacob, restricted by some to Ephraim or the ten tribes. Better understand Jacob of both Judah and Israel, who are both to be recompensed, each according to his works.

Ver. 3.—**He took his brother by the heel in the womb, and by his strength he had power** (margin, *was a prince, or, behaved himself princely*) **with God.** In this verse and the following the prophet looks away back into the far-distant past; and this retrospect, which is suggested by the names Jacob and Israel, reminds him of two well-known events in the life of the patriarch. The meaning and intention of this reminiscence are differently interpreted. The two leading views are the following: (1) Some are of opinion that the prophet means to give an example by way of warning, and to mention a trait of Jacob's overreaching cunning, and likewise of his violence, and thereby show that Jacob had incurred guilt in a manner resembling that of the then present generation; that is to say, his conduct had been like to theirs in deceit, lying, and violence. But (2) according to others, and we agree with them, the object of the prophet in these verses is to admonish them to imitate the conduct of their progenitor, and to remind them of the distinction which he had obtained thereby, as an encouragement to them to go and do likewise. (3) Another interpretation, somewhat similar to (2), is that of those who admit that Jacob's laying hold of his brother's heel in the womb is proposed to his posterity by the prophet for the purpose of emulation and encouragement, at the same time to exhibit God's electing grace from eternity. Thus Jerome: "While he was yet in the womb of Rebekah, he laid hold of his brother's heel, not by his own strength, it is true, who was incapable of perception, but by the mercy of God, who knows and loves those whom he has predestinated." So also Rashi: "All this I have done to him; he took his brother by the heel for a sign that he would prevail over him." Calvin explains more fully thus: "Their ingratitude is showed in this, that they did not acknowledge that they had been anticipated, in the person of their father Jacob, by the gratuitous mercy of God. The first history is indeed referred to for this end, that the posterity of Jacob might understand that they had been elected by God before they were born. For Jacob did not, by choice or design, lay hold of the heel of his brother in his mother's womb; but it was an extraordinary thing. It was, then, God who guided the hand of the infant and by this sign testified his adoption to be gratuitous. In short, by saying that Jacob held the foot of his brother in his mother's womb, the same thing is intended as if God had reminded the Israelites that they did not excel other people by their own virtue or that of their parents, but that God

of his own good pleasure had chosen them." Aben Ezra and Kimchi explain the seizing of Esau's heel by Jacob as owing to the impartation of Divine power, but as a sign of victory over his enemies. We must reject (1) for the following reasons: (*a*) The reference is not to Gen. xxvii., where Jacob's overreaching Esau is recorded, but to Gen. xxv. 26, where it is written, "After that came his brother out, and his hand took hold on Esau's heel;" (*b*) the patriarchs are always exhibited as patterns of piety—besides, Hosea never employs the name Israel in any but an honourable sense. We must elect between (2) and (3); and we incline to (2), as the gist of the passage is to exhibit Jacob's earnestness in seeking the Divine blessing as an example to his posterity. Already in his mother's womb, before he saw the light of the world even in his condition of unconsciousness, he had laid hold of the heel of his elder brother Esau, in order to anticipate him as the firstborn, and thereby appropriate the Divine promises. The second clause describes how with zeal, by labour and effort, he had struggled for the position of pre-eminence, sorely struggling for the Divine blessing. In the maturity of his manhood he wrestled with God, or rather with the angel of the covenant, and prevailed so that his name was changed to Israel. This picture the prophet presents to Jacob's posterity for their imitation, with implied promise of like happy result. Though Aben Ezra and Kimchi, in their exposition of the verse, rather explain in their own way the significance of the original event as recorded in Genesis than the application which the prophet here makes of it, yet it may not be out of place to subjoin their comments, which are as follows: Aben Ezra, "With respect to him who explains 'in the womb' in the sense that Jehovah then decreed the matter of the birthright and blessing, I know not how the meaning of 'in the womb' bears on that, as the Scripture says, 'Before I formed thee in the womb I knew thee.' According to my opinion it should be taken according to its literal sense, that 'he took his brother by the heel in the womb;' and this is made clear by 'and his hand took hold on Esau's heel.' Now the purport is, 'Why do the sons of Jacob not remember that I chose their father, and effected pre-eminence for him over all that are born? For when he was in the womb I gave him strength to lay hold of the heel, and this was as the working of a miracle, for the fœtus has, in the womb and at the time of the opening of the matrix, no strength to lay hold of anything until it comes forth from the womb into the air of the world. And lo! when he was in the womb I gave him strength; and afterwards he wrestled with the angel, and he (the angel) did not prevail over him, although one angel slew the whole host of Assyria, and from his sight the children of men flee in terror as David who was frightened; how much was it to wrestle with him.' The meaning is that all the children of the world should know that his (Jacob's) seed shall endure for ever, and in the end conquer his enemies. But Ephraim thinks that Ephraim himself has found the power." The comment of Kimchi on the first part of the verse is much the same with that of Aben Ezra just cited; while on the concluding clause he remarks, "And yet another sign I have shown him to be a sign to his children after him, for I gave him strength to wrestle with the angel and to be a prince in relation to him as if he was in the same rank with him. And this sign I showed him that his sons would be the portion of Jehovah alone, that star and angel should not prevail over them all the time they would do my pleasure, and by the signs of the heavens they should not be terrified, for they have no strength (physical) nor power (moral) over them, because the providence of God most blessed cleaves to them during all the period they would do my will, nor shall they succumb to any accident of time."

Ver. 4.—**Yea, he had power over the angel, and prevailed: he wept, and made supplication unto him.** As Jacob's position at birth symbolized the pre-eminence which God's electing love had in store for him, and as in his manhood's prime he put forth such earnestness and energy to obtain the blessing, so Israel, by the example of their forefather, are encouraged to like strenuous exertion with like certainty of success. The example is more fully described and dwelt on in this verse for the purpose of more powerfully stimulating the Israelites of the prophet's day to imitate it. From this verse we learn the following facts: (1) the nature of the conflict as of a spiritual kind; (2) the visible embodiment of the invisible deity, so that the angel is not an entire identification with God in the preceding verse, but the organ of Divine manifestation; and (3) the weapons used, or the means employed, namely, weeping and supplication, in a word, the instrumentality of prayer; and (4) the true way of prevailing with God, which is real humility and sincere supplication, not stiffnecked and defiant resistance to the Divine will and word, like that of Israel at the period in question. This verse "is," according to Aben Ezra, "an explanation how he put forth prowess with God." Kimchi regards it as "the repetition of the same thought for the purpose of intensifying, for it was a great

wonder for a man to wrestle with an angel." בָּכָה (1) commences a new clause; while (2) the punctuation of it as a participle, בֹּכֶה, and the connection of it with "prevailed," leaves the following clause isolated without any improvement of the sense. The rendering in this latter case would be "prevailed weeping," a somewhat awkward expression. But (3) there is an exposition adopted by the Hebrew expositors and advocated by Hitzig, which appears to us to do violence to the true signification of the passage. Thus Rashi: "And the angel besought him, 'Let me now go. The end of the Holy and Blessed One is that he may reveal himself to thee in Bethel, and there shalt thou find him.'" Similarly Aben Ezra: "He (the angel) almost wept and supplicated him to let him go. And the signification of עַ֥ד הֵ֛שׁ, Gen. xxxii. 26, is: 'before the light strengthened, that Jacob might not be alarmed.'" Also Kimchi: "This is not mentioned in the Thorah; and the explanation is as if the angel wept and supplicated Jacob to let him go, as he said, 'Let me go, for the day breaketh.'" Such exposition introduces into the text an intolerable anthropopathism. Jerome long before had given the correct explanation thus: "He wept and asked him, when he said, 'I will not let thee go, unless thou shalt have blessed me!' For the wrestling was that which he engaged in with the angel, holding him by prayers that he might bless him, not by the strength of work. If any one weeps and exercises penitence, and supplicates the Lord, he shall find him in the grief of his heart, and when he has invoked him, he shall hear him answering." **He found him in Bethel, and there he spake with us.** The prophet here records the result of Jacob's faithful wrestling. There in Bethel, the very place where years after idolatry and immorality found a home, God had manifested himself to the patriarch. The fruit of Jacob's victory was that (1) he found God at Bethel; not that (2) God found him, as some explain it. The historical basis of the prophet's statement is not Gen. xxviii. 11, which narrates the appearance of God to the patriarch as he fled into Mesopotamia, but Gen. xxxv. 9, when the new name of Israel, "prince with God," was confirmed to him, and the promise of all the families of the earth being blessed through his seed renewed. Of the two visions at Bethel the second is the one here referred to, as it comes after that at Penuel, the scene of the patriarch's wrestling with the angel; while the accompanying circumstances keep us to the right understanding of the expression, "He found him in Bethel," which we are considering. Jacob on that memorable occasion prepared himself and household for seeking God by putting away the strange gods that were among them, by ceremonial purifications, and putting on change of garments. Thus, seeking with holy purpose and prepared heart, he found the Lord at Bethel, and enjoyed heavenly fellowship with him there. Aben Ezra favours (2) making Jehovah, not Jacob, the subject; thus: "As he was returning to his father, the angel found him there; and because the angel appeared to him twice in Bethel, behold the place is the gate of heaven; therefore I and Amos have prophesied about Jeroboam at Bethel, which is the place of his kingdom." Kimchi approves of the exposition of the angel finding Jacob, but mentions a modification of that of Jacob finding the angel; thus: "The angel found him in Bethel and also blessed him there; and the word יִמְצָאֵ֑נוּ, equivalent to 'found him,' is the future instead of the past. But my lord my father, of blessed memory, explains it according to its literal import, that the angel said to him (when wrestling with him) that he would find him in Bethel. The blessed God announced to him the good tidings that he would there manifest himself to him and call his name Israel." The last clause of this verse states the additional fact that God spoke (1) through the patriarch to his posterity. "Let it be observed," says Lackemacher, as quoted by Keil, "that God is said to have talked at Bethel, not with Jacob only, but with all his posterity. That is to say, the things which are here said to have been done by Jacob, and to have happened to him, had not regard to himself only, but to all the race that sprang from him, and were signs of the good fortune which they either would or certainly might enjoy." Though the suffix of יִמְצָאֵ֑נוּ in the Massoretic text is well attested, yet, instead of (*a*) the third person, Ewald reads it (*b*) as the first plural, and consequently so renders the word that the clause implies, not a narrative of the past, but a prophecy of the future; thus: (2) "He will find *us* at Bethel, and there he will speak with us." The Septuagint, again, with other Greek versions, as also the Syriac and Arabic, read in the last part of the clause עִמּ֖וֹ, equivalent "to him," instead of עִמָּ֑נוּ, equivalent to "us," which identifies the patriarch with his posterity. The translation by which a relative is understood before *'immanu*, equivalent to "There he spoke to Jacob the things that are with us," or "happened us," or "pertained to us," is neither necessary nor in accordance with good taste. Kimchi understands the verb in the present tense, that is, God speaks (*a*) *with us*—Hosea and the other prophets, to reprove the idolatry rampant in Bethel; (*b*) rather with the pro-

phet and the people descended from the patriarch. On the words, "there he spake with us," Kimchi comments as follows: "These are the words of the prophet. He says, 'There in Bethel he (Jehovah) speaks with me and with Amos to reprove Israel for the worship of the calf in Bethel,' as Amos (v. 4) says, 'Seek ye me, and ye shall live: but seek not Bethel.' But my lord my father, of blessed memory, explained 'And there he will speak with us' as the words of the angel. He (the angel) says to him (Jacob), 'The blessed God will find us in Bethel, and there he will speak (*c*) with us, with me and with thee, in order to confirm to thee my blessing, and to call thy name Israel, saying, For as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed.'" But others, as Saadia Gaon, explain the word, not in the sense of "with us," but (*d*) "on account of us," or "about us."

Ver. 5.—**Even the Lord God of hosts; the Lord is his memorial.** Here we have at once a confirmation and a pledge of previous promises. Jacob had wronged Esau, and thereby incurred his displeasure; he had offended God by the injury inflicted on his brother. He is consequently in a position of peril with respect to both God and man; he repented of his sin, and with many and bitter tears supplicated safety—salvation in the highest sense. Jacob, or Israel, in Hosea's time were involved in greater guilt and exposed to greater danger; the same unfailing remedy is recommended to them, and the same way of safety is laid open before them; let them only repent, turn to the Lord, and with tears of genuine sorrow seek his face and favour free; and the prospect would soon brighten before them. The Name of God was a sufficient guarantee: he is Jehovah the Everlasting, and therefore *Unchanging One*—the same to Jacob's posterity as he had been to the patriarch himself, equally ready to accept their repentance and equally willing to bless them with safety and salvation. He is God of hosts, and thus the *Almighty One*, governing all creatures, guiding all events, commanding all powers both heavenly and earthly, and ruling the whole history of humanity. His name is a remembrancer of all this, and thus his people were assured that he neither lacks the will nor the power to bless them with all needful blessings, and do them greatest good. The name of an individual is that whereby he is known; on mention of his name the memory of him is recalled. The mention of the Divine Name not only reminds us of his being and Godhead, but recalls to our memory his attributes. Rashi has the following brief comment on this verse: "As I have been from the beginning, so am I now; and if ye had walked with me in uprightness as Jacob your father, I would have dealt with you as I dealt with him." Thus to Abram in a land of strangers, imperilled and defenceless, God revealed himself as God Almighty; to Moses, after centuries of unfulfilled promise, he made himself known as the Unchanging One, still challenging the confidence of his people; to Hosea he brings to mind his unchanging counsel in regard to all the events of time and his unlimited control over all the realms of space and their inhabitants, and so the suitability of his attributes to the multiplied necessities and varying circumstances of his people.

Ver. 6.—**Therefore turn thou to thy God: keep mercy and judgment, and wait on thy God continually.** God's character in itself, and his conduct towards the great forefather of the Hebrew race, call at once for confidence and contrition. The evidence of their repentance is twofold: one aspect is manward, consisting of mercy and judgment; the other is Godward, being a constant waiting upon God. The literal rendering brings out the meaning more clearly; it is, "And thou, *in* [or, 'by'] thy God thou shalt return." If we render the preposition by "in," we may understand it to imply entire dependence on God, or close and cordial fellowship with God; if we take it to mean "by," it signifies the power or help of God; while the return is moral and spiritual, with perhaps material and literal restoration implied. A parallel for *b*e in the signification of "by" occurs in the first chapter of this book at the seventh verse: "I will save them by (*b*e) the Lord their God;" also in Deut. xxxiii. 29, "O people saved by (*b*e) the Lord." We prefer the former sense as more simple and suitable; it is concisely and correctly explained by Keil as follows: "שׁוּב with בְּ is a pregnant expression, as in Isa. x. 22, 'So turn as to enter into vital fellowship with God;' that is, to be truly converted. . . . The next two clauses are to be taken as explanatory of תָּשׁוּב. The conversion is to show itself in the perception of love and right towards their brethren, and in constant trust in God." The difference between שׁוּב בְּ and שׁוּב אֶל is that the latter signifies "to return *to*," and the former "to return into," and thus expresses inward union with him. The general sense of the clause is thus expressed by Aben Ezra: "If thou wouldst return to God, he would be thy help to bring thee back to him;" and by Kimchi as follows: "But thou, who art the seed of Jacob, if thou art willing, canst return unto thy God, *i.e.* thou canst rest in him, as 'In returning and rest shall ye be

savod' (Isa. xxx. 15)." The second point of the verse has an instructive parallel in Micah vi. 8, "What doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" In regard to the waiting upon God, of which the last clause speaks, Aben Ezra has the pithy remark, "Depend not upon thy riches nor thy strength, for the strength thou hadst from him, also the riches." Kimchi comments on the same more fully, as follows: "On this condition thou canst rest and not be afraid of the enemy, if thou wilt observe to do mercy and judgment: for his conditions are as he said, 'I am the Lord which exercise loving-kindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the Lord.' And although he does not mention righteousness here, yet he has said in another place, 'Keep ye judgment, and do justice [literally, 'righteousness'].' And he says here, 'And wait upon thy God continually;' now it is righteousness and equity that thou waitest on thy God continually. And even when thou shalt have great possession and riches and wealth, thou shalt say to thyself, 'It is all from him; thou shall remember him continually and wait on him, as he says in the Law (Deut. viii. 18), 'Thou shalt remember the Lord thy God, for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth; not like Ephraim, who says, 'I am become rich, I have found me out substance.'" The Septuagint has ἔγγιζε, equivalent to "draw near to," having probably read קְרַב instead of קַוֵּה.

Vers. 7—14 contain a fresh description of Israel's apostasy. To this the prophet is led by the preceding train of thought. When he called to mind the earnestness of the patriarch to obtain the blessing, the sincerity of his repentance, and the evidences of conversion, consisting in mercy and judgment and constant waiting on God, he looks around on Israel, and finding those virtues conspicuous by their absence, he repeats the story of their degeneracy.

Ver. 7.—He is a merchant (margin, *Canaan*), the balances of deceit are in his hand: he loveth to oppress. This verse is more exactly rendered, *Canaan is he, in his hand are the balances of deceit: he loveth to oppress.* How the sons have degenerated from the sire! No longer do we see Jacob wrestling in prayer with the angel of the covenant, and knighted in the field with the name of Israel, or "prince with God;" but a fraudulent merchant *K'naan*, seeking to aggrandize himself by cheating and oppression. His conduct is the opposite of what God requires; instead of the mercy and judgment and trust in God enjoined in the preceding verse, we have the Canaanitish (Phœnician) trader, with his false scales in his hand and the love of oppression in his heart. The word *K'naan* sometimes denotes *Canaan*, the son of Ham, and ancestor of the Canaanitish nation; sometimes the *land of Canaan*, or lowlands (from כָּנַע, bow the knee, γονυ, γνυ, γνυτεῖν, *genu*, knee; then "to be low" or "depressed") as opposed to אֲרָם, or "highlands" (from רוּם, to be high); sometimes *Phœnicia*, the northern part of Canaan; also, from the Canaanites or Phœnicians having been famous as merchants, a *man of Canaan*, or any *merchant*, so Job xl. 30 and Prov. xxxi. 24, just as *Kasdi Chaldæan* is applied to an astrologer. At the time of Hosea, the Phœnicians were the great merchants who had the commerce of the world in their hand. Canaan is thus a figurative designation of Ephraim in their degenerate condition as indicated by the false balances and love of oppression. The verse is well explained by Theodoret: "And thou, Ephraim, imitating (1) the *wickedness of Canaan*, hast an unjust balance of mind: thou despisest justice, thou greedily desirest unjust power, thou art high-minded in riches, and dost arrogate to thyself very much in prescribing and determining the conditions thereof." Rashi more briefly remarks, "Ye depend upon your wealth because ye are merchants and defraud; and of your riches ye say, 'Yet I have become rich, and shall not serve the Holy One;'" while Kimchi marks the contrast between Israel as he ought to be and Israel as he actually is, thus: "But thou art not so (*i.e.* practising love and righteousness), but thou art like the Canaanite, *i.e.* as (2) *the merchant*, in whose hand is the deceitful balance." The character of the Phœnician trader is thus given in the 'Odyssey'—

"A false Phœnician of insidious mind,
Vers'd in vile arts, and foe to humankind."

But, in addition to secret fraud, open violence is here charged against Israel.

Ver. 8.—**And Ephraim said, Yet I am become rich, I have found me out substance.** Ephraim in this verse boasts of his riches, though procured by fraud and violence, while he maintains at the same time that he has not sinned thereby so as to expose himself to punishment or deserve severe reprehension. The particle אַךְ has two principal meanings: (*a*) "surely" and (*b*) "only." In the former sense the clause (1) may allude to the injunction contained in ver. 6 to wait on God, and may signify, "No doubt I have become rich, yet not through Divine help, but by my own exertions;" in the latter sense it may signify, (2) "I have only become rich; I have done nothing else; I have done nothing amiss." Aben Ezra regards אַךְ as introducing the apodosis, and explains it nearly in the sense of (1), thus:

"The sense of אך is, 'God has not given me the wealth, *but* I by myself [*i.e.* my own unaided efforts] have become rich, for I am not as the Canaanite,' that is, the merchant, as 'There shall be no more the Canaanite' (Zech. xiv. 21);" he then proceeds to show the connection, "And the meaning [according to the context] is, 'Why does he say, Keep mercy and judgment, and be not an oppressor like the Canaanite [nor am I]? yet all is my own honest earning; none of the sons of men shall find that I have sinned.'" The interpretation of Kimchi is similar, but somewhat simpler, thus: "The words, 'I am become rich,' are the opposite of 'Wait on thy God continually.' But he (Ephraim) does not wait on God the blessed, and he does not acknowledge that he gave him strength to acquire wealth, but says, 'My own power and the strength of my hands have made for me this wealth,' and he forgetteth God the blessed, who gave him power to work, as it is written in the Law (Deut. viii. 14), 'And thou forget the Lord thy God.' This is what he (the prophet) means by 'I have become rich;' he means to say, 'I have become rich from myself,'" *i.e.* by my own labour. The word אוֹן denotes both physical or bodily strength, and also, like חַיִל, riches, Latin *opes*, probably as procured thereby. The flourishing state of the kingdom during the reigns of Joash and Jeroboam II. may have induced their overweening self-confidence and their amazing forgetfulness of God, and at the same time this surprising ignorance of their real condition. (2) The Septuagint rendering is εὕρηκα ἀναψυχὴν ἐμαυτῷ, "I have found refreshment for myself," and Jerome, "Inveni mihi idolum," as if אָוֶן had been read instead of אוֹן. **In all my labours they shall find none iniquity in me that were sin**; margin, *all my labours suffice me not:* he shall have *punishment of iniquity in whom is sin*. Here two modes of construction are possible, and each has had its advocates; thus, יִמְצְאוּ may be (*a*) the *subject* of the verb, as in the LXX., which is, "None of his labours shall be found available for him on account of the sins he has committed." This is the rendering followed and interpreted by Cyril and Theodoret. (*b*) The words in question, instead of being taken as the subject to the verb, may be employed *absolutely* or with the ellipsis of a preposition, as in the Authorized Version; thus: "As to my labours, or the fruits of my labours," for כְּ is used in both senses. The meaning of the passage then is (1) that, besides the sins of fraud and oppression, Ephraim did not shrink through shame to vindicate his conduct and to maintain that, in all the riches he had acquired with such labour, no one could show that those riches had been unjustly acquired by him, or that there was sin contracted in their acquisition. Thus Kimchi: "He (the prophet) mentions another vice, saying that he (Ephraim) oppresses, and asserts that, in all he has laboured for and gathered together, they shall not be able to find (*a*) any riches of iniquity and sin. אוֹן is the same as iniquity *and* sin, and thus (Eccles. v. 18) 'it is good and comely' (*asher* here also for *vav*). Or the explanation of it is: (*b*) They shall not find with me iniquity, nor any matter in which there is sin pertaining to me. And ח is less than ע, iniquity, for sin comes sometimes by reason of error. Or the explanation of 'iniquity which were sin' is: (*c*) Iniquity in which there was sin to me; as if he said, with regard to which I had sinned; for if riches came into my hand through iniquity and robbery, it was not with my knowledge; he means: so that I sinned in relation to it, and took it by iniquity with my knowledge; and in this way (Lev. xxii. 16) 'they lade themselves with the iniquity of trespass,' ע being in construct state, that is to say, iniquity with regard to which they trespassed." לִי signifies "belonging to me;" while חָטְאָה is read, not as a noun, but as a verb in the Septuagint, ἃ ἥμαρτεν. (2) The Chaldee, which is explained by Rashi, gives an explanation identical, though only partially so, with the marginal rendering of the Authorized Version, namely, "It were good for thee if thou consideredst with thyself: all my riches do not suffice me, in order to expiate the iniquity which I have committed." This, and the marginal reading—both where they coincide and where they diverge—we must unhesitatingly reject as far-fetched, artificial, and having no real basis in the text. To their other sins Israel added this protestation of innocence, which was the solemn protestation of a falsehood. The clause (3) may admit another sense; thus: If in my gains by labour iniquity should be found, that indeed would be sin; but such is not the case. Thus, like the Pharisees of a later age, did they justify themselves before men; but God knew their hollow-hearted hyprocrisy.

Ver. 9.—**And I that am the Lord thy God from the land of Egypt will yet make thee to dwell in tabernacles, as in the days of the solemn feast.** This verse consists of two parts which in the original are co-ordinated; but in the Authorized Version the one is subordinated to the other by supplying an awkward and unnecessary ellipsis. It is better, therefore, to translate thus: *And I am the Lord thy God, from the land of Egypt: I will yet make thee to dwell in tabernacles, as in the days of the solemn*

feast. Some understand this verse as a threatening; not a few as a promise; while others combine both. (1) Theodoret, who may be taken as representing the first class of interpreters, comments thus: "That thou mayest understand this and learn wisdom by thy calamity, I will bring thee back again to that point that thou must again dwell in tents and wander as an exile in a foreign land." (2) Kimchi may represent those who understand it as a promise, or rather a promise with an implied threatening, and thus combine both. His exposition is as follows: "Even so am I ready to bring you forth out of the captivity where ye shall be, as I did when I brought you forth out of the land of Egypt, and sustained you in the wilderness and made you dwell in tents; so am I ready yet again, when I shall have brought you forth out of the lands of the Gentiles, to cause you to dwell in tents in the wilderness by the way, and to show you wonders until ye shall return to your land in peace." (3) Wünsche rejects both the preceding, and refers the statement to the other present time, taking עוֹד, not in the sense of "yet again," but in the equally allowable meaning of "further," or "still further;" thus his rendering of the verse is, "And yet I am thy God from Egypt, still I let thee dwell in tents, as in the days of the solemn feast." Thus we have a remembrance of God's goodness to Israel all along from the Exodus to the time then present, including the celebration of their feasts, especially that of Tabernacles, the most joyful of them all. This is favoured by the interpretation of Aben Ezra, which is the following: "The sense is, 'Shouldst thou not remember that I brought thee up out of the land of Egypt in great riches for which thou didst not labour, and nourished thee in the wilderness when thou wast in tents?' In like manner he shall be able to do unto thee as in the days of the solemn feast of thy coming out of Egypt." We prefer, notwithstanding, the exposition number (2), which includes, or rather implies, a threatening of being driven out of their good land into a wilderness state, because of their forgetfulness of, and ingratitude to, God, as also because of their proud self-confidence; while, with this implied threat of punishment, God holds out to them the promise and prospect of like guiding care and sheltering guardianship, as in that early period of their history, the remembrance of which was still kept up by the *mo'ed*, or Feast of Tabernacles, during the seven days of which the people dwelt in booths, in commemoration of their having dwelt in booths in the wilderness after they had been delivered out of the land of Egypt. Thus, as Hengstenberg has well observed, "the preterite is changed into a future through the ingratitude of the nation."

Vers. 10 and 11 prove God's continual care for the spiritual welfare and best interests of Israel all along, and, at the same time, the inexcusableness of Israel in forgetting God and in arrogating to themselves the power of controlling their own destinies in the matter of wealth and prosperity; while multiplied prophecies and visions testified to both, viz. to God's care and Israel's recklessness of warnings. Moreover, their persistence in sin prepared them for and precipitated the punishment.

Ver. 10.—**I have also spoken by the prophets, and I have multiplied visions, and used similitudes, by the ministry of the prophets.** The *vav* before the verb in the beginning of the verse is copulative, and the verb is in the preterite as the accent is on the penult; if the *vav* were conversive of the preterite into the future, the verb would have the accent on the ultimate. The preterite denotes what has been taking place up to the present. עַל is explained (1) by Knobel to denote that the Divine revelation or inspiration descended on the prophets from heaven; but (2) Kimchi explains it as equivalent to אֵת, with; thus: "'Upon (עַל) the prophets' is the same as 'with (אֵת) the prophets,' as (in Exod. xxxv. 32), 'And they came both men and women [literally, 'men, עַל *with*, or rather in addition to, women']. He (Jehovah) says, 'What could I do to you and I did not do it, so that ye should not forget me? And what did I do with your fathers? I spoke constantly with the prophets to admonish you from me, and I multiplied visions to you many days.'" The Authorized Version (3) employs "by" as the equivalent of עַל here. The pronoun *v'anoki* is emphatic, viz. "I even I," as though he said, "I and not another;" while the preterite proves Jehovah to have continued his visions to the very moment at which the prophet speaks. To the word אֶדַּמֶּה, (*a*) use similitudes, some supply a verbal noun of corporate sense, דְּמוּת or דְּמִיוֹן. This, however, is unnecessary, as a verb often includes its cognate noun, of which we have several similar ellipses, *e.g.* Gen. vi. 4, "They bare *children* [יְלָדִים understood] to them;" also Jer. l. 9, "They shall set themselves in array [הַעֲרָכָה understood] against her." The LXX. (*b*) has ὡμοιώθην, "I was represented;" and Jerome renders it *assimilatus sum*. The three modes of Divine communication here referred to are prediction, vision, and similitude. The word for *vision*, חָזוֹן, is used here as a collective; it differs from the dream in being a

higher degree of Divine revelation, also the senses of the receiver are awake and active, while in the dream they are inoperative and passive. Of the *similitude*, again, we have examples in Isaiah's parable of a vineyard (Isa. v.), and in Ezekiel's similitude of a wretched infant, to represent the natural state of Jerusalem. Aben Ezra remarks, "I have established emblems and comparisons that ye might understand me;" and Kimchi, "I have given emblems and parables by means of the prophets, as Isaiah says, 'My well-beloved hath a vineyard;' and Ezekiel, 'Thy birth and thy nativity is of the land of Canaan.' And the explanation of בד is that by their hand he sends them emblems and similitudes as (Lev. x. 11) 'which the Lord hath spoken unto them by the hand of Moses.'" Thus God, as Rosenmüller observes, "left no means of admonishing them untried."

Ver. 11.—**Is there iniquity in Gilead? surely they are vanity.** In reference to hypotheticals, Driver remarks, "With an *imperfect* in protasis. The apodosis may then begin (*a*) hath *vav* con. and the perfect; (*b*) with the infinitive (without *vav*); (*c*) with perfect alone (expressing the certainty and suddenness with which the result immediately accomplishes the occurrence of the promise. Hos. xii. 12 (יח in apodosis, 'of the certain future')." The first part of this clause has been variously rendered. Some take אם (*a*) affirmatively, in the sense of *certainly, assuredly;* others translate it (*b*) interrogatively, as in the Authorized Version, though even thus it would be more accurately rendered: *Is Gilead iniquity?* Pusey, following the common version, explains it as follows: "The prophet asks the question in order to answer it more peremptorily. He raises the doubt in order to crush it the more impressively. 'Is there iniquity in Gilead?' Alas! there was nothing else. *Surely they are vanity;* or, strictly, *they have become merely vanity.*" There does not appear, however, sufficient reason for departing from the ordinary meaning of the word, (*c*) namely, *if* thus, *If Gilead is iniquity* (worthlessness), *surely they have become vanity.* The clause thus rendered may denote one of two things—either—(*α*) moral worthlessness followed by physical nothingness, that is, moral decay followed by physical—sin succeeded by suffering; or (*β*) progress in moral corruption. To the former exposition corresponds the comment of Kimchi, as follows: "'If Gilead began to work vanity (nothingness),' for they began to do wickedness first, and they have been first carried into captivity. אך can connect itself with what precedes, so that its meaning is about Gilead which he has mentioned, and the sense would be repeated in different words. Or its sense shall be in connection with Gilgal. And although zakeph is on the word רק, all the accents of the interpreters do not follow after the accents of the points." Similarly Rashi: "If disaster and oppression come upon them (the Gileadites) they have caused it to themselves, for certainly they are worthlessness, and sacrifice bullocks to idols in Gilgal. The verb רק is a prophetic perfect implying the certainty of the prediction, as though already an accomplished fact." The exposition of Aben Ezra favours (*β*); thus: "If the Gileadites, before I sent prophets to them, were worthlessness, surely they have become vanity, that is, instead of being morally better, they have become worse." To this exposition we find a parallel in Jer. ii. 5, "They have walked after vanity, and are become vain." **They sacrifice bullocks in Gilgal.** שׁרים for שׂרים, like חוחים from חוח. The inhabitants of Gilgal on the west were no better than the Gileadites on the east of Jordan; the whole kingdom, in fact, was overrun with idolatry. The sin of the people of Gilgal did not consist in the animals offered, but in the unlawfulness of the place of sacrifice. The punishment of both Gilgal and Gilead is denounced in the following part of the verse. **Yea, their altars are as heaps in the furrows of the fields.** Gilead signified "heap of witnesses," and Gilgal "heaping heap." The latter was mentioned in ch. iv. 15 and ix. 15 as a notable centre of idol-worship ("all their wickedness is in Gilgal"), and retained, as we learn from the present passage, its notoriety for unlawful sacrifices, sacrifices customarily and continually offered (viz. iterative sense of Piel); the former was signalized in ch. vi. 8 as "a city of them that work iniquity," and "polluted with blood." The altars in both places are to be turned into stone-heaps; this is expressed by a play on words so frequent in Hebrew; at Gilead as well as Gilgal they are to become *gallim*, or heaps of stones, such as husbandmen gather off ploughed land and leave in useless heaps for the greater convenience of removal. חלם (related to *tell*, a hill, that which is thrown up) is a furrow as formed by casting up or tearing into. The ruinous heaps of the altars implied, not only their destruction, but the desolation of the country. The altars would become dilapidated heaps, and the country depopulated. The Hebrew interpreters, however, connect with the heap-like altars the idea of number and conspicuousness; this they make prominent as indicating the gross idolatry of the people. Thus Rashi; "Their altars are numerous as heaps in the furrows of the field. תי שי is the furrow

of the plougher, called *telem*;" Aben Ezra: "כג is by way of figure, because they were numerous and conspicuous." Pococke combines with the idea of number that of ruinous heaps—"rude heaps of stones, in his sight; and such they should become, no one stone being left in order upon another." Kimchi's comment on the verse is the following: "The children of Gilgal were neighbours to the land of Gilead, only the Jordan was between them; they learnt also their ways (doings), and began to serve idols like them, and to practise iniquity and vanity, and sacrificed oxen to strange gods in the place where they had raised an altar to Jehovah the blessed, and where they had set up the tabernacle at the first after they had passed over Jordan: there also they sacrificed oxen to their idols. Not enough that they made an altar in Gilgal to idols, but they also built outside the city altars many and conspicuous, like heaps of stones on the furrows of the field."

Vers. 12, 13.—**And Jacob fled into the country of Syria, and Israel served for a wife, and for a wife he kept sheep. And by a prophet the Lord brought Israel out of Egypt, and by a prophet was he preserved.** The connection of this verse with what precedes has been variously explained. The flight of Israel and his servitude are intended, according to Umbreit, "to bring out the double servitude of Israel—the first, the one which the people had to endure in their forefather; the second, the one which they had to endure themselves in Egypt." Cyril and Theodoret understand them to give prominence to Jacob's zeal for the blessing of the birthright, and his obedience to the command of God and his parents. Pusey says, "Jacob chose poverty and servitude rather than marry an idolatress of Canaan. He knew not whence, except from God's bounty and providence, he should have bread to eat or raiment to put on; with his staff alone he passed over Jordan. His voluntary poverty, bearing even unjust losses, and repaying the things which he never took, reproved their dishonest traffic; his trustfulness in God, their mistrust; his devotedness to God, their alienation from him and their devotion to idols." There may be an element of truth in each of these explanations, and an approximation to the true sense; but none of them tallies exactly with the context. There is a contrast between the flight of the lonely tribe-father across the Syrian desert, and the guidance of his posterity by a prophet of the Lord through the wilderness; Jacob's servitude in Padan-aram with Israel's redemption from the bondage of Egypt; the guarding of sheep by the patriarch with the Shepherd of Israel's guardian-care of them by his prophet when he led them to Canaan. Thus the distress and affliction of Jacob are contrasted with the exaltation of his posterity. The great object of this contrast is to impress the people with the goodness of God to them in lifting them up out of the lowest condition, and to inspire them with gratitude to God for such unmerited elevation and with thankful yet humble acknowledgment of his mercy. Calvin's explanation is at once correct and clear; it is the following: "Their father Jacob, who was he? what was his condition? . . . He was a fugitive from his country. Even if he had always lived at home, his father was only a stranger in the land. But he was compelled to flee into Syria. And how splendidly did he live there? He was with his uncle, no doubt, but he was treated quite as meanly as any common slave: he served for a wife. And how did he serve? He was the man that tended the cattle." This, it may be observed, was the lowest and the meanest, the hardest and worst kind of servitude. In like manner Ewald directs attention to the wonderful care of Divine providence manifested to Jacob in his straits, in his flight to Syria, in his sojourn there as a shepherd, and also to Israel his posterity delivered out of Egypt by the hand of Moses and sustained in the wilderness, so that one scarcely knows what to think of Israel who, without encountering such perils and distresses, and out of sheer delight in iniquity, so shamefully forsook their benefactor. Such is the substance of Ewald's view, which presents one aspect of the case, though he does not bring out so fully the fact of Israel's elevation and the humble thankfulness that should be exhibited therefor. The exposition of the Hebrew commentators agrees in the main with what we have given. Rashi says, "Jacob fled to the field of Aram, etc., as a man who says, 'Let us return to the former narrative which we spoke of above;' and he wrestles with the angel; and this further have I done unto him; as he was obliged to fly to the field of Aram ye know how I guarded him, and for a wife he kept sheep." "Ye ought to consider," says Aben Ezra, "that your father when he fled to Syria was poor, and so he says, 'And he will give me bread to eat' (Gen. xxviii. 20). 'And he served for a wife,' and this is, 'Have I not served thee for Rachel?' 'And for a wife he kept sheep;' and 'I made him rich.'" The exposition of Kimchi is much fuller, and is as follows: "And they do not remember the goodness which I exercised with their father, when he fled from his brother Esau. Yea, when he was there it was necessary for him to serve Laban for a wife, that he should give him his daughter, and the service consisted in keeping his

sheep, and so for the other daughter which he gave him he kept his sheep in like manner. And I am he that was with him and blessed him, so that he returned thence with riches and substance. And further, I showed favour to his sons who descended into Egypt and were in bondage there; and I sent to them a prophet who brought them up out of Egypt with much substance, and he was Moses. The forty years they were in the wilderness they were guarded by means of a prophet whom I gave them, and they wanted nothing. But all these benefits they forget, and provoke me to anger by abominations and no-gods."

Ver. 14.—**Ephraim provoked him to anger most bitterly: therefore shall he leave his blood upon him, and his reproach shall his Lord return unto him.** Instead of humble thankfulness and due devotedness, Ephraim provoked him to anger most bitterly. Therefore his blood-guiltiness and consequent punishment are left upon him; his sin and its consequences are not taken away. The dishonour done to God by Ephraim's idolatry and sins shall bring back a sure recompense and severe retribution.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—6.—*Reproof, retrospect, and exhortation.* Ephraim is reproved for the pursuit of empty and vain courses, and courses detrimental to their best and real interests. Judah is included in the threatening which follows. They are exhorted to follow the example of the patriarch which is proposed for their imitation, with implied promise of similar success. The unchangeableness of God, who not only accepted Jacob, but blessed and prospered him, is held out to the descendants of Jacob as a guarantee of like blessings in case of their turning to God and bringing forth fruits meet for repentance.

I. THE NATURAL AVERSENESS OF THE HEART TO GOD. This feature of the natural heart is patent in the case of Ephraim. The people of the northern kingdom spared neither pains nor expense to obtain human help rather than seek help from God. 1. We notice the *expensive* nature of their proceeding. They made a covenant with the Assyrians, and that was an expensive compact; for Menahem King of Israel had to pay Pul the Assyrian monarch a thousand talents of silver for the desired help, and Hoshea became tributary to Shalmaneser, and gave him costly presents; while the national exchequer was drained in another direction, valuable exports of oil being sent into Egypt. 2. The *energetic* pursuit of their purpose. They are represented as "following after," and "daily increasing." They imposed more toil on themselves to get away from God than they would have required to turn to God. They had "no less pains by going out of God's way than if they had kept in it; but God's way, as it is undoubtedly the surest, so in many respects it is even the easiest, course." 3. The *empty* consequences of this course. Their hopes were doomed to bitterest disappointment, and their human helps proved hurtful in the extreme. The presents which they had lavished on the Egyptians had no other effect than to compromise them with the Assyrians; while the issue was the imprisonment of this prince and the captivity of the people. So is it still; men's carnal confidences deceive them, like wind which may fill but cannot feed them; and not only deceive, but draw down on them greater calamities than those they hoped to escape from. Thus they prove not only profitless as the wind but pernicious as the east wind. The outcome of all is not only lying vanities but desolation.

II. THE APOSTASY OF GOD'S OWN PEOPLE, HOWEVER PARTIAL AND TEMPORARY, IS JUSTLY PUNISHABLE. God does not connive at sin in his saints that serve him, any more than in sinners that have never sought him; neither do men's ordinary good deeds atone for their occasional misdeeds. Sin in the people of God is sure to bring chastisement in some form. At first sight it might seem strange, or even contradictory, that the Lord should have a controversy with Judah, of whom it had been asserted a few verses before that "Judah yet ruleth with God, and is faithful with the saints." But a ready and right solution of the apparent difficulty is found in those striking statements of the Apocalypse, in which God, after bestowing deserved commendation on certain Churches for this or that course of conduct, immediately adds, "Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee." Their goodness, of whatever kind it was, did not cause their ill deserts to be overlooked. "Some there are," says an old writer, "who, if

there be any evil in men, can see no good in them; this is wicked. But there are others that, if there be any good in them, can see no evil; this is too much indulgence. They err in both extremes."

III. THE IMPARTIALITY OF THE DIVINE DEALINGS. 1. It is not a little strange how men sometimes try to screen themselves by the sins of others, or to palliate their wrong-doing by the yet greater wrong-doing of others. It might have been so with Ephraim; they might have pleaded the sins of Judah in extenuation of their own, or even charged the Most High with uneven dealing with them in punishing their sins, when Judah's sins were condoned. They might have said, "We are not so very much worse than Judah; there are sins in Judah as well as in Israel; why, then, should Judah escape?" So with many still; they are ready to say, "We are not worse than others; we have our faults, so have our neighbours; if we deserve punishment, so do others as well." God shows us that his ways are equal, that he will not punish Ephraim and allow Judah to escape, but that he will render to every man as his works shall be. 2. But their plea might be easily turned against them to their great discomfiture. If Judah is admittedly superior to Israel, and retains the true worship of Jehovah though with certain drawbacks, and if Israel has renounced that worship, and is in other matters in a worse case, might it not be asked in words similar to a New Testament Scripture, If even with Judah God has a controversy, how can Israel expect to escape? "If the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and sinner appear?" 3. Though every sin deserves the severest judgment, being an infinite offence against the infinitely Holy One, yet he proportions his chastisements to the degree and aggravation of each offence, and the obstinacy of the offender.

IV. THREE HISTORICAL SKETCHES OUT OF THE LIFE OF JACOB AND THEIR LESSONS. These histories record the three great struggles of the patriarch's life. 1. His *birth*, when he takes his brother by the heel, gives evidence of a Divine instinct or a divinely directed inclination to struggle for the birthright and its blessings. (1) The first lesson taught us in the Scripture record of Jacob's birth (Gen. xxv. 22, 26) is the electing love of God, or that gracious favour which God is pleased to extend to men, and that without respect to their works of merit or deserts of any kind. Not only are the people of God chosen by him from eternity, as we read, "He hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world," and consequently before they have done either good or evil, but sometimes they are made partakers of his sanctifying grace from the womb; thus we read of Jeremiah (i. 5), "Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee;" so also of John the Baptist (Luke i. 44), "Lo, as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in mine ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy." (2) Jacob's struggle to anticipate Esau in being the firstborn, and so to secure the birthright and its blessing, presaged the high spiritual position to which in the purpose of God he was to attain. Even the unsuccess of the effort does not lead Jacob to relax his efforts or relinquish his object, till grace compensated his natural disadvantage and crowned his persistent struggling with success. (3) The posterity of the patriarch are here taught not to fall back on, and boast of, the dignity and privileges of their ancestor, but to bestir themselves as he had done to secure spiritual blessings. (4) When God bestows grace in any it furnishes abundant cause of thanksgiving, but especially is this the case when that grace is granted in early life, so as to prevent those youthful follies and lusts that war against the soul, and which, in the case of those afterwards converted, often make them to possess the iniquities of their youth and embitter all their after-years. 2. The *wrestling with the angel* and prevailing formed the next great epoch in Jacob's life. This which is recorded in Gen. xxxii. was a season of great terror and distress, as well as of no little danger from his brother Esau. But he did not give way before the dangers that threatened him, nor succumb under the difficulties of his position; he bravely faced the discouragements that surrounded him—not, however, in his own strength. By the strength which God gave he had power with God; in the vigour of his strength he wrestled with the Angel of the covenant and prevailed. He saw the providence of God in all that betided him, and wrestled for the Divine favour and succour. The wrestling symbolized the intense earnestness and energy which he put forth; the object for which he strove so earnestly and energetically was the blessing of his God; the means employed were prayers and tears and fervent supplications; the persistence with

which he prayed and pled is expressed in the words, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me." Thus as a prince he had power with God and with men, and prevailed. (2) What evidence we have here of the riches of Divine grace! The omnipotent One gives us the power in virtue of which we prevail with him, even with himself! The method by which men prevail with God is the ordinances of prayer and supplication which he has himself appointed; while the spirit suitable to such employments is a broken and a contrite heart, for such the Lord will not despise. Jacob was truly magnanimous, and yet tender-hearted and contrite, and his weeping was the outpouring of his tenderness of heart and contrition of spirit. (3) The choicest blessings of providence and grace are often bestowed upon men after seasons of affliction and distress; and bestowed after intense wrestlings, earnest prayers, and solemn supplications. Here was a lesson for the people of the prophet's day to encourage them against the dangers and difficulties that were fast crowding upon them, and to instruct them by the example of their honoured progenitor to put their confidence in God, and not in miserable, disappointing human confederacies. Thus by the power of Omnipotence itself they might retrieve their sinking fortunes, surmount all difficulties, and triumph over all enemies. Here, too, is a lesson worth learning by us all. Power belongeth unto God; that power we may partake of; prayer brings that power near and allies it to our side, and in virtue of that power we shall prevail over all enemies whether temporal or spiritual. 3. The *third era in Jacob's history* was marked by his finding God at Bethel. (1) Twice God had been pleased to manifest himself to Jacob at Bethel, first when he left his father's house and set out for Padan-aram, as recorded in Gen. xxviii., when he saw that wondrous vision of the ladder connecting heaven and earth, the creature and the Creator, while angels as heavenly messengers ascended and descended upon it. The other occasion was when he was in great trouble and terror in consequence of the slaughter of the Shechemites To this, which is narrated in Gen. xxxv., the prophet specially refers in the passage before us. The occasion was a memorable one, and in one respect a melancholy one, in Jacob's history. He had forgotten the vows, or at least failed to pay them; he had neglected duty of a solemn and binding character. And now he is in danger and distress, yet finds God, and in him succour and support. God had been with the fugitive who returned a prince and a patriarch; he had prospered him and brought him back in safety and in peace, causing him to find grace in the sight of his brother Esau, father of the dukes of Seir. Arrived at Succoth, Jacob had built him a house, made booths for his cattle, and there his grazing flocks and herds, his peaceful dwelling, his large and powerful family, all attested the faithfulness of the covenant God. But for long there is no word of Bethel, and apparently no remembrance of the vow he had made to repair thither on his return, make that place a house of God, and allot the tenth of his substance to its maintenance. He left Succoth, passed the Jordan, and removed to Shalem; he lingered there, and time passed on, some seven or eight years elapsed, and still Bethel is unvisited and the vow unfulfilled. At length deep family affliction, sad family dishonour, and dark family guilt united to afflict, perhaps punish, the patriarch; and it became necessary for God himself to remind Jacob of Bethel, and the wondrous vision he had seen there, and the solemn vow he had made there, all of which seemed to have faded from his memory, and might perchance have been entirely forgotten, had not God said to Jacob, "Arise, go up to Bethel." In his distress he sought the Lord, and the call of God reminded him of his duty Under such circumstances he found him at Bethel, "which may be understood both of God who prevented Jacob by a vision the first time, and with a call the second time; and of Jacob who found God there when he sought unto him." (2) Thus, after a period of forgetfulness or neglect, soon as Jacob was stirred up to seek the Lord, he found him. Here was encouragement for his erring posterity to seek that God who never said to the seed of Jacob any more than to Jacob himself, "Seek ye my face in vain." (3) It is well worthy of note that the means whereby God is pleased to have intercourse with his people is his Word, as we may rightly infer from the expression, "there he spake with us." And it is further noticeable, that God's revelations of himself of old remain the heritage of the Church in all after ages. The words *there he spake with us* show that the communication was not merely personal to Jacob, but for his posterity. God spake with them as though present, and what he said concerned them though they were yet in the loins of their progenitor. So with the Church and people

of God still; what was written aforetime was written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope. Ver. 5, "*Even the Lord God of hosts; the Lord is his memorial.*" The God who appeared to Jacob, who conversed with him in reference to his posterity as well as himself, and whom Jacob found at Bethel, was the God of Jacob's succeeding race; the God against whom they had trespassed, but to whom they are now urged to turn. (1) That God is *Jehovah*, the self-existing One whose title is "I am that I am," which is a sort of paraphrase of the name Jehovah. He is the first of all beings, the greatest of all beings, supreme over all beings, whose being is without limit of time—everlasting, and without bound of space; infinite, having all being in himself, and giving to all creatures life and breath and all things. He is Jehovah, the everliving and never-changing God, the same in kindness, the same in covenant relation to his people, and the same in accessibility. What he did to Jacob he was ready to do for the posterity of the patriarch, yea, he is willing to do to all people that call upon him in truth, seeking his face and favour free. (2) He is, moreover, God of *hosts*; the armies of heaven are at his command, the inhabitants of the earth are subject to his will, the powers of nature and all the forces of the universe are under his control. This expression is employed in allusion to those hosts of God that met him after he had wrestled with God, after his name had been changed, and of whom we read, "The angels of God met him. And when Jacob saw them, he said, This is God's host," and in relation to whom he called the place Mahanaim, the two camps or hosts of God. (3) Jehovah is his *memorial*. Men short-lived and mortal raise monuments to keep up their remembrance; but the name Jehovah is the Divine memorial, the name by which he wishes to be remembered through all generations, as he says elsewhere, "This is my name for ever, and this is my memorial to all generations." This term may have reference to the memorial stone which Jacob had set up for a pillar, to keep up the remembrance of the gracious vision that had been vouchsafed to him, and as a memorial of his vow. (4) The case of Jacob proves the need we have of a memorial to help our memories; for oh, how deceitful our hearts are; how treacherous our memories in the things of God! We need helps, and means, and memorials, and remembrancers. Pictures are not needed for this purpose, images are not needed. God's name, as indicating his nature, is sufficient memorial of him; his Word and his works are to keep men in remembrance of him. The name Jehovah is God's memorial; every time we read, or hear, or speak that name, we are reminded of the glory and greatness of him who is the first and best of beings, as also of his goodness and grace. We are reminded by that name of the unchangeableness of his nature and his never-ceasing mercy to man—the same to the posterity of Jacob as to the patriarch himself, the same to us as to our forefathers, the God of our fathers being still the God of their succeeding race. "There is no shortening of his power and no darkening of his glory, but with whatsoever power God has wrought, in whatsoever glory he has appeared, in former times, he may manifest the same for us now."

