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THE PURITAN USE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

I. INTRODUCTION

FROM THE Reformers in whose footsteps they followed, the Puritans inherited a devotion to the Scriptures, both Old and New Testaments. From the law, the prophets and the psalms they could preach and exhort with as much fervour as when they were dealing with the gospels and the epistles. Their devotion to the whole Bible is, of course, in line with the statements of the Reformed faith produced both by the Church of England and by the Dissenting communities.

The seventh of the Thirty-nine Articles states: "The Old Testament is not contrary to the New: for both in the Old and New Testaments everlasting life is offered to mankind by Christ, who is the only Mediator between God and Man, being both God and Man. Wherefore they are not to be heard, which feign that the old Fathers did look only for transitory promises."

The second answer of the Shorter Catechism speaks of "The word of God which is contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments" as "the only rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy" God.

Unlike many to-day whose professed guide in all matters of faith and conduct is the whole Bible, taken as the inspired word of God, yet who pay scant attention to the Old Testament either from doctrine or devotion, the Puritans took all scripture and used all scripture as their authority. It was, after all, "the ONLY rule to guide and direct us".

In the case of ministers, a glance at any Puritan work should suffice to show what great knowledge the teacher and preacher had of the text of Scripture. Sometimes such quotations are used to the exclusion of patristic comments, though this is by no means always the case. But whether a powerful phrase from Augustine or Chrysostom is included in the discourse or not, the words of Scripture remain the primary concern of the Puritan writer or preacher. Whether it be for illustration of doctrine or practice, or as text for a sermon, the Puritan brings forth spiritual treasures from both Old and New Testaments. In a

collection of 56 funeral sermons by different authors¹ 34 are based on texts from the New Testament and 22 on texts from the Old Testament.

In the case of the average congregation, we have more than one indication that they too were instructed in all the Scriptures. In many of the aforementioned funeral sermons, the piety of the deceased is briefly indicated by the fact that he or she took extensive notes of the minister's sermons Sunday by Sunday, and meditated much thereon. For example:

She was constant both in the performance of publick duties and private, in hearing God's word, not only on the Lord's day but (as occasion gave leave) on the week-days. . . . She was constant in reading the Word; I am credibly informed that she read over the Bible seven times in the seven years that she was married; she constantly made use of that which she heard, I myself saw no less than two quires of paper writ out with her own hand, collected partly out of other books but principally out of sermons, not noted at church, when she heard them, but when she came home, being in this like Mary that layed up the sayings of Christ in her heart.

Further, from the style and content of the Puritan sermon we may deduce a wide knowledge of the Scriptures on the part of the congregation, in view of the manner in which preachers assume that by the briefest of allusions—perhaps a name only (e.g. Sarah, Dorcas, Ahab, Barnabas, and so on)—their audience will realise that a certain doctrine has been proved, or a point suitably illustrated or confirmed. One example of this, and a striking one, is to be found in a work by Alexander Grosse,² where the author is speaking of salvation by Christ:

Christ alone communicates salvation to the Lord's people; the Ark was the only place of safety to Noah from the deluge; Christ is the only safeguard of the soul of man from the deluge of destruction; all that were out of the Ark perished in the waters; there is no salvation to them that are out of Christ Jesus. Christ is the head and root, enlivening man. The body of Lazarus lay corporally dead till Christ raised it; the soul of man lies spiritually dead until Christ quickens it. Christ is the Sun enlightening man, the world without the Sun is in darkness; the soul without Christ is in blindness. None of the Magicians and wise men, only Joseph was able to interpret Pharaoh's dream; neither man nor angel, but Christ only, hath revealed his Father's will and counsel touching man's salvation. Christ is the Conqueror that vanquisheth the adversaries of man's peace; all Israel stood trembling, only David overthrew the great Goliath; Christ through death destroyed the Devil that had the power of Death, and delivered them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. Christ is the surety that pays man's debt, He gave Himself a ransom for man, whom all the world could

¹ *Threnoiikos, or The House of Mourning* (56 funeral sermons by various authors), 1672 edition.

² Alexander Grosse, *Sweet and Soul-persuading Inducements leading unto Christ*. 1632 edition, Ch. 12, pp. 91-2.

not redeem; Christ is the fountain purging the sin of man's soul, none of the rivers of Damascus only Jordan cleansed the leprosy of Naaman; neither man nor angel, only the Lord Jesus can purge away man's uncleanness. Christ's righteousness is the robe which covers us and makes us appear just in God's presence. Jacob obtained the blessing not in his own but in his elder brother's apparel; man is accepted of God, obtains the blessing of pardon and peace, not through his own but through the righteousness of Christ. Christ is the treasure and storehouse which filleth man, all the garner in the land of Egypt were empty, only Joseph had provision for them; all the souls of men are empty only Christ filleth all in all. Christ is the prince of man's peace and author of man's reconciliation with God. Joseph's brethren being shepherds, were an abomination to the Egyptians, but by Joseph's means they came nigh to Pharaoh and found favour with him; man by reason of his sin is an abomination to the Lord, but through Christ he cometh nigh to God, and finds sweet and gracious acceptance of God; and thus as in a glass we see all the causes of man's salvation and eternal happiness derived and flowing from and through Christ Jesus.

Turning now more specifically to the Old Testament, which is the subject of this paper, we must ask ourselves, what were the principles on which the Puritans grounded their extensive use of all parts of the writings of the Old Covenant? For the answer to this we naturally turn to the great handbook of Reformed Principles, the *Institutes* of John Calvin, the theological founder of the Puritan doctrinal standpoint. In Book II, chapters ix-xi, Calvin deals thoroughly with the relation of the Old and New Testaments and I shall only refer here in the briefest manner to his conclusions.

The two covenants, Calvin maintained, were essentially the same but differed in administration. The pious who died before Christ's time are not excluded "from a participation in the understanding and light which shine in the person of Christ . . . but they had only an obscure prospect through the medium of shadows".¹ The covenant by which they were united to the Lord was founded not on any merit of theirs but on the free mercy of God who called them. And they both possessed and knew Christ as the Mediator by whom they were united to God and became partakers of his promises. The differences which he admitted were as follows. In the Old Testament the heavenly inheritance was exhibited for partial enjoyment under figures of terrestrial blessing, though the Promised Land, with earthly prosperity, was not proposed as the mark to which they should *ultimately* aspire. In the Old Testament the image and shadow of the truth, the covenant of grace, was displayed to one nation; in the New the very body or substance is displayed to all the world.

¹ Calvin, *The Institutes*, II. ix, 1.

In the Old Testament the New Covenant is promulgated, in the New Testament it is inwrought. The Old Covenant tended to induce a spirit of bondage unto fear; the New Covenant effected liberty by faith. For the trembling conscience came rejoicing deliverance. It will be at once seen that the basis of these ideas—the root of both Calvin's and the Puritans' use of the Old Testament—is the exposition of the Old Testament in the New Testament itself, especially in the Epistle to the Hebrews.

We turn now to consider the various distinctive ways in which the Puritans used their Old Testament Scriptures. I have chosen in each case to deal thoroughly with two or three works, used as examples, rather than to refer to large numbers of sermons and treatises, in which case none could receive more than the mere mention.

II. THE OLD TESTAMENT AS ILLUSTRATOR

One of the most characteristic usages of the Old Testament to be found in Puritan writings and sermons is the illustrative use made of the Old Testament narratives. Indeed it is this which gives many a Puritan classic its characteristic tang and spiritual flavour. This use is quite distinct from the allegorising of the Fathers (Origen for example) and from the elaborate typology of some modern circles where doctrine is directly deduced from an Old Testament person or occurrence. The Puritans used the *New Testament* primarily as the basis of the doctrines of the New Covenant but they illustrated the ideas and teachings of the faith by pictures taken from the earlier Scriptures. The Old Testament was for them a word book or glossary of New Testament terms. An idea which might sound abstract, a mere principle without body could take on glowing colours and become immediately and more personally relevant in the light of an Old Testament illustration. Often the relationship between man and God is illuminated by a story of a man-to-man relationship. Grosse's *tour de force* in this respect has already been quoted, but it is worth while mentioning one other passage from the same work,¹ (He is advising us to fasten our "frequent and most serious thoughts upon the brevity and vanity of the life of man".)

Man hath no abiding city here, he flourisheth like Jonah's gourd in an evening, and is smitten and withered in the morning; death, like the waters of the Red Sea,

¹ Grosse, *op. cit.*, pp. 50-1.

drowns all, only Christ makes a safe passage through death for his Israel; for all that receive him; the Ark divided Jordan and Israel went dry and safe over Canaan; Christ makes a ready way for all that believably entertain him, through the horrors of death to the heavenly kingdom; death, like the deluge, spares none; as Noah therefore betook himself to the Ark and was preserved, so let us betake ourselves to Christ that we may be preserved from the second death. All they who were out of the Ark perished in the waters, all they that are out of Christ will perish in the deluge of God's vengeance, the Lord Jesus is the soul's only refuge and deliverance. 'Behold (saith the Lord to Moses in another case) tomorrow about this time, I will cause it to rain a very grievous hail, such as hath not been in Egypt from the foundation thereof until now. Send therefore now and gather thy cattle, and all that thou hast in the field, for upon every man and beast that shall be found in the field, and shall not be brought home, the hail shall come down upon them and they shall die. He that feared the word of the Lord among them made his servants and his cattle flee into the houses, and he that regarded not the word of the Lord left his servants and his cattle in the field, and they were all smitten and died'. Thus in this case behold to-morrow, ere long, very shortly, the Lord will cause a mighty rain, he will rain down snares, fire and brimstone, and an horrible tempest; send therefore now and gather you souls, yourselves, your friends, husbands, wives, children, servants, kindred and neighbours unto Christ, get ye interest in Christ, hide yourselves by faith and love in Christ, for upon every soul of man that shall not be found in Christ, upon every parent and child, husband and wife, master and servant, young and old, bond and free, that shall not be brought home to Christ, the hail, fire and brimstone of God's wrath shall come down upon them, and they shall die, both the first and the second death. And now I know that he who fears the word of the Lord among you will flee to Christ, give all diligence to receive and entertain Christ, to get a sure and blessed interest in Christ; but he that regards not the word of the Lord will stay in the field, abide in the service, way and practice of the profane world, and be for ever destroyed, for there is no salvation out of Christ.

The power of such an illustration is obvious and certainly legitimate. The last judgment is not deduced from God's punishment of Egypt. Rather are both instances found to have their root in one cardinal doctrine: God is a God of judgment and though He leads man to repentance in His goodness, His patience is not everlasting and He has appointed a day wherein He will judge the world. For some souls in that day there will be wrath, tribulation and anguish. The future, final, spiritual judgment is aptly illustrated by a past temporal judgment and thus the reality of the event can be fittingly emphasised. The key words of this usage are JUST AS . . . , so

III. THE OLD TESTAMENT AS A GUIDE TO THE WAYS OF GOD IN PROVIDENCE

The New Testament deals but little with national and international affairs. The Apocalypse is a book of comfort in which the sovereignty of God is gloriously seen, but for many reasons

it is not the book from which to draw clear and certain doctrines, unless these are strongly supported elsewhere. The Apocalypse apart, we have references in the Gospels to the question of paying taxes, to the rejection of the Jewish nation and the mission of the Church to preach the gospel to every nation. In the epistle to the Romans Paul devotes some space in chapter xiii to the relation between temporal power and the sovereign power of God, but he does not speak at length. The New Testament, in short, is primarily concerned with more personal matters, the individual soul, its salvation and sanctification; on a wider plane the Church, her task and her eventual glorification are explained.

For the way in which God works in and through national events and His dealings with the peoples of the earth we must turn to the Old Testament. Perhaps those Christians who lived and wrote in the first century A.D. took the doctrine of Providence and the Sovereignty of God for granted and assumed that none needed to be taught it. The Puritans, however, bent on proclaiming the whole counsel of God, did not neglect such teaching. They saw the hand of God in contemporary history.

Some, of course, went to excess and ever justified themselves. The belief in the Divine Right of Kings is one example of how a doctrine without its correct scriptural counterbalance can lead to error and trouble. There may even have been some who without scruple exploited those who believed and acted on such doctrines. But the greatest figures among the Puritan theologians can be taxed neither with excess nor with lack of scruple. They believed indeed that "the Lord reigneth" but were ever reminding the people to whom they preached that the privilege of power or position brings attendant responsibility, to be discharged according to the word of God.

Two sermons on Old Testament texts, both preached before Parliament, illustrate this Scriptural concern over national affairs.

Thomas Goodwin's sermon *On the Great Interest of States and Kingdoms*¹ was preached in 1645, when the memory of the Civil War was still keen. In the preface to the printed sermon he refers to the terrible consequences if "this kingdom should, after so much bleeding, err a second time". His text is Ps. cv. 14, 15: "He suffered no man to do them wrong; yea, he reproveth

¹ In Goodwin, *Works* (Nichol's Standard Divines Edition, 1866), Vol. xii, p. 31.

kings for their sakes; saying, Touch not mine anointed." The immediate concern of the Psalmist was the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Goodwin first shows that these men are not only to be understood as individuals, or even only as "common persons (representatives) representing the nation of the Jews," but also "the believers of Jews and Gentiles under the New Testament and to the end of the world". He then resolves the words into three parts, or as we should say, makes three points:

- (a) the nearness and dearness of the saints unto God,
- (b) the great danger to kings and states if they deal with his saints otherwise than well,
- (c) the care and protection which God has over them.