V. THE PRACTICAL APPLICATION OF THE PRECEDING STATEMENTS. The application which the prophet makes of the subject is introduced with a "therefore." This "therefore" gathers up the several foregoing thoughts into one urgent appeal. 1. *Motives to repentance.* By the fact of Jacob's wrestling with God and the success of this spiritual struggle, by the memorial of the name Jehovah as an index of the unchanging mercifulness of his nature, and by the implied spiritual declension of his descendants, the people of both the northern and southern kingdoms in general and each individual in particular are earnestly admonished to turn to God, their fathers' God, their own God, as it is stated, "Therefore turn thou to thy God." 2. *Fruits meet for repentance.* The amendment answerable to repentance comprises the duties of the so-called second table of the Law. Justice and mercy may be regarded as a summary. (1) The golden rule of all justice is that royal law of Christ, "All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them; for this is the Law and the prophets." It would be out of place to enter into the details of justice; this one principle includes all, it is plain to all, it is applicable to all; it comprehends princes and people, masters and servants, brothers and sisters; it extends to all stations and relations, it is unvarying in its application to all persons in all matters and at all times; it embraces not only all the business transactions of buyers and sellers, but all situations and stations in which we can stand towards our brother man, whether

as inferiors or superiors or equals; it is a rule easily understood, easily put in practice, and commends itself to every man's conscience. Thus reading the Scripture text before us in the light of our Lord's teaching, we have a rule of justice easily accommodated to all cases, and of ready adaptation to all the vast variety of circumstances that bring us into relation with our fellow-creatures. In this duty of keeping judgment or justice, which is the same word (*mishpat*) in the original, you have only to make the case of your fellow-man your own, to conceive circumstances changed with him and yourself in his position; and then whatever you could reasonably expect of him, supposing yourself to be in his circumstances, that do to the utmost of your ability to every child of man. This principle not only includes that more obvious duty of acting justly in all the transactions of life which the apostle enjoins, saying, "Let no man go beyond or defraud his brother," but also prohibits those acts of injustice that might not chance to fall within the bounds of human law or of civil enactments, by awarding to every one his due—honour to whom honour is due, fear to whom fear, tribute to whom tribute, instruction to the ignorant, relief to the oppressed, bowels of compassion to the poor, and, in the words of Solomon, by withholding not good (of whatever kind) from them to whom it is due. (2) Strict justice is much, very much more than, alas! is often dispensed; yet it is not enough. There must be mercy too, and mercy tempering justice. When we have done full justice to a fellow-being we have not done all that God requires of us towards our fellow-creature; he has other claims upon us, and God has given him those claims. Reversing the order of the words according to the parallel passage in Micah, "Do justly and love mercy," we may say, "Just first and kind next" is the requirement of this Scripture; "Just first and then generous" is a common saying. We might exact strict justice for ourselves, standing upon our bond like him of old and demanding our pound of flesh, we might exact what is justly our due, but what benevolence would not and mercy could not claim, and so verify the old Latin proverb about the "height of justice being the height of injury;" but the requirement of mercy prohibits and prevents that. Then, O man, love mercy—it is the characteristic of your heavenly Father, who is the Father and Fountain of mercies; love mercy, that generous, large-hearted benevolence which does good according to its power to all men under all circumstances, "especially to them who are of the household of faith;" love mercy, that heaven-born principle which, if even an enemy hunger, feeds him, if he thirst gives him drink, if he be naked clothes him "And," to borrow the well-known words, "as in the course of justice none of us should see salvation, we do therefore pray for mercy, and that same prayer doth teach us all to render the deeds of mercy." (3) Further, we are not only to do justly and to love mercy, but to delight therein. Thus we shall not only do some acts of justice and perform some acts of mercy, but *keep* them both; mercy first, as having the pre-eminence and being the consummation of justice—the one the fruit, and the other the root. In this way we are required to keep mercy and justice, that is, to observe uniformly and practise habitually mercy and justice. For a pattern of mercy, read the parable of the good Samaritan; for the opposite, the story of Hazael, and the parable of the man who owed ten thousand talents.

VI. TRUE REPENTANCE INCLUDES, AS ITS NATURAL EFFECT AND TRUE EVIDENCE, THE PERFORMANCE OF OUR DUTY TO GOD AS WELL AS TO MAN. The former duty is here expressed in the words "wait on thy God continually." The connection of the words is very suggestive. Repentance is put to a practical test and its sincerity proved; the proof consists of a right discharge of the duties we owe both to man and God. The duties to man are put first, because we not unfrequently find persons showing a zeal for the outward ordinances of religious worship and yet neglectful of mercy and judgment to their fellow-creatures; and, on the other hand, such duties are never discharged aright where God is not truly worshipped; they may be performed by fits and starts, but not steadily and continuously as the *keeping* of them requires, unless there is genuine godliness. Thus morality has its root in religion, and religion without morality is only a name without reality. In order, therefore, to keep, in the sense of regularly observing mercy and justice, there must be continual waiting upon God.

VII. THE NATURE OF WAITING ON GOD. Waiting on God implies want and weakness and danger on our part, as also that God is the Source of fulness, of strength,

and of sufficiency. It also implies service. "As the eyes of servants look unto the hand of their masters, and as the eyes of a maiden unto the hand of her mistress, so our eyes wait upon the Lord our God." Waiting on God denotes waiting on him in expectation, trusting in him for help, looking to him for deliverance. 1. The *whole of religion* is at times summed up in the expression, "waiting on God;" in this sense the psalmist uses the words three times in a single psalm. After confessing his own faith in God, he prayed for all that possessed like precious faith, saying, "Let none that wait on thee be ashamed." Again, addressing God his Saviour and supplicating Divine guidance and Divine instruction, he says, "On thee do I wait all the day." And a third time, referring to the might and multitude of his enemies and supplicating deliverance, he pleads his own relationship to God, using the same words, "for I wait on thee," and adding, "Redeem Israel, O God, out of all his troubles." Similarly in the Book of the Prophet Isaiah, in reference to the spread of the true religion, not only over the broad continents and countries of earth, but throughout those multitudinous and distant islands that rise in beauty and rest in sunshine amid the wild waves of ocean that roll and rage around them, we read, "He shall set judgment in the earth," and "The isles shall wait for his law." 2. *Reasons for and motives to waiting on God.* There is good reason for waiting on God. God is the God of providence, and therefore all wait upon him. "The eyes of all wait upon thee, and thou givest them their meat in due season; thou openest thy hand, and satisfiest the wants of every living thing." He is the Author of every good gift and of every perfect boon, ruling the changing year, making everything beautiful in its season, causing the sun to rise and the shower to fall, and by that gentle shower and genial sunshine preserving to our use the kindly fruits of the earth; all his people acknowledge his goodness and wait upon his bounty. "Are there any among the vanities of the Gentiles," asks Jeremiah, "that can cause rain? or can the heavens give showers? Art thou not he, O Lord our God? therefore we will wait upon thee, for thou hast made all these things." He is the God of grace and salvation especially, and therefore we wait upon him; thus Israel says, "I have waited for thy salvation, O Lord;" and in like manner the good old Simeon, who is called a just and devout man, is represented as "waiting for the consolation of Israel: and the Holy Ghost was upon him." He is the God of mercy, in him compassions flow; and therefore it is our privilege as well as our duty to wait upon him, and say in the language of ancient piety, "And now, Lord, what wait I for? my hope is in thee; deliver me from all my transgressions, make me not the reproach of the foolish." 3. *Manner of waiting on God and exhortation to the duty.* Wait on the Lord in faith, for without faith it is impossible to please him, and whatever is not of faith is sin. Wait on the Lord in prayer; "In all things by prayer and supplication . . . let your requests be made known unto God," for he heareth prayer, and unto him shall all flesh come. Wait on the Lord in patience, and let patience have its perfect work; "for patience worketh experience and, experience hope." Wait on the Lord with resignation; say in your heart as you pray with your lips, "Thy will, O God, be done;" "It is the Lord; let him do what seemeth him good." Wait on him in the ordinances which he has appointed, reverencing his sanctuary, keeping holy his day of rest, observing those seasons of communion, which are green spots in the desert, where the good Shepherd feeds his flock, making them to lie down in green pastures, leading them by still waters, and causing them to rest at noon. Wait on him by fulfilling the vows of God which are upon you, paying those vows in spite of the world, and in sight of God's people all. Wait on the Lord in your family, and wherever you have a house let God have an altar; and let the incense of prayer and praise regularly ascend from that altar to the God and Father of all the families of the earth. Wait on him in closet prayer, entering thy chamber, shutting to the door, praying to your Father who heareth in secret, and who will reward you openly. Wait on the Lord, not occasionally merely, but continually; not in certain spasmodic efforts, but habitually; not after long intervals, but at all times. Wait on the Lord, and you will thereby renew your strength. There were giants in the earth in days of old. A terrible struggle once took place, as we read in classic story, between two lusty giants. Prodigious they were in strength, fearful in prowess; they struggled hard and wrestled long, but one of them, every time he touched the earth, renewed thereby his strength and prevailed over his antagonist. We need not stop to inquire whether the story be a fiction or a fact;

it matters not, as it serves equally well the purposes of illustration. Scripture records a fact which that fiction illustrates. The giant renewed his strength every time he touched the earth; the believer renews his strength, not by touching earth or grovelling among the things thereof, but by laying hold of the throne of grace in heaven and waiting on the Lord.

Vers. 7—10.—*Extent of Israel's apostasy.* I. Here we are shown HOW FAR ISRAEL HAD APOSTATIZED, how unlike they were to the patriarch of whom they boasted, and how far they fell short of admonitions that had been addressed to them. 1. *They were liker the Canaanite* whom they despised than the patriarch from whom they were descended. They had become liker fraudulent merchants than God-fearing members of the Church of God. To fraud they added oppression where they had the power. 2. *The love of money was the root* of this evil trait of Jewish character—a trait that shows itself too frequently at the present day, and which is not confined to the Jew, but comprehends the Gentile also. Men hasten to be rich, and cannot long be innocent. 3. There is *no greater aggravation* of sin than the love of it. The people of Israel at the period specified were not only addicted to the sin of covetousness or greediness of gain, but were actually enamoured of their sin. One of the worst features of wicked men, which the apostle has so vividly photographed in that black catalogue of sin, is that, "knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them." 4. Men addicted to covetousness and whose hearts are set on getting gain *make light of the doctrines of religion* Thus in the days of our Lord "the Pharisees also, who were covetous, heard all these things: and they derided him." Sacred truths and Divine mysteries were despised, while the ways and means of amassing wealth were their delight. So here the connection of ver. 7 may be the prophet's complaint of his countrymen's neglect of his exhortations, owing to their covetousness. "The scope of the prophet and the connection here is—We may exhort, but so long as their hearts are covetous, and set upon their way of getting gain, they will never regard what we say; they will not turn to God, they will not hear of it, but will rather turn a deaf ear to all entreaties."

II EXCUSES FOR SIN. Here we see how wicked men excuse themselves and palliate their sins. 1. Success furnishes them with a *plausible plea* for self-vindication. The prosperity of fools, we are told, destroys them; while the worldly prosperity of the wicked is frequently fatal to their spiritual welfare. "Fret not thyself because of him who prospereth in his way," says the psalmist, afterwards adding, "for evil-doers shall be cut off." It has been well and truly said that "prosperity in sinful ways is an old snare, hindering men from heeding challenges or God's anger because of them." 2. The *boastful spirit* of the wicked; they glory in their gains as self-procured; they attribute all to their own skill, or strength, or ingenuity, or industry, or ability, and refuse to acknowledge God. Nor is it, indeed, possible they should, for how could they bless God for what they have acquired by sin or gained by fraudulent dealing? 3. *False refuges* to which wicked men resort: they divest themselves of all dread of Divine displeasure or of danger on the ground of prosperity; they force themselves to believe that if their conduct were either displeasing to God or fraught with danger to themselves, they would not be so prosperous in getting gain or have such success in sin. Another false refuge is to seek relief for a guilty conscience from the outward comforts procurable by ill-gotten gain. 4. Other false shifts or hypocritical evasions are, as is here intimated, resorted to by sinners. Sometimes they gloss over their sins with fair names; thus their dishonesties, whether by fraud or force, take the name of the fruits of their labours, the earnings of their industry, or the profits of their calling. Sometimes they depend on secrecy and defy detection, and, while they feel themselves free from discovery, they fancy themselves safe in their sin, as though the eye of God did not penetrate such thin disguises, or as if God had not said, "Be sure your sin will find you out." Sometimes they hypocritically profess abhorrence of sins they habitually practise; or, if they acknowledge sin at all, they salve their wounds of conscience by the consideration that their sins are very venial offences, and such as are incidental to their situation, or common to their calling, or peculiar to their trade. Thus they minimize their culpability and impose on their own souls.

III. EFFECTS OF SIN. God's goodness, which is designed to lead men to repent of

sin, aggravates the sin of the impenitent. 1. God's claims on Israel's gratitude had been, indeed, mighty and manifold, as well as from ancient times. The glorious deliverances he had wrought for them, the low estate from which he had lifted them, the great exaltation to which he had raised them, the good land into which he had brought them, the rich grace he had bestowed on them, and the religious privileges he had conferred on them,—all these blessings, having been abused, increased the sin of their ingratitude and intensified their guilt. 2. God cannot hold the sinner guiltless. Sin, wherever it is found or by whomsoever it is committed, cannot pass unpunished. The offences of God's own dear children bring down chastisement upon them; he will not spare their faults. A father does not love his son less because he corrects him; he pities while he punishes; his bowels of compassion move while his hand holds the rod. So Israel, having been unmindful of God's mercy, must be exiled from their goodly pleasant land, and go into a bondage bad as, or worse than, that in Egypt of yore. 3. Yet God for all that does not renounce his interest in his people; he will give them occasion again to remember his goodness and to celebrate his redeeming love. Their preservation and restoration should again afford abundant matter for gladness and thanksgiving, when they would join trembling with their mirth, and celebrate the solemn Feast of Tabernacles, with joy drawing water out of the wells of salvation. Whether the reference be to a literal joyful restoration of Israel to their own land, or a glad time of revival and refreshing to all the true Israel of God, whether Gentile or Jew in gospel times, the encouragement is gracious and the prospect glorious. Nor is it less so from the contrast between the chastisement so deserved and the consolation promised.

IV. EXCELLENCE OF DIVINE TEACHING AND INEXCUSABLENESS OF THOSE PRIVILEGED THEREWITH. 1. To his people in the past God spake at sundry times and in divers manners, or in divers portions, as they needed or could bear it, and in divers ways, by prophecy, by visions, by similitudes, and by the ministry of the Word. The means of grace were thus abundant and multiplied. 2. However different the modes of ministration were, the speaker was still one and the same. It is God who thus speaks to us by his messengers. If we reject the message and the messenger that brings it, we reject the Author; if we receive the message from the lips of the messenger, we receive him who gave the commission. What a grave responsibility! What need to take heed how we hear as well as what we hear! And how incumbent on ministers also to take good heed, not only to the matter, but to the manner in which they convey the message they have received, remembering that they stand between the living and the dead, like Aaron when he took his censer and ran into the midst of the congregation till the plague was stayed. 3. The inexcusableness of those who, like Israel, enjoy so many privileges. The plainness, the variety, and the frequency of the Divine teaching impose a weighty responsibility, for unto whomsoever much is given, of them much shall be required; it is even a human principle practised among men, that to whomsoever men have committed much, of him they ask the more. How God has left us all without excuse, seeing that in these days of light and liberty God has given us such a clear revelation of his will, so many ministries to explain and enforce it, so much freedom to exercise our judgment upon it, and derive light and leading from it, while we sit, like Israel of old, under our vine and fig tree in peace and safety, none daring to make us afraid!

Vers. 11—14.—*Reproofs and remembrancers.* Reproofs for sin, and remembrancers of mercy.

I. REBUKES FOR SIN. 1. The richest *temporal blessings are blighted by sin.* Gilead was a fruitful and pleasant region, as may be inferred from references to it in Scripture, as when God says, "Thou art Gilead unto me, and the head of Lebanon: yet surely I will make thee a wilderness," and when its productions are spoken of, and its pasturages celebrated. It is still a beautiful district, with its hills and dales, wooded slopes, luxuriant pastures, lovely flowers, and refreshing streamlets. In addition to the natural advantages of the country, there was the city of Gilead, where the ministers of religion on the other side of Jordan dwelt. But sin sadly marred this fair and fertile land; so with many a region "where every prospect pleases, and only man is vile." The inhabitants are branded as transgressors of both tables of the Divine Law; iniquity characterized their conduct towards man, and idolatry their worship of God; while the priests,

instead of hindering, only helped the people in their sinful service. However incredible it might appear, nevertheless it was a fact; nor were they improving at the time to which the prophet refers—nay, they seem to have been going from bad to worse. 2. *The vanity of will-worship.* Will-worship may show much zeal, as appears to have been the case with the Gileadites; yet, without a Divine warrant, it is vanity all the same. They contravened the institution of the Most High, which had appointed one temple, one altar, and one priesthood. Severely, too, had they suffered for their sins. Inhabiting a border-land, they were exposed to the inroads and attacks of enemies, and much needed the Divine protection; but by their sins had forfeited that protection. Consequently they "were threshed," as a contemporary prophet tells us, "with threshing instruments of iron," and, being among the first that fell under the power of Assyria, they were carried away captive from their goodly, pleasant land. 3. *Superstition no substitute for spiritual service.* Nearness to God in outward relation or profession may coexist with absence of right religious principle; and where such is the case, outward observances neither secure from sin nor shield from its punishment. Thus the people of Gilgal, though west of the Jordan and belonging to Judah, were nearer the temple, and so nearer in outward relation to its worship, yet were quite as bad as the trans-Jordanic Gileadites. They had the externals of religion, and were no doubt zealous about them; they presented rich sacrifices and possessed numerous altars; but the altars they had set up were either to strange gods in opposition to the true God, or to the true God in opposition to his own appointment. "Whosoever they be, this side or the other, who profess to come nearest, if they mingle their own inventions in worship, God will be more sorely displeased with them: the more piety and holiness, the more we profess to come close to the Word of God, and yet withal mingle our own inventions, the more is God displeased; Gilgal offends more than Gilead."

II. REMEMBRANCERS OF MERCY. They magnified their ancestor Jacob, but misread his history; they gloried in his greatness, but forsook the God who made him great. It is a common thing for people to boast of their family and forefathers, however much they may have degenerated from those forefathers; and not unfrequently, the more they have degenerated the louder is their boasting. 1. God reminds them of *the humble origin and lowly condition of the patriarch*, of whom they boasted so much as their progenitor. The facts of which he thus reminds them conveyed instruction to them, and teach valuable practical lessons still. (1) The flight of the patriarch; his exile in Padan-aram; his poverty and servitude; having no dowry to give, his service was substituted instead; his hard shepherd-life;—all these were calculated to teach *humility*, and to put an end to the vanity of their boasting. (2) Though Jacob had been obliged in early life to turn his back on his father's house, *he never turned his back upon his father's God*, or the worship of that God. Here was another lesson, at least by implication, for his descendants to learn. In circumstances unspeakably more favourable they had turned aside from both, and wasted their energies in sinful courses and sottish idolatry, either vainly worshipping God, or transferring the worship due to him to those vanities that were no gods. Thus the lesson of their sad apostasy was next to be unlearned. (3) The *secret of Jacob's success* was the blessing of God whom he sought and served. God prospered him and multiplied his seed until they became a great people. Here was cause for *gratitude*, not for vain-glorying. Another lesson which Israel behoved to learn; and not Israel only, but all who at any time or in any land experience the loving-kindness of the Lord. If we are put in possession of great privileges, if we attain to a position of usefulness and influence, and if we are honoured in God's service, let us not forget the lowliness of our original on the one hand, nor fail to magnify the grace of God in our exaltation on the other; in that grace alone may we glory. 2. He reminds them of that great event of their history, that ever-memorable *deliverance out of Egypt.* (1) From this he will have his people learn that when they are brought low by afflictive *providences*, and suffer severely under the rod of correction, God may be thus preparing them for rich blessings to themselves, and training them for future usefulness in his service. This should promote patient submission, and prevent all unseemly murmuring and sinful complaining. (2) The way and *means of their deliverance* were fraught with other profitable instructions. The blessing of deliverance was great, not only for present relief, but subsequent preservation. The Author of it was Jehovah, to whom all the praise and glory were due and ever to be

ascribed; the agent, a prophet whom God honoured in accomplishing his high purpose for the benefit of his people.

III. RETRIBUTION THREATENED. Punishment is slow, but sure. 1. Notwithstanding all the warnings and instructions and remembrancers, Ephraim persisted in sin, and that of the most provoking kind. Instead of good grapes being produced in the highly favoured vineyard of the Lord, Ephraim's grapes were grapes of gall and clusters of bitterness. God here speaks after the manner of men who are provoked by the gross misconduct and affronts from their fellow-men, especially from those whom they have served and benefited. In like manner, despite is said to be done to the Spirit of grace, and the Son of God put to an open shame. How dreadful this misconduct of man, a worm of the dust in relation to God, that infinite Spirit! 2. Ruin irremediable cannot fail to be the result. The ruin, too, is self-procured. So with sinners still: they have themselves, not God, to blame; God will not hold them guiltless, yet the fault lies at their own door; their blood is on their own head; their life is forfeited, but it is their own doing; they are moral suicides. 3. Ephraim by iniquity and idolatry had brought dishonour on the Name and people of God. Sinners cause God's Name to be blasphemed; they bring reproach on our holy religion. This reproach must be rolled away; but it shall at the same time be rolled over or back on those who have occasioned it. Those that bring contempt on religion shall have the finger of scorn and contempt pointed at themselves in the end; those that despise God shall be lightly esteemed; and those who bring reproach upon his cause shall have that reproach returned unto themselves even in this world, while in the eternal world they shall awake up to shame and everlasting contempt.

APPLICATION. 1. Prosperity confirms sinners in their evil ways, and so their hearts are hardened and their consciences become seared. 2. "It is folly to call the riches of this world *substance*, for they are things that are not." 3. It is folly to attribute our riches to our own industry or ingenuity, as if we made ourselves rich, and as if it were the might and power of our own hand that gets us wealth. 4. It is folly to think our riches are our own, for ourselves, and that we may do what we like with our own. We are only stewards, and shall one day be called to give an account of our stewardship. 5. It is folly to boast of our riches as if they were a permanent possession, or as if they were evidence of peculiar merit in the possessor. 6. "It is folly to think that growing rich in a sinful way either doth make us innocent, or will make us safe, or may make us easy in that way; for the prosperity of fools deceives and destroys them."

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Ch. xi. 12—xii. 6.—*Jacob an example to his descendants.* In this passage the prophet exposes the degeneracy of the Hebrew nation by contrasting their ungodly ways with those of their ancestor Jacob, and strives to win them back to the service of God by reminding them of the mercy and grace of which that patriarch had been the recipient.

I. THE DEGENERATE JACOB. (Ch. xi. 12, and xi. 1, 2.) The entire Israelitish people had proved unfaithful to Jehovah. It was especially so with: 1. *Ephraim.* The career of the ten tribes had been one of faithlessness and falsehood. The whole life of the northern kingdom was a lie. Its people had renounced the Divine authority. They had lied to God by revolting from the dynasty of David; by rejecting the priesthood of the sons of Aaron; by worshipping the golden calves of Jeroboam; by abjuring Jehovah to do homage to Baal and Ashtaroth; by loosening the bonds of morality in their social life (ch. iv. 1—3); and by seeking help in times of national distress, at one period from Assyria and at another from Egypt (ver. 1). And yet all the while they claimed to be still the Lord's people, and boasted that Jacob had been their father. Ephraim's apostasy, Hosea says, brought the people no satisfaction; it was like "feeding on wind." Their career of national hypocrisy involved them in "desolation;" it proved as disastrous as for a caravan of travellers to "follow after" the simoom, which bears on its wings the hot poison of death. The degeneracy of the nation had also at last begun to affect: 2. *Judah.* Although the guilt of the southern kingdom was by no means so great as that of Ephraim, yet Judah was now following

in some measure the bad example of its northern neighbour. King Ahaz had given himself up to gross idolatry and iniquity; his reign at Jerusalem was a time of sad moral deterioration and spiritual darkness (2 Kings xvi.). So "the Lord had also a controversy with Judah" (ver. 2); for Judah was "unbridled against God, and against the faithful Holy One" (ch. xi. 12, Keil's translation). "Jacob," *i.e.* Ephraim, is already ripe for punishment; but Judah has now gone so far astray as to require solemn reproof and warning.

II. THE TYPICAL JACOB. (Vers. 3—5.) The Jews gloried in being "the children of Israel," and here the prophet shows them how unlike they were to their father. The national career of Ephraim had been one of constant degeneracy: from the time of Jeroboam, "who made Israel to sin," the people had gone from bad to worse with ever-accelerating speed. Their ancestor Jacob, on the other hand, had trod the path which is "as the dawning light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day" (Prov. iv. 18). Born with a selfish and unlovely nature, and prone to acts of deceit and meanness, he became a child of God, and had his heart moulded by Divine grace, until he showed himself not only a really religious man, but a great saint. How different it would have been now with Ephraim had he lived conformably to his claim of being "the seed of Jacob"! The prophet recalls various acts of the Divine favour to the patriarch. 1. *Before his birth.* His taking his twin-brother's heel by the hand did not foreshadow merely his future overreaching of Esau; rather it was a prognostic of his precedence over him in the Divine purpose of grace, and of the eagerness with which Jacob would labour to obtain the covenant-blessing. 2. *At Peniel.* There what at first seemed a man wrestled with him; and perhaps Jacob mistook him for a robber of the road, until at length the Stranger with a touch dislocated his hip-joint, thus effectually disabling him. Then Jacob perceived that his antagonist was an "Angel"—the Angel of the covenant himself; so he gave up his useless wrestling, and began to pray. "He wept, and made supplication unto him" (ver. 4); and the Divine blessing, which he could never have obtained by wrestling or supplanting, came to him in answer to his prayer. At Peniel Jacob "was knighted on the field," and there he received his new and heavenly name. He who from the womb had been known as the supplanter, the wrestler, the tripper-up, now became Israel—"a prince with God" (Gen. xxxii. 24—29). Ever afterwards Jacob's weapons were not carnal. He learned at Peniel to "prevail" by the power of faith and prayer, and of a holy life. 3. *At Bethel.* Hosea elsewhere calls the Bethel of his time by the contemptuous nickname of Beth-aven (ch. iv. 15; v. 8; x. 5); for, alas! "the house of God" had become "the house of vanity"—an abode of naughty idols. At Bethel, where Jehovah "found" Jacob, he himself was lost by Jacob's degenerate children. At Bethel, where Jacob saw in vision the stairway reaching to heaven, Satan had established a stairway leading to destruction. But now the prophet recalls the early national associations, so pure and hallowed, which were connected with Bethel. God "found Jacob in Bethel, and there he spake with *us*." In revealing himself to Jacob he had in view also Jacob's posterity. The patriarch received a Divine visitation at Bethel upon two occasions. The first, when on his way to Padan-aram (Gen. xxviii. 11—22); and the second, twenty-five years afterwards, some time after his return to Canaan. Probably Hosea refers here chiefly to the latter; for then Jacob performed the vow which he had made on occasion of his first visit, and then God confirmed his new covenant name of Israel, and repeated the promise of his blessing (Gen. xxxv. 9—15). God did all this at Bethel to Jacob and to "us" as "Jehovah, God of hosts" (ver. 5): as "God of hosts," omnipotent in heaven and earth; and as "Jehovah," the unchanging, covenant-keeping God, who desires his people ever to remember him by this profoundly significant Name (Exod. iii. 15).

III. HOW DEGENERATE JACOB MAY BECOME REGENERATE. (Ver. 6.) These words are an urgent exhortation to Ephraim to return to God, from whom he had "deeply revolted." The word "therefore" indicates that the call is grounded upon the representation just given both of the Divine character and of the Divine goodness to his ancestor Jacob. "Turn thou to *thy* God," *i.e.* thy covenant God, who still offers himself to thee, and is still ready to keep his ancient covenant, if thou approach him in penitence and faith. Why should Ephraim go down to destruction when he may have the "God of hosts" for his helper, and when he can plead the promise of the

eternal "I Am"? In the second part of the verse the prophet looks at conversion on its practical side. The reality of Ephraim's return to God would show itself in the discharge of moral duty. "Mercy and judgment" are the sum of the duties which we owe to our neighbour, and the performance of these is the most convincing outward evidence of piety (Ps. xv.). Again, to "wait on God continually" excludes idolatry and image-worship, and all other sins against the first table of the Law. Jacob had learned at Peniel to renounce the carnal device of supplanting, and when he came the second time to Bethel he put away Rachel's teraphim and other household gods. Now, Ephraim must begin to-day to act so if he would become, before it is too late, a worthy descendant of his ancestor. True turning to God involves obedience to both tables of the moral Law.

LESSONS. 1. The sinfulness of insincerity in worship (ch. xi. 12). 2. The mischievousness of a life of sin (ch. xii. 1). 3. The duty of following the faith of our godly ancestors (vers. 3, 4). 4. Places which have been the scenes of special mercy should be dear to God's people (ver. 4). 5. The power that there is in penitent believing prayer (vers. 3, 4). 6. "The Name of the Lord is a strong tower;" it brings to the godly man strength and hope and joy (ver. 5). 7. The practical nature of true piety (ver. 6).—C. J.

Vers. 7—14.—*Three painful contrasts.* In this strophe the threatening of punishment is again repeated (ver. 14). Ephraim's blood-guiltiness is to be left upon him; *i.e.* his sin is not to be pardoned. The "reproach" or dishonour which he has done to God by his idolatry and iniquity God will repay him. But the denunciation is mixed with mercy. "I will yet make thee to dwell in tabernacles" (ver. 9) seems to include, not only a threatening of banishment from "the Lord's land," but a new redemption from the coming Egypt-like bondage, which shall bring with it rest and freedom and prosperity. Beyond his captivity, Ephraim shall keep the joyous Feast of Tabernacles again, as a memorial of Messianic mercies in connection with his restoration. As Ewald, however, remarks, the main feature of these verses consists in "three compressed comparisons."

I. "ISRAEL" HAS BECOME "CANAAN." (Vers. 7, 8.) The "prince with God" has degenerated into a cheating huckster; the descendants of the godly Jacob have become like paltry Phœnician pedlars. Instead of "keeping mercy and judgment" (ver. 6) in their commercial dealings, they love to practise deception and oppression. Ephraim, accordingly, does not deserve to be called by the honourable name of "Israel;" he exhibits rather the innate characteristics of the Canaanite tribes, and may well be spoken of as "Canaan." But, worse even than that, the people are spiritually self-complacent, all the while that they deal so dishonestly. They deceive themselves with the notion that their habits of social injustice involve no sin against God. They ignore the teaching of their law about "just balances, and just weights" (Lev. xix. 36; Deut. xxv. 13—16). Enough for them if they become rich through their ill-gotten gains. They even argue that their continued success in acquiring riches by means of "the balances of deceit" is an evidence that the Lord cannot be angry with them (ver. 8). *Lessons:* 1. It is a spurious piety which does not take to do with "weights and measures." 2. The dangers of covetousness, a besetting sin of many Church members. 3. Long-continued temporal prosperity is not necessarily a token of God's favour. 4. Ungodly men pervert the Divine goodness and forbearance into an encouragement to persist in their sinful courses.

II. EPHRAIM HAS FORSAKEN THE PROPHETS FOR HEATHEN ALTARS. (Vers. 10, 11.) Jehovah, who had been his God "from the land of Egypt," had shown his love for the nation in raising up a succession of men as their teachers, upon whom he caused his Spirit to rest. The prophets instructed the people in spiritual truth and moral duty. They rebuked idolatry. They denounced all injustice and oppression. They warned of coming judgments. They testified beforehand of the coming of the Messiah, and of the ultimate salvation of the world through him. The larger number of the great prophets were sent to the kingdom of Judah, and yet some of the most distinguished of them laboured in the northern kingdom, as *e.g.* Elijah, Elisha, Amos, and Hosea himself. The Lord *gave his Word* to the prophets in a variety of ways. Sometimes by an audible voice, as to Samuel; more frequently, by writing the message in burning

thoughts upon the prophet's soul; and often, as Hosea here reminds the people, by "multiplying visions." The "vision" was a frequent vehicle of Divine revelation during the whole course of the national life of Israel. Jehovah multiplied visions to Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Zechariah, Daniel, etc. And the prophets, *in delivering the Lord's message*, were directed to employ material signs as a means of adding emphasis to spiritual truth. The Lord, who knows our frame, and who has made the earth "but the shadow of heaven" (Milton), took care to "give similitudes by the prophets." The Hebrew seers used the metaphor, the allegory, the parable, the dramatic action. They found spiritual analogies everywhere in nature, and in the circumstances of human life. And all this was a manifestation of God's solicitude for his people's good. He sent the "prophets," and gave the "visions," and suggested the "similitudes" in tender love for his erring children. Yet all was in vain. The people continued to live as if God had given them no revelation. Their idolatry extended all over the region beyond Jordan, here represented by "Gilead;" and all over the west of Jordan, represented by "Gilgal." They turned a deaf ear to the warning voices of the prophets. Ephraim forsook the one altar which God recognized as his, and increased the number of idol shrines until they covered the land, like the heaps of stones cleared by the farmer out of a ploughed field. The idolatry and wickedness of Israel were committed against the clearest light of prophecy, and against the yearning love of Jehovah, which had led him "daily to rise up early" and send the prophets. *Lessons.* 1. The privilege of being within reach of an earnest gospel ministry. 2. The advantage of the judicious use of illustrations in religious teaching. 3. How sad it is when localities which were once the scene of special manifestations of God become polluted with scandalous wickedness! 4. How aggravated the guilt of those who "sin wilfully after they have received the knowledge of the truth" (Heb. x. 26)!

III. EPHRAIM HAS FAILED TO LEARN THE LESSONS OF HIS OWN EARLY HISTORY. (Vers 12—14.) Had he reflected aright upon the course of Divine providence towards himself, his thoughts about God would have been thoughts especially of humility and gratitude. 1. *Humility.* (Ver. 12.) When the Jew offered his basket of "firstfruits" annually to the Lord, he was to say, "A Syrian ready to perish was my father" (Deut. xxvi. 5). Jacob, the stem-father of the tribes, went to Mesopotamia as a fugitive, and remained there for twenty years as a servant. He had no dowry to offer for Rachel; he could only serve for her as a shepherd. Israel, accordingly, had not much to boast of as regards his national origin; the beginnings of the nation could scarcely have been more humble. And yet how different was Jacob's life, spiritually, from that of his children to whom Hosea spoke this prophecy! 2. *Gratitude.* (Ver. 13.) The reference now is to Moses. If Jacob's condition of servitude in Padan-aram taught a lesson of humility, the thought of the slavery of his immediate posterity in Egypt was fitted to inspire sentiments of gratitude. What a great emancipation was that of the Exodus! And the agent by whom that deliverance had been accomplished was a prophet, and one who, like Jacob, had been a shepherd. Degenerate Israel despised the teacher whom God sent, forgetting while he did so that the emancipation from the bondage of Egypt had taken place under the leadership of one single prophet. The Prophet Moses had conducted the tribes through the Red Sea; and had acted as their guardian, and their mediator with God, during all the forty years which they spent in the Arabian desert. Under him the people had passed from a state of servitude into a position of sonship. Yet, alas! the nation cherished now neither humility nor gratitude. The Lord had preserved, enriched, and blessed them; but in return they only "provoked him to anger" by their grievous sins, until it became impossible that they could escape the punishment of their impiety. *Lessons:* 1. The profitableness of the study of Scripture biography and history. 2. God's people must expect to be subjected to discipline as a condition of their spiritual advancement. 3. The Lord uses apparently humble instruments to accomplish great results. 4. The duty of cherishing gratitude for past mercies in our national history.—C. J.

Ver. 3 (last clause).—*Prevailing with God.* It is no small thing to have a godly parentage. To be born to the heritage of a good name and of religious influences brings heavy responsibility and noble privilege. The man who turns from the path in which his godly ancestors walked commits a greater sin, in the judgment of God, than

the godless who have never known the advantages of a religious home. Among the nations, "Israel", had this peculiar responsibility. The name of the people was a reminder of the prayer in which their great ancestor obtained self-conquest, knowledge of God, and grace to keep justice and do mercy. Hence they are reminded by Hosea of what their father was, that they might know what was still possible to themselves. The prophet refers here to Jacob's agonizing prayer at Jabbok, and speaks of a "strength" which was in him, which consisted not in holiness or merit, but (as the next verse suggests) in "supplication and tears." God could not overthrow his faith and constancy. He could not, because he would not. The touch which shrivelled Jacob's thigh showed what *he* could do. The delay and struggle were only imposed on the suppliant (as by Jesus on the woman of Syro-phœnicia) in order to prepare him to receive a loftier blessing than he began at first to seek. The incident is related in a highly poetic form, and to Jacob the conflict was so terrible that it seemed an actual struggle with a living man. The voice and the presence were not material, but they were none the less real. We do not attempt to distinguish between the subjective and objective in this great conflict, yet we believe that Hosea's words respecting it are true, "There God spake with *us*," and that we are called upon to incline our hearts to the inference in the sixth verse, "Therefore turn *thou* to *thy* God," etc.

I. THE PREPARATION FOR WRESTLING WITH GOD, as exemplified in the experience of Jacob. Most men are so surrounded by what is material that they want the help of circumstances to enforce upon their thoughts the deeper necessities of their nature and the nearness of their God. Refer to Jacob's circumstances, and show how they constituted such a crisis in his life. Examine his mental condition, and see in it: 1. *Remembrance of sin.* Twenty years had gone by since that crime was committed which deceived his father, destroyed the peace of the home, and made Jacob an exile. Yet changes of scene, cares of business, the vexations caused by an exacting employer, etc., had not prevented the rising again of that dreadful memory. Bury sin as you may beneath cares and pleasures, it will reappear before you. Men have left the scene of guilt, formed new associations, hushed conscience to silence successfully for years, and then a chance word, or an unexpected event, has raised the spectre of the past sin. Such a one, like Jacob, would give anything to begin life again; but all in vain. We walk on through life like one upon a path in the cliffs which crumbles away behind him, so that he cannot go back to gather the flowers he neglected, or to take the turn that would have given pleasure instead of peril. What else can we do, when the remembrance of sin is overwhelming, but "weep and make supplication unto God"? 2. *Realization of peril.* Jacob cared not so much for himself; but he could not bear to think that these innocent, dear ones around him might suffer death or captivity because of his wrong-doing. When he committed the sin he had neither wife nor child, and little thought how far-reaching and disastrous its results would be. So the sins of youth full often are the seed whence springs a harvest of sorrow to others as well as to ourselves. Darwin would teach as plainly as David that the sins of the father are visited upon the children; as Jacob's children were in peril because of a sin their father committed before they were born. No wonder Jacob turned to God with tears and supplications, and "there God spake with us," saying, "Turn thou to thy God." 3. *Consciousness of solitude.* Jacob was left alone. Most of the crises of life must be faced in solitude. Hence our Lord said, "When thou prayest, enter into thy closet," etc He himself went up into a mountain alone, and when every man departed to his own house, he went to the Mount of Olives. Moses was alone on Sinai, John in Patmos, etc. It is well for us sometimes to shut the world out, to think over the past and to prepare for the future by waiting upon God. "Therefore turn thou to *thy* God," etc.

II. THE MEANING OF WRESTLING WITH GOD. In his spiritual struggle Jacob had: 1. *An apprehension of a personal God.* The expressions "man" and "angel" are used to show that God was as real to him as a man would have been; that Jacob found him to be One with whom he could plead, who could speak, who noticed his tears, and was able to bless him there. Those who know something of the intensity of prayer are not satisfied with vague ideas of God. To them he is not an abstract notion of the mind, projected upon nothingness; nor is he the sum of natural forces. He is the living and true God, who has a personal interest in them, and listens to the cry of their hearts.

Nothing less than that satisfies the soul. Idolatry is but a blind attempt to create some objective personality, nothing less than which men can worship. But what we want is given to us in Christ, who was "the image of the invisible God." Men may be satisfied with less than him in their lower life, but when the want of the soul is really pressing, when the hunger of the heart is fairly roused, prayer becomes an agony, in which they can say, "My heart and my flesh crieth out for the *living* God!" 2. *Consciousness of spiritual struggle.* "Struggle" does not correctly describe *all* fellowship with God, as we may see from Jacob's own experience. When he first left home he saw the heavenly ladder at Bethel, and had a sweet assurance of God's love and protection; but now twenty years have elapsed he goes through this scene of darkness and struggle and weeping. This is not what many would have expected. They demand that religious experience should always *begin* with agony over sin. But it does not. Children may know nothing of the agony of soul, yet they may know the reality of prayer. By the foolish expectations of some Christians, they are tempted to persuade themselves that they have known what they never did know, or else to regard the devotion of their childhood as sentimental and unreal. Why should they not heed the angels of Bethel first, and have the agony of Jabbok twenty years after, as Jacob did? But, sooner or later, most devout men know something of struggle, when the darker problems of life and its more terrible issues face them; yet, although in their later years they have to fight with doubts which did not trouble them once, they have no reason on that account to suspect the reality of their earlier religious life. It was not Bethel's pleasant dream, but Jabbok's dreadful struggle, that transformed Jacob into a prince. 3. *Victory through the Divine goodness.* Observe the change in the attitude of Jacob. At first the angels "met him" as if coming out of Seir, to remind and rebuke him of sin. He began with struggle, but ended in supplication. The end of all wrestling with God is not to conquer him, but to conquer self; *e.g.* one assailed by intellectual doubts finds rest, not in the solution of the difficulty, but in trust in him whose "greatness is unsearchable;" another troubled by the conviction of sin wins peace by confessing sin, not by disproving the charges of conscience. The consciousness and acknowledgment of weakness is our power, "weeping" is our eloquence; and they who come with the supplication, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me," by their strength have power with God.

III. THE ISSUES OF WRESTLING WITH GOD. See what Jacob won. 1. *Knowledge of God.* He knew him as "the Lord of hosts," with power to rule Esau and others, and as "Jehovah," who would fulfil his covenant promise. He was nearer to God now than ever. Before this he had been at Beth-el, "the *house* of God;" but now he was at Peni-el he saw "the *face* of God." 2. *Change in character.* No longer Jacob (supplanter), but Israel (prince). Before this he sought Divine ends by human means, but never after. In the presence of things eternal, things temporal faded away; and in the light of God's countenance he became sincere and transparent. "Beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, we are changed into the same image," etc. 3. *Delight in prayer.* When an old man he blessed his sons, having faith to foresee their future, and power in prayer to win their blessings. The priesthood of Christians on earth has yet to be realized in the fulness of its power. If only the Church had the spirit of supplication which Jacob had when he cried, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me," there would come a wave of spiritual influence over the world which would cover the bare rocks of scepticism, and sing a pæan of victory over the dreary wastes of sin. "By his strength" may the Church have "power with God"!—A. R.

Ver. 1.—*Feeding on wind.* The conduct of Ephraim is in many respects very instructive to all readers of Scripture. There is nothing in that conduct upon which Hosea lays greater stress than the extreme folly, unreasonableness, fatuity of sin. This is a forcible image which the prophet here employs to describe the vanity of a course of life distinguished by forgetfulness of God and rebellion against God, by a constantly recurring though constantly disappointing endeavour to find satisfaction in the pursuits and pleasures of sin. "Ephraim feedeth on wind, and chaseth the east wind."

I. A VAIN AND FALSE STANDARD AND AIM. Compare the wind with wholesome food, and you feel at once the absurdity of regarding the one as though it were equivalent to the other. The objects upon which the ungodly and the worldly set their heart are as

unsubstantial as the "viewless air." Such persons call evil good, and commit the sin of forsaking the fountain of living waters, and hewing out to themselves broken cisterns which can hold no water.

II. A FOOLISH PURSUIT. As are a man's conceptions of excellence, such we may expect will be his life. It is natural that we should seek that which we deem good. Seekers of satisfaction in the pleasures of sin, if they could but understand their real life, would see themselves to be chasing the east wind. All earthly aims, when substituted for God's glory—the one true end of our existence—are unworthy of our nature, and undeserving of our devotion.

III. AN UNSATISFYING REWARD. To swallow the wind is a poor substitute for eating suitable and sustaining food. And sooner or later every person who has given himself to the quest of worldly and selfish aims must discover their utter vanity, their inability to afford a true and lasting satisfaction. When the illusions of earth and time have vanished, and men stand face to face with eternal realities, how empty and unworthy will appear what has so often inflamed their desire and excited their strenuous effort! Anticipating so clear a judgment, let the hearers of God's Word be wise in time.—T.

Ver. 3.—*Power with God.* The prophet here introduced a reference to Jacob, one of the ancestors of the chosen people, in order to encourage his descendants to apply for mercy to the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob. The Eternal and Unchangeable remained the same; and what God had done for the ancient saints he was willing to do for their posterity. The expression used with regard to Jacob deserves attention: "In his strength he put forth power [or, 'prowess'] with God."

I. WHENCE POWER WITH GOD PROCEEDS. 1. From a sense of need and dependence on the part of the suppliant. He who needs much and sorely will plead powerfully. 2. From a conviction of Divine bounty and kindness. He who approaches an unwilling or niggardly person, with the view of asking from him a boon, loses half his energy by the consciousness of the illiberal character to which he appeals. But he who comes to God comes to a King of boundless resources, a Father of infinite compassion; and the knowledge of this should prompt to urgent entreaty.

II. HOW POWER WITH GOD MANIFESTS ITSELF. At Peniel and at Bethel Jacob proved himself a true suppliant; witness his "wrestling" at the one place and his "vow" at the other. We have no power to command God, but we have power to entreat him. We may feel our feebleness, but if our prayer be sincere, ardent, and persevering, it will have power with the Eternal.

"Yield to me, Lord, for I am weak,
But confident in self-despair."

III. WHAT IT IS WHICH POWER WITH GOD SECURES. 1. Personal forgiveness and acceptance. Above all things the suppliant sinner craves for this. To be in the light of the Divine favour is, of all things, the most urgently desirable. 2. The supply of every real need. 3. The relative blessings sought in intercessory prayer.

APPLICATION. Let not the thought of God's greatness cripple the energies or daunt the heart of the lowly applicant for mercy. Great as he is, he delights to be conquered by the urgent entreaties of his children.

"And when my all of strength shall fail,
I shall with the God-Man prevail."

T.

Ver. 6.—"*Turn thou to thy God.*" If there is one message more frequently repeated than another in the Scriptures, both of the Old and New Testaments, it is this message requiring *repentance*. There has been no generation of men, nay, there has been no individual man, to whom it might not justly be said, Repent!

I. HUMAN CHARACTER AND LIFE ARE SUCH AS TO RENDER NECESSARY THIS TURNING TO GOD. One who is on the right road already has no need to turn; but he who is travelling in the wrong direction must first of all reverse his steps, his course. As sin and error have been universal, no limit can be placed to the appropriateness of the summons of the text.

II. MAN MAY FIND IN HIMSELF MANY AND SUFFICIENT REASONS FOR REPENTANCE. His interests demand, his conscience enjoins, his best feelings urge, that he should turn unto God. His present happiness and his future prospects are imperilled by his remaining estranged from his God.

III. IN GOD HIMSELF, AND IN HIS REVELATION, ARE MANY GROUNDS FOR REPENTANCE. 1. First of all there is the fact that he is *our* God. "Turn thou to *thy* God." How just and proper, then, that, instead of looking away from him, men should look towards him! 2. It must be considered that all our happiness is bound up with his favour and fellowship. To turn to him is to turn to the light of the sun, to the source of life. 3. The Divine directions and promises furnish the most persuasive motive and the most authoritative justification for turning unto God.—T.

Ver. 6.—"*Wait on thy God.*" It is very instructive that the prophet in this passage admonished, not only to repentance, reformation, and righteousness, but also to "waiting on God." Many of the effects of repentance, and especially the moral, subjective effects, might be felt immediately, but there were other consequences which might probably be delayed. Hence the admonition of the text.

I. IT IS HONOURING TO GOD THAT HIS PEOPLE SHOULD WAIT UPON HIM. It is not for man to dictate to his Maker, to seek to prescribe when, how, and where God should intervene upon behalf of a suppliant. His wisdom is not to be questioned; his goodness is not to be impugned.

II. IT IS PROFITABLE TO GOD'S PEOPLE TO WAIT UPON HIM. Thus faith and patience are cultivated—virtues which are most serviceable to Christians, and which are a true ornament to the godly character.

III. IT IS WELL TO WAIT UPON GOD CONTINUALLY. Remissness in so doing is to be condemned; weariness in waiting is dangerous. Just at the moment when the Helper draws nigh the needy soul may be in slumber or may be otherwise engaged. Waiting means *watching*.