He begins his detailed consideration with point number two: "That the dealing well or ill with the saints of God . . . is the greatest and highest interest of kings and kingdoms, on which their welfare or their ruin depends". He then commences with this statement:

I have the story of the whole world before me to glean demonstrations and instances out of, to make good this truth; but I shall endeavour to present it to you under that prospect which runs through the story of the whole Bible . . . the sum and issue of all is this: that God from the beginning hath in his providence so ordered it, that the greatest and most flourishing kingdoms and states should still have to do with his saints and people in all ages; either they have been broken by their ill using of them, or they have prospered by their well dealing with them.

This is then proved at great length; Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Ammon, Moab, Edom, Tyre, Persia, Greece, the Jews in the time of Christ and the Roman Empire, and the fall of each one, are made to pass before us.

Goodwin then turns to the reasons for this and demonstrates three, again with a wealth of Scriptural proof. *Firstly*, the saints are near and dear to God. As well as the tender feeling shown in the text, Isaiah's doctrine of the remnant, the preservative salt of the people, is adduced. *Secondly*, "Another reason is taken from the great interest the saints have in God the Governor, and the privilege . . . vouchsafed them by God in ruling and governing the world, and the providences of God therein. They are privy councillors to the great King of kings, who governs all the states and kingdoms in the world, and God doth give these his saints a commission to set up and pull down by their prayers and intercessions." The saints' influence in this respect on the course of

history is then shown from Isaiah xlv, Jeremiah xx and xxii, Psalm xx and the case of Lot in Sodom. *The third reason* is the interest of Jesus Christ Himself: "to show that He is King, even King of kings, and hath a kingdom ordained to Him and His saints, supreme to all theirs in the meanwhile, His design and practice hath been and is to break all the kingdoms that do oppose Him or oppress His saints".

The sermon is then concluded with a shorter word of application. He urges thankfulness for the Reformation and the overthrow of Rome which is soon to be completed. (This latter point Goodwin attempts to establish from the book of Revelation.) For our own country, he cries "Now look upon this isle in which we live, and it is the richest ship that hath the most of the precious jewels of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ in it, and the greatest treasure of any kingdom in the world". He then turns to practical directions: "The saints of England are the interest of England. . . . There is a mighty body, a company of saints in this kingdom. Now if they could all be united in one, and their divisions and animosities allayed, and all reconciled and made one, I am confident we need not fear if all the nations of the world were gathered together round about us. But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed ye be not consumed one of another." He pleads with Parliament to "unite or reconcile all the saints in this kingdom together. Providence hath disposed it so that they do and will differ in judgment. The apostles, who were oracles infallible, could not in their time wholly prevent it; and differing thus in judgment they will hardly ever of themselves agree. But it is your work to make them and to cause them to do so, and to find out ways whereby this may be done, notwithstanding these their differences". He concludes with the words ". . . the saints of this our Jerusalem are our greatest interest and security through the Lord of Hosts, his being our God; and let this saying be ever in your hearts to encourage and to guide you".

An English Parliament was summoned by Cromwell to meet at Westminster on 17th September 1656, with the purpose of obtaining money for the pursuance of the war at sea against Spain. On this occasion Dr. John Owen preached a sermon the tone of which was one of cheerful gratitude for the peace and freedom enjoyed by the nation. He also warned his audience

against any course which might expose them to God's judgment and the loss of their great privileges, and against strifes and animosities which would turn "judgment into wormwood and truth into hemlock". The sermon is entitled *God's Work in Founding Zion, and His People's Duty thereupon*.¹ The text is Isaiah xiv. 32: "What shall one then answer the messengers of the nation? That the Lord hath founded Zion, and the poor of his people shall trust in it." Owen deals first with the historical and literary context of the verse, then briefly considers the wording (in order that the subject may be correctly understood) in the light of the Hebrew and Greek versions.

From the question part of the verse he observes:

(a) "The nations about will be diligently inquiring after God's dispensation among his people.

(b) "The results of God's dispensations amongst his people shall be so evident and glorious, that any and every one however weak, if not blinded by prejudice, shall be able to give a convincing answer concerning them to the inquiries of men."

From the first part of the answer he observes:

(c) "The great design of God in his mighty works and dispensations in the world, is the establishment of his people and their proper interest in their several generations."

And from the last few words he concludes:

(d) "It is the duty of God's poor preserved remnant, laying aside all other aims and contrivances, to betake themselves to the work of God, founding Zion, and preserving the common interest of His people."

These four propositions he then considers turn by turn.

(a) As with the Jews in the time of Esther, a godly people will draw the interest of others and, especially through envy or fear, attract questioning attention.

(b) As to the second proposition, Owen makes the following wise remarks: "I do not say this will hold in every dispensation of God, in all seasons, to the beginning and end of them. In many works of his power and righteousness he will have us bow our souls to the law of his providence and his sovereignty, wisdom and goodness therein, when his footsteps are in the deep

¹ In Owen, *Works* (ed. T. Russell, 1826), Vol. xv, p. 512.

and his paths are not known—which is the reasonablest thing in the world. But this, generally, is the way of his proceedings, especially in the common concernment of his people, and in the disposal of their public interest—his works, his will and counsel therein, shall be eminent and glorious. It is chiefly from ourselves and our own follies that we come short of such an acquaintance with the works of God as to be able to give an answer to every one that shall demand an account of them.” Two things, Owen explains, blind us to the mind of God and his dealings; “self-fulness” and private (personal) enmities and prejudices.

(c) With regard to the third proposition, amongst other things, Owen notes that the proper interest of the people of God is to glorify Him in their several places, stations and generations, and that providential dispensations are discoveries of the wisdom of God in disposing His people so that they may best glorify Him. To dispute against the condition in which we are at any time cast by His providence, is to rise up against His wisdom. This he illustrates suitably from Deuteronomy xxxii and Isaiah x, xxxiv and li.

We see not, perhaps, at this day, he continues, wherein the concernment of the remnant of God’s people doth lie, in the great concussions of the nations of this world; we know not what design in reference to them may lie therein. Alas! We are poor short-sighted creatures; we know nothing that is before us—much less can we make a judgment of the work of God, in the midst of the darkness and confusion that is in the world, until He hath brought it to perfection. All lies open and naked to his eye, and the beauty of all his works will one day appear. The true and proper interest of His people, so as they may best glorify Him in the world, is that which He is pursuing in all these dispensations.

(d) After a short consideration of the fourth item he goes on to apply these doctrines to his audience.

Use 1. He considers what they—leaders of England—should answer the messengers of other nations, when they ask what is to be understood as God’s design at the moment? He answers that God’s present purpose is that Christians may serve God without fear all the days of their lives, living peaceably with each other notwithstanding differences, enjoying authority and promotion as God ordains, and that “Godliness and the love of the Lord Jesus Christ may be preserved, protected and secured from a return from the hand of violence upon it”. The reply to other nations is that God has overthrown all who have tried to overthrow Zion, or his saints (whatever their denomination), that He has given them peace and freedom of worship and given them a government which understands that “as the peace of

Zion lies in their peace, so their peace lies in the peace of Zion”.