IV. GOD'S PEOPLE CANNOT WAIT FOR HIM IN VAIN. They may wait long, but their waiting shall be rewarded. Then shall they sing aloud for joy, "This is our God; we have waited for him." Wait for the harvest, and you shall reap. Wait for the morning, and the sun shall rise upon your expectant soul.—T.

Ver. 9.—*Happiness in reserve.* The mixture of promise with threat is one of the remarkable and instructive characteristics of these prophecies. In the midst of wrath God remembers mercy. The bright lining of the cloud cheers the beholder when he is downcast and troubled. Hosea is commissioned to assure Israel that upon their repentance they shall rejoice before God in the glad Feast of Tabernacles, which they shall celebrate to his glory.

I. TRUE HAPPINESS CONSISTS IN THE REMEMBRANCE AND CELEBRATION OF GOD'S MERCIES. The feast of Tabernacles observed by the Jews was a festival in which the nation commemorated the goodness of Jehovah, both in supplying their wants by means of the harvest, and in delivering them as a nation from the power of Egypt. Now we as Christians have even greater mercies to acknowledge; God has given us the Bread of life, and he has rescued us from the power of sin and Satan. It behoves us, therefore, to cherish gratitude to God the Saviour for all the great works he has wrought for us, and for all the loving-kindness with which he has treated us.

II. THE PROSPECT OF SUCH HAPPINESS IS FITTED TO CHEER THE HEART IN TIMES OF SORROW AND TROUBLE. If this be the wilderness through which we pass, we are journeying to the land of possession and repose. If this be the darksome night whose shadows gather round us, we hope soon to see the streaks of the coming day. Let the discouraged and harassed Christian learn to say with the psalmist, "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him."

III. THE FAITHFUL PROMISES OF THE ETERNAL ASSURE A HAPPY FUTURE TO THOSE WHO TRUST AND LOVE HIM. The religion of Christ places the golden age in the future. The Christian has always something blessed and glorious to which to look forward. His dwelling-place is above. And he has ever before him the happy and inspiring prospect of sharing in "the marriage supper of the Lamb."—T.

Ver. 10.—*Visions and similitudes.* In two ways Jehovah showed himself to be in an especial manner favourable towards the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The first was by his providential care of the nation throughout its history. And the second was that mentioned in this verse: God sent continually to his chosen people prophets, whose communications were the means of instructing, warning, and guiding them. Observe the twofold description of the Divine revelation vouchsafed.

I. VISIONS. 1. The name given to the class of inspired teachers and guides of the nation is significant, and is harmonious with this passage. They were *seers.* 2. By an illumined faculty these Hebrew prophets saw Divine realities. Intuition, insight, inspiration,—such are the terms by which spiritual vision is designated. "The vision and the faculty Divine" has been attributed to genius; but the order of men in question were distinguished by their perception of *spiritual* truth. 3. These visions of Divine realities the prophets, by language or otherwise, conveyed to the people.

II. SIMILITUDES. There is a natural and ordained correspondence between things natural and things spiritual, which accounts for the prevalence and the efficiency of pictorial, metaphorical, and allegorical methods of instruction and admonition. 1. Sometimes the prophets were directed to make use of *parabolic action.* We have several instances of this kind recorded in the books of Isaiah, Ezekiel, etc. 2. Similitude often took the form of parabolic language: *e.g.* Isaiah's comparison of Israel to an unfruitful vine; Ezekiel's comparison of the return from captivity to the revival of the dry bones, etc. 3. In both these prophetic methods there is a sacred purpose. Condescension to the ignorance and unspirituality of many of the people was one reason. 4. Our Lord Jesus himself "used similitudes," and sanctioned this interesting and impressive method in his parables and allegories.

APPLICATION. When God has deigned to communicate with us by visions and similitudes, how great is the responsibility of listening to the inspired prophetic Word!—T.

Ver. 13.—*The ministry of prophets.* The reference of this verse is obviously to Moses, who was indeed a great national leader and legislator, but who, it must not be forgotten, was the first and the greatest of the prophets. The remarkable fact here alluded to is, that God made choice and use of a prophet, not simply to teach, but to effect a great deliverance on behalf of the chosen nation.

I. THE SELECTION OF A PROPHET AS THE INSTRUMENT FOR A GREAT WORK WAS HONOURING TO GOD HIMSELF. If a warrior, a hero, had been employed for this purpose, the minds of the people might naturally have attributed their deliverance to his warlike prowess, his strategic genius. But when Moses, the meekest of men, the wisest of human teachers, was appointed, it was clear to all that, though the hand was that of Moses, the power was that of God.

II. THE GREAT WORK WHICH WAS DONE BY THE AGENCY OF THE PROPHET AUTHENTICATED AND ENFORCED HIS RELIGIOUS TEACHING. It could not be otherwise than that the children of Israel should regard with reverence and confidence a man who had led them out from the bondage of Egypt, notwithstanding the opposition of the mighty monarch whom he had defied. His revelations of the Divine character, his declarations of the Divine will, came home to the people with tenfold power because he had been the means of making the presence of God known and felt among them in a way which the whole nation could appreciate. The same principle explains why it was ordained that signs and wonders should so usually accompany the ministry of inspired men.

III. THE COMBINED MANIFESTATION OF DIVINE WISDOM AND DIVINE POWER RENDERS UNBELIEF AND IRRELIGION THE MORE CULPABLE. It was a reproach to Israel that, after experiencing manifestations of the Divine presence so unquestionable, they should have cherished an evil heart of unbelief. Considering that the Christian dispensation has been marked by an even more striking display of divinity than the Mosaic, it may well be asked, "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?"—T.

Ver. 1.—*Worthless soul-food.* "Ephraim feedeth on wind." Delitzsch renders this clause, "Ephraim grazeth wind." The idea is that it sought for support and satisfaction in those things that were utterly unsubstantial and worthless—"wind."

I. SENSUAL INDULGENCES are worthless soul-food. Men seek happiness in the grati-

fication of their senses, in the free indulgence of their appetites: but all this is nothing but "wind;" it leaves the soul more hungry than ever. Souls die with hunger in the pampered body of the gourmand and voluptuary. "Man cannot live by bread alone," etc.

II. WORLDLY DISTINCTIONS are worthless soul-food. Thousands seek food for their souls in worldly titles, honour, and fame. But these are "wind." The souls of our grandees are perishing with hunger. Walk Rotten Row in the height of the season, and in the countenances of hundreds of those rolling in the stream of dazzling chariots you see moral hunger depicted. What are they doing? They are *grazing* wind.

III. RELIGIOUS FORMALITIES are worthless soul-food. Millions go through religious formalities in search of spirit-food. They crowd temples, synagogues, cathedrals, churches, chapels, rigorously attend to the mere ceremonies of religion, and return from their devotions with hungry and unfed souls. At the altars they have been *grazing* wind. "Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not? hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness."—D. T.

Ver. 6.—*Genuine human goodness.* "Therefore turn thou to thy God: keep mercy and judgment, and wait on thy God continually." Delitzsch renders the verse thus: "And thou to thy God shall return, keep love, and right, and hope continually in thy God." The new translation gives no new idea. The few words may be regarded as representing genuine human goodness. Looking at it in this respect it includes three things.

I. SPIRITUAL CONVERSION. "Turn thou to thy God." An expression implying that their moral mind was in a different direction, away from God. It was so with Ephraim; it was after idols. It is so with all unregenerate souls; they are alienated from God. Terrible fact this. God's intelligent creatures turned from him and against him. Turning to him includes at least two things. 1. Accepting him as the supreme *Monarch to obey.* It means the making of his will the law of all their laws, the test of all their conduct, the guide of all their activities. 2. Accepting him as the supreme *Object to love.* Man is so formed that he must have some one to love supremely. His crime, degradation, and curses are, that the objects which he has chosen on which to centre his paramount love are imperfect creatures and vanities. He is the only Object worthy of the soul's supreme love, and this he demands. He who renders him this will have his heart enlarged, and run with joyous alacrity in all the ways of his commandments. Here, then, is the first step in genuine human goodness—conversion. "Repent, and be converted." This is the grand call of the gospel. God calls men everywhere to repent—that is, to change their hearts, turn from themselves to him their Creator.

II SOCIAL MORALITY. "Keep mercy and judgment." Notice the latter first. 1. "*Judgment,*" that is, justice. Justice means rendering to every man his due; it is compendiously expressed in the words of Christ, "Whatsoever ye would have men do unto you, do ye even so to them." It goes dead against all frauds, dishonesties, and cruelties. 2. "*Mercy.*" Mercy is a modification of love; it is love in compassion, patience, forbearance, etc. Paul makes a distinction between a good man and a just man. There are men conventionally just, who are not good, nor generous, nor merciful. They would pay every man his due, but, like Shylock, they will extort the last grain. It is not, therefore, enough for a man to "keep judgment"—do justice—to his fellow-man; he must have mercy too. "Love is the fulfilling of the Law."

III. LIFE-WORSHIP. "Wait continually on thy God." God must be the All in all; the grand Figure in all the sceneries, and the ruling chord in all the melodies of life. Man is made to worship; but worship is not a ceremony, not a passing sentiment, not an occasional service; it is a life revealing itself everywhere—in marts of business, halls of study, fields of recreation, as well as in conventional temples. It is not a something that appears on this mountain or on that mountain, on this day or that day, in this act or that, but something that is every where and when. The grand pulse of being.

"True religion, sprung from God alone,
Is like her Fountain, full of charity:
Embracing all things with a tender love.
Full of good will and meek expectancy:

Full of true justice and sure verity,
In heart and voice: free, large, even infinite,
Not wedged in straight particularity,
But grasping all in her vast, active spirit.
Bright lamp of God, that men would joy in thy pure light!"
(Hannah More.)

D. T.

Vers. 7—9.—*Fortunes badly used, badly made, and badly ended.* "He is a merchant, the balances of deceit are in his hand: he loveth to oppress. And Ephraim said, Yet I am become rich, I have found me out substance: in all my labours they shall find none iniquity in me that were sin. And I that am the Lord thy God from the land of Egypt will yet make thee to dwell in tabernacles, as in the days of the solemn feast." Here we have—

I. FORTUNES BADLY USED. "And Ephraim said, I am become rich, I have found me out substance." Here is a fortune held and no doubt employed in the spirit of haughty egotism. It is all *I*. "*I* have become rich, *I* have found me out substance." 1. Here there is no recognition of *human co-operation*. No man comes in possession of wealth without the efforts of some men either living or dead. Wealth, whoever holds it, is the result—in most, perhaps in all cases—of the efforts of a large number of human workers. But the possessor oftentimes takes no note of this. He thinks only of himself. He does not think of the toil, the sweat, the exhaustion of those who have helped to put it into his hand. 2. Here there is no recognition of *Divine agency*. All fortunes come of God—out of his materials, out of his seasons, out of the activity of his creatures. But there is no recognition of him here. "*I* have become rich, *I* have found me out substance." How many fortunes are thus held and employed in England this day—held and employed in a *haughty egotism!*

II. FORTUNES BADLY MADE. 1. Here is *fraud*. "He is a merchant, the balances of deceit are in his hand." The hand of fraud has ever been, and still is, alas! the most active of all agencies in the erection of fortunes. There is deceit everywhere. In all fabrics, groceries, trade commodities. Deceit in making, deceit both in the buying and the selling. Were all the fortunes in England that have been built up by deceit to be destroyed this day, the whole human world would be startled with the terrible crash. The event would be as the hurling of the Himalaya into the sea, causing the billows to roar on every shore. 2. Here is *oppression*. "He loveth to oppress." Indeed, fraud is oppression in some form or other. What unrighteous exactions there are in the building of many fortunes! Go to the pits of mine-owners, to the factories of manufacturers, to the warehouses of merchants, to the vessels of ship-owners, and everywhere you will meet men and women groaning under the oppression of those for whom they are building up fortunes. 3. Here is *cunning*. "In all my labours they shall find none iniquity in me that were sin." Ephraim—this typical fortune-maker—took such care to conceal all that was unfair and nefarious in his operations that he was certain no wrong could be found in his doings. Wrong there was, he knew, but he was careful that none should discover it. By plausible and well-guarded statements, by legal *formulæ*, by "board" resolutions, he feels that he can say, "In all my labours they shall find none iniquity in me." Who has not seen many men of this type?—many who have made a fortune by a swindle, but have so guarded the transaction that they have clapped their hands and said, "None will ever find it out."

III. FORTUNES BADLY ENDED. "And I that am the Lord thy God from the land of Egypt will yet make thee to dwell in tabernacles, as in the days of the solemn feast." The meaning of this is—Rich as thou art, I will strip thee of thy wealth, drive thee from thy home, send thee back again to the wilderness a vagrant, to howl for bread and water. Ay, ay, to all such fortune-holders and fortune-makers retribution must come sooner or later. "I tell thee," says Thomas Carlyle, "there is nothing else but justice: one strong thing I find here below—the just thing, the true thing. My friend, if thou hadst all the artillery of Woolwich marching at thy back in support of an unjust thing, and infinite bonfires visibly waiting ahead of thee to blaze centuries to come for thy victory on behalf of it, I would advise thee to call 'Halt!' to fling down thy baton, and say, 'In God's Name, no!' What will the success amount to? If the thing be unjust, thou hast not succeeded, though bonfires blazed from north to south,

and bells rang, and editors wrote leading articles, and the just thing be trampled out of sight to all mortal eyes, an abolished and an annihilated thing."—D. T.

Ver. 10.—*God's method in teaching the great teachers of the world.* "I have also spoken by the prophets, and I have multiplied visions, and used similitudes, by the ministry of the prophets." God is the great Teacher of mankind. "Who teaches like him?" He teaches the best lessons, in the best way and for the best purpose; he teaches man through the works of nature, and through the best of men. God has always employed prophets in his great school for humanity. Into every age he has sent men above the average of the race—men gifted with high intellect, lofty genius, and special inspiration. They are evermore his prophets, and these he himself teaches; they are in his "normal school." He teaches them that they may teach others. The text indicates his method of teaching them.

I. BY VISIONS. He gives to those men inner revelations, unfolds to them spiritual realities, opens their spiritual eyes, and bids them look. What wonderful visions Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Paul, and the Apostle John had! They saw wonderful things; but what they saw was not with the outward eye, but with the eye of the soul. These visions serve to show three things. 1. *The distinguishing glory of the human mind.* What is that? It is a power to see the sensuously invisible, the universe that lies beyond the ken of mortal sight. What a universe came to the eye of the sightless bard of England! In some this visual organ is keener and more active than in others. He who has it in the highest extent is the poet, the prophet, emphatically the seer. 2. *The accessibility of the human mind to God.* Man can only address the mind through the senses; the Almighty can do it when all the senses are closed up, in the "visions of the night." He can take into it at his pleasure a whole universe, and bid it gaze on its objects and listen to its sounds. 3. *The reality of spiritual things.* The bodily eye does not see realities, but mere forms and shadows. The soul alone can see the real, hence God brings the real into it. By visions I think the Almighty has ever taught the great thinkers of mankind, not only in ancient but in modern times. All the true discoveries of men of science, all the creations of sacred bards, all the flashes of the true evangel, are but visions from God. "In visions of the night."

II. BY SIMILITUDE. "And used similitudes." By this is meant, he showed them the invisible by the visible, the spiritual by the sensuous. He gave them parables. "Without a parable spake he not unto them." Hence the prophets spoke in parables; and the great Prophet of the world, who was like unto Moses. There are good reasons for this mode of teaching spiritual truth. Two may be mentioned. 1. It makes the *spiritual more attractive.* All men, whether they will or not, from their very bodily constitutions are vitally interested in material objects. They live in them and by them; and without direct impressions from God, we can scarcely conceive of spiritual truth being made clear to them but by their means. 2. It makes the *material appear more Divine.* Flowers, trees, streams, and stars, when they have become emblems to the soul of spiritual truth, become invested with a mystic charm. The picture that has hung in your room for years, and on which your eyes have rested a thousand times, becomes invested with a strange fascination after you have made the acquaintance and come to love the person whom it represents. Thank God for his parabolic method of teaching.—D. T

Ch. xi. 12—xii. 1, 2.—*God faithful, his people unfaithful.* Probability seems against the rendering, "Judah yet ruleth with God, and is faithful with the All-Holy;" for, though a relative truth might be claimed for the first statement, the other references to Judah are in a very different strain (ch. iv. 15; v. 5, 10, 14; vi. 4, 11; viii. 14; x. 11), and in any case the second clause would be untrue to fact. "Faithful with God" is too glaringly at variance with what Isaiah says of the state of Judah at this time: "Their land is full of idols; they worship the work of their own hands" (ch. ii. 8). The other rendering, "Judah vacillates [roves about] with God, and with the faithful Holy One," better meets the conditions of the context. Ephraim's condition, however, was much worse than Judah's.

I. EPHRAIM'S DECEIT. Deceit had become as second nature to Ephraim. 1. *He nourished himself upon it.* "Ephraim feedeth on wind," *i.e.* on lies. Lies were his

pabulum. He believed the false prophets who preached "peace" to him. He built himself up in his own counsels. He greedily listened to the voice of seducers. 2. *He practiced it.* Deceit had become part of his being. It corrupted his whole existence. Religion, politics, trade—all was penetrated by the spirit of lies. All partook of the character of unreality. There was: (1) Deceit in *religion.* "Ephraim compasseth himself about with lies, and the house of Israel with deceit." This was towards God (ch. xi. 12). With plenty of the outward show of religion—altars, sacrifices, feasts, etc.—there was no heart-reality. All was hypocrisy, pretence, lip-worship. God was owned in name, but denied in fact. His worship was associated with that of idols, and conducted in a way which was a scandal to morality. (2) Deceit in *politics.* "He daily increaseth lies and desolation; and they do make a covenant with the Assyrians, and oil is carried into Egypt" (ver. 1; cf. ch. x. 4). This duplicity in national transactions brought forth its natural fruit in desolation. Treachery is a dangerous game to play in political engagements. (3) Deceit in *commerce.* This also is charged against Ephraim in the chapter (see below, ver. 7). 3. *He pursued it.* "Feedeth on wind, and followeth after the east wind." Pursuing their ungodly aims, the people were as those chasing the scorching blast of the desert. Their hopes deceived them, and they were destroyed (cf. ch. xiii. 15).

II. JUDAH'S INCONSTANCY. (Ch. xi. 12.) Judah vacillated with God. Ephraim sought to practise deceit on the Faithful One. Judah trifled with the Holy One. Religious inconstancy shows itself: 1. *In the maintenance of a right theory of religion with numerous infidelities in practice.* Judah maintained, in form and theory, the right order in religion. They had the temple, the Levitical priesthood, the Davidic line of kings, etc. They set up no calves, as Jeroboam had done. Yet, with this show of orthodoxy, they tolerated many things that were not right, and idolatry was winked at when it ought to have been suppressed. 2. *In the alternation of great fervours in religion with times of backsliding and coolness.* Under good kings, Judah had frequently reformations of religion. At these times there seemed no bounds to the piety and fervour of the people. But the enthusiasm did not last. There was reaction and greater coldness than before. 3. *In divided service.* Judah had of late begun to swerve from the service of the one God. They imported idols. More and more the people were being drawn to idol-service. Their hearts vacillated between Jehovah and the false gods. Inconstancy as often takes this form as any other. The heart is ostensibly God's, but is really divided between God and the world.

III. JEHOVAH'S FAITHFULNESS. God is "the faithful Holy One" (ch. xi. 12). In virtue of his faithfulness and holiness, God: 1. Resented Ephraim's deceit. He would punish Jacob (ver. 2). 2. Was displeased at Judah's inconstancy. He had "a controversy with Judah" (ver. 2). 3. Nevertheless would not utterly destroy them. This point is implied in what follows. 4. In punishment would be strictly just. "According to their ways."—J. O.

Vers. 3—6.—*Power with God.* The people are incited to repentance by the example of their progenitor Jacob. His wrestling for the blessing sets their unfaithfulness in darker contrast.

I. GOD'S ELECTION DOES NOT SUPERSEDE MAN'S EFFORT. Before Jacob was born God had said, "The elder shall serve the younger" (Gen. xxv. 23). Yet the blessing had to be striven for, and won from God by wrestling and supplication. 1. *Jacob had from the first an impulse to realize his destiny.* (Ver. 3.) Even as an unconscious babe he gave token of this. He struggled in the womb (Gen. xxv. 22). His hand took hold of the heel of his elder brother Esau as he was born (Gen. xxv. 22). As he grew older we see the same impulse manifesting itself, not always in right ways. The catching of his brother's heel was a type of the attempts he afterwards made to take the blessing from Esau by force and guile. He got Esau to sell the birthright for a mess of pottage (Gen. xxv. 29—34). He obtained the blessing from his father by fraud (Gen. xxvii.). The acts were indefensible, but they testify at least to his appreciation of the blessing, and to his desire to obtain it. 2. *His efforts were purified as years advanced.* (Ver. 4.) The blessing was at length won, but by far other means than Jacob had at first employed. It was won from God by earnest, agonizing supplication. The narrative is given in Gen. xxxii. 24—32. There Jacob, as a prince, had power with God, and prevailed (Gen. xxxii. 28).

II. GOD PUTS HIMSELF IN MAN'S POWER, THAT MAN MAY OBTAIN BLESSING FROM HIM. 1. *He draws near to man.* God drew near to Jacob at Peniel. He seemed to be a "man," but Jacob recognized in his mysterious Visitant an angel—that Angel of the covenant in whom God's Name was. He accordingly laid hold of him, wrestled with and entreated him, and would not let him go till he had blessed him. So there are awful moments in our experience when, "left alone," the infinite Presence draws near to us, overshadows us, touches us, invites us to wrestle with it for the supreme good of existence. 2. *He gives man power.* If Jacob wrestled prevailingly with God, it was because God gave him power to do so. It is in God's own strength that we wrestle with God. God puts himself in our power, not crushing us by his majesty, but meeting us as on a human footing, and permitting us to prevail over him. 3. *He invites man's requests.* Jacob "wept, and made supplication." Prayer is a real wrestling. God wills man thus to wrestle with him. He gives us the promise of blessing if we ask, seek, and knock (Matt. vii. 7, 8). Jacob's prayer was (1) earnest, (2) persevering, (3) mighty. Jesus prayed "with strong crying and tears," and "was heard in that he feared" (Heb. v. 7).

III. IN TYPICAL CASES LIKE JACOB'S, GOD PLEDGES HIS GRACE TO THE GENERATIONS THAT COME AFTER. Jacob was: 1. *Israel's patriarch head.* "He found him in Bethel; there he spake with us" (ver. 4). The promises given at Bethel had reference to the descendants (Gen. XXXV. 9—12). The blessing was to be theirs also, if they chose to claim it as Jacob had done. 2. *An example.* He who spake with Jacob was "the Lord God of hosts: the Lord is his Name" (ver. 5). The unchangeability of God is our guarantee that, if we act as Jacob did, we shall meet with like reward. 3. *The consequent duty.* "Therefore turn thou to thy God: keep mercy and judgment, and wait on thy God continually." There is here indicated the need: (1) Of earnest desire. "Turn thou to God." Israel must turn from other aims, and set their heart upon the blessing as Jacob set his. (2) Of obedience. "Keep mercy and judgment." For it is only in the way of obedience that God will meet us. (3) Of perseverance in seeking. "Wait thou," etc. It was thus that Jacob waited; wrestling even till the daybreak.—J. O.

Vers. 7—11.—*Balances of deceit.* In the manner of his acquisition of wealth, Ephraim conjoined deceit and oppression. He was dishonest in trade. He oppressed the poor. He was a better imitator of Jacob in his act of laying hold of his brother's heel than in his earnestness in wrestling with the angel. He inherited the evil, not the good, traits in the character of his progenitor. He was a "Jacob," not an "Israel." Yet he plumed himself on his success.

I. EPHRAIM'S SAY IN THE MATTER. (Ver. 8.) 1. *He was puffed up with the thought of being rich.* "Ephraim said, I am rich, I have found me out substance." This was the main thing—he was rich. It did not matter how the riches had been got, when they were there. The existence of the riches covered a multitude of sins. This is too much the way in which wealth is looked at in the world. The possessor of it can count on being honoured, courted, applauded for success, with few questions asked as to the means by which his wealth has been acquired. The love of the honour and position which wealth gives lead men to seek after it by fair means and foul. "Balances of deceit" are not unknown among ourselves. "Tricks innumerable," says Mr. Spencer, "lies acted or uttered, elaborately devised frauds, are prevalent—many of them established as 'customs of the trade;' nay, not only established, but defended." Yet this is thought of little moment, if only men can say in the end, "I am rich." 2. *He took the glory of his riches to himself.* "*I* have found me out substance." It was himself that did it. To him the credit and glory of it belonged. He said in his heart, "My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth," forgetting that it is God alone that had given him power to get wealth (Deut. viii. 17, 18). 3. *He justified himself in his ways.* "In all my labours they shall find none iniquity in me that were sin." As Spencer says above of rogueries in trade, "not only established, but defended." The dishonest trader is yet to be found who is not disposed to justify himself. He gets to look on his dishonesties as trifles—bagatelles. He defies proof of them. He justifies himself by the practice of others. That cannot be wrong which everybody does. If, like Ephraim, he is assiduous in the practice of the outward duties of

religion (ver. 11), he may regard this as amply outweighing the deceits and oppressions of his business life.

II. GOD'S SAY IN THE MATTER. (Vers. 8, 9.) God: 1. *Exposes the sin and folly of Ephraim's boasting.* 'And I am the Lord thy God from the land of Egypt." If Ephraim was rich, it was God who made him rich. If he had substance, it was God who gave him substance, not Ephraim who had found it out for himself. Ephraim's boasting was, therefore, entirely out of place. It was as foolish as it was wicked and ungrateful. 2. *Shows the inexcusableness of Ephraim's conduct.* "I have also spoken by the prophets," etc. Ephraim had been well taught and warned. Moses, in the plains of Moab, had already foreshown the dangers to which Israel would be exposed when they came into possession of the goodliness of Canaan, and had forewarned them against pride and undue self-elation (Deut. viii. 7—18). Other prophets had been sent as occasion required. God had "multiplied visions" to the people, and had "used similitudes" to make matters plainer, and to draw attention. In spite of all, Ephraim continued sinning. If such were his privileges, what are ours, to whom God, "who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past to the fathers by the prophets," hath in these last days spoken by his Son (Heb. i. 1, 2)? 3. *Declares Ephraim's punishment.* "I will make thee to dwell in tabernacles, as in the days of the solemn feast." Ephraim, having forfeited his blessings by his sin, would be turned back again into the wilderness, there to renew the experience of the old wanderings, of which the Feast of Tabernacles was a memorial (Lev. xxiii. 42, 43). The words are a threatening, yet imply mercy. The wilderness wanderings were a punishment, but also a discipline. During these wanderings, Israel enjoyed God's protection and sheltering care. The end of the wandering was Canaan. So Israel's present banishment is with a view to ultimate recovery.

III. THE DELUSION PRICKED. (Ver. 11.) Ephraim, like the Laodicean Church, said, "I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing," and knew not that he was "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked" (Rev. iii. 17). He had failed to take God's counsel (by the prophets), to buy of him "gold tried in the fire" that he might be rich, and "white raiment" that he might be clothed, and to anoint his eyes with eye-salve that he might see (Rev. iii. 18). He still pursued vanity and deceit, and multiplied transgressions. This state of delusion in which he lived was now to be rudely broken in upon. Gilead, for its iniquity, would become (or, perhaps, had already become) vanity, nothingness. Gilgal, where bulls were offered in such numbers in sacrifice, would witness (or had already witnessed) its altars made as heaps of stones in the furrows of the field.—J. O.

Vers. 12—14.—*Preserved by a prophet.* Comparison with Dent. xxvi. 5—10 shows that the point in this passage is the contrast between Israel's original low estate in Syria and Egypt—the nation in the former case being represented in its ancestor—and the state of honour to which God raised it, when he brought it out of Egypt by Moses, and settled it in Canaan. The intention is to show the full enormity of Ephraim's ingratitude.

I. ISRAEL IN SYRIA. (Ver. 12.) This is viewed as the beginning of Israel's servitude. There was little in Jacob's condition in Padan-Aram to indicate the honour that was afterwards to be put on his descendants. His state was one of: 1. *Peril.* "Jacob *fled* into the country of Syria." Or, as in Deuteronomy, "A Syrian ready to perish was my father" (ch. xxvi. 5). 2. *Servitude.* He was a serving-man with Laban. He bound himself for terms of years, and wrought for wages. 3. *Poverty.* When he wished a wife, the only thing he could do was to serve for her. We do well to remember the forlorn, helpless, wretched, and bound state in which we were when grace found us.

II. ISRAEL BROUGHT OUT OF EGYPT. (Ver. 13.) Egypt was a continuation of the state in which Israel found himself at Padan-Aram (cf. Deut. xxvi. 5). From this state God delivered him by a prophet. 1. *It was God who delivered and preserved him.* Moses, though a prophet, was but God's agent. God is the only Saviour. 2. *A prophet was the instrument of deliverance.* This put honour on the prophetic order. It may be cited as a reproof to Ephraim for slighting the prophets now sent to him (ver. 10). The Mediator of our salvation is Christ, the "Prophet like unto Moses" (Acts iii. 22). 3. *He*

was effectually delivered. The Lord: (1) "Brought him forth"—gave him liberty, national existence, laws, privileges, a rich inheritance. (2) Preserved him. Guarded and kept him in the desert, and safely planted him in Canaan.

III. ISRAEL'S RECOMPENSE OF GOD'S KINDNESS. (Ver. 14.) 1. Ephraim, instead of showing gratitude, *provoked God to most bitter anger* by his transgressions. He had persisted in this wrong-doing, notwithstanding warning and entreaty. 2. He had *brought reproach* on God. "His reproach," *i.e.* the reproach he brought on God by his wanton behaviour (cf. Deut. xxxii. 5, 6). 3. He would accordingly *be punished.* God would leave him to expiate his blood-guiltiness by suffering.—J. O.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER XIII.

The first eight verses of this chapter form the premisses from which the prophet, in the ninth verse, draws the conclusion that the conduct of Israel had been suicidal; that they had brought on themselves the calamities which they had experienced, and ultimately the ruin in which those calamities eventuated. The various particulars of their sin are enumerated, with the provocation caused or the punishment incurred by each. Thus the idolatry of Baal stripped them of the authority they once possessed, and issued in the dissolution of their state. After they had been to some small extent reclaimed from this national sin, and had somewhat retrieved their position, their perseverance in the calf-worship and the progress of their idolatrous practices provoked Jehovah so grievously as to threaten their sudden and entire destruction. Then their gross ingratitude to God for his great goodness and long-continued mercies, followed by pride and haughtiness and forgetfulness of the Most High, brought down on their guilty heads fearful vengeance. All these circumstances justify the conclusion to which he comes, that while God had been their Helper and Deliverer all along, they were chargeable with their own destruction.

Ver. 1.—**When Ephraim spake trembling, he exalted himself in Israel.** This rendering of the Authorized Version (1) is supported by the Syriac, which is: "When Ephraim spake trembling then he was, and was great in Israel." Rashi has a similar rendering of the word *r'theth*, which is an ἅπαξ λεγόμενον, and causes the diversity of translation in this clause; but his exposition of the whole sentence is vague and unsatisfactory. Referring it to Jeroboam of the tribe of Ephraim, he explains as follows: "When Jeroboam, zealous for God, spoke against Solomon hard words, and with terror, Solomon was a great king." Poocke's exposition is in harmony with the Authorized Version, and is the following: "When Ephraim spake with fear and trembling (like his forefather Jacob, in his humble supplication to God), he exalted himself in Israel." But (2) the rendering adopted by most moderns, is decidedly preferable, as agreeing better with the context, and much more in harmony with tribal characteristics of Ephraim, as intimated in this very book, and exhibited elsewhere. The translation we thus prefer is: "When Ephraim spake, there was trembling; he, even he, exalted himself in Israel." Such was the fear inspired, and the deference paid to the authority of that powerful tribe. The word *r'theth*, though not found elsewhere, has a cognate root in Aramaic, with the meaning here assigned to it; for רתת is to fear, shudder, tremble; there is also, in Jer. xlix. 24, the word רָעַם, equivalent to "fear," similar in both sense and sound. The Chaldee supports this rendering; its paraphrase is: "When one of the house of Ephraim spake, trembling seized the peoples." Also Aben Ezra and Kimchi. The former's brief comment is: "Before his speaking the peoples were afraid; and the word רתת has no analogue except in the Aramaic." Kimchi's explanation is: "From the beginning, before Ephraim sinned, the fear of him was great over the peoples who surrounded him; for when he spake, fear and trembling were wont to seize him who heard him; and he was great and strong among the tribes of Israel, as it was said of him, 'And his seed shall be a multitude of nations.'" (3) The LXX. renders *r'theth* by δικαιώματα, thus: "According to the word of Ephraim, he adopted ordinances for himself in Israel," that is, when Ephraim spoke, the rest of the Israelites assented to his ordinances and rights, reverencing his authority, so that the general sense differs little from the Chaldee. (4) Rosenmüller constructs and explains differently; his exposition runs somehow thus: "When Ephraim spake, instituting that horrible worship of the calves, he himself bore the sin of that horrible

dictum, *i.e.* was guilty of, and bore its punishment." This explanation of נשׂא is far-fetched and unnatural. We have no hesitation in preferring "lifted up," *i.e.* his head, or exalted himself, for, though it is usually the Hithp. that is employed in this sense, examples also occur in which Qal is so used, for example, Ps. lxxxix. 10 and Nah. i. 5. Kimchi supplies *rosho*. We adhere, therefore, to the rendering and exposition of (2). **But when he offended in Baal, he died.** This was not merely the calf-worship which, for political reasons, Jeroboam instituted and his successors retained, but the worship of Baal for which, no doubt, the calf-worship had prepared the way, and which had been introduced by Ahab at the instigation of his Sidonian queen. And though the people were partially and temporarily reformed through the efforts of Elijah the prophet and by the royal authority of Jehu, son of Nimshi, the evil was not eradicated, but frequently broke out again. The exaltation of Ephraim was not so much his distinction among his brethren as the governmental predominance at which that tribe ever aimed. That elevation, however, was soon followed by religious declension, culminating in the idolatry of Baal, which soon sealed the doom of the northern kingdom, thenceforth given up to destruction. The sentence of death was pronounced, and the actual dying commenced with the introduction of idolatrous worship. Thus, correctly, Kimchi: "He lifted up his head in Israel. And after he offended in Baal he died, as if he said, he was beaten before his enemies, as if he were dead, the power of his hand had departed."

Ver. 2.—**And now they sin more and more** (margin, *add to sin*), **and have made them molten images of their silver, and idols according to their own understanding, all of it the work of the craftsmen.** This part of the verse declares their persistent adherence to idolatry. The note of time, "and now," marks the transition from the past period, when Baal-worship had been introduced by Ahab and subsequently overturned by Jehu, to the prophet's own day. Not content with the calves of Jeroboam and the worship of Baal, they added new superstitious and new hideous objects of worship. מַסֵּכָה, a molten image, like the molten calf of Aaron, is singular, but used collectively, so as to correspond with עֲצַבִּים, idols, which is plural. The reference here is, (1) not to the calves or to Baal, but to various other idols which they had adopted, as at Gilgal and Beersheba (Amos viii. 14). Or, (2) not content with the calves, they introduced gods of their own as their penates. The *material* out of which these molten images were manufactured was silver. Kimchi, however, gives a curious explanation in proof that the material was gold: "The calves," he says, "were not silver, but he means to say that, of the silver which they each one gave to procure gold to make the calves, they made for themselves idols according to their understanding; and these were the calves." The *manner* in which they made these idols was (1) *in their understanding*, that is, in their understanding, such as it was, so stupidly employed in such sensuous work, or their proficiency in the art of graving. Kimchi explains it somewhat differently: "The explanation of בתבונם is, 'As if they had carefully reflected on the matter what form they should give it, and then had agreed to make a calf, as they did in the wilderness.'" The reading of the word בּוּז is disputed, but without sufficient ground. No doubt the Septuagint, which is followed by the Chaldee, Arabic, and Jerome, probably read כְּתַבְנִת, *rad.* בנה, to build, like חַבְנִית, figure, or כְּתַחְמֹנֵת; for they translate (2) *according to the likeness* or fashion of idols; while some manuscripts of Kennicott and De Rossi present (3) the reading כְּבִבְנֹתָם, *according to their understanding*, their own peculiar notions or fancy, and not as Moses, who made everything after the pattern showed him in the mount. The full form would be כְּתִבְנֹתָם, but the feminine form is shortened before the suffix, like מִדָּה for מִדָּתָהּ (Job xi. 9); and פִּנָּה for פִּנָּתְהּ (Prov. vii. 8); צִדָּם for צִדָּתָם (Ps. xlix. 15). Some suppose it from a masculine form, תְּבוּן, of the same meaning. The *defect* of this man-made god is expressed by its being all of it the work of the craftsmen, without any element of sense, spirit, or divinity in it. On which Kimchi has well observed: "The whole calf is the work of the hands of the craftsman; there is nothing spiritual in it; as he says, 'There is no breath at all in the midst of it' (Hab. ii. 19)." **They say of them, Let the men that sacrifice** (margin, *the sacrificers of men*) **kiss the calves.** The best explanation of this difficult clause is, in our opinion, (1) that of Keil. His translation, though slightly different from that of the Authorized Version, has the same general import; thus: "Of them (the *'atsabbim*, idols) they say, viz. 'the sacrificers from among men' equivalent to 'the men who sacrifice,' Let them worship calves. By the apposition *zobhᵉche 'adam*, and the fact that the object *'agalim* is placed first, so that it stands in immediate contrast to *'adam*, the absurdity of men kissing calves, *i.e.* worshipping them with kisses (see at 1 Kings xix. 18), is painted, as it were, before the eyes." As parallel to *zobhᵉche 'adam*, comp. *evyone 'adam* (Isa. xxix. 19). Several eminent modern commentators give the same or a similar explanation, with the exception that, instead of translating לָהֶם, "of

them," *i.e.* the idols, as Keil does, they translate it "to them," *i.e.* the idol-worshippers. Kimchi in the main favours this explanation; he says, "On their account (*i.e.* on account of the calves) the priests of the calf say to the people who come to offer sacrifice: by the אדם he means: whoever of the children of men that wish to offer, 'Let them kiss the calves on their mouth; for their worship shall not be perfect until they shall kiss them,' for so was their custom." But (2) many of the older interpreters among the Hebrews, as also Jerome, Cyril, and Theodoret among Christians, refer the expression to human sacrifices, thus: "Sacrificing men, they kiss, that is, adore, calves." The explanation according to this view, as given by Schmid, is to the following purport: "To *these* who now worship many idols, and among them Moloch, to whom they even sacrifice men, *those* the fathers of such as only worshipped the calves or Baal, would say, if they were alive, 'Let those who sacrifice men give over such cruel sacrifice, and rather kiss calves as we did.'" Rashi's comment is: "The idol priests say to Israel, 'He that sacrifices his son to idols is worthy to kiss the calf, for he has presented to him a pleasant gift.' So have our rabbins in (the tract) Sanhedrin explained, and it suits the text of Scripture better than the translation of Jonathan;" while that of Aben Ezra is as follows: "To them say the sons of men, in order to mock them [kiss the calves], because they kiss Baalim which are the images of calves, as 'And every mouth that has not kissed him' (1 Kings xix. 17), while they shed innocent blood, and this is, 'And his blood shall he leave upon him' (ch. xii. 15). And lo! he has reversed the manner of every man, for man kisses man who is his fellow, and slays calves for his food." The method of kissing the hand in worship is attested by the derivation of the word *adore*, from *ad* and *os*; while in Job xxxi. 27 we read of homage thus rendered: "Or my mouth hath kissed my hand: this also were an iniquity to be punished by the judge." The Septuagint, (3, as if reading וְזִבְחֵי for *zobh'che*,' and ישקקון instead of ישקון, translate by, "They say, 'Sacrifice (*θύσατε*) men, for the calves have come to an end' [or, 'failed,' *ἐκλελοίπασι*]." "Thus," says Jerome, in explanation, "is shown the greed of demons, who are nourished on the blood of victims, that, when victims fail, they desire men to be sacrificed to them."

Ver. 3.—**Therefore they shall be as the morning cloud, and as the early dew that passeth away, as the chaff that is driven with the whirlwind out of the floor, and as the smoke out of the chimney.** The illative particle with which the verse begins has reference to the sins of Israel, so great and multiplied that punishment could not be long delayed. Their irrational and God-dishonouring conduct was bringing on them sure and swift destruction. The prophet employs four figures to exhibit their political extinction. Two of these, the morning cloud and early dew, or rather the dew early passing away, have already been employed by him to characterize the transient nature of Israel's goodness; here they denote the evanescent nature of their national existence. The other two are the chaff and the smoke; the former whirled away by the storm-wind from the threshing-floor, the latter dissipated and speedily vanishing as soon as it escapes from the chimney or lattice. Such shall be the utter extermination of Israel. The senselessness of their idolatry had been treated with derision in the preceding verse; the punishment of their sin is sternly denounced in this. Kimchi comments concisely and correctly thus: "Therefore they shall go to destruction, and shall be as the morning cloud, or as the dew speedily disappearing in the morning, which vanishes when the heat of the sun has touched it; so they shall go away speedily. So also shall they be as chaff—it is the fine particles of straw, which the wind whirls away from the threshing-floor; thus shall they be whirled away from their land. Or as a pillar of smoke which goes forth out of the lattice, which shall speedily disperse and cease." Instead of אֲרֻבָּה, lattice, from ארב, to knit or twist, the Septuagint, according to Jerome, read אַרְבֶּה, locusts, as may be inferred from their rendering *ἀτμὶς ἀπὸ ἀκρίδων* in the Complutensian edition of the LXX., erroneously written in some copies *δακρύων*, that is, vapour from locusts or from tears.

Vers. 4, 5.—These verses make it evident that the punishment inflicted on Israel could not reasonably be accounted too severe; such had been the goodness of Jehovah and the gross ingratitude of Israel.

Ver. 4.—**Yet I am the Lord thy God from the land of Egypt.** The prophet here commences a recital of God's favours to Israel from ancient times, all which they forgot, ungratefully and impiously turning aside from the worship of Jehovah. Jehovah had been Israel's God long before, but never before had the evidence of his power and love to his people been so signal and conspicuous as at the period of the Exodus and onward. **And thou shalt know no god but me.** The use of תֵּדַע in the imperfect is to connect the future with the past. It may be rendered either (1) "Thou knowest," viz. a God of such wonderful attestation thou knowest or findest not beside me—the opposite of the statement, "Let us go after other gods, which thou hast not known, and

lot us serve them" (Deut. xiii. 3); or (2) "Thou shouldest not know or recognize any god beside me." So Kimchi: "Thou shouldest not know other gods, nor serve them beside me, for ye see there is no helper beside me." Likewise Rashi: "Thou shouldest not rebel against me." Also Aben Ezra: "How hast thou turned to kiss the calf, which does not save nor satisfy, and hast left him who has been thy God from ancient days, who has helped thee and knows all thy necessities." The word וּלְתִי (from זול, which, as the cognate Arabic signifies, "to go forth or away") is synonymous with בְּלָתִי.

Ver. 5.—**I did know thee in the wilderness.** The pronoun at the beginning of the verse is emphatic: *As for me;* or, *I it was that knew thee.* The meaning of the sentiment is: I acknowledged thee with kindness, with paternal care and kind providence watching over thee. "Thou shouldest gratefully acknowledge me," is the comment of Kimchi, "because I knew thee in the wilderness, and cared for thy necessity in the wilderness, in which there were no means of livelihood." **In the land of great drought.** The root of the word חַלְאוּבוֹת is לאב, unused in Hebrew, but signifying, in Arabic, "to burn, dry, be dry," akin to לָחַב. Aben Ezra correctly explains it to be "a dry and thirsty land, and so in the Arabic language; and (that it is so called) on account of all hardships being in it, is the allegorical explanation and not the literal sense." Instead of a lengthened enumeration of all God's loving-kindnesses to Israel at the Exodus and during the desert wanderings, the prophet sums up all in the expressive, "the Lord thy God from the land of Egypt;" and "I it was that did know thee in the wilderness." It is as though he had said, "I pitied thee in the bondage and among the brick-kilns of Egypt; I brought thee forth with a strong hand and outstretched arm; I led thee through the wilderness; I relieved thee in thy straits; I gave thee bread from heaven to satisfy thy hunger, and water from the rock to quench thy thirst; I defended thee from enemies; nor did I relax my care till I gave thee the goodly land of promise."

Ver. 6.—**According to their pasture so were they filled.** The literal rendering is, *according to their pasturing so were they filled.* The reference is rather to the care in pasturing than to the pasture-ground. By God's care to the sheep of his pasture they waxed full. **They were filled, and their heart was exalted.** Two consequences followed from God's great goodness to Israel—the immediate consequence was pride of heart; the more remote was forgetfulness of God. Perhaps these results should rather be regarded as concurrent, being in point of time simultaneous or nearly so. **Therefore have they forgotten me.** This forgetfulness of God is identified with the abandonment of his worship in the Chaldee Version, which is, "They have abandoned my service." The metaphor contained in this verse is taken from a domestic animal, which, in a too luxuriant pasture, becomes headstrong and unmanageable. Thus Rashi: "As soon as they came into the land of their pasture, they were filled." The last clause of the verse notices the misuse which Israel made of the riches and blessing of Jehovah, by forgetting their gracious Benefactor; this the prophet attributes to the abuse of the blessings so richly bestowed upon them. Aben Ezra identifies the blessings here mentioned with those vouchsafed to them on their entrance into Canaan; thus: "The prophet enumerates the benefits which Jehovah bestowed on their fathers when they came out of the wilderness into the land of Canaan." Kimchi quotes, as a parallel to this passage, Deut. viii., of which it is undoubtedly a reminiscence; he says, "When they entered into the place of their pasture, and it was the land of Canaan, they had all good, and were filled; and their heart was exalted, and they forgot me, as it is said in the Thorah that they were ready to do so. He said, 'Lest when thou hast eaten and art full . . . then thine heart be lifted up, and then forget the Lord thy God, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt . . . who led thee through that great and terrible wilderness, . . . who fed thee in the wilderness.' "

Vers. 7, 8.—These verses teach that the result of their sins is inevitable destruction, and that Jehovah, merciful and gracious though he is, has now divested himself of all compassion on them. The appropriateness of the terrible figures here employed arises from the fact that Israel had been compared in the previous verse to a flock fed and filled in a luxuriant pasture; the punishment of that flock is now fitly compared to "the tearing in pieces and devouring of that fattened flock by wild beasts." The beasts in question are a lion, a leopard, a bear, a lioness, and fierce wild beasts in general.

Ver. 7.—**Therefore I will be unto them as a lion.** The verb וְאֶהִי is the future changed into the preterite or past tense by *vav* consecutive, and marks the consequence of forgetting God. So Aben Ezra: "The preterite in reference to the evils which Jehovah brought upon them." While the past thus implies that the punishment has commenced, the futures which follow denote its continuance. Rosenmüller regards the preterite here as prophetic and continuative,

and paraphrases the meaning by, "I have at length become and have been, and shall continue to be to them." He considers the reference of the preterite to be to past disasters, especially the various defeats sustained by Israel at the hand of the Syrians (2 Kings viii. 12; x. 32) and the Assyrians (2 Kings xv. 29). He also very aptly compares Isa. lxiii. 7—10 in relation to the subject in hand. The Prophet Isaiah, after relating the loving-kindnesses of the Lord and his praises and his great goodness to the house of Israel on the one hand, and their rebellion and vexing his Holy Spirit on the other hand, adds, "Therefore he was turned to be their enemy, and he fought against them." **As a leopard by the way will I observe them.** The lion and the leopard are frequently conjoined, as animals of like natural ferocity, by the ancients both in sacred and secular writings. The outlook on the way is for the purpose of springing upon the passers-by. The word אֲשׁוּר is properly (1) the future of שׁוּר, to look around, and thence, to lie in wait; but (2) some, taking the initial *aleph* as radical and the word as participle of אָשַׁר, translate it by "*trodden* way," that is, a way trodden and frequented by men and animals. The LXX. and Vulgate again, also Jerome, Hitzig, and Ewald, (3) translate it by "*on the way* of the Assyrians," either referring to the time when they would be led captive by the Assyrians or when they persisted in going thither to sue for aid. But the name of Assyria is always written אַשּׁוּר, as Rashi rightly observes: "In every place where אש occurs in Scripture (*i.e.* as a proper name) it has daghesh (*i.e.* in the *shin*); yet here it has raphe, [to show] that it is not the name of a place, but a verb: 'I observe and keep watch,' as 'I shall observe him, but not nigh' (Numb. xxiv. 17)." Kimchi explains the verse as follows: "Because they have forgotten me, I also have rejected them, and have left them in the hand of the peoples; and have become to them like a lion or leopard, which observes the way, and is prepared to tear whatever passes by it on the way. Just so have I been to them, for I have caused their enemies to rule over them, and they have not had power to deliver themselves from their hand until they returned to me, and I took pity upon them."

Ver. 8.—**I will meet them as a bear that is bereaved of her whelps, and will rend the caul of their heart.** The noun דֹּב is epicene, that is, the one form serves for both genders, as here the masculine includes the feminine, and is used as such. Of all animals, Jerome says, the she-bear is the fiercest, either when robbed of her whelps or in want of food. *Sʿghor* being that which encloses the heart, is either the pericardium, the immediate and proper enclosure of the heart, or the breast itself. The reference is to a beast of prey which seizes its victim by the breast and tears it open, so that the heart is exposed. The verb שׁכל is akin to סכן, the meaning of the root-syllable סך, to meet, strike, being the same in both. Such is the continuation of the picture of the threatened punishment. The picture of the severity of the Divine judgment here presented is very terrible. Kimchi remarks on this picture: "A bear robbed, whose young ones they have slain, which is bereft and bitter in spirit, if it find man or beast rends it speedily." Some understand the verse figuratively, as though it meant "'I will rend their obstinate heart,' the enclosure of the heart being equivalent to a shut or obstinate heart, as, in ver. 5 of this same chapter, 'a land of drought' is pretty much the same as 'a dry or parched land.' Thus the Chaldee translates, 'I have broken the wickedness of their heart.'" **And there will I devour them like a lion: the wild beast shall tear them.** *Sham* there refers (1) to *'al-derekh* of the preceding verse; or, (2) as Kimchi explains it, as referring to their cities: "There in their cities shall I destroy them by pestilence and by the sword of the enemy, like the lion that teareth without pity;" or, (3) more simply still, "there on the spot." The חַיַּת הַשָּׂדֶה, equivalent to בְּהֵמָה, חַיַּת הָאָרֶץ, is the wild beast as opposed to domestic animals. While some were to be destroyed by famine and pestilence, others would perish by the wild beast of the field. "Also," says Kimchi, "shall the wild beast of the field rend them outside (*i.e.* outside their cities), as, 'I will also send wild beasts among you, which shall rob you of your children, and destroy your cattle, and make you few in number.'"