Use 2. He urges them moreover to shun religious intolerance, to avoid partisanship, to instruct the rising generation in the value of their condition, in the cost at which it was achieved and in the danger of losing it, and to make this work of God their pole-star, ever testing new courses by the question “How will this suit the design of God in establishing Zion?” He finally encourages them to help on all things which prosper the work of God and to avoid secret animosities, ambition and mutual suspicion.

We must remember, however, that Owen and Goodwin were both Independents by conviction, and their views would not have been always agreeable to the ardent Presbyterian Puritan, for instance. The two parties differed on the Church and State relationship, though on the general doctrine of Providence they were at one.

We see then from these two sermons, that the Puritan theologian is convinced of the all-wise overruling Providence of God in national and international affairs and that this lends a strength and broadness to his Christian view of the world which we cannot but admire. Turning to the more personal aspect of Providence, we find that John Preston in his treatise *The New Covenant*,¹ has some remarks to make on the Christian’s being pure in heart and thus seeing God. One section of his comments on Matthew v. 8 runs thus:

Again, they [Christians] are able to see him in his works, as Jacob did; as it is said of him, “He was a plain man” and able to see the Lord; he was able to see him in his works of providence; he was able to see him when he got the goods of Laban. Saith he, “God hath taken the goods from your father and given them to me. . . .” He did see him when he met with Esau (saith the text), he saw the face of God when he saw the face of Esau; he saw him in his cattle and in his children that he had gotten; these are the cattle, and these are the wives and the children and the herds that God of his goodness hath given me—he was able to see God in all these; he saw him in all his works of providence and goodness. So likewise in all his chastisements, David saw God in the cursing of Shimei: “it is the Lord that bids him do it”. And so Job saw God; “it is he that hath given and he that hath taken away”; he overlooked those that were the immediate instruments.

This conviction even finds outlet in Owen’s works on the Christian life when he warns Christians that if they do not seek after holiness and follow Christ with all their hearts, but become

¹ *The New Covenant or the Saints’ Portion. A Treatise . . .* by John Preston, D.D. 10th edition, corrected 1655.

backsliders, the providence of God will work against them—temporal affairs will go ill with them, poverty and sickness may be their lot. He is not of course equating sickness or poverty with punishment for sin, but saying that with the Christian this may be a way which God in his wisdom will use to correct and refine him. As is the case with all scholarly Puritan writers, it is primarily (though by no means exclusively) the Old Testament which furnishes him with material leading to this deduction. With the Psalmist, such writers are convinced that "whatsoever the Lord pleased, that did He in heaven and in earth, in the seas and in all deep places" (Ps. cxxxv. 6).

It is the doctrine which lends such strength to their powerful theology and such moral fibre to all their actions. The high ethical standard and the fearless uprightness of the Puritan code of conduct may largely be attributed to their conviction of the work of God in Providence.

IV. THE OLD TESTAMENT AS TEXT FOR A NORMAL SERMON

Though the Puritan sermon in general is not the subject of this paper, a little must be said of the use of the Old Testament as a text for the regular Sunday addresses to local congregations. In a sense, the Parliamentary sermons of Owen and Goodwin are exceptional, in that the occasion and audience were exceptional. So too are the funeral sermons in the volume mentioned earlier.

A Puritan sermon consisted first of all of a statement of the verse or verses on which the sermon was to be founded, followed almost invariably by an explanation of the context—or, as it was termed, the *connection*. Under this heading would come any linguistic problems or textual difficulties, with references to the Greek (New Testament or LXX) and the Hebrew, if necessary. After the context and the words had been fully explained, the text was divided into its constituent parts and paraphrased so that the logic and meaning became clear and the sequence and number of ideas was clarified; this was known as the *division*. The main points or principles were then taken from this material and they would form the foci for all subsequent discussion; thus if there were four main doctrines or principles, the remainder of the sermon would fall into four parts with one doctrine at the head of each. Within each of these sections there were usually one or more sets of subdivisions dealing with reasons, causes, effects or

cures of the condition or action under consideration. At the end of each main doctrinal section would come one or more applications (normally referred to as *Use 1*, *Use 2*, etc.) of the doctrine to the lives of the readers or listeners. Objections and questions, with their answers, might follow each main doctrinal section. Occasionally, but very rarely, there was a short peroration.

In the case of a sermon on an Old Testament text, the doctrinal part of the sermon consists in demonstrating from the immediate concern of the text the universal principle of Divine action which underlies it and shows the development, fulfilment or further revelation of that same principle in the Scriptures of the New Covenant. As examples of the Puritan use of the Old Testament as source of the text for the Sunday sermon, we may take two sermons of Richard Sibbes.

His sermon on 2 Samuel xix. 34-38¹ is entitled *The Vanity of the Creature*.

The incident is Barzillai's meeting with David, who is returning to Jerusalem from his temporary exile during Absalom's revolt. Barzillai, who had offered hospitality to David earlier, now refuses to come to Jerusalem with the returning king. His answer forms the text for the sermon.

Sibbes begin "I have read, beloved, a large text", but promises not to spend too much time over preliminaries. He shortly explains the CONTEXT, then proceeds to the ANALYSIS. He divides his text, thus. Barzillai's answer falls into two main parts:

- I. His refusal—albeit modest—of the king's proposal.
- II. His suggestion—that someone else might go instead and he be allowed to return home.

Reasons for his refusal:

- (i) Because he was no fit man for the court.
 - a. On account of his age—he would not be there long.
 - b. He would gain no real contentment from being there.
- (ii) Because he could not do the king any service there.
- (iii) Because what he had done for the king was no more than his duty.

¹ In Sibbes, *Works* (Nichol's Standard Divines Edition, 1864), Vol. vii, p. 33.

Substance of his suggestion (two parts):

- (i) That the king would allow him to go home and die—something for himself.
- (ii) That the king would take instead his son Chimham.

After a brief reference to David's answer, Sibbes then proceeds to the main part of the sermon. He only manages to deal with three principal doctrinal points, though there are indications that he had more material which he would like to have expounded. His three main doctrines are derived from Barzillai's reasons why he was unfit for the court.

The FIRST DOCTRINE is deduced from Barzillai's unwillingness to go to David's court in spite of all the honour, bodily contentment and spiritual companionship it offered. From this it is concluded that "no company, no comfort, no inducements in the earth should put off thoughts of death when death begins to creep upon us". Like all great Puritans Sibbes moves easily from his Old Testament story to the teaching it exemplifies and from the underlying principle to the New Testament parallel and application.

I say wheresoever we live, what offers soever are made us, whatsoever the motion be, for ease, for profit, for promotion, for any outward contentments—we must not lay down, we must not lay aside the thoughts of our mortality. No dream must put us out of these thoughts while we travel in this main roadway of all flesh. We must never be so busy in discourse, in contrivances, as to forget our way, to forget which way we are going, but still our thoughts must be homewards, and that as we deal with other journeys here upon earth; for these momentary homes that we have here, wheresoever we be, in company that we like wondrous well, where our entertainment is full of kindness, where our welcome is of the best, and all content is given; yet notwithstanding, thoughts will offer themselves of home, night will come and it will grow late, I must home for all this, and leave all this company. So (my brethren) should it be concerning our long home, which is that surest dwelling; wheresoever we be, howsoever for the present we be tempted or taken up, still our eye must be home; we must remember our latter end and remember whither we are going. This Barzillai teaches us in his practice. A motion is made for the court. "Tush! court me no courts" saith Barzillai; "I am an aged man, I have one foot in the grave; let me go home and die". Here is an offer made him of comfort and contentment. "No; I will go home and lie by my fathers". Death possesseth his thoughts; he minds nothing else now but dying. This Barzillai did and thus the apostle would have us do in 1 Corinthians vii. 29-30. Our time, saith he, it is abbreviated [Authorised Version: "the time is short"]. Now our time is nothing in comparison of what it was in the time of the patriarchs. A great part of our time is already run out, and there is but a little of it left behind. Our time being thus short, saith the apostle, "Let him that is married be as if he were not married; let him that weeps be as if he wept not; let him that rejoiceth be as if he did not rejoice; he that is in the world as if he were not in the world."

There are *two reasons* for this course of action. *Firstly* it is useful for the preventing of evil. He enumerates and briefly explains four evils thus prevented, viz. irresponsible, evil behaviour; impenitency toward God; dotage on worldly things; the danger and sting of death. *Secondly* it is useful for the obtaining of good. Good things thus induced are:— painstaking work in one's own vocation, thoughts and words profitable to others, patience, and preparedness. Further, there are *two applications* to be made personally by each Christian. *Firstly (Use 1)* we must shame and blame ourselves that we constantly forget our home and our latter end. "Where is chiefly a Christian's business but in heaven? His conversation must be there, his affections there. He himself, while he is on earth, must be out of the earth and raise himself from earth to heaven every day." *Secondly (Use 2)* "every one of us now should labour after the example of this good man, even to remember his latter end, to remember whither he is going, to remember his house". Before proceeding to practical instructions on how to "improve" (or apply) this doctrine, Sibbes answers *two questions*. *Firstly*, is it possible for a man to forget this point? Yes, very possible, he answers; "it is a very easy matter to speak of death, but it is an hard matter to think of it, and to think of it seriously". *Secondly*, it is objected, surely there is no need to be reminded of death when we have "so many instances of mortality every day before (our) eyes"? The answer is that we need to be assisted by the divine Spirit. In Psalm xc Moses prays "Lord teach us to number our days" though the Israelites fell in the wilderness by hundreds and by thousands. He knows his need of God's help if he is to think as rightly and often about death as he ought. PRACTICAL DIRECTIONS to the Christian then follow. We are to consider the normal span of human life which is short. We are to consider how much of this time has run out already. We are to notice how others fall on every hand before us. We are to remember how death steals on us too by degrees. Practical steps we must take in preparation are disposal of family and children (as Barzillai did his son), disposal of goods and property (by will and by restoration of anything wrongfully acquired), and disposal of our unrepented sin in the heart. And then "labour to take possession of heaven now. Make entrance into it while thou art here, by getting the life of Christ and the life of faith in thee, by getting the saving graces of the Spirit in thee. If these things be in thee, and be not

unfruitful, then thou shalt have entrance into the inheritance and kingdom ”.

The SECOND DOCTRINE is that, as with Barzillai, the natural parts and powers will decay with age. Age will wear out our nature. Examples of this are taken from the Old Testament. There are three applications of this doctrine. Firstly, since our bodies wear out in time, let us make good use of them while we have them, as we do of other instruments while they are fit for use. “ Memory will decay, therefore, let us labour to treasure up good things in our memories, lay up things worthy to come into a treasury, not bad things. . . . So for thine eyes, let them be casements to let in fresh air, and not to let in corruption; use thy ears for wholesome instructions, use thy feet for good purposes, to follow the ways to the house of God; use thy hands, employ them in profitable business while you can work.” Secondly, let us therefore strive to apprehend more than that which is natural. “ Since this will away, let us provide some more durable substance. You know when an old suit fails, we think of getting a new suit of apparel; when the old lease is expired, we think where to get another habitation . . . so we should do much more for matters of the soul.” Thirdly we may use this doctrine to discern who is the wisest man in the world, who makes the wisest choice. He reminds us of Mary who, in comparison with her sister Martha, “hath chosen the better part which shall not be taken from her ” (Luke x. 42).

The THIRD DOCTRINE is that not only natural faculties, but also natural comforts and delights wear away. There are three reasons for this. Natural objects of delight fail in time; natural senses whereby we apprehend them wax dim in time; and the very things in themselves will produce satiety of all natural delights, in the end men are “ dulled and tired with them ”. The sole applications Sibbes makes of this doctrine is that we ought to learn not to “lean too much upon natural comforts and delights . . . as if these would bear us through all perils and dangers and fears . . . You cannot lay too much upon the back of nature but it crusheth and breaks it, it falls asunder; and therefore rest not too much in natural parts, for wit and cheerfulness, all these shall fail in time ”. The sermon ends with Sibbes’ characteristic reply to the objection, “ Ay, but carnal delights will help a man ”. His answer is:

Least of all. If wine will not comfort a man, poison will not. Now all carnal pleasures and delights are poison. Where shall we go then for comfort and delight? Yet above all the creatures, there be joys (I confess) to be had, joys that will drink up all tears, all sorrows; there be comforts to be had, that will carry a man over all discouragements and grievances; there be everlasting joys, unutterable comforts, inconceivable hopes, and peace of conscience, that will carry a man through sickness and through pain and through poverty and shame, through death and all, and will never give him over; a peace that will be with a man in his bed, that will run with him when he flies before the enemy; a peace that will follow him to his grave and beyond the grave; a peace that will live with him when he dies, that will follow him to the throne and tribunal of Christ, and will set a crown of grace and glory on him, at the last. These joys and comforts are to be had. Oh, make out for them, my brethren; seek the joys that are spiritual, seek the comforts of the Scriptures; rejoice in this, that God is your Father; rejoice that Christ dwells in you; rejoice that heaven is yours, that Christ is yours, that God is yours, that the promises and the covenant are yours: these be the joys that no man can take from you and that nothing can take from you. These will make you rejoice in sorrow, these will make you live in death. As I said before, labour for these that may carry you over all troubles and miseries and terrors whatsoever.

Another characteristic sermon is that entitled *The Sun of Righteousness*¹ on the text in Malachi iv. 2-3: "But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall. And ye shall tread down the wicked for they shall be as dust in that day."