Ver. 9.—**O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself; but in me is thine help.** The literal rendering of this verse is, (1) *It hath destroyed thee, O Israel, that thou hast been against me, against thy Help.* The ellipsis is accounted for by the strong emotion of the speaker. שִׁחֵת is (*a*) the Piel third person, and has the suffix of the second person, from which the pronoun אַתָּה may be supplied as subject of the concluding clause. The preposition *be* has here the meaning of "against," as in Gen. xvi. 12 and 2 Sam. xxiv. 17, while בִּי is in apposition to it. The Hebrew commentators take שִׁי as a verbal form; thus Rashi: "Thou hast destroyed thyself, O Israel;" and Kimchi: (2) "The calf has destroyed thee which he had mentioned above; he says, 'This has destroyed thee; for unless this had been so, thy help had been in me.'" (*b*) The Septuagint and Jerome take שִׁחֲתְךָ as a noun, the former translating by τῇ διαφθορᾷ: "Who will aid thee in thy destruction?" the

latter by "Thy destruction, O Israel; but in me is thy help," the noun being of the form קְטֹר רֻגֹּר. The explanation of Rashi, who understands (*c*) the verb as second person preterito Piel with suffix, is: "'Because thou hast acted unfaithfully against me, thou hast rebelled against thy help.' The Scripture uses brevity, but he who understands the language of Scripture will recall to mind that כִּי בִי is 'because against me is the rebellion with which thou hast rebelled. And if thou shouldst say, What does it concern thee? Against thy help hast thou rebelled when thou didst rebel against me.'" Kimchi remarks in the two *beths* servile that one of them would suffice, and that the sense might have been expressed by כִּי אוֹי בְעֶזְרֶךָ or כִּי בִי עֶזְרֶךָ. All the disaster and destruction previously mentioned are charged on Israel's misconduct; they had brought all upon themselves by their rebellion against Jehovah who would otherwise have been their Shield and Deliverer. The sense is well expressed by Calvin thus: "How comes it, and what is the reason, that I do not now help thee according to my usual manner? Thou hast indeed found me hitherto to be thy Deliverer. . . . How comes it now that I have cast thee away, that thou criest in vain, and that no one brings thee any help? How comes it that thou art thus forsaken, and receivest no relief whatever from my hand, as thou hast been wont to do? And doubtless I should never be wanting to thee, if thou wouldest allow me; but thou closest the door against me, and by thy wickedness spurnest my favour, so that it cannot come to thee. It then follows, that thou art now destroyed through thine own fault: (3) *Something* then hath destroyed thee." It will be observed that the rebellion against Jehovah here complained of is not that of all Israel, when they are said to have rejected Jehovah by asking a king of Samuel; but the defection of the ten tribes that cast off their allegiance to the house of David and made Jeroboam their king.

Vers. 10—16.—The concluding verse is at once a conclusion and commencement—an inference from what preceded, and the beginning of a second line of proof showing that, while their ruin was by themselves, their restoration would be by God. When the kings and princes whom they had sinfully sought, and who had been given to them in anger would fail, God himself would be their King, as is stated in vers. 10 and 11. Further, when in consequence of their iniquities treasured up, their sorrows and sufferings would be extreme, as stated in vers. 12 and 13, yet they would be raised up as out of their graves, as promised in ver. 14.

Vers. 10, 11.—Israel had shown contempt for Jehovah by putting confidence in kings of their own choice, yet these kings could not afford them help, whence the questions of ver. 10. The usual rendering is at fault. **I will be thy King.** This should rather be, *Where now is thy king?* though *ehi* may be either verb or adverb. **Where** is any other **that may save thee in all thy cities?** Better take both clauses together and in connection, thus: *Where, now, is thy king, that he may save thee in all thy cities?* (1) The word *ehi* we take, with Ewald, to be a dialectic variation for אַיֵּה, or shortened form אַי, and this is strengthened by אֲפוֹא, equivalent to the Greek ποτε or Latin *tandem*, for sake of emphasis. The purpose for which the Israelites had asked a king was that he might "judge them and go out before them to fight their battles" (1 Sam. viii. 20). The question, then, does not indicate the want of a king, or the prevalence of a state of anarchy, but that a crisis had come when such a king as they had requested should exhibit his prowess and display his power. It is as though the prophet asked, or rather God by his servant, "Where is now the king that can defend the besieged cities, or deliver the attacked fortresses; and defeat the Assyrian foeman who is now threatening both? Or where are the judges (*shophetim*), or the princes (*sarim*), who constitute his cabinet or royal counsellors sharing in the counsels of state, and administering the affairs of the kingdom under him?" The answer implied is that those visible helps, on which Israel had so confidently calculated, turned out valueless; the kingly constitution on which they had set their heart proved a failure, as far as help and deliverance were concerned. (2) Kimchi and others take אוֹהִי as first person future of the verb הָיָה; thus: "I shall be established for ever, but where is thy king? Whereas thou didst reject my kingdom, and demanded a king who should save you; and it should be he that would save you in all your cities against which the enemies came."

Ver. 11.—**I gave thee a king in mine anger, and took him away in my wrath.** The imperfects אֶתֵּן and אֶקַּח here are correctly explained by Keil as denoting "an action that is repeated again and again, for which we should use the present; and refer to all the kings that the kingdom of the ten tribes had received and was receiving still, and to their removal." Hitzig calls it here the historical present. Jerome, Aben Ezra, and Kimchi refer the first clause to Saul as given in anger; and the second to Zedekiah as taken away in wrath.

Ver. 12.—**The iniquity of Ephraim is bound up; his sin is hid.** This verse is intended to remove all doubt about the punish-

ment of sin, whatever interval may have elapsed. The day of reckoning would certainly come, for the sin of Ephraim was neither forgotten nor blotted out. As a miser puts his money in a bag and seals it to prevent it being lost, so the Almighty had, as it were, hoarded Ephraim's sin, putting it in a bag and tying it. A parallel expression occurs in Job xiv. 17, "My transgression is sealed up in a bag, and thou sewest up mine iniquity." Usually when men put money into a bag, purse, or treasure-house, they count it; so the sins of Ephraim were reckoned, laid up in the treasury of wrath, till the amount should be full and the day of reckoning arrive. The sinner himself is represented as treasuring up unto himself wrath against the day of wrath. Aben Ezra only remarks on the place where it is treasured: "It is bound up in my heart; I shall not forget it as they have forgotten me, as is written above" (ver. 6, "They have forgotten me").

Ver. 13.—**The sorrows of a travailing woman shall come upon him.** The threatened punishment that is to overtake them is compared to the throes of a parturient woman, on account of their severity, as 1 Thess. v. 3. Their sinfulness, which stands in the way of their success, shall be succeeded by severe sufferings and many sorrows. But eventually these worldly sorrows shall, under Divine grace, issue in the godly sorrows of repentance: then, and not till then, shall a new and happier period of existence be ushered in. The sorrow of travail shall give place to the joy of birth. Delay of confession and repentance defers that joy, prolongs the sufferings, and puts the life of both parent and child in peril, so far as their personality is identical. **He is an unwise son; for he should not stay long in the place of the breaking forth of children.** Here the unwisdom of Israel is accounted for: it is folly, sheer folly that postpones repentance, and delays efforts and aspirations after new spiritual life. The literal rendering of the last clause is: (1) *For it is time, he should not tarry at the place of the breaking forth of children;* or rather, (2) *When it is time, he does not place himself* at (literally, *stand*) or *come forward to the opening of the womb;* and some translate עֵת (3) "at the time," but that would rather require לְעֵת; it might, indeed, be duration of time, and Aben Ezra so renders it: "Therefore at the time he will not stand in the breaking forth of children." Also Wünsche: "He is an unwise son, for at the time he stands not in the breaking forth of children." It might be expressed, as in the Authorized Version, with a slight modification; thus: *For* otherwise *he would not stand long time in the place of the breaking forth of children.* The figure is now shifted from the mother to the child; such abrupt and sudden transitions are not infrequent in Scripture, especially in the Pauline Epistles (comp. *e.g.* 2 Cor. iii. 13—16). The danger is represented as extreme, as may be inferred from the similar expression, "The children are come to the birth, and there is no strength to bring forth." A perilous period in Israel's history is indicated, and to escape the danger he must make no tarrying, but advance at once into the new life of faith and repentance. Kimchi has the following comment: "Because he has compared his pains to the pains of a woman in travail, he says, 'The children are not wise,' as if he said, 'The coming generations, who have seen their fathers in affliction because of their iniquities, are not wise, and do not consider that distress has overtaken their fathers because of their iniquity; and turn not from the evil deeds of their fathers, but have done wickedness like them.'" He adds: "There are children lively by nature in their coming forth out of the womb; so also would these, if they were wise, not stay a single hour in distress, but immediately on returning to the Lord be delivered out of their distress." The LXX. omit the negative and render מִ by ἐὰν συντριβῇ: "This wise son of thine [employed ironically] shall not stand [or, 'endure'] in the destruction of his children or people."

Ver. 14.—**I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death.** God here promises them deliverance from utter ruin; the grave shall be thus deprived of his victim, and the victim rescued out of the tyrant grasp of death. פָּדָה is to redeem by payment of a price; גאל by right of kinship; while שְׁאוֹל, the under world, is derived (1) by some from שָׁאַל, to ask or demand, and is favoured by such statements as the following: "There are three things that are never satisfied, yea, four things say not, It is enough: the grave," and so on; "Who enlargeth his desire as hell, and is as death, and cannot be satisfied." Others (2) derive it from שׁאל, equivalent to שׁעל (by a softening of the *ayin* into *aleph*), to be hollow; but this signification of the word is not satisfactorily established. A third (3) derivation is שׁוּל, to hang down loose or slack, then to be deep, or low, and so the noun comes to signify sinking, depth, abyss. **O Death, I will be thy plagues; O Grave, I will be thy destruction.** Thus אֶהְיֶה is (*a*) incorrectly taken by some for the first person future of הוה; it is (*b*) more properly taken in the sense of "where," as in ver. 10 of the present chapter. דְּבָרֶיךָ is plural, referred by some to דֶּבֶר, hence θάνατε, LXX.; it is, how-

ever, the plural of (*o*) דֶּבֶר, pestilence, and קָטָבָה, pestilence, destruction, from קָטַב, to cut off, akin to חָסַם. Hitzig says that קָטַב, קָבַל, and קָמַן are originally infinitives, and the last two designate instruments or members, and thus give a sort of support to the traditional *κέντρον* of the LXX. Now, this verse has been understood by some in the sense (1) of consolation; and by others (2) in that of commination. In the latter sense it is understood by the Hebrew commentators, and by not a few Christian interpreters. Thus Rashi: "I am he who redeemed them from the hand of Sheol, and delivered them from death; but now I will set myself to speak against thee words of death." Aben Ezra: "I redeemed thy fathers; now I shall be thy deadly pestilence; I will also be thy destruction." Kimchi is more diffuse, as usual; he explains thus: "I would have redeemed them from the power of Sheol, if they had been wise. But now that he is not wise, but a fool, and denies my goodness, it is not enough that I shall not redeem thee from death, but I shall bring upon thee death by pestilence, and by the sword, and by famine, and by evil beast." The condition supplied by Kimchi is entirely arbitrary and without anything in the context to suggest it. Calvin in like manner interjects a *condition;* thus: "I will redeem them from the power of the grave, I will redeem them from death; that is, except they resist, I will become willingly their Redeemer. Some have, therefore, rendered the passage in the subjunctive mood, 'From the hand of the grave I would redeem them, from death I would deliver them. . . . I will then redeem them, as far as this depends on me; for a condition is to be introduced, as though God came forth and declared that he was present to fulfil the office of a Redeemer. What, then, does stand in the way? Even the hardness of the people. . . . He afterwards adds, 'I will be thy perdition, O Death; I will be thy excision, O Grave.' By these words the prophet more distinctly sets forth the power of God, and magnificently extols it, lest men should think that there is no way open to him to save, when no hope according to the judgment of the flesh appears. Hence the prophet says, 'Though men are now dead, there is yet nothing to prevent God to quicken them. How so? For he is the ruin of death, and the excision of the grave;' that is, 'Though death should swallow up all men, though the grave should consume them, yet God is superior to both death and the grave, for he can slay death, for he can abolish the grave.'" He afterwards proceeds to "answer to that which is said of Paul quoting this passage. The solution is not difficult. The apostles do not avowedly at all times adduce passages which in their whole context apply to the subject they handle; but sometimes they allude to a word only, sometimes they apply a passage to a subject in the way of resemblance, and sometimes they bring forward passages as testimonies. When the apostles use the testimonies of Scripture, then the genuine and real truth must be sought out; but when they glance only at one word, there is no occasion to make any anxious inquiry; and when they quote any passage of Scripture in the way of resemblance, it is a too scrupulous anxiety to seek out how all the parts agree. But it is quite evident that Paul, in 1 Cor. xv., has not quoted the testimony of the prophet for the purpose of confirming the doctrine of which he speaks. What then? As the resurrection of the flesh was a truth very difficult to be believed, nay, wholly contrary to the judgment of nature, Paul says that it is no matter of wonder . . . because it is the peculiar prerogative of God to be the perdition of death and the destruction of the grave. . . . He is endued with that incomprehensible power by which he can raise us from a state of putrefaction; nay, since he created the world from nothing, he will also raise us up from the grave, for he is the death of death, the grave of the grave, the ruin of ruin, and the destruction of destruction; and the simple object of Paul is to extol by these striking words that incredible power of God, which is beyond the reach of human understanding." Others, viewing the subject in the same light, read the clauses *interrogatively*, and the imperfects in a subjunctive sense; thus—

"From the power of Sheol should I ransom them?
From death deliver them?"

The answer being, "Certainly not."

"Where are thy pestilences, O Death?
Where is thy destruction, O Sheol? Let those pestilences and that destruction be produced for Ephraim's ruin."

Repentance (*relenting*) **shall be hid from mine eyes.** This Rashi explains: "I will feel no regret over this calamity." But we greatly prefer the sense of consolation assigned by many Christian interpreters to the passage. No doubt the verse before and that following this fourteenth verse are a threat which probably induced so many, as we have seen, to include this verse in the menace. But the abruptness of the prophet's style sufficiently accounts for a bright Messianic promise to relieve the gloom of the dark predictions among which it is interjected. Redemption from the power of Sheol signi-

fies, not merely deliverance from danger and deliverance from death, but deliverance from the under world by rescuing the living from the region of the dead, or rescuing from the realm of death those already subject to his grim dominion; while the destruction of death is celebrated in words of triumph, as Theodoret says, "He gives command to sing a pæan over [literally, 'against'] death." To the Israelites the promise signified the power of the Lord to redeem from death and restore them from destruction to newness of life, just as the dead dry bones of Israel in the valley of Ezekiel's vision are restored to life. The use which Paul makes of this verse when he couples it with the words of Isaiah, "Death is swallowed up in victory," in 1 Cor. xv. 55, is to confirm the full and final annihilation of death at the resurrection. This fuller and deeper meaning, dimly unfolded to Old Testament saints, was clearly brought to light in New Testament Scripture. The absence of repentance denotes the irrevocable accomplishment of the Divine purpose of salvation. Pusey has pertinently remarked upon this verse: "God by his prophets mingles promises of mercy in the midst of his threats of punishment. His mercy overflows the bounds of the occasion upon which he makes it known. He had sentenced Ephraim to temporal destruction. This was unchangeable. He points to that which turns all temporal loss into gain, that eternal redemption. The words are the fullest which could have been chosen. The word rendered 'ransom' signifies rescued them by the payment of a price; the word rendered 'redeem' relates to one who, as the nearest of kin, had the right to acquire anything as his own by paying that price. Both words, in their exactest sense, describe what Jesus did, buying us with a price . . . and becoming our near kinsman by his incarnation. . . . The words refuse to be tied down to a temporal deliverance. A little longer continuance in Canaan is not a redemption from the power of the grave; nor was Ephraim so delivered."

Ver. 15.—**Though he be fruitful among his brethren.** It should rather be, *for he will bear fruit among brethren.* כִּי, in this verse, is neither a particle of time, "when," nor a conditional particle, "if," but "for," adducing "a reason to prove that the promised grace of redemption would certainly stand firm." *Ki* is distinguished from אִם by being "only used in cases where a circumstance is assumed to be real. For one that is merely supposed to be possible, אִם is required," as may be inferred from the interchange of the two words in Numb. v. 19 and 20. The name Ephraim, signifying "double-fruitfulness," shall be verified, confirming the promised redemption from death, and, by the pledge of blessing, which the name implies affording a guarantee that the coming storm would not quite overwhelm them. The play on the name Ephraim fixes the meaning of יַפְרִיא, the *aleph* taking the place of *he*. The Septuagint διαστελεῖ, equivalent to "shall cause a division," and Jerome's *dividet*, suppose יַפְלִיג or יַפְלִיא. But though fruitful among the other tribes, yet the abuse of that fruitfulness invited the instrument of destruction. There is an allusion to the patriarchal blessing, "Joseph is a fruitful bough by a well;" the source of his fruitfulness was that well or fountain; while the drying up of it would be the certain cause of barrenness. **An east wind shall come, the wind of the Lord shall come up from the wilderness.** Thus, while Ephraim presents the pleasing picture of a fair and fruitful tree, the element of destruction is already on the way. A wind, the east wind, with its rude vehemence, blighting heat, and desolating effect, was coming. It was a wind, not coming by chance, but commissioned by Jehovah as a minister of vengeance to execute his wrath. It was, moreover, a wind issuing forth from its home in the desert, and fraught with fiery heat from the scorching sands of the Arabian desert. **And his spring shall become dry, and his fountain shall be dried up.** This flourishing tree, planted by the living spring, to which it owed its vigour and verdure, was doomed soon to wither in consequence of the drying up of the waters, that nourished it, by the east wind. **He shall spoil the treasure of all pleasant vessels.** Here the figure merges in the fact. The Assyrian conqueror was the blustering east wind, that swept like a whirlwind with his armies from the east. He not only ravaged the country, but rifled the treasures of the capital. The *kĕli chemdah* included all the valuables and treasures of Samaria referred to in the following verse. Kimchi explains the verse as follows: "For Ephraim was fruitful among brethren as long as he did not make calves. He became increasingly great and fruitful among his brethren, as Jacob said of him. . . . And now that he has sinned, an east wind of the Lord shall come; and it is the King of Assyria that is meant. And he compares him to the east wind, because it is a wind from the east, for the land of Assyria lies to the east of the land of Israel; and further he says, 'east wind,' because it is a violent wind. And he says, 'wind of Jehovah,' to magnify the wind and emphasize it; and he says also, 'spirit of Jehovah,' because Jehovah the blessed stirred up his spirit (*i.e.* spirit of the King

of Assyria) to come against Israel, 'goeth up from the wilderness;' wind is always in the wilderness. Or the explanation is, because the wilderness is between the land of Israel and the land of Assyria; and before this wind, which is the King of Assyria, is dried up the fountain of Ephraim, which was at first like a tree flourishing by the waters." And now before this wind shall its spring become dry and its fountain dried up. The verb יְבוֹשׁ, as from בּוֹשׁ, is an irregular formation for יָבֵשׁ, as on the contrary we find the Hiph. הוֹבִישׁ, as if from יָבֵשׁ.

Ver. 16.—**Samaria shall become desolate; for she hath rebelled against her God.** Others translate *shall atone*, i.e. bear guilt or punishment. In the latter sense it is from אָשַׁם, to atone or suffer the punishment of contracted guilt; in the former sense it is from שָׁמַם, and it is translated accordingly by ἀφανισθήσεται in the LXX., and *pereat* by Jerome; so also Aben Ezra: "It shall be laid waste;" Kimchi: "The *aleph* has *sch'wa* alone, and the signification 'desolation,' and so the dwellers therein shall be made desolate." He thus intimates that *aleph*, having *sch'wa* alone without seghol, does not belong to the root, which is not אשם (for its future would be תֶּאְשַׁם), but שָׁמַם. Rashi, however, understands it in the sense of "atone," or "find out her guiltiness;" he says, "From now will her guilt manifest itself." The reason of Samaria being thus mentioned is not only that it was the capital of the northern kingdom, but, as Kimchi says, "it confirmed Israel in the worship of the calves; for if the kings had been good, they would have brought back Israel to what was good." The *ki* assigns the reason of Samaria's desolation or guilt; it was rebellion against Jehovah, for Samaria was the seat and centre of idolatry, and hence it spread throughout the land. **They shall fall by the sword: their infants shall be dashed in pieces, and their women with child shall be ripped up.** The destruction thus described was to be complete. The present population would perish by the sword; the future progeny would be extinguished and all posterity cut off. Not only the children already born, but those unborn, were devoted to destruction; and all this in the most savage and barbarous manner. The word עוֹלֵל (from עלל, to meddle, gratify one's self, indulge one's caprice) presents childhood on the side of playfulness or petulance. The pronominal suffix attached to הרה refers to the city; and the feminine noun itself, forming subject to verbs in the masculine, arises from the fact that the feminine of the imperfect plural becomes rarer; or because the feminine plural only gradually distinguishes itself by a peculiar form from the masculine. The cruelties here specified may have been occasioned by those of the same kind with which Menahem King of Samaria smote Tiphsah. On that occasion "all the women therein that were with child he ripped up" (compare, for the cruel practice, 'Iliad,' vi. 58; 2 Kings viii. 12 and xv. 16).

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—8.—*Justification of the ways of God to man.* Israel had been the cause of their own calamities—another proof that sin is the procuring cause of all human suffering and sorrow. God's character is seen to be everlastingly the same—long-suffering and merciful, ever gracious to penitents, abounding in goodness and truth to all, but by no means clearing the guilty.

I. THE SECRET OF SUCCESS. Most men are fond of power, all men value prosperity; yet few men know the right road, and fewer still pursue it. Righteousness is the right road to success of any kind, and the sure way of elevation; it exalts either nation or individual who practises it. 1. As long as Ephraim worshipped the true God and abstained from idolatry, which subsequently became their besetting sin, they had power and pre-eminence. When they spake, their word was with power and not unfrequently inspired terror; it was sure to come with authority and to command respect among the other tribes of Israel. Ephraim had long been the premier tribe, enjoying the credit of great names, Joshua and Samuel; and of great deeds, the defeat of Midian and the death of the two Midianite princes, Oreb and Zeeb; also of great privileges, the national sanctuary having been for three centuries and a half at Shiloh, within the confines of that tribe. Nor were they slow to assert themselves and advance their claims. 2. But the tide turned. They offended in Baal; then came national degradation and political death—they fell by their own hand as moral suicides. Sin brought Ephraim down from his high and exalted position, and laid his honour in the dust. He became like a dead man,

despoiled of his authority, deprived of many of his subjects, and on the verge of ruin; his activities and vigour gone and his dignity departed, himself already dead though not yet buried. "When Ephraim forsook God and took to worship images, the state received its death-wound, and was never good for anything after. Note: deserting God is the death of any person or persons."

II. SIN IS A DOWNWARD SLOPE. The sin of idolatry was gradually developed in Israel. It began with the modification of the national worship by Jeroboam, when he changed the place and plan of that worship. When he had audaciously transferred the place of worship from Jerusalem to Dan on the Syrian frontier, and to Bethel on the border of the kingdom of Judah, in order to keep the people away from Jerusalem, the true place of worship and seat of the Davidic dynasty, he proceeded further to introduce the worship of the calves—a relapse, at least as to form, into the idolatry of Egypt. His design was not, indeed, the introduction of a new and rival deity, but the modelling of Jehovah's worship under an external and symbolic form. The sin did not stop here; it progressed until, in the days of Ahab, the Phœnician deity Baal became an object of worship. It was bad enough to make a graven image or material representation of the true God and bow down to it, thus violating the second commandment and neglecting the solemn instruction that the worship of God must be *spiritual*, not material; but it was still worse to introduce other gods, as the Phœnician Baal, in direct violation of the first commandment of the Law, which requires the *exclusive* worship of Jehovah. Thus the sin of idolatry progressed in Israel. Nor is this all; along with the worship of Baal the idolatry of the calves, as we learn from this Scripture, still survived two hundred years after its introduction by Jeroboam. Thus they "grew worse and worse; coveted more idols, doted more upon those they had, and grew more ridiculous in the worship of them." Superstition is an expensive thing. Israel used much of the means God had given them in making molten images. It is a whimsical thing; men follow their own fancies in carrying it out. It is an unspeakably stupid thing; that image which is man's work, man's wisdom, the product of man's wilfulness, becomes the object of man's worship. It is, moreover, a debasing thing; the fervour of their worship is stimulated by an authoritative, perhaps a royal, edict, enjoining reverence and homage to the senseless image of a calf. But whether the command proceeds from priests, or people, or prince, the kissing of the calves was in token of "the adoration of them, affection of them, and allegiance to them as theirs." It has been justly remarked by Pusey that "sin draws on sin. This seems to be a third stage in sin. First, under Jeroboam, was the worship of the calves. Then, under Ahab, the worship of Baal. Thirdly, the multiplying of other idols (2 Kings xvii. 9, 10), penetrating and pervading the private life, even of their less wealthy people."

III. THE SHORT-LIVED STATE OF SINNERS. They have often the show of prosperity, but their prosperous state is short-lived. "I have seen," says the psalmist, "the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay tree" (or a green tree growing in its native soil). "Yet he passed away, and, lo, he was not: yea, I sought him, but he could not be found." This truth is illustrated by four very striking similitudes. The morning cloud glowing in the early sunshine, assuming phantastic forms and displaying varying hues of beauty, often presents itself as a forerunner of the rain-shower to moisten the dry parched ground; but ere long it vanishes, and the cloudy morning ushers in a clear and rainless day. The early dew, with its pearly drops so bright and beautiful on the grass of a summer morning, which appears as if to promise sufficient moisture to the earth even in the absence of the long looked-for rain, is soon brushed aside by a passing foot, or evaporates before the day has far advanced. Both similitudes had already been employed by the prophet to exhibit the fleeting and transitory nature of Israel's religious profession and the consequent disappointment to the Divine expectations, so they are used here in turn to represent the transient character of sinners' prosperity and their disappointment from worldly things. The two other similitudes, though less pleasing, are equally powerful as representations of what is evanescent: the worthless chaff, which is whirled away in winnowing; and the offensive smoke, which, as has been pithily said, swelleth, welleth, and vanisheth—both soon dissipated and disappearing. "While these four emblems in common," says Pusey, "picture what is fleeting, two, the *early dew* and the *morning cloud*, are emblems of what is in itself good, but passing; the two others, the chaff and the smoke, are emblems of what is worthless. 'The dew and the

cloud were temporary mercies on the part of God which should cease from them; good in themselves, but, to their evil, soon to pass away.' . . . Such dew were the many prophets vouchsafed to Israel; such was Hosea himself, most brilliant, but soon to pass away. The chaff was the people itself, to be carried out of the Lord's land; the smoke, 'its pride and its errors, whose disappearance was to leave the air pure for the household of God.'"

IV. SIN IS BASE INGRATITUDE TO GOD. 1. God assures Israel that, however far they had degenerated and fallen, however much they had changed, the change had been entirely on their side, not on his; as though he had said, "And I, even I," for the pronoun is emphatic, "am still Jehovah, the same unchanging and unchangeable Being, the same in mightiness to succour, the same in willingness to help; also *thy* God, the same in covenant relation, the same in faithfulness to every promise, and the same in ability to fulfil the word he has pledged." 2. He pleads their past experience and the many proofs he had given them of his goodness; he appeals to them in regard to his treatment of the fathers and founders of their race, going back to the period of the Exodus, and thus gently hinting the covenant entered into at Sinai and reminding them of its conditions. In view of God's faithfulness and their own faithlessness, of God's goodness and their ingratitude, of his enduring mercies which they and their progenitors had experienced for centuries, and of the fitful and unfrequent conformity of their conduct therewith, they must surely have hung their head in shame and cried out in the language of another prophet, "O Lord, righteousness belongeth unto thee, but unto us confusion of faces, as at this day." 3. The law of reciprocity demands a return on the part of the people of God. He had made himself known to them by his Word and by his works, by his providences and by his prophets; he had made himself known to them as their fathers' God, as their own God in a special relationship, acknowledging them as his peculiar people. He naturally claimed, not only their knowledge, but acknowledgment of himself. It was their bounden duty, in turn, to acquaint themselves with him, to know him to be their God and no other, to acknowledge him in his ineffable perfections, in his glorious attributes, and in the ordinances of his worship, and also to own allegiance to him alone. And if all this was a duty incumbent on Israel, surely it is a duty equally incumbent, yea, much more so, upon ourselves; while neglect of such duty on our part brands us with an ingratitude deeper, blacker, and baser than that of Ephraim when the prophet wrote. 4. He backs all with the assurance of his saving power, and assigns as a special reason for knowing and acknowledging God that there is no Saviour besides him. Of this he had given abundant proof by the deliverances he had wrought and the provision he had made for them, as for their fathers before them, under the most trying circumstances, when they were in the wilderness, in the land of great drought. The very idea of God implies saving power on his part, and happiness in time and eternity for all who are his true Israel; and "as where we have protection we owe allegiance, so where we have salvation and hope for it we owe adoration." Now, a friend in need is a friend indeed. Such a Friend was God to Israel, an all-sufficient Friend; and just such a Friend is God to his people still.

V. SIN, BY REASON OF CERTAIN AGGRAVATIONS, BECOMES MORE HEINOUS IN THE SIGHT OF GOD. This is the case specially when the good gifts of his providence are used to the dishonour of God and the neglect of his service. It was thus with Israel, when pride of heart and forgetfulness of God were the return they made him for all his goodness to themselves and their fathers during all the years that had been from their entrance into the land of promise. The Lord himself had been their Shepherd; he had tended them with greatest care, leading them in green pastures and by still waters. But "Jeshurun waxed fat, and kicked." How often is this conduct of Israel repeated! Prosperity pampers pride, and pride makes men forget God, as if it were men's necessities that kept them mindful of God. "It is sad that those favours which ought to make us mindful of God, and studious what we shall render to him, should make us unmindful of him, and regardless what we do against him. We ought to know that we live upon God, when we live upon common providence, though we do not, as Israel in the wilderness, live upon miracles."

VI. SIN'S SAD SEQUEL. The sins of the people grew worse and became more aggravated: the Divine judgments are in proportion. In an early verse (third) of the chapter they are threatened with the evanescence of their prosperous condition, but something

much worse and more alarming is predicted (vers. 7, 8) as ready to follow. Not only was all good to be taken from them, but all evil was to come upon them. The Lord's flock is to lose the Shepherd's care; thus deserted, they will soon fall victims to savage beasts—nay, their former Shepherd not only abandons them to beasts of prey, but does himself assume the character and put forth the fierceness of such beasts. The ferocity of the lion, the fleetness of the leopard, and the fury of the robbed or ravenous she-bear, now represent the means which he employs against them. And as if it were not enough to specify the lion, the leopard, the bear, and the lion a second time, he adds "the wild beast," that is, wild beasts in general. It appears as if the dreadfulness of all wild beasts combined was required to exhibit the power of God's wrath and the fury of his anger. If the sinner escaped from the lion, a leopard overtakes him; or if he escapes the vigilance of the leopard's keen vision, a bear meets him; in a word, the fierceness of all wild beasts together is not equal to that of God's wrath. "All the dreadfulness of all creatures in the world combined meets in the wrath of God." A sorrowful contrast is here presented. God had once watched over them for good; now, leopard-like, he watches their wanderings, and with lynx-eyed vigilance waits as if to take advantage of them. On the other hand, their heart had been puffed up with pride, as well as hard and closed against the gentlest admonitions and most faithful instructions; now their heart shall be torn open with leonine force and violence. Sinners may shut the remonstrances and warnings of the Divine Word out of their hearts and remain obdurate, but afflictive providences or untoward events of some kind may at God's pleasure tear away the obstruction, and tear open the hardest heart. Whether the opinion of those who think there is a reference here to the four ancient monarchies is founded in fact, or is only the mere offspring of fancy, we care not to examine. That there is a resemblance between the terrible threats of this passage and the terrible treatment which the people of God experienced at the hands of those monarchies, there can be little doubt. Of the four monarchies represented by beasts in the seventh chapter of Daniel, the Babylonish was the lion, the Persian a bear, the Grecian a leopard, the fleetness of which suitably set forth the rapidity of Alexander's exploits, all of which he performed in the space of twelve years, while he himself at his death had only reached the age of thirty-three years. The Roman empire is not likened to any one beast in particular, but is described as dreadful and terrible and strong exceedingly, with great iron teeth, devouring and breaking in pieces and stamping the residue with the feet, its ten horns standing for the ten kingdoms into which it was subsequently parcelled.

Vers. 9—13.—*Man's marvellous perversity and God's restorative mercy.* I. RUIN BY SIN, RECOVERY BY GRACE. When Israel had destroyed himself, and when there was neither help nor hope for him in himself or in aught that man could do, help was to be found in God and in God alone. Throughout the whole course of human history wrath and ruin are the deservings of man, goodness and mercy the dispensation of God. In the worst of times and in the darkest day help is to be had in God. In the midst of merited wrath he remembers mercy. God volunteers his help to his erring children even when their sins have been blackest and their need greatest. When there is no human help at hand or anywhere available, God graciously proffers aid. There was now no king to save them in all their cities; God interposes and says, "I myself will be your King." When there was no judge to deliver them, such as those that had been raised up for them on great emergencies in ancient times—no Gideon, no Jephtha, no Samson—God himself stepped forth for their protection and stretched out his helping hand.

II. RELIANCE ON HUMAN HELP IS OFTEN AS FRUSTRATING AS FOOLISH. 1. Israel had *expected much, but got little,* from a king and princes. Thus we read in 1 Sam. viii. 5, "Make us a king to judge us like all the nations." Princes, though not expressed, are clearly implied in that passage, for wherever there is a king, there must of necessity be a court and nobles, or officers of high rank, to attend him. The people gained their object, but find their trust misplaced; in the day of their calamity and their oppression, those from whom they confidently expected such great things, are powerless as themselves and in just as great need of help. Thus history confirms the lesson, "Trust not in princes nor man's son." 2. The folly of obstinately *neglecting or rejecting*

warning well meant and faithfully given. Forewarned is forearmed; this should be the case, but the maxim is often disregarded. Samuel had faithfully warned Israel of the inconveniences to which they would expose themselves by imitating the surrounding nations when they sought a king. He told them truly, for God had instructed him, of the oppressions they might expect, the exactions they would be subject to, and the arbitrariness of rule to which they would have to submit; but, though they could not gainsay aught of his warning, they obstinately persisted in their determination, saying, "Nay, but we will have a king." To their folly they added sin, as is usually the case, for in rejecting Samuel's counsel they rejected the prophet's Master, as it is written, "They have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me." 3. *How little men know what is really good for them!* Frequently we set our heart on things most prejudicial to our best interests. Like children crying for hurtful objects which a wise parent withholds in tenderest affection, and which if granted would be sure to inflict injury or even prove fatal, we clamour for things that would prove not only unsuitable but most harmful; and, childlike, we complain if our requests are not granted. We pray, and in our ignorance we know not what to pray for as we ought. What need we have of grace, that the right desires may be put into our hearts and right words in our lips; that, coming before God with acceptance, we may obtain those things that are most conducive to the Divine glory and expedient for ourselves!

III. REQUESTS GRANTED IN WRATH. God, in his providence ever wise and holy, may, as it were, stand aside from men for a season, and allow them to have their way. After rejecting the salutary warning of his Word they may succeed in their wicked enterprises, and seem even to be seconded in them. 1. *No ground for cavilling at God's providence.* Without any imputation on the Divine holiness, men may be permitted to have their way and to get their will, yet in much wrath. "God," says Calvin, "so executes his judgments, that whatever evil there is it ought to be ascribed to men; whatsoever good to himself. . . . God by his secret counsel had directed the whole business, and yet he had no participation in the sin of the people. . . . Let us learn wisely to admire the secret judgments of God, who thus makes use of wicked men, and directs for the best end what is done by men wickedly and foolishly." 2. There appears to be *an answer to a latent objection.* The people might say to the prophet, "Why blame us when God permitted us to have a king, appointing Samuel to anoint Saul, and allowing Jeroboam to reign over ten tribes?" To this God, by his servant, replies, "I gave you a king when your hearts were so set on one; but I gave him to you in anger and as a punishment of sin—Saul to punish your sin in rejecting Samuel; and Jeroboam to punish the idolatries in the reign of Solomon, as also your rebellion and apostasy." 3. *God's gifts are sometimes tokens of his wrath.* "God," says Augustine, "many times in giving is angry, and in denying is merciful." We have positive proofs of this in Scripture. Besides the passage before us, there is a notable instance on record in Numb. xi.; there God gave the people what they greatly longed for, but in wrath. They had "wept in the ears of the Lord, saying, Who shall give us flesh to eat? for it was well with us in Egypt." They got the flesh they so vehemently craved; their desires were gratified; why? Just, we are told, because they despised the Lord who was among them. Thus God gave them flesh to eat, but it was in anger. The psalmist (Ps. lxxviii.), commenting on the fact, explains it so, "While the meat was yet in their mouths, the wrath of God came upon them." 4. *The end was as bad as the beginning.* A king was given them in anger, and a king was taken away in wrath. The proverb says, "Well begun is half done;" but we may add, "A bad beginning has most frequently an ill end." "Nothing successful," says Calvin, "could then proceed from so inauspicious a beginning. For it is only then an auspicious token when we obey God, when his Spirit presides over our counsels, when we ask at his mouth, and when we begin with prayer to him. But when we despise the Word of God, and give loose reins to our own humour, and fix on whatever pleases us, it cannot be but that an unhappy and disastrous issue will follow." 5. *Criteria of God's gifts.* We may point out a few tokens by which men may judge whether God's gifts are granted in love or in wrath. There are (1) desires which have more respect to the gift than to the giver. Of such it has been well said, "Those desires that are not out of love are not satisfied from love." If our regards are fixed on the creature and have no respect to the Creator, God may grant such desires, but not in love. "Whatsoever a gracious heart would have

from God, yet this is the main thing in its desires—Oh, let me have God in them!" (2) Great vehemence and want of moderation in our desires betoken that the gratification of those desires proceeds rather from wrath than love. In such cases God, we may conceive, says, "If you must have them, if you will have them, take them; but take the consequences along with them." Hence the necessity of moderating our desires in regard to all worldly things. (3) God sometimes grants man's desires, but withholds the blessing, so that it soon becomes abundantly manifest that the gift has come in anger, not in love. The desire has been granted, but there is neither comfort with it nor satisfaction in it. Thus we read, "They shall eat, but they shall not be satisfied." Or a worldly benefit is bestowed, yet not only is spiritual enjoyment withheld, but spiritual declension follows; as the psalmist (Ps. cvi.) says, "He gave them their request, but sent leanness into their soul." (4) When benefits are bestowed, but grace for the right use of them not given, we have good reason to conclude that it is in anger, not in love. God may grant us prosperity in our business or improvement in our lot of life; but if we have not sufficient grace to make a sanctified use of such prosperity or improvement, the benefit is not a sign of love, but of anger. It has been well said that "it is not in love for God to give any success, except he give a measure of grace proportioned to the success." (5) If our desires are attained and our ends accomplished by unlawful means, we have *a priori* evidence that our success has been owing to anger, and not to love. Many other signs might be added, but they must be left to suggest themselves, as there is little doubt they will to a reflecting mind.

IV. RECKONING FOR SIN IS SURE TO COME ONE DAY. Men's iniquity, like that of Ephraim, is bound up as treasure in a bag; it is sealed and kept safe, in order to be brought forth in due time. Sin, in like manner, is hid, not, however, from God, but with God, till the day of reckoning arrives. Just as gifts are bestowed, as we have seen, sometimes in anger and not in love, so sin is often hid in judgment, not in mercy, that is, not for protection but desolation. 1. God's *patience towards, is no acquittance of, the sinner.* His forbearance with the antediluvians lasted several centuries, till all flesh had corrupted its way, and the earth was filled with violence; but his Spirit would no longer strive, and the Flood came, sweeping all except eight souls away. He bore with Sodom till the cry of their wickedness went up to heaven, and Divine vengeance descended on its inhabitants. He bore with the Amorites till the cup of their iniquity brimmed over and brought complete destruction. Every sin, however secretly committed or subtlely contrived, however long overlooked or left unpunished, shall come forth, on the day of reckoning, for just retribution. "Be sure your sin will find you out."

> "Though the mills of God grind slowly, yet they grind exceeding small;
> Though with patience he stands waiting, with exactness grinds he all."

2. *Security in sin is no safeguard for the sinner.* One of the most destructive devices of the evil one is to tempt men to sin by suggesting the thought that what they do is no sin at all, or if it be a sin, that it is a little one, or too trivial to be punishable; or that the sin they commit is not known and shall never be known, or if it should, that it is too long forgotten or unnoticed to be ever punished. Equally devilish is the contrary device, by which, after he has succeeded in tempting men to sin, he drives them to despair by the thought that their sin is too great to be forgiven. 3. *The less the apprehension, the nearer the punishment.* As in the natural world, so in the moral—a dead calm is sometimes the precursor of a storm. So in the days before the Flood, men were "eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage," buying and selling, building and pulling down, planting and sowing, busying themselves in the various engagements of daily life, and all the while felt perfectly secure till the very day that Noah entered into the ark, and knew not until the Flood came and took them all away. Agag thought the bitterness of death was past, just before Samuel hewed him in pieces before the Lord in Gilgal. The inhabitants of Laish dwelt securely till of a sudden they became a prey to their enemies. The Amalekites, after taking Ziklag, were feasting and making merry and fearing no danger, when David came upon them and smote them from the twilight even unto the evening of the next day. So in other cases recorded in Old Testament history. So in New Testament times, as the apostle warns us that "the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall

say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape."

V. RESEMBLANCE OF SINNERS' SUDDEN AND BITTER SORROW TO TRAVAIL-PAINS. When God unlocks his treasury of wrath, and brings forth to light the sins now shut up and sealed and safely kept, men's security and God's forbearance shall in that day issue in sudden and sore sorrows. These sorrows are like the sorrows of a parturient woman, sharp as they are sudden. Many passages of Scripture might be quoted to prove travail-pains to be emblematical of acute anguish and extreme distress. They are at the same time unescapable.

VI. REPENTANCE IS CLOSELY CONNECTED WITH RENEWAL OF LIFE. As the travail-pains of the mother are usually associated with birth, and so a new life and therefore joy; so the godly sorrows of repentance are inseparably conjoined with conversion to God, newness of life, and consequent spiritual joy. The unwisdom of Ephraim is evidenced by his staying so long in the birth; in other words, by his delaying repentance. Ephraim persists in his sins, obstinately persists in them, and makes no effort to get out of them by repentance; he endeavours not, by aid of proffered grace, to extricate himself by repentance from his sin and misery and danger. How many there are, like Ephraim, who are content to lie long under convictions, but never think of agonizing to attain to thorough conversion! How many unwise sons there are! How many there are with strong convictions of sin, their conscience aroused, their understandings more or less enlightened, and affections much moved, and yet they stay there! They are brought to the birth, but they stop short—stay where they are, and refuse to come forth. They are not far from the kingdom of heaven, but unhappily they delay to enter into it, and that delay may prove fatal. They come to the place of breaking forth of children, but they stay long, alas! too long, in that perilous position. They are almost persuaded to become Christians, but not altogether; and so they are only almost, but not altogether saved. How sad the case of those who come within a mile of home, yet never reach it! or who come within view of port, yet sink to rise no more before they reach the harbour! How lamentable the fate of those Israelites who had reached Kadesh-barnea, within eleven days' journey or less of the land of promise, but who never set foot in that goodly land, their carcases having fallen in the wilderness!

Vers. 14—16.—*The humiliations wrought by the sins of Israel.* The prophet's representation implies that they were dead—nationally, politically, and spiritually dead. They were like dead men; and not only so, they were like men dead and gone and buried out of sight—so dreary and desperate was their condition.

I. THE DESPERATE STATE OF SINNERS. They are spiritually dead—dead through trespasses and sins. Even the people of God may by reason of their sins bring upon themselves such calamities, and may sink so low, as to be like men without life and lying in the grave. It was so with Israel at the period in question. They had come under the dominion of death, and had become subject to the power of the under world. Their condition is similarly described by Ezekiel in his thirty-seventh chapter: "These bones are the whole house of Israel: behold, they say, Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost: we are cut off for our parts."

II. THE DELIVERANCE PROMISED. The deplorable state of a sinful people dead and buried under calamities is no proof of helplessness when God undertakes their deliverance and presents no impossibility to the power of his omnipotence. 1. Israel in captivity were politically dead, the place of banishment was their grave. This is the condition of persons in exile, for in a civil sense they are spoken of as dead. Deliverance from captivity is here promised to that people primarily and partially from the country of Assyria, but fully and finally from the lands of their long dispersion and political death. 2. But Israel in all their remarkable history were a representative people; and so their restoration from a state so hopeless and helpless that to the eye of sense it seemed death, may typify the renewal of life in souls spiritually dead by the regenerating power of God, and further the resurrection of bodies long dead and mouldered in the grave. The Septuagint expresses the sense of the original with perfect plainness by substituting "victory" for "plagues," and "sting" for "destruction." Paul, in his quotation of the passage, employs the Septuagint; and whether he employs the words allusively, or by way of accommodation, the better to express his sense of the mighty

power of God, or as an exact citation, he celebrates the greatest of all deliverances, which shall be consummated in that day when the destroyer of the nations shall be himself destroyed, and when the universal conqueror shall himself be conquered, his sting being wrested from him and his power to hurt annihilated. 3. The deliverance thus effected by him who has the right to redeem, as having become our Kinsman, and who, having paid the ransom, possesses the privilege to redeem, both by price and by power, is extolled not only as a victory, but a triumph; while language of exultation is addressed to the ghastly tyrant now fallen and for ever prostrate. 4. When we revert to the immediate application of the words, we find the substance of the promise to Israel to be that, notwithstanding Ephraim's unwisdom in rebelling against and delaying to return to God, and notwithstanding his long impenitence and false security, God's faithfulness shall stand fast, and the truth pledged to his people shall not be disannulled. What comfort for all humble penitents! However hopeless and helpless our condition, and however desperate our state, we have no reason to despair. However gracious the promises of God, and however mighty the power required for their accomplishment, we may rest assured that not one jot or tittle shall fail through fickleness or fall to the ground through lack of power, for he has solemnly said, "Repentance is hid from mine eyes." He will not repent of mercy to his friends, nor relent in his wrath to their enemies.

III. THE DIGNITY AND DOWNFALL OF EPHRAIM. Promise and threatening frequently present themselves side by side in the Word of revelation, and sometimes alternate. The fulfilment of the one is a guarantee for the fulfilment of the other; the accomplishment of the one warrants us to expect the accomplishment of the other. 1. Ephraim's fruitfulness had been the subject of promise, and the very name involved a prophecy. That promise had been realized in Ephraim's great superiority over the other tribes in numbers, in power, and in wealth. The fruitfulness of the earth and the fruitfulness of the womb had been his; he had been blessed with blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep that lieth under, blessings of the breasts and of the womb. Like his father Joseph, he had been a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough by a well, whose branches run over the wall. 2. But as the promise had been so exactly fulfilled, so must the threatening. And notwithstanding the prosperity of this highly favoured people, the day of adversity was at hand. The destructive elements that were commissioned to bring about the downfall of Ephraim are figuratively described; but the figures employed set forth very graphically the violence of the enemy who was approaching, the Power by whom he was sent, the quarter from which he came, the ruin he would accomplish, and the robbery he would effect. The figures are so obvious and applicable that they only need to be indicated. The east wind is the fierce Assyrian conqueror. He comes not by chance, but is commissioned of the Lord; he comes from an eastern land, but more particularly with the vehemence and violence of a wind from the wilderness, such as that great wind from the wilderness that demolished the dwelling where Job's children were feasting; he would dry up and destroy all that lay in his way. The spring would become dry, and thus the streams soon cease to flow; the fountain would be dried up, and so the waters must fail. But to ruin he would add robbery, plundering the treasures of precious metals, costly garments, precious fruits—everything that the covetous, or avaricious, or voluptuous, or lascivious could desire.