Sibbes begins by a full consideration of the context of the verses, showing how after a terrible denunciation of the wicked and a promise of vengeance and retribution, the prophet turns to comfort the faithful, for in the worst times God has a number that fear him. To them only belongs such comfort as these verses contain. After a few general considerations arising from the delineation of the faithful as those that fear the name of God, Sibbes turns to the promise of the Sun of Righteousness, a Messianic prophecy which he immediately applies to Christ, and brings forth twelve reasons why Christ is compared to the sun. This passage has the spiritual eloquence which earned Sibbes the description "sweet"; his words are indeed spiritually sweet and one is constantly discovering passages in which an apostolic fervour is allied with a grace which is quite unique. Having explained the doctrine that Christ is the Sun of Righteousness, he then deals with the question "How shall we know whether Christ be a Sun to us or not?" and gives a threefold answer: we shall feel the heat and comfort of a Christian, we shall see His marvellous light, and we shall walk as the children of the light. A second question

¹ Sibbes, *op. cit.*, Vol. vii, p. 165.

arises: what comfort was this to the Jews of Malachi's day? The answer is twofold: it was a comfort to be assured that their posterity should see Christ, for grace rejoices at the blessing of others; and Christ was a Sun before he was in the flesh, for faith can span space and time and rejoice in hope. He then turns to the "use" of this doctrine, and finds two applications. The first is that we should pity the condition of those in darkness who have never had Christ to shine on them by his Spirit and ordinances, "as in many places of this kingdom". The second is that if Christ be the Sun of Righteousness we should repair to Him and conceive of Him as one having excellencies suitable to our wants. This leads to a discourse on the difficulties of the Christian way, and the all-sufficiency of Christ as the healing Sun. Yet we are warned that "some of Christ's works are all at one time perfected, but some by degrees, little by little. Christ heals the soul of guiltiness immediately, but there remain the corruption and the dregs of this disease for heavenly purposes. And thus he heals by not healing and leaves infirmities to cure enormities. He suffers us to be abased and humbled by our infirmities, lest we should be exalted beyond measure, as he dealt with Paul".

Turning to the words "and ye shall go forth and grow up as calves of the stall" Sibbes expounds these as the vigorous movements of the life of the Spirit in Christian experience. We "go forth" out of the bondage of sin and grow up, go on in a continued motion. We must pay due attention to the means appointed for this object. First we must purge and cleanse the soul of weakening matter, and practise the duty of repentance daily. In the second place we should come to good spiritual food. We should take exercise in holy duties and thereby gain strength in them. Questions and an objection arise after this consideration of Christian growth. Firstly comes the question: Does a Christian perpetually grow? Sibbes answers: not at a uniform speed in all times in all parts. To the objection that the growth may not be seen, he replies: "We perceive not the corn grow nor the shadow to move, yet in continuance of time we perceive the corn hath grown and the shadow hath moved. So, though we perceive it not, yet every act of repentance doth strengthen us. There may be many *turbida intervalla*, cloudy times in every Christian's life". Then comes the question, How shall we know whether we are grown or not? The reply is four-fold: if we taste and relish the food of our souls, the word of God; if we find ourselves able to

bear the burdens of our brethren; if we find ourselves able, like Samson, to break the green cords of pleasure and profits; and if we readily and cheerfully perform our Christian duties.

Lastly Sibbes considers briefly the promise "ye shall tread down the wicked and they shall be as dust". It can be legitimately applied to faithful Jews and perhaps even to all Jews in the future, but its primary meaning for us is in its application to the Church, the Israel of God. It is partially, by anticipation, and figuratively fulfilled already, "but lastly this promise is accomplished at the last day of judgment, when we shall sit with Christ as kings, ruling with Him, and as judges of the twelve tribes of Israel, judges of the world. We are *here* conquerors of the world, flesh and devil; but *then* all things shall be put under our feet".

It is hoped that consideration of these two sermons, one on an historical text and one on a prophetic passage, will show how the Puritans treated their Old Testament. They never did violence to history with exaggerated typology, but they sought their principles and then turned naturally to the New Testament for more light. A Puritan sermon on an Old Testament text is firmly grounded in the Old Testament but finally—and often at climaxes during its course—it bursts the bounds of the Old Covenant and leads us to Christ. It is nevertheless a sermon faithfully preached on a text. In the case of the prophets, the Puritans are one in seeing Christ as the fulfilment of all Old Testament promises of future blessing. They are not over-literalist and understand the spiritual significance of poetic passages. They glory in the Cross and gospel of Christ and rejoice in what God has done in sending his Son, yet at the same time they realise that the final glory and the perfecting of the saints is yet to come. And their sermons always urge self-examination and a renewed devotion, and give instructions for a holier daily walk.

V. THE OLD TESTAMENT AS A BASIS FOR THE EXPOSITION OF CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE

It was as skilled physicians of the soul, equipped with the ability to diagnose according to Scripture and to propose Scriptural remedies, that the Puritans excelled. The two sermons of Sibbes mentioned above will have suggested this. In general, it must suffice to say that the Puritans believed that as long as one

was continually guided by the clear teaching of Scripture, interest in human experience—be it the regenerate or the unregenerate heart which was being examined—was in no way harmful. Scripture gave them, so they believed, a normative account of human nature. For reasons already indicated in the introduction to this paper, they gathered material—both precept and example—from Old and New Testaments alike. God was the same God, giving men promises on which they were to act in faith. He was a holy God graciously speaking to sinful men. When aware of God's nature, man knows himself to be unworthy. These are permanent factors throughout Scripture. Their firm grasp of New Testament theology secured them from excess, and it is only rarely that we find ourselves disagreeing with these Christian teachers of 300 years ago.

Christian experience—the soul of the fervent and toiling believer, the backslider, the weak doubter—all is illuminated by the Old Testament as well as the New. The Psalms are, of course, some of the most-used sources, since their genius is primarily lyrical and personal. Three classics based on a study of Old Testament passages can be mentioned briefly here.

The first is Thomas Goodwin's treatise *A Child of Light walking in Darkness*.¹ It has as its sub-title: "A Treatise shewing the causes by which, the cases wherein and the ends for which God leaves his children to distress of conscience. Together with directions how to walk so as to come forth out of such a condition. With other observations upon Isaiah l. 10-11." These two verses form the foundation of the work and run thus: "Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness and hath no light? Let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God. Behold all ye that kindle a fire, that compass yourselves about with sparks: walk in the light of your fire, and in the sparks that ye have kindled. This ye shall have of mine hand; ye shall lie down in sorrow." The opening paragraph of the work indicates how the author is going to apply the passage:

We have in these words a true believer at his *worst* and natural men in their *best* condition, set forth together unto our view; and withal the power of true faith (as it alone upholdeth him in the saddest hour of darkness that can befall him) opposed unto and compared with the falseness of their presumptuous confidence in their greatest security.

¹ Goodwin, *op. cit.*, Vol. iii, p. 229.

The work itself should be read slowly, for it is strong meat. A short résumé of its contents is all that can be given here. Part I is doctrine. A child of God may walk in darkness, but by that we mean neither in sin nor in utter ignorance; rather in sorrow and discomfort, and not merely outwardly but chiefly inwardly, on account of a lack of the sense of God's favour. The immediate light of God's countenance is wanting and the believer doubts what will become of him; he stumbles and is afraid. Though our own weak and deceitful human hearts are in large measure to blame, Satan himself is especially active in such cases as these. He works on subtle false reasonings and on erroneous guilt of conscience. Goodwin then suggests reasons, both extraordinary and ordinary, why God leaves his children in darkness. Examples of such are carnal confidence, neglect of spiritual opportunities, gross sin, refusal to testify, unthankfulness. The ends which God has in view are then enumerated, viz. to show His power and faithfulness in upholding and raising again, to make known the fellowship of Christ's sufferings, to remind us of the source of all spiritual comfort and our dependence for them, to try our faith and to increase our graces.

Part II opens with a fourfold application: *Use 1*—to such as fear not God nor obey Him; *Use 2*—to those who have never yet walked in darkness; *Use 3*—to those who have been in darkness and are now recovered, and *Use 4*—to such as fear God and walk in darkness at present. His counsel to them consists of ten directions to those who are deeply troubled in this way. The work concludes with a short consideration of three other doctrines found in verse 10 and a brief explanation of the second part of the verse which concerns a child of darkness walking in light. The Psalms figure prominently as a Scriptural source throughout the work.

Sibbes' work *The Bruised Reed and Smoking Flax*¹ is a Puritan classic, and enjoyed a large circulation for many years after the author's death. It was the reading of these chapters which was instrumental in the conversion of Richard Baxter. The text is the well-known verse from one of the Servant Songs of Isaiah. Sibbes takes the version of Isaiah xlii. 3 which is quoted in Matthew xii. 20 applied to the healing ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. After explaining and dividing his text, he embarks on a series of subjects, each germane to the central theme, each considered rather as

¹ Sibbes, op. cit., Vol. i, p. 33.

growing out of the preceding chapter rather than as the next division in an analytic structure. Continual use is made of Old and New Testament Scriptures, but the spirit which informs the whole is the tender loving spirit of the basic text which often recurs quoted either whole or in part, like a musical theme which is the foundation of a symphonic movement. There are twenty-eight short chapters, each one a work of beauty and comfort. Some of the titles suggest the content of the work: grace is little at first; grace is mingled with corruption; Christ will not quench small and weak beginnings; tenderness required in ministers towards young beginners; how to recover peace lost; of quenching the spirit; the spiritual government of Christ is joined with judgment and wisdom; means to make grace victorious; victory not to be had without fighting; be encouraged to go on cheerfully, with confidence of prevailing. The work ends with the following prayer:

The Lord reveal Himself more and more unto us in the face of His Son Jesus Christ, and magnify the power of his grace in cherishing those beginnings of grace in the midst of our corruptions, and sanctify the consideration of our own infirmities to humble us, and of his tender mercy encourage us; and persuade us that since He hath taken us into the covenant of grace, He will not cast us off for those corruptions; which, as they grieve His Spirit, so they make us vile in our own eyes. And because Satan labours to obscure the glory of His mercy, and hinder our comfort by discouragements, the Lord add this to the rest of his mercies, that since He is so gracious to those that yield to his government, we may make the right use of His grace, and not lose any portion of comfort that is laid up for us in Christ. And may He vouchsafe to let the prevailing power of his Spirit in us be an evidence of the truth of grace begun, and a pledge of final victory, at that time when He will be all in all, in all His, for all eternity. Amen.

The third work in which the Old Testament is taken as the norm and rule of Christian experience is Owen's *Exposition of Psalm 130*,¹ the well-known *De profundis*. Consideration of verse 4 ("But there is forgiveness with thee that thou mayest be feared") occupies nearly three quarters of the work, and we are not surprised to learn that Owen had himself received peculiar comfort from this very verse in a time of spiritual perplexity in early life. It is a series of discourses on texts rather than a piece of pure commentary. There are constant encouragements to the distressed soul to go to God and to his Son for forgiveness and relief. Some interesting words in the preface to the Christian reader show the principles upon which Owen was working:

¹ Owen, op. cit., Vol. xiv, p. 1.

These things are to be considered practically; that is, as the souls of men are actually concerned in them and conversant about them. How men contract the guilt of sin, what sense they have and ought to have thereof, what danger they are liable unto thereon, what perplexities and distresses their souls and consciences are reduced to thereby, what courses they fix upon for their relief; as also, what is that grace of God whereby they may alone be delivered, wherein it consists, how it was prepared, how purchased, how it is proposed, how it may be attained; what effects and consequents a participation of it doth produce; how in these things faith and obedience unto God, dependence on Him, submission to Him, waiting for Him are to be exercised—is the principal work that those who are called unto the dispensation of the gospel ought to inquire into themselves and acquaint others withal.

God and man, grace and sin in the human heart, repentance, forgiveness and personal assurance, such are Owen's concern in this work.

In concluding this section, we must note that the broad picture presented by these Puritan works on the Christian experience based on the Old Testament might appear unbalanced. But everywhere Scripture is compared with Scripture and excess and error avoided. The Old Testament continually leads to the New, the darkness and the figure give way to the light and the Person of Christ, the law and the trembling conscience are replaced by the Gospel and the blessed assurance of forgiveness. Even if the point of departure (the Old Testament) of this exposition of Christian experience might seem dangerous, the discourses themselves are nothing but soberly realistic in their comforts and remedies, and are always centred in Christ Himself. To the wound made by the law, the healing plaster of the Gospel is applied, to use a favourite Puritan metaphor.

VI. THE OLD TESTAMENT AS A FOUNDATION FOR CHRISTOLOGY

So familiar were the Puritans with the great Christian doctrines of the Person and Work of Christ that they were prepared to find Christ in all the Scriptures and they were skilful in reading the New Testament into the Old. This was not done at random, however, but chiefly in the prophetic Scriptures. They dug into the prophetic soil with the express intent of finding Christ, and find Him they did. Nor was this only in treatise and expository writing. They *preached* Christ from the Old Testament, directly from the prophets and indirectly from the historical books, as we have shown.

Thus, when enumerating the offices and benefits of the Mediator, texts from Old and New Testaments lie side by side to

prove each doctrine. The Old Testament verses are not picked haphazardly, but from the scriptures where Christians down the ages had agreed Christ was revealed, i.e. the prophets—especially Isaiah, the evangelical prophet, and the Psalms and the Song of Solomon. But there are even sermons and treatise on the Person and Work of Christ which are first and foremost expositions of the Old Testament, and take these Scriptures as the foundation of the whole discourse. Two of these must be alluded to within the short space which remains.