IV. THE DESOLATION OF THE CAPITAL. Not only would the country be ravaged and laid waste, but the capital would be desolated. The citizens would be ruthlessly slain; the present population would be swept away, and the hope of posterity cut off. 1. Consider *the cause* of all these calamities. Why did all this desolation come upon Ephraim and their beautiful city of Samaria? The answer is plain as it is positive, and is given by the prophet in the closing verse: "Because she hath rebelled against her God." The connection may be traced as follows: "Though Ephraim be high and mightily exalted above his brethren, yet, since he has not exalted my Name who exalted him, nor made my benefits and my mercies motives to duty and obedience, but has fought against me with my own favours, and abused my blessings to my dishonour, therefore I will bring the Assyrian upon him, who, like an east wind, shall blast him, utterly dash all his hopes, spoil his treasures, and carry him into captivity." 2. The *fate of Samaria*, as recorded here and in Micah i. 6, has been fully realized. Near the middle of Palestine, and deriving its name from Shomer, the owner of the site on which the city

was built, and not from Omri, the king who built it, B.C. 925, it continued to be the capital of the ten tribes for two centuries till their carrying away by Shalmaneser, B.C. 720, during all which period it was the seat of idolatry. The site of this celebrated capital was one of rare attractiveness; it combined strength, beauty, and fertility. It is "delightful," says Thomson, "by universal consent. It is a very large, isolated hill, rising by successive terraces at least six hundred feet above the valleys that surround it. In shape it is oval, and the smaller and lower end unites it to the neighbouring mountain on the east." Rebuilt by Herod, it received from him its later name of Sebastia, now *Sebusteyeh*, in honour of Augustus. "During the twenty-five centuries which have passed since the Captivity, its fortunes have been very various; often destroyed, again rebuilt, growing smaller by degrees, though *not beautifully* less, until it finally subsided into the insignificant village which now clings to the name and the site." Its site and sin are similarly described by Stanley: "On that beautiful eminence, looking far over the plain of Sharon and the Mediterranean Sea to the west, and over its own fertile vale to the east, the kings of Israel reigned in a luxury which, for the very reason of its being like that of more Eastern sovereigns, was sure not to be permanent in a race destined for higher purposes." 3. The *ruinous* nature of sin. Of the ancient capital of Ephraim, long "the nursery of idolatry and rebellion against God," not even a wreck remains, nor a ruin to remind one of its ancient glory. See what ruin sin has wrought! "All the evil in the world may be seen in sin. . . . Sin dries up all our springs, stops our fountains, spoils our treasures, and robs us of all our pleasant things—our pleasant land, our pleasant food, our pleasant raiment, our pleasant houses, pleasant children . . . and therefore, when anything goes amiss with us, we should search for the sin that has done us mischief; find out the Achan that has caused the trouble; find out the Jonah that has raised the storm; do justice on the one, and drown the other, and we shall have peace."

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—8.—*Ephraim, living and dead.* This passage portrays anew the dreadful prevalence of apostasy and idolatry throughout the nation. "The same strings, though generally unpleasing ones, are harped upon in this chapter that were in those before" (Matthew Henry). Much of the imagery continues to be anthropopathic; the prophet exhibits an apparent tumult of contending passions in the Divine mind towards unfilial and rebellious Ephraim.

I. EPHRAIM WAS ONCE ALIVE. He had been so, both spiritually and temporally. The time was when the tribe of Ephraim, and the other nine tribes over which it cast its shadow, contained many God-fearing families. Joshua, the illustrious hero who led the Hebrews into Palestine, was of this tribe; and to him, doubtless, it owed not a little of its subsequent eminence. The "life" which once dwelt in Ephraim was reflected in: 1. *God's mercies towards him.* (Vers. 4, 5.) The Almighty set his love upon Israel; and "in his favour is life" (Ps. xxx. 5). God had manifested himself to his people in the Exodus from Egypt. He "did know Ephraim in the wilderness;" he visited him there in pity and love—revealing his will at Sinai, feeding the people with manna, bringing them water out of the rock, leading them by the cloudy pillar, and delivering them from their enemies. He "led Joseph like a flock," and at last "made him to lie down in the green pastures" of Canaan—a land which was "the glory of all lands." The Lord had set up his tabernacle in Ephraim; for Shiloh was a city of that canton, and the sacred tent remained at Shiloh for upwards of three centuries. 2. *His own influence.* (Ver. 1.) "When Ephraim spake, there was trembling; he was exalted in Israel." In the early days of the nation Ephraim had been the most powerful of the twelve tribes. Long before the lamentable disruption of the Hebrew state, it had exercised a sort of control over the others. It had a high reputation, and commanded unfeigned respect. At length Ephraim became itself a kingdom, and as such seemed for a time strong and prosperous, and was regarded by Judah as a formidable rival.

II. EPHRAIM IS NOW DEAD SPIRITUALLY. Spiritual life consists in union with Jehovah, and is maintained by communion with him. But sin separates from God,

and gradually kills the life of the soul. Now, Ephraim in his prosperity had apostatized from God. The Divine complaint is, "They have forgotten me" (ver. 6). Although the people owed everything to God, they allowed the very abundance of his gifts to become the means of withdrawing their hearts from him. In the time of Hosea the nation was really "dead in trespasses and sins." Again, in this passage, the prophet laments the manifestations of this state of death. 1. *The Baal-worship.* (Ver. 1.) "When he offended in Baal, he died." The introduction of the Phœnician idolatry involved Israel in spiritual ruin. The rites of that idolatry were in the highest degree obscene and cruel; and by the Law of Moses every breach of the first commandment was to entail terrible penalties. Yet, notwithstanding all, Israel went aside to serve Baal and Ashtaroth, and thereby became morally degraded and spiritually destroyed. 2. *The image-worship.* (Ver. 2.) Although Jeroboam's sin (1 Kings xii. 28) was manifestly distinct from that of Ahab (1 Kings xvi. 31—33), and in itself by no means so heinous, it had yet been the beginning of the evil disease which, under Ahab and Jezebel, culminated in the spiritual death of the nation. Image-worship is idolatry; and the "kissing" of the two golden calves had led to the multiplication of idolatrous images all over the land. The people in their blindness were addicted in their private life to all manner of "will-worship." How melancholy that Ephraim should forsake Jehovah to bow down to manufactured gods—"all of them the work of artificers"! 3. *The self-worship.* (Ver. 6.) Ephraim abused his prosperity to such an extent that his heart became at once steeped in materialism and elated with pride. He minded earthly things. His "pasture" became everything to him; he was greedy, and could never have enough. "Jeshurun waxed fat, and kicked" (Deut. xxxii. 15). Selfishness and insolence and tyranny were born of Ephraim's abundance; he became puffed up with self-sufficiency, forgot Jehovah his God, and "died."

III. EPHRAIM WILL SOON BE DEAD OUTWARDLY. As the dissolution of the body follows death, so the temporal ruin of a state is the natural result of its moral decay. In cherishing his pride and pursuing his idolatries, Israel was busily digging his own grave. As his wealth and power increased, he steadily deteriorated in moral fibre, and thus gradually lost his prestige and reputation. So: 1. *His destruction shall be swift.* (Ver. 3.) This part of the prophecy probably belongs to the time of Hoshea, the last of the kings of Israel, who was "cut off as the foam upon the water," and in whose day the unhappy Ephraimites were carried away into Assyria. The captivity, therefore, was now at hand. The suddenness of the impending transplantation is indicated by four similitudes—"the morning cloud," "the early dew," "the chaff," and "the smoke." Such is the result of the prosperity of nations which continue to be incurably wicked; the time comes at last when the whole fabric of the commonwealth suddenly falls to pieces. 2. *It shall be dreadful.* (Vers. 7, 8.) Here also there are four comparisons—"a lion," "a leopard," "a bear," and "the wild beast." These shall come down upon the flock in their fat "pasture," and devour them. It is remarkable that the same four beasts reappear in Daniel's vision of the four world-empires (Dan. vii.), and that they are combined into one bestial form in "the wild beast" of the Apocalypse (Rev. xiii. 1—3). Alas! Jehovah, who has been the Shepherd of Israel, is now compelled to become Israel's Devourer! He will send the Assyrian—strong as a lion, fierce as a leopard, and savage as a bear—to tear the very heart of the nation. Thus would Israel "destroy himself" (ver. 9), being carried away into sudden exile and total oblivion

LESSONS. 1. "Righteousness exalteth a nation" (ver. 1). 2. "The Lord is a jealous God;" "His glory he will not give to another, neither his praise to graven images" (vers. 2, 3) 3. God destroys our idols that we may learn to "kiss the Son;" for he is "the true God and eternal life," and "there is no Saviour beside him" (vers. 3, 4). 4. The dangers of material prosperity to all who neglect those means of grace which make prosperity safe (ver. 6). 5. "Pride goeth before destruction" (ver. 6). 6. The great moral evils of our age (intemperance, impurity, profanity, infidelity, social disorders, etc.) constitute a call to God's people to more faith and prayer and Christian activity.—C. J.

Vers. 9—16.—*Ruin, retribution, and resurrection.* Underlying these verses, and interpenetrating the judgment of Jehovah's anger with which they are charged, there

is a deep undertone of tenderness. The prophet speaks, in the Lord's Name, "with the labouring voice, interrupted by sobs, of a judge whose duty it is to pronounce the final heavy sentence after all possible pleadings and considerations have been gone through" (Ewald).

I. ISRAEL'S RUIN. This is referred to, both as regards its origin and its most recent manifestations. 1. *The ruin began with the revolt from the house of David.* Ephraim's proud determination to become politically independent of Judah was the root-sin from which sprang the corruption of his religion and the immorality of his whole life. In following Jeroboam, Samaria "rebelled against her God" (ver. 16), and entered upon a career which resulted in moral suicide. She rejected her only true "Help" when she said, "Give me a king and princes" (ver. 10). The kings of the ten tribes could not save the people; for Jehovah, the King of Israel, did not acknowledge their royalty. Neither Jeroboam I., nor any of the princes of the house of Omri, or of the dynasty of Jehu—not to mention the military usurpers who afterwards snatched the crown from one another—had fulfilled the true function of a king as being a shepherd of the people. Despite the seemingly splendid reign of Jeroboam II., the history of the northern kingdom was all along one of misfortune, degradation, and self-destruction. Israel "destroyed himself" with the weapons of pride and idolatry, sensuality and anarchy. 2. *The ruin was perpetuated through his refusal to repent.* This seems to be the idea presented in ver. 13. Hosea had prophesied for upwards of half a century during the last long agony of his country; and during that period God had sent many calamities upon Israel, which were graciously fitted, like labour-pains, to induce the new birth. The latest of these travail-pangs are now imminent; but still Ephraim delayed thorough repentance, cleaved obstinately to his sins, and refused to be "born again." The Lord desired that Ephraim's "sorrows" should suddenly cease, through the birth of a new Israel; but the people were "joined to idols," and thus—meantime at least—there could be no recovery from the ruin into which they had fallen.

II. ISRAEL'S RETRIBUTION. The sin of the nation accumulated gradually. And the justice of God "retained" it, and pronounced punishment on it, and kept the punishment in store (ver. 12). Notwithstanding the distresses of the last two generations, which Hosea had witnessed, and from which he had himself suffered—including now, it may be, the seizure and imprisonment of Hoshea, the last unhappy king of Israel (ver. 10; 2 Kings xvii. 4)—there was still a load of stern wrath waiting to discharge itself upon the guilty commonwealth. 1. *Ephraim has been punished through his kings.* (Vers. 10, 11.) The whole nineteen were apostates from Jehovah, and under them the cup of the nation's iniquity was slowly filled. The very "giving" of each monarch in the providence of God was a mark of his anger; indeed, many of them gained the throne as the result of military revolt and assassination of the preceding sovereign, whom God thus "took away in his wrath." 2. *The kingdom itself is now to be destroyed.* (Vers. 15, 16.) The once "fruitful" Ephraim is about to suffer an irretrievable blight. The Assyrian power, like the hot blast of the simoom, shall blow upon his land, and for ever dry up the springs of its fertility. Samaria, its capital city, after a protracted death-struggle of three years, shall be subdued and devastated by Sargon, the successor of Shalmaneser. The treasures of the city shall be plundered, and its inhabitants cruelly murdered or dispersed among the heathen. Scarcely any trace will be left of the once proud and luxurious kingdom of Ephraim. The sentence of political extinction pronounced against that state is irreversible.

III. ISRAEL'S RESURRECTION. The proper names "Hosea" and "Hoshea" mean "help" or "salvation." In King Hoshea, however, there was "no help" during the final extremity of the national peril; but the venerable Hosea still lived, and announced that the Lord, whose word he had so long spoken to a disobedient nation, was still ready to become Israel's "Help" (ver. 9), notwithstanding all the wretched past. Although constrained passionately to denounce the sin of his people and to forewarn of the coming desolations, the prophet intimates that these dire punishments are also paternal chastisements, sent by Jehovah to arouse the people, and induce them to return to his service. The Divine heart is still full of tender compassion for Israel. The Lord cannot allow the nation utterly to perish. On the other side of the dreadful judgments and the long dispersion, there will be a recovery so glorious as to be called a resurrection. "What shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead?" (Rom. xi. 15). This ultimate

restoration is announced in the splendid apostrophe of ver. 14—a passage which the Apostle Paul, following the Septuagint, quotes towards the close of his sublime argument for the certainty of the resurrection of the saints (1 Cor. xv. 55). In its original sense, however, this song of triumph refers to the deliverance of the posterity of Ephraim from their national doom. The ten tribes shall be carried captive, and shall become politically dead and buried; but the time is coming when God will raise them up spiritually, and restore them to his favour. This brilliant promise received no appreciable fulfilment in the return of a few exiles of Ephraim and Manasseh along with the first colony of Jews who went up from Babylon at the close of the seventy years' captivity. The oracle clearly refers to Messianic times. It is in line with the general run of those Scripture prophecies which anticipate the national conversion of Israel, and announce the Lord's unchangeable purpose to effect it (cf. ver. 14, last clause, with Rom. xi. 29). And, as Israel was a typical nation, this pæan of victory might well be used, as Paul uses it, to celebrate the triumph over death and Hades which the Messiah has already achieved in his own person, and which he will by-and-by repeat in the general resurrection of his people.

LESSONS. 1. God destroys no man; every sinner is self-murdered (ver. 9). 2. Adequate temporal punishment for our sins often consists in the simple granting of our desires (vers. 10, 11; Ps. cvi. 15). 3. When God leaves a man, his prosperity withers (ver. 15). 4. The soul that forsakes God for an earthly portion shall be overwhelmed with regrets (vers. 13, 16). 5. Even while the Lord must denounce severe judgments, his love broods over the sinner, and remains invincible.—C. J.

Ver. 14.—*Jehovah the Destroyer of death.* This sublime promise of mercy is imbedded among threatenings of judgment. It reminds us, both as it occurs here and in the connection in which the Apostle Paul quotes it (1 Cor. xv. 55), that although in our world "sin hath reigned unto death," it is the prerogative of the Almighty to rescue from the grasp of the grave, and even to abolish death itself. We may profitably consider some of the spheres within which the Lord has chosen to exercise this prerogative. The promise of our text applies to—

I. THE RESTORATION OF ISRAEL. Ever since the two captivities Israel has been, as it were, a dead nation. The Jews have been dispersed over the world, and have not yet been able either to recover their national independence or to maintain their national worship. But Hosea here assures his countrymen of future restoration and blessing, notwithstanding the final ruin of the kingdom of Ephraim. "The only meaning that the promise had for the Israelites of the prophet's day was that the Lord possessed the power even to redeem from death, and raise Israel from destruction into newness of life; just as Ezekiel (xxxvii.) depicts the restoration of Israel as the giving of life to the dry bones that lay scattered about the field" (Keil). But the future thus expressly predicted for Ephraim is more blissful than even Hosea, to whom this oracle was given, could readily, or perhaps possibly, conceive. Israel's restoration shall be spiritual. The captive Hebrews, so far and so long estranged from God, shall return to his favour. The very people who at last crowned their sinful career by "crucifying the Lord of glory"—a sin still more heinous than all the wickedness for which Hosea rebukes them—shall be made the subjects of a glorious future. "They shall look upon him whom they have pierced" (Zech. xii. 10), and at last accept him as the Messiah. They shall become zealous and successful missionaries of the cross, and shall contribute largely to the bringing in of the world's jubilee (Rom. xi. 15).

II. THE REDEMPTION-WORK OF CHRIST. Students of the New Testament find a larger and deeper meaning in this glowing promise than that which would limit it to the resuscitation of Israel. To our consciousness the Lord, who is "the Plague of death," is Jehovah-Jesus. He became incarnate "that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage" (Heb. ii. 14, 15). As the great Teacher, he proclaimed himself to be "the Resurrection and the Life" (John xi. 25); and he sealed this testimony by rebuking disease of every kind, and even raising the dead. Most of all, he was himself "obedient unto death;" and by his own decease upon the cross he has "ransomed his people from the power of the grave." Divine justice had put a dart into death's hand to slay us therewith for our sins; but Jesus, in dying for us, satisfied

that justice, made adequate atonement for guilt, and received authority to take the dart away. By coming himself under the power of the grave, the Lord Jesus has "abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light" (2 Tim. i. 10). Of this victory his own resurrection upon the third day is an infallible assurance. In emerging from the grave as the risen Saviour, Jesus revealed himself as "the Plague of death," and as the Source of spiritual life and Author of eternal salvation to his people. "Now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the Firstfruits of them that slept" (1 Cor. xv. 20).

III. THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST'S PEOPLE. Jehovah-Jesus is the Saviour of the soul, and of the body also. 1. *He redeems the soul from death.* Is not the world of mankind like a vast graveyard, where men are lying "dead in trespasses and sins"? Sinful man is naturally destitute of the Spirit of life, and insensible to the beauties of holiness. He is unable to raise himself from the unclean tomb of his own evil lusts and passions. But, so soon as the voice of the Son of God speaks the word, "I will ransom them," the same almighty energy which gave life to Jesus himself, when dead, breathes new spiritual vitality into those for whom he died (John v. 21—27). "Because he lives, they shall live also" (John xiv. 19). 2. *He shall redeem the body from death.* The final ruin of the soul is called in Scripture "the second death" (Rev. xxi. 8); and, if the Lord Jesus can deliver from that, it is no wonder that he is also the Saviour of the body. The order of redemption is that he redeems from the "second death" first; and thus the abolition of temporal death at the end of the world shall really be the destruction of "the *last* enemy" (1 Cor. xv. 26). All men naturally regard "the king of terrors" as the most formidable and cruel of foes. The grave seems to the eye of sense only a despoiler (Prov. xxvii. 20). But it is the glory of Christianity that the Redeemer has robbed death of its sting, lighted up the under-world with his love, and given us the sure and certain hope of a blessed resurrection. Faith sees hanging at the girdle of the Son of man "the keys of death and of Hades" (Rev. i. 18). The grave is to the saints only an underground pathway to heaven, and "death is swallowed up in victory" (1 Cor. xv. 54—57).

> "Death, thou wast once an uncouth, hideous thing:
> But since our Saviour's death
> Has put some blood into thy face,
> Thou hast grown sure a thing to be desired
> And full of grace."
>
> (George Herbert.)

It is also a great joy to know that the Lord's promise to redeem his people from death is certain to be fulfilled. He has passed his word for it; and, as he here assures us, "repentance shall be hid from his eyes." Multitudes of believers die in perfect peace, and some even in triumph, for they are conscious that he is "with them."

LESSONS. 1. The harmony of the Old and New Testaments in teaching that "unto God the Lord belong the issues from death." 2. Christ Jesus is the Lord, who by his Spirit exercises this prerogative, both as regards nations and individuals. 3. The alienation of the soul from God is a state of death—the most awful condition possible to man; and from that state he can only escape by being "born again." 4. The dissolution of the body is not death to the believer, but simply a falling asleep in Jesus. 5. The doctrine that Christ is "the Resurrection and the Life" brings solid comfort in the hour of bereavement.—C. J.

Ver. 9.—*Self-destruction.* Hosea more than once sought to bring this solemn truth home to the conscience of the people (ch. xiv. 1, etc.). They saw that national disasters were impending, but attributed these to any other cause than their own sin; *e.g.* to the divided counsels of their leading statesmen, to neglect of the army, to the ambition of their rulers, to temporary reverse of fortune. The prophet says, in effect, "These would not be against you, if God were not; and he is no longer your Deliverer, because you have turned against him. O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself!" This truth may be seen in the fall of other kingdoms—the Assyrian, Roman, etc. These were destroyed, not by an isolated defeat, but by the moral deterioration preceding it which had destroyed all recuperative power. If we should live to see England's decay—our land untilled, our docks empty, our mills and factories silent, our colonies torn away, our people crushed

by a debt too heavy for them to bear—it will be due, not to this mistake of policy or to that unfortunate war, but to the fact that as a people we had forsaken righteousness and mercy. This deterioration will precede that desolation. It is true of individuals as of nations. If a man sinks into an abyss of despair or of vicious indulgence, it will be, not through the force of his circumstances, but through the worthlessness of his character. To such a one God says, "Thou hast destroyed thyself; but in me is thine help." In treating of self-destruction we will speak of (1) its causes; (2) its delusions; and (3) its remedy.

I. ITS CAUSES. The importance of the subject is seen from the frequency with which its lamentable issues occur. "Wide is the gate, and broad is the road, that leadeth to *destruction*, and many there be that go in thereat." 1. *Neglect of the means of grace.* The Word which reveals God, the Son who declares him, etc. "This is life eternal, that they may know thee," etc. A man who denies himself food till he perishes of starvation, or refuses medicine till the disease proves fatal, practically "destroys himself." 2. *Inward iniquity.* The passions, the worldly spirit, the self-will, etc., which unfit for fellowship with God and prevent all desire for it, are the causes of spiritual ruin. These, and not death, are the true causes of destruction. When a dead tree is cut down as a cumberer of the ground, it is not the gleaming axe which we can see and hear that destroys it. The tree is destroyed before the axe is laid at its root, and perhaps only after its fall will the cause of death be revealed. 3. *Outward transgression.* Show how sin committed leads to other sins, how the sense of shame dies out with the frequency of the act, how habits of evil-doing grow till there seems no escape, and to all holy influence the man seems dead. Conscience says, "Thou hast destroyed thyself."

II. ITS DELUSIONS. Whatever, in a moment of despair, a man might do with his natural life, he would surely not destroy all hope of spiritual life unless the words were true, "The god of this world hath blinded the eyes of them that believe not." Some justify their irreligiousness to their own consciences: 1. *By referring to God's perfections*; *e.g.* to his sovereignty ("If I am to be saved, I shall be"), or to his mercy ("God is too merciful to punish"). 2. *By referring to the condition of their fellow-men.* Of the *godless*, they urge they are so numerous that it is not credible that they should all be in the wrong; of *Christians*, they say that they are too scrupulous for ordinary society, or else that they are so inconsistent that religion cannot be of great worth. 3. *By referring to their own state.* If they are moral, they "thank God that they are not as other men are;" if licentious, they argue that they are "committed to do all these abominations;" if ignorant, they declare they are not scholarly enough to understand the teaching of the Church; if intellectual, they maintain that they require no spiritual illumination; if attentive to the externals of religion, their spirit is that of the Pharisee who said, "I fast twice in the week," etc.

III. ITS REMEDY. "In me is thine help." The Speaker is "the Lord Jehovah, in whom is everlasting strength." He alone can save. When there was no eye to pity, he brought to men salvation. The remedy is to be found: 1. *In the atonement Christ has made.* "He was wounded for our transgressions," etc.; "The blood of Jesus Christ . . . cleanseth from all sin." 2. *In the intercession he presents.* "Wherefore he is able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for us." 3. *In the grace he gives.* When the Holy Spirit is come, "he will convince the world of sin," etc. The Spirit comes to cast out the strong man armed. By his grace he vivifies, purifies, sanctifies, until at last we shall stand faultless before God's throne. "Thou hast destroyed thyself; but in me is thine help." "Neither is there salvation in any other, for there is none other name given under heaven whereby we can be saved."

CONCLUSION. In the text there are (1) enlightenment for the ignorant; (2) warning for the self-righteous; (3) hope for the despondent; and (4) a song for the redeemed.—A. R.

Ver. 2.—"*They sin more and more.*" The tribe of Ephraim was especially upbraided by the prophet on account of their addictedness to idol-worship. Separating themselves from the religious observances which were proper to the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the members of this powerful and central tribe had distinguished themselves

by their defection from Jehovah, and by their zeal in the service of Baal and other gods of the nations. One sin led to another; and they sinned "more and more." In these words a great principle is enunciated. There is a tendency on the part of sinners not only to continue, but even to exceed, in sin. To understand this, it must be observed that—

I. TEMPTATIONS BECOME GROWINGLY NUMEROUS AND POWERFUL. 1. Circumstances are often in an increasing measure favourable to sin. The sinner puts himself in the way of stronger temptations. 2. Wicked companions and instigators to sin gain in boldness and persuasiveness. They learn by experience that no resistance need be anticipated. 3. Restraints are culpably removed. The practice of sin breaks down the fences which virtue sets up around the law-abiding and obedient.

II. RESISTANCE BECOMES GROWINGLY MORE FEEBLE AND FAINT. 1. Desire is strengthened by indulgence. Unbridled passion, ungoverned pride, insatiable selfishness, have everything as they would. 2. Shame is lessened. The reproach of conscience is silenced. Fear is quieted and stifled. The blush no longer rises to the cheek; and the tongue is habituated to falsehood, or profanity, or impurity, without any check. 3. Moral power is weakened. At first there is a contest within between the better feelings and the worse; but after a while there is no conflict, and the vanquished protest dares no longer assert itself.

APPLICATION. The picture thus drawn of the sinner's progress is so fearful, that the contemplation of it may well lead him who is on the downward road to pause. *Facilis descensus Averni.* The only hope lies in immediate and sincere repentance, and (by Divine grace) an urgent application for forgiveness, and for a new and better mind.—T.

Ver. 3.—*Driven chaff and vanished smoke.* The imagery here employed is of obvious interpretation. When the blast of the whirlwind or of the winnowing fan passes over the threshing-floor, the chaff is driven away and dispersed. When the fire is kindled upon the earth, the smoke makes its escape through the lattice-work below the roof into the open air. Even so, those who wickedly depart from Jehovah and addict themselves to the worship of idols shall, says the prophet, learn by bitter experience the folly of their course and the vanity of their trust. No safety, no stability, but certain ruin and destruction shall be their lot.

I. DEFECTION FROM TRUE RELIGION EXCITES THE DISPLEASURE AND INDIGNATION OF THE ONLY TRUE GOD. There are many who refuse to admit that the supreme Ruler concerns himself with the conduct of men. And others consider that benevolence is so all-absorbing an attribute of Deity that they will not hear of punishment either in this world or in a world to come. The declarations of the prophet are utterly inconsistent with such views as these.

II. RETRIBUTIVE JUSTICE WILL CERTAINLY ASSERT ITSELF IN THE CONDEMNATION AND PUNISHMENT OF THE IRRELIGIOUS. 1. There is *national* retribution, as the history of Israel and of every nation abundantly proves. 2. There is *individual* chastisement, as every human life in a measure may convince us. 3. The punishment inflicted upon the ungodly and impenitent is not limited to this earthly life, to this transitory scene of probation.—T.

Ver. 4.—*The only Saviour.* The prophets were in the habit of appealing to the past history of Israel as a nation when they would urge the people to repent of present sin, and would encourage them to seek Divine favour and acceptance. Certainly the records of the past proved that only in returning and in rest had the people ever been saved, and that when they had turned elsewhere than to Jehovah they had only met with disappointment and misery.

I. THE VANITY AND INSUFFICIENCY OF ALL EARTHLY HELPERS. 1. As Israel, when seeking help and deliverance from the deities of the heathen, ever found such a refuge vain, so will all men who look elsewhere than to the Most High experience certain and bitter disappointment. "The idols of the heathen have ears, but they hear not; . . . they that make them are like unto them; so is every one that trusteth in them." 2. Even the best-intentioned of human friends and counsellors are powerless to aid and save. The lesson has to be learned afresh by every generation that the help of man is vain. "It is better to trust in the Lord than to put your confidence in princes."

II. THE SOLE SUFFICIENCY OF GOD AS A MIGHTY SAVIOUR. 1. He has wisdom to devise appropriate means of deliverance. Many an instance in Israel's history might have been quoted, in order to produce this conviction. And we, as Christians, have the one supreme evidence of God's infinite wisdom in the provision of spiritual and eternal salvation in the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, in whom is the wisdom as well as the power of God. 2. The heavenly King has the disposition to deliver. Salvation is not only his prerogative; it is his delight. Mercy and compassion animate him in his treatment of the children of men. "God so loved the world," etc. There is no pity like Divine pity. 3. For an all-sufficient authority and efficacious power to rescue man from sin and death we must look above. The Eternal is "mighty to save." And in appointing his Son to be *the Saviour*, he has laid help upon One who is mighty—

> "So strong to deliver, So good to redeem,
> The weakest believer That hangs upon him."

T.

Ver. 5.—*Remembrance in the wilderness.* No more signal instance of Divine interposition is recorded, even in the wonderful history of Israel, than the care and guidance and protection vouchsafed to the chosen people in their desert-wanderings. No wonder that the inspired prophets should again and again refer to this marvellous record of Divine regard, remembrance, and assistance.

I. THE OCCASION OF DIVINE REMEMBRANCE. 1. To Israel and to humanity (for of the race at large was the chosen people a type) God reveals himself when help is sorely needed. In the wilderness the people hungered; they thirsted; they were in danger from many perils of the way; they were opposed and harassed by many foes; they were beset by frequent perplexities; they were cast down by many fears. Similarly, this race of mankind was without any supply for its sorest needs, without any deliverance from direst dangers and mightiest and most malignant foes, when the eternal Father "remembered us in our low estate." 2. It was an occasion when all other resource and hope were vain. In this respect the tribes in the desert were representative of humanity. "I looked, and there was no helper."

II. THE FRUITS OF DIVINE REMEMBRANCE. 1. The thoughtfulness of God supplies his people's wants. Israel's hunger was met by manna; Israel's thirst by water from the rock, etc. So "the Lord hath been mindful of us." Every spiritual want is supplied in the gospel, where is living water, heavenly bread, etc. 2. Adversaries are overcome by the interposition of the Most High. He who vanquished Israel's foes led captivity captive, and secured salvation for all who trust in him. 3. Difficulties are removed by Divine intervention. 4. Courage and hope are inspired in the breasts of the timid and downcast. 5. Gratitude, piety, and devotion are enkindled in the souls of those who are set free and rescued by the interposition of a merciful and mighty Saviour.

APPLICATION. The gracious knowledge and remembrance of God, leading to merciful interposition on our behalf, should incite us to think upon and to remember him "who led his people through the wilderness; for his mercy endureth for ever."—T.

Ver. 6.—*Forgetting God.* The conduct of Israel in the wilderness was an anticipation and prediction of their national history generally. The parallelism suggested itself to the minds of the prophets, who evidently referred to the books of Moses to find there a description and a censure of their own contemporaries.

I. THE CAUSE OF FORGETFULNESS OF GOD. 1. Generally speaking, this sin arises from absorption in earthly pursuits and pleasures. 2. Particularly it may be learned from this passage—and the lesson is enforced by daily observation—that prosperity is the occasion of irreligion. The more this world's good is sought and prized, the more it often proves to be the case that the great Giver of all good is forgotten.

II. THE SIN AND GUILT OF FORGETTING GOD. 1. This appears from human *dependence* upon the Maker and Ruler of all. 2. And from the consequent *indebtedness* of the creature to the Creator. To him men owe all they have, and it is the basest ingratitude to forget the one Divine Benefactor. 3. And from their *responsibility* to God. Life has to be accounted for, at last, before him who gave it as a sacred trust. If the trust has been abused, such abuse is sin, and sin of the deepest dye.

III. THE CONSEQUENCES OF FORGETTING GOD. 1. *Moral deterioration* will certainly follow. The soul from which God is banished is degraded and ruined by the absence of what alone can dignify and bless. 2. *Judgment* cannot be escaped. If men forget God he will indeed remember them, but he cannot remember them "for good."—T.

Ver. 9.—*Self-destruction.* This is language, not merely of reproach, but of sorrow. After all that Jehovah had done for his favoured people, it grieved him that to so large an extent his goodness was abused, and that those who had enjoyed the greatest advantages had made the worst use of them. At the same time, he justly cast all the blame upon Israel, who, against the Saviour and Helper, had resolved, as it were, upon spiritual suicide.

I. IN TURNING AWAY FROM GOD, MEN TURN AWAY FROM THEIR TRUE SAVIOUR AND THEIR TRUE SALVATION. They often look upon the great and righteous Judge as their enemy, hostile to their pleasures and interests, and consequently imagine that they will secure their own welfare by forgetting and forsaking God. That this is a delusion is certain. In setting themselves against God, men set themselves against their Help.

II. IN SEEKING THEIR OWN SELFISH ENDS, MEN ACCOMPLISH THEIR OWN DESTRUCTION. 1. Ungodliness is destructive of all peace of mind. 2. Ungodliness is destructive of character. They who live without God in the world deprive themselves of the highest motives to obedience, and ensure their own spiritual deterioration. 3. Ungodliness is destructive of all bright and blessed prospects for the future life. "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." Destruction, ruin, banishment from God, such is the doom which sinners work out for themselves. It is not the arbitrary appointment of the Supreme Judge; it is the self-inflicted fate.—T.

Ver. 9.—"*Thy help.*" There is great simplicity and great beauty in this designation of the Almighty. It is indeed wonderful that he who fashioned and who rules this mighty universe should deign to reveal himself to the poor, frail, feeble children of men as their Help!

I. MAN'S NEED OF HELP. We need help from one another; and there is no member of society who is independent. The child is dependent upon the help of the parent, the master upon the help of the servant, etc. But all stand in need of moral, spiritual help, which none but God can bring. And there are special occasions and circumstances which bring home to us our need of help; *e.g.* when we feel our weakness in the presence of difficult duties, sore temptations, crushing sorrows.

II. GOD'S SUFFICIENCY AS THE HELP OF MAN. 1. We perceive this from the consideration of *Divine power and resources.* All things are at God's command and under God's control. 2. His *pity and sympathy* assure us of effective help. There are circumstances in which power and even liberality are of little avail. The heart craves for the heart's sympathy. Of God we know that "in all our afflictions he is afflicted;" and Christ has revealed himself as "touched with a feeling of our infirmities." God makes himself known to men as their Help, and his assurance must be unhesitatingly and joyfully accepted. 3. The experience of "all saints" witnesess to God's power and willingness to help in time of need.—T.

Vers. 10, 11.—*The vanity of earthly kings.* The historic reference of this passage is obvious. The Hebrew nation was properly a theocracy. God himself was their Lawgiver, Ruler, Leader, and Judge. But the people desired a king, that they might resemble the nations around them; and God, in condescension to their infirmities and in answer to their entreaties, gave them a king. The kings proved by no means an unmixed blessing. Many of the kings, both of Judah and of the northern dominion, led the people astray. Hosea addressed himself especially to Israel; and the chronicles of that nation show us how many evils followed upon the reign and power of their monarchs. Disasters and ruin came upon the tribes of Israel, and the inspired prophet well urged upon the people the question, "Where are your kings, to save and deliver you?" The principle involved in the appeal is one of general application.

I. MORAL MALADIES ARE NOT HEALED BY POLITICAL REMEDIES.

II. THE SPLENDOUR OF KINGS IS NO COMPENSATION FOR THE MISERY OF THE PEOPLE.

III. EARTHLY AUTHORITY CAN ONLY BE EXERCISED WITHIN LIMITS APPOINTED BY DIVINE PROVIDENCE.

IV. A CORRUPT COURT IS AN EVIL EXAMPLE TO AN UNSTABLE POPULATION.

V. NO SECULAR—CIVIL OR MILITARY—POWER CAN AVERT THE CONSEQUENCES OF APOSTASY AND DEBASEMENT.

VI. KINGS THEMSELVES ARE SUBJECT, AS WELL AS CITIZENS, TO THE LAWS OF A RETRIBUTIVE PROVIDENCE.—T.

Ver. 14.—*Redemption from death.* Different interpretations are possible of this majestic language. According to one view, these words express the resolution of the righteous King and Judge to let the powers of death and destruction loose upon apostate Israel. According to another view, they express a determination, at some future time and upon Israel's repentance, on God's part to destroy the powers of destruction and to secure for his people an everlasting salvation. Regard the great truths common to both interpretations.

I. DEATH AND THE GRAVE ARE BUT CREATURES AND MINISTERS OF THE ETERNAL. There is apparent among men a tendency to attribute to the forces of destruction an independent power, to regard death as a natural and necessary law of being. But the fact is otherwise; these are only agents used for a temporary and governmental purpose by the Lord of the universe.

II. DEATH AND THE GRAVE ARE TERRIBLE ONLY TO THE ENEMIES OF GOD. To such as resist and defy Divine authority it must needs be a depressing and terrible thought, that their power will speedily come to an end, and they levelled in the dust. But God's people need have no fear of their Father's messengers.

III. DEATH AND THE GRAVE HAVE BEEN ALREADY POTENTIALLY VANQUISHED BY THE LORD JESUS CHRIST. The Apostle Paul makes use of this language in expounding the Christian doctrine of the Resurrection, and sanctions the application of the language of Hosea to the triumph of the Divine Redeemer, when he arose from the dead and abolished death, and became the Firstfruits of them that sleep. The words are in this connection precious and consolatory to the Christian mind.

IV. DEATH AND THE GRAVE, WHEN THEY HAVE FULFILLED THEIR DIVINELY APPOINTED PURPOSE, SHALL FOR EVER CEASE TO BE. "The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death." The destroyer's turn shall come; the grave shall itself be buried; death shall itself be slain. From all fear of mortality the glorified saints shall be eternally delivered. And God shall be for ever glorified in the reign of imperishable life.—T.

Ver. 16.—*Rebellion against God.* Samaria here is no doubt put for the Israelitish kingdom, of which that city was the capital. The seat of government concentrates within itself the various elements of the national life. If there be profligacy, ambition, cruelty, treachery, self-seeking, in a nation, these qualities will be pre-eminently apparent in the capital. Israel, in the person of her monarch and her capital, "rebelled against her God."

I. THE SYMPTOMS OF REBELLION. These are: 1. The defiance of rightful authority. When God's Name is profaned, and God's laws are violated, and God's threatenings are despised, this is a sign that those who are bound to be loyal subjects are so far from fulfilling their obligations that they are in rebellion. 2. The substitution of another authority for that of the Supreme. Whether this be an idol, or a hierarchy of pagan deities, or some selfish, carnal, worldly principle, is of little consequence; the allegiance has been transferred.

II. THE WICKEDNESS OF REBELLION. Samaria's special sin was in rebelling against *her* God. It is the consideration that God has done everything for us; that he has regarded us as his own, and treated us with bounty, forbearance; and loving-kindness, that, in a word, he has every claim upon us;—it is this that brings home the charge of rebellion, and exhibits it in all its heinousness.

III. THE END OF REBELLION. This must be either (1) *submission* with true repentance, or (2) *conquest and destruction.* The Lord shall have the defiant rebels in derision, and break them with a rod of iron.—T.

Ver. 3.—*The life of the wicked.* "Therefore they shall be as the morning cloud, and as the early dew that passeth away, as the chaff that is driven with the whirlwind out of the floor, and as the smoke out of the chimney." This verse may be taken as a picture of a human life unregenerate, out of vital sympathy with God and goodness.

I. IT IS DECEPTIVE. "Like the morning cloud." In Palestine and countries of the same latitude, dense clouds often appear in the morning, cover the heavens, and promise fertilizing showers that never come. The farmer whose land is parched by drought looks up with anxious hope as he sees them gather and float over his head. But they often pass away without a fertilizing drop, and leave him with a disappointed and anxious heart. A life without moral goodness is necessarily deceptive. It walks in a vain show, it deceives itself and deceives others; it is an acted lie from beginning to end. How many lives seem full of promise! They awaken as much interest and as much hope as clouds that float over parched lands; but they result in nothing but disappointment. Oh, what lives there are which are like clouds without water!

II. IT IS EVANESCENT. "The early dew that passeth away." In such latitudes, too, the copious dews that sparkle on the hedges and the fields soon evaporate and disappear. How transient is life!—not the life of the wicked only, but the life of the righteous as well; just like the dew, appearing for a short time, then gone for ever. The Bible abounds with figures to represent the transientness of human life—the grass, the flower, the vapour, the dew, the shadow. The millions that make up this generation are only as dewdrops, sparkling for an hour and then lost and gone!

III. IT IS WORTHLESS. "As chaff that is driven with the whirlwind out of the floor." Like chaff stowed away from the threshing-floor. Chaff, empty, dead, destined to rot. How empty the life of an ungodly man! The life of the righteous is grain—it will grow and flourish; but that of the wicked is only chaff. It is destitute of moral vitality. "Driven away." "The wicked is driven away in his wickedness, whilst the righteous hath hope in his death." The wicked die reluctantly, they hold on to the last; it is only the strong storm of death that bears them off.

IV. IT IS OFFENSIVE. "As the smoke out of the chimney." The ancient houses of Palestine were without chimneys; the smoke filled the houses, and smoke is a nuisance. A corrupt life is evermore offensive to the moral sense of mankind. To what conscience is falsehood, selfishness, carnality, meanness, and such elements that make up the character of the wicked, at all pleasing? To none. The aroma of a corrupt life is as offensive to the moral soul as "smoke out of the chimney."

"Like to the falling of a star,
Or as the flight of eagles are,
Or like the fresh spring's gaudy hue,
Or silver drops of morning dew,
Or like a wind that chafes the flood,
Or bubbles which on water stood,
E'en such is man, whose borrowed light
Is straight called in, and paid to-night.
The wind blows out, the bubble dies,
The spring entombed in autumn lies,
The dew dries up, the star is shot,
The flight is past—and man forgot."

(Henry King.)

D. T.

Vers. 5—8.—*Mercy in beneficent action and in retributive displeasure.* "I did know thee in the wilderness, in the land of great drought," etc. Mercy is the subject of these words; and mercy, like the mystic pillar that guided the Israelites in the wilderness, has two sides—a bright one to guide and cheer, and a dark one to confound and destroy. In these two aspects the text presents it.

I. Here is mercy IN BENEFICENT ACTION. "I did know thee in the wilderness, in the land of great drought. According to their pasture, so were they filled." What mercy did the great Father show the Israelites in the wilderness! The wilderness was a trying region (Deut. viii. 15; Jer. ii. 6). How constantly the Almighty interposed on behalf of his people! He gave them water from the rock and manna from the clouds.

He fought their battles, guided them through perplexities, and helped them in every exigency and trial. The hand of mercy was ever outstretched on their behalf, supplying them with all that they required. In truth, mercy gave them, not only necessities, but luxuries. "Jeshurun waxed fat, and kicked." Thus mercy is treating us now, giving us "all things richly to enjoy" in nature, and offering to us all spiritual blessings in Christ Jesus. The bright side of mercy gleams on us in this life, lights up our path and cheers us on the way.

II. Here is mercy IN RIGHTEOUS DISPLEASURE. "They were filled, and their heart was exalted; therefore have they forgotten me." Observe: 1. *The cause of the indignation.* "They have forgotten me." They abused his mercy. His mercy led them to self-indulgence, the pampering of their appetites, the gratification of their lusts, and the fostering of indolence and pride. Alas! how often the mercies of God in providence are abused! Whilst they should lead men to repentance and to a higher life, they lead them to worldliness and impiety. Because of this, mercy becomes indignant, the oil breaks into flame. 2. *The severity of the indignation.* "Therefore I will be unto them as a lion: as a leopard by the way will I observe them: I will meet them as a bear that is bereaved of her *whelps*, and will rend the caul of their heart, and there will I devour them like a lion: the wild beast shall tear them." What terrible words are these! As a lion, savage and strong; a "leopard," crafty and vigilant, watching an opportunity to wreak destruction; a "bear," bereaved of her whelps, terribly exasperated and heartless;—he "will rend the caul of their heart." It is said the lion always aims at the heart of the beast he falls upon. "Devour them like a lion; the wild beast shall tear them." What does all this mean? It does not mean that the Almighty is carried away by a savage impulse, that he has, in fact, aught of passion in him. No, but it means that after his mercy has been abused it will assuredly become the destroyer. Mercy abused becomes a determined, resistless destroyer. A plant that is not strengthened by the sunbeam is scorched; the soul that is not saved by mercy is damned.

"Thy mercy, Lord, is like the morning sun,
Whose beams undo what sable night had done;
Or like a stream, the current of whose course,
Restrained awhile, runs with a swifter force.
Oh! let me glow beneath those sacred beams;
After, bathe me in those silver streams.
To thee alone my sorrows shall appeal;
Hath earth a wound too hard for Heaven to heal?"

(Francis Quarles.)

D. T.

Ver. 9.—*Sin the destroyer, God the Restorer.* "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself; but in me is thine help."

I. SIN THE DESTROYER. "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself." What connected with self does a man destroy? Not his mental faculties, not his conscience, not his moral responsibilities. These he cannot put an end to. But he destroys the liberty, the peace, the blessedness of his being. He can destroy all connected with his existence that can make existence tolerable or worth having. How is this done? By *sin*. Sin is the soul-destroyer. Every sin is destructive of something. From the eternal laws of moral mind men cannot commit a wrong act without the infliction of an injury to the soul, without blinding the judgment, deadening the sensibility, curtailing the liberty, drying up the affection, enfeebling the will. Sin is suicidal. "He that sinneth against me wrongeth his own soul." What is a sinner doing? Murdering himself. Every lying word, every dishonest act, every impure thought, every impious sentiment, every lustful gratification, is a deadly blow inflicted upon the soul. "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." There is nothing arbitrary in this. "To be carnally minded is death."

II. GOD THE RESTORER. "In me is thine help." Who can restore a destroyed soul? God, and he only. He restores it: (1) By extracting the poison of sin. (2) By breathing into it a new life. (3) By bringing it out into the salubrious atmosphere of truth. (4) By affording it the most wholesome supplies and invigorating exercises. "In me is thy help found." Yes, thou art mighty to save.—D. T.

Ver. 14.—*The great conqueror of the world conquered.* "I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death: O Death, I will be thy plagues; O Grave, I will be thy destruction: repentance shall be hid from mine eyes." Dolitzsch translates this, "Out of the hand of hell will I redeem them; from death will I set them free. Where are thy plagues, O Death? Where thy destruction, O Hell? Repentance is hidden from mine eyes." Primarily, these words apply to God's restoration of Israel from Assyria—partially, and in times yet future, fully, from all the lands of their present long-continued dispersion and political death. But Paul's reference to it (1 Cor. xv. 23) authorizes us to give it a wider application; and we may regard it as referring to death and Christ.

I. Here is the great CONQUEROR, called the "death and the grave." What a conqueror is Death! 1. *Heartless*, dead to all appeals. 2. *Resistless.* Bulwarks, battalions, castles, are nothing before him. 3. *Universal*, his eyes fastened on the world. Young, old, rich, poor, he has marked them all as victims. 4. *Ever active.* He does not pause a moment. Year after year, month after month, day after day, minute after minute, he works without a pause. Thousands fall before him every hour. This is the conqueror keeping the world in awe, filling our houses with mourning, our streets with funereal processions, our cemeteries with the dead.

II. Here is the great conqueror of the world CONQUERED. "I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death. . . . I will be thy plagues, I will be thy destruction." I. Who? "I am the Resurrection and the Life: whoso believeth in me shall never die." How has he conquered Death? Not by weakening his power or arresting his progress, for he is as mighty and active as ever, but by stripping him of his terror. Mentally he overcomes him, swallows him up. He fills the souls of his people with such love to the infinite Father, such interest in the spiritual universe, such desire for a higher life, that they say, "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." A few weeks hence, and spring will come forth as a messenger from the great fountain of life, and look abroad over the earth in winter desolation under the icy reign of death; and will say to every withered plant and buried germ, "I will ransom thee from the power of the grave." This Christ says to all dead souls.

"It is not death, to die;
To leave this weary road,
And 'midst the brotherhood on high
To be at home with God.

"It is not death, to close
The eye long dimmed by tears,
And wake in glorious repose
To spend eternal years.

"It is not death, to bear
The wrench that sets us free
From dungeon-chain, to breathe the air
Of boundless liberty.

"It is not death, to fling
Aside this sinful dust,
And rise on strong, exulting wing
To live among the just.

"Jesus, thou Prince of life,
Thy chosen cannot die;
Like thee, they conquer in the strife,
To reign with thee on high."

D. T.

Ver. 15.—*Reverses of fortune in human life.* "Though he be fruitful among his brethren, an east wind shall come, the wind of the Lord shall come up from the wilderness, and his spring shall become dry, and his fountain shall be dried up: he shall spoil the treasure of all pleasant vessels." "For he will bear fruit among brethren.

East wind will come—a wind of Jehovah, rising up from the desert; and his fountain will dry up, and his spring become dried. He plunders the treasuries of all splendid vessels" (Delitzsch). "This and the following verse set forth the devastation and destruction of the kingdom of the ten tribes, which was to precede the deliverance promised in that which precedes. While the promise was designed to afford consolation to the pious and encouragement to the penitent, the threatening was equally necessary for the refractory and the profane" (Henderson). We shall take the words as suggesting a few remarks on the reverses of fortune in human life.

I. Reverses in human fortune are SOMETIMES VERY STRIKING. Ephraim was "fruitful among his brethren." The very name signifies fruitfulness. Its territory was most fertile, its people the most numerous. (1) Its riches would give way to poverty. Ephraim was at once a rich and a populous tribe; but see the change predicted: "His spring shall become dry. . . . He shall spoil the treasure of all pleasant vessels." The enemy would invade the country, impoverish husbandry, check merchandise. (2) Its populousness would give way to paucity. The enemy would reduce its numbers and almost depopulate it. "His fountain shall be dried up." How great the reverse! and yet such reverses in human history are frequent. Saul, Herod, Nebuchadnezzar, Napoleon, are a few amongst millions of examples. Constantly do we see men hurled from the sunny mountain of opulence into the gloomy valley of poverty. Such reverses should teach us: 1. To hold all worldly good with a very light hand. 2. To settle our interests on the good that is permanent. "Labour not for the meat that perisheth."

II. Reverses in human fortune are GENERALLY BROUGHT ABOUT BY SECONDARY INSTRUMENTALITY. "An east wind shall come, shall come from the wilderness." Nations, communities, and individuals may always trace their calamities to certain natural causes. If a kingdom decays, if a mercantile transaction breaks down, if a fortune is lost, man can generally trace the dispensation to some "east wind"—some secondary agent. This should teach us (1) to study natural laws; (2) to be diligent in checking all elements inimical to human progress.

III. Reverses in human fortune are UNDER THE DIRECTION OF GOD. The change in the fortunes of Ephraim, although brought about by a variety of secondary agencies, was nevertheless under the superintendence of the Almighty. Though a country may be ruined by civil wars, or foreign invasions, or pestilential atmospheres, or unfruitful harvests bringing on famine, still Divine intelligence foresees all, and Divine power overrules all. Both true philosophy and religion teach us to trace all the events of life to him. Some come directly from him; all are directed by him. Friendship and bereavement, prosperity and adversity, sickness and health, sorrow and joy—he is in all. "The Lord gave, the Lord hath taken away." Learn (1) to acquiesce in his dispensations; (2) to look to him for all that is good.—D. T.