The first is Thomas Manton's *Practical Exposition of the Fifty-Third Chapter of Isaiah*¹. The treatment is the normal sermonic treatment outlined earlier in this paper, and the chapter taken verse by verse. The great doctrines of the incarnation and atonement are carefully expounded as they arise from the text and the objections to such doctrines as election and particular redemption are fairly faced and fully answered from Scripture. "Reprobation is God's sealed book. It is not for creatures to look into it. . . . Let God alone with His secret judgments. Christians are to look to the revealed will of God—to directions in the Scriptures, not to the secret that is in God's bosom." It would be invidious to single out any part of the main body of the treatise for special mention; the whole is a careful and spiritual piece of exposition centred in the work of Christ. It may, however, be worth while quoting the words with which the work opens.

I shall [says Manton] in the course of this exercise go over the several verses of this chapter, which is an eminent portion of Scripture, and calls for most serious attention. It may rather be called the Gospel than the prophecy of Isaiah. It contains so ample and clear a discovery of Jesus Christ, that one would rather account it historical than prophetic. Other prophecies are explained by the history of Christ in the New Testament, but this prophecy explains the history; there is no chapter so often quoted and vouched by Christ and the apostles as this, to wit, no less than seven or eight times in the New Testament. It is so full and clear, that it needs a meditation rather than a comment, faith more than learning, to conceive of it. The coherence or connection of this with the former chapter, take briefly thus:

The evangelical prophet (for so he may justly be called) had in the end of the former chapter spoken of the glory of Christ's kingdom, how readily it should be entertained among the Gentiles, how he should "sprinkle" many nations and make "kings to shut their mouths", that is, with silence hearken to and consider his doctrine. Here, coming to the Jews, he finds, on the contrary, nothing but contempt and scorn, and therefore in an holy admiration cries out "Who hath believed our report?" He saw it was not believed in his days, and that it would not in after days. It was in vain to speak to them of the Messiah. In this chapter there are three remarkable parts:

¹ In Manton, *Complete Works* (Nisbet, 1873), Vol. iii, p. 187.

(a) A description of the Jews' horrid unbelief and contumacy against Christ—verse 1.

(b) The occasion and ground of that unbelief, namely, Christ's meanness as to outward show and appearance—verses 2-10.

(c) The removal of this occasion, and taking off this scandal and prejudice, by showing the fruit and glory which followed this meanness—verse 11 to the end of the chapter.

He then begins to expound the first verse.

The second work is by Richard Sibbes and bears the quaint title *Bowels Opened, or a Discovery of the Neere and Deere Love, Union and Communion betwixt Christ and the Church, and consequently between Him and every beleeving soul*.¹ The book is an exposition of part of the Song of Solomon (iv. 16-vi) and it is expounded, as the subtitle shows, in the traditionally spiritual way which commentators down the centuries have adopted; that is, as a commentary on the relation of Christ to the Church. As well as St. Paul's metaphor of Ephesians v, rational consideration of the relationship between Christ and the Christian, a relationship of love, would lead one to expect that the expression of human love would aptly illustrate one side of the Divine nature. As Sibbes himself wisely remarks on the first page: "As Christ and His church are the greatest persons that partake of human nature, so whatsoever is excellent in the whole world is borrowed to set out the excellencies of those two great lovers."

The work forms a fitting comparison to Manton's treatise on Isaiah liii. The latter considers the Person and Work of Christ—it is objective Scriptural exposition. Sibbes's work, no less careful and evangelical in exposition, is strongly devotional; it is the doctrine of the Christ-centred experience which he is expounding. It is a book for the Christian about the Christian experience, and in that sense, subjective. As Sibbes himself says in introducing the work: "Other books of Solomon lie more obvious and open to common understanding; but, as none entered into the holy of holies but the high priest, so none can enter into the mystery of this Song of Songs, but such as have more near communion with Christ."

To a modern reader, and one not perhaps as used to apprehending truth poetically as men were in the seventeenth century, it is amazing to see how naturally the book blossoms and abounds in spiritual comforts, encouragements and warnings under the careful hand of Richard Sibbes. There is no strained allegorising,

¹ Sibbes, *op. cit.*, Vol. ii, p. 1.

no unattached mysticism where doctrine is left far behind. Sibbes unfolds—or, to use the Puritan word, “opens”—Solomon’s Song as a commentary on Christ’s dealings with the Christian soul, and the Christian heart cannot but warm to his sound and loving exegesis. A few of the headings indicate the subjects dealt with in the course of the exposition:

Christians planted in God’s garden should be fruitful;
Wheresoever grace is truly begun, there is still a further desire of
Christ’s presence;
The Church gives all to Christ;
How to know when God hears our prayers;
How to know that Christ is present in us;
The comfort of Christ being our husband;
Christ when He comes to a soul comes not empty;
Friendship of Christ is sweet and constant;
What is meant by the sleep of the church; signs of a sleepy estate;
The excellency of a waking Christian;
How Christ is said to knock at our hearts;
How Christ can come into the soul;
The riches of a Christian that has Christ to be his portion;
How we are Christ’s beloved;
Christ feeds His church and people in fat pastures;
Christ feeds His people plentifully and sweetly; etc. etc.

If there is any doubt as to whether an exposition of this part of scripture on these lines is legitimate, a perusal of this work of Sibbes should soon settle the matter.

Having examined examples of the Christological use made of the Old Testament by Puritan writers, both objectively and subjectively, it only remains to make a few general remarks in conclusion.

To the Puritans, all Scripture was the authoritative word of God and spoke of His free grace to sinful men. The Old Testament was as sure a guide to the child of God as the New. Though at times we may feel that sufficient allowance is hardly being made for the progressive nature of the Biblical revelation, they never fall into excess or error. There are various reasons why the Puritans in their use of the Old Testament can preserve such sanity and balance, though ignorant of so much of what modern research has shown us as to historical perspective and meaning of words, and in regard to the cultural background of the writers.

One reason is that a verse is never taken out of its context, but expounded at the commencement in relation to the whole chapter (or book). Again, the Puritans always confine themselves carefully to the principle of divine or human action implied in the passage under consideration, dealing finally with qualities and springs of action rather than with the particular details of an isolated event. Another reason is that they knew how the New Testament writers treated their Old Testament Scriptures, and worked on the same lines. A fourth reason is that they were so instinct with the great doctrines of the New Testament that they were never tempted to erect unbalanced doctrinal structures, or led into faulty emphases, by their Old Testament studies.

And lastly, and perhaps most important of all, we must ascribe the vitality, the sureness, and the sweetness of their Old Testament exposition to the work of the Holy Spirit Himself. Our Lord Jesus Christ said solemnly that these scriptures were they that testified of Him. The aim of the great Puritans was to honour God in singleness of heart, not as pleasing men. They sought to glorify the Christ who had redeemed them and when they sought Him, and food for His sheep, in the pages to which He had pointed them, He gave them light.

O. R. JOHNSTON.

Maidstone.