Vers. 1—4.—*Baal-exaltation.* The first clause is better read, "When Ephraim spake, there was trembling; he was exalted in Israel." The contrast is between what Ephraim once was, and what his offending in Baal had now brought him to. Once he was great in Israel. He had authority, influence, power to inspire terror. Now he was but the wreck of his former self. He would be swept away like chaff before the whirlwind.

I. THE FIRST FALSE STEP. (Ver. 1.) It is the first false step in sin which needs specially to be guarded against. Israel's first false step as a separate kingdom was the denial of God's spirituality, and the breach of his commandment, in the setting up of the worship of the calves. This was: 1. *Trespass in a fundamental article.* It was practically the denial of the Godhead. It made God like—not to corruptible man—but, worse, to four-footed beasts (Rom. i. 23). They *called* their worship still Jehovah-worship, but God repudiates it as in no sense his. It was really Baal-worship. God gives the sin its right name. 2. *The admission of a wrong principle.* The principle was that of self-will in religion. Setting aside God's commandment, Ephraim claimed to organize his worship after his own heart. He would have no law but his own will. It was to gratify himself that he had set up an independent kingdom. It was to gratify himself that he now set up the golden calves. The adoption of a wrong principle by an individual or nation is the sowing of a seed out of which is sure to

spring ulterior mischief. Israel reaped from this seed of self-will, sown in the heart of the constitution, an unforeseen harvest of evil and woe. 3. *A fatal step.* One false step is often decisive of a whole future. It was so with our first parents. Adam's sin determined the spiritual condition of the race. "In Adam all die" (1 Cor. xv. 22). It was so with this first false step in Israel. "When he offended in Baal, he died." He died: (1) Morally. We die morally the moment we determine to take our own will rather than God's as the law of our life. Self-will is the seed-principle of sin. It is a seed of death. (2) As a nation. That was the step which settled Ephraim's future. It determined the direction of his after-way. Looking back from the end, it could be seen that this was the time when the fatal course was entered on. Virtually, this step doomed him. As Adam, on the day of his transgression, became a dying man, though he did not actually die till long after, so Israel, in this early sin, wrote out their sentence of death as a people.

II. SIN'S PROGRESS. (Ver. 2.) Sin, like strife, is in its beginning as the letting in of water. Israel, having admitted into its midst a wrong principle, went on from bad to worse. Idolatry spread in the nation. In the practice of this idolatry the people were: 1. *Extravagant.* "They have made them molten images of their silver." They lavished their wealth upon their idols. People are generally willing to spend extravagantly upon their vices. 2. *Ingenious.* "Idols according to their understanding; all of it the work of the craftsmen." Not content with the gods of their neighbours, they invented new forms of idolatry for themselves. They were ingenious in forming, adorning, and diversifying their idols. Nothing they could do, however, could make the objects of their ingenuity aught else than idols. "All of it the work of the craftsmen"—this only. And to this product of their own crafts they bowed themselves down. Men whose hearts are too proud to bow to God are ready to bow down to idols of their own making (Isa. ii. 9). 3. *Intolerant.* "They say of them, Let the men that sacrifice kiss the calves." The world will brook no refusal to worship at its shrines. *E.g.* the tyranny of codes of fashion.

III. VANISHING PROSPERITY. (Ver. 3.) Four images are employed to set forth the swiftness, suddenness, and completeness with which Ephraim's once lordly prosperity would vanish. These are (1) the morning cloud; (2) the early dew; (3) the chaff driven by the whirlwind; (4) smoke escaping from a chimney (or window). Some of these things are: 1. *Beautiful at first.* The cloud hangs gay and gilded in the morning sky, and the dewdrop sparkles with a heavenly beauty as it catches the sun's rays. 2. *Unsubstantial.* The cloud, though fair, is a mere mass of vapour. The dew but borrows its sparkle from the light. The chaff is husk without substance. The smoke, rising at first in a solid-looking column, or in thick, heavy folds, is bodiless and without coherence. 3. *They rapidly vanish.* All the four metaphors represent something that "appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away" (Jas. iv. 14). The cloud is gone while yet we gaze on it. The dew, drenching grass and flowers at dawn, soon dries up with the heat. The wind rapidly bears off the chaff. The smoke scatters, or is dispersed by the breeze, and vanishes. In combination, the figures point to different causes of vanishing. Internal lightness (chaff), dissipation of parts (vapour, smoke), external absorption (sun and air), strong forces of destruction (whirlwind). The whole show the short-lived nature of the sinner's prosperity. Its beauty is not abiding. It is substanceless. It is soon swept away.

IV. GOD, NOT BAAL. (Ver. 4.) The end of this judgment was, not utterly to destroy the people, but to drive them out of false confidences, and lead them to the right knowledge of God. It would bring them to see: 1. *That God had been faithful to them, though not they to him.* "Yet I am the Lord thy God from the land of Egypt." 2. *That there was no God but himself.* "Thou shalt know no God but me." They worshipped Baal as God, but experience only showed that he was none. 3. *That God was the only Saviour.* "There is no Saviour beside me." Yet he was a Saviour. He had sought to be their Saviour all through. He would save them still, if they would but turn to him.—J. O.

Vers. 5—8.—*Self-exaltation.* As Moses had foretold (Deut. viii. 10—18; xxxii. 15), when Israel became prosperous, he forgot God, and lightly esteemed the rock of his salvation. The exaltation of Baal was itself an act of self-will—a species of self-

exaltation. The egoistic principle, however, had more direct manifestations. We have in these verses—

I. GOD KNOWN IN ADVERSITY. "I did know thee in the wilderness, in the land of great drought" (ver. 5). 1. *God knew Israel*, in the great care he exercised over the nation, leading it, providing for its wants, protecting it, and showing it manifold tokens of his goodness. 2. *Israel knew God.* The nation was never nearer to its God than during these years of severe trial and hourly dependence. It believed in him, waited on him, trusted him, and was—at least latterly—willing to serve him. Adversity had its uses. It did the people good. It made a strong nation of them, fit to conquer and occupy Canaan.

II. GOD FORGOTTEN IN PROSPERITY. (Ver. 6.) As the people grew prosperous, they forgot God. The stages are: 1. *Sense of repletion.* "They were filled." Satisfied with the good things of earth, they did not feel the same need of God's blessing. They had not the same sense of dependence. 2. *Uplifting of heart.* "Their heart was exalted." Prosperity tends in this direction. It uplifts the heart. It makes the possessor of wealth proud, self-sufficient, arrogant. 3. *Forgetfulness of God.* "Therefore have they forgotten me." This was their base ingratitude. Yet the sin is common. The more we receive from God—so perverse and prone to depart are we—the more ready we are to forget him. We feel as if we were independent. We are full. We reign as kings without him.

III. THE PENALTY OF SELF-EXALTATION. (Vers. 7, 8.) Pride in the creature is the sin which more than any other provokes God to wrath. The Greeks, with just discrimination, viewed the gods as specially wroth with the man who unduly exalted himself. "Ὕβρις never failed to bring down on the unhappy mortal who was guilty of the sin "swift destruction." God here likens himself to the wild beasts that tear the flock—so fierce and unsparing is his anger. He will be "as a lion," "a leopard," "a bear bereaved of her whelps." Strange images to apply to him whose name is Love! But love, outraged and grieved, is the most vehement and fierce of all passions. God's love, because it is intense and real, is not to be trifled with, and, when roused to anger, is terrible to encounter. Better meet wild beasts of the forest than fall into the hands of the living God.—J. O.

Vers. 9—14.—*God-exaltation.* God is exalted, negatively, by the overthrow of whatever is opposed to him—in Israel's case, by the humbling of their pride, the discovery of the vanity of their earthly trusts, and the overthrow of the sinful kingdom; and, positively, by the ultimate triumph of his purpose of salvation—a triumph even over death.

I. ISRAEL THE AUTHOR OF HIS OWN DESTRUCTION. (Ver. 9.) It was a destruction: 1. *For which he only was responsible.* "Destroyed thyself." It was entirely the result of his own perverse actings. Had he taken God's way, all would have been well with him. But—so the words literally run—he was against God. He chose of his own will the way which God told him was the way of death. The sinner's ruin is entirely his own work. God refuses all responsibility for it. He has no pleasure in the death of him that dieth (Ezek. xviii. 32). 2. *Resulting from refusal of Divine help.* "Thy help." This aggravated the sin. "Is there no balm in Gilead; is there no physician there? why then is not the health of the daughter of my people recovered?" (Jer. viii. 22). God wished to be Israel's helper, but Israel would not let him. Sinners perish though salvation is within reach. "This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light," etc. (John iii. 19); "Ye will not come unto me that ye might have life" (John v. 40). 3. *Which his self-sought helpers were unable to avert.* Israel found in his hour of need the vanity of trusting to his earthly helpers. "Where is thy king, that he may save thee in all thy cities? and the judges, of whom thou saidst, Give me a king and princes?" (ver. 10). Baal failed him (ch. viii. 5; x. 5); the Assyrian failed him (ch. v. 13); his kings failed him (ch. x. 3, 15). Thus it was demonstrated that God is the only Helper, that there is no Saviour beside him (ver. 4). God in Christ is the only Hope of the sinner. He is an all-sufficient Hope, if the sinner will only be persuaded to apply to him. Instead of this, how many "refuges of lies" do men resort to!

II. ISRAEL PUNISHED BY THE GRANTING TO HIM OF HIS OWN DESIRE. (Vers. 10—12.) Often nothing will please the sinner but to get his own way. God, in wrath, sometimes grants the sinner his own way. When he gets it, he finds it to be to his hurt. This is illustrated in the case of Israel. 1. *The desire for a king.* "Thy judges of whom thou saidst, Give me a king and princes." The kingdom of Israel had its origin in self-will—was an embodiment of that principle. Rehoboam's rough answer afforded the occasion of revolt, but the desire of the northern tribes to have a king of their own was the real soul of the movement. It was a rebellion against the house of David. The people set up kings, but not by God (ch. viii. 4). 2. *The desire granted.* "I gave thee a king in mine anger." Partly as a punishment of the sins of David's house, and partly as a punishment of the tribes themselves, God granted the wish for a king. The rebellious spirit in which the separate kingdom was set up was chastised by the calamities brought upon the nation by its self-chosen rulers. There is a difference between granting a desire and approving of it. It does not imply approval that Jeroboam was designated beforehand by the prophet as the person to whom God would give the kingdom. God did give Israel its king, but it was "in anger." Doubtless had Jeroboam, on receiving the kingdom, walked in God's ways, his rule, as having a relative sanction from Heaven, would have been established (1 Kings xi. 38). But it was obvious, both from the spirit of the man, and from the motives of the rebellion, and the temper in which it was carried out, that nothing of this kind could be expected. 3. *The king given in anger taken away in wrath.* "I took him away in my wrath." The northern monarchy brought only evil on the nation. The principle of self-will in which it originated wrought itself out further into state-idolatry, Baal-worship, frequent revolutions, intestine conflicts, alliances with Assyria and Egypt, sins and crimes of every description. The kings vied with each other in their wickedness. They set an example which their subjects were only too ready to follow. Thus wrath was prepared which at length swept them away like the whirlwind. Their king perished with them. The monarchy fell, never to rise again. 4. *In the wrath which overtook the kingdom, hidden iniquity was brought to mind.* "The iniquity of Ephraim is bound up; his sin is hid." His whole career was remembered against him. Like a thing treasured up, put past, but not forgotten, it was brought forth at the appointed time for punishment. No sin escapes the remembrance of God. Unrepented of, it will have to be reckoned for in the judgment.

III. ISRAEL UNDULY DELAYING HIS CONVERSION. (Ver. 13.) The pangs of distress which came on Israel were, had he understood their end, meant for his salvation. They ought to have issued in a change of heart, and in "newness of life." While, however, he felt alarms, convictions, and compunctions for what he had done, Israel failed to come to the birth of a genuine conversion. He was an unwise son, who prolonged the birth-labour by refusal to come forth. 1. *The delay of conversion is a cause of needless pain.* How much better had Ephraim come forth at once, instead of thus, as it were, lingering in the womb! Many delay their conversion by indecision, by unwillingness to part with some darling sin, by slowness of heart to believe God's promise, by the thought of what the world will say, what friends will say, etc., thus unnecessarily prolonging their distress, fear, and pains of conscience, and shutting themselves out from the peace, joy, and comfort of the new life of grace. 2. *To delay conversion is to risk the loss of life.* The infant, delaying to come forth, dies in the womb. Israel, because it refused to be taught by the sorrows which had come upon it, was, as regards the nation at large, to be destroyed. It would perish through its delay of conversion. Procrastination in spiritual child-birth is a cause of spiritual death. Compunctions die away, the Spirit ceases to strive, anxiety disappears, the crisis passes and never comes back. 3. *Israel's conversion, though long delayed, will yet take place.* A remnant of the people will be preserved, and these—though the process is slow and tedious—will yet be reborn to God. The nation will be recovered as from death (ver. 14).

IV. GOD THE RANSOMER EVEN FROM DEATH. (Ver. 14.) God's gracious purpose in the case of Israel, of the elect soul, of humanity, cannot be defeated. The words contain a pledge: 1. *Of national restoration.* Israel, though now cast away, will yet be recovered as from death (ch. vi. 2; Rom. xi. 15). God had promised to be the God of this people, and his love would triumph even over their unbelief and sin.

Their recovery will have in it all the marvel of a resurrection. 2. *Of spiritual renewal.* There is a spiritual death from which recovery is more difficult than from national death, or even from the death of the body. A nation, having played its part in history, and perishing, rarely recovers the life it has thus lost. It needs the power of God to restore national life to Israel. It needs a yet higher exercise of God's power to restore life to their souls, dead in long-continued unbelief. But every soul by nature is "dead in trespasses and sins," and needs a moral miracle to be wrought upon it to give it life. God alone can ransom it from death. Each conversion is a new triumph over him that hath the power of death. 3. *Of bodily resurrection.* Salvation would be incomplete if it left its subjects still under the power of physical death. This is clearer under the New Testament than it was under the Old, but it underlay the promise of salvation there also. Christ has made the truth perfectly distinct. He has, by his own resurrection, "brought life and immortality to light" (2 Tim. i. 10). "The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death" (1 Cor. xv. 26). Death meanwhile claims all as his prey. He reigns over all. He comes to men in innumerable forms of horror and anguish. His plagues are terrible. But Christ will rescue his own even from the power of this inexorable destroyer. Then, in their full sense, the words of the prophet will be fulfilled (1 Cor. xv. 55).—J. O.

Vers. 15, 16.—*Figure and fact.* The end of the kingdom is first described in expressive figure; it is then foretold in plain terms, which give a fearful idea of its horrors.

I. THE FIGURE ANSWERS TO THE FACTS. (Ver. 15.) Ephraim was as a fruitful tree among his brethren. But: 1. *The east wind would blight him.* To this answers the statement that Samaria would become desolate. Ephraim fed on wind, and pursued the east wind; now its hot, scorching breath was his destruction. 2. *His spring would become dry.* To this answers the statement that mothers and children would be destroyed. These were the spring, the fountains of his fruitfulness. He would be dried up at his roots. The hope of revival through offspring would be cut off from him. 3. *His treasures of goodly vessels would be plundered.* This leaves the image of the tree. It returns to realism. Plundering would succeed victory. We may apply to sin. It blights the soul; robs it of its bloom and fruitfulness; dries up the springs of its life, which are in God; despoils it of its costly treasures of goodness, truth, holiness, affection, etc.

II. THE FACT IS NOT LESS TERRIBLE THAN THE FIGURE. (Ver. 16.) We are apt, in reading figurative descriptions of the doom of the sinner—the worm, the fire, weeping and gnashing of teeth, etc.—to break their force to our minds by the secret reflection that they are "only figures." "Only figures!" But the figures surely mean something. And is the reality likely to be less terrible than the figures of it? The verse before us should warn us against this delusion. We have in ver. 15 the figure; we have the reality in plain terms here. Which is the more awful? The naked description of what will happen to Samaria greatly surpasses in terribleness all the figures that are employed to image it. And what was predicted actually occurred. —J. O.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER XIV.

Ver. 1.—The foregoing part of this book abounds with denunciations of punishment; this closing chapter superabounds with promises of pardon. Wave after wave of threatened wrath had rolled over Israel and come in unto their soul; now offer after offer of grace is made to them. **O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God.** The invitation to return implies previous departure, or distance, or wandering from God. The return to which they are invited is expressed, not by אֶל, to or towards, but by עַד, quite up to, or as far as right home; the penitent, therefore, is not merely to turn his mind or his face toward God, but to turn his face and his feet home to God; he is not to go half the way and then turn aside, or part of the way and then turn back, but the whole way; in other words, his repentance is to be complete and entire, wanting nothing, according to the statement of the psalmist, "It is good for me to

draw near to God." As punishment was threatened in case of obstinate impenitence, so mercy is promised on condition of thorough repentance. **For thou hast fallen by thine iniquity.** A reason is here assigned for the preceding invitation; *kashalta* is properly "thou hast stumbled," "made a false step," fallen, yet so that recovery was among future possibilities. The same thought may be included in the fact that Jehovah continues to call his erring people by the honoured and honourable name of Israel, and to acknowledge himself their God. Further, many and grievous were the calamities into which by their fall they had been precipitated; neither were any to blame but themselves—their iniquity or their folly was the cause, nor was there any one to lift them up, now that they lay prostrate, save Jehovah. After referring to the desolation of Samaria and the ruthless destruction of its inhabitants, as portrayed in the last verse of the previous chapter, Jerome adds, "All Israel is invited to repentance, that he who has been debilitated, or has fallen headlong in his iniquities, may return to the physician and recover health, or that he who had fallen headlong may begin to stand." The penitent is to direct his thoughts to Jehovah; to him as Centre he is attracted, and in him he finds his place of rest; nor is there other means of recovery or source of help. Thus Kimchi says, "For thou seest that through thine iniquity thou hast fallen, therefore it behoves thee to return to Jehovah, as nothing besides can raise thee from thy fall but thy return to him." "There is none," says Aben Ezra, "can raise thee from thy fall but the Eternal alone."

Ver. 2.—**Take with you words, and turn to the Lord.** (1) Some render this clause, "Take with you [*i.e.* forget not, neglect not, but receive with obedient spirit] my words." This rendering is obviously erroneous. (2) The correct translation is that of the Authorized Version, and the words referred to are such as express prayer for pardon and confession of sin—the audible sound of the heart's desires. There is an allusion, perhaps, to the requirement of the Law: "None shall appear before me empty." Not outward sacrifices, but words of confession, were the offering to be presented. Thus Cyril eloquently explains it: "Ye shall propitiate the Deity, not by making offerings of riches, not by dedicating gold, not by honouring him with silver vessels, not gladdening him by sacrifices of oxen, not by slaughtering of birds; but ye shall give him discourses and wish to praise the Lord of the universe, appeasing him." To the same purport is the exposition of Aben Ezra: "He desires not from you, when ye go to seek his favour, treasures or burnt offerings, only words with which ye are to confess;" so also Kimchi: "He does not require of you on your return to him silver or gold or offering, which the Israelites lavished at great expense on their idols, but good works with which ye are to confess your iniquities." **Say unto him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously.** On turning to the Lord with their whole heart, not with their lips only, they are furnished with a form of sound words which God by his prophet puts into their mouth. Elsewhere a formula is prescribed, thus: "Publish ye, praise ye, and say, O Lord, save thy people, the remnant of Israel" (Jer. xxxi. 7); compare also Isa. xlviii. 20; Ps. lxvi. 3; 1 Chron. xvi. 35. The position of כָּל before the verb creates a difficulty and causes diversity of rendering: for example, (1) besides the ordinary rendering, which takes *kol* as holding its peculiar position by an hypallage, there is a modification of it: "All take away of iniquity." (2) Some supply *mem*, and translate accordingly: "From all take away iniquity." Kimchi explains it as a transposition: "All iniquity forgive," and compares Ezek. xxxix. 11; or, understanding *l*, "Forgive to every one iniquity." The object of the separation may be for greater emphasis. In like manner, the following clause is also subject to diversity of translation and interpretation. There is (1) the rendering of the Authorized Version, which appears to supply *l* before *tov*: "Receive *us* for good," viz. *in bonam partem*, or graciously; or, "receive *our prayer* graciously." (2) Another rendering or exposition is: "Take what is good (of thine own to bestow it on us);" thus in the sixty-eighth psalm at the nineteenth verse God is said to receive gifts among men, *i.e.* for distribution among men, and hence the apostle, in Eph iv. 8, substitutes ἔδωκε for ἔλαβε, and thus expresses the sense. The literal sense (3) is the correct sense, namely, "and receive good:" "And receive good," says Jerome, "for unless thou hadst borne away our evil things we could not possibly have any good thing to offer thee, according to that which is written, 'Cease from evil and do good.'" Thus also the words are translated and interpreted by Pusey: "When then Israel and, in him, the penitent soul, is taught to say, *receive good*, it can mean only the good which thou thyself hast given; as David says, 'Of thine own we have given thee;'" while he adds in a note on these words, "No one would have doubted that קְחוּ מ means, 'receive good,' as just before, קְחוּ דְ means 'take words,' but for the seeming difficulty—What good had they?" So will we

render **the calves of our lips.** This is more accurately rendered, (1) "So will we render young bullocks, even our lips." The word *shillem*, to render, or repay, is almost technical in its application to thank offerings or sacrifices in fulfilment of a vow; the best animals for thank offerings were *parim*, or young oxen; but the lips, that is, the utterances of the lips, consisting of prayers or praises, or both, are to take the place of the animal sacrifices offered in thanksgiving. Thus the psalmist says, "I will praise the Name of God with a song, and will magnify him with thanksgiving. This also shall please the Lord better than an ox or bullock that hath horns and hoofs." (2) The Septuagint, reading פְּרִי instead of פָּרִים, renders by καρτὸν χείλεων, to which the inspired author of Hebrews alludes, "By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks [margin, 'confessing'] to his Name;" or perhaps the reference in Hebrews is to Isa. lvii. 19, "I create the fruit of the lips." Further, as words of confession in ver. 2 take the place of sacrifices of sin offerings, so here words of thanksgiving replace sacrifices of thanksgiving.

Ver. 3.—**Asshur shall not save us: we will not ride upon horses: neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, Ye are our gods: for in thee the fatherless findeth mercy.** This was the practical side of Israel's repentance; this was bringing forth fruits meet for repentance. Here was a renunciation of all hope of safety from the world-powers—both Assyria and Egypt. They would never again have recourse to Assyria for help, nor to Egypt for horses; nor confide in their own unaided power or prowess; while this renunciation of worldly power and carnal confidences implied, as its opposite, unfaltering faith in the protecting power and saving strength of Jehovah. All this was much, and yet more was required; next to such renunciation of merely human aid, as indicated, and its contrary, the recognition of Divine assistance, comes the absolute and complete abandonment of their national and besetting sin of idolatry. They have so far come to themselves and received the right use of reason as to confess that the manufacture of man's hands cannot be man's god, thus giving up with feelings of contempt and disgust the grovelling sin of idolatry with its attendant vices. Still more, they are penetrated with the conviction that man without God is a poor fatherless creature, in no better, if not in a worse, condition than that of a weak orphan child. They have the consolation at the same time that for all such, on their return to him, the father of the fatherless and the God of the orphan has bowels of tenderest compassion. To the presumed prayer of the penitent an answer overflowing with mercy is promised at once, and by God himself in the next section, consisting of—

Vers. 4—7.—**I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely: for mine anger is turned away from him.** The penitential prayer put in the mouth of the people receives in this verse a gracious response; words of contrite confession are echoed back in accents of compassion and consolation. When thus penitent and prayerful they returned to the Lord, he promises them favour as well as forgiveness, so as to heal the moral malady under which they had long laboured, remedy the evil effects of their apostasy, and withhold the stripes he was going to inflict. *Meshubhatham* means (1) their turning away from God and all included therein—defection, rebellion, idolatry, and other sins. The disease would be healed, and its consequences averted. (2) Some, however, understand the word, in a good sense, to mean "conversion" or "the converted," the abstract being put for the concrete; the blessing is thus promised them when they turned or returned to God. Thus the Syriac version. (3) The LXX. again, connecting *meshubhah* with *yashav*, to sit or dwell, render it by κατοικίαν, that is, "I will heal their dwelling." There is little doubt that (1) is the correct translation, and it is generally accepted as such. They are next assured of God's love, and that spontaneously (נְדָבָה, the preposition *l'* understood) with ready willinghood and unfeignedly. God's love is (*a*) free, anticipating its objects, not waiting to be merited or purchased, without money and without price; it is (*b*) also purest and most sincere affection, altogether unlike that feigned affection sometimes found among men, who profess much love while their heart goeth after their covetousness, or after some other and different object from that pretended. Then follows an assurance that there is no barrier to the exercise and no obstacle to the outgoing of God's love; the turning away of God's anger from Israel is the ground of such assurance. Some copies read *mimmeni*, my anger is turned away from me, instead of *mimmena*; this, however, is erroneous, though the sense is not much affected by it. The error may have arisen from a misunderstanding of Jer. ii. 35. Rashi explains the verse correctly: "After they have thus spoken before me: I will heal them of their apostasy, and love them of my own free will; although they themselves are not worthy of love, yet will I love them freely, for mine anger has turned away from them." Aben Ezra says, "Backsliding is in the soul what

disease is in the body, therefore he uses the word 'heal.' But God proceeds to perform what he has promised; he does not confine his goodness to words, he exhibits it in works, as the following verses show." **I will be as the dew unto Israel.** "The Jussive assumes different shades of meaning, varying with the situation or authority of the speaker.... Sometimes, from the circumstances of the case, the command becomes a permission: Hosea xiv. 6, 'I will be as the dew to Israel: *let* him flourish, וְיַךְ, *and strike forth* his roots as Lebanon'" (Driver). In lands where there is little rain, the dew, falling copiously, *fertilizes* the earth, refreshes the languid plants, revives the face of nature, and makes all things grow. Thus the dew becomes the source of fruitfulness. So God, by his Spirit's grace, is the Source of Israel's spiritual fruitfulness. **He shall grow** (margin, *blossom*) **as the lily.** This comparison suggests many qualities, any one of which may characterize, or all of which may combine in, the spiritual growth thus pictured. There is the purity of the lily, the beauty of the lily, the fecundity of the lily, the perfume of the lily, the rapidity of its growth, the stately slightness of its stem. We may combine the *rapidity* of its growth; its *fecundity*, with regard to which Pliny informs us that a single root produces fifty bulbs; its *beauty*, to which our Lord refers in contrast with the glory of Solomon. But its root is weak, and he, on that account perhaps, subjoins: **And cast forth** (margin, *strike*) **his roots as Lebanon.** Whether it mean that the roots are as the trees of Lebanon or the mountain of Lebanon itself, the thought expressed by this comparison is *stability*. "As the trees of Lebanon," says Jerome, "which strike their roots as far down into the depths as they lift their heads up into the air, so that they can be shaken by no storm, but by their stable massiveness maintain their position." **His branches shall spread**; margin, *go*; rather, *go on*. This feature in the representation denotes *enlargement* or *expansion*. The tender branches (suckers) spreading out in all directions very aptly set forth the multiplication of Israel or their growth and increase numerically. But branches straggling, crooked, and ill-shaped would rather be a blemish than a beauty. It is, therefore, added: **His beauty shall be as the olive tree.** The olive has been called the crown of the fruit trees of Palestine, but besides, its fruitage so plentiful and useful, the splendour of its green, and the enduring freshness of its foliage, make it a vivid picture of that *beauty* of holiness or spiritual graces which it is here employed to represent. There is still an additional element of interest pertaining to this goodly tree, namely, **And his smell as Lebanon.** This signifies the *fragrance* of this beautiful tree of righteousness. The smell of Lebanon is referred to in Cant. iv. 11, "And the smell of thy garments is like the smell of Lebanon." What with its cedars, and spices, and fruit, and flowers, and aromatic shrubs, and fragrant vines, Lebanon must perfume the air with the most delightful odours. Thus acceptable to God and pleasing to man shall Israel become. The commentators quote with commendation Rosenmüller's explanation of the individual features of this inimitable picture: "The rooting indicates *stability*; the spreading of the branches, *propagation* and the multitude of inhabitants; the splendour of the olive, *beauty and glory*, and that constant and lasting; the fragrance, *hilarity* and loveliness." The simile changes into the metaphor; Israel, from being likened to a tree, becomes the tree. **They that dwell under his shadow shall return; they shall revive as the corn, and grow** (margin, *blossom*) **as the vine: the scent** (rather, *renown*) **thereof** shall be **as the wine of Lebanon.** There is some difficulty and consequent diversity of rendering and explanation in connection with this verse. If the tree be Israel in its collective or national capacity, the dwellers under its shadow are the members of the nation, separately and severally, flourishing under the widespread branches of this umbrageous tree. The word *yashubhu* is explained: (1) (*a*) return, *i.e.* betake themselves to his shadow, which is incongruous, for how could they be said to return to their own shadow or dwell securely under it? (*b*) return to their native land, so the Chaldee,—this is somewhat better; (*c*) return to the worship of Jehovah, said of Israelites who had abandoned it, not properly of Gentiles turning to that worship; (*d*) Rosenmüller, comparing Judg. xv. 19 and 1 Sam. xxx. 12, explains it in the sense of coming to themselves, reviving. (2) Keil constructs *yashubhu* adverbially by a common idiom with *ychayyu*, and (*a*) translates "shall give life to come again," that is, "Those who sit beneath the shade of Israel, the tree that is bursting into leaf, will revive corn, cause it to return to life, or produce it for nourishment, satiety, and strengthening." Similarly the Vulgate, "sustain life by corn." This, however, must appear tame after the splendid promises that went before. (*b*) Vivify; *i.e.* produce seed like corn, and rejoice in a numerous offspring as from a seed of corn many proceed; according to this, "seed" (זֶרַע) must be supplied, and *caph* of comparison. The added clause agrees with this, for the flourishing of the vine also symbolizes prolific persons (comp. Ps. cxxviii. 3). Further,

the vine does **not always** flourish, yet, not like the corn which after harvest ceases and is no more seen, its root remains, and next year grows green and yields its fruit anew. The fame of the wine of Lebanon is celebrated for its taste and fragrance. Kimchi cites Asaph, a physician, as writing that the wine of Lebanon, of Hermon, of Carmel, of the mountains of Israel and Jerusalem and Caphtor, surpass all others in flavour, taste, and for medicinal purposes.

Ver. 8.—**Ephraim** shall say, **What have I to do any more with idols?** This is full, final, and for ever a renunciation of idolatry on the part of Israel. **I have heard** him, **and observed him**: I am **like a green fir tree. From me is thy fruit found.** This is God's promise, that his eye is fixed on Israel in order to look after him, care for him, and provide for him, and to protect and prosper him; while the figure of a green fir tree is the pledge of shelter and security. **But,** though the fir tree is ever green, it is fruitless; and therefore it is added that God will prove the Source of fruitfulness, and supply all that his people shall or can ever need.

Ver. 9.—**Who is wise, and he shall understand these things? prudent, and he shall know them? for the ways of the Lord are right, and the just shall walk in them: but the trangressors shall fall therein.** This verse demands attention to all the prophet has written, whether for warning, or reproof, or correction in righteousness, or encouragement to piety and virtue, and evidently alludes to Deut. xxxii. 4. The ways of the Lord are those he prescribes for them to walk in, as also the ways he takes in guiding, guarding, and governing men. Like the dictates of the Word, so the dispensations of his providence are to some the savour of life, to others the savour of death; therefore it is added that, while the righteous walk therein, the wicked stumble in them (comp. Deut. xxx. 19, 20).

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—3.—*The fallen invited to return.* The history of Israel is the moral history of the world, at least in miniature.

I. HISTORY REPEATS ITSELF. The history of Israel repeats itself in the history of mankind in general. Their history is the history of sin and of salvation, of ruin and of recovery, of the mercy of God and of the backsliding of man. Their bondage in Egypt represents the slavery of sin; their rescue out of the hand of the oppressor, our redemption; their sojourn in the wilderness, our strangership on earth; their entrance into Canaan, our admission into the better country, even the heavenly; their backsliding from time to time, our own wanderings of heart and life from the living God; their return to the path of obedience, our repentance.

II. GOD'S READINESS TO RECEIVE THE PENITENT. The reproofs for sin and threatenings of wrath scattered over the preceding chapters of this book now give place to invitations to repentance and promises of mercy. The former were a preparation for the latter. Not only so, even interspersed with reproofs for sin we find most gracious calls to repentance; alongside the threatenings of wrath are the most precious promises. It is in this way that God wounds in order to make whole; when he convinces us of sin, his object is to comfort us; when he brings to mind our sin, it is that he may lead us to the Saviour; when he proves to us our ruin by sin, he is at pains to point us to the remedy and provide for our restoration; having warned us of our danger, he urges us to the discharge of duty. He deals with us as with Israel at the time to which the prophet refers, showing us our fall and how we are to rise again; he urges us to repentance, instructing us what to do and what to say, and encouraging us withal by God's willingness to receive us on repentance.

III. MAN'S FALL AND ITS CAUSE. In the passage before us the words apply in the first instance to Israel; they had *stumbled*, such being the meaning of the original word. Their stumbling-blocks were their idols; they had forgotten the living and true God; they had proved ungrateful for his benefits and unmindful of his favours. Despising the riches of his goodness and forbearance, they had lapsed into gross idolatry; they had sunk deep into that degrading sin, making molten images of their silver and idols according to their own understanding,—all of it the work of the craftsman. Their ingratitude for the Divine goodness made their iniquity still less excusable, for according to the multitude of his fruit they increased the altars, according to the goodness of his land he made goodly images. No wonder the Majesty of heaven was provoked with **that stiffnecked and rebellious people.** But the fall of Israel reminds us of the *fall* of

man, and leads us naturally to revert to the infancy of our race. 1. *Before the Fall.* When we picture to ourselves, as far as the Scripture record enables us, the *place* of our first parents in the state of pristine innocence, we think of that lovely garden "planted eastward in Eden;" of its trees and shrubs; of its fruits and flowers; of the rivers that watered it; of its unclouded sky; of the genial warmth of the glorious sun fructifying and beautifying it; of the dews that refreshed it; of man its caretaker and cultivator; of his pleasant position in that paradise, placed there as he was to dress it and to keep it. To this must be added the *communion* of the creature with the Creator, so close, so cordial, and so confidential as that communion then must have been. If Enoch, after sin and Satan had done their worst, still walked with God; if Abraham was called, not only the father of the faithful, but the friend of God; if God spake face to face with Moses, as a man speaketh with his friend;—we may form some faint idea, and it is only a faint idea, of that heavenly communion which man there enjoyed with his Maker as he walked in the garden in the cool of the day. 2. *After the Fall.* We know how the scene was changed—suddenly and shockingly changed. We have seen a picture designed to represent the change which sin introduced into Paradise, and the wreck which iniquity wrought. In one part of the picture all is beauty, all is loveliness; the sky is clear, earth beneath is charming; above, below, around, everything appears inexpressibly gay and grand and gorgeous. Man is the monarch of all; every bird of every wing is subject to him, every animal of every species is submissive to his sway, even the most savage beast of prey owns his sovereignty. The lion crouches at his feet, he strokes the tiger with his hand. But no sooner has he tasted the forbidden fruit than the sky is clouded, lightning flashes with fearful fury, the elements are at war with him. The animals, lately so meek and mild, rise in rebellion against him—the lion opens his mouth in wrath, the tiger is wild with fury. Our first parents themselves, shivering with horror, shuddering with fright, are hurried out of Paradise. A flaming sword prevents their return, and guards on every side the tree of life. Such is the painting referred to, and it pictures a dread reality. It points out how man fell, and how far he fell from his state of primeval bliss, of fellowship with the Holy One, and of Divine favour. 3. *The cause of such a fall.* Iniquity was the cause, as we here read of Israel, "Thou hast fallen by thine iniquity." In that iniquity there were various elements; when analyzed it is found to be made up of several component parts. There was the lust of the flesh, for the tree was good for food; there was the lust of the eyes, for that tree was pleasant to the eyes; there was the pride of life, it was a tree to be desired to make one wise—"Ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil." There was, in short, rebellion against the mildest authority; there was disobedience to the most reasonable command. 4. *Consequences of the Fall* are seen in posterity. When we read the records of the ancient nations of heathendom, even the most enlightened and polished, we cannot fail to be convinced of the deep degradation into which man by iniquity had fallen. In Egypt, the cradle of civilization, men worshipped animals and plants, and even reptiles. In Greece, with all its boasted intellectual superiority, æsthetic tastes, and fine arts, men worshipped a host of false gods, deified men, and even impersonations of the lowest passions and worst vices that agitate the human heart; while of Athens itself it was said that you could as easily find a god as a man in that celebrated city. In Rome men multiplied gods, for, in addition to the national divinities, they readily admitted into their pantheon the gods, however monstrous and motley, of the nations which they conquered. Among the people of Israel in the prophet's time the great besetting sin was idolatry with all its foul accompaniments. In heathen lands at the present day it is still the same; multitudes bow down to stocks and stones, and call these vanities gods. Can anything afford clearer evidence of the fearful fall of our race than this sottish idolatry of ancient and modern heathen, as also of the Hebrew people, though so highly favoured with the written Law, besides that which they had in common with their heathen neighbours? We forbear to speak of the gross impurities and shocking immoralities that go hand-in-hand with idolatry. 5. *Illustration of the Fall.* Of manifold illustrations which the subject admits take that of a stately tree. Its dimensions are mighty and magnificent—its top waves high in air, its branches spread far around, its leafy honours are luxuriant, its foliage umbrageous; it claims or seems to claim supremacy over all the forest trees. But the axe is laid to its root. You beg the woodman to spare that tree. It is vain, however; he

has made up his mind, and it is doomed to fall. Blow after blow is struck; the sturdy strokes are redoubled; at length the root is giving way, the top is nodding, the tree topples to its fall. One creak, one crash, and the goodly tree is prostrate; ruin spreads the ground. Ere long the branches wither and the leaves decay. What a contrast between that tree flourishing in the stateliness of its strength and the loveliness of its life, and that same tree felled to the earth, its leaves stripped off, its branches lopped, the whole a sad emblem of decay, a solemn memorial of destruction! Such is the contrast between man in his original purity, while standing by faith, and man at the present day fallen by iniquity. 6. *Greatness of the Fall.* When the great Roman dictator had usurped the liberties of his country and changed the republican form of government to the imperial; when he had overcome all opposition, conquered all enemies, and fully gained the mastery; when he had reached the summit of popularity and power;—just then the daggers of the conspirators smote him to the earth. He fell at the foot of his great rival's statue. The friend who spoke his funeral oration and improved the occasion did justly magnify that fall, exclaiming, as well he might, "What a fall was there, my countrymen!" But what, after all, is the fall of the warrior, or hero, or emperor, even from the pinnacle of his fame and of his fortune, compared with the fall of an immortal soul by sin, dragged down into the deep pit of perdition? The sight of the fallen warrior, as he sat amid the ruins of Carthage, has furnished a subject for men to moralize on, while historians have commented on the fact; and it is indeed sufficiently impressive. The harmony that existed between the person and the place was necessarily striking and even startling; the fate of the one was so like that of the other, the downfall of the one was so similar to the desolation of the other, that we scarcely know which of the two is more entitled to the tear of pity or sigh of sympathy—the degradation of the chieftain or the destruction of the city. Yet greater far are the degradation and desolation which the blight of sin brings upon person or place. 7. *Practical considerations.* We need not travel far for proof of our fallen state; we do not need to go back to our first parents except for the purpose of tracing the evil to its fountain-head; we need not visit pagan lands, whether past or present; we do not require to quit the lands of Christendom. The condition of the Hebrew people as set forth by the Prophet Hosea is one that often repeats itself in the experiences—some of them sad enough—of everyday life. How many have fallen by iniquity around us! How many are falling by iniquity at our very doors, on this side and on that! How many have we known to begin life well, but they fell by iniquity! The wrecks of the fallen are strewn on the right hand and on the left. Some fall by drunkenness, some by lewdness, some by want of rectitude and right principle, some by what the world calls unsteadiness. If the sword slays its thousands, iniquity slays its tens of thousands. 8. *Personal duties.* Several personal duties of much importance may be learnt from this part of the subject; these may be expressed in Scripture language as follows: "Let him that standeth take heed lest he fall;" "Give diligence to make your calling and election sure; for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall;" "Beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness." Also pity the fallen; try to lift them up; pray for the backslider who has fallen back from the position he seemed to have attained, and seek to restore such a one in the spirit of meekness.

IV. THE RETURN OF THE PENITENT. Many motives, and those of the most powerful kind, urge the sinner to return to God. 1. There is the character of the invitation. It is an earnest one, a precious one, and a glorious one. It is the gospel re-echoing through the past and resounding about us at the present. This invitation proves the height, and depth, and length, and breadth of the Divine goodness. 2. There is the Author of the invitation. It proceeds from the Friend whom we have treated so ungratefully and so ungraciously; he comes after us, as it were, calling and entreating us to return; he promises us a hearty welcome when we do return; he assures us that his heart and hearth and home stand open to receive us; his arms are stretched out to embrace us. 3. There are the persons invited. The vilest are subjects of this invitation; the oldest, the worst, the most wicked, are comprehended; they are offered present pardon, they are assured of instant forgiveness, and all without money and without price: "The Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." Oh,

then, since God is waiting and willing to be gracious, let not the sinner ignore that goodness, nor regard it with insensibility, nor trample underfoot his great mercy, nor treat his gracious overtures as the idle wind that passeth by; but allow himself to be led by the goodness of God to repentance.

V. THE MODE OF RETURNING TO GOD. We are to take with us *words*, as the worshipper in the olden time did not go empty-handed, but brought with him an offering when he went to worship God. 1. The words we are required to bring are words of *confession*, like the poor prodigal when he said, "Father, I have sinned against Heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son;" like the contrite publican when he cried, "God be merciful to me a sinner." If we thus confess our sins, he "is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." 2. There must be *petition* as well as confession; our words must be words of earnest pleading. Nor are we left without instruction on this head; suitable petitions are suggested, and the very words put in our lips. There is, according to the Authorized Version, a petition for forgiveness and one for favour. The former is, "Take away all iniquity;" for it is iniquity that has wrought our ruin, it is sin that is the source of all our sorrows; take it away, for by it we have fallen. Take it *all* away—the guilt of it, the defilement of it, the dominion of it, the love of it, and the practice of it. Take it all away and *for ever*, for it is only thus we can be saved; only thus our souls are washed and justified and sanctified in the Name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God. The second part of the petition pleads for favour; it is, "Receive us graciously;" that is, receive us into thy favour, thy family, and thy service. Receive us graciously, that is, gratuitously, of thy free favour and sovereign grace; not on the ground of innocence, for—

"Not in our innocence we trust—
We bow before thee in the dust;
And through our Saviour's blood alone
We seek acceptance at thy throne."

Not on the ground of merit, for we have sinned and merit only wrath; not on the ground of price, for we have nothing to pay—

"Nothing in our hand we bring,
Simply to thy cross we cling."

Not on the ground of works, for we are saved solely of the Divine mercy, according to the riches of his grace in Christ Jesus. 3. There are words of *thanksgiving*. The calves, even the lips, are the thank offerings and service of the lips in general; nor do these differ aught from the fruit of the lips. Thanksgiving, praise, prayer, self-dedication, and self-surrender are all expressed by the lips, and are thus their offerings or their fruit.

"Nay, rather unto me, thy God,
Thanksgiving offer thou;
To the Most High perform thy word,
And fully pay thy vow:
And in the day of thy distress
Do thou unto me cry;
I will deliver thee, and thou
My Name shalt glorify."

VI. FRUITS MEET FOR REPENTANCE. These in the present instance consist in the complete rejection of carnal confidences and sole dependence on God. The penitent Israelite renounces all confidence in worldly policy, and worldly allies as secured by such policy—the Assyrian and the Egyptian alike. He renounces his idolatrous practices and superstitious devotions; and, depending no longer on foreign help, or objects and observances of idol-worship, or domestic resources, he places his entire and undivided trust in the living God. Henceforth the rule of his conduct and motto of his life may be conceived as summed up in the words of the psalmist: "Some trust in chariots, and some in horses: but we will remember the Name of the Lord our God." It has been well said that "there is no sin more usual among men than carnal confi-

dence; to lean on our own wisdom, or wealth, or power, or supplies from others; to deify counsels and armies, or horses and treasures, and to let our hearts rise or fall, sink or bear up within us, according as the creature is helpful or useless, nearer or further from us; as if God were not a God afar off, as well as near at hand." This was one of Israel's great sins, and which on repentance is renounced. This is a common sin, and one which all must renounce, trusting, not in an arm of flesh, but sanctifying the Lord alone in our hearts. It is when we feel our condition in this world to be one of orphanage, of weakness, destitution, desolateness, and distress, that we repose trustfully and securely in the Divine mercy and gracious fatherhood of God.

Vers. 4—7.—These verses describe *the happy result of Israel's penitence and the merciful response to Israel's prayer*. 1. The pardon sought is secured, and that for the greatest sin—that of backsliding, and so for all minor trespasses. The acceptance prayed for is presently and plentifully vouchsafed. The dark storm-cloud of God's wrath is dispersed and dispelled for ever. 2. We next learn the fulness of God's forgiving love and his superabundant mercy to them that trust in him. By the most pleasing figures we are taught what God promises to be to his people; what they themselves become; and what a blessing they prove to others.

I. PICTORIAL CHARACTER OF DIVINE TEACHING. We find great variety as well as great beauty in the lessons of the Bible. There is great variety, for all nature, animate and inanimate, is laid under contribution to supply fit illustrations of Divine things; there is great beauty, for the loveliest objects above us, around us, and beneath us are employed for this purpose. In the passage before us there is a cluster of lovely natural objects employed in this manner to set forth spiritual truths with all the reality of nature and all the vividness of life. Here we read of the dew, the deep-rooted and everlasting hill, the lily, the tall tree with umbrageous foliage, the olive ever green, and Lebanon ever fragrant. We read also of the springing corn, the blooming vine, and wine of aromatic odour. These, it must be acknowledged, are beautiful figures, and the facts which they are intended to convey are equally blessed. But what enhances the beauty and the blessedness is the circumstance that the persons to whom these facts and figures have reference are those very persons who had erred and strayed from the Lord their God—even Israel who had fallen by their iniquity, Israel who had sadly backslidden, Israel who had grievously provoked the just anger of the Almighty; but Israel repenting and returning, praying and pleading, giving up their false refuges and casting aside their false gods. Oh how cheering and encouraging that God welcomes his erring children to return! Like the father in the parable, he runs to meet the prodigal, he casts the arms of his love around him; he receives the penitent to his fond embrace, laying aside the wrath that had been provoked; he bestows the love that had been undeserved; he forgives the sins that had been committed; he foregoes the punishment that had been incurred; and, physician-like, he heals the backslidings great and manifold.

II. SCRIPTURAL APPLICATIONS OF THE DEW. Figurative applications of dew are frequent in Scripture. Sometimes it signifies temporal benefits, as when Isaac blessed his son Jacob, saying, "God give thee of the dew of heaven, and the fatness of the earth, and plenty of corn and wine." Sometimes it denotes spiritual blessings, as in the case of Israel, of whom we read, "His heavens shall drop down dew. Happy art thou, O Israel: who is like unto thee, O people saved by the Lord, the Shield of thy help, and who is the Sword of thy excellency!" Sometimes it implies the reviving power and refreshing nature of the Divine Word, as when Moses the man of God, before he went up to the top of Pisgah and closed his eyes in death, addressed the people in that lovely song in which he says, "My doctrine shall drop as the rain, my speech shall distil as the dew." Solomon compares the king's favour to "dew upon the grass." The psalmist compares brotherly love and union and peace to dew.

> "As Hermon's dew, the dew that doth
> On Zion hills descend;
> For there the blessing God commands—
> Life that shall never end."

He also speaks of the children of God who have been born of the Spirit—born from above as dew, because Divine light shines in upon them, the Divine image is reflected

in them, and, like the morning dewdrops, they deck and ornament the wide field of humanity; thus: "Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power, in the beauties of holiness from the womb of the morning: thou hast the dew of thy youth." In like manner the Prophet Micah, speaking of the conversion of the Jews, and of the benefit which they shall in that day confer upon the rest of the world, and of their blessing to the peoples among whom they have been long scattered, says, "The remnant of Israel shall be in the midst of many people as a dew from the Lord." So also Isaiah, in a beautiful and highly poetic passage in which he refers to the resurrection of the dead, says, "Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust: for thy dew is as the dew of herbs." Here God, speaking of himself, says, "I will be as the dew unto Israel."

III. PROPERTIES OF THE DEW AS ILLUSTRATIVE OF THIS PROMISE. The first and perhaps most obvious property of the dew is its refreshing quality. 1. This *refreshing property* is experienced most in the summer months, and especially during a season of drought, like that with which the land of Israel was visited, when, for three years and a half, there was neither rain nor dew. At such a time the ground is dry and parched; vegetation languishes; gardens and meadows and corn-lands are scorched; fields of grain, blades of grass, and leaves of trees wither; fruits and flowers droop. The showers of the sky have been withheld; rain-clouds, it may be, have gathered and darkened and promised much; but they have passed over without the long-hoped-for and much-required rain. Oh, how refreshing at such a juncture is the dew when it comes down copiously on the bosom of the thirsty earth! There it lies like a shower of gems upon the ground, shimmering in the morning sunrise; it covers the surface with pearly beauty.

> "As Morn, her rosy steps in th' Eastern clime
> Advancing, sows the earth with Orient pearl."

But those dewdrops are as refreshing as they are beautiful: they water to some extent the fields; they invigorate the languishing herbs; they refresh every green thing; they revive the plants and shrubs, the grasses, herbs, and flowers, and lift up their drooping heads; they gladden all nature. The transition from the soil to the soul is easy and not unnatural. What the dew is to the soil, grace is to the soul. In the natural world, where all erewhile was parched and scorched, dry and hard, waste and withered, consequently bleak and bare and barren, abundant dews, largely supplying in Eastern lands the place of rain, descend; soon new life springs up and revives the half-withered plants and exhausted herbage, new loveliness appears in the leaves of trees and flower-petals. Just so when the grace of God is vouchsafed to the soul, and when the Spirit of God communicates it in rich abundance, new life is imparted to the soul, new energies are awakened, new spiritual vigour manifests itself, and new holy sympathies are developed. Sometimes, too, after the first bestowal of grace and impartation of life, believers may droop and their graces languish; the winds of the wilderness may blow upon us, the drought of the desert may scorch or wither us; in other words, the world, with its trials and temptations, Satan and his snares, sin and its enticements, the flesh and its lusts, all tend to dry up the spiritual affections of the soul, exhaust its energies, and check the heavenly flow of its feelings. Again a fresh communication of the dew of Divine grace is granted, and spiritual greenness springs up afresh and spreads throughout the soul, a renewal of spiritual life ensues, so that we live no longer to self and sin, but to him who died for us; no longer to the world, but are crucified to it; no longer to the flesh to serve it in the lusts thereof. 2. *Dew has a fertilizing and fructifying property.* Hence the dew is indispensable to germination and growth. Without it the husbandman would labour in vain and spend his strength for nought. He might industriously break up the fallow ground and carefully scatter the seed, but without the moisture of rain or dew the seed sown would neither bud nor grow; so in spiritual husbandry, men may plough and sow, but without the dew of Divine grace there will be no increase. How different when the dew of God's grace is abundantly bestowed! Then hard hearts are softened, stubborn wills renewed, invitations of the gospel accepted, the warnings of the Divine Word touch the conscience, its instructions impress the heart, awakenings take place in Churches, revivals occur throughout the land. Nay, more, the weakest means become effectual, the simplest instrumentalities powerful; while in individual life the weak Christian is strengthened, the weary is refreshed, the fainting revived, the unlovely spiritually beautified, and the

spiritual fruitfulness or virtues of all developed or revived. 3. *God's wise economy of the dew.* There is not a single drop of dew formed by the rude hand of chance or made in vain. Neither is there a shrub, or herb, or leaf, or flower, or blade of grass that does not collect as much dew as is needed for its peculiar wants. Grass-lands and cultivated soils radiate very freely by night the heat which they absorb by day; consequently they cool down speedily and condense plentifully into dew the vapour of the air as it passes over them. Gravel, rocks, barren lands, on the contrary, radiate very slowly and very little heat, so that very little dew forms upon them. Thus there are places where little or no dew falls and which no dew refreshes. There is the barren rock—no dew refreshes it; there are the gravel walk and the sandy desert—little or no dew is formed, collected, or needed thereon; there is the stone-paved street—no dew is needed to moisten it. Exactly so there are hearts so hardened by unbelief that no dew of grace either settles on them or softens them. The seed of Divine truth may be scattered on them from sabbath to sabbath, but it makes no impression on them, and takes no root in them; it lies, it may be, for a little on the surface, then cometh the wicked one and catcheth away that which was sown thereon. It is not for want of willingness in God to bestow the dew of his grace, or for want of sufficiency in Divine grace, that such is the case; but because the heart has been so hardened by the deceitfulness of sin, the conscience so seared by iniquity, and the whole man so alienated from the life of God, that there is no disposition to receive or profit by the heavenly boon.

IV. EFFECTS PRODUCED BY THE DEW OF GOD'S GRACE. The first effect is growth as of the *lily.* 1. The growth of the lily is *rapid* as it is *beautiful.* Here we may consider it as an emblem of *beauty.* Thus our Lord says, "Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: and yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these." In a passage in Ezekiel God says to his people, "Thy renown went forth among the heathen for thy beauty: for it was perfect through my comeliness, which I had put upon thee, saith the Lord God." The comeliness to which the prophet refers is the comeliness of the soul. There is nothing so beautiful as holiness; there is no ornament like piety. The earth is beautiful when God adorns it with the bounties of his providence; when he replenishes it with fruit and flower, with grass for the cattle and herb for the service of man; when he carpets its surface with living green, clothing the fields with verdure, and covering the hills with corn. There is beauty in the over-canopying sky, in the bright orbs that sparkle like gems in the firmament. There is beauty in the wide-spread world of waters, and in the waves that dimple ocean's cheek. There is beauty twinkling in every star above us, sparkling in the dewdrops at our feet, and shining in every shimmer of noonday splendour. All these testify how beautiful this world once was, and how beautiful it would still be but for sin. There is beauty in the human face divine: there is beauty in the face of fair woman, and beauty of a rougher cast in the countenance of man, and beauty, playful, cheerful beauty, in the pretty countenance of childhood. But all the varied beauties of a lovely world are not to be compared with the beauty of holiness. It is a beauty that reflects God's own image, and by which we resemble Christ.

"Come, then, O house of Jacob, come,
To worship at his shrine;
And, walking in the light of God,
With holy beauties shine."

There may be beauty in the adorning of the person, in the plaiting of the hair, the wearing of gold, and the putting on of apparel; but the true beauty is the hidden man of the heart in that which is not corruptible, even the beauty of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price. 2. The next characteristic of this growth is *stability.* The growth of the lily may be fair or fast, but it soon fades; it may be easily plucked up, and so another figure is added to show the firmness of the believer. He is firmly rooted as well as spiritually fair. Some colours are very beautiful and very showy, but they are not fast colours; they soon fade, they soon lose their vividness. Some plants are very beautiful in their bloom, but weak in their root and soon uptorn. Not so the Christian. He casts forth his roots as Lebanon—either as the mountain itself, one of earth's deep foundations; or as the forest trees, those cedars

of God, deeply rooted therein. Thus, with the flower of the lily, the believer has the root of the mountain or of the cedar tree, over which the winds of heaven have swept for centuries. He is fair as the one and firm as the other, for Christ dwells in his heart by faith; he is rooted and grounded in love; he is rooted in Christ and established in the faith, abounding therein with thanksgiving. He is, moreover, "steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord," forasmuch as he knows that his labour is not in vain in the Lord. Besides, as the root of trees draws up nourishment from the ground, so the Christian derives nourishment and strength from Christ; while the union is so close and so constant that nothing can separate him from Christ, nothing can wrench him from that rock in which he is rooted, nothing can detach him from the foundation on which he rests. 3. The next characteristic is *expansiveness*, as expressed by the words, "His branches shall spread." While his roots spread far and sink deeply into the soil, his branches spread. The application of this promise is to Israel literally, and so to the Church in general, as well as to the individual Christian. The Church of God is destined to grow to a great extent, and to spread her branches widely on every side, sending out "her boughs into the sea, and her branches unto the river," and ultimately to fill the whole earth. The Christian's growth likewise is expansive. He grows inwardly in the graces of the Spirit, outwardly in good works, upward in heavenly mindedness, and downward in humility. He adds to his faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge temperance, and to temperance patience, and to patience godliness, and to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness charity. These things are in him and abound, and thus he is neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of God and in the doing of the Divine will. Whatsoever things are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, of good report, virtuous, and praiseworthy, he thinks on and practises these things. His profiting appears to all, and his holy demeanour is so manifested that he promotes the growth of grace in others, and consequently the progress of the gospel in the world. He resembles the shining light, which continues to spread more widely and to shine more brightly until the perfect day. 4. The next element of this growth is *permanence* of beauty and abundance of fruit. In addition to the beauty or glory of the lily, the stability of the cedar rooted in Lebanon, or of Lebanon itself, the expansiveness of numerous and magnificent branches, we have also the abiding beauty and rich fruitage of the olive. The beauty of the lily is frail and its glory fading; but the greenness of the olive is perpetual; and as abundance of branches and plenty of leaves may make a show for a time, and suggest the idea of a sort of empty ostentatiousness, the prophet gives a fresh touch to his picture by adding the greenery of the olive, which is lasting, and the fruitfulness of the olive, which is so profitable and for many purposes serviceable—enlightenment, nourishment, and embellishment. Thus the psalmist says, "I am like a green olive tree in the house of God: I trust in the mercy of God for ever and ever." So also in Jer. xi. 8 God calls his people a green olive tree, fair and of goodly fruit; such too is the individual believer—planted in the garden of the Lord, watered by the dew of heaven, his leaf is ever fresh and his fruit ever seasonable. Even in the winter of adversity the leaf of the righteous is green; in the winter of age they still bear fruit; in the wintry storms of the world their beauty remains like that of the olive tree, ever green, ever fresh, and ever flourishing. The beauty of an evergreen is enhanced, like most other things, by contrast; it appears most when other shrubs and trees are stripped and bared by the wintry blast; it is seen to most advantage when deadness and desolation reign around. In like manner, when the storms of life, when the decrepitude of age, when the languor of decay, has stripped the mere worldly professor of the leaves of a merely assumed and temporary profession, a profession without reality, then true Christians stand out in striking contrast.

"Those that within the house of God
Are planted by his grace,
They shall grow up and flourish all
In our God's holy place:
And in old age, when others fade,
They fruit still forth shall bring;
They shall be fat and full of sap,
And aye be flourishing."

5. By the smell of Lebanon is set forth the *fragrance* of holiness. There is nothing so pleasing to God as holiness proceeding from faith in Christ and love to God. The believers' efforts in the cause of God have a rich perfume; their zeal and devotedness are like ointment poured forth; their spiritual sacrifices send forth the savour of a sweet smell. Thus the children of God are trees of righteousness, God's own planting, precious in his sight, pleasant and pleasing to God, and to all who love God and are like God. God compares his Church to a garden of spices: "A garden enclosed is my sister, my spouse; a spring shut up, a fountain sealed. Thy plants are an orchard of pomegranates, with pleasant fruits; camphire, with spikenard, spikenard and saffron; calamus and cinnamon, with all trees of frankincense; myrrh and aloes, with all the chief spices." 6. The people or Church of God *become a blessing* to others. Not only are they blessed themselves, but are made a blessing to others; they benefit all around. Like the pebble dropped into a pool and sending out wavelets to the furthest shore, so the people of God communicate benefits that may reach to the utmost bound of earth and to the very end of time. Such as are converted through their influence, repenting of sin and returning to God, will join themselves to God's people and rest under the shadow of God's Church—shall be spiritually fruitful, reviving like the corn, of which a grain when it dies in the earth brings forth many more; and prolific as the vine, which, when pruned, produces many clusters, and each cluster many grapes; while their persons and their services are fragrant and even medicinal spiritually, as the scent of the far-famed wine of Lebanon physically. So with the Church of the old dispensation; so with that of the new; so with God's Church still.

Vers. 8, 9.—*A call to understanding.* The former verse exhibits Ephraim bringing forth the fruits of repentance, abandoning idolatry for ever. God on his part hears his prayers, grants his petitions, and makes him the object of his paternal care and kind providence. Nor is that all; he becomes to him refreshment in every time of need, and the source of fruitfulness at all times. It is the part of understanding and the privilege of the prudent to devote due attention to and to attain to proper discernment of such things. By the judicious exercise of their natural powers, quickened and strengthened by grace, they convince themselves of the rightness and justness of God's ways, and continue, to their own unspeakable comfort, to walk therein; but transgressors stumble at God's dealings and fall into the perdition of ungodly men.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—3.—*Return to God: its beginnings.* The long and terrible storm of denunciation is now at last over; the wrath-clouds roll away, and the sunshine of the Divine love bursts forth with healing in its wings. Beyond all the hurly-burly of the tempest sent as the punishment of sin, the prophet discerns the paternal tenderness and the loving patience of the God of Israel. So he begins this closing chapter of his book with a last tender entreaty to return to him who "sitteth upon the flood," and who "will bless his people with peace." How changed the prophet's style, in this final strophe, from what it is in most of the preceding! When denouncing Ephraim's sin and doom Hosea is obscure, abrupt, rugged, and volcanic; but in ch. xiv. all is pellucid and restful and full of beauty. The whirlwind and the earthquake and the fire have given place to the still small voice. The subject in these opening verses is—The beginnings of spiritual revival. In its rise there are three stages.

I. THE LORD BESEECHING. (Ver. 1.) As applied to Israel, the exhortation has for its background all the judgments which have been threatened throughout the Book. And since these words were written Israel "has fallen" indeed. The ten tribes were soon carried into Assyria; Judah was by-and-by driven away to weep beside the rivers of Babylon; regained Jerusalem was at length fiercely overthrown by the Romans; and for eighteen centuries now the Jews have been dispersed over the wide world, and exposed to reproach and persecution and cruelty. All this has been the punishment of Israel's own "iniquity"—the political schism, the calf-worship, the Baalism, the godless pride, the unblushing immorality, and at last the rejection and murder of the Son of God. Jehovah could not avoid punishing; he could not but allow the apostate

nation to lie under its doom during centuries and millenniums; but all the while the Divine heart is saying, "O Israel, return!" How wonderful that the eternal God should condescend to entreat men to repent! But "the Lord is good; his mercy is everlasting; and his truth endureth to all generations" (Ps. c. 5). If, however, there is to be salvation, there must be repentance, and all true repentance takes its rise in the call of God's Spirit. The Lord seeks the sinner with his grace before the sinner can seek him. And thus "Return unto the Lord" is the burden of the entire revelation of the Bible; it is the key-note of all Hebrew prophecy, as of all New Testament gospel. Not only so, but in this passage God also condescends to direct the people as to the thoughts and "words" with which they may acceptably approach him in complying with his urgent entreaty (vers. 2, 3). How different all this from "the manner of man"!

II. THE PENITENT PRAYING. (Ver. 2.) This verse and ver. 3 form a sort of "Lord's Prayer" for backsliders. God desires no longer the animal sacrifices of the Law; indeed, the twelve tribes cannot in their exile offer any, for the temple-worship has now ceased. But he requires "words" which shall be the evidence of "a broken and a contrite heart." Even these, however, he here provides for his penitent children. "What need God words? He knows our hearts before we speak unto him. It is true, God needs no words; but we do, to stir up our hearts and affections" (Sibbes). Although the Lord does not now demand sacrifices, the kind of "words" which he asks recalls to our minds the three principal forms of sacrifice ordained by the Levitical Law, viz. the propitiatory, the dedicatory, and the eucharistic, represented respectively by the sin offering, the burnt offering, and the peace offering. In a true return to God there will be: 1. *Words of confession.* "Take away all iniquity." A child who has done wrong recovers his father's favour so soon as he confesses his fault; so Jehovah's children, who have made themselves "fatherless" by their apostasy, take the first step in the direction of "finding mercy" when they "return up to" (ver. 1) him with words of repentance. The penitent draws near with the leper's confession, "Unclean! unclean!" and with the publican's prayer, "God be merciful to me a sinner." His first and deepest need is pardon; he wants mercy for the past, and grace to help for the future. He prays to be delivered from the power of evil; and pleads, in doing so, the merit of Jesus Christ as his Sin Offering. 2. *Words of dedication.* "Receive us graciously;" literally, "receive good." The barrier of sin being removed through faith in the atonement, the next step in revival is the presentation of the person "a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable unto God" (Rom. xii. 1). It is true that of ourselves we have no good which we can offer; but we are to give to the Lord of his own. The grace which he bestows upon us we are to employ in his service and for his glory. The Christian dedicates his renewed humanity, in body and soul, to his Redeemer (Micah vi. 6—8). 3. *Words of thanksgiving.* "So will we render the calves of our lips," *i.e.* we shall offer our lips as a peace offering, instead of calves. The praise of a redeemed heart is an acceptable sacrifice, and "shall please the Lord better than a bullock that hath horns and hoofs" (Ps. lxix. 31). The soul that has been forgiven much loves much, and should therefore overflow with thanksgiving and praise (Heb. xiii. 15). Such are the three sorts of "words" which God expects from all who "return" to him. He wants words of confession like those of Ps. li.; of self-dedication, like those of Ps. cxvi.; of thanksgiving, like those of Ps. ciii. And, now that Christ has come, these are "the sacrifices of God," alike for the sons of Israel and for sinners of the Gentiles.

III. THE PENITENT RENOUNCING CREATURE-CONFIDENCES. (Ver. 3.) After the threefold word-sacrifice, comes the promise of practical amendment and reformation. Israel resolves to forsake his great national sins, viz. his habit of looking for help to Assyria, his reliance upon the cavalry of Egypt or other warlike strength, and his idolatry of Baal and the calves. The people will show the sincerity of their conversion by endeavours after new obedience. They will realize that away from God they are helpless orphans; and, in all their approaches to him, appeal to his "mercy" as the "Father of the fatherless." This is just what every sinner must do in returning to the Lord. We all have Asshurs and horses and idols which we must abjure. If we will "return quite up to Jehovah our God" (ver. 1) we must put away confidence in every creature-help, and in any defence which is our own handiwork. We may have been "glued to idols" (ch. iv. 17); but we must at any cost tear them out of our hearts, even although the soul should seem to be rent asunder in the process. For true conversion implies perfect union to

the Lord Jesus Christ, perpetual communion with the Holy Spirit, and persevering progress in the ways of holiness. We obey "the first and great commandment," and fulfil the chief end of our being, when we choose Jehovah as the Portion of our souls, and give him our supreme and constant and most tender love.

LESSONS. 1. The mercy of God to sinners is untiring and indestructible (ver. 1). 2. Now that Christ has died as our Sin Offering, we plead his atonement as the ground on which we ask the Lord to "take away all iniquity" (ver. 2). 3. "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit," and contrition always manifests itself in prayer (ver. 2). 4. "To obey is better than sacrifice" (ver. 3). 5. The penitent sinner and the backsliding believer have this assuring motive to induce them to return to God, that, however they may be scorned by their fellow-men, they are sure of a warm welcome from him who is the "Father of the fatherless."—C. J.

Vers. 4, 5.—*Return to God: its immediate effects.* So soon as Israel shall return to Jehovah and offer the foregoing words of self-condemning supplication (vers. 2, 3), they shall receive a glad welcome from him "who delighteth in mercy," and who will not "keep his anger for ever." The first clauses of this answer of blessing remind us that there are three results of religious revival which begin to be experienced at once. These are "the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ," in the form of healing; "the love of God," in the gift of positive and full salvation; "and the communion of the Holy Ghost," as manifested in the enjoyment of Divine influence. The answer corresponds to the prayer of the penitents, only that the blessings promised are even larger and richer than those which have been asked.

I. SPIRITUAL HEALING. "I will heal their backsliding" (ver. 4); or rather, "their falling away;" "their apostasy." The Lord will remove the injuries which his people's apostasy has brought upon them, and will cure them of the malignant disease itself. This blessing of healing includes (1) the forgiveness of sin; (2) deliverance from its pollution; (3) the cure of the tendency to backslide; and (4) removal of the chastisements and sorrows which past guilt has entailed. How does God heal all these wounds? He does so by the application of the blood of Christ. That blood is the one unfailing salve for the sinner's conscience and heart, and it procures also his redemption from all future evil. All men, Jew and Gentile alike, who accept the gospel message, receive such healing in our time; and in "the latter days" this gracious promise shall be completely fulfilled in the national conversion of Israel, as well as in the "coming in" of "the fulness of the Gentiles."

II. FULL SALVATION. "I will love them freely: for mine anger is turned away from him" (ver. 4). Jehovah's wrath being gone, and his people's apostasy healed, his generous love is now free to go forth without restraint. He finds in his people themselves, it is true, no cause why he should love them. In himself the backsliding sinner is repulsive and unlovely; and the only acceptable gift which he can bring when he returns is merely feelings and "words" (ver. 2). But, as a mother's love for her child is not based upon the child's character, or upon the return which he makes for her goodness, so also love is instinctive and natural to the Divine heart. He loves "freely," or spontaneously, just because he himself "is love." The Lord heals his people's backslidings by discovering anew to their souls the greatness of his tender mercy towards them. His wonderful love leads him first to be the soul's Physician, and then to become its Husband. His free favour bestows upon the healed one the health of holiness, and continues to be the springing well-head of the believer's salvation.

III. DIVINE INFLUENCE. "I will be as the dew unto Israel" (ver. 5). This promise announces the reversal of the curse of barrenness recorded in ch. xiii. 15. We think of Jehovah as being "the dew" in connection with the gracious operations of his Spirit. He rewards the prayer and the life of penitence, and evinces his free love to his people, by the gift of the Holy Ghost, the Comforter. There are many points of analogy between the descent of the dew and the work of the Spirit. The Divine dew, like the natural, is: 1. *Mysterious and heavenly.* It has its source high above us. The falling of the dew is independent of man's skill and power (Micah v. 7; Job xxxviii. 28); much less are the workings of grace the result of any human process (John iii. 3—8). 2. *Gentle and silent.* No one sees or hears the dew falling, and experience alone has taught man that it is really an important force of nature.

Similarly the grace of the Spirit "cometh not with observation" (Luke xvii. 20). It works on in secrecy, and becomes visible only in its beneficent results upon character and life. 3. *Abundant.* In Palestine the dew is so copious as to compensate to some extent for the absence of rain. The Divine dew, in like manner, is often seen to be most abundant, especially in a time of religious revival. The work of the Spirit may influence for much good an entire Church, or even a whole nation, so as to enrich its life as a Christian community. 4. *Penetrative.* The dew pierces the soil, and insinuates itself into the fibres of every herb and plant; so the Holy Ghost, using the Divine Word, "pierces even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit" (Heb. iv. 12), and searches through the whole nature of man, to purify and bless it. 5. *Given daily.* "The grace of God, like the dew, is not given once for all, but is day by day waited for, and day by day renewed. Yet doth it not pass away, like the fitful goodness of God's former people (ch. vi. 4), but turns into the growth and spiritual substance of those on whom it descends" (Pusey). 6. *Refreshing and fertilizing.* The dew produces verdure and fruitfulness. So the constant presence of the Holy Spirit within the soul and in the Church is essential to spiritual freshness and usefulness. The clauses that follow (vers. 5—8) show that this is the main point of the emblem as employed here, and trace with exceeding beauty of poetic diction the results of the Lord's gracious activity when he comes "as the dew." He shall so come in "the last days"—blessed be his Name!—"unto Israel," *i.e.* to his ancient people; and not to them only, but to the whole Israel of God, of every nation, who follow spiritually in the footsteps of Abraham.

LESSONS. 1. Apostasy is a malignant soul-malady, which, if not arrested by the great Healer, will lead to final perdition. If we would be preserved from it, we must avoid habits of backsliding. 2. What a ground of hope to the penitent, and of comfort to the believer, is the "freeness" or spontaneity of the Divine love! 3. The absolute dependence of the individual and the Church upon the work of the Holy Spirit.—C. J.

Vers. 5—8.—*Return to God: its ultimate results.* These are like the effects of the dew of heaven upon garden and landscape. They are, in fact, the results of the Divine influence which God the Holy Spirit bestows upon returning penitents. The imagery of the passage is borrowed from the vegetable kingdom, and reminds us of that of the Song of Solomon. The prophet employs a combination of emblems—the lily, the cedar, the olive, the corn-field, the vineyard, because it requires them all to furnish an adequate picture of the blessed outcome of religious revival. This representation shall yet be realized in the spiritual future of the Hebrew nation. "Ephraim," now so sadly blighted, shall be dowered with "double fruitfulness," and thus verify the presage of his ancient name (Gen. xli. 52). The promise is fulfilled also, even now, in the case of every Christian Church, and of every gracious heart, which "returns unto Jehovah," and receives a fresh baptism of his Spirit. The rich and blessed results of revival are—

I. GROWTH. "He shall grow as the lily" (ver. 5). There are various plants of the lily species found in Palestine which are remarkable, not only for their beauty, but for their rapid and luxuriant growth. The tall lilies, to whose brilliant colours the Lord Jesus pointed his disciples (Matt. vi. 28, 29), possess also much vitality and productiveness. So is it with the Church that has been watered with the copious dews of God's good Spirit. How rapidly the infant Church grew after the outpouring on the day of Pentecost! What multitudes turned to the Lord in the times of the Reformation! What numbers do still in every season of revival! And so also is it with the individual soul when the garden of its graces is daily wetted with the heavy heavenly dew. It makes rapid progress in its upward growth. Each of us may profitably ask himself, "Am I growing in grace? Are my Christian faith, and love, and patience, and diligence, and holy zeal larger than they were ten or twenty years ago?"

II. STRENGTH. He shall "strike his roots as Lebanon: his branches shall spread" (vers. 5, 6). The lily both grows and multiplies rapidly; but it is not an emblem of stability, for its stalk is frail and its root slender. To find an image of fixedness and forceful reserve, the prophet goes to the cedar of Lebanon. This tree is far-famed for its strength and stateliness. It is very deeply rooted; and from its main trunk numerous branches spread out horizontally, tier upon tier, until the diameter of the compass of ground which the tree covers is even greater than its height. In like

manner, spiritual solidity and expansiveness are secured by striking our roots well down into the hidden life of faith, and prayer, and communion with God, and fidelity to conscience. The moral robustness which is proof against whatever "tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the Word" (Matt. xiii. 21) is always the result of a deep sense of sin, a thorough apprehension of the gospel, and a profound love to the Saviour.

III. BEAUTY AND FRAGRANCE. "His beauty shall be as the olive tree" (ver. 6). There is doubtless a natural glory of its own in the slender grey-green foliage of the olive; but to the Oriental the attractiveness of this tree consists largely in its capacity of yielding that oily matter ("fatness," Judg. ix. 9) which is so essential to health in the dry and hot climate of the East. "His smell as Lebanon" (ver. 6); the reference being to the fresh breezes of the mountain, laden in early summer with the fragrance of the vines and the balsamic odour of the cedars and aromatic plants. "The scent thereof shall be as the wine of Lebanon" (ver. 7), which was celebrated for its fine flavour and its rich aroma. These emblems are suggestive of the beauty of holiness, and the fragrance which proceeds from the renewed heart and life. The Divine dew is sent to make one nature bloom as the lily, and to clothe another with verdure like the ever-green olive. It should impart to every child of God some healthful fragrance or sweetness of disposition which shall lead others to "take knowledge of him, that he has been with Jesus" (Ps. xlv. 8). How many Christians, unhappily, lack this blessed aroma! How many are morose and moody, rather than sunny and joyful; thereby giving countenance to the impression that religion is a melancholy thing, instead of being "cheerful as the day"!

IV. FRUITFULNESS. This is the most important of the results, and Hosea's mind dwells on it in vers. 7 and 8 as the prevailing thought of the passage. Fruitfulness is the ultimate test and the final end of every revival. In ver. 7 the restored Israelitish nation is spoken of as a widespreading tree, under whose grateful shadow its people also shall be individually restored from their backslidings. The corn "falls into the ground and dies," and may seem to be killed a second time by the storms of winter; but when spring comes it revives, and at length yields an abundant harvest. The vine, when its fruit-bearing branches have been carefully pruned, sprouts again with new vigour and bears choicer fruit. So is it with a Church or with an individual believer at the close of a long winter of declension, and after experience of the pruning-knife of affliction. With the blessed consciousness of sin forgiven, and of the restored favour of God, and under the fertilizing influence of the dew of the Holy Spirit, the revived Church ripens like a waving harvest-field, and hangs with luscious clusters like a fragrant vineyard. The purpose of the gift of Divine grace is fruit-bearing. The dew of the Spirit is sent with a view to "the fruit of the Spirit" (Gal. v. 22, 23). The scheme of redemption is God's plan for the promotion of morality. The Saviour says to his disciples, "I have chosen you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain." "Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit" (John xv. 8, 16). It is true, of course, that in different lives spiritual fruitfulness varies in character. One believer has the beauty of the lily; another, the stability of the cedar; a third, the fatness of the olive. But in the communion of the saints, and even within each separate Christian congregation, all the forms of strength, beauty, and usefulness should meet. A revived Church, watered with the Divine dew, should be garden, orchard, vineyard, fruitful field, and forest, all in one.

CONCLUSION. In ver. 8 Jehovah joyfully anticipates the permanence of Ephraim's reformation. He "hears" him resolving to put away idols for ever, and "observes" him bringing forth fruit meet for repentance. The backsliders have returned, and have repented *from* sin as well as *for* it. Those who were "joined to idols" are now joined to the Lord. And the Lord reminds them, in a closing word, that all their "springs" are in himself. Jehovah is "like a green cypress tree;" he is "the Tree of life," and the Giver of "fruit" to all who dwell under his shadow. May the good Lord incline our hearts also to abjure every idolatry, and to seek our "fruit" in himself only, that he may with joy address us as "Ephraim," because he finds in us "double fruitfulness"!—C. J.

Ver. 9.—*The epilogue.* With this weighty sentence the prophet seals up the written record of his life-message. As the foregoing chapters express the essence of Hosea's

public teaching during his prolonged ministry, this closing verse, in like manner, sets before us the quintessence of that written record. The conclusion "unspecializes the prophecy, as it were, and extracts the general moral lesson which underlies it all" (Cheyne). Two main points are suggested here for our consideration.

I. A SUMMARY OF THE PROPHET'S TEACHING. This is given in the second half of the verse. The Book of Hosea is full of precious instruction: 1. *About God.* That "the ways of Jehovah are right" is the sum of its theology. God's "ways" are to be understood to mean his dealings with men as the supreme moral Governor. And the prophet's aim in these pages is akin to that which Milton announces in the beginning of his great epic, viz. to "assert eternal Providence, and justify the ways of God to men." (1) *His ways in judgment are right.* "These things" cannot but include all the lamentations and chidings and announcements of punishment with which the book is so largely occupied. Ephraim had sinned against the voice of God's Law, against the assurances of his love, and even against the pleadings of his mercy; so the Lord could not be "unrighteous in taking vengeance," however dreadful and prolonged that vengeance might be. Hosea's message, on its side of sternness, announced that "righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne." God's ways are right in his dealings with every ungodly nation, despite all the difficulty and mystery which may gather round them. And his ways are right in his dealings with each individual transgressor, albeit that the reasons of his procedure may be "past finding out." The rectitude of the Divine ways is attested by experience; for, although they prove stumbling-blocks to the ungodly, "the just walk in them," and by-and-by arrive at "a city of habitation." To his own people Jehovah is "just," and the Justifier of him that believeth in Jesus. (2) *His ways in mercy are right.* If there be any book of Old Testament Scripture which exhibits the Divine grace and compassion, that book is Hosea. The strain of it is not ethical alone; it is evangelical also. The prophet represents the love of God as the fundamental ground of God's relations to his ancient people. Hosea conceives of Jehovah as Israel's Husband (ch. ii.) and Father (ch. xi.). But, as the prophet was persuaded that it was not wrong for himself to continue to love Gomer, his adulterous wife, and to yearn for the well-being of her children, when they followed in her evil ways,—so God's dealings in mercy towards apostate Israel, and towards sinners of the Gentiles, are right also. "Our book is, therefore, truly a classic for the right understanding of the Old Testament conception of God with its interaction of love and wrath, and of the nature of the Old Testament revelation concerning God. Only such a God who can be so angry and so loving, who in all his love so displays anger, and in all his anger so displays love, could give up his only begotten Son to the accursed death for the deliverance of rebellious man" (Lange). But the Book of Hosea is also full of teaching: 2. *About men.* It separates them into two classes,—"the just" or righteous, and "the transgressors;" those who "walk in" the Lord's ways, and those who "stumble thereon." In other words, this book deals with the great theme of spiritual apostasy and revival. (1) *Spiritual apostasy.* There are always many "transgressors," who, like Ephraim, stumble and fall in the right ways of the Lord. And this book is written to warn men against becoming such. Hosea points out the *earliest symptoms* of backsliding; *e.g.* the "morning-cloud goodness" (ch. vi. 4); the "grey hairs" (ch. vii. 9); the "removing of the bound" (ch. v. 10); the "forgetting of one's Maker" (ch. viii. 14); the "hiring of lovers" (ch. viii. 9), etc. He indicates its *further manifestations;* e.g. "counting God's Law a strange thing" (ch. viii. 12); "mixing among the people;" being like "a cake not turned" (ch. vii. 8); becoming "an empty vine" (ch. x. 1); "sowing the wind" (ch. viii. 7); "sinning more and more" (ch. xiii. 2), etc. And he warns against *ultimate results;* e.g. idols "broken in pieces" (ch. viii. 6); "the land mourning" (ch. iv. 3); "reaping the whirlwind" (ch. viii. 7); "joined to idols" (ch. iv. 17); "cast away by God" (ch. ix. 17), etc. (2) *Spiritual revival.* The prophet deals with this more pleasant side of his message in ch. ii. 14—23, vi. 1—3, and especially in ch. xiv. (For an outline of his teaching regarding the rise, progress, and fruits of revival, see the three preceding homilies.)

II. THE MORAL QUALIFICATION NECESSARY IF WE WOULD PROFIT BY THIS TEACHING. The student of Hosea, who desires to get at the mind of the Spirit contained in these oracles, must be "wise" and "prudent." The "just" or pious man "walks in the

Lord's ways;" and these ways require to be walked in to be understood. The "wisdom" which the prophet desiderates is not to be confounded with intellectual acuteness; it is a moral qualification. Here, as in the Book of Proverbs, and indeed throughout all Scripture, the "wise" are they whose souls have been enlightened by the Holy Spirit, and who have been brought into a right moral state in relation to Divine truth. The profound theology of Hosea, accordingly, will not be grasped by the man of merely intellectual discernment, or by any one who has only accumulated stores of human learning. Moral preparation is necessary in order to the reception and assimilation of spiritual truth. As the psalmist has it, "Light is sown for the righteous" (Ps. xcvii. 11). Or, as the Lord Jesus expressed the same thought, "If any man is willing to do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God" (John vii. 17). This experimental qualification is within every one's reach. The possession of it makes the simple-minded shepherd really wiser than the "undevout astronomer." Cowper's "cottager, who weaves at her own door," has it to the full; while "the brilliant Frenchman never knew" it. Only the right-hearted man will be habitually persuaded of the equity of the Divine government, both as regards judgment and mercy. Such a one has learned to "taste and see that the Lord is good." Correctness of conduct promotes correctness of creed, and helps to the proper understanding of God's ways. A man thinks rightly just to the extent of his living purely (Ps. cxi. 10). In our day, accordingly, one must be a believer in Christ and a follower of him if he would profit by the study of Hosea.

LESSONS. 1. What a commentary upon this verse is the whole history of the Hebrew nation, from the beginning until now! 2. Hosea's last word, like Holy Scripture everywhere, draws a sharp contrast between the righteous and the wicked. 3. Every man must make choice either of "walking in God's ways," or of "stumbling thereon." 4. The believer should derive comfort from this text in presence of the mysteries of Providence. 5. This final exhortation should come home to us with still greater power than it was fitted to do to Hosea's contemporaries; for, since he lived, the four great world-empires have successively fallen, the Jews remain scattered among the cities of the earth, the Lord Jesus Christ has been lifted up on the cross as an atonement for sin, and his gospel has been preached among the nations.—C. J.

Vers. 1, 2.—*God's message to the prodigal.* This chapter stands out in vivid contrast from much that precedes it. The denunciation of threats is over, and now Hosea turns to tender pleading with the godless. The change is like that which we see sometimes during a thunderstorm. The clouds gather, the wind sinks into a solemn silence, then the thunder rolls and crashes overhead, and men's hearts fail them for fear. But suddenly there is a lull, the clouds break, and, as a burst of sunshine lights up the earth, the rainbow of God's faithfulness and goodness is seen. With such a sudden and sublime transition does Hosea pass here from storm to calm, from denunciation to pleading. The prophet is addressing a nation which, as such, could not be saved. The kingdom of Israel was to be hopelessly destroyed. But the children were still "heirs of the promises," and, while the corporate society to which they belonged would be swept away, they themselves might return to their God. There is no nation so evil but that in it some may work righteousness, no family so godless but that some of its members may be loyal to Christ. Circumstances never necessitate the ruin of a soul. The desolation of society has been historically the means of saving what is best in it; *e.g.* if in the reign of Charles I. the unscrupulous Buckingham had been successful in his foreign policy, the result would have been the establishment of a tyranny in England. Our national defeats just then were the cause of our constitutional salvation; men being roused to a consciousness of wrong-doing by the consequences of wrong-doing. So with Israel. The destruction of Israel seemed to the heathen the failure of Jehovah's purpose; but it was the means of salvation to many who heard and obeyed in the misery of exile, as they would not have heard and obeyed in prosperity, the exhortation, "O Israel, return unto the Lord." A world-wide truth was taught by our Lord when he described the prodigal as thinking of the father's home, when he "had spent all," and famine was in the land, so that "he began to be in want." Our text is God's message to such a one.

I. THE CONDITION OF THE SINNER. 1. *A condition of estrangement.* Implied in

"return." Of those addressed by Hosea, some had once joined in Jehovah's worship, but had forsaken it, while others had been taken as children to the altars of idols. These two classes are represented still. There are those who have never known God; to them he is no more than the emperor of a distant land might be, the ruler of others, one to be heard and read of, but nothing more. There are also those whose hearts were once tender, who were nominally on the side of the Church, to whom the Lord says, "I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love." Apply the text to each. 2. *A condition of moral degradation.* "Fallen." (1) *Godlessness is itself an inward degradation.* The godless man has "fallen" below what he might have been, as a ruler of himself and a worshipper of God. He has fallen from the likeness and from the favour of God. (2) *It leads to moral degradation;* so that ultimately courage, purity, and reverence in the outward life disappear. "Iniquity," *i.e.* an inward tendency to evil, does for the character what the sea does for the cliff, undermining it secretly, till unexpectedly it falls. 3. *A condition of self-destructiveness.* "*Thine* iniquity." Not Adam's transgression, not thy father's neglect or evil example, not the associations of life, but "thine own iniquity," ruins thee. Therefore, with a sense of weakness and guilt, let us return to the Lord, saying, "*I* have sinned against Heaven," etc.; "God be merciful to *me* a sinner."

II. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF HIS RETURN. 1. *Sincerity, or thoroughness.* The Pharisees were condemned for want of it. All are rejected of whom God can say, "This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth; . . . but their heart is far from me." The Hebrew signifies, "Return right up to thy God." You are not to stop at self-reformation or at sentimental feeling, but to return "right up to" God, and stand face to face with him. To be nearly saved is to be altogether lost. 2. *Confession.* "Take with you words." Words are cheap enough. It is well that no costly sacrifice is required, but only "words," which the poorest and most illiterate can utter. Words are worthless in themselves, but they have true value when they come from an honest and good heart. If a child who has done wrong is shut up alone to think over his fault, he knows that all he has to say is, "I'm sorry." It is easy enough to say the words; yet he sits there, proud and defiant, until better thoughts come to him; and when at last he falters out "I'm sorry," it is enough to win him reconciliation. The "words" are nothing, but they mean much, for they involve self-conquest and humiliation. That is the meaning of the exhortation to the penitent. "Take with you words." 3. *Entreaty.* (1) "*Take away all iniquity.*" This implies that only God can do so. The prayer involves much. We want not only the consciousness of sin or the punishment of sin removed, but the "iniquity" itself taken away. The true penitent does not say, "Take away the sins that disgrace me, but spare those by which I make money," or, "Destroy my lusts, but let ambition and pride remain." Popular sins, pet sins, as well as vile sins, are included in the words, "Take away *all* iniquity." (2) "*And receive us graciously;*" literally, "receive good." The "good" we offer God comes from himself, so that we must say of all right desire and true thought and Christian service, "Of thine own have we given thee." He can only cast out evil by pouring in good. He leaves no heart empty, but gives the new love to keep out, as well as to cast out, the old. Yet even the good he gives is so affected by our imperfections that, casting ourselves upon his condescension and mercy, we need to pray, "Receive good." 4. *Resolve:* (1) *To have done with the old sins.* "Asshur shall not save us," etc. This is an abjuration of Israel's three sins: (*a*) trust in man (Asshur); (*b*) trust in self (horses, equivalent to military power); (*c*) trust in idols. These have their modern counterparts, when we trust (*a*) in the influence of others to get us on in life; (*b*) in our physical or intellectual power; (*c*) in our wealth and position, instead of in God. (2) *To offer perpetual thanksgiving.* "So will we render the calves of our lips." The meaning of the phrase is—when we have received pardon and conquest of sin, "we will praise thee with joyful lips." What more *noble* than praise, such as the redeemed render! what more *natural*, when we remember the goodness of God! what more *helpful* to others than the songs which of old caused the glory of God to fill the house of the Lord! "It is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord," etc.

III. THE ENCOURAGEMENT TO HIS OBEDIENCE. 1. *It is found in the fatherliness of God.* Ver. 3: "For in thee the fatherless findeth mercy." He is "thy God," to whom thou owest obedience; who has girded thee, though thou hast not known him;

and who now sees thee a great way off, and has compassion on thee. When the dove found no rest for her foot in a dark and desolate world, she returned to the ark; nor had she to flutter outside it in vain. Noah saw her, and put out his hand and "took her in unto him into the ark." If Noah did that for a poor tired bird, what will not God do for his own tired child? 2. *They are found in the promises of God.* Ver. 4: "I will heal their backsliding," etc. He pledges himself to cure our waywardness and fickleness, and he is faithful. Therefore, though a good reputation has been lost, a pious ancestry disgraced, and holy promises broken, yet be encouraged to obey the loving exhortation, "O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God."—A. R.

Ver. 5.—*The heavenly dewfall.* The former part of the chapter describes the experience through which a Church or a soul must pass before the fulfilment of this promise. The repentance, the vows, the hopes of the penitent are here crowned by Divine goodness. With a startling and sudden transition, in the fourth verse, Jehovah is represented as interposing amidst the prayers of those returning to him. So our Lord describes the father as unable to listen to the close of the prodigal's confession, before he breaks forth in a gush of generous pardon and blessing. How encouraging the truth this suggests for all who turn to God! We accept our text as a figurative description of the revivifying and beautifying influence of the Holy Spirit upon the human heart. Let us notice, therefore, some of the characteristics of the dew.

I. DEW IS UNSEEN IN ITS COMING. We see its effects when every leaf and flower glitters in the early sunshine; but the dew came unperceived, when darkness was over the earth. 1. *Probably the most powerful forces are those which are unseen.* The noblest part of man is hidden from human gaze, and of him who is the directing Power of the universe it is said, "No man hath seen God at any time." If it be argued that because God is, and always has been invisible, he must be non-existent; it may also be argued that the conscious ego does not exist, because it has never been seen. It is true that no research or analysis in the natural world has discovered God; it is equally true that no investigation of the human body, living or dead, has ever revealed the subtle consciousness of whose existence each man is, however, certain. Both are beyond the range of experimental science. We do not know how the Spirit of God affects us; we cannot discover the nexus by means of which holy thoughts and impulses from above becomes ours, yet we are confident that they are of God and not of us. In our holiest and best hours the Holy Spirit comes to us, but secretly, "as the dew lighteth upon the grass." 2. *The evidence of the work of the Spirit is to be found in its effects; e.g.* the conversion of Saul of Tarsus; the profound teaching of the unscholarly writers of Holy Scripture; the triumph of Christianity through the influence of such men as were its first representatives; the moral transformation of some we ourselves have seen. One example of genuine conversion will do more to prove the work of the Spirit than all the tomes of theology ever written.

II. DEW IS SILENT IN ITS FALL. We can hear the pattering of rain or the rippling of streams, but the dewfall does not disturb an insect's sleep. 1. *The Church, as well as the world, depends too often on noise and bustle,* as the signs or the causes of success. The preacher whose eloquence attracts the multitude, around whom are clustered societies and organizations to do all manner of work, is not always the man most richly blessed of God. Be that as it may, the signs that the work is of God are to be found, not in the outward, but in the inward—in truer thoughts of sin and holiness, in a loftier standard of Christian integrity, in the generosity and self-sacrifice of Christ's disciples, in the purity and love which are being silently inwrought by the power of the Holy Ghost. Hence we should be slow to measure success in our own efforts or those of others. 2. *As a rule, spiritual blessing is richest when outward joy is least.* The dew falls not during sunshine, but in the night. Note the spiritual richness and power of the Church in times of persecution. Refer to the development of Christian faith, peace, hope, devoutness, in the dark seasons of affliction. The world must be hushed that we may hear God's voice. Earth must be darkened before the dew of heavenly blessing falls.

III. DEW IS REVIVING IN ITS INFLUENCE. We see nothing comparable to that with which Hosea was familiar, living as he did in a land where no rain fell for months together, and where the withholding of dew meant the death of vegetation. Without

it corn would not reach maturity, and olives and vines and fig trees would yield no fruit. A more terrible curse than that pronounced by Elijah in Ahab's reign could not have been inflicted. Christ Jesus foresaw the dearth of comfort and hope and energy which would prevail in his Church if his disciples were left to themselves. Hence he gave the promise of the Comforter, whom he would send from the Father, to lead his disciples into all truth, and to convince the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment. The garden, glittering and beautiful after its dewy baptism, may illustrate such spiritual refreshment as we see in Peter coming from the upper room at Pentecost, or in John rejoicing even in the exile of Patmos. What are the graces and gifts—the fruits of the Spirit in us, which need the heavenly benediction? Whence their impoverishment? Where their source of revival? "Ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full."

IV. DEW IS REPEATED AND ABUNDANT IN ITS FALL. Its departure, as well as its coming, is rapid and secret. Hence Hosea elsewhere uses it as an illustration of transient religious feeling. To give a dewfall once in a season would be of little use. 1. *It comes night after night, and this is in accordance with the Divine method.* Thus God gave the manna, which could not be hoarded or stored up for future use. By this means the people learnt their constant dependence on God. Still we are taught to pray, "Give us this day our daily bread"—a prayer which includes spiritual as well as temporal sustenance. Israel could not live on yesterday's manna. You cannot live on the relics of your old faith. Your character will break down if it rests on the memory of your past experience. The feeling aroused when you first thought of God was enough to *bring* you to him, but not enough to *keep* you near him. The prayer which brought pardon must be daily repeated for purification from sin. And in our weakness this is necessary, lest we should lapse into a prayerless life, and go on our way in a spirit of presumptuous self-dependence. 2. *It is not that God cannot give grace abundantly*, or that he willingly withholds from the feeblest and most worthless what they want and can receive. He does not stint the world of dew. The humblest flower has its drop; unsightly things are baptized with that blessing; the rough bracken shares it equally with the rose, and the tiny flower on the window-sill of the pauper is as much blessed as the garden of the peer. Free to all, it is a fit emblem of the fulness of the Holy Spirit which God will in nowise withhold from him who seeks. "I will be as the dew unto Israel."

CONCLUSION. *If God is prepared to give, are we prepared to receive?* Let us not make a mistake about the Holy Spirit similar to that which men formerly made about the dew, which represents him. They supposed that the moon and planets poured it down upon the earth, regardless of its condition. But at the beginning of this century, Dr. Wells, by three years' experiments, established the theory which, as Dr. Tyndall says, "has stood the test of all subsequent criticism, and is now universally accepted." It was demonstrated, in short, that dew was not dependent on the condition of the heavens only, but on the condition of the earth; ay, and of the various things upon the earth. It was shown that the aqueous vapour condenses on things which are cooled by the radiation of their own heat, and on those only; so that if anything, a cloud, for example, comes between them and heaven, which prevents the giving off of their heat, the dew does not come; or, if they do not themselves freely give off their heat, though all around are blessed, they are not. Carry the thought into the higher sphere of which we have spoken. If there be no outgoing of warm earnest desire on your part, if there be not an honest putting away of any cloud, be it of doubt or of sin, which lies between your soul and heaven, though others may be blessed, you will fail to receive the fulfilment of the promise, "I will be as the dew unto Israel."—A. R.

Vers. 5, 6.—*The bedewed Church.* This is a description of the condition of a Church which has received the fulfilment of the promise, "I will be as the dew unto Israel." Its blessedness is so full and so varied in its manifestations that no one emblem would suffice to represent it. Hence the text is crowded with imagery. The bedewed Church has these characteristics.

I. GROWTH. "He shall grow as the lily." 1. *This presupposes life.* A lifeless log would not grow, however rich the soil, favourable the season, abundant the sunshine and dew; but if these conditions be given to a lily bulb, though it be unsightly in

appearance and deeply buried in the earth, it must grow, because it lives. No Church can expect the blessedness described in the text unless it is living, consisting of those who have more than a name to live, whose consciousness of God's presence and devotion to his service prove that they have passed from death unto life. 2. *This indicates multiplication.* A lily multiplies itself, and so foot by foot conquers the soil about it. Similar extension is a sign of vitality in a Church; for if the life of Christ be in it, it will never be self-absorbed, content with enjoyment, or even with self-culture, but will propagate itself in the waste places around. 3. *It implies variety.* The lily genus contains an unusual variety of species. Sometimes a single scale will produce a new plant. Some lilies are stately, others lowly; some grow in heat, others spread their broad leaves over the surface of a quiet pool. Far greater varieties are seen in the forms in which Divine life displays itself to the world. Some Churches are ornate in their acts of worship, others stern in their simplicity; some lay stress on accurate definitions of theology, others on the human side of their mission, etc. Yet all these but imperfectly represent the fulness of Divine life which was in Christ. These are not antagonistic forms of life, but imperfect developments of the one life. 4. *It suggests purity.* All Churches are agreed in seeking this which the lily so often represents. "The pure in heart shall see God," and "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord." Happy is it for men that "the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth from all sin."

II. STABILITY. "He shall . . . cast forth his roots as Lebanon." The lily grows fast, but is fragile; indeed, stability is seldom reached rapidly in nature. The succulent plant, which swiftly reaches maturity, is killed by the first frost; but the oak, which wrestles with the wind and laughs at the storm, is the growth of years or centuries. In the spiritual sphere, however, God can create a Church swiftly, whose beauty is not transient: "It grows as the lily, but cast forth its roots as Lebanon." The allusion is, not to the cedars of Lebanon, but to Lebanon itself. Standing on the summit of that mountain range, you see below you blooming flowers, solemn cedars, here a patch of waving corn and there a terraced vineyard, here a quiet dell and there a busy village. These change, but Lebanon abides; for it sends out its rocky ridges, like giant roots, down deep beneath the distant sea. That is Hosea's emblem of the stability of the Church, of which Christ said, "The gates of hell shall not prevail against it." The outward forms of Christian life may change, but Christ the Son of God, the one Hope of humanity, the one true King of the world, is rooted deep in the hearts of men, and the purpose of God and "his kingdom is that which shall never be destroyed."

III. EXTENSION. "His branches shall spread." No man can *be* good without doing good. If he has high moral tone, intense spiritual earnestness, strong, deep-rooted convictions, an attractive Christ-like character, his influence will spread in spite of himself—over his home and business relationships. This power is quite distinct from social or intellectual influence, and may exist without it. Hence it is that the rough-handed fishermen of a despised country are swaying the destinies of the world. "I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me." Show how far-reaching is the quiet influence of a Christian mother, whose only sphere of activity is her own home. Note: Influence is not less because it is morally bad. Not only do the branches of the cedar spread, but also the branches of the upas tree, whose shadow is deadly. God forbid that the extension of our influence should prove the extension of our evil-doing, and therefore of our retribution!

IV. BEAUTY. "His beauty shall be as the olive tree." No tree in Palestine was more valuable than the olive. Its oil was used as food, was poured on sacrifices, was employed in the coronation of the king, and afforded sustenance for light. No wonder it is so often used in Scripture as an emblem of prosperity. Here, probably, the reference is to the *abiding beauty* of the character created by God's Spirit—the olive being evergreen, as beautiful in winter as in summer. In natural disposition we often see gaiety and pleasantness supplanted by moroseness and irritability, when the experience of life has been bitter. But we have seen Christians whose luxurious home has been exchanged for straitened circumstances, whose vigorous health has failed, whose family circle has been broken up; and yet, in thankfulness for what is left, in serenity of spirit, in trustfulness for the future, we see the unfading beauty of the olive. "He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season: his leaf also shall not wither."

V. ATTRACTIVENESS. "His smell as Lebanon." In the valley between the two ranges of Lebanon, aromatic plants abound; myrtle and lavender and sweet-smelling reeds send forth delicious fragrance, and every passing breeze is perfumed and carries over the world a message concerning the tender mercy of God. It was with some thought of this that the Church is represented as praying, "Awake, O north wind; and come, thou south; and blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out." Doubtless the graces of the Spirit are signified in that verse and in this, but the reference is chiefly to the diffusive influence of *love*, the greatest yet the quietest moral power we know. There is, unhappily, in the spiritual world, as in the physical, a beauty that is cold and almost repellant. There are Churches and Christians whose intellectual culture and social respectability none would dispute, but they are the last in the world to whom the troubled, the sinful, the sceptical, would turn for sympathy. They are deep-rooted as Lebanon, pure as the lily, but they have none of the smell of Lebanon, and do not bewray themselves and attract others by their sweetness. We cannot do Christ's work without his Spirit, without revealing sympathy and love like his. If we are to have any power for him, it must be spiritual power. If we are to lay hold of men and save them, it must be by the arms of brotherly love. "Let the *beauty* of the Lord our God be upon us: and establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it!"—A. R.

Vers. 1, 2.—*Counsels to the sinful.* It was the office of the prophet to be faithful at once with man and with God. He was bound not to flatter man, not to conceal or palliate human sins. At the same time, it was his to declare the whole counsel of God as the Ruler of all men, the Judge of the obdurate, the Healer of the penitent.

I. A REMINDER OF THE FALL. The Book of Hosea's prophecies is full of reproaches and expostulations addressed to backsliding, idolatrous Israel. The people are charged with iniquity, and they are put in mind of the "fall" into which their ungodliness has brought them. As surely as men wander from the ways of God into the ways of error, unrighteousness, and folly, so surely do they, sooner or later, meet with a fall. It is a plain truth that the godly stand upright. Under a Divine and righteous rule it cannot be well with those who neglect and despise the moral law. Our first parents "fell" by sin, and in this they furnished an exemplification of the consequences of disobedience as a lesson to their posterity.

II. AN ENCOURAGEMENT TO REPENTANCE. In the very language used in this expostulation and entreaty there is much to cheer and to justify the approach of the penitent sinner unto God. 1. There is the designation "Israel," the use of which seems a reminder of the Divine favour. 2. There is the appellation given to Jehovah—"the Lord *thy* God;" thine, even though thou hast shown thyself so insensible and so ungrateful. 3. There is the term which the counsellor employs—"turn," "return," unto the Lord, implying that the right and proper path is Godward, that to have forsaken that path was deviation and error, that steps must be retraced. What stress is laid in Scripture upon sincere repentance and conversion—upon the turning of the soul unto him against whom sin has been committed, needs not to be shown; yet the sinful need that such directions should be repeated, both to preserve them from any other and any false way, and to encourage diffident and desponding souls in their access to God.

III. A DIRECTION TO CONFESSION AND ENTREATY. "Take with you words." 1. This is an encouragement to the expression and outpouring of the feelings of the heart. Mere words, that is, meaningless and insincere words, are vain; but words which are the utterance of a penitent and lowly soul, are acceptable. 2. Words should utter the self-abasement which is the sinner's proper attitude of heart before a righteous Lord. Confession is indispensable; for only the hardened and insensible can withhold it. 3. Words should plead for pardon and acceptance. The prophet himself puts such language into Israel's lips, and at the same time represents the willingness of an offended God graciously to hear and royally to answer.

APPLICATION. To show what light is furnished by the gospel of Christ to make evident alike the sinner's condition and also the grounds and assurance of Divine favour and forgiveness.—T.

Vers. 2, 3.—*The supplication and the vow.* Words alone are vain. Yet, in the

order of nature, words are the expression of thought and sentiment and resolve. Especially must words uttered to Heaven be sincere and truthful; for he is the Searcher of hearts, whose favour the sinner beseeches with contrition and with confidence. Let it, then, be understood that the words here suggested as suitable for the repenting sinner's address to God are the utterance of deep emotion and sincere resolution.

I. PENITENT CONFESSION. Israel acknowledges that there has been misplaced confidence. She has trusted in alliances with Assyria, in military resources, in the vain aid of the idols of the surrounding idolaters. In all this she has been her own enemy, and has been proving her own folly. The confession, which is the indispensable condition to acceptance, is here made.

II. REPENTANCE AND RESOLVE. Israel not only sees the fact and feels the reproach concerning herself; she resolves upon a change—a turning from human aid and an abandonment of self-confidence. Apart from this there is no hope of a safer way, a better life.

III. ENTREATY FOR FORGIVENESS AND ACCEPTANCE. Israel loathes her sin, and desires that both the sin and its consequences should be removed. Israel is weary of enmity with God, and desires that there may be peace, that she may be accepted and dealt with in grace and love.

IV. THE SUPPLIANT'S VOW. It has ever been characteristic of human nature to deal with the higher Power as though that power were human, and to be appeased with offerings and with promises of service. Vows have been and still are made under the influence of this superstitious belief. Yet this is no argument against such vows as that here put into the lips of Israel: "So will we render the calves of our lips." Sacrifices of obedience and of praise are just on the part of man, and are acceptable to God. None who is graciously pardoned and accepted can withhold this tribute. There have doubtless been those who, in their ignorance and unspirituality, have hoped to bribe Deity with the proffer of their praises. But none the less does it become the pardoned penitent to express his gratitude to him who is plenteous in forgiveness.—T.

Ver. 3.—"*The fatherless findeth mercy.*" The sorrows of human life are many, and some of them are, by us, largely inexplicable. The relation of father and son is an obvious provision of Divine wisdom and goodness, and beautifully symbolizes the relation between God and his dependent children. Yet there are the fatherless, deprived of the care and protection so urgently needed. Why should it be permitted that any should be placed in a position so painful and pitiable? We cannot tell. Still the case of such furnishes an opportunity for the intervention of him who is the Father of the fatherless.

I. WHAT THE FATHERLESS NEED. To understand this we must consider: 1. *Of what they are deprived.* They are without a father's kindness, wisdom, and bounty. 2. *To what they are exposed.* How many are the ills which befall the orphan! He is exposed to neglect; poverty may prevent his enjoyment of a suitable nurture and education. He is exposed to injustice and wrong. If he has property, he is liable to the cupidity of a selfish guardian. He is exposed to actual ill treatment. The cruel may take advantage of his defenceless position to treat him with violence for which there is little or no redress.

II. WHAT THE FATHERLESS FIND. They may look for help to man, and look in vain. But in God the fatherless findeth mercy. That which is denied by earth is accorded by Heaven. 1. God raises up friends who, to some extent, take the father's place. Pity leads Christians to adopt orphans into their own families, or to found asylums where they can enjoy the blessings of kind supervision and liberal education. 2. God, in his providence, opens up before the fatherless careers of usefulness and honour in life. How many orphans have occupied distinguished and serviceable positions in society! It is by the mercy of God that what, from a human point of view, seemed so unlikely, has come to pass. 3. God, by his Word and his Spirit, often reveals to the fatherless the riches of his own fatherly love. In him are compassion and affection deeper and vaster than a human heart can know. He dries the orphan's tears, supplies the orphan's wants, and enriches the orphan's nature with the treasures of his grace and love.—T.

Ver. 4.—*Gracious assurances.* As the father was forward to meet and to welcome

the returning prodigal, so our heavenly Father is ever anxious and ready to console and to restore the wandering sinner who repents, confesses, and deplores his transgressions, and casts himself upon Divine compassion. The assurances of this verse must have been comforting to Israel; they have been comforting to multitudes who have sought in the Word of God some consolation for their burdened and penitent spirits.

I. DIVINE ANGER IS AVERTED. 1. The displeasure of God with sin and with the sinner is a fact in the moral government of the universe which it would be folly to overlook. God is angry, *i.e.* with the wicked, every day. 2. Yet God delights not in wrath, but in mercy. Hence the provision in the gospel of redemption from the curse of the Law. It is not by any interposition from without; it is by the exercise of his own wisdom and clemency, that the great Judge of all lays aside his anger. The penitent and believing sinner is the object of the compassion of a God of righteousness and love.

II. HUMAN DEFECTION AND DISOBEDIENCE ARE OVERLOOKED AND FORGIVEN. "Backsliding" is an expression which implies that privileges and blessings have in the past been enjoyed, but then misused. Such was the case with Israel; the sin was the greater because it was sin against light and knowledge, against favour and forbearance. The grace of God is sufficient now, as in the olden times, to deal with cases of defection and apostasy. These are regarded as malignant spiritual diseases; but they are not beyond the healing power of the great Physician. The virtue of the Saviour's blood, the efficacy of the Spirit's purifying energy, are sufficient even for a case apparently so hard and hopeless as this supposed. None need despair who "truly repents, and unfeignedly believes Christ's holy gospel."

III. THE LOVE OF GOD ENRICHES HEARTS LONG AND PAINFULLY ESTRANGED. The promise here uttered is beyond our highest expectations. Forbearance and forgiveness do not, among men, necessarily imply the bestowal of friendship, of love. But God's ways are not our ways. He is not satisfied simply to annul a sentence of condemnation, to remit a merited penalty. He reveals the tenderness of a fatherly heart rejoicing over the restoration of those long alienated. He completes the work of recovery by manifesting his love towards those whom he pardons and accepts. The freedom and generosity of this Divine love are specially mentioned; and may well awaken the wonder and admiration of the ransomed and restored.

APPLICATION. What gratitude, affection, and devotion are due from pardoned and accepted sinners towards him who is not satisfied merely to heal, but who condescends to love!—T.

Vers. 5—7.—*National prosperity.* The prospect of Israel's repentance and reformation fills the mind of the prophet with a happy exultation, and suggests imagery of the most beautiful and vivacious description. The poetical allusions crowd in upon his mind and flow from his pen with a harmonious prodigality. Reading this passage, we are transported in imagination into the scenes of verdure, fragrance, and fruitfulness, which furnished Hosea with the lively emblems of that national prosperity which he was inspired to anticipate with patriotic confidence and hope. There rise before our vision the cedar-glades of Lebanon, the flowery slopes of Carmel, the yellow corn-fields of Bethlehem, the gray and unchanging olive-yards of Judæa. All are too faint to depict the glorious vision—a vision which surely no material prosperity can realize, upon which no earthly day shall ever dawn.

I. THE SOURCE OF LIFE AND PROSPERITY. "I will be as the dew unto Israel." As the sweetly tempered elements are the source of life and growth, of beauty and fertility, in field and garden and forest; so only Heaven's favour, "the continual dew of God's blessing," can give rise to true national greatness, to the growth of a noble patriotism, a disinterested virtue, a general prevalence of piety. A blessed promise is this of showers of blessing, of heavenly nurture, of abundant grace.

II. THE SIGNS OF VITALITY AND PROSPERITY. We notice here figurative descriptions of: 1. *Life.* The several productions of the vegetable kingdom are laid, so to speak, under tribute, and are constrained to set forth the true and higher life of the individual man, and especially of society, of nations. The olive and the vine, the cedar tree and the luxuriant corn are all the signs of the vitality and prodigality of nature. Many and varied are the forms in which life manifests its presence and its activity. When

nations rise from calamity and chastisement, when public spirit springs into being, when the arts and industries of society are vigorous and prosperous, when justice and mutual consideration prevail, when the poor are cared for, when piety assumes practical and beneficent forms,—there is life. 2. *Growth.* Steady and vigorous growth is the result of genial influences acting upon life. Declension is the precursor of death. As surely as the tree lives and thrives, it spreads; as surely as the seed is sown in a fruitful soil, the crop, by its abundance, rewards the labourer's toil. Emblematic of the extension of the people who are filled with a true national life, in whom the Spirit of God lives and moves, and in whose midst the Church is not a dead organism, but an organism which is the vesture and embodiment of a spiritual and imperishable life. 3. *Beauty and attractiveness.* The Author of nature, the Giver of life, has ordered that beauty and fragrance shall accompany the vital growth—that the cedar shall be stately and the olive evergreen, that the vine shall cling with grace around the elm, that the fragrance of the lily shall delight the sense, that the corn shall wave in beauty and rustle with music in the passing breeze. And the same Being appoints that, in the moral realm, true excellence and true attractiveness shall be conjoined. The beauty of holiness, the harmonies of praise, the fragrance of piety, are signs and ornaments of spiritual life. Where these graces abound, the world will feel the spiritual magnetism of the Church. "They shall come again who dwell under his shadow."—T.

Ver. 8.—*Idolatry abjured.* This is the language of sincere repentance. The state of mind here revealed is decisively acceptable to God, and is the earnest and promise of better days. It is a sign of the Spirit's gracious working in the heart that every rival to God's dominion is forsaken and abjured.

I. THE EXPERIENCE THAT LEADS TO THIS RESOLUTION. 1. Disappointment in the service of others than the true God. Israel had addicted herself to strange gods, only to learn that all the flattering promises of their priests and ministers were delusive and vain. And whatever deity man has set before himself, as worthy of the homage and service due to God alone, it may be confidently asserted that such a rival has failed to answer prayer, to fulfil hope, to satisfy the heart. 2. Chastisement on the part of Divine Providence. As long as there is a Supreme Ruler, let men be assured he will not suffer his prerogatives to be invaded without inflicting the righteous penalties due to disobedience and defiance. Israel learned by bitter experience that Jehovah would tolerate no rival; and every generation of sinners has been taught the same lesson. "The way of trangressors is hard." Happy they who, through however painful an experience, have, nevertheless, come to see and feel that to have aught to do with idols is to involve themselves in distress and misery!

II. THE RESULTS THAT FLOW FROM THIS RESOLUTION. 1. When the soul abjures the objects of a foolish affection and devotion, Divine forgiveness and favour are waiting to restore and comfort it. The soul that is without idols shall not be left without God. 2. The rivals to the true worship and service shall lose their charms, and the soul shall wonder how it could have been captivated and enthralled. 3. A full and eternal satisfaction shall take possession of the nature which turns away from idols with abhorrence, and turns confidingly and devoutly unto God. What the false deities were powerless to bestow, the living God confers in perfect completeness. "His loving-kindness is better than life."—T.

Ver. 9.—*Wisdom and righteousness.* The book of Hosea's prophecies closes with a solemn statement of human freedom and human responsibility. God's mind and will are revealed, but the prophet gives all concerned to understand that the revelation alone is insufficient. Let men observe that it depends upon the spirit in which they receive it, and the action which they take upon it, that all its benefit and advantage depend.

I. DIVINE REVELATION CALLS FOR THE EXERCISE OF HUMAN WISDOM. The praise of folly, which some religionists account a proper part of piety, has no countenance in Scripture. The wise man is the good man; and his wisdom is apparent in his acceptance of Divine counsels and his submission to Divine appointments. The faculty of understanding has been implanted by the Creator, and the due exercise of that faculty is honourable to God. Human wisdom may be misdirected; but human ignorance and imprudence are far more likely to lead men astray. What is needed is a more active

exercise of all the powers of the mind; sloth is of all things the most disastrous. On the whole, to know what wise and great men have thought is an advantage to the religious inquirer; a comparison of inspired with uninspired wisdom is likely to lead men into the paths of true and Divine wisdom.

II. DIVINE REVELATION CALLS FOR THE EXERCISE OF RIGHTEOUS OBEDIENCE. Man is not a purely speculative being; he is eminently practical, and knowledge of the truth answers the intended purpose when it leads to the love and practice of rectitude. That abandoned sinners have been converted is true and is ground for rejoicing; that correctness of outward conduct has sometimes stood in the way of a spiritual life is also sadly undeniable. Yet the just are likely to long for a higher righteousness. To admire and to aspire to goodness is to be in the way for the perfect satisfaction which attends those who walk "in the ways of the Lord." These ways are right. And it is hypocrisy to profess to know the revelation of God unless we accept its practical precepts, and make the Scriptures the lamp of our feet and the light of our path. They are truly wise who understand and know God's declarations, and they are truly just who walk in his ways.—T.

Vers. 1—7.—*Repentance, or reformation.* "O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God," etc. "After the prophet has set before the sinful nation in various ways its own guilt, and the punishment that awaits it, viz. the destruction of the kingdom, he concludes his addresses with a call to thorough conversion to the Lord, and the promise that the Lord will bestow his grace once more upon those who turn to him, and will bless them abundantly" (Delitzsch). The subject of these words is—*Repentance; or, the greatest reformation.* Reformation is a subject on which men are never tired of talking: it is the grand text of the demagogue, as well as the leading purpose of the philanthropist. There are various kinds of reformation. There is the *doctrinal* reformation—reformation in creed, the renunciation of one set of opinions and the adoption of another. There is the *institutional* reformation—reformation in political, in ecclesiastical, and in social laws. There is the reformation in *external character*—involving the renunciation of old habits and the formation of new ones. But all such reformations are of little, if any worth, apart from the *moral* reformation—a reformation in the leading spirit and controlling dispositions of the soul, a reformation involving a thorough change of heart. This is the only reformation worth working for. In these verses we have several things worth notice in relation to it.

I. ITS NATURE AND METHOD INDICATED. 1. *Its nature.* "O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God." The description contained in the first and third verses of this reformation implies three things. (1) That the *soul is away from God.* Truly the moral heart of humanity is far gone from the great Father. The souls of men are in the "far country" of sin. "Fallen by thine iniquity." It has gone down from the high hills of spiritual purity and Divine communion. (2) *The renunciation of all dependence upon creatures.* "Asshur shall not save us; we will not ride upon horses." This means—We will not trust to Asshur—that is, Assyria—for help. Nor will we ride upon horses—court friendship with Egypt from whence they are fetched. When danger comes, we will trust in God, and him only. Moral reformation involves all this. All dependence on anything short of God for salvation is given up—science, philosophy, ritualism, priesthood, shall not save us. (3) *Utter abandonment of all idols.* "Neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, Ye are our gods. For in thee the fatherless findeth mercy." 2. *Its method.* "Take with you words, and turn to the Lord." Why take words to God? (1) Not because words can inform him of anything of which he is ignorant. With words we enlighten men; but Omniscience knows all connected with us—all that we *are, have been,* and *shall be,* through all the ages of the future. (2) Not because words can induce him to be more kind to us than he is. With words we persuade men to grant us our requests; but our words can never dispose him to do what he has not been always ready to accomplish. Words can never make him more kind and merciful than he has ever been. Why, then, use words? Because words relieve our own spirits; words aid our own devotions. This, then, is the method—go to God at once, and pour out your souls before him. Before him resolve, "So will we render the calves of our lips." And before him *pray.* Pray for two things. (*a*) His *forgiveness.* "Take away all sin." (*b*) His *acceptance.* "Receive us graciously."

II. ITS CAUSE AND BLESSEDNESS SPECIFIED. 1. *Its cause.* God. "I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely. . . . I will be as the dew." All reformation is brought about by his agency. I will act upon the soul *silently, penetratingly, revivifyingly,* "as the dew." All true reformation brings with it God's silent but effective agency. 2. *Its blessedness.* (1) *Health.* "I will heal their backsliding." The soul is diseased. God is its great Physician. (2) *Divine favour.* "I will love them freely: for mine anger is turned away from him." The anger with which their guilty consciences invested him is removed as a thick cloud from the sky of their soul, and it glows in the sunshine of their love. (3) *Growth.* "He shall grow as the lily." (*a*) The growth is connected with *beauty.* Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like it. (*b*) Its growth is connected with *strength.* "Cast forth his roots as Lebanon." How deeply did the roots of the cedar in Lebanon strike into the earth! and how firm their grasp! The storms of centuries could not remove them. (*c*) Its growth is connected with *expansiveness.* "His branches shall spread." Widely grew the branches of those old cedars, offering to the traveller a cooling shade from the sun and a shelter from the tempest. How a divinely formed soul expands! It outgrows the boundaries of sects and the limits of creeds. Its sympathies become world-wide. (*d*) Its growth is connected with *fragrance.* "His beauty shall be as the olive tree, and his smell as Lebanon." Sweet was the aroma that was swept by the wind over those old hills. How delectable the fragrance of a holy life! (*e*) Its growth is connected with *social usefulness.* It shall offer *protection* to men. "They that dwell under his shadow shall return." Where can we flee in distress but to the sympathy and love of the good? Not only protection, but beneficent *progress.* "They shall revive as the corn, and grow as the vine."—D. T.

Ver. 8.—*God and his reformed people.* "Ephraim shall say, What have I to do any more with idols? I have heard him, and observed him: I am like a green fir tree. From me is thy fruit found." Some think that this is a dialogistic parallel as follows: "Ephraim: What have I further to do with idols? God: I have answered and will regard him. Ephraim: I am like a green cypress. God: From me is thy fruit found." But I am disposed to regard, with Delitzsch and others, that God, and not Ephraim, is representing himself as the "green fir tree." I observe, therefore—

I. THAT GOD FORESEES THE CHANGE IN HIS REFORMED PEOPLE. "Ephraim shall say, What have I to do any more with idols?" 1. *Mark the description of the change.* Before the period of their conversion comes, he hears them say, "What have I to do any more with idols?" What have I to do with them? (1) They are *beneath* me. I am ashamed of them. "What fruit had ye in those things whereof ye are now ashamed?" (2) They are a *curse* to me. Idols degrade, deceive, damn. Omniscience foresees all the workings of the penitent soul. 2. *Mark God's recognition of the change.* "I have heard him, and observed him." He is cognizant of all the reflections, remorses, resolutions, of the repentant soul.

II. THAT GOD PROVIDES BLESSINGS FOR HIS REFORMED PEOPLE. 1. *Protection.* "I am like a green fir tree." Those trees in Eastern countries were exceedingly large and thick, affording shelter from sun and storms and showers. 2. *Support.* "From me is thy fruit found." God is to his people the source of all relief and good, both for this life and the life to come.

CONCLUSION. Sinner, repent and be converted. Say, "What have I to do any more with idols?" Renounce the old. The Almighty Father is ready to receive and bless you.—D. T.

Ver. 9.—*God's ways.* "Who is wise, and he shall understand these things? prudent, and he shall know them? for the ways of the Lord are right, and the just shall walk in them: but the transgressors shall fall therein." God has his ways, his methods of action. He proceeds on certain principles in all his operations, both in the realm of matter and of mind. The Infinite has a way of doing things.

I. HIS WAYS ARE TO BE STUDIED. "Who is wise, and he shall understand these things? prudent, and he shall know them?" It is one thing to know the works of a man, and another thing to know his ways, his methods of action. He only knows a man who understands his way of doing things. God's ways are the highest subjects

of study. It is said that he made known his "way" unto Moses, his "works" unto the children of Israel. The millions know something of his works; only the "wise," the "prudent," the initiated, like Moses, understand his ways. Brother, come away from the study of details, ascend into the realm of principles. Men who understand God's ways become prophets. They can foretell the future.

II. HIS WAYS ARE RIGHTEOUS. "The ways of the Lord are right." 1. They are right; *they cannot be otherwise.* They are right because they are his. He cannot do wrong; there is no law external to him, no law above him. What he does is right because he does it. To say he does a thing because it is right is tantamount to the assertion that there is something independent of him. 2. They are right; *human conscience attests it.* No conscience in heaven, earth, hell, doubts the rectitude of God's ways. If sinners in hell felt they were wrong, they would feel no remorse for their conduct. They are right essentially, immutably, everlastingly right.

III. HIS WAYS ARE TO BE PURSUED. "The just shall walk in them." They are not merely to be studied, but to be practically followed. You cannot do what God does, but what you do you can do in God's way—do silently, lovingly, beneficently. Walk in this way, the way of love and usefulness.

IV. HIS WAYS MAY RUIN. "The transgressors shall fall therein." As God moves in calm majesty and resistless force on his way, he crushes in his march all who oppose him. His chariot-wheels grind them into powder. *Recipitur ad modum recipientis.* What is received influences according to the qualities of the receiver. "The same sun," says an old author, "softens wax and hardens clay. But of all transgressors those certainly have the most dangerous fatal falls that fall in the ways of God, that split on the Rock of Ages, and suck poison out of the balm of Gilead. Let the sinners in Zion be afraid of this."—D. T.

Vers. 1—3.—*The prayer of the penitent.* The prophecy does not close without comforting glimpses into the future, and sweet words of promise. The opening verses of this section invite the nation to repentance. They put a prayer into the people's lips with which to return to God.

I. THE INVITATION. (Ver. 1.) The door of mercy stands open to Israel. But the invitation addressed to the ancient people is equally, in Christ, addressed to every sinner. Consider, accordingly: 1. *The condition in which the sinner is found.* "Fallen by thine iniquity." "There is none righteous, no, not one" (Rom. iii. 10). We have all fallen by our iniquity. (1) Fallen from the state in which we were created. (2) Fallen out of the Divine favour. (3) Fallen into wretchedness, guilt, discord with self, pollution, bondage. (4) Fallen—in some cases—under heavy strokes of the Divine anger. We have so fallen that we cannot raise ourselves up again. 2. *To whom the sinner is pointed.* "The Lord thy God." Israel's God and ours. God is our God, as being (1) our Maker; (2) our Sustainer; (3) our moral Ruler; (4) our Saviour. He is the God and Father of Jesus Christ our Lord. He gives us in the promises of the gospel a claim upon himself. He is ours in offer, and will be ours in fact, if only we will receive him. There is no Saviour beside him (ch. xiii. 4), and no other is needed. He alone is all-sufficient. 3. *The invitation given to the sinner.* "O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God." God might command, but he condescends to invite, to entreat (2 Cor. v. 20). He asks us to return to him. He can ask no less, for without penitent return, salvation is impossible. His mercy is seen in this, that he asks no more—no sacrifices, no price, no probationary curriculum, no works of the Law. But the return must be sincere, not with the body, but with the mind, the affections, the will.

II. THE PRAYER. (Ver. 2.) The penitent, resolved on returning to God, is counselled to take with him "words." The inward penitence is to express itself outwardly. It is to utter itself in prayer. This is the only sacrifice God will require. The prayer with which we are to come is: 1. *Prayer for forgiveness.* "Take with you words, and turn to the Lord; say unto him, Take away all iniquity." Forgiveness is the first need of our nature. Till sin is forgiven us we can have no peace with God, we cannot be visited by his love or made partakers of his Spirit. Forgiveness at once precedes, and is a pledge of, the communication of every other blessing. It is, therefore, the thing we first ask for We are to confess sin and to seek the pardon of it (1 John

i. 9). 2. *The prayer of uprightness.* "Accept what is good"—for thus the second clause must be rendered. The language is not that of self-righteousness, but of sincere motive. The penitent knows his unworthiness, but is conscious at the same time that his prayer no longer proceeds from feigned lips (Ps. xvii. 1); that his spirit is truly contrite; that there is some good thing "in his heart towards the Lord God" (1 Kings xiii. 14). He recognizes this: (1) As a fruit of Divine grace in the soul—therefore a pledge of acceptance. God, who by his Spirit draws the sinner to himself, will not cast him off when he comes (John vi. 37, 44, 45). (2) As essential to forgiveness. For though it is God's mercy, not our own righteousness, that saves us, it is yet essential to acceptance that our spirit, in returning to God, be without guile (Ps. xxxii. 2; li. 4, 6). Coming to God with upright intent, and conscious that we do so, it is natural that we should appeal to this in prayer. 3. *Prayer in order to praise.* "So will we render the calves of our lips." Salvation carries with it the obligation to consecration (Rom. xii. 1). The penitent has no other desire than now to live to God, rendering to him spiritual sacrifices. He asks God to open his lips (by forgiveness), that he may thereafter show forth God's praise (Ps. li. 15). We render to God "the calves of our lips" (1) in acknowledgment of him; (2) in thanksgiving (Heb. xiii. 15); (3) in praises (Ps. xl. 3; l. 23); (4) in confession of him before men.

III. THE VOW. (Ver. 3.) With prayer is connected a solemn vow. Israel renounces all sinful trusts, and looks to God only. He renounces: 1. *Trust in man.* "Asshur shall not save us." The world is a poor saviour. It promises much, but gives little. Its favour is deceitful. Its will to help is even more limited than its power. But its power is not great. It cannot save when God contends with us. It must leave us to shift for ourselves at death. It has no salvation for the soul—for eternity. 2. *Trust in his own strength.* "We will not ride upon horses." Israel had multiplied horses. He put trust in them for his deliverance. This trust, with every other of a similar kind, he now renounced. Neither in war, nor in peace, nor in anything he did, would he exalt himself as independent of God. He would be humble. 3. *Trust in idols.* "Neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, Ye are our gods." Thus, in succession, Israel renounced, as Christians would say, the world, the flesh, and the devil. Every heart not serving God has its idol—its something which it puts in God's place. This it now renounces, and gives him all the glory. The prayer concludes with an appeal to the Divine pity. "For in thee the fatherless findeth mercy." The soul without God is as one orphaned. In penitence it seeks the pity of him who compassionates the fatherless. God feels this pity for his alienated children.—J. O.

Vers. 4—8.—*God's response to the penitent.* Israel's repentance will be followed by the turning away of God's anger, and by superabundant blessings. Figures are heaped on each other, and one figure is employed to fill in another, to set forth the fulness with which this blessing will descend. The prophecy, hitherto so dark and troubled, ends in heavenly peace.

I. BACKSLIDING HEALED. (Ver. 4.) No time is lost in answering Israel's prayer. Forgiveness follows close upon return. So David also found it: "I said, I will confess my transgression unto the Lord; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin" (Ps. xxxii. 5). The penitent need not fear being kept long waiting at the door of mercy (cf. Luke xv. 20—24). God: 1. *Turns away his anger.* "For mine anger is turned away from him." Terrible to him who realizes it is the thought of lying under the Divine anger. Infinite things are to be hoped for from God's love. Infinite things are to be dreaded from his wrath. We dread the anger of fellow-men. Much more should we dread to be the objects of the anger of the Omnipotent. "Fear not them which kill the body," Christ says, "but are not able to kill the soul," etc. (Matt. x. 28). Just, however, because God's anger is so terrible, is it a blessed thing to know, as every pardoned sinner may, that this anger is turned away. "O Lord, I will praise thee: though thou wast angry with me, thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortedst me" (Isa. xii. 1). If God's anger is turned away from us, there is nothing else we need fear. And under the gospel it *is* turned away from every one who believes in Christ. 2. *Restores his love.* "I will love them freely." The love is free as being (1) spontaneous, (2) unbought, (3) unlimited in measure. God loves the redeemed with the same love which he bears to his Son. He rejoices in his love towards them. As it is the

nature of the sun to shine, so it is the nature of God to love. Judgment is his strange work, but love is the proper exercise of his being. The gospel is the manifestation of love. Salvation is the triumph of love. God rejoices more over one lost sheep brought back to him than over the ninety and nine that went not astray. He sheds his love abroad in his people's heart (Rom. v. 5). 3. *Heals their backsliding.* "I will heal their backsliding." He heals the wounds made by sin (cf. ch. vi. 1), both the spiritual wounds, and the wounds resulting from temporal chastisements. He revokes the curse. He restores prosperity. He gives compensations for past sorrow. Often, when wounds are healed, the scar remains. Even the sinner, though repentant, is not in this life relieved from all the consequences of his transgressions. He has to suffer both in soul and body for past indulgence in vice. But when God heals Israel, no scar remains. And all scars will be removed in eternity.

II. THE DEW TO ISRAEL. (Ver. 5.) God will be as the dew to Israel. 1. *He himself will be as the dew.* It is not merely his blessing which he gives; it is himself. He comes in his Spirit. He came first in the Son; and, now that Christ has ascended, he comes in the Holy Ghost. 2. *The dew is copious.* It was so in the East even more than it is with us. It lay thick and soaking on the herbage. Every tree, every twig, every leaflet, every blade of grass, every flower, received its abundant portion. Thus is it with grace. The Spirit will be poured out in the latter days yet more plentifully. 3. *The dew is a source of manifold blessing.* (1) It refreshes; (2) it revives; (3) it promotes growth; (4) it beautifies; (5) it increases fragrance. So God's Spirit is a reviving, refreshing, fructifying, beautifying, and sanctifying power in the soul. It gladdens, comforts, enriches, gives sweetness and fragrance to the character. 4. *This dew is not, like Israel's goodness, evanescent.* It does not pass away (cf. ch. vi. 4). It is not merely a thing of the dawn. Or, rather, it is ever morning with the soul to which this dew is given. It flourishes in perpetual youth.

III. LIFE AND FRUIT. (Vers. 5—7.) These figures from the vegetable world are used to fill out the different aspects of the prosperity which God would bestow on Israel. All are emblems of life, and fitly symbolize the life of grace. The features represented are: 1. *Lily-like purity and beauty.* "He shall grow as the lily." The lily is white, pure, delicate, fragile. It symbolizes innocence, purity, spiritual beauty. Grace bestows a rare sweetness and refinement. Nothing is more fair than a pure soul. 2. *Cedar-like strength.* "His roots as Lebanon." The lily, though graceful, has a weak root. But God would have his people "rooted and grounded" in faith and love—not easily shaken or removed (1 Cor. xv. 58; Eph. iii. 17; Col. i. 23). The cedar is an emblem, not merely of strength, but of stateliness (majesty), immovability, uprightness. 3. *Spreading magnificence.* "His branches shall spread." Depth of root leads to wide-spreading branches. The life of grace has breadth and expansiveness as well as depth and growth upwards. 4. *Olive-like freshness.* "His beauty shall be as the olive tree." "Like a green olive tree in the house of God" (Ps. lii. 8; cf. Ps. xcii. 14). Fresh, unfading, evergreen, fruit-bearing. 5. *Widely diffused fragrance.* "His smell as Lebanon." Character has its aroma. Cf. what Christ says of Mary of Bethany (Matt. xxvi. 13); what Paul says of Epaphroditus (Phil. iv. 18). The renown of good deeds flows forth like spices. 6. *Fruitfulness.* "They that dwell under his shadow shall return; they shall revive as the corn, and grow as the vine; the scent [glory] thereof shall be as the wine of Lebanon." Corn and wine are symbols of the highest material blessings—of plenty, comfort, nourishment, invigoration, joy. The soul possessed by grace is at once fed with bread of heaven, and becomes itself a fruit-producer. In holy deeds, in useful service, in efforts for the advancement of the kingdom of God, in the cherishing of noble and God-like affections, it yields both corn and wine.

IV. EPHRAIM AND GOD. (Ver. 8.) 1. *God's goodness confirms Ephraim in his renunciation of idols.* "Ephraim shall say, What have I to do any more with idols?" This time the goodness is not abused. It does not make Ephraim haughty. It does not lead him to forget God. He no longer attributes his prosperity to Baal. Taught by experience, he loves God more the more God bestows on him. 2. *Ephraim's renewed vows are observed by God.* "I have heard him, and observed him." God takes notice of every stage of our advance in grace. He takes pleasure in our progress, in our renewed vows, in our deepening consecration. 3. *Ephraim, as the result of his renewed vows, becomes yet more fruitful.* "I am like a green fir [cypress] tree. From me is thy

fruit found." The first words are (as we understand them) Ephraim's; the last words are God's. The cypress is an evergreen, but it does not bear fruit. God, however, will give fruit to Ephraim as well as unfadingness. (1) Ephraim derives his fruit from God. His fruit is spiritual. It is only as he abides in God that he is able to bring forth fruit at all. (2) Ephraim "finds" his fruit in God. Fruitfulness is maintained by active fellowship, by constant trust, waiting, watchfulness, and prayer. "Abide in me," Christ says (John xv. 4). "Without me," he adds, "ye can do nothing" (ver. 5).—J. O.

Ver. 9.—*The lesson of the book.* The lesson may be summed up in few words, but it is so comprehensive that the acceptance or rejection of it makes all the difference between supreme wisdom and supreme folly. The lesson simply is that "the ways of the Lord are right." Men prefer their own ways to God's, but what the history of Israel teaches is that, if they do so, it is to their own ruin.

I. GOD'S WAYS ARE RIGHT. They are: 1. *Right in themselves.* They are the ways of absolute rectitude. They are marked out for us by perfect wisdom, spotless holiness, and unchanging goodness. Equally right are God's own ways, the principles of his government, the modes of his action. His commands are just, his requirements reasonable, his doings wise, his intentions kind. 2. *Right as conducting to a right end.* God desires the good of every one. He has no pleasure in the death of any. He sets before us the way of life. "See," he says, "I have set before you life and death" (Deut. xxx. 15, 19). God knows better than any other wherein our true good lies. Taking the way he prescribes, we shall infallibly attain to blessedness.

II. WISDOM IS TESTED BY THE ACCEPTANCE OR REFUSAL OF GOD'S WAYS. "Who is wise, and he shall understand these things? prudent, and he shall know them?" 1. *The wise recognize the rightness of God's ways.* They are taught of God to recognize this rightness. Plain as the truth seems that God's ways alone are right, the natural heart is incapable of receiving it (1 Cor. ii. 14). 2. *The wise show their wisdom by walking in God's ways.* "The just shall walk in them." Wisdom is a practical thing. It implies the adoption of that which we know to be right. Wisdom is connected with uprightness. It is the upright in heart—the just—who choose the right ways. 3. *The unwise show their folly by rejecting God's ways.* This is their ruin. "The transgressors shall fall therein."—J. O.

HOMILETICAL INDEX

TO

THE BOOK OF HOSEA.

CHAPTER I.

THEME	PAGE
The Sin of Israel sharply reproved ...	10
The Sufferings of Israel symbolically recorded	12
There is Salvation in Store for both Israel and Judah	15
The Prophet and his Work ...	16
Hosea's Marriage and Prophetic Training	17
Hosea's Children	19
The Curse reversed	21
"Great shall be the Day of Jezreel"	22
Divine Retribution	23
Divine Deliverance	25
The Word of the Lord	28
Spiritual Infidelity	28
Mercy denied	29
Salvation, not of Man, but of God ...	30
Rejection and Restoration	30
"Sons of the Living God" ...	31
One Body and One Head	31
Scripture, Kings, and Truth ...	32
Retribution	33
God's Mercy	34
The Destiny of the Race	35
Superscription	36
The "Wife of Whoredoms" ...	38
"Children of Whoredoms"... ...	39
Mercy triumphant over Judgment ...	40

CHAPTER II.

THEME	PAGE
The Prophet exhibits the Gross Sin of Idolatry	51
The Pains and Penalties that are attached to Sin	53
Sympathy with Israel in Spite of their Sins	56
Jehovah's Condemnation of Faithless Israel	61
Prosperity abused and blighted ...	62
Israel's Restoration	64
The Golden Chain of Causation ...	65
The Message from Home	67
God's Rule in Nature and in Grace ...	70
The Delusions of the Ungodly ...	71
The Way hedged up	71
Mercies abused	72
Retribution 72,	82
Comfortable Words	73
"A Door of Hope"	73
Divine Betrothal	74
The Great First Cause of Blessing ...	74
Purposes of Pity and of Possession ...	74
Divine Restraints	75
The Conjunction of Sin and Mirth ...	76
The Prosperity of the Wicked ...	76
Soul-Restoration	77
The Sublime Privileges of the Good	78
God and his Universe	79
Spiritual Adultery	80
The Philosophy of the Divine Chastisements	81
Israel's Recovery	82
Allurement	82
The New Betrothal	83

CHAPTER III.

THEME	PAGE
God's Mercifulness and Israel's Sinfulness are brought into Contrast ...	89
The Applicability of these Verses ...	91
Hosea detains Gomer in Seclusion ...	92

THEME	PAGE
"The Love of the Lord toward the Children of Israel"	94
The Kingless State and Priestless Church	94
Returning to God	95
Love to the Adulteress	95

CHAPTER IV.

Israel's Sin and Consequent Suffering	107
Priestly Neglect and its Consequences	109
Faults in the Life breed Errors in the Brain, and Errors in the Brain produce in Turn Faults in the Life ...	111
A Passing Word of Warning is addressed to Judah	112
The Lord's Lawsuit	114
Israel's Guilt and Punishment ...	116
"Like People, like Priest"	116, 124
Ephraim and Judah	119
Insensibility the Result of Impenitence	120
"Hear the Word of the Lord!" ...	122
A Controversy	122
Ignorance and Destruction	123
Sensuality is Ruin	124
Abandonment	125
A Corrupt People and an Expostulating God	125
A Terrible Deprivation	126
Religious Ignorance	127
Secular Prosperity	127
Feeding on Sin	128
The Reciprocal Influence of Priesthood and People	129
An Unholy Alliance and a Righteous Abandonment	130
Retributive Justice	130
The Lord's Controversy	131
Priests and People	132
Sin's Fatuity	133
Warning to Judah	134
Offending	135

CHAPTER V.

God here arraigns the Sins of Princes, Priests, and People	141
No Place found for Repentance ...	143
God's Judgments differ both in Degree and Kind	145
National Sin and Punishment ...	147
Landmark-Removers	148
The Divine Judgments	150
The Misuse of Divine Judgments ...	151
The Affliction of God's Withdrawal...	153
Divine Omniscience	155
Divine Withdrawal	155
Human Treachery	155
Human Physicians Helpless ...	156
Fruits of Affliction	156
National Depravity	157
Necessary Preliminaries to a Godly Life	158
Too Late	159
An Earnest Ministry	159
"The Moth;" or, God's Quiet Method of Destroying	160
Wrong Methods of Relief	162
God and Man	162
Ephraim and Judah	164
The False Physician and the True ...	165

CHAPTER VI.

Exhortation and Encouragement to Repentance	171
Israel's Inconstancy	175
Repentance and Saving Knowledge ...	176
Fugitive Piety	178
Religion and Irreligion	179
On Returning to the Lord	181
The Promised Dayspring	182
Heavenly Blessings for Weary Souls	184
God's Grief over Evanescent Goodness	185
The Divine Healer	187
Spiritual Revival	187
The Quest of Divine Knowledge ...	188
Morning and Showers	188
The Rain	189
Transitory Goodness ...	189, 198
Mercy better than Sacrifice ...	190
Knowledge and Mercy	190
Man's Highest Social Action ...	190
Man God-ward, and God Man-ward ...	191
A Threefold Theme	192
Righteousness and Ritualism ...	193
Divine Institutions corrupted ...	194
Naturalness of Retribution	195
Returning to God	196
The Day-dawn and the Rain ...	197
The Broken Covenant	199

CHAPTER VII.

Crimes charged on Israel; People and Princes	209

THEME	PAGE
The Silly Sinful Pride and Obduracy of Israel, in spite of Many Manifest Tokens of Decay, or their Disastrous Foreign Policy	213
Sins of Court and Country	215
"A Cake not turned"	216
"Grey Hairs"	218
Ephraim's Folly and Falseness ...	220
An Unconsidered Truth	221
The Sin of Half-heartedness ...	221
The Unperceived Signs of Moral Decay	223
Useless Prayers	224
God's Memory of Man's Wickedness	225
None calleth unto God	225
They return not unto the Lord ...	225
The Silly Dove	226
Failure to cry unto the Lord ...	226
God's Remembrance of Sin ...	227
Sad Aspects of Character	227
The Silliness of Sin	229
The Fowler of Retribution	229
Divine Dispensations abused ...	230
Sin's Malignancy	231
The Oven and the Baker	232
Mixing with the Ungodly	233
Ephraim's Flight from God ...	235

CHAPTER VIII.

Ministerial Faithfulness	243
The Causes of Divine Judgments are more particularly specified ...	244
The Justice of the Judgments threatened with Further Additions ...	248
Israel and Judah both in the Transgression	250
A Trumpet-Blast of Judgment ...	251
Sin its own Punishment	252
Reaping the Whirlwind	253
Holy Scripture, and Man's Neglect of it	254
On knowing God	255
Sin's Mockery of the Sinner ...	257
"What shall the Harvest be?" ...	258
The Inspiration of Scripture ...	259
Israel's Cry	261
The Broken Idol	261
Sowing the Wind and reaping the Whirlwind	262
Hired Lovers	262
The Maker forgotten	263
The Conventional Church	263
The Abandonment of Good, and the Consequent Pursuit of Evil ...	264
Idolatry	265
Perversion of Worship	266
Neither the Religion nor Security of a Nation to be judged by Appearances	267
Doomsday	267
Broken Gods	268
Israel among the Gentiles	269
Religion become Sin	269

CHAPTER IX.

Sin is the Cause of Sorrow and the Source of Sadness	277
There is no Joy, any more than Peace, to the Sinner	279
God's Goodness met with Ingratitude by a Sinful People	280
"The Wicked shall not go Unpunished"	282
The Assyrian Captivity	284
The True and the False Prophet ...	286
Bereavement, Barrenness, and Banishment	287
The Lord's Land	289
"What will ye do?"	289
The Sin of Despising God's Prophets	290
The Watchman	290
"Wanderers among the Nations" ...	291
The Solemn Days of Life	292
Charge against Religious Ministers ...	293
The Lord's Land for the Lord's People	294
Prophet and Prophet	295
Gibeah and Baal-peor	296
Ephraim's Woe	297

CHAPTER X.

Sin and its Retribution	308
Israel's Sin, Sorrow, Shame, and Suffering	309
A Chequered Picture	311
The Prolific Fruits of Evil	314
The Calves and the Kings	314
National Prosperity and Calamity ...	316
The Divided Heart ...	317, 321
Moral Abasement	318
Spiritual Husbandry	320
"Foam upon the Water"	322
Despair	322
Prepare for the Time of Divine Favour	323
The Abuse of Worldly Prosperity ...	323
Social Sins and their Result ...	324
The Divine Voice to a Worthless People	325

THEME	PAGE
The Empty Vine	325
The End of Calf-Worship	327
Past and Present	328
Moral Husbandry	328

CHAPTER XI.

A Rich Display of God's Mercy, Love, and Long-suffering	336
The Ingratitude of Israel and its Punishment	338
Called out of Egypt	342
Crowned with Tender Mercies ...	343
The Magnet of Love	344
The Divine Goodness despised ...	346
"Mercy seasons Justice"	347
The Tenderness of Divine Discipline	349
The Attractiveness of God	350
God's Yearning over Rebels ...	351
"When Israel was a Child" ...	353
Healing Grace unrecognized ...	353
"Cords of a Man"	353
"How shall I give thee up?" ...	354
God and not Man...	355
A Typical Portrait of a People ...	355
Justice and Mercy in the Heart of God	356
The Lies of a People	357
God's Early Love for Israel ...	358
Fatal Courses	360
Divine Relentings	360

CHAPTER XII.

Reproof, Retrospect, and Exhortation	372
Extent of Israel's Apostasy ...	378
Reproofs and Remembrancers ...	379
Jacob an Example to his Descendants	381
Three Painful Contrasts	383
Prevailing with God	384
Feeding on Wind...	386
Power with God	387, 393
"Turn thou to thy God"	387
"Wait on thy God"	388
Happiness in Reserve	388
Visions and Similitudes	389
The Ministry of Prophets	389
Worthless Soul-Food	389
Genuine Human Goodness... ...	390
Fortunes badly used, badly made, and badly ended	391
God's Method in teaching the Great Teachers of the World	392
God Faithful, his People Unfaithful	392
Balances of Deceit	394
Preserved by a Prophet	395

CHAPTER XIII.

Justification of the Ways of God to Man	405
Man's Marvellous Perversity and God's Restorative Mercy	408
The Humiliations wrought by the Sins of Israel	411
Ephraim, Living and Dead	413
Ruin, Retribution, and Resurrection...	414
Jehovah the Destroyer of Death ...	416
Self-Destruction	417, 421
"They sin more and more"	418
Driven Chaff and Vanished Smoke ...	419
The Only Saviour...	419
Remembrance in the Wilderness ...	420
Forgetting God	420
"Thy Help"	421
The Vanity of Earthly Kings ...	421
Redemption from Death	422
Rebellion against God	422
The Life of the Wicked	423
Mercy in Beneficent Action and in Retributive Displeasure	423
Sin the Destroyer, God the Restorer	424
The Great Conqueror of the World conquered	425
Reverses of Fortune in Human Life ...	425
Baal-Exaltation	426
Self-Exaltation	427
God-Exaltation	428
Figure and Fact	430

CHAPTER XIV.

The Fallen invited to return ...	434
The Happy Result of Israel's Penitence and the Merciful Response to Israel's Prayer	438
A Call to Understanding	442
Return to God: its Beginnings ...	442
Return to God: its Immediate Effects	444
Return to God: its Ultimate Results	445
The Epilogue	446
God's Message to the Prodigal ...	448
The Heavenly Dewfall	450
The Bedewed Church	451
Counsels to the Sinful	453
The Supplication and the Vow ...	453

THEME	PAGE
"The Fatherless findeth Mercy" ...	454
Gracious Assurances	454
National Prosperity	455
Idolatry abjured	456
Wisdom and Righteousness ...	456
Repentance, or Reformation ...	457
God and his Reformed People ...	458
God's Ways	458
The Prayer of the Penitent ...	459
God's Response to the Penitent ...	460
The Lesson of the Book	462